

## Timescape 261

### Chapter 261: He Arrives

Xu Qing sped through the jungle of Forbidden by the Phoenix. He moved as quickly as he could, though it caused intense pain to fill him from head to toe. The aura of decay from the taboo poison pill was still eating away at him. Though his level of resistance was much greater than when he first opened the wish box, he had been stuck inside the blood world with the poison for too long. That, plus all the other serious injuries he had sustained, left Xu Qing feeling immeasurably weak, like a lantern sputtering out of oil.

Thankfully, adding another life lamp gave him six-flame power, which made him capable of astonishing levels of speed. Despite his injuries, he was still surrounded by fire, casting light all around him. He looked like a living torch as he sped along.

Meanwhile, eyes suddenly appeared on his shadow, stretched out in front of him. They seemed curious as they looked at Xu Qing. Then a violet will erupted from Xu Qing, which violently suppressed the shadow. The shadow screamed in agony, then quickly tried to seem ingratiating.

"I might be hurt," Xu Qing said grimly, "but I can still suppress you to death if I have to. By the way... you should cherish the credit you earned in the fight."

The shadow quickly let loose fluctuations of subservience. Truth be told, some malicious thoughts had occurred to it after seeing Xu Qing hurt so badly. However, it was still afraid of him. That was why, during the fight with Master Shengyun, the shadow hadn't dared to ignore the orders to cover the enemy's dharma aperture, nor had it considered trying to sabotage the battle. That wasn't how it normally operated given its personality. That was how it acted out of fear of Xu Qing. Fear was the way Xu Qing controlled the shadow, and within the curiosity it had just shown was a bit of maliciousness. How could it have known that Xu Qing would notice it?

In contrast, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior understood how things worked. As he followed Xu Qing, he maintained a visage of ultimate loyalty. Xu Qing noticed that and nodded. Next, he had the shadow cover his two life lamps, while simultaneously extinguishing the fire around him.

Xu Qing's expression was gloomy. The three pursuers were still locked onto him, and if it weren't for his six-flame speed, they would already have caught up.

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If I was in top shape, I could think about fighting them!

Xu Qing stopped and looked down at himself. Waves of weakness and dizziness swept through him. He bit the tip of his tongue, using the burst of pain to clear his head. Then he started moving again. He had used all of his poisons on Master Shengyun. He hadn't held anything back, not even his beetles. The only beetles he had left were the ones that had gone dormant after devouring that immortal ice.

It was still a long way from dawn. As Xu Qing sped along, he continued to bite his tongue every so often.

I need to think of a way to shake these three dao protectors and get out of Forbidden by the Phoenix.... I'm not sure what Seven Blood Eyes is going to think of all this. I'll need to take stock

of the situation before I decide what to do next. Maybe leaving Forbidden by the Phoenix isn't the best idea. Should I think about settling down here?

Although doing that would come at a big cost, the fact that he had acquired another life lamp made his eyes shine with determination. In a brutal, chaotic world, one had to fight to survive. Having reached the conclusion that this was definitely the best idea, he shifted directions and started heading deeper into Forbidden by the Phoenix. At the same time, he thought back to that voice which had spoken out in the moment of ultimate crisis.

Was the branding mark on the seven-colored ceramic lamp wiped out as a side-effect of that aura? Or did that voice do it on purpose?

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed as he thought about it. For some reason, he just couldn't believe that it had been a complete coincidence. No, it seemed intentional.

"But why?" he murmured. He had no idea. He just kept speeding along, occasionally reaching out to grab various medicinal plants that he would eat raw. Whenever he saw plants that could be beneficial, he did that. Unfortunately, without preparing them properly, the medicinal effects wouldn't be very strong. But it was better than nothing. Looking into his bag of holding, he realized he had a few black boluses.

It's best to use black boluses at night, when the mutagen is strongest.

Despite the danger he was in, he took a deep breath to calm himself down. After doing some calculations, he came to the conclusion it would be about five days before he was fully recovered.

Five days.... That said, the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect is definitely going to do something. In fact, I probably don't have more than two days. I need to lose these three dao protectors before then.

He sped up to the top of a nearby tree and checked the wind.

My only option is to use the taboo poison pill!

After once again checking the state of his injuries, he sighed. At the same time, his eyes glittered with ferocity as he took out the wish box and prepared to open it and let the wind carry the aura.

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Meanwhile, further back in the jungle, Master Shengyun's three dao protectors were speeding along with grim expressions on their faces. All of them wanted to kill Xu Qing. After all, Patriarch Soaring Cloud had made it clear that if they didn't, all of them would die.

They were all shaken to the core, and could hardly believe that Master Shengyun had been defeated by Xu Qing, and his life lamp taken away. Because of that, they were being cautious in their pursuit. Furthermore, all of them had defensive magical devices at the ready, and were using wind techniques to constantly sweep the area around them. At a certain point, they ceased pursuit and huddled to confer.

"This brat is good with poisons. We have to be careful!"

"That's right. He definitely fights dirty, so we can't be careless."

They were no fools. Xu Qing might be injured, but he had nearly killed Master Shengyun. Given that, they knew that they couldn't afford to make any mistakes.

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Xu Qing sensed that they had suddenly stopped moving. He breathed a sigh of relief, but at the same time, his eyes glittered.

If the three pursuers split up, then his plan was to try to ambush one of them, and take them out, even if he got hurt in the process. If they didn't split up, then he would use the aura of the taboo poison pill. Even if they used wind techniques to dispel the aura, the slightest mistake on their part would yield him some results. Either way, he was ready to act.

Looking down at his hands, he saw flesh slowly starting to cover the bones. Bending into a crouch, he shot into motion.

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Eventually, when the sky was just starting to turn bright, one of the three pursuing Gold Core experts suddenly did a double take when he noticed a patch of rotting flesh on one of his companion's faces.

"Your face!" he said, reflexively reaching up to his own face to check it for evidence of poison. When he found none, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Dammit!" said the infected dao protector. Eyes flickering with cold light, he quickly tried to suppress the poison, but it did no good. Ultimately, he had to do the same thing as Master Shengyun, and pull out some medicinal pills designed to bolster life force.

"I can't believe this!" he said. "This is a very gruish poison. Hard to suppress. We've been so careful, but we still fell for his tricks!"

The other two dao protectors' eyes shone with determination.

"If we're not careful, and he manages to keep poisoning us, we'll fail where failure is least expected!"

"We have to hit him fast and hard!"

After exchanging glances, they gritted their teeth and used various methods to accelerate rapidly. Moving upwards of thirty percent faster than before, they became three beams of light that shot forward at top speed.

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When Xu Qing sensed what was happening, his eyes flickered coldly.

He still had one trump card left. He could stimulate the taboo poison pill, unleashing it dramatically to kill everything around him.

It wouldn't be easy to do that, and he wasn't even sure he could. But with Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits and his life lamps, even if he couldn't release the full potential of the pill, he should

be able to unleash enough of it to be inimitably terrifying. In the destruction that would follow, he doubted the three pursuers would survive.

Should I risk it...?

It was a trump card that would probably end up killing him, so he couldn't help but calculate the chances of making it out alive.

The odds aren't in my favor.

He once again checked his injuries. His hands were close to being whole again. Though they still looked bad, they were at least usable.

"Gotta keep running!" He started moving. However, after only taking a few steps, he slowed down and stopped. Pupils constricting, he looked ahead of him in the jungle.

He saw a shadowy figure there.

An old man.

He wore a violet robe, and though he had wrinkles on his face, his eyes shone brightly. He seemed scholarly and refined. As he stood there in the jungle, he seemed out of harmony with the surrounding shadows. In fact, ripples spread out from him that seemed to draw the sunlight toward him.

Between his fingers was a black Go piece with which he fiddled. Looking at Xu Qing, he took in all of his injuries, then said, "Put away the poison."

Xu Qing bowed his head and put away his poison. Though he was on guard, he didn't need to guess who this person was, and knew he had no option other than to do as instructed.

This old man was none other than the seventh peaklord of the Seven Blood Eyes. He was Master Seventh.

Despite having put away the wish box, Xu Qing kept a sliver of dharma force on it, just in case he needed to open it suddenly.

When Xu Qing put away the poison, Master Seventh blurred, then reappeared right behind Xu Qing, between him and the approaching Gold Core experts.

As they burst onto the scene, their expressions flickered, and they stopped in place, panting for breath. All of a sudden, they seemed nervous, and they even edged backward. If they were in Seven Blood Eyes, they wouldn't have acted like this. They knew that Seven Blood Eyes wouldn't dare to act against them publicly. But they were in a forbidden ground now, and none of them dared to take any risks.

After a moment of hesitation, the Gold Core expert in the middle clasped hands, bowed, and said, "Well met, Seventh Peaklord. This child instigated a huge calamity. He injured a chosen from our Soaring Cloud Sword Sect and stole our sect's life lamp. On orders from Patriarch Soaring Cloud himself, we're to arrest him. Please forgive us for any inconvenience, Master Seventh."

Master Seventh looked at the three of them, then waved his hand. In the blink of an eye, a shocking force swept out of nowhere, becoming a huge mouth that bore down on the three dao protectors. As their faces fell, the mouth chomped down on them and consumed them!

Brutal crunching sounds then echoed out into the silence of the forest.

Xu Qing shivered and looked at Master Seventh. He opened his mouth to speak, except he couldn't think of what to say. Master Seventh clasped his hands behind his back and started walking.

“What are you staring at? Let's get moving. I have a Go game to finish.”

Chapter 262: Violet-Cyan History

Xu Qing was somewhat in a daze as he walked with Master Seventh through the jungle.

Even though Master Seventh said he had a Go game to finish, he didn't seem to be in a hurry as he led the way. Quite the opposite. That said, every step he took propelled him a vast distance. Of course, he pulled Xu Qing with him as he proceeded.

As Xu Qing followed, he kept replaying the scene of Master Seventh waving his hand and killing three Gold Core experts from the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect. It almost didn't seem real. He maintained silence.

A short time later, Master Seventh said, “You did a good job handling the situation with Grandmaster Bai.”

“I just did what I had to do,” Xu Qing replied softly.

“You also performed well in that Seazombie incident.”

“The Cap— er.” Xu Qing hesitated slightly. “Grand Highness did all that.”

“The Night Dove matter went well.”

Xu Qing bowed his head. “I did my best, that's all.”

“But you were really reckless in dealing with Master Shengyun.” As the words left Master Seventh's mouth, they stepped out into a section of city ruins. It was none other than the spot where Xu Qing had fought Master Shengyun.

Xu Qing didn't respond.

“What you should have done,” Master Seventh continued, sounding less than pleased, “was ask for help from Big Sib, Second Sib, and Third Sib. If the four of you killed him together, you wouldn't have ended up so badly injured.”

Xu Qing thought about it and came to the conclusion that what he said made sense. He nodded.

Master Seventh seemed to approve of Xu Qing's pleasant attitude. He turned, and his expression overflowed with praise. “Step closer. I thought you weren't afraid of anything in heaven or earth. Why are you standing so far away?”

Xu Qing hesitantly took a few steps closer to Master Seventh.

Master Seventh looked him up and down, and there was a gleam of reminiscence in his eyes as he thought back to the scavenger basecamp, and how Xu Qing had changed clothes to make sure they didn't get dirty. He chuckled. [1]

“You're taller than back then.”

Xu Qing looked up at him, trying to figure out exactly what was going on.

Master Seventh didn't continue the conversation, though. He led the way further into the ruins, and Xu Qing followed without a word.

From a distance, it was possible to see an old man and a young man, walking through the desolate ruins as the evening sun shone down on them. It seemed almost like they were strolling through ancient times.

"This place is both a testament to the past, and also a place where a lot of history is buried." As Master Seventh's voice echoed through the ruins of the old city, it seemed to drift like the song of a distant flute.

Xu Qing looked at him and waited for him to continue.

"This city was once home to a person of legend. An outstanding figure who was said to be the most outstanding human to live after the broken face of the god arrived. He was the crown prince of the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan.

"Supposedly, that crown prince had exceptional aptitude. He had a bloodline legacy from the Ancient Emperors and Imperial Sovereigns, and dominated an entire generation.

"Some people claim that he was born bearing the destiny aura of the human species, and that auspicious heavenly signs appeared on the day he was born, specifically, nine golden dragons that accompanied him throughout his life. Others say that the world itself gathered all its resources so that he could be born, and that as a result, he saved the world.

"According to the history books, when he was born, a howl of grief echoed out of all the forbidden grounds in Revered Ancient, and mutated blood flowed from within them. Yet others claim that the eyes of the god gazed down on him five times during his life, yet he never died. Thus, he acquired the blessing of the god.

"Even the holy lands were shocked by him, and tried to recruit him, though he refused their offers.

"Unfortunately, that most peerless of humans eventually died in battle in the territory of the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan. Reportedly, countless species joined forces and sent their most powerful representatives to cut him down."

Xu Qing was deeply moved by all of this information. It was a bit different from his previous understanding of the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan. The story he'd heard was that eight clans rebelled and stripped away the bloodline power of the royal clan. After, there was no more Violet and Cyan. Instead, there were the eight clans of the Violet Lands. [2]

Seeing Xu Qing's facial expression caused Master Seventh to grin.

“I’m not talking about the Violet and Cyan from South Phoenix,” he said. “I’m talking about the real Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan, which existed after Dark Serenity, and most likely conquered all of Revered Ancient. Unfortunately, it would be easier to find a phoenix feather or a qilin horn than to find people who know about such history. Whether intentionally or not, all the species in the world, including humans, have erased that history from their records.

“As for the eight clans of the Violet Lands, what they overthrew was nothing more than an enfeebled remnant of Violet and Cyan, which by that time was a tiny kingdom of little note.”

Xu Qing took a deep breath.

“That said,” Master Seventh continued, “it was an interesting coincidence that the spectacular crown prince of the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan actually did die in battle on the continent of South Phoenix. Eventually, a city was built on the spot where he died. However, ten years ago when the god’s eyes opened, that city vanished.

“Some people claim the place was cursed by the crown prince. That said, there’s another story about this crown prince of Violet and Cyan. Supposedly, he had a cold personality, and could even be described as evil!”

Xu Qing looked at nothing and didn’t speak. Eventually, they reached the daoist temple. The entire area was devastated thanks to the fighting that had taken place. Xu Qing looked over at Master Seventh.

“Didn’t someone mention that you lack divine abilities and magical techniques?” Master Seventh said. He smacked Xu Qing gently on the head. “Go seek enlightenment. And hurry up, I still have a game of Go to play.”

Xu Qing’s heart thumped. The ‘someone’ Master Seventh had just mentioned was obviously Master Shengyun. Nodding, Xu Qing walked into the daoist temple and sat down cross-legged in front of the statue there. He stared at it for a while, then stood up and looked back at Master Seventh.

“What’s wrong?” Master Seventh asked.

Xu Qing hesitated for a moment, then said, “You can’t get enlightenment during the day. You need moonlight.”

Master Seventh muttered something that Xu Qing couldn’t quite make out, then waved his hand. Instantly, dark clouds spread out over the sky above the temple, blocking out the sunlight, and casting the temple and everything around it into utter darkness. Then, a rotating mirror appeared in the dark clouds above. Unexpectedly, moonlight spilled out of the mirror, falling down from the sky and onto the divine likeness in the temple. Almost immediately, the image of a saber appeared.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing’s thoughts were in chaos because of what Master Seventh had just done. He had seen Master Sixth in action, and hadn’t got the sense that he could simply wave his hand to

transpose the sun and moon. And that got Xu Qing thinking about the traditions of the Seventh Peak.

I bet Master Seventh is above the Nascent Soul level!

However, Xu Qing knew time was of the essence, so he stowed such thoughts and concentrated on the image of the saber. As he did, a violet heavenly saber took form above his own head. He began seeking enlightenment.

As he did, Master Seventh stood outside looking at the surrounding wreckage.

He really does lack divine abilities and magical techniques.... And he's got a lot of really random assets. He has a lot to learn about the art of fighting, but given how young he is, he's not bad at all.

In that manner, time passed.

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Out on the Forbidden Sea, sword light filled the sky.

Numerous streams of sword energy sped toward Seven Blood Eyes, and in the middle of them all was the enraged Patriarch Soaring Cloud. Behind him were numerous disciples from the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect, and all of them pulsed with killing intent.

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In Forbidden by the Phoenix, things were quiet and peaceful.

Night had come.

Xu Qing was focused on seeking enlightenment. The moonlight Master Seventh had provided became even more brilliant at nighttime, and that made the image of the sword even clearer.

Xu Qing's speed of enlightenment was astonishing, and the violet saber above his head grew solid faster and faster. It had previously been only ten percent corporeal, but soon that number climbed to fifty percent. Then sixty percent. Then seventy....

The night passed and dawn neared. Just as sunlight drove away the darkness, a tremor passed through Xu Qing, and an incisive aura spread out from him in all directions. The violet saber above his head was now completely solid. No longer was it illusory. It was a true heavenly saber, radiating a terrifying sharpness.

What was more, the extended period of rest, as well as the moonlight provided by Master Seventh, ensured that Xu Qing's wounds had all healed up. His missing fingers had grown back, and his aura was now at an all-time peak. As he stood, six-flame battle prowess surged around him, causing winds to scream into a vortex.

Master Seventh looked at him with approval in his eyes. "Even outsiders know the truth. You don't have to be deceptive around me."

Without a word, Xu Qing allowed two halos of light to appear above his head. One was made of black fire, the other radiated seven colors. Two umbrellas cast radiant light in all directions. Dawn had brought light, but Xu Qing was even brighter.



“Let’s go,” Master Seventh said. “Given the time, I’d say we can expect some visitors soon.” He flicked his sleeve, and the space around them transformed. It was like thick mists had suddenly sprang up around them, swirling about and causing everything around them to sway.

Yet again, Xu Qing was struck by the level of Master Seventh’s cultivation base. Only a moment later, everything around them went back to normal. Now, they weren’t in Forbidden by the Phoenix anymore, but instead, were in a building at the summit of the Seventh Peak.

The sea breeze blew, bringing with it a familiar humidity. The clamor of the capital city drifted up with the breeze, the sound of innumerable people talking, shouting, engaged in business, all of it mixing together into a faint thrum. Feeling a bit dazzled, Xu Qing looked around. In addition to Master Seventh, there was another familiar face present.

It was a middle-aged man in a gray robe, with a smile on his face. He had a Go piece held between his fingers. Xu Qing knew this man. He was the very same person who had given him that identity medallion back in the scavenger basecamp. [3]

“Master Seventh,” the servant said, clasping hands respectfully in greeting. Then he looked at Xu Qing and nodded.

“Are the visitors here yet?” Master Seventh asked, looking down at the Go board. He placed the piece onto the board.

“They’ll arrive soon,” the servant responded.

“Alright. Take the Kid to be bathed. He went and got himself all dirty.” Master Seventh flicked his sleeve and walked out.

When Xu Qing heard Master Seventh call him ‘the Kid,’ it further confirmed his theories and speculations.

“Kid, come with me,” the servant said. “Let’s get you cleaned up. Today’s a big day for you, but it’s also a big day for Master Seventh and Seven Blood Eyes.” With that, the servant offered Xu Qing a jade slip. “After you bathe, you’ll step out of the grand hall and walk up the stairs. As you do, look at the images in that jade slip.”

Xu Qing took the jade slip, then clasped hands respectfully and followed the servant. After thoroughly bathing, he put on a new daoist robe. That was when the handmaidens arrived with special incense.

Xu Qing wasn’t used to this sort of thing, but he didn’t send them away.

As a couple of the handmaidens stepped behind him and bound his hair into a topknot, the Captain peeked through the doorway and winked at Xu Qing. Next, the chamberlain arrived, carrying a violet daoist crown in both hands. The crown radiated light, and looked absolutely exquisite. It exuded terrifying pressure, and featured the image of a mutant beast. Looking closely, it was a nine-headed snake, the same type of fantastic creature that had appeared toward the end of the fighting with the Merfolk. If you looked at the image for long enough, you would be able to hear that fantastic creature howling! [4] [5]

The Captain's eyes glittered as he watched the chamberlain put the crown on Xu Qing's head. "Well, shoot. It's the Violet-Heaven Supreme-Limitless Crown, with half the soul of a Nascent Soul beast sealed inside. The old man is really being prejudiced here! I've asked for that thing a bunch of times and he never once gave it to me!"

Xu Qing now wore a violet daoist robe embroidered with gold. He had the Violet-Heaven Supreme-Limitless Crown on his head, and the faint image of an umbrella stretched above him. All of that, coupled with his incredible good looks, made him seem absolutely extraordinary, and beyond anything you would expect to see in the mortal world.

The handmaidens all looked at him with glittering eyes.

Just as the Captain was about to say something, a stern voice spoke from outside.

"The dao is void, shapeless and nameless; without scriptures, one cannot grasp the dao; the dao exists in scripture, serene and hidden, subtle and delicate. Without a teacher, one cannot understand its truths.

"Today, a child from the Seventh Peak named Xu Qing will be taught of the dao, and pay formal respects to his sect ancestor!"

The voice echoed from the Seventh Peak to fill the heavens.

#### Chapter 263: Apprenticeship Ceremony

The voice was consummately solemn and respectful, and contained wording not commonly encountered in everyday speech. It was like an ode, uttered loudly in all heaven and earth! The words carried a sense of antiquity and beauty. For instance, the term 'pay formal respects.' It was like a rite, in which formal respects were paid to the terrestrial and the celestial!

Even the Captain suddenly looked unprecedentedly serious. On this day, he didn't wear his usual gray daoist robe. Instead, he had the same type of robe Xu Qing wore, violet, with golden embroidery. At a glance, it was obvious that the robes were those of the Seventh Peak, but at the same time, they were nothing like the ordinary robes.

As the Captain stood in the doorway looking at Xu Qing, he said, "Xu Qing, as the grand highness, it is my pleasure and honor to serve as your chief attendant today. Come with me."

The Captain never talked like this; the words he spoke matched his serious expression. Clasping his hands one atop the other, he bowed deeply at the waist in a very formal dao prostration.

Xu Qing could sense the solemnity, and knew something very important was about to happen. Straightening his garments, he returned the Captain's bow and then walked to the door. It only took three steps to walk outside, and once he was there, his heart skipped a beat. The grand hall he had been in was at the very summit of the Seventh Peak. Astonishingly, a huge octagonal daoist altar spread out in front of him. Crafted from green slate tiles, it pulsed with a godly resonance, and featured a statue at the far end.

That statue depicted a middle-aged man with his hands clasped behind his back, staring off into the distance. His face wasn't visible, but he wore an imperial robe embroidered with an ancestral dragon, and his hair was bound with an azure imperial crown. Nine imperial umbrellas hovered

over his head, he pulsed with draconic energy, and was like a general who could topple all under heaven and consume mountains and rivers.

The fact that a mere statue contained such a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering energy caused Xu Qing's pupils to constrict. However, he quickly settled his thoughts and looked around.

There were over a thousand Seven Blood Eyes disciples gathered around the daoist altar. There were men and women, young and old. Though all wore the same type of violet daoist robe, few seemed accustomed to such finery. All were very solemn and respectful.

Leading up from the daoist altar was a staircase of white stone with a dragon motif and ninety steps. At its top was a grand hall that glowed with violet light. It was... the highest location on the Seventh Peak.

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Clouds swirled above in the dome of heaven, and within them was the dreadnaught dracolizard. It caused the clouds to seethe and sent bolts of lightning crashing left and right. It was possible to see six figures within those clouds, almost like statues. Among them were men and women, and it only took a moment for Xu Qing to realize that they were the peaklords. Master Sixth was in their number. All of them were looking down at Xu Qing. As for Master Sixth, he had an encouraging look in his eyes.

After seeing all this, Xu Qing started to feel a bit nervous. Then he looked a bit further up and saw that, above the clouds was a blood-colored figure that seemed almost like a deity. It was the patriarch of Seven Blood Eyes, Sir Bloodsmelter.

All of these people were here to observe the ceremony!

The Captain stood next to Xu Qing, staring straight ahead at the statue. Raising his voice, he spoke in a very solemn tone as he announced, "Seventh Peak disciple Xu Qing, this statue depicts the source of the Seventh Peak's core teachings and doctrines. It is Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity. He was the last human emperor to conquer the Revered Ancient. Now, you will pay him your respects! Let the ceremony begin!"

Xu Qing ducked his head, clasped hands, and bowed very deeply to the statue of the Ancient Emperor. Off to the side, the Captain, as well as all of the Seventh Peak disciples who had come to observe the statue, also clasped hands and bowed.

Their unified action created a profound and moving scene.

After the bowing, the atmosphere seemed even more dramatic. Xu Qing, his expression more serious than ever, followed the Captain across the daoist altar to the staircase.

Stopping there, the Captain spoke in a voice that was almost like a chant, "We who practice cultivation follow a path that defies heaven. We gaze upon the ancient world and observe the nine heavens and ten earths. Thus, our Seventh Peak has crafted these ninety stairs of white stone. Climb the stairs to offer proof to the nine heavens. Reach the summit to swear your oath to the ten earths! Xu Qing, begin your ascent!"

With utmost solemnity, Xu Qing walked forward and put his foot on the first step. The moment it touched the white stone, bells tolled in the Seventh Peak.

BOOM!

The sound of it caused wild colors to flash in heaven and earth.

At the same time, a jade slip flew out of Xu Qing's garment. It was the slip the servant had given him. As it floated in front of him, it radiated dazzling light, as if it were lighting his path. Within that glowing light were images that shone directly into Xu Qing's mind.

He saw the beast arena in the scavenger basecamp, and the dirty young man in the animal skin jerkin dragging a huge snake away. Sitting off to the side were two people that no one could see. One was Master Seventh, the other was the servant. They were watching Xu Qing. Then Master Seventh spoke in a somewhat excited voice.

*"What an interesting young man."*

Xu Qing's eyes widened. That young man in the beast arena was him. And at long last, he understood why he ended up in Seven Blood Eyes. He was so shaken that he didn't even notice that he had already ascended eight steps. When he reached the ninth, the Seventh Peak bells tolled deafeningly again a second time.

Meanwhile, the dazzling light in the jade slip sent a second image into Xu Qing's mind.

He saw a young man squatting in a dark alley. Then, a skinny scavenger walked past. The young man jumped out, clamped his hand over the scavenger's mouth, and slit his throat. Also within that image was Master Seventh on a nearby rooftop, a look of admiration on his face.

*"An interesting young man indeed."*

Xu Qing breathed deeply as he finally came to understand everything. The bells tolled a third, fourth, fifth, and sixth time. With each tolling of the bells, he walked up nine steps. By the sixth bell toll, he was at the fifty-fourth step. Each toll of the bells was louder than the previous, and with each one came a new image.

In the third image, Master Seventh wondered why he had changed out of his new clothing. The fourth image showed him killing Fatmountain, then stumbling away in the moonlight, wracked with poison. On the rooftop, Master Seventh smiled. Grandmaster Bai appeared in the fifth image. Master Seventh was walking out of Grandmaster Bai's tent when he stopped and looked back.

*"Grandmaster Bai, if you really think the boy has potential, then teach him some more. Give him a chance. Maybe he can get to Seven Blood Eyes as an academic with a cultivation base."*

The sixth image was after Sergeant Thunder, Grandmaster Bai, and the little girl had left. Xu Qing was alone in the darkness of his room, and Master Seventh was outside.

*"Give him the identity medallion."*

Xu Qing was trembling. He had long speculated about these things, and now he knew all the details. Looking up toward the top of the mountain peak, he walked past the sixty-third step. The bell tolled a seventh time. Then an eighth and a ninth. As the sound of the bells rang, Xu Qing saw a seventh image.

It was back when he first arrived at Seven Blood Eyes. Sitting on his dharmaboat one night as it bobbed in the harbor, he took out a jug of alcohol and drank to his parents, to Sergeant Thunder, and to his birthday. The eighth image depicted him being chased by Seazombies. The ninth was his fight with Master Shengyun at the daoist temple.

Emotions swept through Xu Qing as the light of the jade slip faded. He put the jade slip back in his robe as he reached the ninetieth and final step. In front of him was a spectacular hall glowing with violet light. Seated inside was Master Seventh, who was looking at him.

Next to Master Seventh were Second Highness and Third Highness.

Master Seventh was dressed far more formally than usual. He wore a violet robe with swirling clouds on it. His hair was bound in a daoist crown decorated with nine four-clawed dragons that were as blue as the sky. His eyes glittered like lightning, and even just sitting there, he was boundlessly majestic.

“Xu Qing.”

The person to speak wasn't Master Seventh, but instead, the Captain, who was still by Xu Qing's side.

“You have proven yourself to the nine heavens and sworn your oath to the ten earths, thus showing your respect to the world. Now, the time has come to turn and pay respects thrice! Let the ceremony continue!”

As the Captain's words continued to echo, Xu Qing turned atop the ninetieth stair and bowed three times to heaven and earth!

After he straightened up, the Captain and all the surrounding disciples also bowed thrice to heaven and earth!

There was deep meaning in everything that was happening. Every part of the ceremony had significance. It was a chaotic world, and cultivators usually lived simple lives. They put themselves first. But there were two things in which there had to be a level of ceremony: ancestral sacrifices and apprenticeship formalities.

The Captain continued to speak in a voice that echoed through heaven and shook the earth. “The dao is void; without scriptures, one cannot grasp the dao; the dao exists in scripture. Without a teacher, one cannot understand its truths.

“Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity is the great founder. All humans owe him a single bow of respect.

“Heaven, earth, celestial, terrestrial. They bear the weight of all. All humans owe them three bows of respect.

“And yet, however amazing the Ancient Emperor was, he did not show you favor. Heaven and earth, and all other living beings in this sea of suffering, have done nothing to save you. Only Master will ascend to heaven and descend to hell for you.

Only he will show you favor. Only he will save you. Only he will expend all effort so that you can walk a great dao. Therefore, you owe him nine bows of respect!”

Turning, Xu Qing bowed to Master Seventh nine times! One bow for the Ancient Emperor. Three bows for heaven and earth. Nine bows for the Master. As for the nine bows, only the Captain and Xu Qing participated. The host of other disciples simply averted their gazes. They didn’t qualify to join. After the nine bows, the Captain produced a violet tea cup that he offered to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing took it and walked into the violet hall.

“Offer the tea of gratitude!”

Bowing his head, Xu Qing took three steps forward and held up the cup of tea with both hands.

At almost exactly the same moment as he did that, a wind kicked up in the dome of heaven. Off in the distance, a towering sword energy pierced through the sky, bringing with it a blood-colored light that seemed like a giant hand rushing toward Seven Blood Eyes. The Soaring Cloud Sword Sect had come to inflict violent punishment! A voice spoke from within that sea of blood and sword energy. Thrumming with killing intent, it filled all of Seven Blood Eyes.

“Sir Bloodsmelter, hand that cretin Xu Qing over to me this instant!”

Chapter 264: If You Don’t Leave Me, I Won’t Forsake You

Outside Seven Blood Eyes, killing intent roiled high into the sky.

Inside Seven Blood Eyes the attitude was somber and respectful. Up above, the various peaklords all had tranquil expressions on their faces.

Xu Qing heard the enraged shout from beyond the spell formation, but he didn’t look over his shoulder. He kept his head bowed and held the cup of tea up in front of him.

Master Seventh also ignored what was happening outside. It was as if he didn’t care at all, and was only concerned about his new apprentice, who was still in the middle of the apprenticeship ceremony. He waved his hand, and the teacup in Xu Qing’s hands flew over to him. However, Master Seventh didn’t drink. He simply put it on the table next to him. It was the ‘tea of gratitude,’ which was not to be consumed.

Meanwhile, Second Highness and Third Highness stood off to the side, looking very respectful. However, at one point, Third Highness caught Xu Qing’s eye and winked.

“Offer the tea of the past!” the Captain said. He handed Xu Qing a second cup of tea, and Xu Qing took three steps forward and held it up in front of him. At the same time, shouting could be heard outside the sect.

As the furious cultivators from the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect arrived, they didn’t slow down at all. Instead, they unleashed raging sword energy, creating dazzling beams of blinding light that shot right toward Seven Blood Eyes.

The Seven Blood Eyes Formation activated and blocked the millions upon millions of streams of sword energy, and massive booms rang out, shaking the seven mountain peaks. Apparently, something about the spell formation was different than before. It seemed to be rejecting the authority of the Seven Sect Coalition, and treating the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect as an enemy.

The peaklords ignored what was happening, and thanks to their placid expressions, the disciples from the other peaks remained calm, and focused on the ceremony taking place on the Seventh Peak.

Within the violet temple, Master Seventh continued to ignore what was happening outside. Waving his hand, he took the second cup of tea from Xu Qing. This was called the 'tea of the past,' and by taking a sip, it would indicate that the Master was willing to accept a new apprentice. Master Seventh held it up, put it to his lips and drank, then set it down on the table.

"Offer the tea of faith!" the Captain said, and he gave Xu Qing a third cup.

Taking a deep breath, Xu Qing took three steps forward, knelt, and held the cup up.

Intense booms rang out from the formation, like heavenly thunder. A 30,000-meter blood-colored stream of sword energy slammed into the Seven Blood Eyes Formation. At this point, the formation couldn't stand up to the force, and it shattered.

Then the sword energy turned into an old man in a golden robe. As he appeared above Seven Blood Eyes, the countless streams of sword light behind him resolved into the forms of Soaring Cloud Sword Sect disciples. Every single one pulsed with killing intent. Every single one seemed arrogant and domineering.

"Sir Bloodsmelter, you...." The old man who had smashed the formation was none other than Patriarch Soaring Cloud. As he spoke, he sent his divine will streaming through the sect, which was when he caught sight of Xu Qing offering a cup of tea to Master Seventh atop the summit of the Seventh Peak. His words trailed off. He had lived for many years, and was the patriarch of an entire sect. He knew exactly what he was looking at.

"You're accepting an apprentice?" The killing intent in his eyes was as cold as ice, as though everyone he was looking at was already dead. "You injured my grandson, stole my sect's life lamp, and now you're holding an apprenticeship ceremony! Sir Bloodsmelter. I am very, very curious what gives you the courage to do something like this!"

Smiling enigmatically, Sir Bloodsmelter replied, "If there's something you'd like to talk about, Soaring Cloud, please wait until after my son-in-law finishes accepting his new apprentice."

The six peaklords in the clouds didn't look alarmed at all by what was happening.

Seeing that, Patriarch Soaring Cloud's pupils constricted, and his heart sank. The feeling he was getting from Seven Blood Eyes was completely different than anything in the past!

Inside the violet hall, Master Seventh wasn't paying attention to the drama outside.

Xu Qing knelt and offered the third cup of tea. All eyes in the sect were on him.

As the killing intent raged outside, Master Seventh calmly said, "Let's forget about the ceremony for a moment, Kid. I want to ask you a simple question, and I'd like your sincere answer. Deep in your heart, do you really want to be my apprentice?"

Xu Qing looked up into Master Seventh's eyes, and quietly answered, "Yes, Master."

Master Seventh smiled broadly. "Good, my apprentice. If you don't leave me, I won't forsake you!"

With that, he put his index finger and thumb into the tea, then flicked his fingers. As the tea sprayed out, the ceremony of apprenticeship was completed! Bells tolled inside Seven Blood Eyes. But this time, the bells weren't just those from the Seventh Peak. The bells on all seven of the mountain peaks tolled, shaking everything.

"As of today, we have a Fourth Sib," Master Seventh said. "It's truly a happy occasion. Now, let's go outside and see what that clamoring is about. Apparently, someone has the gall to talk about taking away my apprentice."

In response to those words, Patriarch Soaring Cloud let loose an enraged laugh. As he did, a middle-aged cultivator next to him stepped forward, his expression very unsightly. In appearance, he looked very much like Master Shengyun. Turning into a blood-colored sword, he shot with incredible speed toward the violet hall on the Seventh Peak. As he moved, he pulsed with the fluctuations of a Nascent Soul cultivation base. Though those fluctuations surpassed those of an ordinary Nascent Soul cultivator, they obviously weren't at the peak of that level.

In the blink of an eye, that blood sword reached the violet hall, and was about to pierce inside of it. However, that was when Master Seventh chuckled and stood. Taking a single step, he emerged from the hall, then casually waved his hand in the direction of the sword.

The blood sword instantly shattered, and a bloodcurdling shriek echoed out from within. The middle-aged Nascent Soul cultivator was sent spinning off to the side like a kite with its string cut. Virtually every part of his body then exploded, turning into chunky, bloody mist that spread out into the air.

Only his nascent soul survived. Flying out in alarm, he looked in terror at the violet hall, where Xu Qing, the Captain, Second Highness, and Third Highness... walked out into the open with Master Seventh.

The Nascent Soul cultivator that Master Seventh had so casually shredded to pieces had a very high rank in the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect. In fact, he was one of their grand elders. He was also the only son of Patriarch Soaring Cloud, and Master Shengyun's father. That was why he had charged in with such rage. But now he was in an incredibly pitiful state. In fact, his nascent soul was dull and dark, as though it might collapse at any moment. He was astonished down to the core of his being. He knew without a doubt what kind of cultivation base was required to shatter his body with the wave of a hand. What was more... it obviously hadn't been a killing blow, otherwise it wouldn't have been so easy for him to escape in nascent soul form.

"You're not in Nascent Soul, you're in Spirit Trove!!" blurted Master Shengyun's father. As he backed away, the disciples of the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect were visibly shaken.

Only Patriarch Soaring Cloud didn't have a physical reaction. Looking closely at Master Seventh, he said, "How very deceptive of you. Not even I noticed. And you're no ordinary Spirit Trove cultivator. You already have three secret troves! Even still, that's not enough. What else do you have, Sir Bloodsmelter? Put it all out in the open."



Master Seventh said nothing. Smiling, he stood outside of the violet hall and looked up at Sir Bloodsmelter.

Sir Bloodsmelter looked back down, his eyes full of praise. Then he looked at Patriarch Soaring Cloud, and his eyes glittered with malice. "Let's fight a bit before I do that!"

All of a sudden, Sir Bloodsmelter's gaze turned into a host of blood-red lines that shot toward Patriarch Soaring Cloud.

Patriarch Soaring Cloud snorted coldly and waved his hand, sending sword energy raging toward Sir Bloodsmelter. When they clashed, wild colors flashed, and rifts spread out in the sky. As they rose higher and higher, booms rang out like heavenly thunder. At the same time, the dracolizard in the clouds roared at the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect disciples, and the six peaklords released the fluctuations of their cultivation bases, causing everything to shake violently.

That, coupled with the image of Master Seventh standing with his hands clasped behind his back atop the Seventh Peak, took a lot of air out of these disciples who had supposedly come to inflict violent punishment on Seven Blood Eyes. Among the group were some Nascent Soul cultivators, except now their skin was crawling as they looked fearfully at Master Seventh.

The difference between Nascent Soul and Spirit Trove was like the difference between one-flame power and six-flame power. If Master Seventh wanted to, he could wipe them out of existence, and none of them would even have a chance to flee. That difference made all the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect disciples nervous. After all, though the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect did have a Spirit Trove cultivator, it was their sect leader. And since the patriarch had led this expedition, the sect leader had remained behind to watch over the sect.

Never could any of them have guessed that Seven Blood Eyes wouldn't just have a Void Returning patriarch. They also had someone stronger than the Nascent Soul. A Spirit Trove expert!

It wasn't just the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect disciples who were shaken. The disciples of Seven Blood Eyes were also astonished. That said, when they thought about the traditions of the Seventh Peak, they realized that this development wasn't that unusual after all. The peaklords had known all along, so they weren't surprised. As for the disciples gathered on the daoist altar, including Xu Qing and the other apprentices, they exchanged awkward glances.

"I have the feeling the old man is still being deceptive about something," Third Elder Brother murmured.

The Captain chuckled. "He is, Third Sib. Believe it!"

Xu Qing looked at the Captain and then Third Elder Brother. Off to the side, Second Elder Sister had a jade slip that she was using to send voice messages to someone, excitedly explaining what was happening. [1]

Grinning, Third Elder Brother looked at Xu Qing and said, "What did I tell you, little Junior Brother? The first time I laid eyes on you I knew we were connected by destiny. And wouldn't you know it, I barely had time to snap my fingers, and here you are my Junior Brother. Although, I do admit I'm surprised you took down Master Shengyun. When the Seven Sect Coalition started throwing challenges around, the grand highnesses from the other peaks threw most of their matches. The only exception was the First Peak."

## Chapter 265: The Birth of a Taboo!

Smiling, Third Elder Brother continued, “That’s another reason why I sent my beloved mermaid girlfriend to her ancestors right in front of you.”

Off to the side, the Captain smiled enigmatically. He knew that Third Sib wasn’t the kind of person who wasted words. The reason he was saying all this was in the hopes of warming Xu Qing up to him.

Xu Qing looked at Third Elder Brother and thought back to that time in the harbor when he gently crushed the mermaid’s head. Back then, he’d been struck with how dangerous Third Elder Brother seemed. Even now, that sense of danger still remained. [1]

But if I had to fight him to the death, I’d probably survive. With those thoughts on his mind, he clasped hands and bowed.

Still smiling, Third Elder Brother took out a stack of spirit notes and offered them to Xu Qing. “Here, take this. A gift to mark this day. Back at Sealizard Island, you weren’t my Junior Brother, so I messed with you a bit. I hope you don’t mind. I guess I owe you for that.”

Xu Qing glanced at Third Elder Brother. He clearly remembered how there had been an aura that locked onto him when he fled Sealizard Island. He had never identified who it was that was chasing him, but later on he’d suspected it had something to do with Third Elder Brother. [2]

He was actually surprised that Third Elder Brother had just admitted the truth so casually. He looked down at the spirit notes and realized that they were worth 500,000 spirit stones. That was certainly appropriate for a show of good faith. Nodding, he accepted them.

Third Elder Brother breathed a sigh of relief when Xu Qing accepted the spirit notes. He enjoyed how things were on the Seventh Peak, and wanted to keep things as they were. What was more, he got the feeling that this new Junior Brother Xu Qing was the kind of person who would hold a grudge for life, and wouldn’t rest until his enemies were dead. That was not the kind of person Third Elder Brother wanted to provoke. He was about to say something further when a roar of rage echoed through the sky, so loud that even the deaf could hear it. Lands shook and mountains rocked as shockwaves rolled out in all directions.

“Are you looking to die, Sir Bloodsmelter?”

Everyone looked up.

Sword energy swept through the sky as if to slice apart the dome of heaven. Numerous sword projections flew about with destructive force. Just looking at it all, Xu Qing’s eyes stung. What was more, he also saw a very familiar withered hand appear. It was like the hand of a deity, filled with terrifying godliness, sending out fluctuations that transformed magical laws. As a result, numerous indistinct figures appeared around the hand, as if generations of sages and saints had been summoned to bless it. It seemed capable of plucking stars out of the sky, of destroying heaven and earth. Energy surged into the clouds as the hand stretched out.

The air shattered, turning into a raging sea of blood, and the indistinct figures around the hand started chanting. Immense pressure began to build up.

Xu Qing’s pupils constricted.

Meanwhile, the blood-red streams that Sir Bloodsmelter had produced were equally shocking. Each was like an undying devil. As the sages and saints descended and the sea of swords weighed down, those ferocious devils stood strong. Cackling laughter rang out as the blood-red streams swept about viciously, like snakes of blood. Wherever they passed, sword energy collapsed, and sword projections shattered. Finally, they transformed into the vicious head of a draconic snake that attacked the withered hand.

Heaven and earth trembled, and thunderous booms rang out as the hand collapsed. Patriarch Soaring Cloud shot backward in the face of the gigantic blood-colored snake head. Then, that head transformed back into Sir Bloodsmelter, his eyes burning with killing intent. Laughing, he said, "Fellow Daoist Soaring Cloud, you're only a thousand years older than me."

"You're from a subsidiary sect, and you will be crushed, Sir Bloodsmelter! This is your last chance. Hand over Xu Qing and return our life lamp. Follow the orders from the Seven Sect Coalition. If you do, then things can go back to normal, and Seven Blood Eyes can manage your own affairs without much interference from the coalition!"

Patriarch Soaring Cloud's eyes shone with cold light as he performed a right-handed incantation gesture then pointed out in front of him. Instantly, a sea of blood trembled in the sky, and it was barely possible to see the image of a huge blood tree inside of it.

This was the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect's taboo treasure. Though it wasn't the real thing, only a projection, it was still incredibly powerful.

"Without much interference?" Sir Bloodsmelter said. He laughed. "For thousands of years, my sect has paid a sixty percent yearly tithe to the coalition. You conscript all of our top chosen disciples. You force them to either surrender and pay allegiance, or be sent on dangerous missions that lead to certain death.

"Our sect techniques are throwaways from the coalition, and they all contain fatal flaws. If we somehow acquire new techniques, you take them away!

"You can override our sect's grand spell formation any time you wish. If our peaklords do something you don't like, you force them to accept assignments on the mainland, where they disappear, perhaps into death."

As Sir Bloodsmelter spoke, the disciples of the seven mountain peaks listened anxiously, their gazes growing sharper and sharper.

As for Patriarch Soaring Cloud, he frowned in response. "When drinking water, don't forget who dug the well! Seven Blood Eyes was founded by coalition disciples and coalition funds. That's the only reason your sect was able to grow. What, now you want to just be free? Now you want to forget favors and violate justice?"

Hearing this, Sir Bloodsmelter smiled broadly, though it was a smile that contained incredulity.

"Favors? Let's talk about favors. 3,000 years ago, the battle in Forbidden by the Zombie. 2,700 years ago, the War of Soulstream. 2,000 years ago, the battle with the Cloudpeople. 1,700 years ago, the big war with the Heartsouls.... To this day, Seven

Blood Eyes has fought more than six hundred battles and wars for your Seven Sect Coalition!

“There have been countless deaths. Our bones litter the lands! We give the wounded disciples medicinal pills, and the dead disciples burials. But have we ever asked compensation from the Seven Sect Coalition for that? Every time our sect is about to prosper, war comes, and we decline. And whatever gains made from the war are meager!

“Over the past several thousand years, this sect has been brought to the brink of destruction seventy-nine times. Did your Seven Sect Coalition ever help us out on such occasions? Successive generations of patriarchs have requested aid. In fact, our third generation patriarch literally kowtowed to you and pleaded for help. Did you ever once pay attention?

“Every single time, the patriarchs of Seven Blood Eyes have to be cautious and conscientious. They lick their wounds and work hard to recover from the losses of war. Then, once things are starting to go well again, your coalition starts conscripting our best disciples again!

“Don’t tell me that the lives of Seven Blood Eyes aren’t worth anything! Do they exist just to die for you while you sit back and relax, Soaring Cloud? I, Sir Bloodsmelter, am asking this question to the Seven Sect Coalition. And I’m asking it of all heaven and earth!

“Has Seven Blood Eyes repaid you well enough for these ‘favors’?

“Has Seven Blood Eyes wiped out the debt incurred by these ‘favors’?

“You bleed us dry, always citing the ‘favor’ of how you helped us get started, and then telling us we have to abide by things because we owe you. You sit there, high and mighty, and say that if we in Seven Blood Eyes don’t die for you, that we’re ‘forgetting favors.’ You say that if we don’t pay our dues to you, that we’re ‘violating justice.’

“Could it be that your ‘favors’ boil down to Seven Blood Eyes being enslaved to you for generation after generation? Will it just keep going like that until the epoch ends and the apocalypse comes!?”

Sir Bloodsmelter’s words rang out loud and clear, shaking all seven of the mountain peaks in Seven Blood Eyes.

Patriarch Soaring Cloud’s expression was grim. He was fully aware of the situation with Seven Blood Eyes. But in the end, profit determined one’s position in life.

“There’s no need for speeches. People who forget favors always come up with plenty of excuses.”

Sir Bloodsmelter laughed. “Ah, what an impressive supervisory sect. How amazing you are to use ‘favors’ to enhance your own prestige and power. As it turns out, you are the ones who drink water, and forget who dug the well. Well, in that case, starting today... Seven Blood Eyes is going to become a supervisory sect!”

Patriarch Soaring Cloud’s eyes turned incredibly sharp. “Your sect isn’t worthy.”

“See what happens next before you decide.” Sir Bloodsmelter waved his right hand and pointed to the sky. “Open the portal to the Seazombie ancestral land!”

As the words left his mouth, winds swept through the sky, and heaven and earth shook. At the same time, beyond Seastar Island, the Merfolk Isles, and the various Seazombie fortified islands, was the Seazombie ancestral land, which also trembled.

Half of those ancestral lands had been ceded to Seven Blood Eyes. That was where the Seven Blood Eyes army still was, having not yet returned to the sect. That was where Seven Blood Eyes had built a huge teleportation portal to transport the zombie ancestor statues. In fact, those two statues had already been moved to the teleportation portal, and stood there tall and imposing. Now, the teleportation portal suddenly glowed with immense light. The clouds parted as if being dragged apart by invisible hands.

As the light of teleportation glittered, intense rumbling sounds rolled out everywhere. The rumbling sounds didn’t come from the two zombie ancestor statues by the teleportation portal. Instead... they came from the sky as something was teleported in.

Five beams of light became visible.

They were so dazzling they were difficult to see. As they closed in, they attracted the attention of all the cultivators in the Seazombie ancestral land. All of them were shaken, and looks of disbelief could be seen everywhere.

And that was because, inside of those beams of light, astonishingly, were... five unfamiliar zombie ancestor statues! They were not from the nine statues that had originally existed with the Seazombies. They were different statues! The statues seemed incredibly ancient, as if they had seen many things from ancient times until now. They were covered with cracks, yet were obviously not made from ordinary stone. And it was only when in the Seazombie lands that they would emit dazzling light. That was one of the marvelous properties of the Seazombie divine likenesses. They were only powerful in one specific location.

When the five statues arrived, they slammed down, causing the earth to quake violently, and filling the Seazombie lands with intense rumbling sounds.

Now, it was possible to see that there were a total of fourteen zombie ancestor statues in the Seazombie ancestral land. Seven were located in various parts of the ancestral land, while the other seven were arrayed by the teleportation portal leading to Seven Blood Eyes.

As the teleportation portal thrummed, the seven statues glowed brightly, then sent out powerful fluctuations. It was like they were seven massive power sources! At the same time, above each of the seven statues... seven blood-colored vortexes appeared. They were seven eyes! They were all closed, but as they appeared, they caused a violent tsunami to sweep out across the sea. All nonhumans, all sea beasts, and everything else trembled in absolute astonishment. And that was

because... this was not the aura of an ordinary magical treasure. This was something approaching the level of a taboo treasure!

As the matchlessly fierce aura became more intense, the air screamed above the closed eyes as something else appeared. It was an ancient bronze mirror, fully 30,000 meters in size! [3]

It hovered vertically in the air, rotating slowly in a circle. It could face north to the Emperor-Receiving Prefecture, south to Seven Blood Eyes, east to Forbidden by the Zombie, and west to the Sea of Endlessness. Everything was within its range!

And wherever it pointed, people would feel struck down to their soul, and would shiver in terror! As the power sources that were the seven zombie ancestor statues fed into the mirror, it pulsed with a taboo aura. Seven Blood Eyes' taboo treasure had formed!

#### Chapter 266: The Truth Revealed

In the blink of an eye, the Forbidden Sea was thrown into chaos. Everyone from the Emperor-Receiving Prefecture was visibly stunned.

The first to react was the group closest to the Seazombies, and that was the Seven Sect Coalition. Almost instantly, six immense figures appeared, projected above their headquarters. They included both men and women, and their faces were obscured. Only their eyes were visible, bright and radiant.

“Seven Blood Eyes....”

“They actually managed to create a taboo treasure.”

“Sir Bloodsmelter really is a man of rigorous schemes and deep foresight. He's not to be underestimated!”

These six figures were patriarchs and matriarchs who were on the senate of the Seven Sect Coalition. As they communicated with divine will, they rose high into the air. Then they began moving, taking steps forward before vanishing in the direction of the Seazombies. They appeared in the air over the Seazombie ancestral land only a moment later. As the immense bronze mirror rotated, the terrifying power of a taboo treasure struck them to the core. When a magical treasure became a taboo treasure, it involved very unusual transformations. Gruish abilities would manifest, which would then determine the full extent and capabilities of the taboo treasure.

“Punishment.... I can't believe it! This thing has the power of capital punishment!”

“The Seven Blood Eyes taboo treasure doesn't have the power to destroy a sect. Instead, it can do something even more unique. It can destroy an individual! Based on what I can sense, it has a destructive power that is... absolutely terrifying!

“Once it locks onto someone, it has a ten percent chance of instantly detonating them! And because of the nature of that mirror, it can target people from a great distance!”

“Even though the success rate is only ten percent, that's only for a single eye. This thing has seven eyes! For all intents and purposes, that means it has a seventy

percent chance of succeeding. Who would dare to take a chance against something like that?"

"Sir Bloodsmelter is in the first stage of Void Returning. With this taboo treasure and its ability to inflict capital punishment, he could definitely target someone in second stage Void Returning!"

"Second stage... that's the level the president of the Seven Sect Coalition is in."

The patriarchs and matriarchs of the Seven Sect Coalition fell into silence. Each had their own thoughts on the matter.

A taboo treasure was the greatest threat a sect could unleash, and it wasn't something that just any sect could unleash. Of the 136 sects that made up the coalition, there were only seven that had taboo treasures. What was more, taboo treasures were things that other people couldn't just take away. They had spirit automatons, and could defend themselves. For example, if anyone attempted to take Seven Blood Eyes' taboo treasure, it was entirely possible that the treasure could be unleashed against them.

Seven Blood Eyes' taboo treasure had other unique aspects. It was powered by seven zombie ancestor statues. Therefore, when any of its seven eyes opened, it would unleash terrifying power.

After assessing the situation, the patriarchs and matriarchs of the coalition exchanged glances, then performed incantation gestures that instigated a long-distance teleportation. Then they vanished in the direction of Seven Blood Eyes.

In a matter of moments, all of the various factions in the Emperor-Receiving Prefecture on the Revered Ancient mainland were using their own methods to observe what was happening above Seven Blood Eyes. And all of them realized... that the structure of the Seven Sect Coalition was going to change. By extension, that meant that the structure of the Emperor-Receiving Prefecture was also going to change.

Storm clouds were on the horizon.

All of the Seazombies in the Seazombie ancestral land were trembling in despair. In contrast, the Seven Blood Eyes disciples who were stationed there all seemed incredibly excited.

Of course, most astonished of all was the person currently having trouble breathing steadily, and that was... Patriarch Soaring Cloud, who hovered in the air above Seven Blood Eyes. Sweat had broken out on his forehead, and his eyes were narrowed. It was impossible for him to prevent his shock from showing on his face as he stared in the direction of the Seazombie ancestral land.

Although he couldn't actually see what was happening there, he could sense that something had locked onto him, and he knew that with a mere thought, Sir Bloodsmelter could bring deadly catastrophe to him. From the mere sensation of that force locking onto him, it was obvious that he was in an absolute crisis.

Capital punishment... seven shots at capital punishment!

Breathing unsteadily, he looked at Sir Bloodsmelter with bloodshot eyes.

“Now do you think Seven Blood Eyes is worthy to be a supervisory sect?” Sir Bloodsmelter asked coolly.

Patriarch Soaring Cloud opened his mouth to speak, but then realized he didn't know what to say. All of a sudden, it occurred to him that everything Seven Blood Eyes had done was part of one unified strategy.

It had only seemed that Seven Blood Eyes was targeting the Seazombies to absolutely destroy them. In reality, that wasn't their plan at all.

Seven Blood Eyes actually had two goals.

The first had been to create a path to the Revered Ancient mainland. Patriarch Soaring Cloud could envision that path in his mind. The starting point was Seven Blood Eyes. Second came the Merfolk Isles, third were the Seazombie fortified islands, and fourth was the Seazombie ancestral land. The fourth location on the path was very close to the Seven Sect Coalition on the mainland. That path was essentially a straight line from Seven Blood Eyes to the Seven Sect Coalition.

However, Seven Blood Eyes' strategy was complex. They had attacked the Merfolk during the Seventh Peak's Grand Competition, all in order to draw out the Seazombies. Sir Bloodsmelter chose that moment for his breakthrough, in order to attack and injure the Seazombie patriarch.

That was the main reason why the Seazombies were ultimately defeated.

The next logical step was for them to attack the Seazombies, and slowly conquer their fortified islands before moving onto their ancestral land. It was a clean operation, and during the entire time, Seven Blood Eyes didn't give any indication that they had the power to do anything beyond achieve this first goal of theirs.

Of course, the Seven Sect Coalition had quickly realized what that first goal was.

That was why they stepped in to prevent Seven Blood Eyes from taking over the Seazombie ancestral land. The Seven Sect Coalition had taken advantage of the moment to destroy the Young Arbiter Sect and restore the flow of the Everlasting Immortal Profundity River. But that didn't mean they weren't paying close attention to Seven Blood Eyes. Their action had been an act of shaking the mountain to frighten the tiger. In this case, the mountain was the Young Arbiter Sect and the tiger was Seven Blood Eyes. In that manner, they won a victory without expending much effort, and made sure that Seven Blood Eyes was put into place.

However, no one in the Seven Sect Coalition had even considered that Seven Blood Eyes actually had a second goal. And that second goal was cloaked in profound deception. In fact, it had been hidden so perfectly that, right now, Patriarch Soaring Cloud's scalp tingled when he thought about it. Now he realized that Seven Blood Eyes had intentionally made their first goal obvious. And the reason was to prevent anyone from realizing what their second goal was.

This was not Sir Bloodsmelter's usual style.

The second goal was to acquire the zombie ancestor divine likenesses, and then use them as a power source. By doing so, they could upgrade their sect's magical treasure to the point of becoming a taboo treasure.



The success of the operation hinged on two premises. First, they needed a way to use the zombie ancestor statues as power sources. Second, they needed to locate several zombie ancestor statues that were floating around outside of the Seazombie ancestral land.

Clearly, Seven Blood Eyes had fulfilled both premises.

Seven Blood Eyes had even calculated that the Seven Sect Coalition would interfere with their operation, and force them to end the war. All of their previous anger and defiance, as well as all their haggling, had been for a purpose. And that was... to make sure they could get the final two zombie ancestor statues they needed.

Even after the negotiations were complete, Seven Blood Eyes still showed restraint. Despite how the Seven Sect Coalition's chosen came and issued dueling challenges, causing Seven Blood Eyes to lose a lot of face, they kept quiet and just waited for the spell formation construction to be completed. Supposedly, that spell formation had been built to transport war reparations. It seemed like something any conquering force would do. But the reality was that it wasn't built to transport two statues to Seven Blood Eyes. It was built to transport five statues from Seven Blood Eyes.

With that one teleportation, the number of statues around the formation reached a total of seven. What was more, upon being returned to the Seazombie ancestral land, they awoke from their state of slumber.

Gritting his teeth, Patriarch Soaring Cloud growled, "So when our coalition disciples issued challenges to your disciples, you intentionally put on a weak front? All to trick us? In that case, what's your ultimate goal? You want to be an independent force on Revered Ancient?"

Sir Bloodsmelter didn't answer the first question, as it wasn't important. He just smiled and said, "I'm old. I want to enjoy a life of retirement on the mainland. But at the same time, I hope to see a new seat added to the Seven Sect Coalition's senate."

Patriarch Soaring Cloud didn't respond. He was incredibly frustrated and annoyed. His sect's life lamp had been taken, and his grandson had been seriously injured. However, those things were secondary to Seven Blood Eyes' sudden show of decisiveness and ambition.

Seven Blood Eyes was very still and quiet. The ordinary disciples didn't know exactly what was going on, but they could sense that the atmosphere had changed. And when they heard their patriarch's words, their hearts started racing. They could guess what was coming.

Xu Qing looked out at the sea. A moment ago, he had sensed something happening out there, and he could speculate about what it was.

"So, that's what's going on here," the Captain said quietly, but loud enough for his fellow apprentices to hear. "The old man really is a cunning old fox. Now I get what the secret weapon is."

Xu Qing looked over at him. So did Third Elder Brother. Second Elder Sister, on the other hand, was still sending voice messages.

"You really know what's going on, Eldest Brother?" asked Third Elder Brother. "Is it a taboo treasure? Does Seven Blood Eyes finally have a taboo treasure?" Third Eldest Brother seemed hesitant about that assessment.

As for Xu Qing, he kept his eyes on the Captain. He was also hesitant.

The Captain sighed deeply. "Something like this is worth about 1,000 spirit stones. Whoever wants to know, just pay up, and I'll tell you."

"You don't know squat!" Master Seventh said.

Looking embarrassed, the Captain cleared his throat.

"I worked a hundred years to plan this thing for the patriarch," Master Seventh continued. "Step by step, we've carried out the operation to this point.

"There's no need for you four to speculate about the details. I'll tell you. Out in the Seazombie ancestral land, we created a taboo treasure that belongs to Seven Blood Eyes. It will be the eighth taboo treasure to exist in the Seven Sect Coalition. With it, we can control everything around us, and also ensure safe passage to the Revered Ancient mainland.

"After this, the Seven Sect Coalition is going to have to change its name." Looking back at his four apprentices, Master Seventh smiled. "What do you think? Does 'Eight Sect Coalition' sound good? I think it does."

As the words left Master Seventh's mouth, the sky above shimmered as powerful auras suddenly spread out everywhere. Six god-like beings appeared in the dome of heaven around Sir Bloodsmelter and Patriarch Soaring Cloud.

These were the patriarchs and matriarchs from the senate of the Seven Sect Coalition.

In almost the exact same instant that they arrived, an old woman walked out of Seven Blood Eyes and flew up into the air. Arriving next to Sir Bloodsmelter, she looked at the people from the Seven Sect Coalition and smiled.

"Hey everyone. Long time no see. I was napping earlier when I heard someone mention handing over Xu Qing. My granddaughter really likes that kid, and I'm thinking of marrying them. If you kill him, my granddaughter wouldn't be very happy. And that means I wouldn't be happy either. I don't have much in my old age, but I do have my granddaughter. Therefore, if I'm not happy, I'll make sure the lot of you are very unhappy!"

Chapter 267: Eight Sect Coalition

The words spoken by Yanyan's grandmother echoed to fill the entire sect.

Xu Qing didn't say anything. The Captain and Third Elder Brother both looked at him. Second Elder Sister even stopped sending voice messages to do the same.

Master Seventh looked over his shoulder at Xu Qing, a look of praise on his face. "Well done. You're just like me back in the day."

Then he looked at his other three apprentices, frowning in frustration at how they continuously failed to live up to his expectations. That said, his gaze quickly omitted Second Sib, and focused

mainly on Big Sib and Third Sib. After thinking about Third Sib for a moment, he ignored him and stared straight at the Captain.

“You could learn a thing or two from your Junior Brother!”

“If I looked like him, I’d be doing fine!” the Captain said gloomily. “Not even magical techniques can replicate little Ah Qing’s face!”

Far gloomier than the Captain, however, was Patriarch Soaring Cloud. As he hovered in the air above the sect, he glared at Guru Eastnether, his expression immeasurably unsightly. It was bad enough that Sir Bloodsmelter was protecting the scum who had harmed the interests of his sect. But it was completely unthinkable that Guru Eastnether, who had long ignored the outside world and never made alliances, was also doing the same thing.

Patriarch Soaring Cloud thought about how his grandson was injured, and might not even survive. He thought about the stolen life lamp, and he thought about how everything had gone wrong lately. Seven Blood Eyes now qualified to be a supervisory sect, and was clearly no weaker than any of the other top seven sects. All of it caused his eyes to become completely bloodshot. He knew that he couldn’t stop Seven Blood Eyes from becoming a supervisory sect.

After all, the Seven Sect Coalition was not run by any one particular sect. There were eight people on the senate: the president plus seven patriarchs and matriarchs. Although they had common interests, there was also friction between various members. Seven Blood Eyes was powerful, and now they had a taboo treasure. They didn’t just qualify to join the coalition, they would obviously be a force to be reckoned with.

Patriarch Soaring Cloud knew that the other members of the senate would approve of the change. In fact, thinking about everything Seven Blood Eyes had done to reach this point, he was convinced that they must have already made contact with people in the coalition, and earned their secret support.

Grinding his teeth, he said, “If you give us back our life lamp, then the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect will support you joining the coalition! If you don’t, then you’re responsible for the consequences! You have the power, Sir Bloodsmelter. You decide whether you’re our enemy or our friend!”

Patriarch Soaring Cloud raised his hand and pointed toward the sky. The sea of blood in the dome of heaven rumbled as it began to form a blood tree that could descend on Seven Blood Eyes in an instant. Great pressure suddenly weighed down on Seven Blood Eyes.

Sir Bloodsmelter chuckled darkly. “How amusing, Soaring Cloud. And how very sinister of you. You think I’m going to sacrifice one of my disciples’ interests to join the Seven Sect Coalition? If I did that, what would the other disciples think?”

“Might they not wonder if I would sacrifice them later on, just to get ahead? And what would allies think? Might they not wonder if I would sacrifice them?to get ahead? How much face would I lose by doing that?”

“Soaring Cloud, you vermin, such words are deplorable even for you. It seems to me you don’t believe that I really have a taboo treasure.”

Eyes hardening, Sir Bloodsmelter shoved out his right hand. As heaven and earth trembled, the patriarchs and matriarchs from the Seven Sect Coalition watched closely. In the Seazombie ancestral land, the huge bronze mirror rotated until it was facing Seven Blood Eyes. As it completely locked down onto Patriarch Soaring Cloud, one of the seven eyes hovering above the seven zombie ancestor statues snapped open.

The blood-red eye had no pupil. As soon as it opened, a sinister wind sprang up that seemed cold enough to freeze the nine heavens. As it enveloped Seven Blood Eyes, an image of Patriarch Soaring Cloud appeared within the mirror.

Patriarch Soaring Cloud's face fell as an intense sensation of deadly crisis overwhelmed him. It had been many years since he had experienced any feeling like this. His flesh and blood quivered, his mind shook, and his life force screamed. It was like he was facing a deadly predator who held his life in its hand, and could easily rip out his soul. Sensing that death was coming for him, Patriarch Soaring Cloud unleashed the power of his cultivation base to fight back.

Simultaneously, a cold voice rang out from the bronze mirror.

“Capital punishment!”

In the mirror, the image of Patriarch Soaring Cloud twisted and distorted. A vicious expression appeared on his face, as though the image itself were a unique entity, and not the patriarch himself. A moment later it exploded.

The eye closed.

Meanwhile, back in Seven Blood Eyes, blood sprayed out of Patriarch Soaring Cloud's mouth. He shook violently, and his facial expression matched the image of himself in the mist. Then he exploded in a cloud of blood.

Some distance away, he formed back again. This time, his face was pale, and his eyes seemed dull. His expression was one of complete disbelief.

The cold voice from the mirror echoed out again.

“Capital punishment failed. Initiating second capital punishment.”

Sir Bloodsmelter snarled and was about to make a move when the other six patriarchs and matriarchs from the Seven Sect Coalition moved to interfere. Before they could, Sir Bloodsmelter grinned viciously and shouted, “Taboo activate!”

Instantly, the seven zombie ancestor statues beneath the bronze mirror unleashed unrivaled energy and blood, causing the six eyes that had not yet opened, as well as the seventh eye that had just closed... to all open!!

The seven eyes released seven gazes that crossed the Forbidden Sea, entered Seven Blood Eyes, and locked onto the seven patriarchs and matriarchs! All of them trembled, and their faces fell.

All of a sudden, they realized that Seven Blood Eyes taboo treasure was a lot more gruish than they'd realized. It wasn't the case that each eye could unleash capital punishment. Even if one of the eyes' capital punishment failed, it would unleash another attack immediately. Clearly, the attacks could build on each other. In other words, even if someone got incredibly lucky and survived seven capital punishments, they would end up so injured they would be hovering on the

brink of death. Even more relevant was that Seven Blood Eyes' taboo treasure had ample power, such that no one knew how many times it could be used. It was a terrifying thing considering that the other sects' taboo items could only be used once in a specified period of time. Although it was likely that Seven Blood Eyes' taboo treasure also had some sort of cooldown period, none of them wanted to take a risk considering they didn't know for sure.

All of these patriarchs and matriarchs had a sense of propriety, and thus, in that moment, the representatives from Spiritgloom Valley and the Heavenmirror Treasure Sect spoke.

“We propose to let Seven Blood Eyes join the coalition!”

“We second the motion!”

Although it seemed like their decision was made in the heat of the moment, Patriarch Soaring Cloud wasn't convinced that was the case. He was thinking about back when he had activated his own taboo treasure to destroy the Young Arbiter Sect and intimidate Seven Blood Eyes.

During the middle of that event, Spiritgloom Valley and the Heavenmirror Treasure Sect had also activated their taboo treasures. After the event was over, he'd come to the conclusion it made sense given the circumstances. But now he realized that those two sects must have activated their taboo treasures just in case he didn't follow the plan, and actually attacked Seven Blood Eyes. [1]

They've been working together all along! Patriarch Soaring Cloud thought, his face turned even paler.

The action taken by Spiritgloom Valley and the Heavenmirror Treasure Sect seemed to sway the other four.

Seeing that, Patriarch Soaring Cloud's heart filled with grief. He wanted to do something, but the sensation of imminent death that filled him prevented him. Right now, maintaining face was more important than a life lamp. As the saying goes, if you ride a tiger, it's hard to get off.

Around this time, a calm, ancient voice suddenly spoke from the dome of heaven.

“We're all on the same side here. There's no point in making such a big fuss over a simple misunderstanding.

“Fellow Daoist Soaring Cloud, please return to headquarters. And the rest of you Fellow Daoists do the same. Fellow Daoist Bloodsmelter, we welcome you to join the senate, and we are pleased to have Seven Blood Eyes as part of the coalition. Please come so that we can discuss the particulars of transporting your sect here.

“I hereby swear an oath, witnessed by all Revered Ancient, that the Seven Sect Coalition will be renamed the Eight Sect Coalition. What do you think, Fellow Daoist Bloodsmelter?”

High in the dome of heaven a face appeared, pulsing with spectacular energy, and causing crushing pressure to weigh down on the nine of the first stage Void Returning patriarchs. It didn't affect any of the Seven Blood Eyes disciples. The face belonged to that of a middle-aged cultivator. He seemed scholarly, and lacked any sort of perverse energy. As he looked down at Sir Bloodsmelter, a second, slightly larger version of his face appeared and superimposed upon the first. Then a third, a

fourth, and a fifth face appeared. Each one was larger than the one before it. More and more appeared, until they were impossible to count, and seemed to fill the entire sky above the continent of South Phoenix.

“Well met, President!”

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“Well met, President!” All of the Seven Sect Coalition patriarchs and matriarchs looked sober as they clasped hands respectfully.

Xu Qing struggled to control his breathing, while the Captain stood next to him, his eyes shining. Further ahead, Master Seventh looked up and murmured, “This is the second stage of Void Returning. Transform 10,000 Veracities....”

Xu Qing gazed into the dome of heaven, his heart pounding, his eyes burning with a thirst to become stronger.

Meanwhile, Sir Bloodsmelter took a deep breath and clasped hands respectfully to show his agreement.

A moment later, the faces in the sky vanished. Looking very frustrated, Patriarch Soaring Cloud flicked his sleeve, picking up all of the trembling disciples of his sect, then becoming a bright beam of light that shot off into the distance.

The other sect patriarchs and matriarchs clasped hands to Sir Bloodsmelter and Guru Eastnether, and then some of them departed. One of them, a woman from the Dark Serenity Sect whose face it wasn't possible to see clearly, smiled faintly as she looked down at the summit of the Seventh Peak. Then she left.

The matriarch and patriarch from Spiritgloom Valley and the Heavenmirror Treasure Sect chose not to leave. She was tender and delicate, he was burly with a big beard. Whether in terms of appearance or aura, both surpassed anything ordinary. Their eyes glittered, and they smiled as they looked at Sir Bloodsmelter and Guru Eastnether. Apparently, all of them were well-acquainted with each other. Now that everything had played out, there was no need for any of them to maintain appearances.

“We'll be waiting for you in the coalition.”

“Welcome to the coalition, Bloodsmelter, old pal!”

Sir Bloodsmelter laughed heartily, and Guru Eastnether gave a faint smile. After reminiscing for a short time, the coalition representatives said their farewells and headed back to the mainland.

The outsiders were gone. Master Seventh had accepted a new apprentice. And now, Sir Bloodsmelter publicly announced the result of everything that had happened. Seven Blood Eyes was to join the Seven Sect Coalition, which would become the Eight Sect Coalition. They would move to the mainland in a matter of days.

All Seven Blood Eyes disciples were filled with excitement. And that excitement lasted for the seven or eight days that came after. The entire sect was bubbling with joy, and everyone was talking about things to come.

As for Xu Qing, things quickly calmed down. Though he was now the fourth highness from the Seventh Peak, he still had work to do acclimating to his second life lamp. The sect did not officially ask him any questions about that second lamp.

A few more days went by, and then another announcement was made.

In three days, a delegation led by Sir Bloodsmelter and Master Seventh would go to the Seven Sect Coalition in the Revered Ancient mainland. There, they would negotiate details about the upcoming move.

Moving an entire sect was no small affair, and would require a lot of give and take on both sides. Though Xu Qing wouldn't participate in the actual negotiations, he was going to be part of the delegation. Also coming along were the Captain and Third Elder Brother. There were also highnesses from the other mountain peaks. The Seven Sect Coalition wasn't going to act arrogant and overbearing. They would treat Seven Blood Eyes as equals, and would follow all of the prescribed formalities to welcome them.

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In the last few years, Xu Qing hadn't dreamed very much, but the day before leaving, he did.

He dreamed of being a child, back with his mother and father in the city where he was born. Back then, he wasn't a street urchin. Back then, he had a happy family life. Back then, he had no idea how evil the world really was. In the dream, his parents' faces were blurry. He tried hard to remember what they looked like, but their faces seemed lost in time. It had nothing to do with his cultivation base. It was just how life worked. That said, his older brother's face was very clear.

He did have a brother. In the dream, he and his brother got along well. They grew older together, playing in the dirt, giggling and laughing, going to school together, and whispering to each other after lights out. However, in the dream, his brother's face suddenly split apart in a very grisly fashion, revealing another face underneath. It was a cold face, with nefarious, evil eyes.

Chapter 268: Eat the Whole Thing by Yourself?

It was the tenth month. Fall.

In the north of South Phoenix, in the capital city and sect headquarters of Seven Blood Eyes, the sky was blue and sunny. A few wispy clouds drifted overhead. They almost looked like clouds painted casually onto a canvas by a scholar.

Things below looked just as picturesque. The capital city thrummed with life and everyone seemed to be smiling. They were real smiles, as Seven Blood Eyes had recently announced the plans for moving. Anyone who had been paying taxes in the city for ten years or more could apply to move to the Revered Ancient mainland. Of course, they would have to cover their own moving expenses. Countless cultivators in South Phoenix longed for such an opportunity, and that wasn't to mention the numerous mortals who lived in Seven Blood Eyes.

As the city bubbled with excitement, seven enormous watercraft were moored outside Harbor 1. They all looked identical. They were violet, and were massive, being fully 3,000 meters long. They were extravagantly decorated, covered with spirit jade, and gilded with gold. Each one had a huge, vicious eye as the figurehead. At the stern of each ship were nine terrifying tails that filled one with a ghastly sensation upon looking at them.

Complicated spell formations were built into all of the giant ships. People who knew spell formations would gasp upon seeing them. That was because the formations were so complex that, upon being activated, they would turn each ship into a war fortress.

There were already Seven Blood Eyes disciples boarding the ships. Based on the clothing of the disciples, it was clear that each mountain peak had one ship. All of the disciples were extraordinary, and had powerful cultivation base fluctuations. Because of that, other disciples had gathered to watch, and were excitedly discussing what was happening.

“I saw the second highness from the First Peak! I heard that after he lost to Master Shengyun, he went into seclusion. He’s definitely a lot stronger now!”

“He’s not the only one. Look over there, everyone! Those are the grand highnesses from the Third and Fourth Peak.”

“The highnesses from the Second and Fifth Peak are here too!”

As the crowds of disciples chattered, the Captain stood on the deck of the seventh huge ship, his lips pursed in thought. “I guess they’re out for revenge, huh? Before, everyone was throwing their fights, but that doesn’t mean they really gave up. I guess they want to take advantage of the big negotiation to wipe away their humiliation. Say, little Ah Qing, do you think we should go track down Little Kunkun to get revenge? He has an older brother, you know. Maybe he has some Dark Serenity Fingers also!” [1]

Taking a bite of an apple, the Captain looked over at Xu Qing, who was seated cross-legged in meditation.

Xu Qing opened his eyes. The images from the dream the night before were still floating in his mind, but he shoved them away.

Most of the people joining the delegation had been selected by Master Seventh because of their familiarity with the people from Revered Ancient. Xu Qing himself wasn’t the only one with such experience. All of the mountain peaks had people like that. For the most part, they were the top highnesses. As for the Seventh Peak, all of the highnesses were going except for Second Elder Sister.

In response to the Captain’s question, Xu Qing thought for a moment. Given that Seven Blood Eyes was joining the coalition, he hadn’t seen any need to keep their chosen locked up, and had thus freed Huang Yikun and the others. He nodded.

“When he left,” Xu Qing explained, “he didn’t pay his incarceration fee. He just wrote an IOU. I supposed I ought to go find him and collect.”

The Captain’s eyes lit up and he tossed an apple to Xu Qing. “Good thinking. We’re not going over there to cause trouble, just to settle some debts. Speaking of which, what about everyone else, little Ah Qing. Did they pay up?”

“They all wrote IOUs,” Xu Qing replied, his expression the same as ever.

“Hahaha! I have to offer you some praise, little Ah Qing. You always come up with good reasons to do what you do. In that sense, you’re like me. You and I are both



very reasonable. Unlike Third Sib, who goes around forcing people to cooperate. That's just ridiculous. Wait. Hold on... where'd Third Sib get off to?" Eyebrows dancing up and down, he looked around. "I bet he went to brownnose Master. Or maybe chat with girls from the other peaks. Let me tell you, from the moment he joined the sect, I never really liked him. At first, I was thinking I should hook him up with Second Sib. But then I realized she'd probably just beat him up every day."

The Captain sighed regretfully.

Xu Qing looked at him and didn't say anything in response.

Before long, the people from the other mountain peaks had boarded their ships. All seven of the huge watercraft rumbled to life, then slowly started moving out of the port, out to the Forbidden Sea, and in the direction of Revered Ancient.

Sir Bloodsmelter and Master Seventh were leading the delegation going to the mainland. The other peaklords wouldn't go, and would instead remain behind to handle preparations for the big move.

South Phoenix was so far from Revered Ancient that traveling by ship would take too long. Therefore, once the seven huge ships were out of the port, they blurred as they tapped into the power of the sect's spell formation to activate teleportation formations built into them. Loud rumbling sounds echoed out, and then the ships vanished.

When they appeared, they were near the Merfolk Isles.

They didn't stop to rest. Using the spell formations there, they performed another greater teleportation, which took them to the Seazombies' fortified islands.

Tapping into the spell formations there, they quickly traveled to the Seazombie ancestral land. From there, only a single teleportation would get them to their destination. Even if they didn't use such a teleportation, it would only have taken three days at sea for them to arrive.

That meant that the Seven Blood Eyes disciples had one day of free time to disembark.

This voyage was being made on official sect business. That said, everyone was curious about the taboo treasure. What was more, the top figures from the various mountain peaks were certain to be important people in the future. Therefore, it was important that they understood their own sect's taboo treasure.

After the seven ships dropped anchor, numerous figures flew out of them and shot toward the taboo treasure. From a distance, Xu Qing could see the huge bronze mirror. All fourteen of the zombie ancestor statues were now arrayed in the area, and they pulsed with an ancient aura. Most grisly of all, however, were the seven closed eyes.

After Seven Blood Eyes revealed its taboo treasure, what territory the Seazombies had retained was naturally ceded. From that point on, there was no autonomous Seazombie culture. They were now a subsidiary species attached to Seven Blood Eyes. As long as Seven Blood Eyes had its taboo treasure, their fate would never change.

Vastworld had been allowed to leave the sect headquarters, but it didn't matter. Nobody cared about Seazombies anymore. In the Emperor-Receiving Prefecture, all eyes were on the first sect to have truly risen to prominence in the last ten thousand years. Seven Blood Eyes.

The Captain looked around and, seeing that everyone else had left to look at the taboo treasure, said, "I have a personal matter to attend to, little Ah Qing. There's an old friend I need to see. Ai. She's the only reason I managed to get out of this place back then. You probably already guessed who I'm talking about, right? That's why it's not exactly going to be convenient to bring you along. I'll head off now, little Ah Qing. Your Elder Brother trusts that you won't tell anybody about this."

Seeming very serious, he flew off into the distance.

Looking after him for a moment, Xu Qing got to his feet and followed.

Sensing Xu Qing behind him, the Captain suddenly looked very much on guard. "What the hell are you following me for?"

"I also have a personal matter to attend to," Xu Qing replied calmly.

The Captain blinked a few times, then plastered a look of sudden understanding onto his face.

"You want to go take care of Vastworld, don't you? I already know where he is. Just head in the direction indicated on this jade slip." The Captain tossed a jade slip to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing put the jade slip into his robe and continued after the Captain.

"Why are you still following me, Xu Qing?" the Captain blurted. He sounded quite anxious.

Xu Qing didn't say anything. After looking around, he flew into a shadowy canyon. The Captain followed.

"Take it out, Eldest Brother," Xu Qing said. "We only have a day. Let's eat it together."

"Eat what?" the Captain said, glaring as he backed away a few steps.

"The nose! I went to the museum yesterday, and it was gone. You took it, right? What, you thought you were going to eat the whole thing by yourself?"

The Captain blinked a few times, then laughed heartily. "Hahaha! I really can't slip anything past you, little Junior Brother. Well done. Very well done. I'd planned all along for the two of us to eat it together. I was joking around just now, that's all."

Clearing his throat, the Captain looked around, then grimaced and took something out of his bag of holding.

With a thump, it landed on the ground. It was, of course, the nose from the zombie ancestor divine likeness. Back in Seven Blood Eyes, it was nothing more than ordinary stone. But here, it emanated shocking fluctuations, and contained a divine resonance.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered as he sat down cross-legged and circulated his cultivation base. Two umbrellas appeared above him, and the golden crow manifested and began viciously assimilating the nose.

Seeing this, the Captain instantly got anxious. The main thing he had been worried about was the possibility of Xu Qing devouring the nose too quickly. That was why he'd attempted to sneak out, absorb most of it, and give some leftovers to Xu Qing.

Obviously, Xu Qing had seen through his plan, and was now voraciously devouring the nose. All the Captain could do was rush forward, throw his arms around the nose, and start doing his own absorbing.

While the highnesses from the other peaks were sighing in admiration at the sect's taboo treasure, Xu Qing and the Captain were secretly having a feast.

Inside Xu Qing, a massive, terrifying force was building up. Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior and the shadow also rushed out to join in absorbing the nose.

"Outrageous!" the Captain growled. "Ridiculous! This is beyond the pale!"

Baring his teeth, he bit a huge chunk out of the nose. However, that wasn't enough for him, so he utilized some unknown technique to cause himself to suddenly grow multiple mouths all over his body, all of which he used to bite the nose.

Crunching sounds echoed out as the two of them used various means to absorb the nose.

In the blink of an eye, Xu Qing opened his 93rd dharma aperture. And there was more. He soon opened his 94th and 95th. Right now, he needed many times more power to open dharma apertures than he did before. And yet, just as in situations past, he was opening one after another thanks to the terrifying power in the nose.

Time passed. Before long, the day was up. The highnesses from the other peaks returned to their ships. By that time, Xu Qing had opened his 101st dharma aperture!

The zombie ancestor nose was now forty percent smaller. The divine resonance inside had been greatly reduced. Absorbing more of the nose would require a high cultivation base, otherwise, the Captain would have devoured the entire thing.

Xu Qing hesitated, as he had the feeling he couldn't digest any more. After some hesitation, he waited until the Captain had devoured half of the nose. Then Xu Qing waved his hand to put the nose away.

The Captain burped and rubbed his swollen stomach as he lay sprawled on the ground. He looked very weak.

"I'm totally stuffed.... Help me up, little Ah Qing. I can't stand on my own."

Chapter 269: Just Like Reincarnation

Seeing the Captain like this caused Xu Qing to sigh.

"Why'd you have to go and eat so much?"

"I didn't! You took most of it. You and your friends!" Inside, the Captain was grumbling, I wanted to eat it by myself, didn't I? That's a normal thing! Xu Qing, you treacherous thief! I can't believe you caught on to me.

“Wait a second,” the Captain said, looking warily at Xu Qing. “You wanted to eat it by yourself, didn’t you?”

Xu Qing looked the Captain in the eyes and shook his head very seriously.

The Captain continued to eye Xu Qing suspiciously as Xu Qing helped him along.

“It’s all the fault of the old man and his ‘raising wolves’ philosophy. Where else in the world is there a Master who doesn’t give a bunch of resources to his apprentices, huh? Look at all the other mountain peaks! Whatever those apprentices want, their Masters get. But not us....” The Captain sighed.

Xu Qing didn’t say anything. He was already familiar with Master Seventh’s style. He would give his apprentices techniques, protective items, and even safe asylum. The only thing he didn’t give them were dao protectors and resources. On that front, his apprentices were on their own. That was the only way for an apprentice to become the ultimate lone wolf. The alternative was to be a housedog. The result was obvious when you looked at the Captain and Third Elder Brother, both of whom went to great lengths to acquire cultivation resources.

“And then there’s that Master Shengyun,” the Captain continued impatiently. “Next time you run into a gem like that, make sure to let me know. We can handle him together, and both get rich in the process.”

Xu Qing quickly nodded as he helped the Captain out of the canyon and back to the ship.

Before long, the ship rumbled to life. This time, it wasn’t a teleportation. Instead, they sailed out across the water toward the Revered Ancient mainland.

Shortly before dawn, it became obvious that the Captain really had stuffed himself too much and was having digestive problems, as he went into convulsions. Master Seventh, not wanting to be bothered, knocked the Captain unconscious. Then he took Xu Qing out to look at the sunrise.

Third Elder Brother was staying with some Second Peak girls, and wasn’t onboard. Other than some ordinary disciples, the only people on the Seventh Peak ship were Xu Qing and Master Seventh.

As Master Seventh stood at the prow, the sea breeze carried black froth up from the water, but an invisible force dispersed it before it touched either of them.

Xu Qing stood next to Master Seventh looking out at the dark sky.

“Fourth Sib, do you know much about Revered Ancient?” Master Seventh asked coolly.

“Not much,” Xu Qing replied with a shake of his head. He still didn’t feel completely comfortable in the presence of Master Seventh.

“The Revered Ancient mainland is a massive place. The Emperor-Receiving Prefecture is only a small corner of it. That said, even though it’s only a corner, it’s still about ten times as large as South Phoenix.

“The Emperor-Receiving Prefecture is basically a peninsula. It has the sea on three sides. Going from north to south are the Supreme Arbiter Salvation Mountains. From east to west is the Everlasting Immortal Profundity River. They meet in the middle. The mountain range is made up of about 100,000 individual mountains, all of them steep and treacherous. They’re filled with countless sects, mutant species, grues, and the like.

“The river is amazing. It’s filled with immortal energy, and its waters can purge mutagen. As you can imagine, people constantly fight over control of it. It enters from another province to the east and is controlled by the Supreme Arbiter Immortal Society, who holds about thirty percent of the territory in the Emperor-Receiving Prefecture. Upon leaving their territory, it goes through the Supreme Arbiter Salvation Mountains and into a forbidden ground called Spiritsound. Then it runs its course to the west, where it empties into the sea.

“In the spot where the river intersects the Supreme Arbiter Salvation Mountains, there’s a tributary of the river that long flowed into the Seven Sect Coalition. However, years ago, the Young Arbiter Sect created a dam to block it off. Recently, that dam was destroyed, and the river once again started to flow into coalition territory.

“The Seven Sect Coalition is located to the south of the Supreme Arbiter Salvation Mountains, near the Forbidden Sea. On the other side of the mountains is the Three-Spirits Dao-Suppressing Mountain.

“As for the Church of Departure and the South Tor Ghost Mountain, they’re in the west, on either side of the Everlasting Immortal Profundity River. When the river goes through the Spiritsound forbidden ground, it turns black, and the river transforms into something vile. Honestly, that makes it a good match for the vile godly power of the South Tor Ghost Mountain. And the Daoist Rite of Departure is a very bizarre organization, and they don’t really care.

“Finally, there’s the Supreme Beginning Netherflight Pillar, which is located in the snowy tundra to the north, just on the border of the prefecture beyond.”

As Master Seventh explained these things, the sky turned bright, as if a sea of fire were spreading from the horizon. Xu Qing watched as the red sun rose into the sky like a fireball.

“Rest up,” Master Seventh said. “We’ll arrive in two days. After we make landfall, crush the coalition cultivators that need crushing. When necessary, be deceptive. When necessary, show off.” With that, Master Seventh vanished.

Xu Qing watched the sunrise, then sat down cross-legged to meditate.

The two days passed relatively quickly. Eventually, land rose up on the horizon. The Captain’s belly was back to normal, and he was bouncing up and down in excitement. Third Elder Brother had

returned. The highnesses from the other mountain peaks were cracking their knuckles, their eyes shining as they contemplated the revenge that they were about to get.

As the huge ships got closer to the mainland, Xu Qing spotted a huge city. It was so big it seemed to stretch on and on forever. Compared to it, Seven Blood Eyes could well be called a village. The place excelled in the size, population, and luxury on display. The architectural style was very different, and reminded Xu Qing of the buildings he'd seen in the Violet Lands. They exuded a sense of grandeur and antiquity, but at the same time, were exquisite and refined.

Even from a distance, Xu Qing could see seven mountains rising up in the middle of the city, all with unique shapes. The mountains were located quite a distance from each other, and with the surrounding city linking them all. Each and every mountain exuded a shocking pressure, and had a statue at its summit. Some were human, some were sea beasts, and others were simply immense towers. One of them was a massive sword that rose into the heavens.

The moment the seven ships from Seven Blood Eyes sailed into the port, the sound of bells rang through the mighty capital city of the Seven Sect Coalition.

They tolled twelve times.

It was obviously ceremonial. Two people in the patriarch level were there to receive them, those being the representatives of the coalition's second and sixth peaks. Also present were the sect leaders from those two sects.

In addition, numerous coalition disciples waited on the shore. Though they stood there solemnly and respectfully, there was also vigilance and even displeasure in their eyes.

That was especially true of the disciples from the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect, whose eyes were cold as ice. And many of them, after looking over everyone from Seven Blood Eyes, stared at Xu Qing. They weren't the only ones. Other sect disciples eventually fixed their gazes on Xu Qing. As for the male disciples, most of them had complicated expressions, while the female disciples seemed delightfully taken aback.

Meanwhile, the highnesses from the various mountain peaks all emerged onto the decks of their respective ships. Each of them released the power of their cultivation bases, opening their dharma apertures and even igniting their life flames and entering the profound radiance state. Although none of them had four flames, all of them were unique and stunning. Some had ways to improve their battle prowess, pushing it past the ordinary limits.

Seven Blood Eyes had been preparing for a long time to become a supervisory sect. And of course, part of that plan had been helping the current generation of disciples reach their potential. It was even possible to say that these disciples were the best these mountain peaks had ever been able to offer.

Although the Seven Sect Coalition was also capable of doing something like this, it wasn't something that could be repeated over and over again. Thus, when it happened, it was profoundly impressive. Some disciples had howling grues around them. Some had all sorts of high-level magical devices. Some created ripples with each footstep. Some looked ordinary, but were covered with beastly totem tattoos.

Almost instantly, the disciples on the ships and the disciples on the shore were all itching to fight each other.

Of course, the coalition disciples were all from supervisory sects, and were amazing in their own right. All of them exuded impressive auras as they all took a threatening step forward.

As the auras from the two sides vied with each other, Xu Qing looked around, his expression the same as ever. After looking at all the disciples on shore, he didn't see any he recognized. None of the chosen who had previously come to Seven Blood Eyes had come. Obviously, they realized that most of the highnesses from Seven Blood Eyes had intentionally lost their matches earlier, and were now out for revenge.

As for Xu Qing, he usually didn't like to make a scene. However, his Master had asked him to do just that, and so, when the coalition disciples all stepped forward threateningly, he did the same. Wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. A tempestuous aura erupted from Xu Qing, shaking everything around him and causing a stiff wind to scream in the area. Even the sunlight seemed to bend in his direction, much less the gazes of everyone present. Xu Qing wore his violet robe with gold embroidery, plus the Violet-Heaven Supreme-Limitless Crown. He had two umbrellas overhead. One was covered in flowing black flames that could shake one's soul. The other was dazzling and seven-colored, and thrummed with a chanting like a song from the highest heavens. Behind him, a piercing cry rang out into the sky as a golden crow appeared, glaring at the disciples on the shore. All of this, combined with Xu Qing's spectacular good looks, made him like an imperial prince walking through the mortal world.

The coalition disciples on shore reacted visibly. It was like they had been struck with heavenly thunder, and had no choice but to take a step back.

Xu Qing took another step forward, and his six-flame battle prowess erupted with terrifying pressure. It became a shockwave that could crush anything in its path, and it caused sweat to break out on the foreheads of the coalition disciples. Expressions flickering with terror, they took another step back.

Just one person was exerting crushing pressure onto everyone on the shore! It was just like reincarnation, as this was what had occurred when Master Shengyun arrived at Seven Blood Eyes! That said, at this moment, Xu Qing was even more fear-inspiring than Master Shengyun had been.

“Xu Qing!”

“It's the number one chosen from Seven Blood Eyes, Xu Qing!”

“He arrested a bunch of highnesses from various sects, and also defeated Master Shengyun. He has terrifying six-flame battle prowess, and what's even crazier is that six isn't his limit!”

“He has an imperial-class technique, the blessing of two life lamps, and is peerlessly talented!”

Chapter 270: Visitors in a Foreign Land

Xu Qing stepped out and exerted crushing pressure on everyone! Then he stood there, the center of attention. The bearing and manner which had once belonged to Master Shengyun was now embodied in Xu Qing. When you added in his amazing good looks, he was like a shooting star that

gave the coalition disciples no choice but to bow their heads. As for the female disciples, their eyes shone brightly.

High above in the sky, Sir Bloodsmelter looked down with an expression of satisfaction. Master Seventh was next to him, smiling. As for the patriarch and matriarch from Spiritgloom Valley and the Heavenmirror Treasure Sect, they smiled and shook their heads as they glanced at Xu Qing.

“Things seem to be going well.”

“Ahh, kids. Always getting so worked up. They’re definitely not like us.”

Sir Bloodsmelter laughed heartily, and then followed his two friends to fly off into the distance. After the older generation left, the mood on the shore remained tense. However, with Xu Qing there, the male coalition disciples eventually just sighed and backed down.

The Seven Sect Coalition actually had a much more relaxed atmosphere than in Seven Blood Eyes. Therefore, the female disciples openly ogled Xu Qing, which he didn’t exactly like.

After stepping out and crushing the opposition, Xu Qing led the way to a ceremonial flying boat that had been set up to take them into the sect. The coalition disciples parted to make way for them.

The Captain ran to catch up with Xu Qing.

Third Elder Brother joined them on the flying boat. Clicking his tongue, he said, “Nice job, little Junior Brother. Later on I’ll teach you a few things that’ll make you unbeatably attractive to the female disciples here.”

Xu Qing looked at Third Elder Brother but didn’t say anything.

As for the Captain, he bit a chunk out of an apple and then sneered. “That’s more than enough from you, Third Sib, you pervert. Little Ah Qing and I prefer to play it cool. We don’t do things like you.”

Third Elder Brother chuckled as he looked at the surrounding crowd.

After the Seven Blood Eyes delegation was on the ceremonial flying boat, the disciples that had been assigned to escort them led the way into the city. Almost immediately, Xu Qing was overwhelmed with the sensation of being in a foreign land. Though many of the buildings reminded him of the architecture in the Violet Lands, there were also a lot of small buildings with domed roofs and white plaster walls. It made the place seem very neat and orderly.

The vegetation here was different from South Phoenix. The plants were much less leafy, and the leaves they did have were very big and thick. Some of them emitted a fragrant aroma that would stick to you when you walked past them. Xu Qing could tell that they weren’t poisonous. Instead, the aroma contained medicinal properties that, over time, would improve one’s constitution and cultivation base.

As they proceeded along their way, Xu Qing noticed numerous streams meandering through the city, the waters of which contained spirit energy that would nourish the populace. The temperature here was different than back in Seven Blood Eyes. It was warmer, and as a result, people wore more revealing clothing. Many people would look at them curiously as they passed. Xu Qing noticed that most people had smooth skin with few wrinkles, and their eyes shone brightly. Even small details like that revealed what it was like to be in a supervisory sect.



This was only one tiny part of the city; from his position on the flying boat, Xu Qing couldn't even see where the city ended. It was truly a spectacular place.

Eventually, the Seven Blood Eyes delegation arrived at the location where they would be staying. It was a mansion complex filled with buildings large and small, all of them richly ornamented and beautiful.

The coalition disciples said their farewells, after which the Seven Blood Eyes delegates took some time to rest before going their separate ways. After all, this was everyone's first time in the Seven Sect Coalition, and they were all very curious to explore the city.

The older generation would spend the day reminiscing, and would get down to business the following day.

It wasn't long before the various highnesses were spreading out into the city to explore. As for Xu Qing, he inspected the building he had been assigned to, then set up some spell formations and scattered poison powder everywhere. As he was finishing up, the Captain and Third Elder Brother came looking for him.

"Come, little Junior Brother. Your Elder Brothers are here to take you for a stroll." The Captain was obviously eager to show Xu Qing some of the sights.

Xu Qing looked back at him suspiciously.

Standing next to the Captain was Third Elder Brother, who blinked a few times, then smiled and said, "I asked some of my old coalition friends about what to do around here. They strongly recommended one of the nearby immortal hot springs."

"Before the Everlasting Immortal Profundity River flowed into coalition territory," the Captain explained, "there weren't many immortal hot springs. But now that the river is flowing again, quite a few have opened up. We should go try one out." His eyes glittered as he looked around, then lowered his voice and said, "I heard that some of the immortal hot springs allow for co-ed bathing. It's ridiculous! I just can't believe something like that would be allowed right out in the open. We should definitely go take a look and offer some constructive criticism!"

Xu Qing had originally been planning to decline their offer, and simply stay in the complex to work on his cultivation. But the Captain and Third Elder Brother were just too insistent, so eventually he forced a nod out and let them pull him along.

It didn't take long before they had changed clothes and were out on the street. The shops lining the way were busy, and there was a lot of foot traffic. People were talking everywhere, and they had different accents than back in South Phoenix, which only accentuated the sensation of being in a foreign land.

The Captain bought a bunch of fruit that he'd never seen before, and tossed a few to Xu Qing and Third Elder Brother. Munching on fruit, they walked around looking at the sights.

“This place is huge,” the Captain said. “It’s probably ten times bigger than the capital city back home. Third Sib, you’re originally from Revered Ancient, right? You must know your way around here.”

Third Elder Brother grinned. “The coalition doesn’t just have one capital city. Each of the seven sects has one. But they’ve expanded over the years to become one megacity. The district we’re in right now is part of the Heavenmirror Treasure Sect. There are also many places controlled by small kingdoms, as well as 130 of the sects that make up the coalition. One of the big reasons our delegation has come here is to discuss where exactly Seven Blood Eyes will end up in the city.”

Xu Qing listened carefully as Third Elder Brother explained things. He also noticed that the Captain seemed to be looking left and right in a very suspicious manner.

“Another unique thing about the Seven Sect Coalition,” continued Third Elder Brother, “is that it’s not just made up of seven huge cities. The seven sects’ headquarters are also located here. What’s more, each sect offers techniques, reserve power locations, and areas of good fortune that anyone can visit.” He pointed at a huge white mountain off in the distance. “That’s the headquarters of the Heavenmirror Treasure Sect. Anyone can go to those places to study and seek enlightenment, although it’s not free. They charge high prices for admission. I suppose Seven Blood Eyes has something like that now. The Seazombie ancestral land is an area of good fortune that we control.”

With Third Elder Brother explaining things along the way, they walked through the city until they reached a very fancy looking building constructed next to a stream. It was pentagonal in shape and very large. The stream flowed right into the building, and came out the other side having been split into several smaller streams that fed into other parts of the city. It was obviously a very popular place. Both male and female disciples came in and out, all of them wearing different clothing, which went to show that cultivators from all over the coalition came here, not just the seven sects.

“This is the place,” the Captain said, his eyes glittering. Pulling Xu Qing and Third Elder Brother along, he headed inside. Third Elder Brother paid for all of them, and soon enough, they were standing next to one of the hot spring pools inside. Steam curled up from the surface, but it was still possible to see male and female cultivators here and there. None of them wore very much clothing. Some carried on whispered conversations, others just kept their eyes closed and worked on cultivation.

Because of the steam, it wasn’t possible to see very clearly.

Xu Qing could sense the strong spirit energy in the pool, and could also tell how pure the water was. Unexpectedly, it didn’t contain even a scrap of mutagen. Cultivators who soaked here and did breathing exercises could purge themselves of mutagen.

Of course, Xu Qing didn’t have any mutagen to begin with, but practicing cultivation here would be half the work, twice the effect.

“It really is co-ed!” the Captain murmured. Clearing his throat, he stripped down to his undergarments and waded in. Third Elder Brother did the same.

After some hesitation, Xu Qing took off his outer garment and then picked a place to sit cross-legged in the water. The water wasn’t too hot, and it felt wonderful. Xu Qing felt very comfortable as the spirit energy seeped into his pores and caused his cultivation base to stir.

The three of them were in one corner of the pool, and had all taken measures to disguise their appearance so they looked like ordinary coalition cultivators. Because of that, no one had any idea who they were. Time passed. Cultivators came and went. About two hours later, conversation swelled in the hot spring in response to some big event that had just taken place outside.

“Seven Blood Eyes is so fierce!”

“I just heard some news. The grand highness from Seven Blood Eyes’ Third Peak challenged a group of chosen from the House of Grue Hunters. He fought three in a row, beat two, and then ended up fighting to a draw with Chen Yunhua, who’s considered on the same level as Sima Ling. After that, Sima Ling refused to fight him!”

“The same thing happened in the Lunisolar Dao Palace. The grand highness from Seven Blood Eyes’ Fourth Peak is over there right now. I heard that he fights really fiercely. He also swore that he would fight anyone from the Lunisolar Dao Palace who’s under Gold Core.”

“Back when our coalition chosen went to Seven Blood Eyes, they made a big deal about how good they were. Apparently, Seven Blood Eyes was actually being very deceptive. And now that they’re here, they’re determined to show how strong they really are!”

Upon hearing this talk, Xu Qing, the Captain, and Third Elder Brother opened their eyes and exchanged glances. Lowering his voice, the Captain said, “It’s the perfect opportunity to get rich.”

He looked at Xu Qing.

“You’re right, Eldest Brother,” said Third Elder Brother. “If we work together, we should be able to make out like bandits.” He also looked calmly over at Xu Qing.

After a moment of silence, Xu Qing said, “What’s the split?”