

Timescape 481

Chapter 481: Euphoria Iris

Xu Qing currently sat atop a big headless turtle that had a fist-sized barnacle on its tail. He made quite a strange sight, so it was no wonder the Smokewights noticed him. That said, there were all sorts of strange and unusual species on the wharf, so Xu Qing didn't stick out very much. There were other cultivators who had mounts, including some who were riding skeletal creatures.

Humans weren't as common nowadays in Sea-Sealing County. The various Swordsage Courts had issued the call to war, so most human cultivators were on the northern and western fronts defending the county. It wasn't just the Spirit Trove and Void Returning cultivators who had been mobilized. Though they had left some forces behind, especially those who were supposed to be the future of their sect, the majority of their forces had been mobilized.

As Xu Qing studied the Daybreak Prefecture harbor, he saw mostly nonhumans. These people all lived in Sea-Sealing County, and had benefited for countless years from the protection of humankind.

Though that protection wasn't necessarily critical to survival, such species hadn't been expelled. As a result, this was their home.

When Xu Qing thought about how many of them had refused to join the war effort, he shook his head. In some ways he could understand that decision. They believed that the war wasn't their fight, and that it didn't matter to them who was in charge of Sea-Sealing County. Given that, why should they fight? From their viewpoint, it made sense. But Xu Qing was not some sort of saint that loved all species unconditionally. Given his perspective on the matter, he didn't have much love for these nonhumans.

What was especially noteworthy was that Xu Qing had already spotted some Smokewights among the nonhumans. Smokewights didn't just live in the desert. It was common for mist and fog to crop up in Daybreak Prefecture, and such things made the conditions perfect for Smokewights.

Their bodies were made from smoke, so unless you were extremely familiar with them, it wasn't possible to tell which were male and which were female. In fact, you couldn't even make out their facial features clearly. They looked like shadowy wisps of smoke that moved through the crowds on the wharf. They seemed to be searching for something. Also in their group was a type of special pitch-black puppet, with numerous cracks and crevices where the Smokewights could live symbiotically.

Xu Qing didn't like Smokewights. They had treated him maliciously on his trip through the desert, which was what led to his big fight with Chu Tianqun in their major world fragment. [1]

After that incident, Xu Qing had done some calculations and come to the conclusion that he ran into Chu Tianqun only two hours from the county capital border. And two hours... was how long the Smokewights had made him wait.

Of course, he was on a secret mission right now, so he suppressed his killing intent and paid no attention to the Smokewights. He went down to the dock and sat atop the headless turtle waiting for this ship to show up.

The Smokewights looked him up and down, but didn't find anything suspicious, and continued on their way down the wharf.

Xu Qing had no idea what they were looking for. However, after they had moved along, the surrounding nonhumans cultivators started talking.

"The Smokewights have been searching for days now, although I'm not sure for what. I heard they're not just searching here. They're even out on the open water."

"I heard someone say that they're looking for the remains of the sun that perished here in Daybreak Prefecture. Except that happened years and years ago. Humans and other species have long since searched high and low. It's been thousands of years since any new bits of flesh have been discovered."

"They're probably not really looking for the sun's remains. I get the feeling they're trying to prevent someone from getting into Daybreak Prefecture."

Xu Qing looked thoughtfully at the distant Smokewights.

Two hours passed, and more nonhumans gathered on the wharf. That was when something like a whimpering sound echoed out from the distant fog. Everyone on the wharf looked in that direction. Along with the sound came a cold, sinister wind. As it swept across the wharf, a handful of strange-looking ships floated out of the fog. There were two types of ships.

One type resembled a swallow. Each was about three thousand meters long, their decks covered with numerous beautiful buildings. There were handmaidens on the decks of the ships, all of them extremely lithe and beautiful, with rabbit ears growing out of their heads. Xu Qing recognized them. They were members of the Spirit Rabbit species. They had no ancestral land, and instead could be found in prefectures far and near. They usually adhered to whatever powerful experts would accept their service.

The other ships hardly even looked like ships. They seemed more like giant leaves, with four legs stretching down beneath them like tree trunks. The leaves were about three hundred meters, and were much more simple and crude than the swallow ships. There were a lot more of them. Of the group, about ten percent were swallow ships, with about ninety percent being leaf ships.

As they neared, the cultivators on the wharf stirred into action, and began heading toward whatever ship would take them to their desired destination.

Xu Qing noticed that there were some Nascent Soul cultivators present. They all went to the swallow ships. The rest of the cultivators chose the leaf ships. That made it clear to Xu Qing that the ships were designed for different cultivation bases.

After studying the options, he boarded one of the leaf ships that was going to Mount Greenmist, which was near the middle of Daybreak Prefecture, not very far from Mount Daybreak.

It didn't seem smart to Xu Qing to simply go straight to Mount Daybreak. It was a secret mission, after all. His plan was to go to Mount Greenmist, where he would rely on the power of his cultivation base to make the journey to Mount Daybreak. Journeying across the water on his own wasn't something he could do for long periods of time, but he could manage a short journey.

After boarding the leaf ship, he looked around. It was a very simple vessel. There was no cabin and no handmaidens. Instead, there were three cultivators at the front of the ship, wearing green robes and ghost masks. They were in charge of the ship. In terms of passengers, there were over thirty. There was a group of eight that were obviously traveling as a group, but the others were individuals. Everyone spread out and took a spot. Given the three-hundred-meter length of the ship, there was plenty of room for everyone.

After finding a corner to sit down, Xu Qing looked at the three cultivators in green robes.

Most of what Xu Qing knew about Daybreak Prefecture came from the swordsmage files he'd read. For example, he knew that ferries like this were controlled by a group called the Dawnluster Consortium. It was a business alliance formed from many organizations. Even the Swordsmage Court had a share in the business. After all, Daybreak Prefecture was a very unique place, and there was a lot of profit to be had in maritime ventures. Official members of the Dawnluster Consortium wore green robes.

After studying them briefly, Xu Qing took a look at the other cultivators on board the leaf ship, then closed his eyes to meditate.

Enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, after which the ships started leaving the wharf.

That included the ship Xu Qing was on. Sometime after he paid the fare, the leaf vibrated. Then the four legs started moving the ship forward. The wind blew, and there was nothing blocking it, so it swept across the passengers.

Eventually, the leaf ship left the harbor behind. When the wind picked up, a shimmering shield finally spread out to block it. However, the wobbling sense of movement remained.

Xu Qing didn't pay attention to any of that. He focused on meditating. Three days passed.

During that time he occasionally opened his eyes and looked around. He would gaze at the depths of the Abyssal Sea, and could sense its cold, damp aura. Occasionally, strange entities would appear.

For instance, there were winged whales, flocks of flying red lanterns, and huge two-headed bats. That said, the Dawnluster Consortium had brokered deals with all such mutant beasts, so they didn't cause any problems for the leaf ship.

At one point, Xu Qing noticed a huge flower blooming shortly beneath the surface of the water. It was roughly 3,000 meters across, and was bright red, making it very conspicuous. As Xu Qing watched, a host of stamens rose up above the water, swaying back and forth.

When the nonhuman cultivators aboard the leaf ship saw the stamens, they looked over curiously. The reason was that at the end of each swaying stamen grew a woman. All sorts of species were represented. Xu Qing even saw a human female. They were lithe and beautiful, and none wore clothing. Stroking their hair coquettishly, they beckoned at the cultivators.

"We're really lucky, exalted one," a voice said. It came from the barnacle attached to the turtle's tail. That barnacle was really the head from D-132. Eyes were visible on the barnacle as it stared out at the flower. "It's a euphoria iris! Back in the day, that was my favorite type of flower."

Xu Qing frowned. He had never heard of euphoria irises before.

Eyes gleaming with reminiscence, the head continued, “Euphoria irises are a special type of gruish plant native to Daybreak Prefecture. The stamens transform into women of varying species that entice passersby.

“If they succeed in getting someone to approach, they grab them and drag them down to the sea floor where they suck them dry, leaving behind nothing but a desiccated corpse. An ordinary Foundation Establishment cultivator would only last for four or five breaths of time. A Gold Core expert might last for a bit longer, but not that much. Only individuals like me with unique innate abilities can turn things around and experience the true bliss of a euphoria iris. Now, before you make some joke about that being reason I don’t have a body, let me clarify that—”

“Quiet,” Xu Qing said. The turtle and the barnacle said nothing further.

As Xu Qing remained in place cross-legged, he cast out his senses in the direction of the group of eight nonhumans. It seemed they were discussing the Swordsage Court.

By focusing properly, Xu Qing could hear their conversation.

“The whole world is falling apart! I heard that it’s only when the population drops in Daybreak Prefecture that these vile euphoria irises start blooming....”

“Things don’t look good for the humans. The Swordsage Palace is heading into a huge crisis. From what I heard, a lot of nonhumans and rogue cultivators are eyeing the Swordsage Court on Mount Daybreak.”

“I heard that rumor too. There’s somebody recruiting rogue cultivators, bandits, and criminals from all species. They’re preparing to strike at Mount Daybreak and loot the Swordsage Court there.”

“Things are really unstable. I’ve definitely seen a lot of strangers around lately. I think most are cultivators from outside Daybreak Prefecture.”

“It doesn’t have anything to do with us. Let’s just get home. Who cares if the humans survive or not? But if they fall... then we should make sure to get a piece of the pie.”

“True. I heard the Swordsage Court has some serious treasure stockpiled....”

Xu Qing frowned, and his gaze turned cold. However, that was when he suddenly noticed something in the fog. He saw eight 30-meter-tall puppets, pitch black in color, emerging from the fog. Their eyes glowed red with malice as they looked at the leaf ship. It was a party of Smokewights.

Xu Qing’s eyes turned icier. As the Smokewight puppets approached, he assessed their cultivation bases and battle prowess.

Smoke emerged from the cracks and crevices in the puppets, which turned into Smokewights. They fanned out to surround the leaf ship. As for the puppets, they arrayed themselves in front of the ship so it couldn’t move forward.

The leaf ship's four legs shivered but didn't move. Meanwhile, the cultivators on board looked at the Smokewights with vigilance.

The three cultivators in green robes and ghost masks quickly got to their feet. The one in the middle stepped forward, looked at the Smokewights, and said, "How can I help you, Fellow Daoists from the Smokewights?"

Chapter 482: Don't Flip Out In Front of the Yama King

The Smokewights surrounding the leaf ship didn't respond to the green-robed cultivator's question. Completely ignoring the leaf ship's defenses, they floated aboard and started circulating among the passengers. The cultivators looked around with varying facial expressions. Some of the Smokewights approached Xu Qing and circled around him a few times, their vicious faces just barely visible in the smoke as they inspected him. A moment passed, and the Smokewights left the ship. Returning to the puppets, they gathered in front of the centermost puppet and kowtowed.

"Exalted one, of the thirty-five cultivators, six have suspicious auras."

The expressions of the passengers flickered when they heard that.

Before anyone could do anything, the puppets' eyes glowed even more brightly with a red color. It was especially evident in the center most puppet. In fact, it was so bright the entire leaf ship looked like it was the color of blood.

"Kill them," the puppet said in a cold voice. In response, the Smokewights rose into the air and transformed into six huge faces that shot toward the leaf ship.

Battle prowess equivalent to six heavenly palaces erupted from the six vicious faces. In any location, battle prowess of that caliber would be considered the backbone of a species. And that was more the case considering there were no Spirit Trove or Void Returning cultivators in Sea-Sealing County right now. The most powerful were Nascent Soul experts, but people like that would be stationed in their sect or species headquarters. As a result, Gold Core was the highest level of battle prowess that could be found out and about.

The six faces rushed toward six individual cultivators. Three of them were lone travelers. Two were members of the group of eight. And one of them was one of the green-robed members of the consortium.

Rumbling booms echoed out as the six cultivators fought back. But the red light shining from the puppets weakened them, such that the six Smokewights easily devoured five of them. The final individual fled. But before he could get far, the center most puppet blurred into motion. Chasing after him, the puppet unleashed a palm strike that caused everything to shake. The fleeing cultivator screamed, then exploded.

Pseudo-Nascent Soul, Xu Qing thought.

He had been able to tell from the beginning that the six faces were not individual Smokewights. They were formed by numerous Smokewights merged together. As for the eight puppets, the center most puppet had pseudo-Nascent Soul battle prowess, while the others were at the level of seven or eight heavenly palaces. That level of battle prowess was on par with the Holytide Black Guard.

These must be elites among the Smokewights.

Xu Qing stifled his killing intent, as he didn't want to reveal himself right after he had just arrived in the prefecture. He sat in place coolly. That said, he had already released his taboo poison, and was ready to activate it at a moment's notice.

As Xu Qing sat there in concealment, the six faces hovered above, scanning the crowd of passengers.

Every cultivator on the leaf ship was breathing heavily and looked furious. That included the two cultivators from the Dawnluster Consortium. They were obviously enraged that their compatriot had just been killed. However, they didn't dare say anything.

"Exalted one, the magical device reading... hasn't weakened. There's still someone suspicious onboard."

The puppet with pseudo-Nascent Soul battle prowess just hovered there for a moment.

"Kill them all."

"Yes, sir!"

When the cultivators on the leaf ship heard that, their faces fell. All at once, they burst into motion. Even the green-robed cultivators fled at top speed.

None of them moved quickly enough. The six faces broke apart, turning into twelve faces, each of which had five-palace battle prowess. As they shot in pursuit of the passengers, the puppets also took motion, with the exception being the pseudo-Nascent Soul puppet.

The puppets with seven- and eight-palace battle prowess could easily slaughter random cultivators like this. In the blink of an eye, miserable shrieks rang out everywhere.

The one to attack Xu Qing was one of the twelve Smokewight faces. It now looked like a human. Within the blurring smoke that made it up was the face of a middle-aged woman. As she neared, her mouth opened wide. At the same time, tendrils of smoke snaked out from her, which performed incantation gestures to launch a magical attack.

Xu Qing just looked at her coldly.

All of a sudden, she shivered, then let loose a bloodcurdling scream. There was no way she could stand up to the power of Xu Qing's taboo poison, and began to immediately dissolve. She backed up at high speed, smoke crumbling everywhere. No attempt to dispel the poison did any good, and her screams intensified. A moment later, the smoke vanished, as she was destroyed in body and soul.

That immediately attracted the fury of the other Smokewights. Two of the puppets flew toward Xu Qing and launched attacks.

Xu Qing frowned. His mission was to perform a secret investigation, and thus he hadn't intended to get involved in a fight. But since they were attacking him, he would react in kind. As per his custom, he would wipe them out.

As long as no one finds out, it won't affect the mission.

He pulled out his dagger, then suddenly vanished. The puppets could tell something had gone wrong but before they could react, Xu Qing appeared behind one of them. The dagger slashed through its neck.

Explosive cultivation base power ripped through the puppet. Then a boom echoed out as the puppet collapsed. Out from inside emerged a stream of gray smoke that tried to flee.

The shadow appeared out of nowhere and devoured it.

“I need one of them alive,” Xu Qing said calmly. Bursting into motion, he slammed into the next puppet. The puppet exploded, and the gray smoke inside of it fled. However, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior shot forth and surrounded it with crackling lightning.

All of this takes a bit of time to describe, but actually happened in the time it takes a spark to fly off of a piece of flint. Two puppets and one face were destroyed, causing the remaining Smokewights to look over in shock. The pseudo-Nascent Soul puppet reacted with particular intensity. Its red eyes glowed even more brightly. It was about to issue some orders about what to do when, out of nowhere, more agonized shrieks rang out from the Smokewights in face form.

All eleven of them screamed in horror as their bodies started corroding. The expressions of the Smokewights within the smoke were that of agony as they howled. There was nothing they could do. In the shortest of moments, they lost all their life force, and became scattered scraps of smoke.

“You!!!” Trembling, the pseudo-Nascent Soul puppet turned and fled. The other four puppets did the same.

They were too slow.

Xu Qing blurred with incredible speed, appearing only a moment later in front of the pseudo-Nascent Soul puppet.

He could kill actual Nascent Soul enemies, so someone in the pseudo-Nascent Soul level counted for almost nothing.

Xu Qing’s eight heavenly palace erupted with power. Taboo poison spread out, and the power of the violet moon converged on his finger. Then, Xu Qing struck the puppet. As the puppet shivered, the shadow arrived, wrapping around Xu Qing and instantly boosting his fleshly body power to the ten-palace level. It was a peak level of fleshly body power that even an early Nascent Soul expert would have trouble dealing with, much less a pseudo-Nascent Soul cultivator....

Xu Qing’s attack caused the pseudo-Nascent Soul puppet to explode as his hand reached inside and grabbed the white smoke.

The smoke rippled and distorted, revealing the face of a young woman. She looked terrified as she opened her mouth to speak. Xu Qing viciously twisted his hand, causing half of her to collapse. She lapsed into unconsciousness.

Having accomplished that, Xu Qing turned to look at the remaining four puppets. All were in a bad state, as the shadow, patriarch, head, and lion had already been fighting them.

Face completely expressionless, Xu Qing went over and destroyed all four puppets. The gray streams of smoke that emerged from them couldn't escape; he captured them all. The reason he didn't kill them was that he wanted to get information from them. He wanted to know exactly what they were looking for, and how they had determined someone suspicious was on board.

He had been suspicious about the Smokewights ever since arriving at the harbor.

Back on the leaf ship, he sat down cross-legged and took out one of the gray streams of smoke. "What are all you Smokewights looking for?"

The leaf ship was clearly a living being, as it was trembling.

As for the gray smoke, it distorted to reveal a face that glared at Xu Qing without saying a word.

Not wanting to waste words, Xu Qing released his taboo poison. The face instantly started screaming shrilly, which in turn caused the other captive Smokewights to tremble. Moments later, the gray smoke was destroyed in body and soul. Xu Qing moved on to the second Smokewight. Voice calm, he asked the same question.

The Smokewight hesitated.

Xu Qing tossed the smoke to the shadow.

"Eat."

The shadow excitedly opened its mouth and devoured the smoke. Then it made deliberately loud chewing sounds that were laced with the screams of the Smokewight. The other Smokewights now looked at Xu Qing as if he were a Yama King from the Yellow Springs.

Xu Qing grabbed the third Smokewight. This time, before he could even ask a question, the gray Smokewight blurted, "Our leaders gave us a mission. We're just supposed to look for people who seem suspicious. And we kill them. We're not supposed to let them get anywhere near the depths of Daybreak Prefecture.

"The inspection method relates to their aura.... We can detect human blood in a cultivator's aura. Even if it's a tiny fraction, we can still find it."

Xu Qing was stunned. Off to the side, the stone lion, the head, and Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior all looked instinctively at Xu Qing. From what they remembered, the Smokewights hadn't initially detected Xu Qing.

Xu Qing considered the development. After interrogating the other gray Smokewights, he came to the conclusion that it was as the first had said. They were on a mission and didn't know much in the way of details. Even torture produced the same answers.

After a while, Xu Qing turned his attention to the last Smokewight, which was the white smoke from the pseudo-Nascent Soul puppet. The young woman was conscious again, and when Xu Qing focused on her, she trembled and her eyes went wide.

"I don't know anything else...."

Xu Qing waved his hand and was about to ask Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior to interrogate her when the shadow suddenly let loose fluctuations of longing, as if to impart to Xu Qing that it could do just as good a job as the patriarch.

Xu Qing thought for a moment, then tossed the white smoke to the shadow.

“I want answers,” he said.

The shadow looked excited, while the patriarch looked shaken. The latter felt a sense of intense crisis. Meanwhile, the shadow opened its mouth and gobbled up the young woman.

It was impossible to say what torment the shadow inflicted, but after enough time passed for half an incense stick to burn, the shadow spat out the white smoke. The young woman looked completely terrified, to the point where she had almost lost her mind. As she trembled, she blurted, “I’ll talk. I’ll talk! The human Marquis Yao came to our species and entrusted us with—”

All of a sudden, the young woman’s words activated a secret warding spell within her. Before she could finish speaking, she violently exploded. Smoke scattered everywhere.

Xu Qing felt ripples of shock flowing through him. It took about ten breaths of time for him to calm himself. The young woman was gone.

Marquis Yao?

After a bit more time, he put the matter aside and patted his hand onto the surface of the leaf ship.

“We need to get to Mount Daybreak. Time is of the essence.”

The leaf ship vibrated, and the four trembling legs started moving it forward.

Chapter 483: Lonely One Step, Fiendish the Next (part 1)

The leaf boat sped across the surface of the black Abyssal Sea. It was moving about ten times as fast as before, making it seem like it was truly fearful of causing any delays for Xu Qing. Whenever it noticed Xu Qing’s facial expression turning dour, it would speed up.

Given the information he’d learned from the Smokewights, Xu Qing had abandoned his previous plan to go to Mount Greenmist. Instead, he would go directly to Mount Daybreak. That said, he was feeling more uncertain than ever. For one thing, he was worried about the war in the north and to the west. What was more, the information from the Smokewights made it impossible for him to forget about what the palace lord had mentioned in the jade slip about a behind-the-scenes traitor.

I can’t do anything to affect the war... The only thing I can do is finish this mission for the palace lord.

Days passed. The net in the dome of heaven seemed to flicker more dramatically than before. To Xu Qing, that seemed to indicate that the war was heating up.

Sighing, he focused on the path ahead.

On the evening of the fourth day, he spotted Mount Daybreak off in the distance. The mountain was very unique. Instead of being black like all the other mountains, it was seven-colored. It almost looked like it was a puzzle put together with many pieces. But in reality, it was whole. It was clearly larger than any of the other mountains Xu Qing had passed along the way. It towered over the Abyssal Sea, reaching high into the sky, roughly about 30,000 meters above water level.

As the moonlight shone down onto the seven-colored Mount Daybreak, it created a dazzling, beautiful halo around it. It was possible to glimpse the mountain stretching down into the black water, making it seem even more majestic.

As Xu Qing neared, he could sense incredible pressure radiating from the mountain, weighing down on the entire area. The sun wind was incredibly strong here, causing whimpering sounds to echo out, and creating innumerable rifts in the air. They would form, close up, then form again, over and over again.

He felt mixed emotions as he looked at the mountain, which ultimately became a blend of apprehension and nervousness. On the one hand, he had to worry about the palace lord's mission. But also... he was thinking about his parents' graves. Sitting atop the leaf ship, he looked at distant Mount Daybreak. Eventually, he settled his thoughts, took a deep breath, and flew off the ship toward the mountain.

As for the leaf ship... as soon as Xu Qing was gone, it sank underwater. Apparently, it was worried that it would disturb Xu Qing, so it quietly went down as far as it could go before speeding away. The stone lion and the head watched with expressions of envy....

After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, Xu Qing arrived at Mount Daybreak. He could sense the defensive barrier surrounding the mountain, covering it from top to bottom.

It was the Swordsage Court's grand spell formation, which would prevent any unauthorized people from entering, even swordsages from other provinces without the proper qualifications. Because this place housed secret locations set up by the Swordsage Palace, even local swordsages were prohibited from going to most places on the mountain. Only people with sufficient battle credits could qualify to access such places.

That said, the barrier might well have not existed as far as Xu Qing was concerned. With the command medallion he had been given, he basically had the same level of authority as Palace Lord Kong. When he arrived, the spell formation didn't block his path, or even react at all.

First, I'll start my investigation. Later I'll look for Mom and Dad's graves.

Eyes shining with determination, he took out the palace lord's command medallion and slipped onto Mount Daybreak without any fanfare.

The moment he stepped onto the mountain, his heart thumped in his chest as he sensed a faint reaction in his blood. As he inhaled, he realized his heart hurt. He could sense his father and mother. After his cultivation base reached a certain point, he became sensitive to matters relating to bloodline. Reaching up, he put his hand on his chest over his heart.

"Dad... Mom...." His eyes were already bloodshot.

To most people, Xu Qing was a decisive, ruthless killer. He never revealed his emotions. But that was something he had been forced to learn. It wasn't his inherent nature. As he stepped onto Mount Daybreak, he found himself thinking back to his day to day life in Peerless City.

Xu Qing looked down and took a moment to settle and conceal his aura. Right now, the most important thing was to handle Palace Lord Kong's mission.

With that, he started climbing the mountain. At the summit, he could see over a hundred palace buildings. They were made from rock quarried from Mount Daybreak, so they were also seven-colored. And they were constructed in a very bold style of architecture, so they seemed incredibly holy in the moonlight. It was a beautiful scene.

The Swordsage Court here was much larger than the one back in Emperor-Receiving Prefecture. Normally speaking, there were many, many more swordsages stationed here than back there. But because of the war, ninety-nine percent of the Swordsage Court here had gone to the front lines. As Xu Qing walked along, the place seemed incredibly peaceful and quiet.

Xu Qing didn't even see thirty swordsages as he studied the place from concealment. Most were on patrol, and their expressions were wary. Obviously, they had heard the rumors about people planning to make a move on the Swordsage Court.

The cultivators left behind were mostly in the Gold Core level, with only a few heavenly palaces. There was only one Nascent Soul swordsage, and his aura was similar to that of Chu Tianqun, pegging him as being in the early Nascent Soul level.

Xu Qing studied the area for a while, then turned his attention to the Swordsage Court's spell formation. It wouldn't be a simple thing to break through that formation. It was connected to the great net in the sky, which was a way of ensuring that all of the Swordsage Courts in Sea-Sealing County were safe. After checking the formation, Xu Qing looked away and focused on the interior of the virtually empty Swordsage Court. Making sure to avoid the patrols, he continued toward the summit.

He had one destination in mind: the Swordsage Court's Archives Pavilion.

The concealment provided to Xu Qing by the palace lord's command medallion ensured that things went very smoothly. After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, he had arrived. The warding spells protecting the pavilion would prevent even swordsages from casually entering. But the command medallion emitted a soft glow that caused the warding spell to ripple and open up.

Before going inside, he sent a divine will message to his shadow, which quickly spread out and enveloped the stone lion and the head. It was almost as if they had been placed into a bag.

After making sure they were secure, Xu Qing stepped inside and took a moment to get his bearings. After making sure there were no swordsages on duty at the moment, he went inside and started looking for the files he needed.

The pavilion had four floors, and too many files to count. There was no way Xu Qing would be able to look through all of them. Instead, he found files that related to daybreak light. It was on the third floor that he found the files he was looking for. After unlocking the warding spell, he started reading.

Soon enough, he frowned. According to the records, it was exactly as the previous information indicated. Daybreak light was light cast out before a sun perished. And it was intelligent, not dead in any way. Over the years, daybreak light had appeared 752 times. That said, it seemed contradictory. If it formed when a sun perished, then shouldn't it have all exploded out that one single time? It shouldn't have appeared over and over again over a period of many years.

The answer came when the Swordsage Palace did further research. Eventually, they came to find that, in some respects, daybreak light was related to a perishing sun. But that wasn't the only thing that would cause it to form. Apparently, when a sun perished, it would change some of the surrounding magical laws of heaven and earth. And from that point on, that area was essentially alive. And that was why the daybreak light continued to manifest over the years.

It only happened on Mount Daybreak.

According to one story in the file, just before perishing, the sun coughed up a mouthful of blood that scattered around the area. That sun's blood was seven-colored, which was why the mountain was also seven-colored.

Because this place had the aura of a sun, it met one of the prerequisites required to produce daybreak light.

At the same time, daybreak light could be a huge benefit to one's cultivation base. It could help a cultivator gain enlightenment of the power of suns, and could also be used in bloodline retroconversion. And when used in equipment forging, it produced astounding results. Furthermore, research done by the Swordsage Palace showed that it was extremely effective in resisting the power of gods. For all of those various reasons, it was extremely rare. In fact, the Swordsage Court had kept accurate records of every single time daybreak light appeared. That included when it appeared and where it ended up.

Xu Qing reviewed the records and didn't find anything unusual. Every single bit of daybreak light was accounted for, with most having been sent to the Swordsage Palace, and only a few having been traded to other organizations. The Swordsage Court's records included all the details of the light that had been traded out.

Xu Qing looked around some more, but that was all the relevant information.

Short of tracking down every single place where the daybreak light went, it's going to be hard to get any clues by going down this path. Xu Qing frowned and looked around at the endless files around him.

Deeper in Daybreak Prefecture, in the depths of the Abyssal Sea... was an area filled with boundless mutagen, as well as a terrifying will of death that weighed down on everything around it. Things were blurry there, almost as if it were a place formed by the opening of a god's eyes.

Any cultivator who came to this place would probably explode or be mutated. It was a forbidden region. The source of it all was some of the remains of a sun, which had seemingly long since vanished.

Standing shivering atop a chunk of flesh fully 3,000 meters in size was Sir Inkwel. Hovering in front of him was a 300-meter long finger that emanated terrifying godly might.

"Oh mighty exalted one," he said, his voice trembling, "according to what I heard, in the countless years that have passed, many species have come here looking for the remains, but never found them. Yet you found them right away! You truly are a god favored by heaven!

"That being said, this part of the sun's remains fell here long, long ago. There's no life left in it. It's going to be hard to use it for the paint we need. We need some living things to blend into the mix. The more life force, the more potent the paint will be...."

When the god's finger heard that, it swiveled in a certain direction. Everything around it rippled and distorted, then it vanished.

Seeing the finger speeding off into the distance, Sir Inkwel scowled on the verge of tears.

How do I turn this around...? Once I finish painting, it'll kill me. And if I don't paint it, I'll still end up dead....

Chapter 483: Lonely One Step, Fiendish the Next (part 2)

It was that moment right before the break of dawn. The sky was dark, though the moon still hung high. That said, the moonlight couldn't pierce the mist and fog covering Daybreak Prefecture. And thus, the entire Abyssal Sea was dark. There was only one spot in which it was possible to see the moon, and that was at the summit of tall mountains in the Abyssal Sea. However, not all the mountains towered high above the mist and cloud. The brightest of them all was Mount Daybreak.

Xu Qing still stood there on the third floor of the Archives Pavilion. As he looked out the window, the breeze swept past, stirring his hair. Moonlight glittered in his eyes.

I need more clues. However, tracking them down by myself is going to take a really long time.

His frown deepened. He couldn't explain the matter to anyone else. Even if he told other swordsages, he would need to be very careful about who he trusted. If the palace lord was correct, and the person responsible for the governor's death was a traitor, then they would definitely be a very powerful person. Therefore... he didn't dare to casually put his trust in swordsages.

After all, if he made a mistake in whom he trusted, he could end up in a deadly crisis.

He put some more thought into the matter, then went through the files one more time. Finally, he left the Archives Pavilion, taking advantage of the concealment effect to make his way through the Swordsage Court.

Dawn neared, and the moonlight faded, causing everything to turn even darker. At the same time, the wind grew even colder than before. As it blew on Xu Qing, it caused his daoist robe to sway. He walked quietly through Mount Daybreak, intending to find his parents' grave to pay his respects. He had been waiting for this day for a very long time.

His mood was unstable. His thoughts created ripples in his emotions, ripples that penetrated to his very core. He couldn't suppress those emotions or get rid of them. Eventually, they became so intense he began to tremble physically. It was something that rarely happened. He didn't attempt to control them. He just closed his eyes, sent his senses out, and followed the tug of his bloodline.

He passed a residence that tugged him toward it.

He passed some boulders that tugged him toward them.

He passed a pagoda that tugged him toward it.

He walked for a long time, going through many areas. Wherever he went, he felt that tug, yet it didn't lead him anywhere specific. Eventually, he had traversed the greater part of Mount Daybreak.

Finally, he came to a stop at the very summit of the mountain. The wind was very strong here. As the sun rose, the dark sky turned crimson, like fire. It pierced through the clouds, landing on the waters of the Abyssal Sea, and illuminating all the mountains. Of course, it shone directly onto Mount Daybreak. Seven-colored light shone off of every rock and pebble that covered Mount Daybreak. Mixing with the daylight, it formed something incredibly beautiful, making the place more eye-catching than anything else.

From a distance, that seven-colored mountain rose high above the black water, becoming a dazzling source of light that seemed almost as majestic as the sun itself. As the light shone everywhere, the sky grew brighter, and the sun climbed higher. All the while, Mount Daybreak cast seven-colored light on everything around it. It was spectacularly beautiful.

Xu Qing opened his eyes and looked down the mountain. He understood. He knew why all the places he had passed tugged at his blood. He realized why he had felt as if the graves he were looking for were at his side, yet couldn't be seen.

"I buried Dad and Mom at Mount Daybreak." That was what the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan had said to Xu Qing. [1]

As of this moment, Xu Qing knew why.

Mom and Dad's grave is Mount Daybreak itself.... They're buried in the heart of the mountain, which is why I felt the tug wherever I went.

He looked down at Mount Daybreak beneath his feet. He wanted to enter the interior of the mountain, but it was unique. Given the level of his cultivation base, he couldn't do that.

Time passed.

Xu Qing quietly dropped to his knees and put his hand on a boulder in front of him. He bowed his head. No one knew he was here, so of course, no one saw the tears dripping off his nose and splattering onto the boulder like drops of ink.

The seven-colored light coming off of Mount Daybreak spread out like a gentle hand that closed around him. Xu Qing trembled as he wept silently. A very long time passed. He put his forehead onto the boulder.

"Dad... Mom, rest in peace..." His voice was so low that not even he could hear it.

Finally, he looked up, and there were no tears in his eyes. As he got to his feet, he looked incredibly bleak. He started down the mountain.

The sky was now bright. Boundless sunlight shone onto him, and onto the mountain. The dawn light was spectacular, creating the most gorgeous scenery imaginable.

Xu Qing left. He hadn't wanted much. He just hoped to come to Mount Daybreak and pay respects in front of his parents' graves. Once he was at the bottom, he looked back at the seven-colored mountain.

Later on, when I have no more regrets in life, I'll come back here and settle down.

He closed his eyes.

After a few breaths of time passed, he opened them. His mind and heart were in order, and his eyes were once again cold and harsh. Turning, he walked off with a determined step.

His destination was an underwater valley some distance away from Mount Daybreak. According to the records, that was the last location where daybreak light had been seen. He wanted to investigate the area to see if there were any clues to be found. Under the surface of the water, it seemed like a different world. The mist above blocked the sunlight, as well as the warmth.

Xu Qing shot away from Mount Daybreak and into that darkness, picking up speed until he was a blur of afterimages that headed down and down. The mutagen here was strong, and full of unhealthy yin energy. He occasionally saw green ghost fire, dancing about in the silence.

After the sun perished, mutagen flourished.... Keeping his guard up, he kept moving. He knew full well that the mutagen-laced depths of the massive Abyssal Sea would be full of danger. There would be ferocious and vile beings that lived there. That was one of the main reasons Daybreak Prefecture cultivators didn't travel underwater. It was similar to the Forbidden Sea. Everyone knew that there were terrifying entities beneath the waters in the Daybreak Prefecture. Anyone who stayed under the water for long enough would eventually run into incredibly dangerous situations.

Xu Qing made sure to strengthen the concealing magic, making him like a specter that headed toward that specific underwater valley. Four hours later, when Xu Qing was far from Mount Daybreak's spell formation, he reached his destination.

The so-called valley was actually a deep crevice that ran along the lake bed. It was fully 300 meters across, and ran for a length of several thousand meters. Black mist floated up from inside the crevice and drifted around everywhere.

Xu Qing observed it from a distance. He was tempted to rush right in, but instead, squatted in place and hid behind a rock formation. There were some very familiar fluctuations in that black mist.

"Delicious... smoke...."

the shadow projected via divine will. At the same time, it finally released the stone lion and the head, who emerged trembling. The two of them didn't move a muscle. Being entrapped by the shadow had made them feel like they were going to be devoured, and they were still a bit traumatized.

Xu Qing ignored them. After confirming that there were indeed Smokewights in the black mist, he gave the shadow orders to go scout the area.

The shadow immediately stretched out. However, it didn't go into the crevice. A short time later, it returned looking very excited. Apparently, it had seen something, but was acting so twitchy it was impossible to understand. Even Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior looked confused.

Frowning, Xu Qing took the head off the stone lion and tossed it to the shadow.

"Take it with you."

The head was terrified as the shadow swallowed it in a single gulp, then raced toward the crevice. It returned a short time later.

"Exalted one, I saw everything," the head gushed. *"There are Smokewights there. A few hundred of them. And quite a few are in Nascent Soul! They're building some sort of magical treasure. From what I could see, and also based on my vast experience, I recognized it instantly. It's a disposable taboo treasure!"*

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior frowned as he looked at the head. More than ever, he was feeling a sense of impending crisis.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing looked in the direction of the crevice, his eyes shining coldly. The fact that the Smokewights were constructing a magical treasure so close to Mount Daybreak made it fairly obvious what they were up to. Obviously, they were targeting Mount Daybreak or something connected to it. Although he couldn't be absolutely certain of that, it seemed the most likely explanation.

However... whether he was right or not didn't really matter. He didn't like Smokewights to begin with. What was more, Mount Daybreak meant something different to him now.

He was going to destroy this valley of Smokewights.

If there are Nascent Soul Smokewights there, I can't just stroll in and kill everyone. He waved his hand, causing his third heavenly palace to tremble. The power of taboo poison streamed out in all directions.

Next, he sensed which way the current was running, and carefully applied more poison into it.

And thus, he spent about an hour lacing the entire area with taboo poison power. Then, when he was sure everything was ready, his eyes glittered with killing intent as he waved his finger. Instantly, poison billowed into the crevice, taking with it countless little beetles.

It took only a short moment for the poison to fill the crevice. Then anguished screams rang out from inside.

Some distance away in the depths of the water, a 300-meter-long finger was speeding along right out in the open. Whatever living beings it encountered were quickly bound and strung up behind it.

From a distance, it looked like there were several hundred cultivators, all of them unable to escape, their eyes full of despair.

Chapter 484: Golden Crow Devours Sun (part 1)

Outside of Mount Daybreak, next to the underwater valley, Xu Qing studied the situation, then turned and left. Behind him, agonized shrieks continue to ring out, as well as howls of rage.

Smokewights then began to emerge from the valley, their divine sense out in full force as they scanned the area in both frustration and anger. The interior of the valley was in complete disorder. Before, there had been hundreds of Smokewights inside, but now there were only a few left. Xu Qing's taboo poison had killed most of them in body and soul. Xu Qing's poison really was just that ridiculously brutal. Those who were not dead yet were moaning in agony. They were doing everything they could to stop themselves from decomposing, but their bodies of smoke continued to fall apart. One after another, they died.

The work on the magical treasure was now stalled. And as the mutagen in the poison filled it, it became clear it wouldn't survive for long.

"Who's there?"

There were seven or eight Smokewight puppets who emitted terrifying Nascent Soul fluctuations. They were now frantically searching for the perpetrator. The puppets were corroding rapidly, exposing their true bodies within and making it clear they couldn't escape the effects of the attack. Obviously, they were urgently looking for the enemy in the hopes of finding an antidote. Though

their plan had involved concealing any evidence of their presence, including energy fluctuations, things had so quickly gone out of control that they were ignoring that directive.

Sadly for them, Xu Qing's jade slip of concealment had been given to him by Arch-Immortal Plumdark, so there was no way some mere Nascent Soul cultivators would be able to perceive it. What was more, as soon as he unleashed his poison, he took a very quick look at the results and then left. After confirming that his poison was working, he had decided to simply wait until the Smokewights were all dead before going back to investigate the valley.

Normally speaking, they should all be dead in an hour. But I'll wait six hours just to be safe.

However, even as he sped along, a sudden sense of terror rose in his chest. Expression flickering, he turned to look in the general direction of the valley. He had just sensed a familiar aura.

As soon as it appeared, something changed about the lake bed; mutagen levels began to increase.

What was even more shocking to Xu Qing was that everything in the area began to ripple and distort, to where it became hard to see clearly.

A god!

Xu Qing thought back to what the head said about Sir Inkwell. Given this new aura, his face turned grim and he started fleeing even faster than before. This aura wasn't coming from inside the valley. It was coming from a slightly different direction.

Probably attracted by the energy fluctuations. The finger of that god must have brought Sir Inkwell to look for the remains of the sun. But would the energy fluctuations really be that much of a draw...? Don't tell me that valley really does have some of a sun's remains in it?

Back when the head mentioned these things, Xu Qing hadn't placed much importance in the information. He and the god's finger were on completely different levels, so he didn't intend to go looking for it. His intention was to make use of his concealment abilities to complete the mission and then go check in at the Swordsage Palace. After all, Daybreak Prefecture was such a big place that the chances of randomly running into the god's finger were extremely small.

For one thing, when that sun perished, it collapsed, meaning that its remains scattered far and wide. Add in the fact that it happened so long ago, it meant that most pieces had already been located.

The proximity to Mount Daybreak made it even less likely that some of the sun's remains were nearby.

Could it be the head and stone lion drawing the attention of the finger? Xu Qing looked down fiercely at the head and the lion.

Trembling, the stone lion rocked back and forth as if to tell Xu Qing that it had nothing to do with the situation.

"It's not me, exalted one!" the head wailed. "It really isn't me. I couldn't attract the attention of that god even if I wanted to."

Killing intent glittered in Xu Qing's eyes, and he made a decision to teach a lesson to the lion and head once he was sure he was safe. Looking away from them, he continued on his way.

He didn't dare to use the power of his taboo poison, so he kept it inside. Although that power could be used as a cover, as had been proven when he used it on the violet moon, that was in a circumstance in which the red moon wasn't anywhere close by. Right now, he wasn't sure if using it would have the same effect or the opposite effect.

He anxiously tapped into every bit of concealment power the jade slip would offer. However, after only ten breaths of time had passed, the fluctuations behind him grew more intense, and the area around him became even more distorted. As the fear in his heart reached explosive levels, a terrifying stream of divine will spread out from the mist behind him. It spread out to cover everything, including Xu Qing.

As everything turned blurry, a 300-meter long finger suddenly appeared in front of Xu Qing.

A tremor of fear passed through him, and every fiber of his being screamed at him that he was in mortal danger. He felt like his body was about to be ripped apart limb from limb.

Without the slightest hesitation, Xu Qing released the power of his taboo poison and the power of the violet moon. As it swept through him, he fled in the opposite direction.

It didn't do any good.

He was no longer in the Corrections Division. Back there, the finger was in a state of suppression, but out here, it was free. Though it had been injured during the prison break, even if those injuries were far worse than they were, Xu Qing still wouldn't have been able to fight back.

As godly authority filled Xu Qing, pushing him to a higher level, his mind spun. The divine will of the god's finger overtook him and dragged him close.

The power of that god's finger superseded every asset Xu Qing had at his disposal. Then he was thrown behind the finger onto a pile of despairing nonhumans that it was dragging along. The stone lion and the head were there too.

The latter shrieked. "Boss! Boss!! It's me! Me! The head! We're cell mates...."

The finger ignored the head, whose cries had absolutely no effect whatsoever. Instead, the finger shifted to point in the direction of Mount Daybreak. And it looked hesitant. In the end, the finger didn't get any closer to the mountain. Instead, the finger vanished, to appear a great distance away. After another teleportation, the finger arrived in a location with a lot of living beings.

Already, it had captured over five hundred cultivators, including quite a few Smokewights.

Xu Qing himself hadn't attracted any special attention. The other cultivators all seemed full of terror and despair. There was something very strange about the way they looked. Most were incomplete. They had been ripped apart. Eyes, noses, ears, organs, and limbs were scattered everywhere. Even the Smokewights were in similar condition, with their smoke bodies having been ripped apart.

Because of the power of the god's finger, after being piled up, they couldn't leave. They just lay there in pieces. It was a very grotesque and very inauspicious scene.

Xu Qing looked around with a scowl. However, he didn't try to leave. Instead, he tapped into the two types of godly authority within him to prevent himself from being ripped apart. That effort kept

him whole. Then he struggled to look around. However, all he saw was a blur. Obviously, he was being dragged along at high speed behind the god's finger.

What's this finger doing? Xu Qing forced himself to calm down and start thinking of a way out of this situation. *Back in the Corrections Division, they suppressed this thing using destiny aura....*

Countless thoughts ran through Xu Qing's mind. Meanwhile, rumbling sounds echoed out as the god's finger suddenly stopped moving. The sudden lurching motion caused quite a few of the surrounding cultivators to explode. Blood sprayed out of Xu Qing's mouth. Thankfully he had godsource and an extraordinary fleshly body. Though cracks spread out across him, they didn't rip him apart.

Again, he struggled to look around. The most noteworthy thing he spotted was a 3,000-meter chunk of rotting flesh.

Standing atop it was an old man with an anxious expression on his face. He was none other than Sir Inkwell of the Paintedfolk.

Before Xu Qing could study the situation any further, the pile of cultivator body parts flew through the air toward the chunk of flesh. As soon as they hit it, the flesh wriggled, and crevices opened up on its surface. It sucked in all of the body parts. Some were sucked all the way into the crevices, others stuck out partly. Then it began absorbing them. The stone lion and the head were among those who got partly stuck inside the flesh.

Screams of agony echoed out. In some cases, the cultivators could cry out loud, in other cases, they sent out streams of divine will.

Xu Qing himself was about half-sucked into the flesh, and as screams echoed out around him, his heart swelled with astonishment.

The reason was that he didn't feel the pain of being dissolved. Instead, the moment he was sucked into that chunk of flesh, he felt an intense sensation of longing coming from the golden crow on his back.

Is this... part of that sun's remains??

His eyes widened, and his mind reeled. He turned to look at Sir Inkwell not too far away. Sir Inkwell had already spotted the head and the stone lion, and he had just noticed Xu Qing as well. Their gazes met.

The head, of which only half a face was visible, looked at Sir Inkwell. "Hahaha! A reunion..."

Sir Inkwell ignored the head and focused on Xu Qing. A curious look gleamed in his eyes as he slowly approached.

"Exalted jailer?"

"You've really done something amazing," Xu Qing said.

Sir Inkwell stopped in place, his eyes suddenly glittering mysteriously.

He looked Xu Qing up and down briefly, and quickly noted that the 'exalted jailer' didn't seem the least bit frightened. The calm expression on his face made Sir Inkwell suddenly feel like he was back in D-132. That, in turn, caused the cautious Sir Inkwell to stifle his previous clever thoughts.

Something didn't seem right here. He looked at the head. Before he could say anything else, though, wails of anguish echoed out, and the air vibrated as the god's finger appeared in front of Sir Inkwell.

Sir Inkwell tried to prevent himself from trembling, and even plastered a fawning smile onto his face.

"Oh great and mighty lord who is favored by heaven, mighty god from the sky who is recovering by means of the sun's remains, sir, you are surely foreordained to conquer Revered Ancient and reach the most paramount of positions."

The pressure from the god's finger lessened by a bit, and it released a roar that echoed into the minds of everyone present.

Sir Inkwell couldn't stop himself from shivering head to toe. However, his facial expression didn't change. Looking completely pious, he continued to speak in what was almost a chant.

"Oh lord, favored by heaven, only a few days are left until you can recover. The paint needed to restore your fleshly body is half complete. Were this any other vulgar and filthy god, the paint material would be sufficient. But for a god favored by heaven, your humble servant needs to have the perfect ingredients to create the perfect body for you. Sir, you really cannot allow yourself to be profaned.

"Therefore... I need more life force. Once I bring some life back to this flesh, then it will benefit you, oh exalted god favored by heaven."

The god's finger thrummed a bit impatiently, causing some of the wounds on its surface to open up again. However, it didn't seem to care, and instead rose up and circled around the area a few times. Then, everything in the area blurred and distorted again before it disappeared.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed in response to this development, and his mind was working on overdrive. He knew full well that he was in an extremely dangerous situation, but at the same time, he could tell this was a destined opportunity.

The golden crow tattoo on his back was heating up with longing, but he kept it under tight control. It wasn't time yet.

Chapter 485: Golden Crow Dao Soul Accompanied by Daybreak (part 1)

"Exalted jailer, let me plan things out," Sir Inkwell said excitedly. "In order to buy time for you, sir, I can just use the same general method I'd devised earlier in the hopes of getting myself out of this situation. Originally, I didn't have much faith that it would work. But with you here, sir, I think it should work fine.

"Exalted jailer, all we have to do is wait until the finger returns. I'll explain that you have a Golden Crow Body, and therefore, you can bring life back to these remains. You just need to fuse with it.

"I'll start painting for the finger, but I can control how long it takes. I'll go really slowly, and wait for your signal before finishing.

“However, the entire thing will be a trick. I’ll paint something that looks like a body, but is, in reality, a cage of flesh. The finger was injured in the prison break, and lost some of its thinking ability. Besides, it won’t be possible to identify what I’m painting by just looking at it. I’m very confident no one would be able to notice it’s a trick. Once it’s inside, then we lock the cage and flee!

“Because this cage will be made from the remains of a sun, it will be quite sturdy. My original estimate was that it would hold strong for a few days. But with the life provided by your golden crow, sir, I think it would trap the finger for half a month or more.

“That should give us plenty of time to get away. What do you think, sir? If you have some other ideas, I’m happy to follow your lead.”

Despite having gone through that entire explanation, Sir Inkwell apparently had more to say. “Oh right, exalted jailer. I’m not sure if you’re aware, but I came to realize that the palace lord used a taboo treasure to strike the finger during the prison break. Because of that, the finger has become somewhat forgetful....”

Xu Qing looked at Sir Inkwell and nodded. Then he closed his eyes and focused fully on directing the golden crow to devour the power in the sun’s remains. As the golden crow wildly absorbed the power, Xu Qing could sense more tails growing on it. In a very short amount of time, it reached the level of over sixty tails.

Based on his previous experience, he was fairly certain that once he broke past ninety-nine tails, Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits would reach the third stage. The power of the third stage was equivalent to Nascent Soul!

Furthermore, because his golden crow was already part of his fifth heavenly palace, once the golden crow reached the next stage, that heavenly palace would experience a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering transformation. In fact, it would make an advance transformation into the pseudo-Nascent Soul level.

Xu Qing was looking forward to that very much.

As time slipped by, the golden crow continued its work, and Xu Qing’s aura climbed higher and higher. In fact, he began to pulse with fluctuations that terrified both the head and Sir Inkwell. At the same time, the sun’s remains showed more and more signs of life, as if they might awaken.

All of a sudden, the terrifying divine will of the god’s finger swept forth from the depths of the Abyssal Sea. Then the finger appeared, dragging a host of nonhuman cultivators with it. The majority of them were Smokewights. They were all in a tattered state as the finger threw them toward the sun’s remains.

One of the reasons Smokewights often lived in desert environments was because of the sun. As a result, they provided a lot of nutrients, which was a help to Xu Qing’s cultivation.

That said, the return of the finger made Xu Qing more than a little nervous. He opened his eyes. Obviously, the finger sensed that something unusual was going on with the sun’s flesh, and it sent divine will sweeping about.

Off to the side, Sir Inkwel looked like the paragon of piety as he kowtowed, “Oh great lord, you truly are a god favored by heaven, sir! While you were gone, I discovered that you happened to capture a very interesting fellow. It’s him!” Sir Inkwel pointed at Xu Qing. “Exalted one, you might not remember him, but he was actually the guard back in our D-132. I just took a close look at him and found that he has a Golden Crow Body. That means he’s the descendant of a sun!

“Discovering him is like an amazing blessing from heaven and earth, oh exalted one. He can actually bring a certain level of life back to the sun’s remains!

“And because of that, your humble servant can paint a new god body for you! The mere thought of having the honor of painting a new body for someone favored by heaven has filled me with the utmost excitement!”

Thrumming, the god’s finger turned and locked onto the sun’s remains, then began pulsing with fluctuations of hope. Everything in the area rumbled. The water shattered, and the ground cracked.

Alarmed, Sir Inkwel was about to start painting. However, that was when Xu Qing gritted his teeth against the discomfort of being in this god’s presence.

“Exalted god,” he said, “there isn’t enough life in this sun’s remains. Check if you’d like. If you give me some time, I can bring more life into it. If you use flesh full of life to paint your body, it will turn out perfect!

“After all, there aren’t many of this sun’s remains left in the world. If you waste this one, who knows when you might find another. Exalted god, do you mind waiting a short time?”

As Xu Qing spoke, the golden crow expanded its influence, causing the sun’s flesh to emanate an aura of awakening. When the finger’s terrifying divine will picked up on that, the finger seemed hesitant and thoughtful.

Off to the side, Sir Inkwel’s eyes flickered imperceptibly as he noted that Xu Qing had already gone off script.

Xu Qing ignored him. Looking at the finger, he suppressed his anxiety and continued, “Exalted god, the Smokewights you just brought have a unique body composition, and are full of life. I’m sure you noticed that. They’re very useful. If you can get more, we can bring even more life into the remains. Furthermore, if you’re able to bring some daybreak light to this sun’s remains, it will reach an incredibly high level very quickly!”

Based on the records back on Mount Daybreak, he knew that the most recent daybreak light to appear had been seventy years in the past, and had been recovered by the Swordsage Palace. None had appeared since then. That said, nothing Xu Qing had said so far was a lie. Everything was truthful. He *could* bring more life into the remains, and the Smokewights *would* be helpful in that regard. As for daybreak light, it was related to the fallen sun, so adding it would make the process better, were some of it to be recovered.

The finger scanned the area again with divine will, all the while pulsing with fluctuations of irritation. However, after a few breaths of time passed, the finger vanished into the distance.

Xu Qing breathed a sigh of relief. He'd made a bit of a gamble just now, and it had all been based on the assumption that the finger was completely focused on that new body.

If Sir Inkwell could use that method to manipulate the finger, then Xu Qing was willing to bet that he could too. And by doing so, he had taken the upper hand in the situation.

"Well played, exalted one," Sir Inkwell said, chuckling.

Xu Qing ignored him. With the finger gone, he pushed the golden crow again, and it started assimilating the power in the remains. If the god's finger really did try to find some daybreak light, then it wouldn't return any time soon.

Daybreak light was exceedingly rare, to the point where Xu Qing doubted the finger would even be able to find some.

At this point, the golden crow had over eighty tails.

The breakthrough point wasn't very far off.

Xu Qing was now feeling confident that the golden crow would indeed break through to the third stage. If he could get free from the warding spell, then he could use the power of the taboo treasure the palace lord had given him to strike a powerful blow. And if he did that, then he would most likely be able to make his escape.

Off in the distance, the head could tell that Xu Qing and Sir Inkwell were playing some game. Therefore, it climbed onto the stone lion and surreptitiously started planning to escape once Xu Qing and Sir Inkwell made their move.

In that manner, time passed.

Xu Qing's aura kept getting stronger and stronger. Soon, the golden crow had ninety-three tails.

And it kept going.

Ninety-four. Ninety-five. Ninety-six....

Around the time the ninety-seventh tail grew out, powerful fluctuations suddenly swept over them. The god's finger was on the way back! It was carrying several thousand Smokewights, all of whom were moaning in despair. If that were all there were to it, it might not be a big deal. But to Xu Qing's utter shock, the finger also had a seven-colored beam of light with it!

That light contained life force, and it gave off the sense of being newly born. It seemed completely and utterly holy, as if it had actually come to exist when the sun perished, but now was filled with hope and a sense of new life!

It glittered dazzlingly, sending out immeasurably powerful pressure that felt vastly superior to what Xu Qing remembered feeling from the tree branch from the Ten Entrails Tree. When he saw that light, he started breathing heavily, and his eyes went wide.

Daybreak light!

Even as the golden crow continued to absorb the sun's remains, it pulsed with intense hope, as if it wanted both the remains and the daybreak light.

It actually found some? Xu Qing was so astonished that he had a hard time believing it was true. He wasn't sure how the god's finger had pulled this off. Daybreak light was clearly very rare, and hardly ever appeared. And yet... it managed to bring some back!

Xu Qing didn't care about the Smokewights; all of his attention was focused on that daybreak light. At any other time, he would have been shaken to the core by this level of godliness. But now... he was conflicted.

He needed time.

That was why he'd told the finger that Smokewights would work, but that daybreak light would be much better. He'd assumed the finger would stay away much longer as a result. That, in turn, would give him the time he needed to advance his golden crow to the next stage, then break through the warding spell.

Never could he have imagined that the god's finger would return so quickly... with daybreak light!

Chapter 485: Golden Crow Dao Soul Accompanied by Daybreak (part 2)

As Xu Qing looked on in surprise, the finger tossed the thousands of screaming Smokewights into the sun's remains by Xu Qing. The Smokewights instantly became nutrients that the flesh assimilated. By extension, Xu Qing benefited.

As for the daybreak light, the finger flicked it right toward Xu Qing....

Xu Qing stood there in silence. The moment the light neared, the golden crow snapped it up, preventing it from reaching the sun's flesh. The light erupted inside the golden crow, causing a seven-colored glow to fill the area. From a distance, it almost looked like the sun's remains really were going to awaken. Powerful fluctuations rolled out everywhere, and at the same time the nourishment from thousands of Smokewights bolstered the life in the flesh.

The ninety-ninth tail sprang out of the golden crow.

The one hundredth tail was just about to appear. Meanwhile, Xu Qing's cultivation base was growing, and a Nascent Soul aura was building in the golden crow.

The god's finger thrummed as its divine will scanned the sun's flesh. Clearly, it didn't care about what was happening with Xu Qing's golden crow. Instead, the finger turned and pointed directly at Sir Inkwel's forehead. The explosive nature of the finger made it seem like it was already vexed beyond measure. It was as if the fact that a body had not been painted made the finger so enraged that it wanted to lay waste to everything in the area.

Sir Inkwel trembled as he sensed death looming over him.

"That's no problem at all, heaven-favored one. Your humble servant will start painting your body immediately!"

Sir Inkwel quickly took out a paintbrush and waved it in the direction of the sun's flesh. In response, some energy and blood emerged from inside and converged in front of him. Next, he dipped the tip of the brush into it a few times, then began to paint something. With only a few brush strokes, he completed the basic outline of the body.

Seeing that, the finger's impatience seemed to fade a bit, to be replaced by deep-seated longing. Ignoring everything in the area, the finger's divine will became fully focused on Sir Inkwel's work.

“Oh heaven-favored one, you can insert your divine will into the body if you wish, sir. That will ensure that you’re fused with the body from the beginning. It’s an idea your humble servant came up with specifically for you. This will increase the likelihood of success, and reduce the chances that the body will reject you.”

It was hard to say if it was because Sir Inkwell was working so hard or because of his efforts to sell the act, but either way, he no longer seemed scholarly and refined like before. Instead he seemed crazed, with his hair disheveled.

The god’s finger sent divine will into the outline of the body, and as Sir Inkwell continued to paint, the finger fused more and more deeply. At the same time, the body became clearer and clearer.

When Xu Qing saw what was happening, he felt more anxious than ever. He knew he didn’t have much time to work with. If Sir Inkwell finished that painting, then Xu Qing wouldn’t have any control over what happened. That wasn’t to mention that he didn’t trust Sir Inkwell. Although they were working together, he was still convinced the Paintedfolk man had some malicious ulterior motives.

I need the golden crow to reach the next stage before he finishes.... Xu Qing gritted his teeth and checked the golden crow’s progress on the one hundredth tail.

That was going to be the key to everything. Unfortunately, it wasn’t forming very quickly. Right now, it was only about half finished.

Must go faster! he howled inwardly.

The golden crow could sense his anxiety and tried to speed up. It madly absorbed the sun’s flesh, and even started assimilating some of the Smokewights that were still present.

In that manner, an incense stick’s worth of time passed.

From a distance, the scene playing out was very grisly.

A completely deranged old man with bloodshot eyes and disheveled hair was madly painting a 300-meter-tall body. The body’s skull was already completely painted, and its flesh was starting to take shape. It looked very shocking and ghastly. The body emanated sun-like fluctuations, and as the divine will of the god’s finger fused with it, godly might pulsed out, along with a feeling of awakening.

Some distance away on the sun’s flesh, Xu Qing closed his eyes and sat in place. The flesh around him was already withering up dramatically. One reason was because of Xu Qing absorbing it, the other was because of Sir Inkwell using it as paint.

The stone lion and the head were cautiously inching away, until they reached the warding spell, which made it impossible for them to move any further.

The head had been hoping to look more closely at what was happening, but was now moaning inwardly. *The two of them are trying to one-up each other. Each one is trying to turn the other into a scapegoat. Based on what I can see... my god! This is terrifying. We’re dead. Dead....*

The head couldn’t understand why it was so unlucky. In fact, it was already starting to think back fondly to the Corrections Division.

That was when Xu Qing's golden crow finished with its one hundredth tail. The golden crow was obviously excited, and wanted to erupt with flames, spread its wings, and fly high into the sky. However, Xu Qing restrained it!

It was almost as if he clamped his hand around its throat. The golden crow could do nothing other than meekly re-enter Xu Qing and go back to his fifth heavenly palace. That palace had been created by Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits. Once back inside, the golden crow changed. Instead of looking like a crow, it looked like a young man.

He wore an imperial gown and an emperor's crown. His facial features were the same as Xu Qing's, except he didn't have a flesh-and-blood body. Countless streams of dharma force and the dao of the golden crow made... a dao soul! [1]

It was a bit blurry, making it obvious it was in an embryonic state. But the moment it appeared, fluctuations that vastly surpassed the Gold Core level erupted from Xu Qing's fifth heavenly palace. As they spread through his sea of consciousness, the golden crow rose to the third stage. And at that point, his fifth heavenly palace couldn't really be called a heavenly palace anymore.

It was now an incubator for a dao soul!

This was a unique position. One of his palaces was in the Nascent Soul level, while the others hadn't progressed. Because of that, Xu Qing's level was actually... pseudo-Nascent Soul!

As his battle prowess rose with heaven-shaking, earth-toppling force, Xu Qing sensed the shapeless warding spell, which was made from innumerable transparent chains. He felt god power fluctuations in the area, almost like countless incredibly tiny worms wriggling.

And he could sense an aura of new life coming from the body Sir Inkwell was painting. He hadn't been able to sense that before, but now it was very clear. That was because he was changing on a substructural level, and had now developed divine sense!

Divine sense was something unique to Nascent Soul cultivators, and it was a power formed by the combination of his dao soul and regular soul. It was also the foundation of divine abilities.

Before Nascent Soul, magical techniques were magical techniques. After reaching Nascent Soul, there weren't just magical techniques, there were also divine abilities.

Beyond that, now that the golden crow had reached the third stage, a powerful nourishing force flowed out of his fifth heavenly palace to replenish Xu Qing. That was from Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits; whenever it devoured something, it could help Xu Qing in return. That said, this particular instance was providing an astonishing level of replenishment that surpassed anything from before.

Rumbling sounds filled Xu Qing as his fleshly body was further refined. The replenishment was so astonishing that it affected his heavenly palaces; his ninth heavenly palace was now getting very close to being fully materialized.

His current heavenly palaces had been formed in the following order: the first was a black umbrella; the second was a seven-colored wind-chanting lamp; the third was a taboo poison core; the fourth was a violet moon palace; the fifth was an imperial-class technique; the sixth was a heavenly dao bluegreen dragon; the seventh was occupied by the Ghost Emperor mountain; and the eighth was the hellspirit bloodwing lamp.

As for the ninth, Xu Qing had completed it by half thanks to the Ten Entrails Tree. But with the replenishment power coursing through him, it reached seventy percent. Then eighty percent. Ninety percent! After an incense stick's worth of time, his ninth heavenly palace reached a state of ninety-nine percent completion. All it needed was something inserted inside to complete it.

“And that item will be... golden crow, spit out that light!”

Xu Qing's mind raced as he sent divine sense to his fifth heavenly palace. Inside, the golden crow dao soul opened its eyes, causing a seven-colored glow to spring out of its mouth.

It was daybreak light. As that light flashed, it flowed toward the ninth heavenly palace.

When it entered, the ninth heavenly palace became a seven-colored palace that was crystalline and semitransparent. It glowed like the sunrise. The daybreak light became a sphere of light, within which was some immense living creature that resembled a phoenix, except asleep.

The perished sun here was not a golden crow. Instead, it was a different type of living being. The reason Xu Qing's golden crow had been able to devour it was that they were similar on a substructural level. When the ninth heavenly palace materialized, and the daybreak light settled inside, Xu Qing's cultivation base experienced a breakthrough!

His battle prowess skyrocketed, and at the same time, the replenishment from his golden crow continued, causing his tenth heavenly palace to start forming!

Xu Qing was shaken, but also felt keen anticipation. Then he opened his eyes and looked at Sir Inkwell and the god's finger. To Xu Qing, the changes that had occurred to him felt heaven-shaking and earth-toppling. But they were all internal. To the god's finger, the most important thing was the body being painted, and therefore, the finger didn't bother paying attention to Xu Qing.

However, Sir Inkwell did notice, and his eyes glittered. Pretending that nothing had happened, he continued painting. The painted body was now about half complete, and the godly might within it was astonishing. It pulsed out, causing everything to twist and ripple.

Seeing that, Xu Qing's heart grew more determined.

If I fled now, the old man would have to stop painting. He wouldn't have any more paint to work with. And then he could send the finger after me. Therefore, now's not the time to make my escape. I need to wait until the finger is fully fused!

Calming himself, he sat by waiting, while simultaneously using the replenishment from the golden crow to further complete his tenth heavenly palace.

As for what object he would place inside that tenth palace, he already had a plan.

This time, I'm going to try out my violet crystal!

Chapter 486: The Violet Crystal Glitters; The Heavenly Palaces Tremble

When Sir Inkwell saw that Xu Qing didn't take advantage of the moment to escape, his heart sank.

The little punk is too cautious. Well, fine. I'll have to resort to Plan B!

Snorting coldly in his heart, the old Paintedfolk continued working on the painting.

Xu Qing directed the replenishment from the golden crow toward his tenth heavenly palace, causing rumbling to echo within his sea of consciousness as the palace rapidly materialized.

After reaching the five-flame level in Foundation Establishment, I didn't plan to add any more life lamps. I thought my limit was going to be eight palaces. Of the ten heavenly palaces I now have, three are made from life lamps. And now, I'm working on my seventh heavenly palace, which is one of the original group of eight. After I complete it, I'll only be one palace away from being in the great circle of Gold Core! [1]

As Xu Qing contemplated those details, the replenishment from the golden crow surged, and time passed. When Sir Inkwell was about seventy percent finished painting the god body, and as the sun's remains withered up, Xu Qing's tenth heavenly palace was more than half complete.

It won't be long now.

Xu Qing felt keen anticipation. He was really looking forward to finding out what would happen when he used the violet crystal to finish his tenth palace. While keeping an eye on Sir Inkwell in case he fled, Xu Qing focused on the materialization. Before long, the tenth palace had reached ninety percent completion. Then, after a few dozen breaths of time passed, Sir Inkwell's painting was complete except for the head. At that point, Xu Qing's tenth heavenly palace was ninety-nine percent complete.

Violet crystal!

Without any hesitation, Xu Qing lifted his right hand and turned it semitransparent with the Gruegloom Daoseizing Art. Plunging it into his chest, he ignored the piercing pain as he wrapped his fingers around the violet crystal. However, instead of pulling it out, he pushed it toward his sea of consciousness.

“Fuse!” The anticipation he felt in his heart reached incredibly intense levels.

However, as the violet crystal got close to his sea of consciousness, before he could even insert it, he felt a very strong force of rejection. It wasn't coming from one of the heavenly palaces. No, it was coming from *all* of his heavenly palaces. As one, they were sending out fluctuations to keep the violet crystal away.

Xu Qing's jaw nearly dropped.

That force of rejection seemed to irritate the crystal. Seemingly offended, the crystal released a tiny fraction of the boundless and paramount force it was capable of. That stream of force contained something absolutely domineering. It was majestic and paragonic, like something that could crush anything and everything in the world. Intense rumbling filled Xu Qing's sea of consciousness, causing his entire body to tremble.

The violet crystal seemed to transform into a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering archaic mountain, pulsing with the aura of aeons. Compared to it, Xu Qing's sea of consciousness seemed like a tiny burlap sack. There was no way something so massive could fit into such a small sack.

Xu Qing's sea of consciousness shook violently, and cracks started spreading through it. His ten heavenly palaces were all trembling.

The three palaces formed from life lamps, including the black umbrella, the seven-colored wind-chanting lamp, and the hellspirit bloodwing lamp, generally burned with flames that seemed like they would stay lit forever. Yet right now, they were flickering as if they might go out!

They had all been created from the blood of Ancient Emperors and Imperial Sovereigns, yet right now, they simply couldn't stand up to a scrap of power from the violet crystal. And beyond that, they looked like they might break. This definitely surpassed anything Xu Qing could have planned for, and it caused a look of blank shock to fill his face.

Then something happened with his taboo poison core that left him completely gobsmacked. That taboo poison core originated from ancestral god power from a god domain. However, before it could even release the full extent of its power, it shrank back, becoming clearly blurry, as if it might be erased out of existence. As it struggled, it became increasingly unstable, making it seem like it might collapse at any moment. His violet moon heavenly palace came from the essence of Crimson Mother. But right now, that palace was trembling like a waif in a winter wind. Cracks spread out over the palace, and it looked like it might shatter.

Nothing like this had ever happened before!

This.... Xu Qing felt waves of shock smashing into him.

Then he realized that his heavenly dao bluegreen dragon and Ghost Emperor mountain were both shivering like mad. The bluegreen dragon was sending out fluctuations of terror, as if it was looking at some horrifying entity that could completely destroy it. And the Ghost Emperor mountain was bowing its head in subservience to the violet crystal. The golden crow was already at stage three, and had turned into a dao soul, but right now it looked extremely nervous and was whimpering.

In his mind and heart, Xu Qing felt like he had suddenly been thrown into the midst of a violent hurricane. He knew that his violet crystal was special. After all, it had always been the key to keeping his shadow in check. But he could never have predicted that it would be so unbelievably terrifying. What was more, he had only pushed the violet crystal *toward* his sea of consciousness, not *into* it. Yet all of his heavenly palaces were acting like little girls being approached by an evil tyrant. They didn't even want it to be near them.

Because of the palaces' instinctive rejection, the violet crystal's domineering nature erupted. It was easy to guess what would happen if Xu Qing forced the violet crystal closer to his sea of consciousness. The sea of consciousness wouldn't be able to sustain the pressure. It would collapse, and all of his heavenly palaces would shatter.

Xu Qing's hand trembled. All of a sudden, it didn't feel like he was holding a violet crystal. Instead, he was holding a bolt of lightning that could destroy the world! Without the slightest hesitation, he carefully pulled the crystal away from his sea of consciousness and back to its spot in his chest.

As the violet crystal moved away, his sea of consciousness slowly stopped trembling and went back to normal.

What exactly just happened?

Xu Qing's forehead was covered with a sheen of sweat. All of a sudden, he realized that he really didn't know much about the violet crystal. However, what he did know was that now wasn't the time to sit around thinking about it, so he forced himself to put the matter aside for now.

If I can't use the violet crystal....

His eyes gleamed with determination as he took out the bamboo slips that had been infused both with D-132's suppressing force, and also the power of the god's finger. That collection of bamboo slips contained a record of everything Xu Qing had experienced after waking up in D-132.

They contained both the power of memory and the power of amnesia. After taking them out of his bag of holding, Xu Qing inserted them directly into the tenth heavenly palace in his sea of consciousness. The moment he did that, the bamboo slips collapsed into dust. Then that dust swirled together in the tenth heavenly palace to become... a bamboo slip that glowed with the color of blood. It was covered with lines of text, all in Xu Qing's handwriting. The text shifted back and forth between blurry and clear. Sometimes it disappeared, but it would always return. It was extremely gruish. The strong blood-colored light it emitted turned his tenth heavenly palace a deep crimson color.

As the tenth heavenly palace changed form, it came to look like... D-132! And the blood-colored light it emitted was just like the glow cast by the god's finger.

If you looked closely, that blood-colored light contained bits of white that crisscrossed the red. Within that heavenly palace that resembled D-132, the bamboo slip floated, casting out a glow that combined white and red. It looked profoundly sinister.

The moment the process was complete, Xu Qing's cultivation base skyrocketed. It was completely appropriate to say that, at that moment, Xu Qing had essentially reached the ultimate possible peak in Gold Core.

From ancient times until modern, people like that had indeed existed before in the Revered Ancient mainland. However, it would be *easier to find a phoenix feather or a qilin horn* than to encounter one of them.

His heavenly palaces now contained the ancestral god taboo poison, the godsource of the violet moon, and the god power of misfortune. Those three alone would be enough to dominate everything near and far. And that wasn't even to mention the heavenly dao bluegreen dragon, the Ghost Emperor mountain, or the daybreak light from the perished sun. A Gold Core cultivator like this basically didn't even count as being in Gold Core. If Xu Qing were to encounter Chu Tianqun right now, it would only take a moment to crush him.

In fact, he was already considering trying to break through to the next cultivation realm. After he left the Gold Core level, he would reach something called the Heavenfate Dao Soul level, which was also just called Nascent Soul. However, the reality was that Xu Qing still hadn't reached his limit. Of the eight palaces formed from his original five life flames, he still had one more that wasn't complete. With that thought on his mind, Xu Qing took a deep breath. Eyes flashing, he turned to look at Sir Inkwell.

Sir Inkwell's painting was almost complete. The only thing it was missing was the pinky finger on the right hand and the face on the head.

When Xu Qing looked at Sir Inkwell, the Paintedfolk looked back. And then Sir Inkwell grinned gruishly, reached out with his right hand, and quickly painted the face.

It was... Xu Qing's face!

Xu Qing's eyes became as cold as ice. When Sir Inkwell put the eyes onto the face, the massive body he had painted suddenly trembled as if it was awakening.

“Exalted god, the body I've painted for you is now complete!”

With that, Sir Inkwell turned and fled at top speed.

The god's finger thrummed with fluctuations of excitement as it flew toward the body. As it fused, the surrounding warding spell shivered and loosened.

That was when Xu Qing made his move.

Xu Qing shot away from the shriveled remains of the sun. Taking advantage of the loosening of the warding spell, he pierced through it.

Sir Inkwell did the same, and the two of them fled. The head and the stone lion also broke free.

The god's finger wasn't paying attention to them at all; instead, it shrank down and fused with the painted body. It was possible to see countless tendrils of flesh snaking off of it and latching onto the body. Then, as it struggled, the body's eyes fluttered as if trying to open.

Everything in the area rippled and distorted. As the final tendril of flesh connected, the painted eyes opened. However, the moment that happened, cracks exploded all over the body, spreading to cover every inch of it. Then, a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering boom echoed out as... The entire body exploded! A massive shockwave spread out in all directions. An agonized shriek rippled out, filled with madness and fury.

As it passed the head and the stone lion, they detonated with a thump. Then it hit Sir Inkwell, whose body immediately started turning blurry. It looked like he was about to disappear. That said, he didn't seem afraid. Rather, he seemed regretful.

I guess I can't control a god, huh? What a pity. It was a good opportunity. Ah, whatever. I guess I should flee for my life now.

While he sighed inwardly, he shouted as loud as he could.

“Don't panic, oh exalted god! Your humble servant didn't just prepare one body for you. There are two! One was a painting, but the other is real! But they look the same. Sir... just go try out the other body!”

Chapter 487: God Possession

An enraged roar drifted through the depths of the Abyssal Sea. As the painted body collapsed, the god's finger shot out from within the haze of flesh and blood, pulsing with a will of destruction.

The head and stone lion had already collapsed, but Sir Inkwell had used some unique method to last a bit longer and yell those final words.

Instantly, the furious god's finger swiveled to point in the direction of the fleeing Xu Qing.

Although its mental faculties were impaired to a degree, and it was a bit forgetful after being injured, it immediately identified Xu Qing as bearing a perfect resemblance to the painted body. As a result, the finger didn't bother chasing down Sir Inkwell, and instead shot toward Xu Qing.

When Xu Qing realized what was happening behind him, his expression turned dour. Truth be told, the moment he realized Sir Inkwell was painting that face to resemble him, he had guessed what was coming.

Unfortunately, Sir Inkwell had been in control of the painting, and the god's finger was lurking nearby the entire time, so there was nothing he could do. The only thing he'd been able to do was influence the direction in which Sir Inkwell fled.

When Sir Inkwell saw the god's finger pursuing Xu Qing, a very complacent expression filled his face. That said, he did feel some regret.

What a pity I wasn't able to control a god. Even though it's only the pinky finger of a god's clone, it's still on a higher level of existence than I can interfere with. That said, after this experience, I need to think more about how to make it work better next time. This world inside of a painting is a very interesting place. If I could control a god in here, then just imagine what I could do outside the painting....

That thought got Sir Inkwell fairly excited. He glanced back at the fleeing Xu Qing.

The jailer certainly showed up at just the right time. Without him, I might not have escaped. He's one of the few good people in this painting. I'm going to miss him. All I can do is hope he ends up safe and sound.

Sir Inkwell chuckled and sped up. However, that was when he suddenly felt something extremely malevolent locking onto him. Face falling, he looked over his shoulder, whereupon his eyes went wide.

At some point, a gigantic bluegreen dragon had appeared behind him. It had a dark gray body covered with countless sharp scales, and it stared at him with ice-cold eyes. It was hundreds of meters in length, making Sir Inkwell seem like a bug in comparison. A tremor passed through Sir Inkwell, and his mind reeled.

"A heavenly dao??" he blurted. Waves of shock assailed him. Although he feared the god's finger, there was a second thing he truly feared, and that was destiny aura!

Those were the two things he had been forced to deal with in D-132. D-132 was used to suppress a god and sever karma. But it had also suppressed the prisoners, who had all been transformed to a certain degree by the god's finger. Though he feared the god's finger, that fear wasn't overwhelming. After all, he was something of a companion to that finger, and because of their dealings, had strong karma built up with it. As for the destiny aura... it could suppress that god's finger. And given that Sir Inkwell was a companion to the god's finger, it meant that destiny aura was like his nemesis!

And destiny auras came from heavenly daos!

As Sir Inkwell's eyes went wide, he instinctively let loose a miserable shriek, as if he had just encountered the most deadly beast in the world. Turning, he fled at top speed away from the bluegreen dragon.

Dammit, dammit, DAMMIT. What's a heavenly dao doing here? What is that bluegreen dragon, anyway? Don't tell me the giant lake in this painting produced it because of the sun's remains?

As Sir Inkwell fled, his scalp tingled as he realized the bluegreen dragon had opened its mouth.

Why is it staring at me?

Nothing that Sir Inkwell could do would mean a thing when dealing with a heavenly dao. Thus, he fled right back into the world of his painting, which lay on the ground nearby.

However, the bluegreen dragon followed, chasing him right into the painting. Inside of that painting was Sir Inkwell's family. They all looked terrified when the bluegreen dragon appeared. Then they started disappearing one by one, as if they'd been devoured. A feeling of terror began to spread out from the painting.

However, Sir Inkwell obviously had some skills. Though he was facing his nemesis, a heavenly dao that he couldn't possibly fight against, he was still able to buy some time.

That was one reason why Xu Qing didn't make a move against him back when he was absorbing the sun's remains. Back then, Sir Inkwell had been painting in the presence of the god's finger, so making a move against him would have been counterproductive. But now the god's finger was chasing Xu Qing. As it turned out, though Sir Inkwell thought he was plotting against Xu Qing, the reality was that Xu Qing was plotting against him. From a certain perspective, it seemed... that neither of them had come out on top.

Sir Inkwell was in mortal danger, but so was Xu Qing.

Xu Qing was currently fleeing at top speed. The godly might of the god's finger seemed boundless, and considering it was capable of greater teleportations, it didn't seem likely that Xu Qing could outrun it. After only about four or five breaths of time, everything around Xu Qing rippled and turned blurry.

The god's finger raced with madness and determination right toward Xu Qing.

Xu Qing looked over his shoulder and released an explosive poison mist. He unleashed the godsource of the violet moon, and summoned a projection of the Ghost Emperor mountain. The golden crow appeared, a dao soul within it, its eyes glowing brightly. There was also a seven-colored stream of light that spread out from Xu Qing, making him seem full of holiness. In addition, there was a bamboo slip that floated in front of him, releasing fluctuations exactly the same as the god's finger.

Finally, he had a command medallion. Raising it overhead, he shouted, "Taboo treasure!"

The great net that covered Sea-Sealing County, including the Abyssal Sea, suddenly glittered brightly. Countless streams of blinding light then converged high above Xu Qing.

Taboo treasures were not things that any person could just randomly use. They required a certain level of understanding. Because of that, they often had limitations, and required great effort to use. In many cases, it was difficult to use much of their power. Using a taboo treasure wasn't something that could be done intuitively. Taboo treasures were critical to any major organization, and that meant that most people would never get a chance to study or experiment with them.

Thankfully, Xu Qing had an advantage in that regard. Thanks to how much Master Seventh favored him, he had been appointed as a treasure custodian for a short time. That had allowed him to study and experiment with a taboo treasure, an experience which was now proving very handy. As a result, the light that gathered overhead was exceedingly dazzling.

The moment Xu Qing did that, the god's finger appeared only a few dozen meters ahead. Its maddened divine will locked onto him, causing an enraged howl to fill his mind.

"You... took away... my body. Give it back!"

Xu Qing backed away cautiously, while simultaneously tapping into all his trump cards.

"I didn't take away your body. That bastard Inkwell painted your body to look like me, all so he could escape. You should be chasing him!"

As Xu Qing backed away, the god's finger rushed forward by nine meters, its divine will exploded out.

"Give... it... back!"

"My body is filled with a bunch of random stuff that's not suitable for you. You can sense it, can't you?" As Xu Qing struggled to control his breathing, he sent his shadow out. The shadow appeared, trembling, then shrank beneath Xu Qing's feet.

"Give it... back!"

The god's finger wasn't listening to anything Xu Qing said. The finger's divine will grew more insane as it got closer and closer.

Seeing that, Xu Qing's eyes filled with a crazy look. His right hand dropped, and the taboo poison power within him erupted. A projection of the violet moon appeared, shooting right toward the god's finger. Daybreak light erupted dazzlingly, creating a sea of light around the finger. The golden crow overhead held nothing back; one hundred tails rippled behind it as the power of a dao soul swept toward the finger. Things weren't over yet, though. Xu Qing was going all out! Taking out some demonization symbols, he sent the Ghost Emperor mountain out with full force.

And then, Xu Qing pointed at the god's finger. That was when he pushed down on the command medallion the palace lord had given him. The power of a taboo treasure descended. Brilliant light gathered in the net above, then shot downward in the form of a glowing hand some several thousand meters in size. As the hand dropped, the water shattered, spreading out in all directions.

As of this moment, Xu Qing was unleashing every scrap of battle prowess he was capable of. Intense rumbling sounds echoed into the sky. However... Xu Qing's enemy was not a cultivator, but rather, a god. Maybe it was only the pinky finger of the clone of a god. But the terrifying power emanating off of it could shatter heaven and rock the earth.

His poison didn't do much to the finger. Given it's maddened state, it didn't care about a bit of rot. What was more, it was part of a god's body, so it naturally had defenses. The violet moon godsource was relatively negligible. To cultivators, it would be boundlessly powerful. But to this god's finger, that small amount of essence was something it could easily rebuff.

Even more noteworthy was that it's thinking was currently muddled; it was completely consumed by desire and madness. The finger pierced through the power of the poison and the violet moon. However, as it neared Xu Qing, it was resisted by the daybreak light. But that didn't last for long.

However, Xu Qing took advantage of the time it bought him. His golden crow let loose a piercing cry and closed in. The Ghost Emperor mountain hurtled forward. And the hand of light descended

from above with crushing power. As the taboo hand grew larger and larger, destructive power pulsed off of it. Then, it hit the god's finger at the same time as Xu Qing's other attacks.

Xu Qing didn't bother to see what happened as a result. He just fled with all the speed he could muster, turning into a blur of afterimages that shot off into the distance.

Behind him, a deafening boom shook heaven and earth. A massive portion of the Abyssal Sea exploded, sending water spraying everywhere, and causing huge, destructive waves to roll out.

Xu Qing coughed up mouthful after mouthful of blood, and his face went as pale as death. He staggered dramatically, but at the same time, kept fleeing.

However, after only a dozen or so breaths of time passed, a howl echoed out that could shake heaven and make ghosts and gods weep. And then, from the area where Xu Qing's attacks had all landed simultaneously, a wriggling mass of shattered flesh slowly rose up.

As it stitched itself back together, it raced after Xu Qing. Xu Qing knew he couldn't fight it, so as it closed in, his eyes lit with craziness as he tapped into the violet crystal! The wriggling mass of flesh neared, leaving behind a trail of blood. In the blink of an eye, it was on top of Xu Qing.

"My... my.... Give... it... back!"

All of a sudden, Xu Qing was no longer visible. The spot where he had been was now covered with a mountainous mass of bloody flesh. And a terrifying, evil will spread out from that spot.

Chapter 488: The Finger Didn't Want To Possess Him....

The depths of the Abyssal Sea were very quiet. This part of Daybreak Prefecture was remote to begin with, and few travelers ever went there. Couple that with the fact that the god's finger had already scoured the area to capture living cultivators, and the result was that right now, the place was completely desolate. Whether because of the sun's remains or the god's finger, this area now abounded with mutagen, to the point where it was showing signs of becoming a forbidden region.

The head and the stone lion were both affected by the fluctuations coming off the god's finger, and were taking longer than usual to recover. At the moment, they were mangled masses of gore. Sir Inkwell's painting still had some of his family members in it, but only about five. And the survivors were still being devoured.

As a result of that, no one was aware that something extremely bizarre was happening beneath the mountainous mass of flesh at the bottom of the lake.

That was what remained of the god's finger, and at the moment, it was wriggling like mad. As for Xu Qing, he was underneath it, completely surrounded by the shredded flesh of the finger, which was now burrowing into him, causing intense pain to sweep through him.

It felt like he was being stabbed repeatedly while also being slashed to ribbons. Xu Qing trembled violently. However, no matter how he fought back, it didn't seem to do any good. He couldn't stop the invading flesh and blood. Thus, time passed, and the massive mountain of flesh slowly shrank down.

After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, the mountain of flesh was reduced by half, and an outline of Xu Qing was visible. He was twitching and jerking around, making it obvious

how much pain he was in. The flesh wasn't done burrowing into him. It continued to squirm as it madly entered him through every pore in his body.

Another incense stick's worth of time passed, after which Xu Qing became more visible. There was now only one big strip of flesh left, which turned into a host of tiny tendrils that started digging into Xu Qing's forehead.

Then it was gone.

Xu Qing lay there unmoving, his expression one of frozen pain. He could not sense anything around him. All of the flesh that made up the god's finger was now inside of him, turning into a host of extremely fine tendrils that filled him from head to toe.

His meridians. His flesh. His bones. Every part of him was filled with those tendrils. And they were slowly linking together, causing a terrifying mutagen to spread out and change Xu Qing, to transform him into something suitable for the god's habitation.

The violet crystal in his chest was still glowing with violet light. But that light could repair damage to him, and wasn't able to fight back against a transformation that came from the flesh of a god. In fact, in some ways, that recovery power was actually making the transformation process proceed more smoothly. Any damage that was inflicted was quickly healed.

As a result, the flesh of the god's finger didn't pay any attention to the violet crystal, and just slowly continued transforming Xu Qing.

Fleshy growths sprang out from him, like tentacles, spreading out, growing longer, and swaying back and forth. It was a very bizarre scene, but what was most bizarre was how those flesh tentacles were rapidly intertwining around Xu Qing. Close observation would reveal that meridians and blood vessels were being formed by the flesh tentacles, and it was actually being done in exactly the same way that Sir Inkwell had painted the body earlier.

Apparently, the god's finger had observed that painting process and learned from it. Each of the fleshy tentacles was like a paint brush, and the body itself was the paint. In that manner, a new body began to take shape, which was several hundred meters from head to toe. The god's finger was using Xu Qing as the core, while building another body like an outer shell.

Time passed. The outer shell grew more and more complete. It was possible to see bones, with muscles slowly taking shape over them. Then the flesh tentacles began making limbs, and also, they spread up like a blooming flower to create a neck. Next was the head. The outer shell made a general framework, while flesh tentacles proliferated and filled in the gaps. Eventually, the wriggling tentacles from the neck completed the head. Facial features appeared, and astonishingly, they were those of Xu Qing.

About an hour later, the outer shell was complete. The body was unclothed, and the muscles wriggled as skin formed and filled in any empty spots. When the last gap was removed, a perfect body was visible, over 900 meters tall, right there in the depths of the lake.

It was perfectly proportioned, being tall and lean, with broad shoulders and a sturdy chest. It had terrifyingly powerful musculature, and bewitching good looks.

One unusual aspect was the body's hair, which wasn't black, but violet. As the violet hair swayed in the surrounding water, it created an image that seemed both vile and charming at the same time.

Godly might spread out, and something holy pulsed from the body. It was a combination that was extremely disturbing to say the least.

This was the body of a god!

However, other than the swaying violet hair, the body wasn't moving at all. The eyes had not opened.

That was because it lacked a soul.

The god's finger had created a very suitable body, but the last step had not yet been carried out. And that was... possession. It needed to devour Xu Qing's soul, and then use godliness to make its own soul for the body, a god's soul. Only then would it be well and truly independent! When all was said and done, it would have changed from being a god's finger into being a brand new god in full form, filled with limitless potential.

This was its dream. And of course, that dream was what Sir Inkwel had hoped to commandeer. As of now, its dream was almost complete. All that remained was to simply devour the soul. After all, it was a god on a substructural level, and little effort was required for a god to devour the soul of a mortal.

Thus, the will of the god's finger erupted inside the body, converging into one spot that then shot toward Xu Qing's soul in his sea of consciousness.

Xu Qing's befuddled soul sensed the vile, icy will rushing toward it. It didn't struggle. However, the desire to fight back had not left it. Though the soul did not have control of the body, or even consciousness, or even the ability to sense the outside world, there was still a crazy notion that existed within Xu Qing.

Years ago, the shadow seemed immeasurably mighty to me. And there was no way I could have fought back when it tried to possess me. Just like now. To me, this god's finger is something I simply can't defend against.

Except, the violet crystal made all ten of the heavenly palaces in my sea of consciousness tremble uncontrollably. The crystal was what fought back against the possession attempt by the shadow. So today... why don't I do the same thing to defend against the possession attempt by this god's finger?

The crazy notion that drifted out from Xu Qing's soul was the exact reason he hadn't struggled earlier. He had simply watched the power of the gods and spirits craft a new body as an outer shell. He had observed everything. And he had waited....

He had waited for his opponent to try to devour his soul.

That moment had arrived.

As that vile, icy will assaulted him, and the sensation of impending doom grew more intense, the violet crystal in Xu Qing's chest seemed offended. And it erupted!

A boundless, majestic force swept out from the violet crystal, becoming a paragonic, unstoppable, ancient sea of violet light that rushed toward the will of the god's finger with domineering force. Rumbling echoed out, and Xu Qing's mind felt like it was filled with infinite bolts of lightning. A heaven-shaking, earth-shattering explosion ripped out as the god's finger, which had previously been a bit muddled, could suddenly think very clearly. And it screamed.

“W-what... what is that?? How could something like that be in a body like this?? This power... th-this power....”

The god’s will was filled with astonishment, and at the same time, indescribable terror of the violet crystal. As the screams echoed about, the god’s will retreated. It... wasn’t interested in possessing Xu Qing anymore.

Xu Qing had made the right gamble!

He had remembered how the violet crystal had been passive from the moment he acquired it. Even in the most deadly situations, the crystal never did anything, leaving him with the feeling that if he died in such a situation... he would truly die. The only time the crystal had ever reacted explosively was when the shadow tried to possess him. [1]

That seemed to indicate that the violet crystal had no interest in things relating to the fleshly body. Nor did it care if Xu Qing himself faced any sort of deadly crisis. But if something tried to possess him, then it perked up.

That was what happened with the shadow all those years ago. And it was happening now with this god’s will.

The god’s will pulsed with intense terror. Its mental faculties had recovered, and because of that, it could think and reason. As a result, it abandoned all possession attempts and tried to retreat.

It was too slow. The shadow had tried to do the same thing, and it had also failed.

Next, Xu Qing’s violet crystal released terrifying fluctuations, causing the violet sea to surge in the direction of the god’s will.

The god’s will screamed as a sealing power slammed into it.

“NO!!!”

The god’s finger struggled violently as it screamed into Xu Qing’s mind. To it, this moment was more of a deadly crisis than what Xu Qing had experienced earlier. As this fight played out, the 900-meter-tall body in the depths of the massive lake started twitching. Then a vicious ghost face appeared on its chest, bulging outward as if trying to break free into the open. But then a huge violet hand wrapped around the face, grabbing it and pulling it back. The ghost face screamed.

Unprecedented despair filled the will of the god’s finger.

“Just who exactly are you?! What exactly is this thing??”

The howls were filled with grief and indignation, as well as wild madness. Xu Qing’s massive body trembled as the god’s will repeatedly tried to struggle free. Such efforts were to no avail.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing had come to notice something unusual.... The power of the violet crystal didn’t seem even close to its true limit. Yet it wasn’t actually able to seal the god’s will in the same way it had sealed the shadow. The god’s will was fighting back. As for his own soul, it was filled with intense pain, and seemed like it might start withering into nothing.

It’s not that the violet crystal isn’t strong enough. Rather, I’m not capable of unleashing its full power....

As Xu Qing realized that, cold light flickered in his eyes.

Chapter 489: Out of Consideration for a God, We Continue the Traditions of the Corrections Division

It's only sealed it by half.

Now that the god's finger was no longer muddled in the head, it was struggling violently. The finger could sense the violet crystal in Xu Qing, and could also sense that the sealing power had reached a limit, and wasn't getting any stronger. Upon sensing that, it reacted immediately.

"You're not strong enough to sustain the use of that treasure!"

The will of the god's finger pulsed with fluctuations of delight, then struggled even more violently, going all out to try to break free. After all, it could sense that, thanks to the repeated injuries it had sustained, this moment of clarity wouldn't last for very long. Therefore, it hoped to get free of this bizarre, terrifying body and flee as far away as possible.

That said, though Xu Qing was too weak to release the true might of the violet crystal, the violet sea of light was still completely terrifying. Thus, no amount of struggle on the part of the god's finger was enough to break free. In fact, the god's finger was slowly being dragged backward. The will of the god started to get very anxious, and was pulsing with a wild sense of frustrated anger.

Just like the situation with the heavenly palaces, this was like a little girl facing an evil tyrant. The difference was that the god's finger was fighting back with more intensity, and was not willing to surrender.

Seeing that, Xu Qing frowned. He could sense that his soul was starting to wither up thanks to this struggle. If things continued in this manner, and he didn't give up, then the violet crystal would be fine, but he would end up destroyed in body and soul.

He sighed inwardly at the realization that the violet crystal actually wasn't helping. That said, he also realized that the true reason for that was himself.... After all, this was no shadow being sealed. It was a god. The difference in the difficulty between those two things was like the difference between heaven and earth.

That said, he wasn't ready to just let this god's finger make a getaway.

From the depths of his soul, he said, *"You're right, I'm not strong enough to control my heavenfate god crystal for much longer. But that's not important. What's important is that if I really go all out, I might die, but you end up sealed in the end! So, don't force my hand!"*

"Heavenfate god crystal?" The will of the god's finger hesitated. It could sense that Xu Qing wasn't bluffing. He really could perform the sealing, though it would cost him his life.

"That's right. When I was born, the destiny aura of the Revered Ancient mainland converged on me, and thus, I was born with a heavenfate item inside of me!" Xu Qing offered the explanation in the most serious of tones.

The god's finger was dumbstruck. In any other situation, it wouldn't believe a story like that, but right now... it was having trouble deciding what was true and what wasn't.

The god's finger didn't want to sit around trying to figure out what was true and what wasn't. It could tell that it was starting to lose its thinking faculties again. And therefore, it screamed, *"Let me go! I don't want to possess you. And even if you do manage to seal me, you'll be killed in body and soul. Maybe I'll lose my freedom, but you'll lose your life!"*

Xu Qing frowned. It was true that he could let the god's finger go. All it would take would be a thought on his part, and the violet crystal would retract, leaving the path free to escape. But he didn't want to do that. For one thing, he was the type of person who would seek revenge over the smallest grievance. He couldn't just let an enemy like this go free. Beyond that, he could tell... that this god's finger was actually a mixture of deadly threat and destined opportunity!

What was more, he didn't dare to let the god's finger go free. If he did, the thing could turn around and crush him to death. If the finger really didn't want to possess him, then he would be killed beyond the shadow of a doubt. And even if he somehow wasn't crushed to death instantly, and the finger fled, it would surely look for another opportunity in the future to kill him. With such thoughts on his mind, he decided that he definitely couldn't free it. Besides, he also couldn't risk publicly revealing his biggest secret, which was the violet crystal. In addition, Xu Qing could tell that though the god's finger was fighting back, as long as it was in the half-sealed state thanks to the violet crystal, it actually couldn't hurt him.

After considering the situation for a few breaths of time, he calmly said, *"As I said, I can't sustain the use of the heavenfate god crystal. But I also said something else. Before you tried to possess me, I said I have a bunch of random stuff. I didn't want you coming inside because I can't control them all, and—"*

"Let me out of here!!" the god's will interrupted furiously. Then it struggled mightily, which caused Xu Qing's soul to wither even more.

Seeing the situation turning more critical caused Xu Qing's ferocity to erupt.

"Shut up! If I had a way to let you free, I'd already have thrown you the hell out!"

As Xu Qing's shout echoed within his sea of consciousness, the god's finger suddenly hesitated.

"If you don't let me go, I'll make sure you die! If you die, and all that happens to me is I get sealed, then eventually I'll get free, one day!" The will of the god's finger again struggled, but it seemed like it was willing to accept a mutual loss as the outcome of the conflict.

"You'll get free one day?" Xu Qing laughed coldly. *"You must have sensed it in the past. Did you forget, or are you intentionally not mentioning it? It doesn't matter. Tell me, what is... this?"*

The godsource of the violet moon suddenly erupted from within its heavenly palace, filling his sea of consciousness and turning into a signal. By now, Xu Qing was very familiar with the process. It wasn't his first time using the violet moon as a threat. He was basically doing the exact same thing he had done to deal with Emperor Ancient Spirit.

That said, because he was in the Revered Ancient mainland, he didn't release the godsource to the full extent. He kept it inside of himself. But if he died and lost control, then the godsource power would connect to its origin, and the red moon would sense it.

The will of the god's finger trembled and spoke as if through gritted teeth.

"That's the essence of High God Crimson Mother!"

It had entered Xu Qing's sea of consciousness in a muddle state, and had vaguely sensed the essence, but had been more focused on possessing Xu Qing's soul. Then the violet crystal erupted, forcing a state of clarity. After that, the terror of the situation made the god's finger fully focused on escaping.

"You see, I can't use the god crystal to seal you, but I also have other ways to kill you. If Crimson Mother comes, you'll be devoured. I'll die. But you won't survive!"

As Xu Qing spoke word by word, the will of the god's finger pulsed with extreme anxiety. At the same time, it was starting to lose control of its faculties, and was gradually losing the ability to think clearly.

When Xu Qing saw that he was making some progress, he growled, *"I have something else!"*

He activated the power of this sixth heavenly palace, and though the bluegreen dragon wasn't there, the heavenly dao aura was still around.

"A heavenly dao!" The will of the god was even more shaken.

Xu Qing's third heavenly palace shivered, and taboo poison seeped out.

"And the curse of a god!"

The will of the god's finger wasn't sure what to say. As its faculties degraded, they were replaced by a sense of chaos.

Sounding very calm, Xu Qing said, *"Therefore, don't feel embarrassed. I don't want you to stick around, but I have no way to make you leave. But that doesn't mean I won't be able to do so in the future."*

"I... don't believe... you...."

Xu Qing could sense the god's will getting muddled again, so he spoke in a softer tone.

"I can guarantee you that once my cultivation base is high enough, I'll free you. In fact, if we get along, maybe I can even make a new body for you...."

"As you know, the destiny aura of Revered Ancient converged on me when I was born. The heavenfate god crystal accompanies me for life. As such, staying with me is not a degradation of your status as a god. And in the future, I'll definitely qualify to form a new body for you."

"I... I... don't...." The god's will again felt more muddled.

Xu Qing's voice became even gentler.

“Don’t struggle. If you do, then I’ll die and you’ll still be devoured. You’re a god, but you can be easily devoured by a stronger god. You surely know what kind of pain that will involve. You’ll be ripped to shreds and swallowed! Do you want to become food?”

“No... I....”

“Exactly! I know you don’t want to become food. So stop struggling. Just rest. Later on, you’ll have endless possibilities.” Then Xu Qing concluded with a final question. *“Do you want to live, or would you rather die?”*

“Live... I....” The will of the god’s finger seemed dazed.

“I promise!” Xu Qing said resolutely. *“Just rest and leave everything else to me. I’ll take care of everything.”*

As Xu Qing spoke softly and gently, a rift opened in his sea of consciousness, which led right into his D-132 heavenly palace, his tenth.

“Go. You’ll feel right at home. And you can just rest. Rest....”

Acting on instinct, the will of the god’s finger slowly headed toward D-132. Xu Qing was right, it did feel right at home. However, it stopped right in front, and a sensation of irritation suddenly rose within it.

Xu Qing quickly said, *“Don’t overthink things! If you do that, you’ll just get frustrated. Trust me.... I’ll make you a new body and then set you free!”*

The will of the god’s finger let loose a few more fluctuations. Then it eased into D-132 and went to its usual spot, which was made up of a few dozen cells. There, it transformed into a huge, blood-colored finger, then settled down to sleep.

However, just when Xu Qing was about to breathe a sigh of relief, D-132 suddenly trembled. Divine will emerged from the god’s finger.

“Where’s... everyone else...?”

“I’ll bring them soon to join you,” Xu Qing said solemnly.

In the outside world it was evening, and red light filled the sky. Not very far away from Xu Qing and his 900-meter-tall body, was Mount Daybreak, which was currently in great danger.

Pressure weighed down on the interior of the mountain, while the spell formation that kept it safe was vibrating. There were about a dozen locations where the formation was close to breaking open thanks to the vicious black spikes being stabbed into it. Outside of the formation were a host of nonhuman cultivators, their vicious eyes gleaming with greed. Shockingly, quite a few of them were escaped prisoners from the Corrections Division. They had all recently answered the call to join forces and besiege Mount Daybreak.

“There’s definitely a lot of treasure in this Mount Daybreak. The swordsages are all at the front lines, so they don’t have attention to spare. Fellow Daoists, the time has come to get our revenge!”

“Break open the spell formation! Kill everyone in the Swordsage Court. Wipe out the swordsages. Clean this place out. And then there’s the mountain itself. Hey, everyone, let’s see if we can blow the entire place up!”

“Good idea! We can make sure that Daybreak Prefecture doesn’t even have a Mount Daybreak anymore! This is going to be incredible! Hahaha!”

“And we don’t even have to worry about repercussions! The humans of Sea-Sealing County... are doomed to be overthrown!”

“The Swordsage Courts everywhere else are also under siege. By the way, everyone, I have some good news. I have a confirmed report that the humans of Sea-Sealing County on the northern and western fronts are in really bad shape! Their defense could collapse at any moment!”

“Break open this spell formation! We’ll kill all the swordsages and tear down Mount Daybreak!”

As the demonic, animalistic howls filled the air, the spell formation rippled, and intense killing intent surged out from the nonhumans. Rumbling booms filled the air, and the light of magical techniques glowed. Huge magical devices were being used to assault Mount Daybreak’s spell formation.

Inside Mount Daybreak were a few dozen swordsages. All of them looked like they were ready to fight to the death as they faced the sole Nascent Soul swordsage present.

The Nascent Soul cultivator looked off toward the distant battlefields to the west and north, and quietly said, “We’ll stand our ground and die together if we must.”

His voice was soft, but full of conviction.

Chapter 490: Shamelessly Reaping Without Sowing!

In the depths of the massive lake, the spot where the god’s finger made its possession attempt was now unnaturally silent. The mutagen levels were very high, causing everything to ripple and distort as it gradually turned into a forbidden region.

The source of that forbidden region was a huge figure standing in the depths. It was 900 meters tall and looked like some type of devilish god. It was completely naked, without any clothing. Swirling mist surrounded it, making it look almost dead. However, countless faintly glimmering magical symbols could be seen on its skin, causing it to pulse with an ancient aura that seemed alive. That figure seemed like a mountain, with shoulders broad enough to prop up the dome of heaven. It was perfectly proportioned, with a bewitching face. Within the mutagen and mist, it seemed profoundly nefarious. It also seemed fatally attractive.

As time passed, the devilish god began to glow with seven-colored light. At first, it was weak. But it gradually grew more dazzling, until finally, that devilish god's body seemed extremely holy. And then the nefariousness and the holiness combined with each other.

Some time passed, and the huge body shivered. Then it started dissolving.

It started with the head, then the neck. After that, the limbs. It almost looked like a person taking off a suit of armor. Countless tendrils of flesh sucked inward to Xu Qing's real body.

Before long, all of the exterior flesh and blood was back inside, and the 900-meter-tall devilish god body had vanished. Xu Qing opened his eyes. At first, he looked a bit confused. Everything that had just occurred was inside his sea of consciousness, and now that he was waking up, it almost seemed like a dream.

The moment he opened his eyes, he coughed up a huge mouthful of black blood. He wasn't injured. Instead, he felt something brimming inside of him. And he felt a fleshly body power that vastly surpassed anything from before. As the feeling surged within him, he struggled to control his breathing. And the confused look in his eyes resolved into clarity.

"My body..." he murmured. After sensing himself, his spirits lifted.

His body felt both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. After a few breaths of time passed, his eyes glittered brightly. Then he burst into motion, causing a piercing boom as he suddenly moved hundreds of meters in the blink of an eye.

It was an astonishing level of speed. Left behind him was a string of slowly fading afterimages.

I'm so fast

.

Based on what he could sense, his fleshly body was at least three times stronger than before. Eyes shining, he launched an experimental punch with his right hand. He used no magical technique, just fleshly body power. And as a result, a vortex opened up, rumbling loudly, surrounded by a destructive tempest. It destroyed anything it touched.

Xu Qing's pupils constricted, and his heart started pounding. Clearly, his body was very different compared to before. He was faster and stronger, but also, a lot tougher. And his attack power was very different. In a very short time, he had experienced a heaven-shaking, earth-toppling transformation. His fleshly body level had changed.

As his heart raced in his chest, he released his taboo poison, causing it to fill his body and test how well he could sustain godly power.

Soon he realized that the taboo poison was deeply fused with his body. In the past, releasing the taboo poison would cause his own flesh to corrode. Thankfully, he had built up a resistance, so the effects weren't too bad. Combined with the powers of the violet crystal, he could maintain an equilibrium. But that was only short-term. If he used the taboo poison for a long time, the effects could be calamitous. As of now, though, that didn't seem to be happening at all. His body seemed fully acclimated to the power of the taboo poison.

His mood lifted as he did some tests with the violet moon. Soon, he discovered that he was much more able to deal with the violet moon's power as well. Apparently, this body really had been built with the intention of being able to use the power of a god.

"A god body..." he murmured.

He tested out some more of his magical techniques, and before long, confirmed that this fleshly body upgrade affected every aspect of himself. The good fortune he was experiencing left him feeling very excited. It was sort of like *reaping without sowing*.

This is what happens when I take really big risks! Of course, this isn't truly the body of a god....

Xu Qing could remember the 900-meter-tall external shell from earlier. By casting his senses into himself, he could see a large number of golden threads. They seemed infinite, filling every part of him, and all of them pulsed with a very holy sensation. He could tell they were harmless, and also that he could control them. That said, the method of control wasn't magical techniques or cultivation base. It was only by tapping into the power of the taboo poison and the essence of the violet moon that he could do so. Also, he couldn't use them to form that same exterior shell as before.

It seems that the 900-meter-tall exterior shell was the real god body. Unfortunately, I can't make it again right now.... Obviously, it was because he didn't have enough godly power.

That was the body the god's finger had prepared.

Xu Qing next scanned his tenth heavenly palace in his sea of consciousness.

Within the cells in D-132, the blood-colored finger rested alone, sleeping. However, apparently because of being so lonely, it wasn't sleeping soundly, but rather, stirred occasionally.

Sadly I have no control. But one day, I should be able to use the violet crystal to completely seal it. Then I'll be in control just as I'm in control of the shadow.

Xu Qing did not feel bound to stick by the words he had spoken earlier to the finger. It was just like the time his Master had taken him along to prepare his special technique. Master Seventh took him to many sects to look through their secret magical techniques. When they left each sect, Master Seventh taught Xu Qing how to bow and offer respects. That way, if they met as enemies, they could kill them with a clean conscience. This was a similar situation. Xu Qing felt that what his Master had said made sense, and therefore, he clasped hands and bowed. Though there was nothing in front of him to bow to, Xu Qing felt that the sincerity in his heart was the most important thing. As long as he was being sincere, it was the same as actually bowing in thanks to the god's finger. It was the type of logic Master Seventh had taught to Xu Qing, and he agreed with it. [1]

However, he still needed to make sure that the finger slept peacefully, so after bowing, he looked around. After sensing his next objective, he blurred into motion, becoming another string of afterimages.

His destination was an unrolled scroll painting. The painting had once been filled with a large family, but now the only person left was an old man. His expression was one of terror, and that was because he wasn't alone. He was the only person left, but there was also a vicious bluegreen dragon next to him with its mouth wide open.

Xu Qing looked coldly at the painting, reached out, and made a grasping gesture. The painting flew up into his hand. When the bluegreen dragon sensed him, it flew out.

Looking at Xu Qing, it roared, then let loose a loud belch. Finally, it returned to the sixth heavenly palace inside Xu Qing.

“Get the hell out of there!” Xu Qing said coolly, looking into the painting.

The bluegreen dragon knew he wasn’t talking to it, so it settled down quietly.

Inside the painting, Sir Inkwell shivered with fear. However, he didn’t dare to ignore Xu Qing, so he emerged from inside the painting. After taking human form, he floated in front of Xu Qing, looking terrified.

Shivering uncontrollably, he cautiously asked, “Sir... sir, are you the god favored by heaven, or are you the jailer?”

He really wasn’t able to tell exactly who he was dealing with.

Face expressionless, Xu Qing sent some divine will to the shadow.

The shadow immediately rose up from the ground, pulsing with a terrifying aura, looking completely ferocious with bared teeth and flexing claws. Despite its ferocious appearance, the shadow was actually feeling very scared. When Xu Qing had been in danger of being possessed, the shadow had been hiding. The truth was that it had harbored some hope that the violet crystal might end up being broken by the god....

If that happened, the shadow might have a chance at freedom.

But when the violet crystal erupted with power, and the god’s finger moaned in agony, the shadow had become filled with terror and despair.

That said, regardless of anything, it didn’t want to die. Therefore, it put on a show of being completely devoted and loyal. It loudly salivated as all of its countless eyes glared at Sir Inkwell. Then it growled a bit, like a vicious dog.

When Sir Inkwell saw the shadow like that, his face fell.

“Y-y-you’re... you’re the jailer!! How is that even possible? Weren’t you being possessed by the god’s finger? How could a godly possession have failed?”

Sir Inkwell trembled violently. He recognized the shadow. After all, the shadow had shown a lot of interest in him back in D-132. [2]

Xu Qing’s eyes glittered with cold light, and the shadow understood what he wanted. Acting like the vicious dog, the shadow lunged forward and sunk its teeth into Sir Inkwell. An agonized shriek echoed out from the old Paintedfolk’s mouth.

Xu Qing ignored him as he next went to the head and stone lion. The two of them had still not recovered yet, so though they wanted to flee, they couldn’t. The stone lion’s legs had not grown back, while the head was only half complete. Upon seeing Xu Qing moments ago, they had both begun trembling. Just like Sir Inkwell, they hadn’t been sure if he was or wasn’t Xu Qing. But then they heard Sir Inkwell’s voice, and they realized what was going on. And that filled them with intense terror.

“That god’s possession failed? Holy crap....”

Then the head noticed the bedraggled state of Sir Inkwell and his painting.

“Congratulations, exalted one!” he gushed fawningly. “Great job! Your humble servant guessed earlier that the shifty god wouldn’t be a match for you, sir. And that old fart Sir Inkwell obviously was being as treacherous as ever. Exalted one, you can consign him to eternal damnation by hardly lifting your finger! Your humble servant really is extremely excited. We’re finally getting our D-132 reunion!”

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior suddenly whooshed out of Xu Qing’s bag of holding.

“Milord, that’s nothing but villainous poppycock! That head seems like it’s being ingratiating, but look at the way its eyes roll when it talks! That makes it obvious the thing is planning its escape. Just like Little Shadow, these people are all traitors to the core. Milord, the moment anything goes wrong, they’ll turn on you. They’d love to see you suffer! My humble advice is to thoroughly crush them!”

The head cast a venomous glare in the direction of the black iron skewer, and was about to offer a retort. Before it could, Xu Qing waved his hand in the direction of the head. Instantly, his tenth heavenly palace appeared, and a violet glow covered the blood-red light within it.

The moment D-132 appeared, the head’s jaw dropped and its eyes went wide with disbelief.

“You wanted a reunion, right?” Xu Qing said calmly. “Get inside.”