

Timescape 551

Chapter 551: Disciple Xu Qing of the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect (part 1)

On the border between the Holytide Region and the Moonrite Region were a host of scattered mortal nations. There were also bazaar towns that surrounded the various ferries that facilitated travel across the river. Out-of-region visitors to Moonrite Region could enter; as long as they didn't stay for too long, they wouldn't be affected by the curse. Therefore, there was quite a bit of trade that went on between the two regions.

The hard border was formed by the massive Yin Sacrifice River, which surrounded the Moonrite Region. The river water was red, like blood, and it also smelled like blood. When the wind blew, it would spread that odor of blood throughout the area. People who weren't used to that smell would often feel nervous and go on guard when they detected it. But even passing travelers would get used to it quickly.

That was exactly the case with the caravan Xu Qing was part of. The merchants and bodyguards were obviously familiar with the route, and didn't react at all to the smell.

When Xu Qing detected it, he realized that the gory smell contained traces of Crimson Mother's aura. However, it was very faint. Without his violet moon, Xu Qing would never have noticed it.

"There's a curse at work here," Ling'er said in her melodious voice.

The Captain stretched, then pushed aside the carriage curtain to look outside. "That smell is from the Yin Sacrifice River. It's not a naturally occurring river. Crimson Mother feeds it with the cursed blood of the living beings from Moonrite Region. The river isn't dangerous to outsiders, as long as you offer the proper sacrifices. But to people from within the Moonrite Region, it's like a cage. I'd say we should reach the shore by evening. After that, it will take a few days to cross the river, and then we'll be in the Moonrite Region." The Captain's eyes glittered with anticipation.

After leaving Sea-Sealing County, they had snuck through the Deep Blue Region as well as most of the Holytide Region. Then, at the suggestion of Xu Qing, they joined this caravan to travel the rest of the way. It would be easier to remain hidden by staying among mortals. After a month, they reached their current position.

As evening fell, the sky turned bright red, matching the color of the river. However, it didn't come across as looking beautiful. Instead, it seemed sinister and gruish.

Eventually, Xu Qing and the others left the caravan and approached the bank of the Yin Sacrifice River.

The raging waters flowed south, and the smell of blood was extremely strong. It was possible to see bodies floating in the river, which were the remains of residents of Moonrite Region who had tried to escape the region. The water was so corrosive to them that their facial features had already melted away. However, it was possible to determine that the corpses included both adults and children.

"All living beings in Moonrite Region are food," the Captain said quietly, "from the moment they're born."

Ling'er took it in and sighed. Then she snuggled a bit closer to Xu Qing, as if his warmth would keep her safe.

Xu Qing silently looked up at the broken face of the god in the dome of heaven. Whether it was the Moonrite Region or the Revered Ancient mainland as a whole, when had things *not* been like this?

Ning Yan had been scowling before, but now his expression was even more bitter. He had never wanted to come on this journey. Life had been good back in the county capital, but then he had been forced to travel to this hellish place. He knew all about the Moonrite Region. And because of what he knew about it, the place terrified him, and he wished he didn't even have to get near it.

It's all the fault of that damned Chen Erniu! This is completely outrageous! Though Ning Yan was cursing in his heart, he didn't let it show on his face. He was too scared of being bitten.

In contrast to Ning Yan, there was Wu Jianwu, who had been more than willing to join. And not even the gruish river could affect the haughtiness in his heart. As he stood on the river bank, he took a deep breath and then loudly said, "*The lonely clouds and sunset birth memories; the river has raged for seven hundred centuries.*"

"Great poem!" the Captain said, his eyes shining with praise.

Wu Jianwu cleared his throat, stuck his chin up, and was about to continue with some more poetry. But then he noticed Xu Qing frowning, and decided not to.

Xu Qing was starting to get annoyed. After all, Wu Jianwu had spouted roughly a hundred poems on the road. Waving his hand, he produced his spirit cruiser and put it on the water. The spirit cruiser was the work of the Sixth Peak elders, as directed by Zhang San. It looked completely different from Xu Qing's old dharmaship. In fact, it almost couldn't be described as a ship. It was all according to Zhang San's ingenious planning.

In appearance, it resembled a hunch-backed old woman, about 1,500 meters tall, clad in a black robe. Atop her hunched back was the superstructure. Her robe, which spread out over the water and caused ripples to flow out everywhere, were the sails. Most gruish of all was what the old woman had in her hands. In her right hand she held a lantern that emanated a mysterious green light. And from within the fire that cast that light rang out bloodcurdling screams. That was the power source. Floating above her left hand was a red eyeball that constantly shifted around to take in the surroundings. That was an imitation of the Seven Blood Eyes taboo treasure.

Xu Qing had been surprised when he first took a look at the spirit cruiser. As it appeared on the river, Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu were both completely stunned.

Wu Jianwu gasped and spoke like a normal person. "Is that a Seventh Peak spirit cruiser?"

The Captain chuckled. "It seems Zhang San misses Joine!"

It was true; the spirit cruiser really did look like the god of the Merfolk Isles, Joine. [1]

Xu Qing nodded. Without another word, he flew up to the superstructure on the old woman's back. There, he looked off into the distance.

The others flew up after him. Moments later, the lantern in the old woman's hand glittered with bright light, and the black robe 'sails' fluttered as she started moving at top speed.

The Yin Sacrifice River was no small river. Even at the speeds Xu Qing's spirit cruiser was capable of, it would take about five days to cross it. They encountered some dangers. But when the gaze of the imitation taboo treasure from Seven Blood Eyes landed on them, most of them simply fled.

There were a few unexpected developments. At one point, a host of blood-colored hairs erupted from the water, rapidly encircling the spirit cruiser and then heading toward Xu Qing.

Neither Xu Qing nor the Captain needed to do anything.

Wu Jianwu had been itching to show off, especially since he'd had no opportunities to do so up to this point. He flicked his sleeve, and dozens of vicious animals appeared around him. Some of them flew into the air, and others dove into the water. One of the animals was a parrot which let out a loud squawk as it landed on Wu Jianwu's head and spread its wings wide.

The parrot looked around arrogantly, then spoke in a human voice. *"Wherever my daddy makes an appearance, spirits and immortals tremble and fear us!"*

Then Wu Jianwu haughtily said, *"The House of Wu has eight hundred progeny; who in the world dares brag to them wantonly?"*

Xu Qing looked on with an odd expression. Ling'er's eyes were wide. Ning Yan gasped. The Captain's eyes shone.

As the words left Wu Jianwu's mouth, a bear flew out of his sleeve, rapidly growing bigger until it was 30 meters from head to tail. Standing in front of Wu Jianwu, it let loose a thunderous roar. Stretching its arms out, it grabbed the incoming hairs and shredded them.

The fierce animals were all extraordinary. They all had unique appearances, yet were clearly related. They worked together perfectly as a team, and seemed capable of ignoring whatever vile enemies they faced, as if their bloodline and personhood existed on a much higher level. Thanks to their efforts, the attacking hairs soon retreated back into the water.

Wu Jianwu looked very proud of himself, and the parrot threw its head back arrogantly. The parrot's behavior was odd; it had clearly received a lot of instruction on how to act. The animals all opened their mouths as if to recite whatever lines came next in their script. However, the danger had not yet been completely dealt with.

The water suddenly seethed, and the smell of blood grew stronger, as countless blood-colored hairs shot up from the water and into the sky. In the blink of an eye, they formed into the shape of a gigantic figure, hundreds of meters tall. It was just an outline, without any flesh or blood, and vaguely resembled a skeleton. It pulsed with a terrifying mightiness.

It looked down at Xu Qing and the others.

"Offering!" it growled. At the same time, the river continued to seethe as another figure rose up. Then a third and a fourth....

In the end, thirty-seven such figures appeared, one after another, surrounding Xu Qing and the others.

As each one appeared, it said the same thing. "Offering!"

“These are the river spirits of the Yin Sacrifice River,” the Captain explained. “They require you to give them an offering to cross the river.” He had obviously come prepared, as he waved a hand, sending a bag of holding splashing into the water.

Xu Qing had no idea what was inside. But once the bag of holding entered the water, most of the figures faded away.

However, a few remained behind, and suddenly, they all looked at Ning Yan.

“Offering!”

Ning Yan’s face fell.

The Captain frowned. He knew that Ning Yan had an extraordinary background, but had never guessed that it would result in the river spirits asking for a second round of offerings.

“I wonder if river spirits taste good...” After looking around, he came to the conclusion that there were probably a lot more river spirits in the area than he could see. He sighed. Thankfully, he had gone all out in his preparations. Taking out another bag of holding, he prepared to toss it out. Before he could, Xu Qing spoke.

“Can I give it a shot, Eldest Brother?”

The Captain thought about it briefly and then nodded. “Sure. The offerings I prepared can be put to use later in the Moonrite Region.”

Xu Qing took a few steps forward and looked at the blood-colored figures.

“Step aside,” he said calmly. As the words left his mouth, violet light shone in his eyes. At the same time, his violet moon nascent soul opened its eyes. Instantly, pressure appeared, and fluctuations rolled out, turning into a manifestation of personhood and godly authority.

The Yin Sacrifice River went still. The wind ceased blowing, and everything stopped. The river spirits trembled, then quickly bowed their heads and dropped to kneel.

“Our respects, godherald.”

They all said the same thing. At the same time, more river spirits appeared. Their total number went from dozens to hundreds, and then thousands. There seemed no end to them. All of them were kneeling very respectfully.

Although Ning Yan had been prepared to see something like this, it still caused his heart to skip a beat. Ling’er’s eyes went even wider, and she looked confused.

The Captain’s eyebrows danced up and down. *With little Ah Qing along, this trip to the Moonrite Region has a much greater chance of turning out how I’ve planned!*

Meanwhile, Wu Jianwu inhaled sharply, and the parrot on his head shivered and forgot to remain in its arrogant pose.

After a long moment of silence, Xu Qing once again spoke in a calm voice. “Escort me.”

“Your godly edict will be honored!”

Chapter 551: Disciple Xu Qing of the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect (part 2)

Thousands of humanoid skeletons made from blood-colored hairs all said the same thing, then circled around Xu Qing’s spirit cruiser and led the way forward. Ripples flowed out on the surface of the water.

Wu Jianwu was left trembling.

Seeing that, the Captain sidled over to him, threw his arm around his neck, and quietly said, “See, I wasn’t lying, Big Jianjian. Now, do *you* want to be like that one day?”

Wu Jianwu definitely did want to be like that one day, and that was why he was doomed to never escape the Captain’s clutches. Before long, the Captain had dragged him off to the side and was whispering into his ears. Wu Jianwu’s eyes glittered with both struggle and excitement, but eventually, the excitement took over.

“Moron!” Ning Yan muttered.

Xu Qing ignored them all, as he was focused on the river spirits.

These river spirits were living beings, so unlike the situation with the Nightshade divine likeness he had encountered in Holytide territory, he could sense reverence within them. What was more, after activating his violet moon nascent soul, he realized he could sense a very faint medicinal energy coming off the river spirits. Eyes glittering, he sent his violet moon nascent soul over his head, where it not only emanated pressure, but also, it started absorbing that medicinal energy. Slowly but surely, the energy left the river spirits and flowed into the violet moon nascent soul’s mouth. A pleasant sensation spread through Xu Qing’s mind and heart, and the violet moon nascent soul shivered and slowly started growing. As the river spirit’s medicinal energy was absorbed, their expressions grew more pious.

Xu Qing’s heart pounded. He could sense that the medicinal energy was something very beneficial, and was about to start absorbing more when, all of a sudden, a sensation of impending danger swept through him, prompting him to stop.

This place is a pasture for the red moon. Since the red moon can absorb anything here, theoretically speaking, so can I. However, doing so will increase the chances of me being noticed. And if that leads to an early awakening....

Xu Qing sighed inwardly and abandoned any further tests. He figured he would wait until he was actually in the Moonrite Region before making any further decisions.

And thus, it was with an escort of thousands of river spirits that Xu Qing’s spirit cruiser rapidly crossed the Yin Sacrifice River toward the opposite shore. It was a shocking scene that was bound to attract notice.

Xu Qing and his group weren’t the only ones going into the Moonrite Region. There were many local cultivators who could go in for trading purposes. Even now, there were dozens of ships on the river, all of whom were required to give offerings to be allowed passage. When they saw what was happening, they were stunned. All the ships stopped in place, and the cultivators on them looked over and speculated among themselves about what they were seeing.

“Escorted by thousands of river spirits...? Who could that possibly be?”

“Don’t tell me it’s someone from the Red Moon Cathedral? Maybe someone with really high standing there?”

“There’s only one possibility. It has to be someone with a very high status in the Red Moon Cathedral.”

“People from the Red Moon Cathedral rarely make public appearances. In fact, I think this is the first time I’ve seen someone from there.”

The speculations led to lingering fear in the hearts of the observers. People like them who traveled to and from the Moonrite Region knew the details of the curse. They realized that the living beings in the region were like livestock, and that it was the mighty Red Moon Cathedral that harvested them for the god. All of them bowed their heads and waited for the river spirits to pass before looking up again.

Two more days passed in which Xu Qing and the other swept across the Yin Sacrifice River. Eventually, they saw the other shore, which was the Moonrite Region proper.

The soil was black. The sky was like an evening sky, with no sun; there was only sourceless moonlight that spread out like a mysterious veil over the dark lands. Birds flew in the night sky, letting loose occasional mournful cries, while rotting corpses were visible here and there on the ground.

Xu Qing and the others made landfall on a bare hill. Xu Qing put away his spirit cruiser. As soon as he was on land, the thousands of river spirits bowed to him, then sank back into the water.

The Captain looked around, his eyes glittering with reminiscence. He sighed. “It’s been so many years. I’m finally back. Alright, little Junior Brother, we’re fairly safe now. Crimson Mother is asleep, so as long as we don’t blow our cover, we’ll be fine.”

Xu Qing nodded. For all intents and purposes, there was no one here who could possibly know them.

The Captain patted Xu Qing’s shoulder. “Now we split up. I’ll go handle my business, and I’ll take Little Ningning and Big Jianjian with me.”

A pained expression could be seen on Ning Yan’s face, while Wu Jianwu seemed very excited. Clearly, the latter felt very important.

This was the plan they had agreed on. They were currently in the eastern part of the Moonrite Region. By heading a bit further east, Xu Qing would eventually reach Heavenfire Sea.

Xu Qing glanced at Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan, wished them well in his heart, then turned to the Captain. “Take care of yourself, Eldest Brother!”

“I’ll be fine. With Little Ningning and Big Jianjian to keep me safe, who would dare to mess with me?”

The Captain blinked a few times at Xu Qing, then reached up and smacked himself on the top of the head. He instantly transformed, turning into an elegant middle-aged cultivator. He actually looked

quite a bit more handsome than before. What was more, his smile and facial expression made him seem somehow more wicked.

Smiling enigmatically, he smacked Ning Yan's belly, causing him to shiver and transform into a servant girl. Ning Yan had apparently been aware that this would happen, as he didn't seem surprised. The scowl that stayed on his face now that he was a servant girl made him seem like the kind of person who suffered a lot of bullying.

Wu Jianwu was all smiles as the Captain gave him similar treatment. With a smack, he transformed Wu Jianwu into a young boy.

Xu Qing wasn't even curious at how the Captain did all of this. The more seals the Captain undid, the more strange and unusual abilities he seemed capable of.

"I've prepared a secret identity for you as well, little Junior Brother." The Captain tossed a jade slip to Xu Qing. "Going forward, you're a wandering disciple from the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect, known as Master Heavengreen. That's your identity slip, and will also serve as your travel permit. There are all sorts of nations and species in the Moonrite Region, so you'll need something like that to find your way around. The Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect is in charge of the sacrificial dances for the Red Moon Cathedral. They're a very big sect, and that means, being a member will offer you a lot of protection!" [1]

Xu Qing took the jade slip. He was really getting a sense of how much work the Captain had put into the preparations. He was clearly dead set on devouring the red moon.

"And now the time has come to part ways. We'll meet up at Mount Heavenly Ox in the Unfinished Mountains. Whoever gets there first will wait for the other. And if one of us doesn't show up, the other will surreptitiously go looking for the other."

The Captain reached out and pulled a fan out of midair. Opening it with a snap, he fanned himself a few times in a very leisurely fashion. "Remember, little Junior Brother. My secret identity is that of Master Unfinished! I'm also a disciple of the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect, and I'm your Eldest Brother! In a few months, that name is going to be famous throughout the Moonrite Region. You'll likely hear it while you're out and about. Now, let's go!"

The Captain waved to Xu Qing. Xu Qing bowed. And thus, the Captain took Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu off into the distance. It seemed that Ning Yan would rather have stayed with Xu Qing, as he kept looking back helplessly.

Xu Qing pretended not to realize that as he watched them leaving.

About ninety meters away, the Captain suddenly stopped in place. It looked like he had just remembered something. Turning back, he called, "If you have a chance, little Ah Qing, you should really go visit the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect. Your identity is legitimate. They emphasize the harmony between yin and yang, and the way they complement each other. I bet you could learn some things from them. Considering your aptitude, you'd probably master their teachings quickly. That way, if you happen to run into any seductive girls, you'd have some additional methods to keep yourself safe, and won't be taken advantage of!"

When Ling'er heard that, she immediately stuck her head out of Xu Qing's sleeve. "With me here, Big Bro Xu Qing won't run into any seductive girls!"

The Captain was about to say something further when Xu Qing expressionlessly produced a peach and took a bite.

The Captain's eyes widened into a glare. Muttering to himself, he turned and led Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu away.

Xu Qing watched them go. When the Captain had disappeared into the night, Ling'er looked at him with bashful anticipation in her eyes. "Big Bro Xu Qing, does this count as our first date?"

Xu Qing chuckled and nodded. Then he turned and sped away. As he did, his facial features changed, making look less extraordinary and more like a random person.

For an entire night, Xu Qing sped through the Moonrite Region. He passed a lot of corpses, from a variety of species, most of whom had died from explosive mutation. Some of them had been killed in fighting. It all was what Xu Qing had expected. Given the unique circumstances in the Moonrite Region, it was a place rife with death and evil.

There were some places that Xu Qing passed that made him pause.

They were corpse pits. Upon nearing the edge of the first one, Xu Qing saw that it was some 30,000 meters wide, like a massive crater full of piles of bones. From the markings on the bones, it was obvious their flesh had been stripped off and used for food.

Ling'er said nothing.

Xu Qing took it in and felt the need to be even more vigilant. Eventually dawn came in the form of artificial light in the dome of heaven. The lands were no longer pitch black, but instead, like dusk. That dusky darkness was how daytime usually was in the Moonrite Region.

Eventually, Xu Qing found himself on a barren mountaintop, looking off into the distance. Taking out the map the Captain had given him, he identified his current location.

This area is called Lesser Shrine. It'll take half a month to pass through here. The next area is controlled by the Twofold Alliance. Once I get to the other side of that, I'll be at the Heavenfire Sea. [2]

Xu Qing put the jade slip away and continued traveling.

Days passed. Half a month later, he reached the other side of Lesser Shrine and neared the territory controlled by the Twofold Alliance.

After traveling through Lesser Shrine, he now understood where it got its name. There were over a thousand corpse pits there, and they were arrayed in the shape of a crescent moon. In the very middle was an old shrine that was roughly the size of a city. Xu Qing had kept his distance from it, as he could sense the lingering aura of the red moon. It made him think of the alternative name for this region. Spirit Garden.

With that, he entered the allied species' territory. The moment he did, he stopped in place. Not too far ahead of him, he saw beams of light shining out of a host of irregularly shaped mirrors. They were pointing at Xu Qing. The mirrors were about the size of an ordinary person, and their surfaces

were blurry and cracked. However, he could see his reflection in all of them. What was most strange was that his reflections all had vicious gazes. And then they spoke in cold voices.

“Present your travel permit now!”

Chapter 552: When Striving Against Heaven, the Days Do Not Pass (part 1)

The map in the jade slip given by the Captain had obviously not been created with this part of the Moonrite Region in mind, as it wasn't very detailed. It just gave a general overview of the area.

However, it did indicate that neither member of the Twofold Alliance was human. The alliance was made up of two species called the Mirrorlings and the Skyfaces, respectively. The cultivators asking for Xu Qing's travel permit were Mirrorlings.

Mirrorlings were literally mirrors. As youngsters, they were simply small mirror fragments, but as they matured, they grew much larger. They were categorized as a grue species, and had come into existence after the broken face of the god arrived. They were hermaphroditic, and could reproduce rapidly. What was more, they had an innate ability that allowed them to exercise a measure of control over an enemy by trapping their reflection in their mirror bodies. They were also fond of enslaving members of other species and parasitizing them. However, enslavement required a powerful version of their innate ability that only the nobility had.

At the moment, Xu Qing's path was being blocked by these Mirrorlings. However, they were mere patrolling guards with cultivation bases equivalent to Foundation Establishment, which was roughly the same as the cultivation base Xu Qing was revealing as part of his secret identity.

That was why they felt confident in blocking his path and openly revealing their malicious intentions. Apparently, if Xu Qing didn't quickly prove that he was somehow important, then they would attack and kill him. After all, in their eyes, humans were an inferior species.

Xu Qing looked with cold, expressionless eyes at the Mirrorlings, noting their malicious gazes and committing that to memory.

That said, he didn't attack. After all, this was their territory. Looking them over and noting his reflection on their mirror bodies, he took out the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect jade slip the Captain had given him, and tossed it toward them. He was curious to see how they interacted with other physical objects.

As the jade slip sailed through the air, the reflection of Xu Qing in one of the Mirrorlings reached his hand out of the mirror. When inside the mirror, that hand looked exactly like Xu Qing's. But outside the mirror, it was a bundle of black energy that grabbed the jade slip and inspected it.

After the Mirrorlings realized who he was, as indicated by the identity slip, they seemed to frown. The malice and greed in their eyes didn't completely disappear, and they continued to measure up Xu Qing. Clearly, they didn't want to just let him go on his way.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered coldly as he faced off with the Mirrorlings.

After a long, tense moment, the Mirrorlings exchanged glances and ultimately decided to hold back. Apparently, the threat of the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect was real. The Mirrorling guards dropped down, sank into the ground, and disappeared.

Xu Qing watched with great curiosity as they sank into the black soil.

Why do they merge into the soil?

The jade slip map didn't give any details about that behavior.

Putting his curiosity aside for the moment, he consulted the map again, then proceeded into the territory of the Twofold Alliance.

The soil here was black like everywhere else. However, the dusky sky looked different from the sky in Lesser Shrine. It was brighter. Perhaps that was because it was closer to the Heavenfire Sea. Furthermore, there were no more corpse pits.

Instead, as Xu Qing traveled, he spotted villages and cities. They were very different from human villages. Mirrorling cities were mostly made from mudbricks, and resembled large, earthen castles. Xu Qing saw quite a few such cities. Even the largest of them resembled sprawling fortresses. They all seemed like bleak and rough places.

The Mirrorlings were a quiet species. Xu Qing didn't hear any chatting, laughter, nor did he spot much activity. He just saw their mirror-like bodies walking or flying about. Apparently, they weren't a very talkative species, and did most of their communication nonverbally. It was almost a given that a species like that would be xenophobic.

Xu Qing attracted no small amount of attention. Malicious gazes locked onto him from all sides. However, nobody made a move on him.

The Mirrorlings didn't have a lot of cultivators. The majority of their species were mortals. The mortals didn't have complete mirrors as their bodies. Instead, they were cracked. Most had only seven or eight cracks, while others had so many cracks their mirror bodies weren't reflective at all. The latter were the weak ones who abounded with auras of death. In terms of the specific shapes of their bodies, some were humanoid, while others looked like animals. All of them were scruffy and dirty. There were even some who seemed to be made up of countless smaller mirror fragments all clumped together.

At a certain point, Xu Qing spotted humans. All of them were extremely weak, and clearly occupied a very low standing in the Mirrorling cities. Those who spotted Xu Qing looked at him with dull, empty eyes.

Xu Qing just looked back at them. There was nothing he could do to change their situations. Although these lands weren't very far from human territory, especially now that the Holytides had returned to the fold, it was separated only by the Yin Sacrifice River. However, there was nothing humans could do to break the curse of this region.

It was the same with humans in many other regions. When Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity conquered the Revered Ancient mainland, humans proliferated in all the regions. Later, Emperor Eastglory's huge defeat resulted in countless humans being isolated and unable to rejoin humankind. As the generations passed, some of those isolated humans rose to prominence, but generally speaking, they devolved into being lesser species. Some of them thought of themselves as humans, but given that tens of thousands of years had passed, many of them had either forgotten who they were, or had experienced such a change in their bloodline that they might not even be considered human anymore.

That said, there were some who looked with longing in the direction of the human Imperial Region. Unfortunately, because of the great distance involved, the curse, and all the complicated situations

that existed between the various regions, it was only the most powerful experts who could dream of making that journey. The vast majority of mortals would never be capable of it. All they could do was wait. Wait and hope that one day a human emperor would rise up, conquer Revered Ancient, and give them the chance to once again be part of humankind. After the tens of thousands of years that had passed, though, that hope had grown very weak.

Even Ling'er sighed at what she was seeing. After all, the Ancient Spirits were in a similar situation. They had been waiting for an even longer time, all in vain. Though Emperor Ancient Spirit still existed, what Ling'er had experienced in the Spirit Abyss left her feeling very suspicious. She wasn't even sure if that Emperor Ancient Spirit was the same one who had actually led the Ancient Spirits to conquer Revered Ancient.

Xu Qing continued silently on his way. Eventually he left Mirrorling territory and reached Skyface lands. This species lived in a mountainous region with very few open spaces. They were also categorized as a grue species. Unlike the Mirrorlings, they had flesh and blood bodies. However, all members of their species wore masks. Or perhaps the masks *were* their faces.

Everything else about them looked similar to humans, although they were taller and larger. On average, they would reach a height of about three meters. As for the masks on their faces, they didn't have the same facial features as humans. Instead, the masks featured complex designs.

They were even more malicious than the Mirrorlings. And as Xu Qing traveled along, he saw that they were very active.

Because of the aura Xu Qing exuded, most of the Skyfaces restrained their malice. However, there were a few foolish ones who caused problems. Xu Qing ran into some ambushes as he made his way through the mountains. They played out as expected.

The Skyfaces had large cities that matched their tall frames. And those cities reeked in such a way that humans couldn't tolerate it. Because the Skyfaces lived in that environment, they were used to the smell and didn't even notice it.

Xu Qing didn't see any humans. However, he did see a restaurant in one of the cities. The proprietors were an old man and woman whose masks made them seem very kind. However, hanging in the front of their shop were slabs of meat. From the bones, it was possible to tell that some of the meat came from humans, while some was Skyface flesh. In this place, the weak were devoured. Truth be told, situations like this existed everywhere. Even back in South Phoenix, cannibalism was practiced in the lower rungs of society. [1]

"What a chaotic world..." Xu Qing murmured. He eventually reached the border of Skyface territory.

Beyond it was his destination, the Heavenfire Sea. Xu Qing saw endless red lava, atop which burned eternally indestructible flame. It was a massive place. Even when Xu Qing flew high up into the sky, he couldn't see the end of it. The sky above reflected the sea of flames, making everything bright. And the heat pulsed out endlessly.

Rumbling sounds echoed out from the sea of flames. Occasionally, the lava would form bubbles which, when they popped, created flower-like explosions of sparks.

After taking in the scene for a time, Xu Qing shot forward through the exploding sparks. He didn't intend to immediately absorb the fire. He wanted to make some observations first, then find a suitable location for an extended session of cultivation. After all, he had no idea if trying to melt his life lamps might cause something unexpected to happen, and thus attract unwanted attention.

There were actually quite a few cultivators in this area. The fire here could be harvested and taken out of the region, as long as you had an extraordinary method to store it. And it could be very useful in both alchemy and equipment forging. As a result, it was a valuable trade item. There were also some cultivators who specialized in the dao of fire, and could use it in their cultivation.

Because of that, Xu Qing spotted both outsider cultivators and locals. Most were on their own, but others were in groups of three to five. All were on guard, and would react viciously if anyone got close to them.

Overall, he saw more Mirrorlings and Skyfaces than any other species. Given that they lived so close to the Heavenfire Sea, it was only natural that they could endure the heat much more easily than other species, and also use it to become stronger.

Xu Qing found that there were some unique places where cultivators would use geomantic compasses to search for something.

Obviously, there was a lot about the Heavenfire Sea that Xu Qing didn't know. Asking around wasn't an option, so he decided that his best bet was to just observe what was happening. As he sped along the sea of flames, he moved quickly, but not too quickly. After three days had passed he still couldn't see the other side of the sea.

This place is huge. It's going to take a long time to explore it....

During the three days that passed, Xu Qing figured out what the cultivators were doing with the geomantic compasses. They were looking for a specific type of white crystal. It was a naturally occurring substance in the sea of flames, and seemed to be like spirit stones. They were obviously valuable, as they were relatively rare, and had to be pulled up from within the lava. It was only possible to find them by using a geomantic compass.

Xu Qing observed the process from afar a few times. That said, everyone present was both vigilant and hostile. Xu Qing knew what was proper, and didn't get very close to any of them.

He flew a few more days until he was deep within the Heavenfire Sea. Fewer and fewer cultivators were present. Eventually, Xu Qing changed his mind about what to do here.

I might as well do some tests right now!

Looking down at the fire, he waved his hand to put some extra protection around Ling'er.

Knowing that Xu Qing was about to work on his cultivation, she said, "You're going to do great, Big Bro Xu Qing! My innate ability is starting to work now, so I'll help you keep an eye out for any bad guys in the area!"

Xu Qing grinned. Here he was in strange, grim lands, but with Ling'er to keep him company, he didn't feel lonely at all.

Nodding, he made some final preparations. Then, eyes shining with anticipation, he headed directly toward the sea below.

Chapter 552: When Striving Against Heaven, the Days Do Not Pass (part 2)

As he dropped down, and the fire raged, the violet crystal immediately sprang into action. Xu Qing inhaled, and fire swept into him. After a moment of thought, he reached out and touched some of the lava. It was very hot, but his hand wasn't injured.

My body is strong enough to sustain this.

With that thought in mind, he dropped down into the lava. When he had sunk down to his waist, he inhaled, and could sense the intense heat wrapping him up. It was starting to sting.

I can't go any deeper.

After looking around vigilantly, he inhaled again, bringing masses of fire inside of him.

As the violet crystal rapidly absorbed the fire, it sent out six streams of violet light that thoroughly illuminated his sea of consciousness. Because of that light, the life mist didn't obscure things as much as before, and the five life lamps within it became bright.

Xu Qing's heart filled with anticipation. Although he couldn't control the light emanating from the violet crystal, as it shone through the life mist, it first landed on the black umbrella life lamp.

That was the life lamp he'd acquired in that temple in the Merfolk Isles. As the six beams of light landed on it, it once again showed signs of melting. One of the umbrella spindles no longer looked as sharp. It gradually began to bend, until it ultimately turned into liquid that flowed downward. A drop of liquid landed in his sea of consciousness, causing thunderous rumbling to fill Xu Qing's mind.

A tremor passed through him as the fantastic elements that made up the life lamp flowed into his blood. Things were going exactly as they had in his previous experiments.

Eyes shining, Xu Qing took another deep breath, and more fire raged into him. Another six beams of violet light formed, and the melting continued.

Two hours later, the second drop of liquid fell from the black umbrella life lamp. At the same time, the nascent soul that had formed from that lamp began to blur.

Xu Qing stopped to assess the situation. What he confirmed was that the nascent soul wasn't being harmed. Instead, some of the melting parts of the lamp were fusing into it. Breathing a sigh of relief, he continued.

Three days passed.

Because of the unending access to the flames, Xu Qing was able to constantly work at melting the black umbrella life lamp. By now, it was thirty percent melted. It no longer resembled a life lamp, but rather, a broken umbrella.

Meanwhile, the life lamp elements in his blood were growing stronger. Xu Qing got the strong feeling that, once those elements reached a certain level of strength, then it was highly likely he would be able to form his own personal life lamp.

With such thoughts on his mind, he steadied his breathing and, instead of continuing to absorb the fire, flew back up into the air. He flew for about a day, found a new spot, checked carefully to make sure it was safe, then dropped back down into the lava and started again. Given how unfamiliar he was with the environment, and his vigilant and cautious nature, he was acting very similar to the

way he had back when he first arrived in Seven Blood Eyes. He knew that it was too dangerous to stay in one spot for long. [1]

It's too bad this sea of flames isn't a suitable space to set up spell formations. That would make things much simpler.

After some thought, he used his Gruegloom abilities to become semitransparent.

That method made him much more difficult to spot. Only then did he start absorbing the fire again. With the light of the violet crystal shining, the black umbrella life lamp, which no longer looked like either a black umbrella or a life lamp, continued to melt. It was now down to the base of the lamp.

Three days later, Xu Qing switched spots again. The lamp was now melted by fifty percent.

It's fine. I have plenty of time!

Xu Qing wasn't in a hurry, so he continued at this pace. He would never stay in one place for more than three days. He was constantly switching locations.

The black umbrella life lamp went from fifty percent to sixty percent. Then seventy percent. Eighty.... During that time, red crystals continued to form, each of which he would instantly put away. He still wasn't sure exactly what they were, but he still didn't think it was a good idea to keep them out in the open.

As it turned out, being cautious in that way had its benefits....

“High-grade heavenfire crystals!”

A small team of Mirrorling cultivators was flying along over the Heavenfire Sea. They were different from the Mirrorlings that Xu Qing had encountered previously. They didn't have mirror bodies. Instead, they had fleshly bodies. However, those bodies were actually those of other species. In the forehead position of each of them was a diamond-shaped mirror shard, blood red, without any cracks on its surface. The mirrors were not dirty in the least bit; in contrast, they were as clear as glass. These were members of the Mirrorling nobility, with bloodlines that far surpassed ordinary members of their species. All of them had enslaved members of other species, and used their bodies like puppets.

The leader of the group was a cultivator with three pairs of wings on his back and a body covered in black scales. He had a geomantic compass in his hand, which glittered with red light as it led him in a certain direction.

The Mirrorling cultivators spoke in hushed, excited tones as they sped along.

“Our luck is good today. We actually found a high-grade heavenfire crystal!”

“High-grade heavenfire crystals are usually hidden deep at the bottom of the sea. But occasionally the lava flows dislodge them and they rise toward the surface. That doesn't happen often, though.”

“Let’s hurry. If we get there too late, someone else might get it, and then we’ll have to kill them.”

A moment later, their expressions flickered as the red light on the geomantic compass suddenly went out.

“Dammit! Someone took it!”

“Let’s keep going in this direction and see if we can find whoever stole our crystal!”

This scene wasn’t just playing out with the Mirrorlings. There were other cultivators in the area who had noticed the high-grade heavenfire crystal. And it had happened several times.

“It happens every three days. But it vanishes almost as soon as it appears.”

“How could there be someone getting the heavenfire crystals so quickly?”

Not far away in a different direction was a group of Skyface cultivators, who were having a similar situation with their geomantic compass. Outsiders might not be familiar with high-grade heavenfire crystals, but these people knew exactly how valuable they were.

“There’s got to be a reason why these sacrificial items are appearing with such regularity!”

“We should ask the royal preceptor to come help. His geomantic compass is extremely accurate. It can even lock onto things hidden in firebrane boxes!”

As dramatic developments were brewing in the area, Xu Qing was focused on melting his life lamp. The black umbrella life lamp was now ninety percent melted.

I only need one more day!

Eyes glittering, he looked around. Although he had no idea that there was increased cultivator activity in the area, his bluegreen dragon had been sending him warning signals, and he felt the need to be more on guard than ever.

Looking at the lava, which was at his chest level, he gritted his teeth, sent Ling’er into his bluegreen dragon heavenly palace, then sank deeper. In the blink of an eye, the lava covered him. Everything seemed to be going smoothly. Xu Qing’s aura was completely masked by the lava. That said, he couldn’t go very deep. At the most, he could go down a bit more than a meter. Gritting his teeth, he started moving. Thanks to the lava, he left no trace of his passage.

When he was a good distance away from his previous location, he once again settled into a cross-legged position and started absorbing fire. Instantly, huge waves of fire entered him, the violet crystal stirred, and light shone out again.

In that matter, time slipped by slowly but surely.

Twenty hours passed. At that point, a loud crack rang out from the black umbrella as the last bits of it melted into liquid and fell into Xu Qing’s sea of consciousness. A boom followed. It had taken a month, but the black umbrella finally melted.

The sound swept like wind over the water, causing ripples to spread. It reached the dome of heaven, and rumbling like thunder echoed out.

Xu Qing shivered uncontrollably in the lava. Unafraid of the heat, his eyes opened. Within them, something like a swirling mist converged, pulsating, preventing the lava from harming him.

Meanwhile, the life lamp elements in his blood had reached the requisite level. As the thunderous rumbling continued, and as the lava seethed around him, something like a vortex appeared in the sea of flames, with him at the center. It spun rapidly and visibly. However, beyond the 3,000-meter area of the vortex, everything seemed completely normal.

Only within that area did everything look different.

Xu Qing remained cross-legged in the middle of the vortex, flickering with light that pulsed between bright and dark. At the same time, an aura erupted from him that contained the advancement of life force.

Inside of Xu Qing's sea of consciousness, a tempest raged in the spot where the black umbrella life lamp had once sat. Throughout Xu Qing's body, violet threads appeared and gathered there.

As they did, a new life lamp began to take shape. This life lamp was actually made from Xu Qing's blood, making it one-of-a-kind in heaven and earth! Whether it was the Ancient Emperors or the Imperial Sovereigns, when they created life lamps, they were just like this. After the arrival of the broken face of the god, people who could attain Imperial Sovereign personhood, even when taking in the entire Revered Ancient mainland as a whole, were *rarer than phoenix feathers or qilin horns*. Thus, it was the same with new life lamps.

Yet right now, a life lamp that had never been seen before in the world was now being born!

What appeared first was a circular plate of violet jade, tilted at an angle. The disk had twenty-four marked sections, each of which contained masses of magical symbols. All in all, the violet jade plate looked complicated and somehow full of holiness. Right in the middle of the plate was the spot where the violet threads were gathering. They slowly took the shape of something that resembled an upright needle!

It was a gnomon!

There was also a ball of light that slowly rotated around the gnomon.

When looking closely at that ball of light, it was possible to see that, seated cross-legged inside was one of Xu Qing's nascent souls!

The light shining from the nascent soul landed on the gnomon, casting a shadow onto the plate. And that shadow was constantly rotating as the nascent soul rotated.

It was... a sundial!

This was Xu Qing's life lamp! Violet jade formed the plate. Greenish gold made the needle! A ball of light floated around it, creating an image of ancient time.

It was: *the sundial moves; the timescape is eternal. When striving against heaven, the days do not pass!*

Chapter 553: Kids Nowadays are So Unethical! (part 1)

Replacing the black umbrella within the life mist was a sundial life lamp, which glittered radiantly. Though the dial plate was jade, the ball of light made it seem like it was made of crystal, resplendent and dazzling. To Xu Qing, it seemed to be formed from a similar material to the violet crystal. In fact, the sundial was like an extension of the violet crystal. Lending weight to that observation was that both the shadow and the god's finger sleeping in his D-132 heavenly palace were trembling.

What was more, the violet crystal seemed to have changed with the addition of the sundial, although Xu Qing wasn't certain of exactly how. However, he did know that the gnomon which grew out of the sundial like a bone spur pulsed with fluctuations that were unique to himself. It was formed from his own blood!

At first glance, the gnomon looked like a needle. But close examination would reveal that there was something carved on its tip. By zooming in very closely onto that spot, it was possible to see an ordinary-looking violet-colored chair.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed. As for the ball of light that rotated around the gnomon, it resembled a sun, and it cast a shadow of the gnomon onto the dial plate. Meanwhile, the complicated designs on the dial plate were not only clearly visible; they were in constant motion.

Xu Qing was reeling mentally. He actually had no idea why the life lamp he had made would look like this. It seemed to have something to do with the violet crystal.

Is it because the violet crystal has fused with my blood? And then there's that aura....

As the shadow moved around Xu Qing's life lamp, it emanated an aura that was similar to a timescape bottle.

It was the aura of time! However, that time wasn't in sync with the time of the outside world.

It caused a sense of boundless majesty to rise in Xu Qing, causing his sea of consciousness to seethe. It affected his fleshly body as well; he started trembling. Furthermore, it affected the outside world, spreading into the 3,000-meter vortex, cutting it off from the surroundings, and forcing the time within the vortex to sync with Xu Qing.

As a result, everything beyond that 3,000-meter area seemed like a different world, and the border between them was a mass of rippling undulations.

When a new life lamp was created and made contact with the magical laws of the Revered Ancient mainland, it led to supernatural phenomena. Each life lamp was different, so the supernatural phenomena would also be different. Regardless, such phenomena were indications of the approval of Revered Ancient. Few people know about this, mostly because from ancient times until modern, very few people had been present to witness such things.

Within that 3,000-meter area, Xu Qing sat cross-legged, his entire person shining with violet light and a mysterious will. Meanwhile, his heart was pounding so hard it was hard to remain calm.

Looking at the sundial that had formed in his sea of consciousness, he stopped thinking about whether the life lamp really was a fusion of the violet crystal and his blood, and instead focused on how he now seemed to have the same origin as the life lamp. This was, without any shadow of a doubt, *his*

life lamp.

It felt completely different from any of the other lamps he had acquired. Though he had integrated the other life lamps into himself, in the final analysis, they were not connected to his blood. As far as Xu Qing was concerned, they were essentially dead. Therefore, he could use them and borrow their power, but they weren't truly his.

That was why, to the cultivators of Revered Ancient, though life lamps were definitely precious treasures, they were only useful for cultivation levels beneath Spirit Trove. After Spirit Trove, they became useless, and you actually needed to get rid of them to avoid the negative effects of karma. That was the experience of all cultivators who used life lamps made with the blood of other cultivators.

But starting now, Xu Qing was different. Because this life lamp had been made with his own blood, it could be used like an enormous furnace in Spirit Trove, and would allow him to create a foundation similar to the Imperial Sovereigns.

By entering Spirit Trove with that furnace, he could refine anything to put into his secret trove, thus strengthening that secret trove and putting him on the path to great strength.

It was an advantage that, normally speaking, only the descendants of Ancient Emperors and Imperial Sovereigns could benefit from. In fact, Xu Qing had pushed it a bit further. He wasn't benefiting the way that such descendants did. He was creating his own good fortune. Because of that, he would have to figure out what other mysterious abilities his new life lamp had.

For now, all he could sense was that the powers of his life lamp were related to time. In terms of how strong it was, he would have to do some tests to find out. Based on what he was feeling, his new life lamp was roughly as strong as his other life lamps. It wasn't a situation of suddenly having immense strength and being able to crush all enemies regardless of their cultivation base.

That left Xu Qing feeling slightly disappointed. That said, it was a bit unrealistic to expect such dramatic benefits.

The biggest difference between a personal life lamp and a life lamp belonging to someone else is the difference between life and death. The life lamps of others are dead as far as I'm concerned. There's no long-term potential for them. They're basically on loan. However, my personal life lamp is linked to my own life force. It contains unbounded potential, and it can grow with me. As for its powers of time, I bet they come from the violet crystal.

In any case, Xu Qing knew that now wasn't the best time to experiment with the new lamp. After all, the gigantic vortex was bound to draw attention eventually.

Around then, Ling'er urgently said, "Run, Big Bro Xu Qing! Bad guys are coming! A lot of bad guys!"

She sounded anxious. Though his heavenly dao had been sending him urgent warnings, they hadn't changed much in recent days. It went to show that Ling'er's senses were very refined.

Without any hesitation, Xu Qing settled his thoughts, sank down into the lava, and sped away. He also put away the red crystals that had formed on the life lamp. This time, quite a large group of crystals had formed, more than twenty.

About six hours after he left, the 3,000-meter vortex gradually faded into nothing. Not long after that, a group of Mirrorling cultivators flew toward that spot. When they arrived, the vortex was

already gone. However, there were traces of its power remaining, and as the Mirrorling cultivators neared, they cried out in shock.

“Something’s strange about this spot!” one of them shouted. Then he backed up at top speed. As he did, his parasitized body began withering rapidly. It wasn’t a case of its life force being taken away, but rather, its life being run in reverse. His face fell.

The other Mirrorling cultivators all gasped in shock.

“Either there’s some powerful expert here, or there’s some mysterious magical treasure beneath the Heavenfire Sea here that’s connected to time itself. This is a big deal!”

“Based on the reaction from the geomantic compass, more than twenty high-grade heavenfire crystals just appeared now. That’s enough... to cause a war!”

The group exchanged glances that combined fear with greed.

“The royal preceptor is on the way. Let’s see what we can find out before he gets here!”

“Notify all Mirrorlings in the area to join us!”

The Mirrorlings started sending voice messages while simultaneously searching the area. Before long, a lot of Mirrorling cultivators had gathered.

Not far off, there were cultivators from other species whose geomantic compasses had brought them in this direction. Some were on their own, others were in groups. And a rather large group of Skyfaces were approaching from one area. For 5,000 kilometers in all directions, hordes of cultivators were on the move, making what seemed like a gigantic vortex.

Meanwhile, the warning from Xu Qing’s heavenly dao was getting more intense.

Ling’er, her voice trembling, said, “Big Bro Xu Qing, there are too many people coming! And I can sense two really powerful auras on the way!”

Xu Qing frowned. He had originally assumed the vortex that formed when making his life lamp had been attracting attention. But that didn’t explain the repeated warnings from his heavenly dao.

Don’t tell me it’s because of those red crystals?

All of a sudden, he stopped in place and shoved his hand upward through the lava. As he did that, a massive force weighed down from above. It turned into a giant mask that sank into the lava and slammed into Xu Qing’s hand. In an area of about 300 meters, all of the lava sank down by almost ten meters. As sparks exploded everywhere, Xu Qing was revealed.

Thanks to the attack from above, the pressure of the sea of flames became like a balloon on the verge of popping.

Xu Qing shot up into the air just as the lava below him exploded in something like a flower of sparks. As the sparks fell like rain, Xu Qing looked up to see who had attacked him. It was a Skyface cultivator, fully 21 meters tall, pulsing with formidable might. He wore a golden suit of

armor that reflected the light of the fire and made him glitter blindingly. His cultivation base was also extraordinary. He had seven nascent souls, which took the form of seven huge masks that circled around him, their eyes closed. He appeared to have passed two nascent soul tribulations, and wasn't far from his third. He was one of the people who had just attacked Xu Qing.

“So, you've been sneaking around in the lava. You thought you could evade notice that way, you filthy human?”

The Skyface cultivator looked coldly at Xu Qing, the many complex designs on his mask flowing and writhing to make two vortexes, one on top of each other like an eye.

That eye had unusual powers, and it was how he had been able to spot Xu Qing underneath the lava.

“The Mirrorlings are locking down this area. Don't tell me they're looking for you?” The Skyface cultivator started walking toward Xu Qing. “The logical conclusion is that you must have all those heavenfire crystals. I only want five. Give them to me, and I'll pretend I never saw you. Think about it, but don't take too long. There are a lot of cultivators searching this area.”

Given the surroundings, any cultivator who didn't have a very high cultivation base would definitely pause for thought upon hearing those words. And that was why the Skyface immediately burst into motion after he finished speaking.

He moved with shocking speed right toward Xu Qing.

Chapter 553: Kids Nowadays are So Unethical! (part 2)

Sadly, the Skyface's clever plan didn't amount to much. Xu Qing didn't need to think anything over, and immediately launched his own attack. As far as Xu Qing was concerned, this Skyface's offer wasn't even worth thinking about. It was obvious what the Skyface was really up to.

A moment later, a massive boom rang out, and the Skyface shot backward, eyes shining.

“Thirteen nascent souls? And five life lamps?? No wonder something seemed strange. You're not from the Moonrite Region!” The Skyface cultivator excitedly licked his lips. “Life lamps are precious treasures. I can't believe you have five of them! You must be some human chosen from a neighboring region.... I wonder what you'll taste like when I eat you?”

The Skyface cultivator's hands flashed in a double-handed incantation gesture, and his seven nascent soul masks all opened their eyes, stared at Xu Qing, and let loose piercing cries. The sound pierced through the air, creating a rippling with astonishing force behind it.

Xu Qing, meanwhile, shot backward just as the Skyface had done. Secretly releasing his shadow, he pulled out the Spike of Misfortune, and his eyes shone with killing intent. He knew that he had to finish this fight quickly, otherwise more enemies would show up, and then getting away would become a lot harder. Two wings suddenly appeared behind him, and he raced with incredible speed toward the Skyface.

The Skyface laughed mockingly and similarly advanced.

However, before they could reach each other, Xu Qing's pupils constricted as he realized a shadowy figure had appeared behind the Skyface cultivator. It happened without any warning or obvious indication, and the Skyface clearly didn't realize it. The shadowy figure extended its left hand, lifted its index finger, and put that finger to its lips, signaling for Xu Qing to be quiet.

Then it reached out and put its right hand on the Skyface's head. A cultivation base power very close to Spirit Trove flared. The Skyface couldn't resist, and before he could even react to what was happening, the images on his mask stopped moving for all eternity.

A thump rang out as the Skyface's huge body exploded. His seven nascent souls collapsed, and everything about him crumbled with the exception of his mask. Chunks of flesh and blood, along with fragments of spirit flesh from the nascent souls, rushed toward the mask, turning it the color of blood. Then, the figure that had smashed the Skyface out of existence reached out and took the mask.

"I got lucky," the figure said in a raspy voice. "This Skyface punk really was nobility. Thanks to him, I get another heaveneye."

Meanwhile, Xu Qing backed up as surely as if he were facing a deadly enemy.

At that point, the figure began to turn clear. It was an old man who was so scrawny he almost looked skeletal. His eyes were cold and sinister, and he pulsed with a malicious will. However, based on his physical appearance, he was human.

He looked Xu Qing up and down. "Out-of-region human?"

Xu Qing continued to keep his guard up as he backed away. He kept the power of his taboo poison swirling, and made sure the Spike of Misfortune was ready to use. His shadow remained hidden in the firelight.

Xu Qing felt massive pressure weighing down from this old man.

His cultivation base seemed like it was in Spirit Trove, but at the same time, seemed like it wasn't. He was keeping the truth hidden. At the very least, he was in the Nascent Soul level with five tribulations under his belt, putting him in the great circle. Based on what he had said so far, Xu Qing had no way to know if he had good intentions or not, so he decided not to answer. He refused to believe that this person would just sit around randomly after killing that Skyface.

Xu Qing was right. The old man scanned the area, then looked back at Xu Qing. He didn't seem troubled by Xu Qing's silence. He then performed an incantation gesture with his right hand, causing the fluctuations unique to human blood to pulse out of both of them. Seeing that, the old man's expression softened.

"Alright boy, since you're human, I'll give a little bit of advice. You need to take those heavenfire crystals in your bag of holding and put them in a secure box. Otherwise, people will never stop chasing you down to get them."

The man produced a black box made of jade, which he tossed out. It landed on the lava. It was obviously made in a very special way, as the lava didn't affect it at all.

Glaring, the man said, "The charge for that box, plus the information I just gave you, is 10,000 spirit stones!"

Meanwhile, powerful auras were approaching in the distance.

Without saying a word, Xu Qing threw out a bag of holding, turned, and vanished.

“You don’t want the box?” the old man called out. But then, the box suddenly disappeared from its spot on the lava. The old man’s eyebrows shot up. *He’s got some skills.*

The old man turned and shot off into the distance, leaving no trace of himself behind.

It was very rare for people to be charitable in this world, so the fact that the man wanted spirit stones in exchange for his help was actually a relief to Xu Qing. That said, he wasn’t going to let his guard down. After leaving, he masked his aura and fluctuations, then looked around to make sure he wasn’t being followed. Then he laced the area with poison.

He’d had his shadow take the box. Now, the shadow was sending out emotional fluctuations to indicate that there was nothing hidden inside. It was just a unique box designed to store things securely. Xu Qing took it, inspected it to be safe, then scattered poison on it. Only then did he breathe a sigh of relief. After sinking down into the lava, he took out the more than thirty red crystals he’d collected and put them into the box.

Based on my previous speculations, coupled with what that Skyface cultivator said, I guess these must be heavenfire crystals. And they must be produced when you use the fire from here to melt a life lamp. I suppose this box will mask their presence. I need to confirm that.

With that, he flew out of the lava. If the Skyfaces could see him in the lava, then hiding there seemed pointless. Eyes glittering, he flew off into the distance.

Four days passed.

During that time, it was perhaps because of the box that, whenever Xu Qing ran into other cultivators, they ignored him. Occasionally someone would block his path, and he would kill them. That was how he managed to eventually get one of the geomantic compasses, as well as a few more of the black boxes.

They seemed to be common items that most cultivators here possessed. The majority were either empty or contained white crystals.

At one point when he was alone, he did some tests with the boxes and the geomantic compass. Sure enough, the geomantic compass would reveal the location of the red crystals, but not when they were in the box.

“It does work!”

Seeing that, Xu Qing decided to discard the box the old man had given him. Although he couldn’t find anything to indicate there was anything suspicious about it, he also couldn’t guarantee that there was just something built into the box that he couldn’t detect.

Before discarding it, he put some poison in it. After switching the red crystals into one of the boxes he’d taken as plunder, he continued moving.

The next day, the mysterious old man from earlier showed up at the spot where Xu Qing had discarded the box. The moment he picked up the box, his face fell, and he threw the box away, took out some antidote pills and consumed them.

What the hell? I had no idea those out-of-region kids are so treacherous! Not only do they throw their trash around, but they also lace it with poison! So unethical!

The old man turned to leave, but then looked down and realized his hand was slowly decomposing. His antidote pills didn't seem to be doing anything. He inhaled sharply.

What damn poison is this?

The old man's heart started pounding.

Xu Qing was currently hovering over the Heavenfire Sea, looking at a trembling Mirrorling cultivator. Previously, the Mirrorling had three companions, who had locked down the area and were forcing passersby to submit to searches. Upon seeing him, they had quickly surrounded him and demanded he let them look through his bag of holding.

Xu Qing had encountered similar situations over the past few days. They weren't just searching the bags of humans. They were searching the bags of all species other than Skyfaces. Xu Qing had attacked, killing everyone but leaving this one alive to have a friendly conversation with.

"What are high-grade heavenfire crystals good for?" the Mirrorling said in a trembling voice. "They can be given as offerings to the Red Moon Cathedral.... The Red Moon Cathedral comes here to the Heavenfire Sea every hundred years or so. They wait at the big rift in the middle of the sea, and all the surrounding species come and give offerings. Heavenfire crystals are just one thing that can be given. They'll also state other requirements that have to be met. They're different every time."

This Mirrorling was covered with wounds, and the mirror on his forehead had a dozen or more cracks in it. The Spike of Misfortune currently hovered right in front of his forehead.

Xu Qing's eyes hardened. This was the fourth Mirrorling he had interrogated so far, and they all gave the same answer. They had also all mentioned the pending arrival of their royal preceptor. The royal preceptor was in the Spirit Trove level. Apparently, the Mirrorling species only had three Spirit Trove experts, although no one he had interrogated knew how many secret troves any of them had. He got the feeling the Skyfaces were similar.

No Void Returning experts? Xu Qing thought, surprised. He refused to believe that. Regardless, even Spirit Trove experts could be very dangerous to him.

Therefore, he kept his guard up and looked at the Spike of Misfortune. Inside the Spike of Misfortune, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior got the message. He sent the fish bone spike flying forward and into the mirror, which let loose a loud cracking sound. The Mirrorling was thus destroyed in body and soul.

Xu Qing had already extracted the Mirrorling's nascent souls.

With that, Xu Qing turned to leave. Surrounding him were roughly a dozen heavenfiend clones. They looked like specters that emanated sinister coldness and surrounded Xu Qing with a nefarious will.

Regardless, I need to get out of here.

He began flying at top speed over the lava.

The reality was that he couldn't stay in the Heavenfire Sea for long periods of time. The heat was never-ending, and the exploding lava bubbles would release even greater blasts of heat. Xu Qing could sense that he was reaching his limit. His plan was to go back on the shore for a time, recuperate, then go back in to melt another life lamp.

Right now, there were simply too many cultivators from the Twofold Alliance present. What was more, he wanted to find a safe place where he could study his sundial life lamp, and hopefully find out what it was capable of. Although he had done a bit of study, the situation was too dangerous to allow him to concentrate fully on that.

I wonder who that old man was.

Xu Qing had asked the Mirroring cultivators about that as well. However, none of them recognized the old man based on his description. That led him to wonder if he was even an old man at all, or if that was a disguise. All of it made Xu Qing feel more than ever that he needed to stay vigilant.

Days passed as Xu Qing cautiously made his way out of the Heavenfire Sea.

Eventually, he found a barren mountain where he dug out a mansion grotto, set up some spell formations, and prepared to spend some time holed up. After making sure the area was safe, he settled down cross-legged and took a deep breath. Forcing himself to accept the situation as relatively safe, he unhesitatingly focused his attention on the sundial life lamp. By using its connection with his blood he began to study it closely.

Seven days passed in a flash.

At a certain point, Xu Qing's eyes opened within the darkness of his makeshift mansion grotto. An excited look appeared on his face.

“So that's how it is.”

Chapter 554: Freezing Time (part 1)

The light of the violet crystal had fused with his blood to form a life lamp. After doing some study, Xu Qing was convinced the life lamp's ability had something to do with time itself. However, he still wasn't absolutely certain of the details. The soul-protecting properties of the black umbrella had not gone away just because he melted that life lamp. They still existed. As a matter of fact, those properties had improved compared to before.

And the time indicated on the sundial seemed to be fourteen hours off real world time. Xu Qing didn't know what mystery was contained in that difference, not even after putting a lot of thought into it.

Over the seven days he had spent studying the new life lamp, he'd attempted to speed up the sundial. But it was impossible to get the ball of light, which of course contained a nascent soul, to either speed up, slow down, or stop. The sundial was obviously part of him, but at the same time,

acted independently. In fact, even when Xu Qing took control of the nascent soul, for instance by taking it away from the sundial, the ball of light would stay behind and continue its prescribed movement.

In that manner, it was very much like the violet crystal.

Eventually, Xu Qing came up with an idea.

He couldn't alter the movement of the ball of light, nor could he rotate the plate, but he *could* manipulate the gnomon! After all, fundamentally speaking, the gnomon was made from his blood. With some experimentation, he realized that he could detach the gnomon from the dial plate and send it flying around. When he did that, the dial plate then lost its guiding element, and the ball of light stopped moving. That, in turn, removed the sensation of time from the sundial. The ball of light still shone, but it didn't cast any shadow. In fact, it was possible to see faint signs of degradation on the dial plate.

Xu Qing quickly put the gnomon back. The dial plate returned to normal, and the ball of light continued orbiting. The shadow of the gnomon went back to normal. As for the time notation, it began to move from the exact spot where it had stopped. To some extent, it was as if the time that had passed between removing the gnomon and replacing it... had disappeared.

I guess it makes sense to say that time stopped?

Xu Qing's eyes gleamed as he came to the conclusion that his assessment wasn't entirely correct. Regardless, he had at least unlocked the first function of the life lamp.

When he had removed the gnomon, stopping time, Ling'er had been climbing out of his sleeve to whisper something in his ear. He had looked down at her, and then she had stopped moving. She'd just remained in place completely motionless. It was almost as if time had ceased flowing for her. She had existed in that state for only a brief moment. Once Xu Qing saw the degradation of the disk place, he'd returned the gnomon, sending everything back to normal.

That discovery caused his heart to leap in his chest.

When I take out the gnomon, time stops moving for whatever I look at?

Xu Qing did a few more tests. The entire time, Ling'er had no concept of the fact that she was remaining in place, motionless. It was as if she was working very hard to reach his ear, but kept stopping along the way. Eventually, she reached his ear and looked at him bashfully.

"What are you looking at little old me like that for, Big Bro Xu Qing?"

Those words seemed somehow familiar to Xu Qing, but his mind was reeling so dramatically that he didn't put any thought into it. [1]

Nodding, he said, "Ling'er, did you notice anything unusual just now?"

Surprised, Ling'er shook her head.

Xu Qing continued doing some more experiments.

Ling'er was curious about what was going on, but could tell that her Big Bro Xu Qing was busy, so she settled down in a comfortable position and then rocked back and forth as if playing.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing's mind was racing.

Ling'er didn't sense that time stopped for her. I can think of a lot of applications for this function....
Stepping out of the mansion grotto, he looked up at the evening sky and the lands surrounding him. Sensing the heat on the breeze, he looked in the direction of the Heavenfire Sea.

After some thought, he decided not to do any larger experiments.

Given the low level of his cultivation base, and the fact that he'd only just created the sundial, he had the feeling that if he tried to use the time-stopping function on a large scale, for instance to stop the starry sky from moving, or cease the flow of the wind, or orbital track of the world itself, he would probably end up killing himself in body and soul. If the movement of Revered Ancient was likened to that of a massive running animal, then one of the magical laws governing it would be akin to the energy in that animal. Given his current state, he was like a flimsy rope. It was easy to imagine what would happen to a flimsy rope if you tried to use it to restrain a huge animal.

Might as well forget it for now....

However, Xu Qing could imagine how useful and shocking this ability would be if he used it in the middle of a fight.

I'm going to call this ability Time Lag!

Xu Qing had the feeling the sundial life lamp had more functions which would be revealed over time with further study.

There's no rush. The most important thing now is that I have four more life lamps to melt.

In the seven days that had passed, he had fully recovered, and was back in his peak state, leaving him ready to go back to the Heavenfire Sea to further his cultivation. What was more, he had improved his resistance to the heavenfire.

Not wanting to waste any time, he sped through the night toward the glow of the sea of flames.

This time, Xu Qing adjusted his tactics based on his previous experience. He picked a very remote area, and made sure to immediately put away any of the red crystals that formed. That would ensure this session of cultivation was much safer. He had no idea if another 3,000-meter vortex would form.

Since there was nothing he could do to hide the vortex if it appeared, he picked the remotest location he could find.

Twelve days passed.

Perhaps because of the sundial, or perhaps because of other reasons, the seven-colored wind-chanting lamp melted a lot faster than the black umbrella. As it dripped into his blood, and the life lamp elements gathered, he could sense that another personal life lamp was about to form.

Eventually, in the evening of the twenty-third day, Xu Qing opened his eyes in the depths of the lava. A 3,000-meter vortex swirled around him as the seven-colored wind-chanting lamp completely vanished, and a second sundial life lamp formed in the life mist of his sea of consciousness.

It looked exactly the same as the first sundial! This was what lamps looked like that were formed from his blood. That was what always happened with Imperial Sovereigns and their descendants. For other people to later acquire a full set of the same type of life lamp was incredibly, incredibly difficult.

When the new life lamp formed, and the gnomon shadow started moving, it was exactly fourteen hours behind that time indicated on the first sundial life lamp. Both sundials moved in unison, causing the vortex to spin even faster. It was even possible to see spatial rifts forming.

As Xu Qing took in the astonishing sight, he could sense that this second life lamp's powers still contained the fleshly body protection from the seven-colored wind-chanting lamp.

What was more, the augmentations of the two lamps were astonishingly beyond anything from before. After some study, he realized that the strength of Time Lag was double that of before.

Meanwhile, he had long since stowed all of the red crystals that formed, cutting off their aura using the same box from before. It seemed reasonable to conclude that this session of cultivation had remained completely undetected by anyone.

Although the vortex could theoretically attract attention, given his remote location, it wouldn't be easy for people to detect it the way they could lock onto the heavenfire crystals with a geomantic compass.

Xu Qing had planned things out in this way thinking it was the best way to keep a low profile. But sometimes, fate can operate in mysterious ways. For example, as the 3,000-meter vortex spun, three red crystals suddenly emerged from the lava and flew into the vortex.

Xu Qing's expression flickered and he reached out as if to grab them. But then, he reconsidered and pulled his hand back. At this point, they were already out in the open and flying around, so it was a bit too late to think about preventing people from noticing them. Gritting his teeth, he turned and flew away.

He didn't need heavenfire crystals, and besides, if they drew people to that spot, it would make it easier for him to stay out of sight by moving in a different direction.

Although the incident the month before didn't amount to much, the Mirrorlings and Skyfaces hadn't given up. After all, both groups had already calculated that dozens of heavenfire crystals had appeared recently. Although some of the readouts might have been duplicates, they knew for sure that there was one instance of more than twenty appearing at once. Considering that they viewed those crystals as precious treasures, it was no wonder the royal preceptor had personally come to take charge.

When the heavenfire crystals appeared in that vortex, they quickly locked onto that location, assuming that the crystals would disappear quickly like they had in the past. But when they didn't, it quickly became very clear where they needed to head to.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing was already a good distance away from the vortex, traveling at top speed. But soon, he realized that something was going on.

There was a group of Mirrorling cultivators who seemed to have locked onto *his* position, and were moving to intercept him. The group had four Gold Core cultivators and two that emanated the fluctuations of Nascent Soul. Of the latter two, one had passed a single tribulation, the other had passed two.

Upon catching sight of Xu Qing, their faces lit up. The Gold Core experts fell back to notify other members of their species, while the two Nascent Soul cultivators shot toward Xu Qing.

They still found me? Xu Qing frowned. He was really coming to understand how frustrating it was to be in a strange location with no background information or intelligence reports. *Don't tell me they can sense the heavenfire crystals even inside the box?*

Xu Qing's eyes glittered with killing intent. After all the running and fleeing he had been doing, his killing intent had been building up to a very high level.

Since I don't have any intelligence reports, then I'll kill some of them and see if I can figure out what's going on!

Xu Qing released the power of his taboo poison, let the shadow free, released the strength of the Spike of Misfortune, and let loose the fluctuations of all his nascent souls.

Chapter 554: Freezing Time (part 2)

Xu Qing was about to launch an attack when a familiar shadowy form suddenly appeared behind the two attacking Mirrorlings. The figure raised both hands and slapped each of the Mirrorlings.

When facing deadly power like this, the Mirrorling cultivators weren't even able to dodge the blow. They screamed and then exploded, their flesh, blood, and nascent souls converging together just like the last time this old human man had launched an attack. But this time, masks didn't form. Instead, they turned into two mirrors that the old man took. Then he blurred into motion toward the Gold Core Mirrorlings. They were even less qualified to fight back, and died screaming. The old man collected the resulting mirrors. Having accomplished these things, the old man turned and glared angrily at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing frowned as he looked back, taking note that the man was now wearing a reflective glove so his skin didn't touch the items.

"Why are you so careless, boy?" he snapped. "If it weren't for the fact you're human, I wouldn't bother wasting time on you! You're obviously an out-of-region human. Did you come here from the human Imperial Region? Are you royalty or something? You obviously have talent, plus you have a full set of life lamps. So what, you think you can just screw around however you like?"

"Let me tell you, this is the Moonrite Region! Around here, humans are a lesser species that count as nothing more than food! The living beings in Moonrite Region all know the fate that ultimately awaits them, so they're brutal and vicious. It's an instinct to them. Whether you believe me or not, I can tell you that if you keep acting like this, then within two months you'll be in Holy City, where the Mirrorlings and Skyfaces will delight in sampling your flesh!"

The old man had certainly unleashed a torrent of reprimands.

In response, Xu Qing simply backed up a few steps. "What are you trying to say?"

"What am I trying to say? You little punk! Why did you throw away the box I gave you? Don't you know that the Mirrorling royal preceptor has a special ability to see through all sorts of concealments? But I personally modified that box to give it extra layers of

screening. I was doing you a favor. But then, not only did you throw it away, but also, you laced it with poison! Now hand over the antidote!"

It took a while, but the old man finally got around to making his point.

Face expressionless, Xu Qing decided not to drag things out any further, so he took out a medicinal pill bottle and threw it over. "My poison is a mix of a lot of different things. Take that medicine for seven days. At dawn, when the sun first rises, take three pills and perform seven full cultivation base cycles. Considering there's no sun here, you'll need to calculate the time carefully on your own and double the dosage." Xu Qing tossed him a second bottle. "Don't skip any doses. Since the poison has already started to take effect, you can't afford any delays, otherwise you won't be able to purge the poison. Don't blame me if you don't do everything as I've said."

With that, Xu Qing backed up rapidly and kept his guard up in case the old man launched an attack.

The old man took the pill bottles and was about to say something when something locked onto their location. Glaring at Xu Qing, he turned to leave. However, after a moment of hesitation, he sighed and tossed a box to Xu Qing.

"Your antidote better work. Take this to keep yourself off the geomantic compasses."

The old man sped off into the distance.

After considering the situation, Xu Qing took the box and left.

As he moved along, he thought about the conversation. Eventually, his eyes shone with determination as he put the heavenfire crystals into the newly acquired box. Then, just to be safe, he sent the box into D-132 to experience the pressure of a god. After, he covered it with taboo poison, and then purified it with his violet moon nascent soul. When that was done, he sped on his way.

Five days passed in a flash.

During that time, Xu Qing encountered some Mirrorlings, but it was obvious that none of them had known his position. Most of them were oblivious to him, and just randomly went on their way.

Wait, was the old man actually telling the truth?

Xu Qing hesitated for a moment. The antidote he'd given the old man was fake. The reality was that there was no antidote for his taboo poison. The only way to dispel it was for Xu Qing to personally extract it. After some thought, Xu Qing was still hesitant and a bit suspicious about the old man. But there wasn't anything he could do about it, so he found another remote place to melt his third life lamp.

This time it was the hellspirit bloodwing lamp. Specifically, the left wing.

All my other life lamps are singular. It's only the hellspirit bloodwing lamps that have a left and a right version....

Xu Qing's gaze sharpened as certain possibilities occurred to him. Then he started the melting process.

Seventeen days later, in the east part of the Heavenfire Sea, another 3,000-meter vortex appeared over the lava. This time, nothing unusual happened. No heavenfire crystals appeared. And because the vortex was in a remote area, nobody noticed it.

Several hours later, the vortex vanished, and Xu Qing was speeding off in another direction. He looked exhausted. He was reaching his limit of endurance with the heavenfire, and knew he would need to leave to rest and recuperate before continuing with the process. Despite the exhaustion on his face, his eyes glittered with excitement.

I have three sundials!

Xu Qing's third personal life lamp again took the shape of a sundial. Just like before, it provided augmentations to everything from strength to speed. From what he could tell, it added an additional seventy percent to his previous foundation. By now, he could move so fast that ordinary cultivators wouldn't be able to see him move with their naked eye. They would only be able to catch some fading afterimages.

I wonder what will happen when I have a full set of five.

Anticipation filled Xu Qing at the thought. He could already sense that once he had a full set of sundial life lamps made from his own blood, some mysterious and amazing transformations would occur.

With that thought on his mind, he sped on. A few days later as he continued over the lava, he suddenly stopped in place and looked off into the distance. He could just barely detect some rumbling sounds in that direction, as well as the fluctuations of a magical technique. From what he could tell, someone was refining something in that area.

What was especially noteworthy was that he could sense his taboo poison.

Although the old man he'd met had been poisoned, he obviously hadn't been hit with a very strong dosage. What was more, he had that special mirror-like glove, which helped reduce the level of the poisoning by reducing the level of contact. But even after the time that had passed, the poison was still there, which was why Xu Qing could sense it.

It's still pretty strong....

Xu Qing knew how terrifying his poison was, and after some consideration, came to the conclusion that the old man hadn't tricked him.

"Might as well check it out."

He shot in the direction where he sensed his poison. His goal was to see how the old man was doing, and possibly extract the poison from him. As he got closer, his expression turned serious. Then, without any hesitation, he sank down into the lava.

He had spotted a group of Mirrorling cultivators. There were dozens of them, including a lot of Gold Core experts, plus eight or nine Nascent Soul cultivators, who ranged from the one-tribulation to the three-tribulation level.

What put Xu Qing on guard even more was the fact that he'd spotted a spell formation. Because of the unique characteristics of the Heavenfire Sea, making spell formations there was very difficult. That had been very frustrating for Xu Qing. And yet, there was actually a spell formation here. It would obviously take someone extraordinarily powerful to set up a spell formation here.

It was a strange formation that resembled a huge mirror. It was about 300 meters across, and as it floated in the air, the surrounding Mirrorling cultivators were powering it.

The mirror was pointed at the lava below, and the reflection of the sea of flames below was thus trapped inside it. Also trapped inside it was a person who had been standing in that same area.

The trapped person was that old man. His entire body was greenish black, and parts of him were decomposing, revealing bones beneath. And thanks to the immense pressure of the spell formation, he was trembling violently. His disguise was being wiped away. Although he still resembled an old man, he wasn't scrawny anymore. Instead, he was burly, and he looked unusually dignified as he stared at the mirror.

In addition to the sea of flames and the trapped figure, the mirror also contained a bulging face that was coldly eying the trapped figure.

“Duanmu Zang!” the face said in a rumbling voice. “You’re always sneaking around killing chosen cultivators of my species. Now look at the state you’re in! If you get on your knees and surrender, then I’ll consider letting you become a Mirrorling. You can shed your despicable human blood, and I’ll help you once again reach Spirit Trove. Although it’s virtually impossible to avoid death, at least you can be a bit happier in what life you have. And you won’t have to go skulking around all the time. Consider carefully. If I come here in my true form, and you insist on being stubborn, then you won’t have any options to pick from.” [1]

The old man laughed harshly. “That’s complete nonsense. Human blood is incomparably noble, you fool! You think you can compare your lowdown species to me? How much history do you Mirrorlings have? We humans have a history that goes back as long as Revered Ancient does. When Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity was in charge, he conquered Revered Ancient. Back then, you Mirrorlings were nothing but farts that hadn’t been farted out yet!”

“So, you refuse to come to your senses,” the voice said coldly from the mirror.

The surrounding Mirrorlings unleashed the power of their cultivation bases. As a result, immense pressure weighed down from the mirror, causing rumbling sounds to echo out from the old man. However, he still held strong.

Unfortunately, his heart was full of despair thanks to the poison in him. It was a terrifying poison that he had initially ignored. But as time went on, it got worse and worse. And now it was too late. Everything about him, including his body and soul, were decaying. It had also dispelled his concealment magics, which was how the Mirrorlings had tracked him down. And now he was trapped.

It’s all that little punk’s fault. That no-good schmuck!

In the very beginning, Duanmu Zang didn’t have good intentions. However, after realizing Xu Qing was human, he’d decided not to kill him, but instead, to mark him and come back later to rob him. But what really ended up happening was that he ended up infected with a terrifying poison.

That antidote was fake!

As Duanmu Zang cursed in his heart, Xu Qing was hiding some distance away in the lava, watching. Because the Mirrorlings were focused on their spell formation, they hadn’t noticed him. Besides, none of them believed that there were people of any species in this area who would dare to

provoke them. That was especially true since their royal preceptor had unleashed the power of this formation treasure.

Xu Qing mulled the situation over and came to the conclusion that the box the old man had given him really did turn out to be useful. Therefore, he made his decision.

I'll save him. This one time!

With that, he unleashed his taboo poison core, causing the poison to spread out. Then he waved his hand to produce the Spike of Misfortune. And finally, he sent his shadow out. Eyes glittering coldly, he shot out from the lava. Thirteen nascent souls erupted with heaven-shaking, earth-shattering force. And the gnomons on his three sundials quivered; at any moment, they could be plucked out to unleash Time Lag.

“Die!”

Chapter 555: If You're So Strong, Why Didn't You Say So Earlier! (part 1)

There could be incredible differences between cultivators in the Nascent Soul level. Based on what reserve powers they had, how they had prepared for their breakthrough, and many other small factors, two cultivators could be on completely different power levels. For one thing, the number of tribulations had a huge influence on how strong a cultivator was. Different species had different traits, and personal experience also played into it. It was not as simple as things had been in Gold Core, where everything came down to heavenly palaces.

If two Nascent Soul cultivators were dramatically different, then their auras would feel different. Otherwise, careful examination would be required to see the differences. However, there was a rough standard that most species applied. The first tribulation propelled one from pseudo-Nascent Soul into the real Nascent Soul level. That was when a cultivator acquired a dao soul, and true Nascent Soul battle prowess. The second heavenfate tribulation would double one's power. In other words, every nascent soul would be twice as strong. With the third tribulation, it became triple!

The Skyface cultivator Xu Qing had fought previously was considered a chosen in his species. Although he had no life lamps, he did have seven nascent souls, and had experienced two heavenfate tribulations. Because of that, he could be considered to have fourteen-soul battle prowess. It was for that reason that, after detecting Xu Qing's thirteen nascent souls, he had chosen to attack. Based on that, it was possible to deduce that when he was in Gold Core, he had seven heavenly palaces. And when in Foundation Establishment, he'd possessed four life flames. That, in turn, meant he had 120 dharma apertures; he had never reached the ultimate limit of 121.

But Xu Qing's path *had* involved reaching 121 dharma apertures. Other than Master Shengyun and Kong Xianglong, he had never met anyone else who accomplished that. Or if he had, that person hadn't revealed their true strength, ensuring that Xu Qing had no way of knowing.

However, that was just the foundational aspect. Heavenly palaces were the easiest way to classify Gold Core cultivators, but when it came to fights between Nascent Soul cultivators, things changed.

Measuring Nascent Soul cultivators of a similar level also involved their treasures, their techniques, the innate abilities of their species, and their adaptability in combat. All of those things played vital roles in determining victory or defeat. In other words, Nascent Soul strength wasn't the only thing that could be relied upon. It was more like a general reference. Sometimes, the only way to find out who was stronger was to fight.

That was how things worked with Xu Qing. His thirteen dao souls had experienced a single heavenfate tribulation, so theoretically speaking, he had thirteen-soul battle prowess.

But his dao souls were extremely unique. The factors included his imperial-class techniques, his connection to gods, his heavenly dao, the timescape bottle, the daybreak light, and his sundial life lamps. Because of all those reasons, Xu Qing's battle prowess in the Nascent Soul level was far beyond that of an ordinary cultivator. In essence, his dao souls were already as strong as if they had experienced two heavenfate tribulations.

And that meant that he basically had twenty-four soul battle prowess!

The only reason it wasn't twenty-six was that he still had two life lamps that he hadn't melted and turned into an additional two sundials. When he did that, he would have twenty-six soul battle prowess.

That said, Xu Qing was always cautious. If he could push his dao souls to that level, then other people could do the same. And that wasn't to mention that enemies would have treasures and techniques at their disposal. That was why things got so tricky in Nascent Soul.

Even as such thoughts swirled in his mind, he shot out from the lava, unleashing all the might of his thirteen dao souls, which turned into the terrifying battle prowess of twenty-four souls.

A moment later, he appeared in front of one of the one-tribulation Nascent Soul Mirrorlings.

The Mirrorling cultivator reacted with shock. Though all of his energy was being poured into the spell formation, he had ample fighting experience and good reflexes. As a result, he instantly shifted his attention and unleashed the power of six of his nascent souls. He also spat out a flying sword. At the same time, the mirror on his forehead glittered, casting light onto Xu Qing which caused the Mirrorling's face to suddenly resemble Xu Qing's.

This was one of their species' innate abilities, and it instantly boosted the Mirrorling's battle prowess to the level of eight souls. That innate ability was nothing short of amazing, and when used on ordinary one-tribulation cultivators, would almost always result in the victim being slaughtered. However, when the absolute level of power was too disparate, there would be too many factors at play that couldn't be controlled.

And thus, the moment Xu Qing arrived, cold light flared, and the Mirrorling cultivator's head flew off his shoulders.

Blood sprayed, and a scream rang out, but Xu Qing was already gone, rushing toward one of the Nascent Soul Mirrorlings. He also sent his taboo poison raging out, not to target the Nascent Soul experts, but rather, the Gold Core cultivators.

Xu Qing's recent upgrade resulted in his taboo poison core becoming even more ruthless and terrifying. As it spread out, around seven Gold Core cultivators cried out in alarm. Before they could do anything in response, their bodies turned purple, and they started rotting. Terrified screams rang out everywhere.

Meanwhile, other Gold Core cultivators shivered, and then their eyes turned pitch black. Erupting with fiendish laughter, they rushed toward the giant spell formation mirror and then self-detonated.

As booms rang out, a streak of red lightning followed the Spike of Misfortune as it zipped back and forth with deadly accuracy.

The other Mirrorling cultivators in the area were visibly stunned. Chaos ensued almost immediately. Duanmu Zang, who was still dealing with the pressure of the mirror, was also astonished. But when he saw that the Mirrorling cultivators had been poisoned, his pupils constricted. He knew exactly what was going on.

It's that treacherous punk!

With that, he called out in a loud voice, "Stop wasting time. Finish the fight and kill those Nascent Soul cultivators. Without them powering the spell formation, I'll be free. Hurry! The Mirrorling royal preceptor is on the way!"

The face in the mirror spun to look at Xu Qing. However, that was when Duanmu Zang laughed heartily, and ignoring the fact that it could exacerbate his injuries, tapped into the power of his cultivation base.

Eight nascent souls rose up, all of them pulsing with the shocking power of five tribulations. Even more astonishing than the eight nascent souls was an illusory secret trove! However, the secret trove had collapsed, and was withering, which was the evidence of a previous breakthrough failure. Even still, it was an impressive level of battle prowess. And the addition of the secret trove forced the face in the mirror to look away from Xu Qing and focus all its efforts on suppressing Duanmu Zang.

Rumbling booms echoed out as Xu Qing attacked with greater speed. He needed no advice from Duanmu Zang. From the moment he'd launched his attack, he'd known that it needed to be ended quickly, and that he couldn't afford any delays. At the moment, he had unleashed his taboo poison, let the shadow wreak havoc, and sent the Spike of Misfortune flying around. While all that played out, Xu Qing closed in on another Nascent Soul Mirrorling.

Unfortunately, the Mirrorlings were finally reacting to the sudden development. With angry shouts, two of the two-tribulation Nascent Soul experts, and one three-tribulation cultivator, all shot toward Xu Qing.

As they neared, Xu Qing's daybreak light flashed.

All the light in the area was replaced by a seven-colored glow, forcing the enemies to stop and back up. Meanwhile, Xu Qing entered his Gruegloom state, blurring into motion and speeding right through one of the Mirrorlings. When he came out the other side, he had two nascent souls in his hands, which he instantly crushed. Dozens of snarling heavenfiend clones pounced on the Mirrorling behind him.

Shrill, despairing screams erupted from the Mirrorling's mouth as his body trembled and withered. Xu Qing lunged backward, and as he did, the spot he had previously occupied collapsed into a huge vortex sent by the three-tribulation cultivator.

"Have a death wish, you despicable human?" the Mirrorling shouted. Seven nascent souls appeared within him, five of which had three-tribulation power, with the remaining two having two-tribulation power. Overall, that caused him to thrum with close to twenty-soul battle prowess.

What was more, an illusory black mirror appeared behind him, which boosted him further. Inside the mirror was a huge black bat, bound in place and releasing powerful sound waves in all

directions. He also had a long spear in his hand, which was surrounded by countless resentful souls howling in grief.

And yet, there was more. There were two of the three-tribulation Mirrorlings, and the other was closing in from the opposite direction. This one wore a black suit of armor and had seven balls of ghostfire floating around its head. Each was the manifestation of a nascent soul. In addition, he had a cape attached to his suit of armor that was made of countless eyes, all of them glaring angrily at Xu Qing. If that wasn't enough, there were still four of the two-tribulation Mirrorlings approaching Xu Qing from all directions.

Duanmu Zang was paying close attention to what was happening. If he wasn't trapped, killing those Mirrorlings would have been as simple as turning over his hand. And yet, there was something about Xu Qing's battle prowess that seemed odd to him.

The little punk's nascent souls seem unusually gruish.

As Xu Qing's poison spread, agonized shrieks could be heard everywhere. But the six Nascent Soul Mirrorlings were still closing in.

That was when Xu Qing's eyes turned as cold as ice. Inside of him, the gnomon on one of his sundials rose up, and he turned to look at the nearest three-tribulation Mirrorling.

Instantly, his first sundial stopped moving. That power of stoppage then traveled through his gaze to affect the Mirrorling he was looking at. The three-tribulation Mirrorling stopped in place, his expression vicious. It was as if time had slowed to a standstill for him specifically. It only lasted a moment before he recovered. But for cultivators in the Nascent Soul level, a moment can mean the difference between life and death.

Just as he recovered, Xu Qing's knife slashed into his throat, and his head tumbled off his shoulders in a spray of blood.

Xu Qing didn't have time to do anything other than grab the nascent souls and crush them. When he put the gnomon back in place, the sundial looked extremely withered. It was in far worse shape than when he'd tested it on Ling'er. Thankfully, it was already starting to slowly repair itself.

Now wasn't the time to study what was happening, though. Xu Qing quickly looked at the other three-tribulation Mirrorling and removed the gnomon from his second sundial.

That other Mirrorling was completely astonished by what he'd just seen. For some inexplicable reason, his fellow Mirrorling had just stopped moving moments ago. He didn't fight back or resist in any way. He seemed almost like a puppet as this human cultivator beheaded him.

"This..." Before the Mirrorling could process what was happening, Xu Qing's gaze landed on him.

Chapter 555: If You're So Strong, Why Didn't You Say So Earlier!?! (part 2)

The three-tribulation Mirrorling stopped moving. He couldn't sense anything or move. And when he recovered, Xu Qing was right in front of him. Another head flew through the air, and more nascent souls were destroyed. All of that happened in only two breaths of time.

The other two-tribulation experts let loose cries of alarm. Scalps tingling, they spun to flee.

Xu Qing ignored them and focused on the giant mirror spell formation.

Temporarily pushing aside his astonishment at Xu Qing's abilities, Duanmu Zang shouted, "This thing is a precious treasure belonging to the Mirrorling royal preceptor! It's not going to be easy to destroy. But without anyone powering it, there's a possibility. Back up! I'll detonate one of my nascent souls. That should damage it!"

With that, he prepared to detonate one of his nascent souls.

But then Xu Qing waved his right index finger, and Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior became a red lightning bolt that shot forth. He moved with incredible speed, guiding the Spike of Misfortune directly into the mirror.

The vicious face in the mirror looked at Xu Qing and was about to speak. But then its expression flickered. Rumbling echoed out as the Spike of Misfortune completely ignored the mirror's defenses and stabbed into its surface like a hot knife through butter. A loud crack could be heard as the mirror shattered.

Not even looking at Duanmu Zang, Xu Qing turned around and waved his hand.

His taboo poison rushed back toward him, as did the shadow. The Spike of Misfortune was a red glow that sped back into his hand.

Then Xu Qing blasted away at the highest speed possible. During the entire time, he didn't say a single thing. He struck like a metric ton of lightning, then left without even the hint of a sound.

The mirror trembled as more cracks spread out over its surface. The face distorted in anxiety as it glared at Xu Qing fleeing off into the distance.

As for Duanmu Zang, he inhaled deeply and ceased the nascent soul detonation process. Racing toward the hole that had been punched in the mirror, he waved his sleeve, sending his collapsed secret trove shooting out in front of him.

BOOM!

More cracks covered the mirror's surface as it dropped out of the sky and slammed into the lava.

The face seemed like it wanted to speak, but had suffered such a grievous injury that it couldn't send out any divine will.

Snorting coldly, Duanmu Zang hawked a loogie and spat onto the mirror. The force of the spitting caused the mirror to sink further into the lava. With that done, Duanmu Zang turned and fled off into the distance.

About six hours later, a tempest raged on the horizon as a huge figure approached. The figure wore a golden robe, and had no face, only a mirror. After arriving, he stopped and looked down at the lava. His face reflected the images in the area. A moment passed, and he extended his right hand. The mirror slowly emerged from the lava. After he had it in his hand, a cold voice emanated from his mirror-face.

"Humans..."

Three days later, some 5,000 kilometers away on the Heavenfire Sea, Xu Qing finally slowed down. He'd been moving nonstop that entire time, staying concealed and moving toward the shore. During those three days, the sky had become brighter, as if the fires of the sea had begun burning more

strongly. The popping bubbles of lava had become more common. As a result, the heat had been rising, to the point where his soul was hurting.

I need to get to the shore, otherwise I'm not going to be able to hold on, and my soul's going to melt.

Xu Qing even felt like his hair was starting to dry up. He was just about to speed up, but then he coolly said, "Senior, do you really need to follow me secretly for so long?"

A moment later, he continued on his way.

He'd been doing this roughly every two hours for the past three days.

Though Xu Qing had the ability to sense the aura of his taboo poison, he knew that complacency could easily lead to slip-ups. And in a chaotic world like this one, slip-ups could lead to very tragic outcomes. Therefore, even though he hadn't sensed any taboo poison aura, he still made a point of speaking out loud like he just had.

Another day went by. At that point, Xu Qing stopped and said, "Senior, you really do love staying invisible, don't you?"

This time, he got a response....

"Hmm?"

A bit more than thirty meters to his right, the air rippled, and Duanmu Zang appeared. He was surrounded by a bubble that completely isolated his aura. What was more, he had a cloth wrapped around his right hand, which masked the taboo poison aura.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed as he realized this actually seemed very familiar.

How'd the little punk detect me? Duanmu Zang wasn't sure, but considering what he'd seen Xu Qing doing, it seemed most likely that some unusual technique was responsible. *Or maybe he's just stopping every so often and saying something like that! How treacherous!*

Duanmu Zang noticed Xu Qing looking at the strip of cloth around his hand. He offered no explanation. Glaring angrily, he said, "You have no conscience, boy! I didn't do a single thing to harm you. I even gave you a box to keep those heavenfire stones secret. But the antidote you gave me was fake!"

Xu Qing frowned.

Seeing that frown, Duanmu Zang quickly changed to a more agreeable tone. "However, since you did help me escape back there, I guess there's no need to bicker about the past." Waving his hand dismissively, he cleared his throat. "We're both human. So... why not give me that antidote?"

Face completely expressionless, Xu Qing coolly said, "10,000 spirit stones!"

Duanmu Zang inhaled sharply and glared at Xu Qing. Then he smiled wryly, shook his head, and took out the very same bag of holding Xu Qing had given him earlier.

Xu Qing took it and checked it. There was nothing unusual about it.

Seeing Xu Qing meticulously check the bag of holding caused Duanmu Zang's temper to heat up, but he forced himself to remain calm.

“Good enough?”

Xu Qing nodded and waved his hand. A tremor passed through Duanmu Zang, and then all the poison power in him stirred. An expression of pain appeared on his face as the poison then burrowed out into the open. Once outside of him, it turned into a black mist that swept back toward Xu Qing and vanished inside of him.

When the taboo poison vanished, Duanmu Zang immediately felt a wave of relief. His cultivation base power surged, and his body returned to normal. Heaving a sigh, he looked at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing backed up a few steps, looking supremely vigilant.

Duanmu Zang’s eyes narrowed. “After seeing how formidable you are, boy, why did you need my help those other two times?”

“I didn’t have time to do anything,” Xu Qing replied calmly and honestly.

Hearing that, Duanmu Zang confirmed that this kid really didn’t talk much. He turned to leave. However, after only taking a couple steps, he looked over his shoulder at Xu Qing.

“The Heavenfire Skycrossing is starting. You’d better find a place to hole up.” He tossed Xu Qing an umbrella. “The umbrella will keep you safe for short periods of time. But it won’t last long. You’re on your own now.”

With that, he turned to leave.

Xu Qing inspected the umbrella to make sure it was safe. That was when something occurred to him, and he called out, “Wait a moment.”

Duanmu Zang stopped in place and looked back at him curiously.

Xu Qing reached out and extracted one last bit of poison from Duanmu Zang. He’d left it there as insurance just in case the old man suddenly attacked him.

When the poison appeared in the open, Duanmu Zang’s expression flickered. Glaring at Xu Qing, he breathed in and out heavily a few times, then suddenly burst out laughing.

“Completely unethical!”

Xu Qing betrayed no facial expression in response. Given everything he had experienced from a young age, he had been forced to develop caution. And that was more appropriate than ever considering he was in this unfamiliar region. From beginning to end, he’d harbored no harmful intentions.

Duanmu Zang eyed Xu Qing, then nodded. “Whatever. It’s normal to be so vigilant.” With that, he tossed a jade slip to Xu Qing. “If you can’t find any good place of refuge from the fire, you can go there.”

This time, Duanmu Zang really did disappear.

Xu Qing scanned the jade slip and then put it away. He knew what the Heavenfire Skycrossing was that Duanmu Zang had referred to. It was a special weather pattern in the Moonrite Region in which the sky turned very bright.

Presumably it has something to do with the Heavenfire Sea.

Xu Qing hadn't been aware of the details before, but he'd had his speculations, especially considering how things had been heating up recently. He started moving again. A few days later, he was back on shore. He didn't return to the same mansion grotto he'd hollowed out earlier. He didn't like the idea of using the same place twice.

Looking up into the sky, he could see that it really was a lot brighter than two months ago. The Heavenfire Sea also seemed to be in a much greater state of agitation. From where he was standing, the rumbling sounds coming from the Heavenfire Sea sounded like thunder. And there were hardly any cultivators out and about like there had been before. The ground trembled occasionally, as if there were some enormous creature preparing to rise up from the depths of the Heavenfire Sea.

It made Xu Qing think back to how the Mirrorling guards had sunk down into the ground.

Is that the way to avoid the Heavenfire Skycrossing?

After some thought, he found a suitable location to carve out a cave. Covering the entrance, he settled down cross-legged to focus on recovery. Although he had a god body, the Heavenfire Sea was a mysterious place, and the lava there was terrifyingly hot. At the most, Xu Qing could sink down about three meters into it. He wouldn't dare to go any further lest his soul be damaged. Not even the violet crystal would be able to keep up with the effects.

Days passed. Eventually, Xu Qing had fully recovered. During that time, he did some further study into his sundial life lamps.

Occasionally he would chat with Ling'er. Because of that, he still didn't feel lonely.

Seven days later, he was back at a new peak. And that was when he noticed what was happening outside. The temperature during the last week had soared. Even being deep underground, he could see the soil around him starting to turn red. Eventually, he heard a distant rumbling like the crack of thunder. Then, using divine sense, he caught sight of something that struck him with waves of astonishment.

Something like a tsunami was rolling across the Heavenfire Sea. The lava exploded with massive waves. As they slammed into the shore, a pair of 300,000-meter-long severed arms rose from inside the Heavenfire Sea.

The severed arms ended in huge, cancerous growths that had countless tentacles growing out of it. And the palm prints on the palm of the hands were like the canopy of heaven. As the two hands floated into midair, they slowly performed an incantation gesture. Massive amounts of lava began to rise into the air, creating rivulets and streams that spread out in all directions. The sky was turning very bright.

Endless fire began to fall from the sky, immolating the lands below. That was why this area was full of barren landscape and low-lying mountains, and also why it had no vegetation. The effects stretched out, covering the lands of the Twofold Alliance, going from east to west until it covered the entire Moonrite Region.

Seeing it, Xu Qing murmured, "Heavenfire Skycrossing...."

Chapter 556: A Lie Called Hope (part 1)

The Heavenfire Skycrossing was a unique weather pattern in the Moonrite Region. Opinions differed about why it occurred. Some people said it was akin to a tide flow caused by the pull of the

red moon. The reason for that theory was that Heavenfire Skycrossing occurred more frequently when the red moon was nigh. Other people claimed that the red moon, which had been subdued by an Imperial Sovereign long ago, would soon make a comeback.

Whenever the Heavenfire Skycrossing appeared, all of the Moonrite Region would be lit up brightly. A sea of flames would roll across the dome of heaven, starting in the east. The further east you got, the brighter and hotter it became. At the same time, rains of fire would appear, sometimes heavier and sometimes lighter, depending on the specific location. It would last for a few months, and then the sea of flames would retreat to the Heavenfire Sea in the east. That was considered a full cycle.

During that time period, all locations in the east, other than locations like Lesser Shrine, would be set aflame by the fiery rains. Everything turned to ashes, from cities to vegetation. That was why the cities of the Twofold Alliance were mostly constructed from clay bricks. Only their jointly-owned Holy City was strong enough, and bolstered with enough special magics, to endure. But even then, it would sustain damage.

After every instance of Heavenfire Skycrossing, the effects of the fires would be purged and the mudbrick cities would quickly be rebuilt. Crop cycles were also planned around the event.

Thankfully, Heavenfire Skycrossing didn't happen very often, only once every few decades. The destruction was mostly limited to the east, with other areas being mostly spared. What was more, thanks to the magical technique employed by cultivators, reconstruction wasn't very difficult. Ordinary people just needed to get to Holy City to find refuge, which was usually very expensive. If they didn't have some way to stay safe... then they would hide themselves under the ground.

Over the generations, their natural constitutions made them much more capable of avoiding the destructive nature of the fire. That was why the guards who had stopped Xu Qing sank down into the ground. In the days preceding Heavenfire Skycrossing, they needed to break down their bodies and become one with the soil. The Skyfaces had similar methods to deal with the situation.

Unfortunately, the evolutionary traits of those two species were assets Xu Qing didn't possess. As the soil around him heated up to the point of crystallizing, the temperature soared, and Xu Qing started feeling more and more uncomfortable.

It's already nearly as hot as the surface-level lava. And the event has just started....

Beads of sweat had popped out on Xu Qing's forehead, and he felt clammy all over. His garments were getting soaked, and his discomfort was increasing. He started burrowing deeper.

At a certain depth, he started to get some relief. However, he was still receiving a sensation of warning from his bluegreen dragon. And it was getting stronger.

Instead of retracting his divine sense, he kept it outside to see what was happening. The sky was blindingly bright. It was as if lava were soaring through the canopy of heaven. Those two severed arms continued to perform incantation gestures that seemed to send the lava spreading out constantly.

Meanwhile, fire rained down, causing mountain peaks to melt, and dramatically transforming the landscape. Heaven above and earth below were full of roiling flames. The terrifying level of the heat reminded Xu Qing of what he had felt when going down three meters into the lava.

This isn't going to work!

As the sensation of crisis grew stronger in Xu Qing, he looked outside thoughtfully. Staying in place clearly wasn't an option. After all, he had limitations. There was inherent pressure in the Revered Ancient mainland, and the further down you went, the stronger that pressure got. At a certain point, he wouldn't be able to go down any further.

What's worse is that I don't know how far down the heat will go.... If it goes down farther than I can go down, then I'll end up dead.

He weighed the matter over, taking into consideration that this was only the first day, and the effects would most definitely grow increasingly terrifying.

Eventually, he took out the jade slip Duanmu Zang had given him, inside of which was a simple map. Duanmu Zang had told Xu Qing that if he didn't have a suitable place to weather the Heavenfire Skycrossing, he should follow this map.

After mulling the matter over, Xu Qing decided to check out the location in the map. If it wasn't suitable, then he would have to just burrow down as far as he could go in the ground, and gamble that it would be sufficient. Either that or try to flee the territory of the Twofold Alliance.

Having made his decision, he burst out of the ground. Although subterranean travel was possible, it would have been a lot slower. As soon as he was out in the open, he felt the terrifying heat weighing down on him. Almost immediately, his flesh suffered deep burns, and he felt pain filling him.

The surface temperature was now greater than the three-meter lava temperature. Even Xu Qing's extraordinary fleshly body and healing powers weren't enough to stave off the pain. Most importantly, the heavenfire reached all the way to his soul. Thankfully, he had his sundial life lamps to offer additional protection, but even with that, he wouldn't be able to last very long in these conditions.

It was for the same reason that he hadn't been able to stay in the Heavenfire Sea for very long during his cultivation sessions. The fleshly body was one aspect. The soul was the other aspect. That was especially true considering that his soul was actually a lot weaker when compared to his fleshly body.

I can't stay out here long! When he inhaled, the scorching air made him feel like he was burning from the inside out.

Without the slightest hesitation, he pulled out the umbrella Duanmu Zang had given him and opened it. That cut him off slightly from the heat. Relaxing slightly, he sped up, becoming like a storm wind screaming through the fire at top speed.

In that manner, he traveled for two days. The temperature around him continued to rise, causing everything around him to ripple. His divine sense was being limited, and the umbrella was on the point of crumbling. Thankfully, he was getting very close to the spot indicated on the map.

There didn't seem to be anything special about that area. It appeared to be an old abandoned mine, and now that it was surrounded by a sea of flames, it had melted so badly it was almost unrecognizable.

Xu Qing arrived on the scene and looked around, a frown on his face. It didn't seem at all like a place of refuge. What was more, through some of the cracks in the ground he was able to see the interior of the mine, and the place seemed full of intense heat.

Too bad my divine sense is limited, otherwise I might be able to detect more.

He looked at the crumbling umbrella and then the mine.

That said, given what Duanmu Zang was like in the Heavenfire Sea, it actually makes sense that he would hide in a place like this. Somewhere that looks like a place of refuge obviously wouldn't make a very good hiding spot.

After some thought, he bent his legs and then sprang into motion, heading right toward one of the crevices leading into the mine. He stayed quiet and kept his guard up as he prepared to go deeper into the mine to assess the situation.

About two hours later, he still hadn't reached the bottom of the mine. At the same time, it was no less hot. At a certain point, Xu Qing stopped. Frowning, he looked ahead, where he had just spotted a figure laying on the ground, unmoving. It wasn't possible to tell if it was a man or a woman. However, the figure was wearing thick armor. Discarded on the ground nearby was a heat-blocking umbrella.

This was the first person Xu Qing had seen since Heavenfire Skycrossing began. Narrowing his eyes, he sent his shadow out to scout the situation. When he got word back from the shadow in the form of emotional fluctuations, Xu Qing looked surprised. He hurried toward the figure. It took only a moment to reach it. He stopped a short distance away, which was still close enough to inspect it.

It was a young human cultivator with a three-flame Foundation Establishment cultivation base. He was obviously hovering on the verge of death. He was covered from head to toe in pitch-black armor that was made from a special heat-resistant material. His umbrella was especially noteworthy. It looked exactly like the umbrella Duanmu Zang had given to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing looked deeper into the mine. Then he picked up the armored figure and continued on.

Another hour passed. That was when Xu Qing finally reached the bottom of the mine. He saw nothing special there. The soil was crystallizing, and the temperature was extremely high.

After looking around, Xu Qing suddenly said, "Senior, I found this person along the way. Was he looking for you, sir?"

The answer was provided by a cold voice that echoed out from the surrounding walls. "I have no use for people who don't follow my rules!"

The wall rippled, becoming a vortex, out of which stepped Duanmu Zang. He extended his arms to take the armored figure from Xu Qing.

Xu Qing handed the young man over, whereupon Duanmu Zang tossed him into the vortex. Then he looked at Xu Qing.

"What are you doing here, boy?"

Given their handful of interactions, Xu Qing had a general idea of how Duanmu Zang operated. Instead of wasting time talking about the jade slip, he skipped directly to the important part.

“A hundred spirit stones a day!” he offered.

Duanmu Zang snorted coldly. “A thousand a day!”

Xu Qing nodded. “Deal!”

Duanmu Zang eyed him briefly, then stepped back through the vortex.

Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing kept his taboo poison swirling around him just in case he was walking into an ambush. Then he stepped into the vortex. After he was inside, the vortex faded into nothing, and everything returned to normal. Xu Qing stepped out of the vortex into a cave temple filled with crumbling statues. Some were missing heads, others limbs. Other than the statues, the place was relatively barren.

There was no sign of the young man in the armor. Duanmu Zang, meanwhile, was seated cross-legged on a headless statue. He was looking at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing studied his surroundings, and when he looked over his shoulder, his eyes narrowed. There was a huge wall there covered with thousands of masks and a similar number of mirrors. The masks were obviously the remains of Skyfaces that had been specially refined after their death. The mirrors were similar. Xu Qing even spotted the mask left behind by the Skyface that had attacked him originally.

Sounding very proud of himself, Duanmu Zang said, “Those two species have worked hard over the generations to adapt to this place. I used their strength, coupled with some special magics, to create this safe haven from the Heavenfire Skycrossing. The event usually lasts for about a hundred days. At a thousand a day, that will be a total of 200,000 spirit stones. Hand them over.”

Xu Qing’s eyebrows shot up and he glared at Duanmu Zang. “A hundred days would be 100,000.”

Duanmu Zang glared right back at Xu Qing. “Per person. Considering you have that snake with you, it’ll be 200,000, right?”

“I don’t have that many spirit stones on me.” Xu Qing was telling the truth. He actually had a lot of spirit notes, but not many spirit stones. He took out a magical device and put it off to the side. “How about I use this for payment?”

Duanmu Zang waved his hand to collect the magical device. He studied it then nodded. “Alright.”

With that, his eyes glowed with cold light, and his tone became very somber and desolate.

“Considering you’re human, I’ll help you out this one time. But listen well. Everything beyond this cave temple is off limits. If you go poking around... then don’t blame me for forgetting all about us being fellow humans!”

Xu Qing nodded in response.

Duanmu Zang gave him a deep look, then turned and disappeared into the depths of the cave temple.

Xu Qing’s expression didn’t change at all as he looked around again to make sure the area was safe. The statues looked very old, and none of them depicted humans. All of them had snakes and dragons wrapped around them, making them look very dangerous.

Although the statues were all in bad shape, it was possible to tell that, back when they were whole, they had been in worshipful poses. Coupled with the sinister atmosphere, it made the place seem like a tomb.

Was this place some sort of burial ground?

Chapter 556: A Lie Called Hope (part 2)

Xu Qing found an appropriate statue that he could sit cross-legged atop.

That was when Ling'er poked her head out of his sleeve, looked around, and quietly said, "Big Bro Xu Qing, this place looks like it might be connected to my own species, the Ancient Spirits."

Xu Qing's heart flip-flopped. He looked down at Ling'er. She was still studying the place.

"Big Bro Xu Qing, these statues are all Ancient Spirit divine likenesses. My people look like snakes when we're young, but we can take human form when we grow up. If we have a strong bloodline, then when we break the shackles of our cultivation base, we'll gain heavenly dragons as lifelong companions. From that point on, we'll be forever guarded by dragons and snakes.

"Given this place's layout, I'd say it must be the tomb of an important member of my species. Usually, my people will make tombs with multiple levels. Big Bro Xu Qing, my guess is that the main tomb chamber is probably below us. This is just the first level. I can sense the warding spells down below. Big Bro Xu Qing, I could probably open an entrance to the level below."

Ling'er was feeling really excited at the prospect of finally being able to really help her Big Bro Xu Qing.

After hearing Ling'er's explanation, he studied the area again. Then he stroked Ling'er's head and said, "Don't open it. The person in charge of this place now asked us not to disturb anything. Let's wait until the Heavenfire Skycrossing is over, and then we'll leave."

Xu Qing was generally a polite person, and since he had entered into agreement, he wouldn't break the terms of the deal unless it was absolutely necessary.

Ling'er thought about it and came to the conclusion that her Big Bro Xu Qing did things very differently than her papa. Going forward, she would remember that, and try to do things more like Big Bro Xu Qing.

Half a month flew by in the briefest of moments.

The Heavenfire Skycrossing grew more terrifying. Heaven and earth were scorched, countless living beings were destroyed, and those who survived trembled in fear. From a distance, it almost looked like the fury of a god. It was completely appalling. Rumbling like thunder echoed out. The sea level of the Heavenfire Sea grew lower and lower as the lava inside was sucked up into the canopy of heaven by the severed arms.

Deep in the mine, in the Ancient Spirit tomb, Xu Qing kept his promise. He didn't take a single step outside of the cave temple. Instead he stayed in place and worked on cultivation. Duanmu Zang didn't come back. Everything was peaceful and quiet.

Ling'er was on her best behavior. She didn't try to sneak down into the deeper parts of the tomb. As far as she was concerned, she was more than happy to just be able to keep her Big Bro Xu Qing company. The only downside was that she occasionally felt useless.

I really need to hurry up and absorb all the power of that ancestral emperor destiny aura. Then I can improve the level of my bloodline.

With that thought in mind, Ling'er got to work.

On Xu Qing's seventeenth day of cultivation, he was interrupted by a visitor.

Some distance away, the ground of the cave temple started glowing as a teleportation activated. A figure solemnly stepped out of the light. It wasn't Duanmu Zang. Instead, it was a young human man wearing a green jerkin.

Xu Qing opened his eyes.

This was the very same person he had saved half a month before. He still looked weak, but had clearly recovered from his injuries. Apparently that armor had really proved useful. Duanmu Zang must have intervened to save his life. However, the effects of the fire still lingered. He had many burn patches and even parts of his skin that had melted away and not grown back. As a result, he looked quite ferocious.

As Xu Qing looked over, the young man looked back nervously. Then he hurried over and knelt in front of Xu Qing.

"Senior, I am Shi Pangui. Many thanks to you, Senior, for the kindness of saving my life!" [1]

Xu Qing looked the young man up and down. He had a rather strange name, but Xu Qing didn't inquire about it. "It was nothing. If I hadn't done something, Senior Duanmu would have saved you."

Nevertheless, Shi Pangui kowtowed three times, then looked up and nervously said, "Either way, Senior, you're the one who saved me. I'll never forget that kindness."

With that, he took a meal box out and placed it off to the side. [2]

"I know you have a very high cultivation base, Senior, and I have nothing of value to offer you. This is some food my missus made. Many thanks, Senior!"

With that, Shi Pangui stood, bowed to Xu Qing, then respectfully backed up to the teleportation portal. A moment later, he disappeared.

Xu Qing looked at the meal box. It was filled with aromatic pastries that someone had clearly taken much effort to prepare.

Given Xu Qing's skill in the dao of poison, all it took was a single whiff for him to check for poison in food. He didn't detect any such poison, so he picked one up. Seeing Ling'er salivating off to the side, he took a bite to make sure they were safe. Then he gave a piece to Ling'er.

When she took a bite, her eyes narrowed with pleasure.

“Coo. Coooo.” The flavor was so wonderful that Ling’er couldn’t help but speak in the way she had as a child.

Seeing how happy Ling’er was caused Xu Qing to smile. He ended up giving her all the pastries. Later, he closed his eyes and went back to meditation.

More days passed. Shi Pangui came back to visit a few times, and each time he brought delicious food with him. He always seemed to have something on his mind, but was always hesitating to give voice to it. Eventually, he couldn’t hold it in any longer. Eyes brimming with hope, he said, “Senior, the chancellor said that you’re from another region? So... how are we humans doing out there?”

Shi Pangui was obviously nervous, but his hopefulness seemed to surpass that nervousness. He had lived his entire life in Moonrite Region, unable to leave, and doomed to a fate he couldn’t escape. That said, even in childhood, he had heard people talking about the glory of humankind, and about how powerful humans were. But all he saw was how weak and feeble humans were, to the point where they were little more than food to the nonhumans. He had seen misery and grief that left him shaken and dazed.

And the reality was that it didn’t matter what Xu Qing told him. It wouldn’t change his situation. But he still wanted to get an answer to his question. He wanted to know if what the older humans said was true, that human society outside the Moonrite Region was glorious and beautiful. That alone would give him pride and strength.

Xu Qing looked at Shi Pangui for a few breaths of time.

As the moments ticked by, the light in Shi Pangui’s eyes faded.

Xu Qing smiled and softly said, “Humans on the outside live in peace and work happily. They have good lives. There’s little fighting, and everyone gets along. Our reigning emperor has outstanding ability and grand vision. We recently fought a war with the Nightshades, and came out victorious. Nonhumans bow their heads in our presence. Either they choose to join us, or we destroy them. What’s more, our emperor firmly believes that one day he will be able to change things here in the Moonrite Region.”

His words, and his smile, caused Shi Pangui’s eyes to light up, and his heart to race. “I knew it! Me and Zhou Wangbei got into a big argument last night. She said that humans on the outside are the lowest of the low. I told her that’s impossible! We humans have noble blood. Maybe we’re weak and powerless in Moonrite Region, but in the past, we conquered Revered Ancient, and that means we’re definitely glorious on the outside! Many thanks, Senior!”

Shi Pangui excitedly bowed to Xu Qing, then hurried away to tell his wife, friends, and family what he’d found out.

Xu Qing watched him leave. He sighed. Now he understood the meaning behind Shi Pangui’s name. ‘Pangui’ referred to a return to glory for all humankind. [3]

The other name, Wangbei, came from the fact that humankind’s Imperial Region lay to the north. [4]

Over the past few days, Xu Qing had begun to speculate what was happening in the lower levels of this tomb. It seemed likely there was a colony of humans who lived there, and the ‘chancellor’ Shi Pangui had mentioned was none other than Duanmu Zang. Humans took shelter here to avoid the

bitter life they would otherwise live outside. And that was why Duanmu Zang had told him not to leave the cave temple.

Feeling a sudden swell of respect in his heart, Xu Qing stood, clasped hands, and bowed at the waist.

As he did that, Duanmu Zang materialized on one of the other statues. Looking at the spot where Shi Pangu had disappeared, he turned to Xu Qing. When he spoke, his voice was a bit hoarse.

“Thank you. Did humans on the outside actually win a big victory?”

Xu Qing nodded solemnly. “The Holytide Region belongs to humankind now. And we have a domain treasure.”

Duanmu Zang hopped off the statue and strode over to Xu Qing. This was the closest they had ever been to each other. In the past, they had always interacted at a distance. Duanmu Zang sat down, took out a jug of alcohol, and tossed it to Xu Qing.

“Explain everything,” he said.

Xu Qing took a long drink, frowned, and then took out a jug of alcohol from his bag of holding, which he handed to Duanmu Zang. Duanmu Zang’s eyes lit up, and he took it.

And thus, the two of them drank together as Xu Qing gave Duanmu Zang a general overview of recent events. Of course, he didn’t reveal his true identity. He told everything from the perspective of an observer.

Duanmu Zang didn’t say anything the entire time. He just listened intently.

Xu Qing finished the story right about the time they finished the alcohol.

Eyes narrowing, Duanmu Zang said, “What you saw was this Seventh Prince’s actions. And you heard the emperor’s orders. But you overlooked something. Seventh Prince’s mother and her people!”

Xu Qing’s gaze hardened.

“As an imperial prince,” Duanmu Zang continued, “it makes sense that he’s daring and reckless. But given the bigger picture, it’s clear he has deeper reasons for being so confident. The way he handles complicated matters with such ease leads me to believe that his mother might not be human. And even if she is, well, she’s definitely not from ordinary stock!

“As for the emperor, I find his actions very thought-provoking. Everything he does seems to be handled perfectly... But the reason for that is that you’re looking at the outcome, and it seems like the outcome of everything is completely under his control. But it seems to me that there’s some other bigger force behind the scenes, carefully manipulating everything.”

Duanmu Zang looked up at Xu Qing. “Everything you’ve described so far... it’s just the beginning. If I was the emperor, I would have long since put someone in Sea-Sealing County that I trusted. To

be my eyes there, and keep watch over everything. Whoever this person is, they wouldn't have a very high cultivation base, otherwise they would draw too much attention."

Xu Qing didn't react visibly, but inside, he was shaken.

Duanmu Zang didn't say anything beyond that. Floating up into the air, he looked off into the distance for a long moment, then turned back to Xu Qing. "Would you like to see my home?"

Chapter 557: Fireflies in the Night (part 1)

Duanmu Zang hovered in the darkness of the cave temple and looked at Xu Qing, his words still echoing back and forth.

Xu Qing stood, clasped hands and bowed. "Thank you."

Earlier, Duanmu Zang had thanked Xu Qing for making the outside world seem beautiful, and in turn, giving hope to the people here. Now, Xu Qing thanked Duanmu Zang for trusting him.

Duanmu Zang waved his hand, and a vortex appeared in front of him. He stepped inside.

Xu Qing followed. Since he had come here nearly a month ago, he had never gone below the first level of the tomb. After stepping through the vortex, he found himself in a world of mortals. He was still underground. But the open area was massive, enough that it created an entire subterranean city. It was a bustling place. Chatting and laughter drifted through the air to Xu Qing's ears. Ling'er stuck her head out and looked at the city.

All residents of the city were human, and the population was well over 100,000. This was the first human city Xu Qing had seen in Moonrite Region, and also the most humans he had seen gathered in one place. Though he had been prepared to see something like this, it was still an astonishing sight. What was even more surprising was that the ceiling overhead was covered with a blue canopy.

That canopy was massive, and it almost looked like a blue sky. There were even beautiful white clouds. As for the ground, though there was a city, there were also trees, vegetation, and even fields of crops off in the distance. A glowing ball of light hung above everything. It was actually a bottle in which some heavenfire had been sealed using a special magic, making it like a sun. As that glowing light filled the cave, it was possible to hear children reading out loud in their classes.

In Xu Qing's travels in the Moonrite region, all the humans he'd seen had looked numb and lowly. Like food waiting to be eaten. Because of that, Xu Qing knew that only a very courageous and broad-minded person could create a city like this, and offer safety and refuge to so many other humans. Not all powerful experts cared about taking care of mortals. To many such people, survival was more important than anything else.

"This is my home," Duanmu Zang said softly.

Heart swelling with respect, Xu Qing once again bowed.

As time passed, his opinion of Duanmu Zang had been slowly changing. That was especially true right now. In fact, because of what he was seeing, his impression had completely changed.

When Duanmu Zang looked at the city, his gaze was gentle and kind. The light of the heavenfire 'sun' glittered in his eyes. He smiled. He looked like an elderly person gazing at all of his descendants.

“History hasn’t treated humans well in the Moonrite Region. Life is hard and full of bitterness. It was like that even when I was a child. Most of the people you see here once lived terrible lives in the territory of the Twofold Alliance.”

Right now, Duanmu Zang seemed like a completely different person than the one who had been fighting with the nonhumans outside. When he returned here, his devious, treacherous, and ruthless nature vanished. And the only thing left behind was warmth and kindness.

“There’s only so much I can do. I can’t save all of them. But I can help some. I can save a few. Over time, that number adds up to what you see here.”

Xu Qing felt deeply moved by Duanmu Zang’s words. What was more, it was obvious that it must have been hard to carve out a safe refuge for humans here. To many top experts, something like this would be a hindrance.

Emotions swirled in Xu Qing as he followed Duanmu Zang into the city. The buildings were simple, and the people wore plain clothing. Xu Qing saw no signs of luxury. There were no businesses on the street. Instead, everyone helped each other. He saw smiles everywhere. As he walked along, he realized that there were middle-aged people present, as well as youngsters and children. But there were no old people.

“The elderly prefer death,” Duanmu Zang explained simply. “They don’t want to waste food.”

There was grief in his eyes, but that grief disappeared when excited voices reached his ears.

“It’s the chancellor.”

“Greetings, Chancellor!”

“It’s Grandpa Chancellor! Hi, Grandpa!”

“Grandpa Chancellor, I’ve been looking at those clouds in the sky for so long now. How come they don’t move?”[1]

A crowd was building. The middle-aged people had respectful looks on their faces. The youths seemed excited. And the children treated Duanmu Zang like he was family as they raced over and started running playful circles around him.

Kneeling down, Duanmu Zang smiled and took a small boy into his arms. “The clouds in the sky can definitely move. But they’re sleeping right now! Once they wake up, then they’ll start moving.”

Laughter and chatting ensued. Some people looked at Xu Qing leerily, but most seemed friendly. Apparently, anyone that was with Duanmu Zang was a person they trusted. Like family.

Xu Qing followed as Duanmu Zang led the way through the city. He saw many scenes play out just like before. At one point, they passed a school.

Looking at the school, Duanmu Zang sighed and said, “History is about legacy. Civilization has to continue! We humans live bitter lives here in the Moonrite Region, but I really hope that more people can understand how glorious humankind was in the past. We must never forget that!”

Xu Qing looked at the school, and listened to the sound of the children reading out loud from their textbooks. They were studying about human history. There were many inaccurate parts that actually sounded wonderful. There were some places in the city that taught about cultivation, or plants and vegetation. By studying there, the mortals would have a chance to rise to a higher level of existence.

There were a lot of children around. At one point they stopped at an alchemy school, where Xu Qing heard the voice of a young girl.

“Teacher, I know about that seven-leaf clover you just mentioned! A while back I searched everywhere for it but couldn’t find any! I couldn’t find any of that soaring ox sapling either! [2]

Hearing that, Duanmu Zang quietly said, “The cultivation methods taught here, and the information about plants and vegetation, are partly from me. But I’ve also compiled a lot of information that I either won in fights or traded for. Most are from ancient records, so they’re not exactly very meaningful. The majority of the plants and vegetation they learn about don’t even grow in Moonrite Region. But knowledge is knowledge. Who knows... maybe it’ll be useful in the future.”

Xu Qing nodded quietly. Strolling through the city, he saw a lot of low-level cultivators similar to Shi Pangu. They were members of the city militia who, during times when the Heavenfire Skycrossing wasn’t an issue, would go out and trade with other cities for living essentials.

Time slipped by slowly but surely.

Eventually, the heavenfire ‘sun’ in the sky dimmed, bringing night. At that point, glittering lights like stars appeared overhead. They were actually the refined remains of Mirrorlings. By this point, Xu Qing had been through the entire city.

Beneath the darkness of the night, Duanmu Zang stopped outside of an abandoned house. He looked at Xu Qing for a long moment.

“What do you think of my home?” he asked in a hoarse voice.

“You are the pinnacle of virtue, Senior!” Xu Qing said solemnly.

“I can’t claim that,” Duanmu Zang said, shaking his head. “What you see is me protecting them. But the reality is... that they’re here to keep me company. That’s why I call this place my home.” Duanmu Zang turned to leave, and Xu Qing made to follow. But then Duanmu Zang said, “Heavenfire Skycrossing will last two more months. You can stay here for now.”

Xu Qing stopped in place. He knew the significance of those words. Duanmu Zang was inviting him to stay in his own home.

Looking very solemn, Xu Qing clasped hands and bowed.

After Duanmu Zang left for his own residence in the city, Xu Qing turned and looked at the house. It was a simple structure, but to Xu Qing, it was full of the warmth and comfort that had been lacking during his travels in the Moonrite Region. And so, he moved in.

Ling’er chose to temporarily take human form. Smiling broadly, she started organizing things and working hard to prove to Xu Qing that she knew how to do housework. Seeing Ling’er scurrying

around busily brought a smile to Xu Qing's face. Gradually, he relaxed and settled into life in the city. It actually wasn't very hard. The people here were friendly and approachable. Xu Qing's mood became increasingly stable.

The 'sky' overhead alternated between black and blue, and as the Heavenfire Skycrossing continued outside, half a month passed.

During that time, Shi Pangui came to visit at least seven or eight times. He always brought delicious food with him. His wife clearly had culinary talent, and the food she made delighted Ling'er.

At first, Ling'er didn't reveal her human form to anyone. But after she got used to Shi Pangui, she eventually stopped hiding when he came around.

When Shi Pangui saw her for the first time, his jaw nearly dropped. However, the next time he came to visit, he brought a young woman who looked to be around the same age as Ling'er, as well as a young girl.

"Senior," Shi Pangui said respectfully, "allow me to introduce my wife and my younger sister."

The woman and girl seemed very nervous as they offered curtsying bows to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing smiled warmly. He had previously asked Shi Pangui about how he ended up unconscious in the mine during Heavenfire Skycrossing. Shi Pangui had explained that he'd been out trying to get medicine for his wife. She was very weak, and got sick a lot. Two months ago, her illness had become more serious. Although Shi Pangui knew the Heavenfire Skycrossing was coming, he'd been too anxious, and had thus taken the risk to visit one of the allied species' cities to buy medicine. It had been a dangerous risk, but he felt he had no choice.

"The chancellor is responsible for a hundred thousand people. It's not as if every person can go asking him for help with every single thing."

That was how Shi Pangui had explained it when Xu Qing asked. Everyone in the city felt gratitude and deep respect for Duanmu Zang, and thus didn't want to burden him with too many things. They tended to care for their own situations.

Xu Qing had not encountered many places in his life where people behaved with such virtue. After a quick visual examination of Shi Pangui's wife, Xu Qing took some medicinal pills out of his bag of holding.

"Your daoist partner is suffering from yin poisoning from living in this cave environment, plus an overabundance of yang pathogens from the heavenfire. They don't mix together any more than water and fire. These medicinal pills should neutralize those things to an extent. They can't completely extrude them, but they'll help a lot."

Shi Pangui gratefully accepted the medicinal pills. His wife was equally grateful, and the two of them even tried to get on their knees to kowtow. Xu Qing reached out to prevent them from doing so.

“There’s no need for you to kowtow. Think of the pills as a thank you for all the wonderful pastries.”

Shi Pangui and his wife seemed even more grateful. Meanwhile, the little girl was surreptitiously eyeing the medicinal pill bottle with great curiosity. Eventually, they had to leave to take the girl to class.

After they were gone, Ling’er started eating the pastries they’d brought. Looking at Xu Qing, she smiled, her eyes turning into crescent moons. She was really proud.

My Big Bro Xu Qing is such a good guy. Even if the person he’s dealing with has a low cultivation base, he won’t be all high and mighty. He’s so kind and gentle.

Xu Qing was surprised to see Ling’er staring at him. “What’s wrong, Ling’er?”

“Huh? Oh, nothing!” Flushing a bit, she hurried over and grabbed his forearm. “Why don’t we go for a walk, Big Bro Xu Qing?”

Chapter 557: Fireflies in the Night (part 2)

Xu Qing looked at the sky and saw that it was roughly noon. He nodded. Together with Ling’er, he left the house and started strolling through the city. Ling’er was in very high spirits, and couldn’t hold back from hopping and skipping almost like a child. She was so cute that many city residents noticed her and smiled. Some families brought out food as gifts. Ling’er would offer spirited greetings and scarf the food down happily. Ling’er’s child-like innocence made Xu Qing smile.

They walked around corners and down streets until eventually they passed a school. The class topic was plants and vegetation, which caused Xu Qing to stop and look over.

It was an open-air classroom that all children in the city could attend. The lecturer was a middle-aged woman. She had no legs, and sat in a wheelchair as she gave a very serious lecture about plants and vegetation. She was surrounded by children between the ages of about seven and thirteen, and all of them were paying very close attention.

There was one young girl who seemed completely absorbed in the information as she listened and took notes. That young girl was none other than Shi Pangui’s sister. Seeing her reminded Xu Qing of his days back in the scavenger basecamp. After Grandmaster Bai had invited him in to attend lectures, he had paid attention as raptly as this young girl was paying attention.

After watching for a short time, he turned and left.

Another half a month passed.

Heavenfire Skycrossing was to last for three months. Xu Qing had spent the first month in the cave temple above. He had spent the second month in the city. He was not the type of person who liked a lot of hustle and bustle, so he spent most of his time in his room meditating.

Ling’er, in contrast, got bored easily. At first, she kept asking Xu Qing to go out with her, but eventually, when she got familiar with the city, she didn’t hesitate to go out on her own. Although Xu Qing doubted she would run into any trouble, he arranged for Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior to go along with her and keep her safe.

It didn't take long for Ling'er to become a lot more popular than Xu Qing in the city. And thanks to Shi Pangu's wife, she got to know a lot of the other women in the city, both those her age, and also the older ones. All of them seemed to really like her, and of course, everyone was curious about her relationship with Xu Qing.

Whenever that got brought up, Ling'er would blush shyly. Before long, the women of the city had taken it upon themselves to teach her how to cook. As they said, *the way to a man's heart is through his stomach*.

Ling'er excitedly devoted herself fully to mastering cooking. There were other women who emphasized how important it was for her to learn how to sew. After all, a woman couldn't let her man go around in clothes some other woman had fixed. After that, Ling'er was even more excited to learn sewing. She was determined that, going forward, *she* would be the one to mend all of her Big Bro Xu Qing's clothing.

Five days after Ling'er had started to learn how to cook, Xu Qing ate one of her meals for the first time. She bustled around the kitchen for two hours before presenting him with several dishes.

Xu Qing looked down at the blackened vegetables, then up at Ling'er's expectant, and also slightly nervous, expression. He took a bite. It took him a while to chew it up and swallow it down.

"What's wrong, Big Bro Xu Qing?" she asked nervously. "Is it good?"

A long moment passed, and then Xu Qing smiled. "It's delicious."

Ling'er burst with joy. "Then eat some more, Big Bro Xu Qing!"

Xu Qing hesitated, then went ahead and finished all the food. After, he prepared to go back to meditation.

"Don't worry, Big Bro Xu Qing," Ling'er said exuberantly, "I'll cook again tomorrow!"

Xu Qing was quiet for several breaths of time, then he nodded.

Ling'er wasn't the only one getting popular in the city. Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior also took human form, and quickly started becoming very well-known. In fact, he soon became more popular than Ling'er, despite getting a later start than her. The reason was that, while accompanying Ling'er around the city, he'd found a place where storytellers would ply their trade. After listening to one of the storytellers, and being far from impressed, he'd taken the stage and told the story of one of the books he'd read.

To people living in the Moonrite Region, it was a very fresh and innovative tale. What was more, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior also sprinkled in a few things from Xu Qing's real-life story. Because of the vivid, lifelike nature of the narrative, he earned quite a bit of cheering and applause at the end.

At first, only a few people listened to his story. But the crowds grew every day. Given how many years the patriarch had spent trembling in fear at Xu Qing's side, it had obviously been a very long time since he enjoyed any public praise. It was so enticing that he started taking advantage of the moments when Ling'er was studying cooking and sewing to sneak off and tell stories.

At the moment, he was sitting in a small roadside pavilion surrounded by a crowd of several hundred listeners.

Looking out at the crowd, the patriarch cleared his throat and then calmly said, “Last we left off, Seven Blood Eyes sent tens of thousands of dharmaboats to surround the Merfolk Isles. The Merfolk patriarch was no hero. The truth is that....”

The audience listened, entranced, as the patriarch told the story with great gusto, his voice rising and falling during all the right parts. Everyone felt like they were right there, watching the events play out. Duanmu Zang was up in midair, invisible, listening along and nodding occasionally.

That evening, when the blue of the ‘sky’ was starting to turn dark, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior stopped talking and cleared his throat.

“If you want to know what happens next, please come back tomorrow at the same time. The story will continue then.”

When the audience realized the story was over for the day, they seemed to get very anxious, and started crying out.

“Hey, at least finish this part of the story!”

“This installment was short. Too short. Way too short!”

“What even happened in the story this afternoon? I hardly remember!”

“No! You have to at least tell the next part! How could you stop right here?”

Hearing that, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior smiled. “I’ve read tens of thousands of stories, and I can tell you that, although this part might have seemed boring, the reality is that there was a lot of important information hidden in the narrative. You can’t just gobble down the story! Savor what’s happening. Enjoy it!”

As the crowd hooted and guffawed, the patriarch hummed a little tune, clasped his hands behind his back, and slowly walked off to find Ling’er.

The shadow was very envious of how much Ling’er and the patriarch were shining. It also wanted to go out and have some fun. However, it didn’t dare. All it could do was lay on the ground and stare impatiently at Xu Qing as he sat there like a block of wood, meditating.

That said, Xu Qing did have visitors. Shi Panguai would come to visit, as did his little sister. She was only about eleven or twelve years old. Every time she came to visit, she would bring some type of simple food, like a roasted sweet potato, and would set it off to the side as a gift. Then she would stare at him nervously for a while as if she wasn’t sure what to say.

After a few visits, she finally got impatient enough that she blurted, “Big Bro, can you... can you concoct pills?”

She hadn’t forgotten how Xu Qing gave her sister-in-law some medicinal pills.

Xu Qing nodded.

The girl immediately got excited. Taking out a little notebook, she asked him a simple question about plants and vegetation.

He gently explained, “Seven-leaf clover, also known as mutagen-expelling grass, is a spirit plant with a single long blade similar to wood rices. It’s a perennial grass that grows in the shade in

humid, wide-open areas. It will not grow in areas that the broken face of the god has looked at directly.”

The girl wrote down everything that Xu Qing said. Then she quickly asked a second question about something she’d learned previously. Both of these questions were things her teacher hadn’t been able to explain.

Xu Qing patiently offered a detailed explanation. The girl kept asking questions, one after another. As he provided the answers, he could see how determined this girl was to learn about plants and vegetation, also how outstanding her memory was. The latter was one of the foundational elements in learning about plants and vegetation. The question-and-answer session lasted for about four hours. After that, the girl came over every few days. On one particular day, she came with even more sweet potatoes than before, which she carefully placed off to the side before starting up with more questions.

Xu Qing eyed the sweet potatoes, smiled, and then launched into his explanations.

When evening came, the girl sighed contentedly and left with a smile on her face. However, later that night, her brother Shi Pangui brought her back to apologize and promise she wouldn’t bother him again.

Xu Qing looked at how nervous both of them looked, and was about to speak when he noticed the obstinate look in the girl’s eyes. After some thought, he just nodded. He was curious to see if the girl would come back to ask more questions.

A few days later, she came back.

This time, she changed tactics. She timidly took some medicinal plants out and asked, “Teacher, is this the golden twistgrass you mentioned?” [1]

Xu Qing looked at the little plant with an odd expression on his face. Then he looked back at the girl. Eyes shining with a profound look, he went on to explain how to tell golden twistgrass apart from plants that looked somewhat like it.

The girl apparently believed her tactic to be very effective, because in the following days, she kept bringing random plants to ask similar questions. Xu Qing always went into a very detailed explanation.

Time passed. Before long, the Heavenfire Skycrossing was coming to an end. Calculations indicated that there were only ten more days. At that point, the sea of flames would retreat, and the Heavenfire Skycrossing wouldn’t come again for a few more decades.

It’s almost time to leave, Xu Qing thought. With that, he cast his senses out until he located Ling’er, who was practicing sewing with some of the older women in the city. And then he found Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior, who was prattling on to a large crowd. Xu Qing looked out at all the people in the city, and in the end, all he could do was sigh.

“You’re leaving?” Duanmu Zang asked. He had just appeared out of nowhere in the room.

Xu Qing nodded.

Duanmu Zang sat down. “You have nice alcohol.”

Xu Qing grinned. He transferred about half of the alcohol he'd brought along into a separate bag of holding and handed it to Duanmu Zang.

Duanmu Zang accepted it, looked inside, and then broke out into a smile. He looked up at Xu Qing.

"I'm not just going to take your alcohol without compensation. I noticed how you were zipping around up at the Heavenfire Sea. My guess is that you need the heavenfire from there to cultivate some sort of magical technique. I can lend you a secret treasure that will give you extra protection against the fire. It'll allow you to sink much deeper into the lava. That way, you won't attract attention as easily, and you should be much safer."

As the words left his mouth, he reached out his hand and opened his palm. Resting there was a gruish brown eyeball covered with blood-red veins, looking right at Xu Qing.

Chapter 558: The Sorrow of Parting; Disappearing Over the Horizon (part 1)

The moment Xu Qing saw the eyeball, his gaze hardened. Off to the side, Ling'er blinked a few times and quietly edged closer to Xu Qing.

Duanmu Zang glanced at Ling'er then back at Xu Qing. The brown eye was covered with blood-red veins, and it emanated a faint sensation of decay. A caustic aroma pulsed off it, quickly filling the small room. The faint sound of screaming could be heard.

"What is it?" Xu Qing asked, looking up at Duanmu Zang.

"It's a gruish item I picked up when I first discovered this place," Duanmu Zang said, looking very serious. "It has spectacular fire-resistance qualities. However, you first have to subjugate it. I doubt that will pose a challenge for you. It's timid. Just frighten it a few times, and it won't dare to cause any problems. I used its power to explore some of the deep areas in the lava.

"The depths of the Heavenfire Sea are full of profound mysteries, so I recommend not going lower than 3,000 meters. Past that, you'll run into warding spells set up by the Red Moon Cathedral. Few people can get past such things. I've even seen a few mutant beasts swim down past 3,000 meters and end up shredded to pieces."

With that, he tossed the eyeball to Xu Qing.

After Xu Qing caught the eyeball, he found it was still staring at him, all while emanating a vile, malicious sensation.

Xu Qing's expression didn't change. Rolling the eyeball in his hand, he said, "Senior, has the Red Moon Cathedral set up other warding spells in the Moonrite Region, similar to the ones in the Heavenfire Sea?"

Duanmu Zang sat down, hefted one of the alcohol jugs Xu Qing had given him, and took a drink. He nodded, a complex expression on his face.

“Quite a few, actually. In the Moonrite Region, there is no higher authority than the Red Moon Cathedral. Their whims determine life or death for all living beings. Any who lack respect, even by the tiniest of margins, will end up suffering a tragic fate.”

Xu Qing digested that and then said, “Senior, I’m interested in knowing more about the Red Moon Cathedral. Do you mind telling me a bit more?”

Duanmu Zang peered at Xu Qing. “Boy, in the Moonrite Region, the Red Moon Cathedral is like a god. You absolutely cannot blaspheme it. In other words, be cautious about provoking them. Otherwise, they won’t just kill you. They have ways to turn you into an offering. To curse you. And if that happens, you’ll never leave this place.”

Duanmu Zang’s face was cold, but his heart burned. Given his interactions with Xu Qing, and his life experience, he had come to understand Xu Qing a lot more. And his impression of him had changed a lot. Although his expression seemed solemn, his words were obviously a reminder and a bit of a warning.

Xu Qing nodded. He was no fool. Though he had his violet moon, he obviously couldn’t afford to underestimate anyone or anything related to the red moon. What was more, he also knew that there were some things that would be difficult to avoid in the Moonrite Region. The more he knew about the Red Moon Cathedral, the better chance he would have to avoid some of those things. Therefore, he asked for some more details.

Duanmu Zang considered his request, then said, “The more you know, the better. It’ll help you understand how truly terrifying the Red Moon Cathedral is around here. Members of the Red Moon Cathedral are like herdsmen for Crimson Mother. Every so often, the various species here have to voluntarily bring sacrifices to them.

“The Red Moon Cathedral doesn’t care the least bit about the lives of the species here. Every time Crimson Mother comes, the majority of the living beings in Moonrite Region end up being devoured. Therefore, the mission of the Red Moon Cathedral is to gather food and put it into storage before Crimson Mother arrives. After Crimson Mother leaves, the species need to proliferate again. They’re almost like crops, constantly being harvested and regrown.”

Duanmu Zang spoke as calmly as if he were recounting a story that didn’t affect him at all, as opposed to explaining his own doom.

Xu Qing listened carefully.

Ling’er watched them drink for a bit, then after some thought, she hurried to the kitchen, rolled up her sleeves, and started preparing a meal. That was what the other women had taught her. When the men drank, then she, as a good wife, should prepare a few dishes to make it obvious how able and virtuous she was.

Xu Qing looked over at her and seemed like he wanted to say something. In the end, he didn’t. When he saw how excited she seemed, he just couldn’t say anything.

Duanmu Zang also noticed what was going on, but didn’t take it to heart. He just continued drinking and explaining the Red Moon Cathedral to Xu Qing. As a local, his understanding of the

Red Moon Cathedral would obviously surpass anything that might show up in an intelligence report.

Xu Qing listened attentively. Eventually, Duanmu Zang reached the end of his explanation.

“Based on my calculations, the Red Moon Cathedral will be coming soon. After you leave this place, if you ever see them, keep your distance and stay out of sight. They’re easy to spot, considering they dress in all red. Normally speaking, as long as you don’t provoke them, they won’t bother you. They don’t care about random rogue cultivators, any more than an elephant cares about ants.” Duanmu Zang laughed self-deprecatingly. “What they *do* care about are the species that don’t have enough offerings prepared. Any species that isn’t sufficiently prepared has to make up for the difference.

“For example, over forty years ago, the Whitelaw species in the north didn’t meet the demands of the cathedral. Therefore, a godherald came with some godservants, and ended up harvesting seventy percent of their species to make up the difference.”

“What kind of cultivation base do the godheralds have?” Xu Qing asked.

“No one knows exactly how many godheralds the Red Moon Cathedral has. They come from all species. All are Void Returning experts. The godservants are in Spirit Trove. Anyone lower than Spirit Trove are godslaves.

Xu Qing thought about everything he had learned so far. “Are there godchildren?”

“Yes,” Duanmu Zang said, his eyes flickering with fear. “There’s one godchild in the Red Moon Cathedral. Supposedly, he’s an actual blood relative of the red moon. No one knows his cultivation base, but in reality, cultivation base is irrelevant to him. What’s important is that he commands the power of a god. Therefore... he can exempt anyone from the fate of becoming food, and allow them to survive the coming of Crimson Mother.” Duanmu Zang sighed. “Because of that, countless powerful experts go crazy trying to impress him. Given they have the chance of earning exemption, they’ll do anything he asks them to.”

Hearing that caused an imperceptible glimmer to pass through Xu Qing’s eyes. After that, he didn’t ask any more questions about the Red Moon Cathedral. Instead, he asked about the Twofold Alliance. After all, that was the most pressing issue he had to deal with.

“The Twofold Alliance has a total of six Spirit Trove experts, two of which are patriarchs. As for Void Returning...” Duanmu Zang shook his head. “They have none. Void Returning experts are the most flavorful, so when one appears, they’ll be marked by the Red Moon Cathedral. Think of them as ripe fruit. Although nothing happens to them immediately, they’re most definitely put onto the menu.

“Because of that, most cultivators in the Moonrite Region stop at the great circle of Spirit Trove. If they can avoid breaking through, they do.

“Once you’re on the menu, your fate is sealed. You’ll die eventually. In contrast, if you stay off the menu, then you have a chance of surviving. Although that chance is small, it still exists. And most people would rather have a shot at staying alive.”

Xu Qing had previously suspected the Twofold Alliance didn’t have Void Returning experts, and now he had confirmation.

Duanmu Zang continued speaking. “The Mirrorlings and Skyfaces are really just minor species. Of their six Spirit Trove experts, only the two patriarchs have complete secret troves.

“The others, including that royal preceptor, are in the process of growing heavenly daos for their secret troves. They’re still in ‘dao begetting and dawnstar raising.’”

Xu Qing didn’t know very much about Spirit Trove. Considering how far away it was, he hadn’t bothered asking his Master any questions. So this was his first time hearing a description of it.

“Dao begetting and dawnstar raising?” Xu Qing asked. Those words had stuck out to him.

Duanmu Zang nodded. “To truly unlock the power of magical laws within your secret trove, you have to generate a heavenly dao, and also cause a dawnstar to rise. Only then will your secret trove be considered complete, making you a true Spirit Trove expert. [1]

“It’s an extremely difficult stage. Having the proper cultivation base and lots of resources are only one element of success. You also need enlightenment of the power of magical laws to be able to generate a heavenly dao. That’s the most critical aspect. In reality, most Spirit Trove cultivators don’t proceed past the stage called ‘dao begetting and dawnstar raising.’

“To Nascent Soul cultivators, Spirit Trove cultivators in that ‘dao begetting’ phase are actually extremely strong. But to someone in the true first stage of Spirit Trove, dao begetting cultivators have not achieved their dao, and are thus unworthy. It’s similar to the ‘before and after’ difference of life flames in Foundation Establishment.”

Xu Qing’s eyes narrowed.

“I’m not sure how it is in other regions,” Duanmu Zang went on, “but here in the Moonrite Region, for every thousand Spirit Trove cultivators, there are only one or two who generate a heavenly dao and actually complete their first secret trove.

“The rest stay in the dao begetting phase. Many of them ultimately suffer severe injuries, the reason being that if your secret trove collapses before being completed, your cultivation base drops significantly.”

Xu Qing looked at Duanmu Zang and thought back to what he had seen back at the Heavenfire Sea. He had personally laid eyes on Duanmu Zang's collapsed spirit trove.

Noticing the look in Xu Qing's eyes, Duanmu Zang coolly continued, "That's what happened to me, so I can tell you firsthand how dramatic the difference is between a Spirit Trove cultivator in dao begetting and dawnstar raising, and one who has passed that phase."

Xu Qing nodded and was about to continue with more questions when Ling'er bustled out with two plates of blackened food. She put them down on the table, one in front of each of them, then stared at them expectantly.

Xu Qing smiled, picked up some chopsticks, and started slowly eating. A moment later, a look of praise appeared on his face, and he took a drink.

Stunned, Duanmu Zang looked at the blackened food, then the approving look on Xu Qing's face, and finally Ling'er, who was looking at him with hopeful expectation.

Duanmu Zang also took a bite. His expression did not change. After slowly chewing and swallowing, he took a drink and looked at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing looked back at him.

Duanmu Zang's expression became one of admiration. Turning to Ling'er, he said, "Excellent."

Ling'er burst with joy.

Xu Qing smiled and continued eating. Seeing that, Duanmu Zang cleared his throat.

"I have a batch of medicinal pills I need to check on. See you later." With that he stood, blurred, and disappeared from sight.

"Is it that good?" Ling'er said. "Now I want to try!" Ling'er went to take some of the food, but Xu Qing quickly put the last bit into his mouth.

Ling'er looked very pleased. Seeing that Xu Qing was going to start meditating again, she hurried over, picked up the set of clothes she was working on, and started sewing again. *I definitely have to get Big Bro Xu Qing to wear the clothes I'm making for him.*

Thinking of that future scene, and how wonderful it would be, Ling'er focused completely on her work.

In that manner, the final ten days passed.

Chapter 558: The Sorrow of Parting; Disappearing Over the Horizon (part 2)

As the day of departure neared, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior stopped cutting off the story in the middle of the good parts. He also sped up the plot a bit. On the day before Heavenfire Skycrossing ended, he reached the end of the tale.

Ling'er's mood became a bit more reserved as she realized they would be leaving soon. Deep in her heart, she wished she could stay. In the two months that had passed, she had made friends. She had also given out a lot of medicinal pills as gifts.

Xu Qing wasn't looking forward to parting ways with the little girl who loved alchemy. She had come to visit many, many times. Three days before it was time to leave, he decided to personally tell her that he was leaving.

"Panyan, take a seat in front of me," he said softly. The girl's name was Shi Panyan. [1]

"Yes, Teacher!" Shi Panyan had full confidence in Xu Qing, and thus immediately sat down in front of him.

Xu Qing reached up and put his hand on her forehead. "Don't resist."

Hearing that, Shi Panyan closed her eyes.

A moment later, Xu Qing shook his head and sighed inwardly. He had done a quick test in the hopes that he could somehow undo the red moon curse in her. At the very least, he had hoped to find out the basic principles that made the curse work. Unfortunately, given his current level of power, there was no way he could do anything about the curse in her blood. And he would need to do a lot more research, study, and experimentation. Unfortunately, such tests would require large amounts of blood, and meticulous vivisection. Xu Qing couldn't bring himself to do tests like that on humans.

"Panyan," Xu Qing whispered.

She quickly opened her eyes.

"I'm leaving in a few days."

Shi Panyan's eyes turned red and she bowed her head. She didn't say anything. She had come to realize a few days ago that this was coming, and had tried to prepare herself mentally. But when she heard the words coming from Xu Qing's mouth, her heart hurt.

Xu Qing thought back to her earnest hard work over the past month, and how she thirsted for knowledge. It was something Xu Qing was very familiar with. After a lot of thought, he'd made a decision.

Taking a medicinal codex out of his bag of holding, he rubbed the cover and thought about Grandmaster Bai. Then he handed the book to Shi Panyan.

"My Teacher gave this to me, and now I'm giving it to you."

Shi Panyan's little hands trembled as she reached out and took the book. She looked at it, then clasped it against her chest and gazed up at Xu Qing. Her eyes seemed sad and reluctant. She obviously wanted to say something, but didn't know how to form the words. In the end, though, she knew that she and her Teacher were from different worlds. Therefore, all the words she wanted to say transformed into one thing.

Shi Panyan kowtowed nine times to Xu Qing.

He accepted her kowtows, and then said, "If you carefully study this medicinal codex, you won't need any more help from me. Now go."

Shi Panyan got to her feet. She walked to the door and stood there, her skinny little frame looking unusually lonely and desolate. She looked over her shoulder. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she said, "Teacher, will I ever see you again?"

He looked up at her. She was only eleven or twelve, and he knew what kind of thoughts were in her heart and mind. Something very similar had happened to him once. [2]

He smiled warmly and nodded. "The world is a tavern for living beings. And the timescape is an old guest. As long as we don't die, we'll meet again. I hope that when we do, you'll have made something of yourself."

Shi Panyan committed the words to memory. Taking a deep breath, she bowed to Xu Qing, then left. As she walked through the night feeling very down, she clutched the medicinal codex against her chest, as if it was the embodiment of hope to her.

"As long as we don't die," she murmured, "we'll meet again!"

Xu Qing watched her go, thinking about Grandmaster Bai, as well as himself back at that time.

Teacher, I accepted an apprentice. Her name is Shi Panyan. She's very studious.

Xu Qing closed his eyes.

There was no farewell banquet. After the Heavenfire Skycrossing ended, the time came to leave the city. To Xu Qing, the people in that city were like fireflies in a world of darkness and gloom.

Before leaving, Ling'er embraced all of her friends, young and old. She cried a lot.

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior said farewell to the people who had come to listen to his stories. He was clearly loath to part with them.

Duanmu Zang stood next to Xu Qing, looking on and sighing inwardly.

Xu Qing also studied the crowd. He saw Shi Pangu off in the distance with his wife and sister. He clasped hands and bowed in farewell. Shi Panyan kept her head bowed as she stood there trembling slightly. She didn't want her Teacher to see her crying.

After taking it all in, Xu Qing quietly said, "Senior, do you mind seeing me out?"

He turned and started walking away. He left the city. He left the tomb.

Ling'er went back to her snake form and nestled in Xu Qing's sleeve. Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior went back into the Spike of Misfortune, feeling very melancholy.

Once outside the abandoned mine, Xu Qing gave Duanmu Zang some more jugs of alcohol. He also gave him some spirit stones, medicinal pills, and magical devices. In fact, he gave most of his collection.

The two of them looked at each other and nodded. Both wished each other well.

After that, one of them walked back into the mine, and the other flew up into the sky.

There were no flames above. It was dark again. However, there was a bit of the glow of fire coming from the direction of the Heavenfire Sea. The lands were all scorched and blackened. The mountain peaks looked crumpled, and there wasn't any sign of plants or vegetation. The world looked withered and dry. There was still some lingering heat.

As Xu Qing flew along, he tried to stop thinking about departures. He was used to such things. It had always been like this, from the time he was young. That said, even things that you think you're used to can still be difficult. The only difference as you get older is that it's easier to hide it inside.

A few days later, Xu Qing caught sight of the Heavenfire Sea. It looked the same as before. The lava still bubbled, and rumbling sounds still echoed out. As he flew out over the sea, he didn't see anyone else.

Because the Heavenfire Skycrossing had just ended, local cultivators would be most concerned with the rebuilding efforts. Few of them would do as Xu Qing was doing and immediately go to the Heavenfire Sea. He felt like he was the only person in the world.

That said, he was no less cautious than before. He wanted to find a distant and remote location to start melting the next life lamp.

Seven more days passed.

He was now in the very depths of the Heavenfire Sea. That evening, he noticed a red glow.

The source was an incomparably massive heart. As the heart beat, it sent out shocking thumping sounds into heaven and earth. Atop the massive heart was a red church temple. The construction was crude, and everything was as red as blood. It also pulsed with the god power of Crimson Mother. The most eye-catching thing about it was the statue that rose up above it. It was a kneeling statue, with its hands covering its eyes. Blood oozed out of the statue's eyes, ears, nose, and mouth.

Rotating around the heart were several dozen asteroids of varying sizes. They were pitch black, but they oozed with blood, making them look magenta. Atop each asteroid sat a cross-legged cultivator. They were all from different species, and none of them were moving. All had their eyes covered with their hands, and blood dripped from them down onto the asteroids. Not one of them spoke. The only sound to be heard was the beating of the heart. These people were obviously from the Red Moon Cathedral.

The moment Xu Qing spotted it, he dropped down into the lava. Once there, he continued to observe through narrowed eyes.

The huge heart was floating through the canopy of heaven, the asteroids orbiting around it. It seemed to be completely oblivious to everything around it as it flew toward some unknown destination.

In the Moonrite Region, they were gods. Any species who encountered them would either bow in obeisance or flee. No one would dare block their path. Eventually, after they were far in the distance, Xu Qing emerged from the lava. After ensuring they were really gone, he continued on his way.

Three days later, he found a suitable location. There, he took out the eyeball Duanmu Zang had given him. The eyeball was still staring at him. Thinking back to what Duanmu Zang had said about subjugating the eyeball, he summoned his shadow. The shadow manifested around him in a canopy of darkness. Its eyes glittered like countless stars, and all of them focused on the eyeball. The eyeball shivered.

Expression cold, Xu Qing tossed the eyeball into the black canopy.

"Have a chat with it."

The eyes in the dark canopy blinked, and malicious fluctuations of divine will spread out. The canopy wrapped around the eyeball.

Sometime later, the canopy spat the eyeball back out. The eyeball looked listless and terrified. It was trembling.

Xu Qing examined it, then called out Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior and told him to use the eyeball to polish the Spike of Misfortune. The patriarch complied with a vicious grin, and the eyeball trembled even more.

Finally, Xu Qing gripped the eyeball in his hand and dropped into the lava. The brown eyeball obediently sent out a defensive shield.

Although it looked timid and weak when dealing with Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior and the shadow, once in the lava, it really did a fantastic job of helping Xu Qing deal with the heat. This eyeball was a perfect example of the principles of mutual augmentation and suppression that exist in all living things. With the help of the eyeball's power, Xu Qing sank down further.

The shadow seemed concerned the eyeball might try something, so it stayed out in the open.

In that manner, Xu Qing sank down about 300 meters before settling cross-legged. Then he sucked in some of the flames from outside. It was only a bit, yet it instantly filled him with a sense of deadly crisis. The violet crystal immediately gobbled it up.

A light that was far more intense than before filled Xu Qing's sea of consciousness, shining right onto the immortal-shredding god-devouring lamp.

The lamp started melting. The process went much more quickly than before. Xu Qing watched excitedly. Meanwhile, the shadow was going all out to supervise the eyeball, and was continuously emanating a sensation of profound hunger.

The terrified eyeball did everything possible to reduce the heat from the lava.

Seven days later, Xu Qing had completely melted the immortal-shredding god-devouring lamp. His sea of consciousness vibrated as a 3,000-meter vortex appeared beneath the surface of the lava. Then, a fourth sundial life lamp appeared!

The gnomon shadow moved to a different time as its effects spread to the outside world. Being 300 meters below the surface of the lava, the effects, though dramatic, weren't as noticeable. Coupled with his remote location, they didn't attract any attention.

Seven more days passed, and Xu Qing opened his eyes. Another 3,000-meter vortex appeared as a fifth sundial appeared in his sea of consciousness. Terrifying fluctuations rose up from him the moment that fifth sundial formed. The gnomon shadows spun, all of them fourteen hours apart from each other at different times!

Xu Qing studied them thoughtfully. Several hours later, the first sundial's gnomon shadow stopped at noon. The ball of light also stopped moving. A sensation of enlightenment filled Xu Qing's mind.

Next, the other four sundials will stop at noon. When they're all at the same time, some special ability will manifest....

Xu Qing had no idea what it would be. But based on what he could sense, it was going to be the first time the true power of the sundials were revealed.

Chapter 559: A Bronze Coffin Under the Heavens Sea! (part 1)

The other four sundials will come to a stop soon.

Because each sundial was fourteen hours behind the dial in front of it, they stopped moving in a specific order. Anticipation filled Xu Qing's heart.

As he waited, he rose through the lava until he was only three meters below the surface. There, his eyes glittered. The lava was turning out to be very beneficial. Not only did it allow the violet crystal to melt the life lamps, it also... upgraded his Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits. At least, that was what it seemed like to Xu Qing. He had yet to confirm it. But considering his Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits could assimilate the remains of a fallen sun, then fundamentally speaking, this sea of flames should be beneficial to it.

After Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits became a nascent soul, it reached the third stage of development.

After some thought, he sent the golden crow nascent soul flying out of his forehead, surrounded by dazzling light. It started out as an ordinary nascent soul, but it took only a moment for it to transform into a golden crow. As it circled around Xu Qing, its cries echoed out in his mind. Then the golden crow inhaled deeply, causing the power of fire to sweep into its mouth. A tremor passed through it and its eyes narrowed. At the same time, the fire surrounding it grew more intense.

After fully digesting the fire, the golden crow shivered and let loose an even more piercing cry. Then it circled around Xu Qing again before diving directly into the lava.

Stunned, Xu Qing looked to see what would happen after that. A moment later he breathed a sigh of relief. The golden crow was a spirit, and its spirit qualities grew stronger after turning into a nascent soul. And considering its connection to Xu Qing's mind and heart, he could sense everything about it.

The golden crow remained at the three-meter mark, devouring the fire. As it did, its aura grew more intense, and it grew even more tails. Two hours later, Xu Qing's second sundial stopped. By then, the golden crow's number of tails had gone from 100 to 130. Excited, Xu Qing had the golden crow continue its devouring.

Time slipped by slowly but surely.

Soon, three of the sundial life lamps had stopped at the noon position. It took a few more hours for the others to stop. When that happened, the lava around Xu Qing pulsed.

For a moment, he looked dazed.

But then that dazed look vanished from his eyes, to be replaced with astonishment. He could now sense that the five sundials contained an ability that he could activate with a mere thought. As for what that ability was, he couldn't tell by merely sensing it.

I guess I'll test it out! Eyes narrowing, he settled down and sent a thought out. Inside his sea of consciousness, the five sundials thrummed as they appeared around him as projections.

The five sundials slowly rotated around him, looking almost like the petals of a huge violet flower. Dazzling light shone out as five balls of light like suns appeared above his head, arrayed in a pentagonal shape. The sundials complemented him. The balls of light were like stars. And they made Xu Qing absolutely resplendent.

What was more, the five sundials emanated the power of time, which poured into Xu Qing, filling him with a mysterious sensation. It almost made it seem like he himself had come from within time.

The entire process lasted for only a moment before the feeling vanished. The sundials went dark, and flew back inside of him along with the suns. The first sundial immediately began moving again, tracking time, but the others remained still. Stunned, Xu Qing looked around, then cast his senses inside of himself. He didn't detect anything unusual.

What's going on?

Frowning, he thought back to everything that just happened, and couldn't determine what the ability was that came with the sundials' eruption of power.

Confused and curious, he kept waiting.

Fourteen hours later, the second sundial life lamp started tracking time again. The others did the same, all of them in fourteen hour intervals. After the fifth sundial started moving, the first one eventually stopped at the noon position.

Xu Qing did some calculations. *It's been seventy hours. That's about three days.*

Twenty-four hours passed. During that time, as the sundial life lamps remained in a stopped position, that explosive aura once again built up.

Four days. That's a complete cycle. Could it be that the effect wasn't very obvious because I'm in this lava?

Xu Qing looked at the golden crow off in the distance, which now had over 200 tails. Looking away, he flew up out of the lava.

Once he was hovering midair, he unhesitatingly activated all five of the sundials. Five sundials and five suns rotated around him, and the sundial's power erupted.

Xu Qing immediately felt heat everywhere.

He was surrounded by lava! He had... returned to the exact spot he had occupied before in the lava! The realization struck him and his eyes filled with disbelief. Looking around, he confirmed that he had returned to the same spot.

I was definitely midair a moment ago!

As waves of incredulity assailed him, he realized there was one obvious possibility.

Could this be some sort of time reversal?

The speculation caused his heart to pound. After doing some basic calculations based on the height to which he'd flown, and the time it took, he realized that seven breaths of time had passed during the whole process.

I went back seven breaths of time? The first time I tried it, I was just sitting there cross-legged, so it wasn't obvious what happened! [1]

Eyes glittering, Xu Qing decided that he needed to do some more tests to come to a firm conclusion.

As the golden crow continued its devouring, Xu Qing remained in the lava for eight days. During that time, he used the power of the sundials twice. He varied his testing methodology.

The first time, he burst into motion and went as far as possible before unleashing the sundials' power. What he found was that he went back seven breaths of time.

The second time, he broke some magical devices and threw them off to the side, then injured himself intentionally. Then he used the sundials' ability. What he found was that the sundials didn't affect other objects. Only himself. The things he'd broken remained broken and in the same place. But his body returned to the state before it had been injured, and he looked exactly like he did seven breaths of time earlier.

Those tests gave him a much deeper understanding of the sundials' ability.

It returns my body to the state it was in seven breaths of time previous! Using this ability at the right time would be like having a spare life. I could also use it as a deadly weapon!

After some thought, he quelled his shock. At the same time, he realized that all of this seemed to be because of the violet crystal.

Just what is the violet crystal...? It can seal the shadow, seal gods, gives me shocking regenerative capabilities, and contains some sort of time magic....

After a while, he stowed the questions to consider later, and turned his attention to the golden crow.

The golden crow now had 280 tails, which was its limit at this level. It would need to absorb lava from a deeper level to progress any further. Paradoxically, the golden crow couldn't go any further down than three meters. That said, the increase from 100 tails to 280 was a huge boost to the golden crow. It now pulsed with a sensation that seemed to indicate it was on the verge of provoking a second heavenfate tribulation.

Xu Qing's session of cultivation in the lava had reached its conclusion. There was no reason to stick around any longer.

I'll return this eyeball, then leave the east and go meet Eldest Brother at Mount Heavenly Ox.

He had already been in the eastern part of the Moonrite Region for almost half a year, and was wondering how the Captain was doing. He actually missed him. Before leaving the Heavenfire Sea, he turned and looked into its depths.

I'm really curious to see the Red Moon Cathedral's warding spells that Senior Duanmu mentioned....

For one thing, he was curious why the Red Moon Cathedral felt they needed to set up warding spells there. Now that he had the power of the sundials, he felt that as long as he was careful, he shouldn't run into any trouble.

With that, he tightened his grip on the eyeball. The eyeball trembled and released more of its protective power.

Satisfied, Xu Qing retracted the golden crow, then held the eyeball tightly as he dropped down deeper into the lava. Soon he reached a depth of 300 meters. He kept going until he reached 600 meters. 900 meters....

The further down he got, the hotter it became. Thankfully, the eyeball's protective power kept the heat mostly at bay.

Xu Qing eventually passed a depth of 2,700 meters. There wasn't just intense heat down here, there was also immense pressure. More veins than ever could be seen on the brown eyeball.

The deeper Xu Qing got, the more he realized he was sensing a familiar aura. It was the god power of Crimson Mother. That realization caused him to put up his guard even further. As he carefully descended, he felt a sensation of crisis building within him. Without any hesitation, he unleashed the power of his violet moon nascent soul. Violet moon power spread all around him.

As a result, that sensation of crisis faded away. It was also by means of the violet moon's power that he was able to determine the source of the red moon power that he sensed.

After a moment of hesitation, he continued downward.

Chapter 559: A Bronze Coffin Under the Heavenfire Sea! (part 2)

Not too far away, in the sky above the Heavenfire Sea, the Red Moon Cathedral's massive heart floated along.

The figures on the dozens of asteroids that rotated around it remained completely unmoving. The only movement visible was when someone walked out of the temple atop the heart. It was a human woman wearing a long red robe. Her facial expression was icy cold, and she had impatient eyes. Walking out of the temple and to the edge of the heart, she looked down at the sea of flames below. Her brow was furrowed.

She knew what she had to do next, but didn't really want to. It wasn't that she couldn't handle the brutality of it. Rather, it would mark her, and that would affect her future. However, as a godservant, she didn't qualify to refuse.

All I can do is try to use a dispersal magic later on to get rid of the mark.

The woman sighed. Stepping forward, she dropped toward the lava below. As she fell, she waved her hand to produce a red pearl. She put the pearl into her mouth and entered the lava. The pearl was obviously a unique treasure of the Red Moon Cathedral. After swallowing it, it allowed her to move about freely in the lava without being harmed.

Thus, she sank down at top speed, releasing the power of her cultivation base, which was in the Spirit Trove level. However, she didn't have a heavenly dao or magical laws. She was not a cultivator with a true secret trove, but instead, was in the dao begetting and dawnstar raising phase. That said, as a godservant who had the blessing of Crimson Mother, she was the kind of person no one in the Moonrite Region would dare to provoke, assuming she was outside of the cathedral. There was no species in the Moonrite Region who could afford to harm a godservant.

In fact, her godservant authority gave her the right to sentence minor species to death. Having grown up in the Red Moon Cathedral as part of a clan that had produced godenvoys, she was almost like royalty in the Moonrite Region. Right now, she was speeding down through the lava toward a specific destination.

Xu Qing was at around 3,000 meters down, relying on his instincts to proceed. He was much closer to that specific area than the woman in red.

However, she was moving far, far faster than him, so she actually arrived first. Because of the limitations imposed by the lava, neither of them were able to detect each other with divine sense. Furthermore, because of the different environments in which the two of them had been raised, the

woman wasn't as vigilant as Xu Qing. The result was that, in his overabundance of caution, and his senses being augmented by the violet moon, he actually noticed her before she noticed him.

He instantly shrank in on himself, hoping to make himself smaller and less noticeable.

Meanwhile, further down at a depth of 3,000 meters, there was what initially looked like a strange, enormous mountain. In reality, it wasn't a mountain at all. Instead, it was a gigantic coffin. It seemed as big as a city to Xu Qing. Made entirely of bronze, it was covered with corrosion, making it a mixture of black, green, and blue. As a result, the coffin abounded with a sensation of ancientness. It was as if it had been laying there for countless years of time.

The exact size of the coffin was difficult to determine, but Xu Qing could see that it had four chains attached to its four corners, which stretched down into the depths below. The coffin's lid wasn't sealed. It was slightly open. That said, the coffin was so enormous that even the slight crack was actually massive, like a huge abyss.

The woman in red neared that door, eventually floating to a stop about 300 meters above it. There, she performed a double-handed incantation gesture, causing pulses of red moon god power to flow out. The power of the hand sign entered the nearby warding spells, causing a glowing red net to appear. That red net was the manifestation of the warding spell. Close examination revealed that the net was full of magical symbols, and it pulsed with godly might.

As Xu Qing continued to observe, he came to realize that the woman was apparently bolstering the warding spell. That said, the paltry level of god power involved was miniscule at best.

Next, Xu Qing's eyes narrowed as the woman in red pulled out a head-sized crimson crystal. The crystal caused the surrounding lava to roil, and it emitted an aura that left Xu Qing feeling shaken. Others might not recognize that aura, but given the sense he had thanks to the violet moon, he could tell that the crystal was actually a drop of blood that had been diluted countless times.

Is that Crimson Mother's blood?

His heart was already racing. Even if the blood was diluted, the aura of the red moon it had was very strong. And to Xu Qing, it could be considered incredibly nourishing.

As Xu Qing secretly looked on, the woman in red gazed at the crystal with longing. However, she kept her feelings in check. She knew that this object was not meant for her benefit.

When the High God comes and finishes harvesting the region, all members of my clan will get a drop of god blood like this. And then I'll have a chance to do some absorbing.

With that, she threw the crystal down into the crack in the coffin. As it drifted down, it crumbled, causing terrifying fluctuations to sweep into the huge red net created by the warding spells. This was a true reinforcement of that huge net. The net glowed with blinding light, and its godly might surged. Meanwhile, the aura from the coffin grew more incisive. The ground quaked, and a bitter howl of rage echoed out.

"Crimson Mother!!"

As the voice rang out, the coffin trembled violently. Xu Qing's mind spun, and he kept his guard up more than ever. At the same time, the woman in red looked down into the abyss of the coffin and spoke with divine will.

“Shut up!”

Labored breathing could be heard in the coffin. Clearly, whatever entity was in that coffin felt completely humiliated at being insulted by a low-level cultivator like this woman, yet was powerless to do anything in response.

The woman’s eyes gleamed with derision. To her, it was an absolute delight to be able to humiliate an ancient, terrifying entity such as this. With the wave of a hand, she produced numerous chunks of meat from her bag of holding. There were over a hundred of them, each about thirty meters in size. Extending her finger, she sent one of the chunks of meat flying into the abyss.

“Eat. It’s food from the High God to you. It’s made from the people of Moonrite Region. Your brothers and sisters all think it’s delicious. And to aid in your digestion, we made sure to remove all the bones. Now, enjoy!”

As the meat fell into the abyss, a bitter howl emerged. It was as if the entity in the abyss wanted to reject that meat, yet for some unknown reason was being forced to swallow it.

As it bitterly whimpered on the verge of weeping, chewing sounds emerged, creating a mixed sound that couldn’t have been more miserable. At the same time, bitter resentment floated out of the coffin, turning into a mark that settled onto the woman in red, branding itself into her. The woman seemed to enjoy the sounds she was hearing. Ignoring the mark that had settled on her, she started throwing down the rest of the meat.

Xu Qing noted the way the woman held herself, and listened to the painful sounds coming from inside the coffin. He already had an idea what kind of person this woman was.

After a moment passed, he began slowly backing up with the intention of leaving. He had no desire to get into friction with the Red Moon Cathedral right here and now.

Yet before he could get very far, the woman suddenly laughed.

“Considering how long you’ve been watching, why leave now?”

Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing sped up. At the same time, the woman in red raised her right hand and pointed in Xu Qing’s direction. Calling on her powers as a godservant, she tapped into the warding spells.

“Come here!” she said. The manifestation of the warding spells, which contained the power of the red moon, immediately rippled, turning into a huge crimson hand that shot toward Xu Qing.

Xu Qing knew that, relying only on his own power, he couldn’t possibly deal with this giant hand formed by the red moon warding spells. The only other option was to reveal the authority he carried. But if he did that, he would blow his cover.

It only took a moment for him to make his decision. Eyes flickering with cold light, he said, “What nerve you have!”

The moment the words left his mouth, the huge red hand stopped, turned around, and shot toward the woman in red.

The woman in red was visibly shocked. She quickly performed an incantation gesture, yet couldn't avoid the hand, and was sent tumbling backward, blood spraying out of her mouth. It was only by pulling out a blood-red command medallion that she managed to dispel the attack power.

Expression flickering dramatically, she gasped, "Godherald?"

She immediately locked her fingers into a very peculiar configuration, bowed respectfully at the waist, then looked at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing frowned. This was obviously a ceremonial way of offering greetings to a superior. But he wasn't sure of the proper way to return the greetings. All he could do was calmly nod. When that happened, the woman's pupils constricted. Again, she locked her fingers together, bowed, and looked at him. After that, her expression flickered.

"You're no godherald! Who are you? And how can you command the power of a High God?"

The woman was suspicious but not exactly sure of what was happening. And her heart was racing. It was the first time anything like this had happened to her before. Truth be told, it wasn't just her. No one in the entire Red Moon Cathedral had ever experienced anything like this. She almost couldn't believe it was happening.

Xu Qing showed no reaction via facial expression. However, inside, he had come to the conclusion that the woman realized the truth about him, not because of him flubbing the etiquette, but rather, some other reason. Given the level of her cultivation base, she obviously wasn't an idiot; she must have picked up on other clues. He had been planning to just leave, but since she attacked him, it didn't matter how much he feared her cultivation base. He would just have to figure out a way to kill her.

Killing intent swirling, he coolly said, "You're overstepping your authority."

He waved his finger, and the surrounding red moon warding spells rumbled with unprecedented loudness. Ripples spread out in all directions. In the blink of an eye, Xu Qing took control of them and sent crushing power right toward the woman.

The woman's countenance fell, and shock ran rampant through her.

He's not from the cathedral! I'm certain of that. So how does he have god power? He also commands authority. And with such strength! What's going on here??

Trembling, the woman launched an attack. Her secret trove appeared behind her, and though she had no heavenly dao, her battle prowess was still beyond compare. Combined with the blood-red command medallion she had, it was virtually unstoppable.

This level of control, and the fact the warding spells are cooperating... it means his level of authority surpasses that of a godherald!

The woman couldn't have been more shocked. For years she had attended her clan's patriarch, and she had witnessed godheralds utilizing the warding spells. What she was seeing now definitely surpassed that.

"Impossible!" As her mind spun, a new thought suddenly occurred to her. *This is big! If I report this to the cathedral, I'll definitely get rewarded!*

With such thoughts in mind, the woman held nothing back. Her spirit trove ignited, and she unleashed all the power of the command medallion... not to attack Xu Qing, but rather, to flee! 3,000 meters up above was the cathedral's church temple atop the heart. If she could just fly out of the lava and send a message, then she could notify the cathedral's leadership.

Of course, how could Xu Qing let her do something like that? He waved his hand, causing more fluctuations to sweep out from the warding spells. Instantly, eight blood-colored hands appeared, which smacked viciously toward the woman.

Xu Qing knew that if she left the vicinity of the red moon warding spells, then he wouldn't be a match for her. It didn't matter that she was only in the dao begetting and dawnstar raising phase, she was still a Spirit Trove expert. And if she escaped, he would be in incredible danger.

She's got to die!

Chapter 569: Imperial Sovereign's God-Weapon Suppresses the Northern Plains (part 2)

Not too far away, the very Xu Qing the Captain was so worried about was seated cross-legged atop the glacier, looking down into the ice. He had been waiting for quite a while now. Already, about half of the day he'd set as the deadline had passed. As of yet, there was no change to the figure in the glacier below.

Xu Qing's facial expression was the same as ever as he retracted his vision and continued to wait. He would do his absolute best to wait for the entire day.

Thus, time passed. Soon, as the twenty-fourth hour neared completion, Xu Qing opened his eyes. Standing, he clasped hands in the direction of the ice.

"Time's up, Senior."

"*Back up by about 3,000 meters,*" came the faint voice of the Heir Apparent from beneath the ice.

Hearing that, Xu Qing sped away. When he was about 2,400 meters away, a thunderous boom erupted from the glacier behind him. The icy ground quaked, and blue light shot up from the ice below, making everything increasingly bright. Eventually, it became so bright that the area beneath the glacier almost seemed lit by a blue sun. The source of that blue light was the nail in the huge figure's forehead.

Quivering, the nail slowly rose, as if there was a massive power inside of it trying to pull it out of the body's forehead. As every successive inch came out into the open, it shone with more scintillating blue light. Gradually, terrifying fluctuations spread out from the glacier. The mere sensation of the fluctuations caused Xu Qing's heart to thump with fear. The sensation he was getting surpassed the taboo treasure of Sea-Sealing County. In fact, the difference between the two was like that between a firefly and the sun.

There was also something profoundly ancient spreading out. As a result, Xu Qing had no other choice than to back up. After he'd gone another 300 meters, the feeling of fear remained, but wasn't as intense. Meanwhile, the fluctuations had provoked a reaction from the red moon warding spells.

From a distance, it looked like the red light of the warding spells was being suppressed by the blue light. As a result, the glacier vibrated, and cracks started spreading out over its surface.

All of a sudden, a howling voice echoed in Xu Qing's mind.

"Help me suppress them!"

Xu Qing gritted his teeth. It was obvious that if he stuck around, he would be asked to provide help. Without the slightest hesitation, he reached out with his right hand and pushed it down onto the glacier.

Violet moon godly authority erupted out to interfere with the warding spells.

He didn't need to take control of the warding spells to open a passage. He just needed to interfere with the warding spells. As for whether the Heir Apparent would ultimately make it out, there was no way for Xu Qing to assess.

That said, to the Heir Apparent, Xu Qing's actions were crucial. His interference and influence could very well make the difference between success and failure. Before, all probabilities pointed to failure. But now, things were different.

Next, an even more deafening sound erupted from the glacier. Blue light shone brilliantly as the nail continued to rise. Ultimately, it completely emerged from the corpse.

When that happened, the northern ice plains turned blue.

Various species and sects that called the northern ice plains their home took notice, and many were curious about why things had suddenly turned blue. Though they had no idea what was happening, they all felt fear and pressure as the blue light spread everywhere.

Cracking sounds erupted that surpassed the volume of heavenly thunder. In the depths of the glacier, the nail, which was emanating that boundless blue light, pulsed with terrifying energy as it slowly rotated around to point at the red moon warding spells. Light flared as the blue nail then shot upward.

It accelerated with boundless courage and unstoppable force as it slammed into the warding spells. Blue and red light flickered together, creating a violet glow. It was a deadlock.

"God Weapon Qi Nuo, you were born in the darkheaven and tempered in an earthworld; are you really willing to be trapped here? I can help you! Now is the time to unleash your power!"

The blue nail vibrated, until eventually, the defiant fluctuations of a spirit automaton rolled out of it. They were imbued with a spirit that could conquer mountains and rivers, and as they gathered at the tip of the nail, it pulsed with the power to crush everything in its path! Wild colors flashed in heaven and earth as the nail shot high into the sky! The dome of heaven was now lit by blue light, so that it was no longer dusky. From a distance, the northern ice fields seemed to have been turned into a world of blue. Cracks spread out on the ground, and many places caved in. Glaciers shattered. The entire northern region was starting to sink down.

Nothing like this had ever happened before. Whether it was to the living beings of the north, or to the Moonrite Region in general, it was completely unprecedented! There was no way the Red Moon Cathedral wouldn't investigate something like that, and thus, it was only possible to imagine what explosive developments were just around the corner.

All living beings were shocked. Cries of astonishment rang out everywhere. However, the blue nail in the sky didn't leave. It slowly turned until its tip was pointed at the ice below. Light flickered dazzlingly, making it look like the nail was building up power.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing appeared on a distant shattered glacier, looking around at everything. He had prepared himself mentally, but even still, was nearly bowled over with shock.

The Heir Apparent said that he had a younger brother who died here, and a big sister who was sealed here.... Does that mean he's about to....

Pupils constricting, Xu Qing turned to run. He could tell that things were going to get very dangerous and destructive soon. However, even as he turned, a majestic stream of divine will slammed into his mind like ten thousand sledgehammers.

"It will be really unlucky for me if you leave now, young friend. Don't you remember how I promised to give you a very mysterious gift? As the Heir Apparent, my word is my bond. And I promised you something!"

Xu Qing stopped moving. Gritting his teeth, he turned to look at the blue nail, which seemed very close to the point of being fully powered up.

"What gift?" Xu Qing asked.

"How about the fragment of a Smoldering God's major world? There are three items sealing my third older sister, and that's one of them."

Xu Qing's eyes went wide, and his heart raced. How could he ever have guessed that the mysterious gift which had been offered to him was the fragment of a major world?

The identifying mark of a Smoldering God was the ability to bring forth a major world. A major world like that would have boundless mysterious abilities. And even a broken fragment of one would still be considered a precious treasure. It was something that would be valuable even to a god. The red moon hadn't taken it away, but rather, used it as part of a sealing cage. To ordinary cultivators, something like that would be even more incredibly precious.

Once again, divine will echoed into his mind. *"Do you dare come with me to get it?"*

"Yes!"

Xu Qing said, his eyes already bloodshot.

A prize like that was enough to cause craziness to bubble up from deep within him. It was like the time he got his first life lamp, his first imperial-class ability, or that experience with the seazombie divine likenesses. During those escapades, the craziness in his heart rivaled the Captain.

In response to his words, laughter swept out from the nail.

"Come here!"

Blue light shone down, surrounding Xu Qing like a cage, then taking him up into the sky. Eventually, he approached the nail and stood atop it.

The blue light connected with the nail. Because the light was from the nail, Xu Qing didn't suffer any of the pressure of being so close to a precious treasure. As he stood there, the Heir Apparent spoke to him again with divine will.

“Okay, young friend. Now I'm going to show you exactly how mighty this precious treasure of my father's was!”

Rumbling sounds erupted from the blue nail as it turned into a streak that shot down toward the ice! Its shocking speed and might caused ripples to spread through the canopy of heaven, and resulted in the ground caving in.

There wasn't anything that could stand up to it!

Meanwhile, inside the major world fragment, atop the highest of the black glaciers, the Captain stood, looking around. Of course, he had no idea what was going on outside.

“This is the place! Little Ningning, Big Jianjian, you two better behave well! In a moment, you both need to unleash your treasures. We need to do the sealing as quickly as possible. Once the sealing is over, we'll get out of here. If we go too slowly, though... well, then I wish all of you good luck. After all, every place that I've raided up to this point ends up becoming a barren wasteland.”

Wu Jianwu nodded vigorously, though inside, he felt very nervous. Ning Yan was also getting anxious.

Seeing their facial expressions, the Captain inwardly shook his head.

Just not on the same level as little Ah Qing. They clearly lack courage. If little Ah Qing were here, he would just be looking at me calmly.

Sighing inwardly, the Captain waved his hand, causing a ball of light to shoot up into the dome of heaven.

“Show yourself, my Little Roundy!”

The ball of light suddenly erupted with blinding beams of light that contained seemingly infinite heat. As the light rose high into the canopy of heaven, it turned into a sun! Boundless light and heat spread out, covering all of the black glaciers!

Chapter 570: Look, Everyone! Who's That on the Nail? (part 1)

There was no true sun in the Moonrite Region, which existed in year-round dusk. It was only during the three months of Heavenfire Skycrossing that the region received significant light. What was more, *that* light represented death.

However, not all species were adapted to living in endless darkness. Therefore, after the living beings in the region were culled, and regrowth had begun, there were always certain big species who produced talented and courageous individuals. The artificial sun that was being discussed was the result of a very powerful species who, after generations of replenishment, managed to raise a sun for their own species.

That said, the light and heat of suns like that wouldn't travel very far, and generally only illuminated the species in question. They were nowhere near as mighty as the Dawning Suns. Even still, just being able to do that was enough to guarantee a certain level of protection for their species.

Usually, more godheralds came from such species than others. As a result, when Crimson Mother came, though such species would suffer from the fate of extermination like all the others, their sun would remain. And because of that, they could recover more quickly. The cycle would continue for years and years.

There were originally nine species in the Moonrite Region who had their own suns. Due to unexpected circumstances, three of them ended up being wiped out, leaving six. The Lonesuns were one of those six, and they were also the most recent addition. Reportedly, they had mysterious assistance back when they originally created their sun.

Months earlier, their sun suddenly vanished, seemingly of its own accord, despite the Lonesuns having extremely strict security. It almost seemed like the sun had intentionally gone into hiding.

Right now, that very sun appeared in the sky of the major world fragment.

“Those old Lonesun bastards borrowed my things years ago and never gave them back. Hmmmphh! Little do they know I let them do that on purpose!” The Captain looked up at the sun, feeling superlatively comfortable. “They took good care of it for me.”

The sun the Captain had released into the sky unleashed dazzling, blinding beams of light, as well as intense heat. Instantly, heaven and earth shifted into the warm season.

The temperature increased, and was continuing to increase. After only ten breaths of time had passed, it reached shocking levels. Mist roiled off of the ice, and the seemingly eternal glacier was already showing signs that it might melt. That said, this one sun wasn't enough to melt all the glaciers in the entire major world fragment. That was why the Captain had come to this specific ice mountain.

“I just need this place melted! That'll be enough!” The Captain's eyes glittered as he lifted both hands into the air. “Little Roundy, this is the place to let it shine!”

The sun in the sky vibrated, causing the light and heat to contract. Wherever it passed, the ice slowly melted, revealing the ruins beneath.

Eventually, all of the light and heat was focused on the ice mountain the Captain was standing on.

Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu were fully aware of how mighty this sun was, so they had long since picked a safe spot off in the distance to watch from. Meanwhile, the Captain's hair was melting away, leaving him looking very strange. He didn't seem to care. His clothes weren't affected by the heat, and he looked very calm and relaxed.

“It was so nippy. Finally it's warming up a bit.”

The ice mountain beneath his feet was starting to melt. Rivulets of black water rolled down its side until it eventually evaporated into steam. The mountain was rapidly shrinking, until all that was left was a 300-meter cavern in the ice shelf, out of which emerged steam and an ancient aura.

Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu watched fearfully as an intense rumbling sound also emerged from the huge cavern.

The melting continued until the bottom of that huge cavern was visible! Now it was possible to see something that had been concealed for countless years: the true surface of the ground. That said, compared to the endless black glaciers in this area, that 300-meter cavern was like the eye of a needle. Though it had been opened, the frigid energy in the area was so strong that the cavern was already showing signs of icing over.

The Captain didn't care. He just looked down excitedly into the cavern.

Thanks to the sunlight, the depths of the cavern were clearly visible. There was black soil there, as well as numerous blood-colored furrows arranged in a very precise fashion. If you took them all in together, you would realize they resembled a huge fingerprint. It was as if some paragonic entity had slammed a palm down onto this area to wipe out all living things, and had left behind a blood-colored palm print. The markings, here, though, were just those from a single finger.

After confirming this was the right spot, the Captain bellowed, "Little Ningning! Big Jianjian! Hurry up. Help me handle this treasure!"

Using his outstretched hands to control the sun, he sent more heat into the area, preventing the cavern from being sealed over again.

Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu didn't dare to dally. They burst into action, with Ning Yan waving a hand to produce a patch of golden flesh. The patch of flesh was large enough to be able to cover dozens of people at once. And once unfurled, it was obvious that it had actually been stitched together with many smaller pieces. Because of that, it would be very difficult to determine where it came from. Wu Jianwu quickly gripped the side of the flesh opposite of Ning Yan. Then the two of them stretched it out and sent it toward the bottom of the cavern.

"Hahaha! I like this skin patch treasure more and more!" Up in midair, the Captain's eyebrows danced up and down as his eyes burned with excitement.

Ning Yan looked like he wanted to say something, but ultimately held back. He glanced at Wu Jianwu. Wu Jianwu kept his mouth shut.

Next, the excited Captain performed a double-handed incantation gesture, then pointed up into the sky.

"Let it shine a bit more, Little Roundy! Help me get a good image of this fingerprint!"

The sun above seemed to shift in place, and then it erupted with light that was vastly more intense than before. It abruptly stopped, only to reappear a moment later. That happened about a dozen times, so quickly in succession that the entire area was bathed with dazzling light.

Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu kept a firm grip on the patch of skin, and as the light flared, an image of the fingerprint appeared on the skin. It was a perfect copy of the fingerprint in the cavern, although much smaller. As it became increasingly clear, it emanated an astounding level of pressure.

Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu were ready for that, but it still caused them to tremble. And as the patch of skin transformed it seemed to become so heavy that it started to slowly sink down.

That was when Ning Yan unleashed the power of his bloodline. At the same time, a host of little animals appeared around Wu Jianwu and released bloodline fluctuations. As a result, they managed to keep the patch of skin from falling. About ten breaths of time later, the sun darkened, and the fingerprint was clearly visible on the patch of skin.

Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu struggled to control their trembling as they quickly rolled up the patch of skin. When it was put away, both exhaled sharply in relief, then looked up at the Captain.

The afterglow of the sun landed on the Captain, making him look very imposing, and perfectly highlighting the emotion on his face as he sighed.

“It’s too bad the only people here to witness this majestic event were us three. Little Ah Qing had no way to see it.” The Captain clasped his hands behind his back and sighed loudly. “Later on when I explain what happened, he’ll definitely have mixed emotions. What a pity. What a pity!”

The Captain shook his head and was about to continue speaking when, all of a sudden, something very dramatic happened.

The sky in the major world fragment glittered, and wild colors flashed left and right. Then, blue light appeared in the canopy of heaven. It wasn’t just a small section of the sky. It filled everything! It was as if the entire dusky sky had turned light blue. What was more, that light grew more intense, all while terrifying ripples spread out.

Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu were visibly stunned, but the Captain was taking it in stride.

“Presumably we’ve been discovered. They’ll be here soon. But that’s fine. This is all within the realm of what I predicted. The two of you can make your escape according to the method I explained earlier. We’ll meet back up at Mount Heavenly Ox. Once we’re there, I can promise you that even more good fortune will appear!” The Captain waved his hand to produce a jade slip. “Starting now, we just let things play out naturally and—”

Before he could finish speaking, a heaven-sundering, earth-crushing rumbling sound spread out through the blue-lit sky. The deafening sound stirred the clouds as a massive rift opened up in the icy canopy of heaven.

As the fully 5,000-kilometer rift opened, the sound continued to echo out, shaking the lands. There wasn’t just one rift. In the blink of an eye, a second opened. Then a third and a fourth....

Dozens of rifts opened in the icy canopy of heaven. Looking up, the sky almost seemed like a shattering mirror. As rifts continued to open, the rumbling sounds were like thunder.

Meanwhile, the blue light continued to shine dazzlingly, and the faint blue in the sky became deeper and deeper. Then light emerged from all of the rifts, in narrow beams that shone onto the glaciers below. The black glaciers couldn’t do anything to stop the blue light, and thus, the lands also turned blue. In the blink of an eye, everything in heaven and earth was blue. The terrifying pressure that came from beyond the icy sky grew even more intense.

Rumbling sounds echoed out as the canopy of heaven started crumbling. Countless chunks of ice fell like blue meteors. As they slammed into the ground, everything started crumbling. Deafening rumbling rolled out everywhere. As the sky collapsed, the tip of a 30,000-meter nail appeared!

It was only the tip, but it shattered the canopy of heaven around it, with those effects spreading rapidly in all directions. As the sky fell, the huge blue nail descended! The entire major world fragment was shaking violently. Not even the Captain had caused something as dramatic as this to happen.

The countless deceased souls in the major world fragment, regardless of whether they drifted aimlessly or were sleeping in the ice, all let loose terrified screams. As far as they were concerned, doomsday had come!

Ning Yan was completely and utterly stunned, while Wu Jianwu looked like he might start crying.

“We’re finished! I said before we came in here that I had a bad feeling about this! Why’d you have to drag me along??”

“Chen Erniu!! What are you doing? What’s going on?”

The two of them had already crushed their teleportation talismans. Unfortunately, thanks to the dramatic situation, the talismans that the Captain had said would ‘never, ever malfunction’ were somehow not working.

Chapter 570: Look, Everyone! Who’s That on the Nail? (part 2)

The Captain inhaled deeply, his eyes wide and somewhat blank.

“I have no idea what’s going on! Something weird is happening. This is too bizarre! I just came in here to take a picture! I didn’t touch anything! I definitely didn’t do anything to instigate something like this. How could these Gloomites be so unreasonable? We do one tiny thing and they go and destroy everything? What are they doing! This is outrageous!!”

Trembling, the Captain looked up at the enormous blue nail, and his blank expression changed into one of shock.

That’s freaking... the weapon of an Imperial Sovereign!!! These Gloomites are all psychos! In order to destroy us, they’re deploying the weapon of an Imperial Sovereign? They were never this vicious back in the day! Also, where did they get a weapon like that? Wait, hold on. That’s the same nail that’s in the forehead of the Imperial Sovereign’s third son! What the hell? That was supposed to be my sixth major heist! Who’s taking that thing? Who?? Who is the early bird getting that worm??

The Captain was both shocked and also a bit defiant. There was no questioning that the aura he felt was from the weapon of an Imperial Sovereign. The Captain quickly snapped a jade slip, but it didn’t do anything. After that, all he could do was turn around and run. As he did, he pulled out more teleportation jade slips and snapped them.

“Stop standing around shivering, you two! Hurry up and follow me. We have to get out of here. This really isn’t my doing!”

“It’s definitely your doing!” Wu Jianwu shouted angrily. However, he also knew that now wasn’t the time to lose his temper. Gritting his teeth, he promised himself that if he survived, he would make sure to stay as far away from this crazy person as possible.

The terror in Ning Yan’s heart swept away any fear he had of the Captain, so he shouted, “This is just like the Ten Entrails Tree! Chen Erniu, don’t you know that you can’t die if you don’t have a death wish??”

Despite those words of fury... he still followed the Captain.

The three of them were like three tiny rabbits fleeing in the face of a landslide. But then, the rumbling sounds in the sky grew louder, and the area of devastation widened. Countless chunks of ice rained down from above as the massive nail pierced down and stabbed directly into the surface of the major world fragment. The descent of the nail sent out terrifying shock waves that obliterated countless deceased souls. Violent winds swept out.

All the Captain, Ning Yan, and Wu Jianwu could do was huddle together in the patch of skin and flee as fast as they could.

The Captain was really not inclined to give up so easily, and looked back in the direction of the descending nail. When he did, his pupils constricted and he gasped.

“What the eff? That nail... there’s someone standing on it!!”

Hearing that, Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu instinctively looked over their shoulders. Sure enough, they saw that atop that absolutely terrifying nail... was a person.

The blue light made it hard to see, but that person’s robe and hair whipped in the wind, making him look like an immortal. His beautiful facial features and slender frame were completely attractive in every sense of the word. The way he stood atop the nail made it seem like it was his personal weapon that he was controlling. The imposing manner, the grandeur, were enough to deeply shake anyone who could see.

The Captain suddenly stopped in place. Gaze somewhat blank, he said, “Say, guys, does that fellow look familiar...?”

Ning Yan stared, his eyes filled with disbelief and his mind a complete blank. Wu Jianwu stood as motionless as a wooden chicken, his eyes numb. Reaching out, the Captain pinched Ning Yan very hard. When Ning Yan yelped in rage, the Captain knew that he wasn’t hallucinating. His eyes began to shine.

“It really is little Ah Qing!” The Captain started jumping up and down and waving his hands. “Little Junior Brother! I’m right here!”

Meanwhile, in the shattered sky, the massive nail continued to descend. The ground was shattered and collapsing in many places. Ice fell out of the icy sky like rain.

Atop the nail, Xu Qing was not as calm as his facial expression might indicate. He was actually trembling inwardly, and was absolutely shaken to the core. The pressure from the nail really was fearsome. From the moment the nail had stabbed into the glaciers in the world above, it had

smashed through all obstacles without a pause. All of the layers of ice had shattered, until the nail pierced all the way to the major world fragment.

It had taken him here. Upon looking around, Xu Qing saw the shattered black glaciers, as well as the light source in midair, which resembled a sun, except that it was going dark.

Xu Qing couldn't help but be curious about why there was a sun here. Then he saw the figures fleeing like rabbits down on the ground below. His expression became one of absent-minded curiosity.

It seemed impossible that the Captain and the others would be here. After all, they were supposed to be meeting at Mount Heavenly Ox soon. Xu Qing had been hurrying on his way, worried about being late, only to find the Captain right here. The feeling of disbelief only lasted a moment before vanishing. It took only that long for him to realize that it actually made sense to find the Captain here.

After all, given how crazy the Captain was, the more unimaginable a place was, the more likely he was to go there. The Captain had already traveled far, far down the path of having a death wish. He didn't ever seem to get tired of it. And the only way he would stop would be if he reached the end of the path....

Such thoughts only existed in Xu Qing's mind for a moment. Then, it was without hesitation that he jumped off the gigantic blue nail.

Given the speed of the nail, the moment Xu Qing left its surface, he was already a great distance away from it. However, blue light still surrounded him protectively as he shot toward the Captain and the others. Behind him, the blue nail picked up speed. Surrounded by blue light and whipping winds, as well as by the collapsing heaven and earth, it got closer and closer to the icy surface of the ground.

In the blink of an eye, there were only about 6,000 meters between the tip of the nail and the ground.

Being that close, the destructive power of the nail could eradicate everything in its path. The layers of ice below shattered, revealing a huge crater.

As the 30,000-meter crater opened up, the deceased souls sleeping there didn't have a chance to awaken before being wiped out of existence. Those who did awaken had it worse off, as they were unable to flee, and could only scream as they were ripped to shreds.

The distance shrank by 300 meters. 2,400 meters. 1,500 meters....

The ground was completely cracked and shattered, and the massive hole was so huge it couldn't be covered back over like the crevice created by the Captain's sun. Finally, a massive boom echoed out, and the entire major world fragment shook violently, as the Imperial Sovereign's nail stabbed deeply into the depths of the crater.

A tempest sprang up, and a violent shock wave spread out. From a distance, it was possible to see the ice layers exploding out from that central area.

50 kilometers. 500 kilometers. 5,000 kilometers.

The ice layers erupted in a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering manner. The nail pierced into the crater like a hot knife through butter, crushing everything and piercing into the depths of the soil. As everything collapsed, the nail pierced through the outer layer of the earth! Keeping up its terrifying momentum, it continued stabbing down!

Despite Xu Qing being in midair some distance away, the shockwaves still slammed into him and sent him tumbling away like a kite with its string cut. Thankfully, he was protected by the blue light, so all that resulted was he coughed up a few mouthfuls of blood.

The Captain, Wu Jianwu, and Ning Yan had already flown up into the air. With the patch of skin as a shield, they weathered the storm. The Captain had already retracted his sun. That said, all three of them were still trembling with fear.

As Xu Qing got close to them, he raised his voice and said, "Fly up! Something big is about to happen below!"

Xu Qing knew exactly what the nail was aiming at, and thus he knew that this world fragment was heading toward destruction. After shouting his warning, he turned and fled toward the shattered canopy of heaven.

The Captain and the others followed at top speed. Everybody knew that now wasn't the time for reunions. Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan were rather slow, so the Captain grabbed them and then held nothing back to fly high into the sky.

As they got farther from the ground and closer to the canopy of heaven, the entire world started shaking. It was far more intense than before. The effects went beyond 5,000 kilometers, filling the entire major world fragment. Because the cause came from above and went down, the effect came from below and went up!

Beneath the layers of ice in the major world fragment, there was some colossal entity... and it was emerging from a sealed state of slumber into consciousness! It shivered, and then started rising from beneath the ground. Layers of ice exploded, and ice chunks flew everywhere. A huge bronze coffin broke through the ground, the ice, and the snow to appear right in front of Xu Qing and the others.

It looked exactly like the coffin at the bottom of the Heavenfire Sea! It was horrendous and stupefying! After having been buried under the ground for countless years, it... was finally out in the open! An ancient aura spread out from it, filling the area. In the lid of the coffin was a nail, spreading out from which were numerous tiny cracks.

In that shocking moment, the face of the Heir Apparent appeared in the blue mist surrounding the nail. Looking down at the coffin, he quietly said, "Time to wake up, Third Sister."