

## Timescape 571

### Chapter 571: Awake, My Third Sister (part 1)

The world fragment didn't even have a 'dome of heaven' anymore. The 'sky' had previously been made of ice, but now that had mostly been shattered. And the growing rifts were ripping the rest of it apart.

The ground was in a similar state, being completely uneven thanks to the destruction that had been wrought on it. All of the layers of ice had been completely thrown to the side by the rise of the massive bronze coffin.

The coffin was actually larger than the one Xu Qing had seen at the bottom of the Heavenfire Sea. With most of it exposed, it radiated boundless majesty. It also pulsed with an incredibly ancient aura that spread out to fill the world fragment, as if the coffin was releasing all of the captured time that had remained buried with it through the years. It had been buried for a very, very long time, as was evidenced by its corroded exterior. The Imperial Sovereign's nail had clearly unleashed a very powerful attack. Though it didn't actually pass through the lid of the coffin, there were already numerous cracks spreading out from the point of impact. Meanwhile, some parts of the coffin were bulging outward, making it seem like it was just on the verge of completely exploding.

Seeing that, Xu Qing, the Captain, Wu Jianwu, and Ning Yan all exchanged glances, and then kept flying higher.

Meanwhile, the figure in the blue mist surrounding the nail spoke again.

"Third Sister, once I was free, I could sense you. The only people who emanated the fluctuations of consciousness from our homeland are me and you.... Our other brothers and sisters have all lost consciousness. Their souls are not intact. They were extracted by Fourth Brother, Li Pan.... Therefore, I came here to unseal you. Awake... my third sister."

The voice contained grief that filled the entire world. Meanwhile, the bronze coffin trembled.

The cracks on the coffin's lid expanded and grew deeper, and an increasingly terrifying aura spread out from inside. Then, the entire world fragment shook as a withered hand smashed through the coffin lid. A smashing boom echoed out as bits of coffin lid sprayed in all directions. It was difficult to identify much about the hand. It wasn't obviously male or female, and it didn't have any skin, only bloody flesh. There were no fingernails on the tips of the fingers, and the entire thing emanated an aura of death.

When the figure in the blue mist saw the hand, his sorrow deepened. This was his third sister, beloved by his father the king, and who had been doted on so lovingly. Among all of the siblings, she was the only one who qualified to stand on equal footing with their ninth brother. Her cultivation base had been astonishing, and she had revealed amazing battle prowess when on the campaign trail with their father. Beyond that, she had been famous among a myriad species for her astounding beauty. Countless nobles had admired her, and the emperor had personally bestowed upon her the title Princess Brightblossom. Back then it was said that she was "like a cloud above the masses, free from even a speck of dust."

But then Crimson Mother came and changed everything. The peerlessly magnificent Princess Brightblossom ended up being sealed in a coffin when her father died. Their fourth brother, who was more beastly than most beasts, intentionally tormented her by placing the blood of their third brother in the coffin with her. As she became ravenous, she had no choice but to abandon her principles and humanity, and for the sake of future revenge, absorbed it. [1]

A human, but not human. A ghost, but not a ghost. Living, but also dead. Dead, but also alive.

The Heir Apparent's grief grew as he looked at the coffin. The interior was pitch black, making it impossible to see what lay therein. It was only possible to see the hand slowly reaching out from inside. The coffin shivered, then went still. After a moment of silence, the hoarse voice of a woman spoke.

“Heir Apparent....”

That familiar voice made the Heir Apparent think back to better times. After that, the figure in the coffin slowly stepped out into the open. She stood tall and straight, so withered that the rusted suit of armor she wore hung empty on her frame. As the wind blew through the cracks in the armor, it made whimpering sounds. The parts of her body that the armor didn't cover were horrendous. They were covered with wounds infested with countless maggots. What was more, she had almost no skin on her, as if she had been skinned alive. Because of all that, she was horrendously ugly, and in fact, it was hard to tell if she was even male or female.

Her face was sunken in. Where the eyes should have been, there were nothing but empty cavities within which burned the fire of the underworld. Given her appearance, it was obvious that she had experienced torment and torture that defied imagination. And yet, she still emanated terrifying fluctuations, and those fluctuations grew stronger as she stepped into the open. The world fragment shook so violently that the effects were already spreading into the world outside.

The sky above the northern ice plains flashed, and winds swept back and forth. A huge vortex even appeared in the sky. As the vortex rotated, all of the lands in the north rippled and distorted. It seemed like a god was arriving. All living beings trembled, and off in the distance, a red glow appeared on the horizon.

Those were fluctuations from the Red Moon Cathedral. There was no way the cathedral would allow something as dramatic as this to occur without investigating it.

What was coming wasn't a godherald. Instead, it was a massive palm.

The prints on the palm were like huge canyons, clearly visible as the thing emanated blood-colored light. It got closer and closer until it filled the entire sky, like the boundless hand of a god. After covering the northern ice plains, it pressed down toward the major world fragment. It was obviously going to crush everything here. The air shattered, the ice trembled, snowflakes were sent swirling, and countless living beings were stunned into a daze.

Inside the major world fragment, neither the Heir Apparent nor Princess Brightblossom who had just emerged from the coffin seemed to be affected at all.

The two of them looked at each other. Given their cultivation level, there were many things which could be communicated with a mere glance. Princess Brightblossom knew what the Heir Apparent was planning.

“Are you sure?” she asked, her voice as grating as two chunks of iron being rubbed against each other.

“Crimson Mother is asleep, Third Sister,” the figure in blue replied. “It’s a rare opportunity. I want to go see our fourth brother and bring an end to the enmity from years back. As for how it will turn out, I’m done contemplating the possibilities. I’d rather fight than continue living like this.”

Princess Brightblossom didn’t say anything. She waved her hand, and the nail of the Imperial Sovereign vanished from its spot next to the dilapidated coffin. When it reappeared, it was outside of the major world fragment, shooting right up toward the enormous blood-colored hand. It emanated force that could shatter space itself, as well as something profoundly ruthless.

In the blink of an eye, it stabbed into the hand. A heaven-rending, earth-crushing boom rang out over the northern ice plains. The seemingly unstoppable palm stopped in midair as the nail hit it. Blinding blue light spread out, wrapping around the bright red hand. And as the nail stabbed into the middle of the palm, cracks spread out from that point. As the cracks spread, the hand collapsed. In the blink of an eye, it shattered into dozens of fragments. At the same time, numerous beams of blood-colored light shot out over the northern ice plains. The pieces were like crimson shooting stars that slammed into the ground and created bright red craters.

The blue nail didn’t stop moving. It continued moving until it disappeared over the horizon.

Princess Brightblossom looked up. “He knows that we’re free. That palm strike was actually an invitation. In that case, let’s go. It’s time to see how this little brother of ours, child of our father and mother, has fared since joining Crimson Mother.”

She took a step forward and floated up into the air.

The Heir Apparent looked at Xu Qing off in the distance. He completely ignored the Captain, Ning Yan, and Wu Jianwu.

“Many thanks for your help, young friend.” With that, he looked at his third sister and nodded. She, in turn, looked at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing stopped in place, clasped hands, and bowed to the two of them.

No facial expression could be seen on her ugly, skeletal face. However, she did reach out with a withered hand and push down toward the ground. The world fragment rumbled. Lands shook, and mountains rocked. The ice shattered, creating black snow. It seemed like, going forward, this place would be a land of endless black blizzards. At the same time, creaking sounds could be heard. It was almost as if this Imperial Sovereign’s daughter had somehow taken control of the entire world fragment.

As she did, the world fragment started to shrink. In the shortest of moments, it transformed into a palm-sized chunk of stone that looked like black glass. She sent it flying toward Xu Qing. As it neared, flames erupted from its surface, burning it and purifying it. By the time it came to a stop in front of him, it looked like a black crystal, sparkling and translucent.

A boundless energy surged within it, and it glittered like the stars in the sky. What was more, thanks to the way it had just been purified, it was masterless.

Something like this was indescribably precious!

Xu Qing's heart pounded. Though he had been prepared for something like this, he was still deeply moved. After taking the crystal, he looked at Princess Brightblossom, as well as the Heir Apparent, and he bowed deeply.

The Captain, meanwhile, was breathing heavily, and his eyes shone with deep longing. Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu were shaken to the point of madness. The latter seemed to have it better off, because he apparently didn't realize as much as Ning Yan how significant and meaningful the gift of a world fragment was.

*S-s-seriously? You can just give those things out as a gift?* As Ning Yan reeled, Princess Brightblossom vanished. When she reappeared, she was in the outside world. As for the Heir Apparent, he nodded at Xu Qing again, then similarly vanished.

The two of them stood tall next to each other in the crimson rain of blood.

"There's no need for such a detestable species to exist in this world." Princess Brightblossom looked down at the mountain headquarters of the Gloomites. Clenching her fist, she punched downward.

A massive fist projection appeared right above the Gloomites. The mountain exploded. The lands collapsed. All of the buildings were destroyed. Everything was wiped out. All that was left behind in the city landscape was a huge, blood-colored hand print.

With that done, the two figures became prismatic beams of light that shot off into the distance. They carried with them incredible majesty, unstoppable will, and a grudge that had existed for countless years. Their destination: the Penitence Steppes. That was the place where their father's corpse was, and it was also the headquarters of the Red Moon Cathedral.

Out over the Heavenfire Sea, the air rippled and distorted as a streak of blue light shot along, piercing through the fire, splitting apart the canopy of heaven, and dazzling the cosmos.

Looking closely, it looked like a 30,000-meter-long nail!

As it descended from above, its target was clear: it was locked onto a location beneath the surface of the Heavenfire Sea. Its passage caused a deafening roar. Lava sprayed everywhere as the spike shot down toward... the bronze coffin.

Chapter 571: Awake, My Third Sister (part 2)

3,000-meter tsunami waves spread out in all directions as the nail slammed right into the coffin. The red moon warding spells dimmed, and the coffin started trembling violently. The deafening noise reached a crescendo, and the coffin started crumbling! As debris exploded out, it created numerous huge whirlpools that seemed almost like swirling sparks.

Then, a shocking and majestic body akin to Princess Brightblossom emerged from the rubble of the coffin. It was a very emaciated body covered with blue veins that resembled vicious mountain ranges. A brown robe covered most of him. It was covered with blood splatters that had turned its once apricot color into what it was now. His face was emaciated, but that couldn't completely conceal his heroic spirit. His blue eyes were like gemstones that radiated a captivating force. The bloodline of an Imperial Sovereign caused powerful fluctuations to constantly roll off him.

He was completely eye-catching, especially his full head of gray hair that flowed down around him like a cloak, spread out around him, and curled up at the end. Every single strand of hair was a deceased soul that howled to heaven!

This was the true form of the Heir Apparent! He slowly looked up, then started walking. His first step took him out of the Heavenfire Sea. He hovered in the dome of heaven, his hair swaying around him like endless clouds.

“I was born in the golden age of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity’s rule, and was sealed after the arrival of the false god. Now I reappear in the sorrowful world of Revered Ancient. In this life... I’ve experienced glory, splendor, wealth, and rank. I’ve been the hope of all peoples. My cup did runneth over.”

His mere murmuring caused thunderous rumblings to spread out. The sky flickered, winds screamed, and the sea of flames seethed.

“But there are two obsessions of mine that cannot be forgotten. First: destroy the moon and free the people from their curse. Second: to kill my traitorous brother to assuage the hatred in my heart! If Li Pan doesn’t die, it will be a betrayal of my father, a betrayal of the people and the region, and a betrayal of my entire existence!”

The Heir Apparent looked in the direction of the Penitence Steppes. His eyes were as cold as the netherworld as he took a step forward and vanished into thin air.

The Heavenfire Sea churned. Ripples spread through the dome of heaven. All living beings in the Moonrite Region shivered in fear.

The top experts from many species could sense that something was happening. Shocked, they looked in the direction of the Penitence Steppes.

Meanwhile, many parts of the northern ice plains were collapsing. An entire minor world fragment had existed beneath them, but now it was gone, so many places were simply crumbling. As rivers became waterfalls tumbling in all directions, four figures shot like lightning through the collapsing, icy landscape.

They were, of course, Xu Qing, the Captain, Ning Yan, and Wu Jianwu. As they fled at top speed, rumbling sounds echoed out behind them like the howling of a god. The icy ground collapsed, becoming like a black hole that sucked everything else toward it.

Ahead of them, sections of ice rose up like blades. Frigid winds assailed them.

Thankfully, all four of them were extraordinary individuals, and had plenty of magical techniques to call on. Wu Jianwu was once again surrounded by a host of animals that helped clear a path for him. The Captain used Ning Yan like a meteor hammer, allowing him to speed along disdainfully. When adding in the field of pressure put off by the patch of skin, it made things simple.

Xu Qing, though, used the simplest method. He used his Gruegloom abilities to become semitransparent, allowing him to disregard anything in his path.

And thus, the four of them got closer and closer to the surface. A few times, the Captain couldn’t help but look at Xu Qing and open his mouth as if to say something. He looked depressed. The

reality was that he was stupefied. The fact that Xu Qing had suddenly shown up and did what he did left the Captain feeling completely robbed by the 'early bird.'

My sixth major plan here in the Moonrite Region was to get the nail from the forehead of the Imperial Sovereign's third son. The eighth major operation was to free the Heir Apparent from his imprisonment beneath the Heavenfire Sea....

But little Ah Qing obviously went to the Heavenfire Sea, and he... already did those things? And he didn't just half-heartedly do them. He couldn't have done everything more perfectly! He even rescued the Imperial Sovereign's third daughter?

*Something feels really off about this. It should be me taking him to do these things, right...?*

The Captain looked at Xu Qing with hidden bitterness. What was even harder for the Captain to take was that Xu Qing had somehow acquired a fragment of a major world. When the Captain thought about the countless untold hardships he had endured just to get a picture of that fingerprint, all while Xu Qing went and *ripped up everything by the roots*, well....

*No. I have to work harder! I'm the Eldest Brother here! Besides, I'm totally familiar with this area. I have to establish my authority and dignity as the Eldest Brother. There's one person who pulls off incredible jobs, and that's me!*

Determination flickered in the Captain's eyes as he accelerated.

After enough time had passed for an incense stick to burn, the four of them finally burst out from the subterranean world and into the ice plains.

Slapping his forehead, the Captain shouted, "Little Roundy!" A faintly burning ball of fiery light emerged from the Captain's forehead and started flying up into the sky. The Captain quickly jumped inside of it. "Hurry up, all of you!"

Without a word, Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan flew inside. But they weren't as fast as Xu Qing.

The moment Xu Qing saw that sun, he took action. He knew the Captain well enough to guess what was coming next, and therefore, almost as soon as the Captain was inside the sun, Xu Qing was standing there next to him.

Rumbling sounds echoed out from the faintly burning sun as it rumbled into motion, disappearing over the horizon a moment later. With that sun gone, Xu Qing and the others had nothing linking them to the ice plains.

Slowly but surely, the day passed.

In the dome of heaven above the Moonrite Region, a blurry ball of light shot along at top speed. It was cloaked with a concealment power that made it so no one noticed its passage.

Looking closely, it was possible to see that the ball of light was actually made of five intertwining rings. The five rings were covered in magical symbols that pulsed according to some unknown rhythm. Because of the rapid pace of the pulsing, they emitted almost a constant light. In the middle of the five rings was a golden asteroid.

The light emitted by the asteroid was absorbed by the five rings and then sent out in the form of light and heat.

Atop the golden asteroid was a beautiful building. The Captain sat on the roof of that building, his expression strange. Occasionally he would sigh, occasionally he would look determined, and occasionally he would grit his teeth.

Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu had obviously been here before, as they weren't looking around curiously. They were sprawled out on the floor, thinking fearfully back to what happened in the ice plains. The treasured patch of skin had been tossed off to the side.

Xu Qing stood off in the distance, examining his surroundings. He already knew the origin of this artificial sun. What he was curious about now was how it had been created.

Meanwhile, the Captain was on the rooftop, secretly passing a message to Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan.

*“Haven't the two of you rested enough? Pick up that treasured patch of skin! It's going to dry up in the heat!”*

Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan both sighed, crawled to their feet, and went over to roll up the patch of skin.

Noticing the movement, Xu Qing walked over. He... could sense that something strange was going on with the Captain. He had a good idea what it was, but also didn't care. It wasn't his first time dealing with something like this. It was the same back at the Supreme Beginning Netherflight Pillar. That was when Xu Qing had come to realize that the Captain sometimes just needed some time to settle his thoughts. [1]

After reaching Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu, Xu Qing looked at the patch of skin, as well as the fingerprint on it. “That's what you came for?”

Wu Jianwu nodded helplessly.

Ning Yan, who actually revered Xu Qing, quickly said, “That's right, Biggest Bro. After we parted ways with you, Elder Brother Erniu has constantly been pushing us forward.” With that, he glanced at the Captain out of the corner of his eye.

Off in the distance, the Captain sighed again.

Xu Qing blinked a few times, then quietly said, “This patch of skin is incredible!”

Ning Yan hesitated, then lowered his voice and said, “It is incredible.... You see, it's Elder Brother Erniu's skin! He had me and Big Jianjian slice a few dozen pieces off him... and then sew them together. I think Big Jianjian is still haunted by all that.”

Xu Qing didn't respond. He knew the Captain was crazy, but he never thought he was *this* crazy. That said, it made a lot of sense to use one's own body as an asset.

Up on the roof, the Captain noticed Xu Qing's facial expression, and he suddenly felt very pleased with himself. He was just about to open his mouth to speak when he realized that the patch of skin he had made couldn't possibly compare to a world fragment. He sighed again. It felt like he'd let himself be skinned alive for no reason....

A moment passed, and then his eyes shone with determination. Shooting to his feet, and looking very serious, he turned to Xu Qing.

“Little Ah Qing!”

Xu Qing looked attentively in the Captain’s direction.

“Little Ah Qing, this was simply an instance of your Eldest Brother being *the butcher who gives only a small demonstration with his cleaver*. We’re on our way to Mount Heavenly Ox, which is where I’m really going to open your eyes. I’m going to show you how fucking awesome I was back in the day!”

Xu Qing immediately donned a look of keen anticipation.

Seeing that look on Xu Qing’s face made the Captain feel a lot better. Clapping his hands behind his back, he looked at Wu Jianwu briefly, stared off into heaven and earth, and said, “*Gaze not at yesterday’s daylilies; instead, see who will be more awesome tomorrow!*”

Wu Jianwu was completely speechless.

Chapter 572: Heavenly Tribulation Tempers the Soul; the Ox Returns (part 1)

If there was one truly holy location in the Moonrite Region, it was the Penitence Steppes. It was considered holy in the past because of being the location of the Imperial Sovereign’s palace. It was considered holy now because it was the location of the headquarters of the Red Moon Cathedral.

Though it might sound like the place was just a sprawling plane, there was more. It was more like an island surrounded by a sea of blood.

Towering above the Penitence Steppes was a kneeling statue, taller than any mountain in the Moonrite Region. It was as tall as heaven, and boundlessly astonishing. It was the Imperial Sovereign who had once ruled this region. Though he had died, he still emanated majestic pressure. What was more astonishing was that on his head was a massive palace complex shaped like a crown. It was crimson, and acted like a sealing restraint that forced the Imperial Sovereign statue to stay kneeling. Because of it, the statue sank down a little deeper every year. The palace complex was the headquarters of the Red Moon Cathedral.

Sprawled out around the statue on the ground were a host of church buildings. People strolled about in red robes, all of them quiet and peaceful. There was almost no sound. That was because the godchild didn’t like a lot of noise.

But today, it was going to get noisy. Two prismatic beams of light shot through the air, one from the north and one from the east. They were like two sharp blades slicing the sky, destroying the silence and sending loud rumblings throughout the earth.

The beam of light from the north abounded with death energy. Within it was the daughter of the Imperial Sovereign, clad in her suit of armor. From the east came something like a massive tempest in the form of a brown-robed figure. Full of daring, the two figures closed in, causing the sky to pulsate because of their passage, and shattering the surrounding air. Their arrival caused the sea of blood to churn, and the cathedral buildings to tremble. The moment their terrifying, apocalyptic aura descended, a tender voice spoke from the church complex atop the Imperial Sovereign’s head.

“Well, if it isn’t my big brother the Heir Apparent. And my beloved third sister is here too. I’m honestly surprised you got free.”



As the words echoed out, a figure in a red robe walked out of one of the buildings. His mere presence caused the sky to brighten. A thousand radiant beams of light swayed, sending light out for 30,000 meters, illuminating the world. With a single step, he rose into the air, everything around him pulsating, distorting the air. He headed straight toward his two blood relatives.

The three astounding individuals squared off, then clashed with a boom. Their fight existed on a level that most living beings couldn't even directly perceive. They could just see the sky shaking, heavenly bodies being disturbed, and landscape elements in turmoil.

Countless church cultivators bowed their heads and piously offered obeisance, all while chanting together.

*“The red moon, lady to me; Revered Ancient's true trustee; the living hosts suffer; they have a blissful guarantee.”*

The sound of the lyrics drifted through heaven and earth.

As for how the battle ultimately turned out, it was impossible for anyone to say. However, the fighting caused fluctuations that spread through the canopy of heaven over all of the Moonrite Region. It was almost like Heavenfire Skycrossing was back. Natural laws were influenced, and magical laws were thrown into chaos.

During that time, no living being dared to fly high in the sky. Even the sun in which Xu Qing and the others traveled, which was far to the south, was forced down to a low elevation.

Eventually, the Captain put the sun away, and they landed on top of a mountain. Standing on a boulder, the Captain and Xu Qing looked off into the distance. Wu Jianwu still seemed to be trembling with fear, and Ning Yan seemed to be thinking deeply about something. A long moment passed, and then Xu Qing and the Captain looked at each other.

“They're at war,” Xu Qing said calmly.

“It's too early. It'll be hard to succeed.” Shaking his head, the Captain produced a peach, took a bite, then continued, “That said, it's not necessarily a bad thing for us. And since we're not exactly in the position to participate directly, we need to just proceed according to plan. Little Ah Qing, going forward, this territory belongs to your Eldest Brother. Me. Are you ready?”

To the Captain, what was really important wasn't the fight playing out at the cathedral headquarters. No, it was Mount Heavenly Ox. Once there, he planned to give Xu Qing a glimpse into his own former glory and majesty.

Xu Qing didn't react visibly. This was at least the seventh or eighth time the Captain had said something like this recently.

Seeing that Xu Qing wasn't cooperating, the Captain tossed him an apple. Xu Qing grabbed it, took a bite, and then plastered a look of anticipation onto his face.

The Captain immediately looked pleased.

Off to the side, Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan exchanged a glance and sighed. Before Xu Qing showed up, neither of them got to eat any of the Captain's apples. And after Xu Qing showed up... they still didn't get any apples.

"Let's go!" the Captain said energetically, and took a step forward.

Xu Qing was also about to take a step forward, but then he stopped in place and looked up into the sky.

"Eldest Brother, do you think this would be a good spot to provoke heavenly tribulation?"

The Captain knew what Xu Qing was thinking. Looking back at Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan briefly, he replied, "Your violet moon nascent soul?"

Xu Qing nodded. After everything that happened in the northern ice plains, his nascent souls were all in the great circle of the one-tribulation level.

The Captain muttered to himself for a moment, scanned the sky, and then chuckled.

"It's an interesting idea, little Junior Brother. Because of the high-level battle going on, the magical laws of heaven and earth are in chaos. Although everything looks normal to the naked eye, if you provoked heavenly tribulation right now, I'd say there are two possible outcomes.

"One is that the heavenly tribulation won't even come. It'll be stuck on the outside, and you'll be able to get your hands on the heavenfate without going through the tribulation. But the second possibility is that the heavenly tribulation will come down with stupefying force. And it might even affect your true soul. Have you put all that into consideration?" The Captain looked at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing mulled it over briefly. "If it's the latter, it would probably result in even more heavenfate than average. And it would be good soul tempering."

The Captain's eyes gleamed. "Well said. Especially the part about soul tempering. Heavenly lightning is great for that."

Xu Qing thought about it some more, then calmly said, "Let me give it a shot."

The Captain licked his lips. He found this idea of Xu Qing's very amusing. "You know, there's another possibility. You could always hide out in your minor world as well!"

Realizing that what the Captain said made sense, Xu Qing discussed a few particulars, then found a valley to start making preparations.

Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu almost couldn't believe what they were hearing. And once they were in the valley, they couldn't hold back from talking about what was going on.

"Why does it feel like they're once again feeling suicidal?"

"You should trust yourself more," Ning Yan said with a sigh. "Just take out the part about 'why does it feel like,' and you're on the money..." As a very bad premonition

built in Ning Yan, he turned to flee. Unfortunately, before he could get very far, his premonition became a reality.

A massive gravitational force erupted from the valley, grabbed Ning Yan, and pulled him back inside.

“We still have tools at our disposal, right little Junior Brother? With the right tools, we’ll have a much better chance at success.”

As the Captain’s words rang out in the valley, Wu Jianwu shivered and accelerated. About 3,000 meters away, he quickly hid in a ditch. Peeking back at the valley, he heard intense rumbling in the sky. The thunderous booms were like the enraged roars of a god. Wu Jianwu inhaled sharply and fled another 3,000 meters. Only then did he start to feel a bit more at ease.

The transformations up above became more terrifying. A massive vortex appeared, within which crackled endless bolts of lightning, which gradually converged into a massive lightning dragon.

To the astonishment of Wu Jianwu, the lightning dragon roared and then shot toward the valley. The ground shook violently as the lightning dragon smashed into the valley. Boulders shattered as an infinitude of sparks showered out, creating a lake of lightning.

It was just barely possible to make out the screams of Ning Yan.

So terrified his scalp was tingling, Wu Jianwu fell back even further. The vortex above grew larger, and a second convergence of lightning tribulation descended. At the same time, the lightning from the lake below shot upward, connecting to the sky. From a distance, all of the lightning seemed to converge, then form one solid mass that smashed into the valley.

Soil exploded in all directions. The shock wave sent Wu Jianwu’s hair into disarray as he fled for his life.

Lightning fell over and over again, the range widening, sending out deafening noise everywhere. It lasted for seven days. Eventually, everything for 500 kilometers became scorched earth. The final round of lightning was immensely terrifying. A huge spear formed of lightning pierced through the dome of heaven and toward the earth below. Lands shook, and mountains were rocked.

500 kilometers away, Wu Jianwu trembled as he observed. As of now, he came to the firm conclusion that Xu Qing was just as crazy as Chen Erniu, even more so in some ways.

No. I have to get out of here! Traveling with Chen Erniu feels like walking constantly on the edge of death. And then if you add Xu Qing, it’s like strolling in the middle of death! I’m freaking walking directly down a path of death!!

Eye shining with determination, Wu Jianwu turned and fled. He shifted directions back and forth numerous times in order to avoid detection. After running for a few days, though, he suddenly heard a very familiar voice behind him.

“Don’t run, Big Jianjian. Fear not. Hahaha! It’s over now!”

Howling inwardly with grief, Wu Jianwu pretended not to hear, and just started running away faster. But he couldn’t outpace the Captain. About four or five breaths of time later, the Captain whizzed

past him and grabbed him by the shoulder. Scowling on the verge of tears, Wu Jianwu looked up at the Captain's wickedly smiling face.

Ignoring the look on Wu Jianwu's face, the Captain amiably wrapped his arm around his neck. "What are you running for, Big Jianjian? I thought the two of us were good friends! This is a dangerous place, and though we're strangers in a strange land, we're not strangers to each other. Sticking with me will be the safest thing to do. If it weren't for Little Ningning being able to track you down, you might have ended up wandering around all alone."

Hearing that, Wu Jianwu glared at Ning Yan.

The Captain had Ning Yan in his other hand. Ning Yan was smiling at Wu Jianwu in a way that said, 'Don't even think of trying to leave me behind.'

As Wu Jianwu fumed, he suddenly realized that Xu Qing was behind the Captain, looking pale and quite weak. Though his clothes were in tatters and his hair was disheveled, he seemed to be in good spirits. Also, his aura was much stronger than before. However, he trembled as he walked, and he occasionally let off small bursts of sparks.

The tribulation lightning had been so formidable that, thinking back on it, Xu Qing trembled in fear. Thankfully he had a minor world, so when things got really bad, he went inside to recover briefly before going back out to face the lightning. What was more, he had the Captain there to provide assistance. Despite all that, Xu Qing had been pushed to his limit several times. Although it was pure torment, he eventually passed the unusually intense heavenfate tribulation. As a result, he acquired more heavenfate than was normal. Most importantly, his soul had been baptized by the lightning, and was now a lot stronger.

Xu Qing steeled himself mentally. *If things keep going like this, then when I finally pass the fifth heavenfate tribulation, my soul will no longer be so weak and feeble!*

Chapter 572: Heavenly Tribulation Tempers the Soul; the Ox Returns (part 2)

With Wu Jianwu back with the group, they were whole again, and could start moving in the direction of Mount Heavenly Ox.

It was hard to say how the Captain did it, but thanks to his endless cajoling, he finally won over Wu Jianwu again. Once Wu Jianwu was smiling again, he started spouting poetry. That said, he was so furious with Ning Yan that he didn't speak one word to him the entire trip.

Xu Qing ignored their antics. As they traveled, he stimulated the violet crystal to heal himself as quickly as possible. The lightning tribulation had been so powerful that he ended up with a lot of deep flesh wounds. Of course, that meant that the recovery process was a big transformation for his physical body.

In this manner, half a month passed.

The restrictions on movement in the air became less severe, and eventually, they started traveling in the artificial sun. About half a month later, they finally caught sight of Mount Heavenly Ox.

Mount Heavenly Ox was located in the Unfinished Mountains. Those mountains formed an extensive forested mountain chain, inhabited by many small sects and species. The climate was very different from either the north or the east. There was lush vegetation everywhere, making the

mountain range as a whole seem emerald in color. The sky overhead seemed clearer as well. There was abundant life force in this location.

“See that?” the Captain said proudly. “The tallest mountain there is Mount Heavenly Ox. All of you, listen to me. Back in the day, Mount Heavenly Ox was a holy land here. It occupied the highest position possible!

“But let’s not bring up history. All of those things are past glories. Now... now there are all sorts of sects here, and they’re organized into an alliance. And that alliance is named, ahem, well, they clearly feel sentimental about the legends associated with this place, because they’re called the Heavenly Ox Alliance.”

The Captain seemed very happy to speak those words. In fact, back in Sea-Sealing County, when he received the intelligence reports that explained all of these things, he had been elated for days. [1]

Hearing all of that, Xu Qing made sure to look very impressed. Then he looked up into the sky.

“Seems brighter than everywhere else, right?” the Captain said, grinning. “That’s because the canopy of heaven here was once split open. Also, the mountains are special. They actually produce their own light. Because of that, the Unfinished Mountains are quite famous throughout the Moonrite Region. Now, let’s get moving. I’ll take you to the main city at the bottom of the mountain. Because there are so many cultivators here, the city formed naturally there, and it’s a very bustling place.”

Clasping his hands behind his back, the Captain led the way. It almost seemed like he was arriving back at his own home. Before long, a huge city appeared up ahead. Even from a distance, it was possible to hear the hustle and bustle. There were local cultivators from a number of species present, as well as lots of mortals. Standing outside the city gate, the Captain cleared his throat loudly, stuck his chin up, and intentionally studied the placard with the city’s name printed on it.

Ox-Receiving City.

The name seemed bold and also ancient, as if it had existed for countless years of time. Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan looked at the name of the city, then reflexively looked at the Captain. Beaming with joy, the Captain turned to Xu Qing. Xu Qing studied the name of the city, and his expression flickered.

The Captain roared with happy laughter. Leading them forward, he said, “You saw that, huh? This city was built for the specific purpose of welcoming me! Coming back to this place really is coming home.”

The Captain strode forward jauntily. However, when they actually went through the gate, a little incident occurred. As it turned out, entering the city required a hefty spirit stone fee. The Captain had just finished explaining that this was his home, so he obviously wasn’t very thrilled at having to pay money to get in.

Ning Yan averted his gaze. Wu Jianwu looked around blankly. Neither of them had any money.

Xu Qing blinked a few times. Noting how dismal the Captain looked, he quietly offered some words of comfort. “It’s fine, Eldest Brother. They don’t know who you are, or that this place

actually belongs to you. And if you think about it, the spirit stones being paid are actually yours anyway, right?”

The Captain’s eyes beamed with admiration. *Little Ah Qing really is so considerate!*

With that, he happily paid the spirit stone fee out of pocket.

And so they entered the bustling city. There were species and sects of all sorts represented, and there were lots of shops. The place was clearly very prosperous.

As they walked through the city, the Captain looked around and sighed contentedly. At one point, he spotted a spirit spring facility, and he stopped in place, a look of reminiscence appearing on his face.

“There’s a spirit river that snakes through the Unfinished Mountains, and it forms plenty of spirit springs. Even after all the years that have passed, the springs are still there. Back in the day I used to love having a soak here, and of course, having some of the female cultivators join me. Come! Let’s go relax in the water. After you’re all feeling comfortable, I’ll take you to my home.”

And thus the Captain led them inside.

The proprietor of the spirit spring facility was a cultivator. After nodding in greeting, he accepted the payment and then led them inside. The pools were large, and there were lots of customers present. Though the pools were separated to allow for private bathing, it still felt like a bustling place, filled with the sound of chatting and laughter.

Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu each got a separate pool. Doffing their outer garments, they slipped into the water and sighed contentedly. Wu Jianwu paid extra so that he could be joined by all of his children.

The Captain had his own pool, where he spread out his arms and let loose a long sigh.

Once Xu Qing was in his own pool, Ling’er came out and took human form. Blushing a bit, she scooted close to Xu Qing and smiled so broadly her eyes became thin crescent moons. Xu Qing smiled, closed his eyes, and felt his mood improving as he relaxed. After all, the exhausting travel, plus the physical transformation he went through, had left him so worn out that soaking in the spring just felt extremely rejuvenating and comfortable.

As they acclimated to the surroundings, the laughing and chatter wasn’t just random noise. After getting used to it, it seemed like part of the experience.

There were some conversations that caught Xu Qing’s attention.

“What a pity! Next month, all of the spirit springs on the mountain are going to be closed. Supposedly the spirit river is going to be completely diverted and sent to the local branch of the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect.”

“It is what it is. Immortal Fairy Sweetfrost is getting married, and she has to go through a one-month baptism first. Everyone in the Unfinished Mountains has to give her some face. The Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect even agreed to host her baptism, right?”

“Isn’t that just because of her fiancé, Master Darkfate? Considering he’s the top expert in the Unfinished Mountains, people basically have no choice but to cooperate.”

“Maybe. Immortal Fairy Sweetfrost really is a stunning beauty. I happened to catch a glimpse of her last year, and she’s really a looker. Completely incomparable.”

“I heard Immortal Fairy Sweetfrost isn’t actually from the Unfinished Mountains. She just showed up a while ago when she was passing through. For Master Darkfate, though, it was love at first sight.”

Those were some of the things Xu Qing heard mixed in with the regular chatting and laughter.

It was very thought-provoking to Xu Qing. This was his custom; whenever he was in a new location, he would take time to learn more about the place, including the current gossip. The latter was especially important. Considering what happened in the Heavenfire Sea, and how a lack of information had proved to be very troublesome, he had come to value that sort of thing more than ever.

Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan weren’t thinking about such things. However, the Captain was keeping his ears open. Eventually, he looked over at Xu Qing, smiled, and said, “That’s not important to us. This is our house, and they’re like little house sparrows.”

In response to the Captain’s confident words, Xu Qing nodded, then closed his eyes and sank down a bit in the water.

Two hours passed. When they left the spirit spring facility, they all felt revitalized.

Although Xu Qing was in disguise, his tall, slender frame still attracted a lot of attention when they left. So did rosy-cheeked Ling’er. Now that she was back in human form, she was exquisitely beautiful, and as she accompanied Xu Qing, quite a few people glanced at her.

Wu Jianwu was feeling great. Any sense of depression he had felt was long gone, and as he walked the streets along with Xu Qing and the others, he gracefully fanned himself with a fan.

*“Floating clouds are mountains’ halos; in my heart a field of boulders glows!*

*“A feather from spirit to mortal will grow; its beauty is naught but apropos!”*

Wu Jianwu usually stuck to a single line of poetry at a time. But this time, he spoke two lines with two sections each, for a total of four rhyming sections. After finishing with the poem, he looked very pleased. Ning Yan took a few steps away from Wu Jianwu, while the Captain seemed confused about the meaning of the poem. Xu Qing kept looking straight ahead. Other pedestrians who heard Wu Jianwu’s poetry looked over curiously; it wasn’t common to hear poetry like that on the street.

Wu Jianwu snorted coldly in his heart. *Simpletons! How can they not understand the deeper meaning of my poetry?*

Feeling more highbrow than ever, Wu Jianwu shook his head and strolled after Xu Qing and the others.

Unbeknownst to him, two women were looking down at the street from the second floor of a nearby building. One of them was younger, and had her head bowed as she said something to the other woman, who was good-looking and middle-aged. The latter looked surprised. However, it wasn't because of what her subordinate was telling her.

Standing, she pushed aside the curtain and looked out to see Wu Jianwu walking away in the opposite direction. Her eyes filled with admiration and praise.

“What an extraordinary individual. He's using mountains and boulders as a metaphor for inner will, and 'spirit' to describe mortality. He's giving voice to his true inner ambitions in the same manner as Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity! Given the times we live in, romantics like this aren't very common!”

The woman's subordinate was visibly taken aback by her words, and stepped up to the window to take a look for herself. She was aware that her sect leader had always been enamored with Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity. And for someone to become a sect leader with such public adoration was something only an extraordinary individual could accomplish.

“Sect Leader, should I do some digging and find out who the young gentleman is?”

“There's no need,” the middle-aged woman said softly. “Our Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect values predestined affinity. Besides, romantics such as him probably wouldn't appreciate people prying into his personal affairs.” Eyes glittering, she turned to look at her subordinate. “Did you dig up any information about Fellow Daoist Sweetfrost?”

Her subordinate ducked her head and respectfully replied, “I got some. She was originally in the first stage of Void Returning. However, after sustaining a serious injury, her cultivation base dropped below Void Returning.

“She's probably using a fake name, as her background story is completely fabricated. She does have some of the curse in her, but not much, which seems to indicate she's an out-of-region cultivator. What's more, her spiritual souls and physical souls are incomplete. Given the location where she first appeared, it seems unlikely that she's a Firemoon Darkheaven. She probably isn't a Nightshade either. The most likely possibility is that she snuck in from Holytide territory. It's impossible to say what she's doing here. However, we do know that she only met Master Darkfate a year ago.”

With that, the subordinate stopped speaking, so the middle-aged woman waved her hand. The subordinate quickly took her leave.

Once alone, the middle-aged woman looked off into the distance.

In that case, why does this Sweetfrost have the aura of a Smoldering God on her...?

Chapter 573: Opening a Tomb on a Moonless Night (part 1)

As Wu Jianwu followed Xu Qing and the Captain, slowly shaking his head, he had no idea that, at long last, someone had appeared who could not only understand his poetry, but appreciate it.



*“The crumbling leaves are lonely and scattered; a bird missing feathers cannot fly high.”* Wu Jianwu sighed.

Off to the side, Ning Yan’s lips twitched with disgust. As far as he was concerned, Wu Jianwu was off in the head. In fact, Ning Yan had decided that if he ever reached the pinnacle of all heaven and earth, he would definitely issue orders to have Wu Jianwu’s head opened up to see what host of demonic beings had possessed him.

Sensing that something was off about the way Ning Yan was looking at him, Wu Jianwu looked at him and snorted coldly.

*“Shameless, but seemingly a decent chap; look close, you’ll realize he’s a piece of crap!”*

The infuriated Ning Yan looked like he was about ready to start an argument. But then he thought about all of those random animals Wu Jianwu had, and decided not to.

Around then, the Captain said, “Would you two cool it? It’s getting late, so the time has come to show all of you my home. You will now see splendid architecture and overflowing wealth. There was a lot of blood, sweat, and tears that went into the construction of my mausoleum. And there was amazing treasure left inside as well!

“Big Jianjian, you like to collect the Ancient Emperor’s calligraphy? I have five scrolls in there! Little Ningning, remember those things you need for your ancestral bloodline awakening? I have seven of them. Just follow me! And as for you, little Junior Brother, believe me, you’re the main foundation of all of our big jobs, and also the main reason the Red Moon Cathedral is going to topple soon!

“Remember, all of you. Keep a firm grip on your jaw. Otherwise, it might drop so low it falls off your face!”

The Captain’s eyes shone with lofty pride, and he kept his chin stuck up as he led them forward.

The Captain’s confident words, and his look of longing, got Xu Qing thinking. He was increasingly curious about this past life of the Captain, and though he had some speculations, there was no evidence to give him any solid clues. That said, from all the Captain’s descriptions, it must have been a very extraordinary life. Thus, Xu Qing’s eyes glittered with anticipation.

Wu Jianwu had stopped his poetry, and walked a bit faster to keep up. Ning Yan was looking increasingly excited, and Ling’er’s eyes shone with deep curiosity.

As night fell, the five of them left Ox-Receiving City and entered the Unfinished Mountains.

The Captain led the way. He hadn’t been here for a very long time, but it was where he had lived a previous life. Therefore, all it took was to note a few landmarks, and he had no trouble leading. Four hours later, the five of them were deep in the Unfinished Mountains. They had made their way past quite a few mountain peaks, and every time they did, the Captain would wax reminiscent.

“In the past, that was Pure Girl Summit, which was the location of a sect that one of my old flames called home. Ah, what a pity. She’s nothing but bleached bones now. She won’t be chasing me anymore. [1]

“This is where the Three Cauldrons Sect once stood. It was also where one of my best friends was born. Oh, how I miss him. As a member of the Weaponoid species, he was much stronger than our Little Ningning. He could take the form of any kind of weapon!

“There’s one constant in the vicissitudes of time: things change, but people stay the same.”

The Captain continued to sigh. Eventually, when the sky was completely dark, he led Xu Qing and the others to the foot of a barren mountain. Along the way, they stopped at seven different locations, where the Captain would perform an incantation gesture. It seemed like he was dispelling sealing marks.

“There are eight steps involved in opening this tomb from my previous life. All the seals have to be opened in the correct order within six hours. Make even one mistake, and it won’t work. The most important thing is to space out the timing correctly. You can’t go too fast or too slow. And now, we’ve reached the eighth and final spot.”

The Captain looked up at the barren mountain. There didn’t seem to be anything unusual about this location. It looked completely average.

But after looking around and calculating the time, the Captain performed a right-handed incantation gesture, then pushed his hand out in front of him. A tremor passed through the ground, and many boulders seemed to shift in place. Upon sensing that, the Captain grinned. Then he smacked himself in the chest, causing blood to spray out of his mouth. As it landed on the ground, the blood seeped down and disappeared.

The Captain wasn’t done with his work, though. He began speeding circles around the barren mountain. To the shock of Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu, as the Captain ran, he pummeled himself viciously, until he had coughed up so many mouthfuls of blood it was hard to keep track of. The blood all disappeared into the soil, leaving no trace of itself behind. After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, the Captain returned to them, huffing and puffing, his face pale. He was clearly very weak, but also visibly excited.

“If you mess up even one step of the process, the tomb won’t open. Other than me, nobody could possibly do this.”

After some quick calculations, Xu Qing determined that the Captain had coughed up enough blood to fill the bodies of two hundred ordinary people. It really did seem reasonable to say that the Captain was the only person who could do this.

“And now, polish your eyeballs and get ready to see something amazing!”

Laughing heartily, the Captain slapped the ground. The soil beneath his feet sank down, creating a vortex that instantly sucked the Captain inside.

Without the slightest hesitation, Xu Qing led Ling’er forward. Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu followed. They all entered the vortex.

A moment later, the vortex vanished, and everything went back to normal. The warding spells here had obviously been designed to mask fluctuations. During the entire time, almost no noise or vibrations escaped out to be detected by anyone.

Xu Qing had no idea where the vortex was taking them. When he finally opened his eyes, he saw that the five of them were in a subterranean cave temple. It was quite large. The temple layout was oval, and it had a ceiling some several hundred meters high. Against the walls were twelve enormous statues. Some were humans, some were nonhumans. All of them had weapons in hand, and fierce eyes that seemed to see back into ancient times. They were so enormous that Xu Qing and the others felt like they were in a kingdom of giants. In the temple's position of honor was a huge throne. It was empty save for an imperial crown made of stone. Though the stony cavern was simplistic in nature, it abounded with a straightforward and even overbearing air.

When Ning Yan was able to see everything clearly, he inhaled sharply.

Twelve Imperial Sovereigns, each of them 299 meters tall. And they're bowing to a throne that's 300 meters tall. It conforms to the pattern of a Grand Emperor!

Wu Jianwu didn't know about such things, but he was nonetheless struck with an indescribable sensation that caused him to look at the Captain with a bewildered look in his eyes.

Xu Qing was similarly astonished. Based on all of this, it was obvious that the Captain had been an extraordinary person in this previous life of his. Even Ling'er's eyes were wide with incredulity.

Seeing the looks on everyone's faces caused the Captain to sigh softly. The sound of his sigh carried a sensation of reminiscence and melancholy throughout the stony cavern as the Captain slowly started walking forward. As everyone watched, he strode toward the front until he reached the 300-meter-tall throne, growing larger and larger as he did. Sitting on the throne, he looked out at everything.

The height, and the gaze, as well as the grandeur because of the surroundings, made it seem like the Captain really was a Grand Emperor returned, imbued with a spirit that could conquer mountains and rivers.

Wu Jianwu shivered instinctively. Ducking his head, he clasped hands and bowed. Ning Yan felt himself going a bit weak at the knees.

Only Xu Qing managed to keep himself calm and collected. He looked around suspiciously at the cave, and then at the enormous projected version of the Captain on the throne.

"Everything here is fake, isn't it, Eldest Brother?"

Xu Qing's words caused the eyes of Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu to go wide. The Captain, however, maintained the same dignified facial expression as he looked back at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing turned to the left, toward what seemed like nothing but thin air. Face completely expressionless, he said, "Stop fooling around, Eldest Brother."

Laughter suddenly erupted from the spot Xu Qing was looking at, and the Captain materialized.

Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu looked at that spot, then back at the throne. The huge projected figure on the throne was obviously an illusion, not the real Captain.

The Captain ignored Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu. Chuckling, he looked at Xu Qing.

“Nobody understands me better than you, little Junior Brother. Well done. This place is actually intended to deter tomb raiders. Although the method to open the entrance here is complicated, and only I know how to do it, I still wanted to play things very safe. So I made this area.

“Any tomb raider who managed to make it this far, would surely be fooled by the illusion, and then stumble into the deadly traps. I’ve engaged in a lifetime of tomb raiding myself, so I understand all such things very deeply.”

Xu Qing nodded. All of this really did conform to the Captain’s style.

“Come, I’ll take you in further,” the Captain said. “After this are eight similar locations set up to guard against tomb raiders.”

Grinning craftily, the Captain led them up to the throne. There, he coughed up a massive mouthful of blood, and another vortex appeared that they jumped into.

They passed through six of the areas the Captain had mentioned earlier. All of them were constructed to look inimitably realistic. Also, each one was bigger and more magnificent than the one before it. In the sixth location, they felt like they were floating amongst the clouds. When Ning Yan looked around at what scenery was visible through the clouds, he was yet again dumbstruck. Everything conformed exactly to the pattern of the Ancient Emperors.

They didn’t continue any further. In the sixth location, the Captain harvested a bit of a cloud, coughed up some blood to mix with it, and subsequently created an enormous door made of mist.

Looking as proud as a peacock, the Captain stood in front of the door and said, “Normally speaking, anyone who reached this point would believe that there were more spots to visit. And that’s why I did things contrary to logic and hid the real entrance right here. This door leads to the first floor of my residence from this past life.”

Everything Wu Jianwu had seen had left him shaken to the core. The fact that so many facade tombs had been built to guard against tomb raiders begged the question of how amazing the real tomb was going to be.

Ning Yan’s thoughts were focused in a different direction. “What do the last two facade tombs look like?”

The Captain laughed but didn’t answer the question. Waving his hand, he summoned the Lonesun’s artificial sun, and had it shine a burst of light on the door. He did that nine times. After the ninth burst of light, the door rumbled open.

“I’m finally home! Ai. It’s been such a long time. I really miss this place.”

The Captain could already imagine Xu Qing’s stunned reaction upon seeing how skilled he was at hiding treasure. Trying to look like the epitome of casualness, the Captain beckoned at them to enter the door.

Xu Qing actually was looking forward to seeing what lay beyond the door, so he strode forward. Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu followed. Once they were in, the Captain smiled proudly and stepped in the door. On the other side was a very large mansion grotto.

“And this is— wait. What?”

As the Captain looked around, his jaw slowly dropped.

Chapter 573: Opening a Tomb on a Moonless Night (part 2)

The place was completely and utterly empty. There was nothing present, not even a chair. It was absolutely bare, to the point where it looked like someone had cleaned the place. There wasn't even any dust in the corners.

A strange expression could be seen on Xu Qing's face. Ning Yan blinked a few times. Wu Jianwu's eyebrows danced up and down.

Ling'er leaned over to Xu Qing and loudly whispered, “It's so clean!”

The Captain spun to look left and right, feeling increasingly flustered. Something was definitely not right here. However, he managed to maintain superior control over his facial expression, and continued to talk in a very relaxed and casual manner.

“There was never anything on the first floor. Considering how many years have passed, you would expect things to look a bit weathered. In any case, my really good stuff is all on the second floor. I put special protections in place there.”

The Captain hurried to the opposite wall, where he flicked his sleeve. Rumbling sounds echoed out as a stone door appeared. Seeing that the door was undamaged, the Captain breathed a sigh of relief. Placing his hand in front of his mouth, he started licking it to cover it in saliva. At the same time, he provided an explanation for Xu Qing and the others.

“This door can only be opened with my saliva and palm print. Without those two things, nobody can open the door.” The Captain put his hand directly on the door. “Open!”

The door vibrated a few times, but in the end, it didn't open.

Xu Qing blinked a few times. Ling'er looked at the Captain. Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan were also looking at the Captain.

Surprised, the Captain retracted his right hand. After giving his left hand a thorough licking, he tried again. The door vibrated even more dramatically, but it didn't open. Beads of sweat were now visible on the Captain's forehead. Aware that everyone was looking at him, he cleared his throat.

“It's been a really long time. I guess some parts have broken over the years. It's fine! It's totally fine. I have other ways of getting inside.”

The Captain put both hands on the door and pushed, and though the door vibrated even more dramatically than before, it still didn't open. The Captain's eyes went wide. Biting his tongue, he spat out some blood. The blood made the door shake violently. But it didn't open.

Eyes glittering, Xu Qing took a step forward, clenched his hand into a fist, and punched the door. It shook even more violently.

The Captain inhaled sharply. He was starting to get anxious. “What are you people standing around for? Help me! Something is freaking wrong here. Somebody changed the lock on my house!”

Wu Jianwu muttered to himself apprehensively, but in the end, still summoned some of his children.

A bear appeared, as did a parrot, as well as a host of other strange-looking animals. They charged toward the door.

Ning Yan was starting to get a very bad feeling, and started to back away. But then the Captain reached out, grabbed the vines growing out of his belly, and yanked Ning Yan through the air to slam into the door. A boom rang out. Ning Yan had very thick skin, so he wasn't hurt. And thanks to the force being focused on it, it finally opened a tiny crack.

Looking very nervous, the Captain started spitting out mouthful after mouthful of blood onto the opened part of the door. His blood was apparently an all-purpose tool in dealing with things he had set up in a previous life....

Thanks to the blood, the crack grew wider. Rumbling sounds echoed out as the door eventually swung open, revealing a cave temple beyond.

It was... a complete mess.

A thief had clearly been here. There was junk tossed around everywhere, including broken medicinal pill bottles and overturned book cases. There was also a faint scent of decay.

The Captain looked around, flabbergasted.

Xu Qing's eyes shone as he stepped into the cave temple and looked at the chaos.

Wu Jianwu sighed. Given what he was seeing, he couldn't hold back from reciting some poetry.

*"The delighted ox took the long path back, only to find a home bare and miserable...."*

"What Big Jianjian means, Elder Brother Erniu," Ning Yan said quietly, "is that your home got robbed."

The Captain turned to look at the two of them, and he seemed so furious that he looked like he might eat them. They quickly shut their mouths. That said, the Captain wasn't in the mood to deal with the two morons. Looking at the devastation in the cave temple, anger began to bubble within him. That was especially true when he thought back to all the expensive things he had stored here in his past life.

Finally, he sighed, and pretended to be very relaxed. "I predicted years ago that something like this could happen," he said loftily. "After all, a lot of time has passed. It's normal for unexpected things to happen. And that's why I made sure all the best stuff was actually on the next floor, by the coffin.

"This is the second floor, and what's gone is gone. My coffin, on the other hand, is on the third floor. It's definitely going to be untouched. Other than me, no one in heaven and earth exists who could open the third floor. Not even a god!"

With that, he strolled to the middle of the stony cavern, where he performed an incantation gesture. The cavern trembled, and then a circular door appeared.

Some of what the Captain said, Xu Qing believed. But he didn't believe the part about gods being unable to open the door. However, he didn't say anything. He scanned the floor, then looked at the

door thoughtfully. He was about to say something, but before he could, the Captain suddenly coughed up a huge mouthful of blood and staggered to the side.

Snarling viciously, he said, "Very interesting. Someone actually altered this warding spell!"

Xu Qing prepared to step over and help, but the Captain waved him away.

"I don't need any of your help. I refuse to believe I can't handle this alone!" Everything he'd said on the way here now seemed like slaps on the face. With his self-esteem crashing and burning, the Captain gritted his teeth. Gruish faces appeared in his pupils, and the faces' pupils also had faces in them. Apparently, that pattern went on forever.

The area was now surrounded with blue light, as well as an explosively frigid coldness. Approaching the door, he lifted his right hand and then shoved it out. His chest suddenly ripped open as a blue hand with bone spurs jutting off it emerged. There wasn't just one. A total of eight hands burst out from inside him, along with terrifying fluctuations.

Wu Jianwu and his animal children trembled. Ning Yan was stunned. And the eight vicious blue hands shoved at the door.

Rumbling sounds echoed out. The Captain had set up the warding spells here, and though they had been altered, he still had a higher level of command over them than any other person. The door trembled as glowing cracks spread out over its surface to form a magical symbol. The magical symbol flickered a few times, and then a loud cracking sound could be heard. The door collapsed, revealing a roughly 30-meter cave temple.

Without the slightest hesitation, the Captain flew inside. A moment later, a howl of grief rang out.

It was an intense cry that prompted Xu Qing to rush into the cave temple. Once inside, he gasped. The mess on the third floor surpassed that on the second floor. If the second floor had been ransacked by a thief, then the third floor had been cleared out by a gang of thieves. Everything was in complete disorder. Worst of all, there were some dried-up piles of excrement in a few places.

There was a tall plinth in the middle of the cave, atop which the coffin would normally rest. The coffin had been smashed to pieces, although there was one small part of it still intact, laying off to the side. It was empty. There was no corpse.

The Captain sat down on one of the pieces of the coffin and looked around. He seemed numb.

Seeing that, Xu Qing sighed, walked over, and clasped the Captain's shoulder.

The Captain looked at him with grief and indignation in his eyes. "Little Junior Brother, my past life... has been stolen."

Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan entered, and they looked around, shocked.

"Eldest Brother," Xu Qing whispered, "just calm down. Are you completely sure that your past life body was actually dead?"

He had no idea what it would be like to have your corpse from a previous life stolen. After all, not many people could experience something like that. But he could guess what the Captain was feeling.

Hearing Xu Qing's question caused the Captain's eyes to harden. He was a shrewd person, and though it had been a big shock to find that his past life body was gone, after Xu Qing's question, he started noticing things. His expression turned cold.

"Do you mean that my body might have woken up and done all this? But if I didn't die in that previous life, then how could I be here in this life? It doesn't seem to me that your suggestion is very realistic. Unless...."

"Unless some unclean thing came and possessed your body," Xu Qing said calmly.

"That's right!" the Captain said, standing. Terrifying fluctuations rolled off him. "I'm the one who usually pulls a fast one on other people. This is the first time someone else has pulled a fast one on me! The chaos on the second floor spread from one spot, so it seems likely it was caused by a single person."

"And then this third floor..." Xu Qing said, looking at the Captain.

A crazy look appeared in the Captain's eyes. "Everything on the third floor is focused on the center of the cave. Given the damage here, it seems that the coffin exploded, creating a big shockwave. Only after the dust settled did someone search the place. For this unclean thing to open the doors and change everything shows that they must understand me very well...."

"That lets us narrow things down a lot. It seems extremely unlikely that someone broke in from the outside. Instead, an unclean spirit that originated here seems like the most likely culprit. I had a lot of funerary objects in here. Maybe after all the years that passed, one of those objects had some sort of destined opportunity and ended up producing a spirit automaton!"

The more the Captain voiced things out loud, the more everything made sense. A cold light flickered in his eyes.

"That said, this unclean thing really should not have possessed my old body. I ensorcelled that body starting from when it was just born. What's more, it's linked to this specific location. Without interference from me, if it leaves the Unfinished Mountains, it'll collapse into ash. And that means... if it's still alive, it can't be very far away!"

The Captain's cold voice thrummed with killing intent.

Xu Qing nodded, looked at the cave walls around them, and opened his mouth to speak.

The Captain beat him to it. "We need to determine if this thing sensed that we were coming."

The Captain performed a double-handed incantation gesture, causing streams of light to spring up everywhere, allowing him to connect to the warding spells. A moment later, he gave a cold harrumph.

"There are no signs of any fluctuations leaving this place. This unclean thing might have some control over things here, but in the end, this is *my* tomb!"



The Captain spat up another mouthful of blood, then lifted his right hand and snapped his finger. The blood he had just coughed up turned into a geomantic compass. The needle on the compass spun, then pointed it in one specific direction.

“Anything connected to my blood can be tracked using this bloodline compass!”

All of a sudden, the needle shifted to point at Ning Yan.

Ning Yan’s face fell.

Chapter 574: Predestined Relationship; Too Wonderful for Words (part 1)

“It’s not me!” Ning Yan blurted anxiously. “It’s obviously pointing at something behind me! That’s got to be it!”

Ning Yan quickly hurried over to Wu Jianwu’s side. However, as he did, the blood needle on the Captain’s geomantic compass swiveled to follow him.

The Captain’s expression turned very serious as he stared deeply at Ning Yan.

“Get over here!”

Wu Jianwu’s expression flickered as he turned to look at Ning Yan and, without even thinking about it, said, “*A barren tree blooms, making new generations; the glimmering light points to distant relations?*”

Trembling with terror, Ning Yan ignored Wu Jianwu. He looked confused, and at the same time, his heart was pounding so hard it could dry up rivers and drain seas. He really had thought that he was just standing in between the geomantic compass and the tomb raider. But now it was clear that the needle really was pointing at him. When he thought about what that signified given the circumstances, he started to get panicky.

“Elder B-brother Erniu,” he stammered, “this doesn’t have anything to do with me, really. I... I don’t even know what’s going on!”

Xu Qing looked on curiously, but didn’t say anything.

Eyebrows dancing up and down, the Captain said, “Hurry up and give it to me.”

“Give you what?” Ning Yan said, grimacing. “You and I definitely aren’t blood related!”

The Captain frowned in disdain. “I know this has nothing to do with you. How could I possibly have a descendant like you? I want you to give me that treasured patch of skin!”

Shivering, Ning Yan quickly took the patch of skin out of his bag of holding and threw it to the Captain. The needle followed it. Seeing that, Ning Yan breathed a huge sigh of relief. He’d been scared nearly to death just now.

Wu Jianwu sighed inwardly and murmured, “*The world collapses, the bird pees in fright; fate comes and goes for this troglodyte.*”

Ning Yan didn’t understand the poetry, but he could sense that it was somehow making fun of him. He glared at Wu Jianwu. Wu Jianwu glared back, and the numerous animals surrounding him joined him. Ning Yan kept his mouth shut.

The Captain was already ignoring their mutual animosity. Picking up the patch of skin and storing it in his own bag of holding, he once again consulted his geomantic compass. It was now pointing in a specific direction.

“That’s the way. Let’s go! I’m very curious to see who the hell went so far as to possess my past-life body!”

Bristling with anger, the Captain hurried back toward the entrance of the tomb.

Xu Qing hurried along. As he did, he checked the shadow beneath his feet, and also sent his senses into his bag of holding to make sure the Spike of Misfortune was ready to use. He was now more determined than ever to stay on guard against them; the Captain’s current situation had made it obvious how important that was. When the shadow sensed Xu Qing’s divine will, it trembled. Inside the Spike of Misfortune, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior shivered. Both tried to exude overt subservience.

Xu Qing’s facial expression remained unchanging. Inside, he was thinking that he should probably learn some more about warding spells, and consider using some to make sure he was fully prepared to deal with any issues with the shadow or patriarch. He didn’t want to hurt their feelings, but also didn’t want to make the same mistake the Captain had made. As he was wrapped up in such thoughts, he followed the Captain out of the tomb and into the morning outside.

Off in the distance, an artificial sun cast out its first morning rays, driving away the darkness. The lush mountain vegetation became clearly visible. Given the bitterness of the world they lived in, the life pulsing through the plants and vegetation almost seemed like an illusion to Xu Qing. But as the day grew brighter, things seemed to turn normal, and the mountain boulders looked less like demonic monsters and more like ordinary rocks.

The small group of four was wrapped up in all sorts of emotions.

The Captain was anxious. Wu Jianwu was sighing regretfully. Ning Yan was still a bit frightened. Xu Qing was completely on guard, as he was convinced that this incident wasn’t going to wrap up as smoothly as the Captain had claimed it would.

Xu Qing had no idea how many years had passed since this previous life of the Captain’s. And if the culprit was still in the Unfinished Mountains, it seemed likely they would be very well prepared.

In all likelihood, whoever we’re dealing with knows that Eldest Brother can transmigrate. In other words, he would be able to guess that Eldest Brother would eventually come back. And that means this guy is definitely extremely cautious.

Xu Qing hurried to catch up with the Captain and then shared some of his thoughts.

The Captain nodded. He had considered such things as well. However, he still felt confident. Claspng Xu Qing’s shoulder, he lowered his voice and said, “Whoever the hell did all this, little Junior Brother, you can rest assured that there’s one thing he didn’t think of. And that is... all I have to do is touch him and I have my ways of taking control.

“You see, whenever I transmigrate, I always ensorcel my new body as soon as possible after being born. That way, the body is ready to be used as a weapon at any moment. Because of that, this past-life body really can’t escape me.”

Xu Qing looked the Captain up and down. “You did the same thing with your current body?”

“Of course, little Ah Qing!” the Captain said, looking down his nose. “On that fateful day back in the county capital, I was ready to open all my seals and call all of my past-life bodies to me. That’s no exaggeration. If I called all my past-life bodies together, then even gods would have to call me ‘Big Bro.’” [1]

Xu Qing chuckled. He had long since grown used to the Captain’s bragging. However, considering that the incident related to Xu Qing himself, it had a different level of meaning. He nodded earnestly.

Seven days passed. During that time, they followed the Captain’s geomantic compass deep into the Unfinished Mountains. The mountain peaks were tall and forbidding, the vegetation was dense, and they saw lots of wild animals.

Similar to both cultivators and mortals, the animals in the Moonrite Region were also cursed. Because of that, they had all changed, and were much fiercer than their out-of-region counterparts. Just now, a swarm of tiger-headed butterflies was flying past, their wingspans nearly two meters. As they flew along, they scattered extremely poisonous powder. Xu Qing captured a few of them, whereupon his eyes glittered with curiosity. He looked in the direction they were flying.

The powder has the red moon curse in it.... But it’s very active, like it was just created.

Though his curiosity had been aroused, he decided to think about such matters later, and instead followed the Captain.

At a certain point deep in the mountains, the sensation the Captain was getting from his blood prompted him to mask his presence. Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan also used similar methods to conceal their auras. Xu Qing took out the mask his Master had given him, then went into his Gruegloom state, making him virtually invisible.

In a small valley, the Captain squatted on the branch of a tree, then turned to what seemed to be empty air next to him and said, “Little Ah Qing, about a day ahead of us is where my bloodline power is strongest. However, only scraps are left behind. The origin isn’t there.

“Instead of running around after him, I want to lay in wait until he returns. Incidentally, because of various reasons, this old body of mine likely doesn’t have Void Returning battle prowess. It should be in Spirit Trove. Spirit Trove fleshly body battle prowess.”

“Okay,” Xu Qing replied from a different direction.

The Captain blinked a few times. *Hmm. Little Ah Qing’s concealment abilities have really improved. I need to pick up the pace.*

However, now wasn’t the time to put a lot of thought into such things, so he just squatted there unmoving.

Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan were nearby, hardly daring to breathe.

After all, no one knew who exactly had taken over the Captain’s previous life body. And in terms of this person’s cultivation base... the Captain might seem relaxed, but if they were dealing with a

Spirit Trove cultivator, they might as well be up against a colossal monster. Everyone was being very cautious. Time passed.

Four days later, the Captain suddenly transmitted a message to everyone.

*“He’s here!”*

Xu Qing looked, not up into the sky, but at a spot in front of the Captain. There was an eyeball there which was projecting an image of the area.

Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan retracted every scrap of their auras. At first, they looked up into the sky, but then quickly shifted their attention to the eyeball in front of the Captain.

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About a day’s journey from where they were, something dramatic happened in the canopy of heaven. A group of people flew over the horizon. Along with them came music spreading out in all directions. There were over a hundred people in the group, and all of them were playing flutes. The music was beautiful and energetic. There were handmaidens flying alongside them, scattering flower petals that caused a fragrant aroma to surround them.

The group wore colorful clothing that made them look like beautiful flowers flying through the sky. The flowers swirled around an enormous marriage sedan crafted from a gigantic skull. It was being carried through the air by thirty-two burly men who weren’t human at all. They were Lionfolk. The way their golden fur shone in the sunlight made them seem like celestial soldiers. [2]

In Sea-Sealing County, this type of ostentatious show wouldn’t be very unusual. But in the Moonrite Region, and especially the Unfinished Mountains, it was dramatic to the point of being a bit ridiculous.

Inside the marriage sedan sat a man and a woman. The woman appeared to be about twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. Clad in a beautiful gown embroidered with a cloud-studded red sunset, she was petite, with skin as fair as snow, and eye-catchingly attractive. She was currently leaning up against the man, and had pulled his arm around her. From the gentle way she stared at him, it was as if he was the only person that existed in her world.

Beneath her slender neck was a milky-colored chest that was only half-covered by her garment. The silk band around her waist accentuated her long, shapely legs, which ended in feet as dainty as lotus blossoms. Altogether, she was incredibly enticing, and could definitely be described as a consummate beauty. [3]

The man was tall and muscular, with rather crude facial features, and grayish skin that seemed devoid of life force. He had one large eye and one small eye that didn’t seem to match. When he breathed, he exhaled dark, turbid energy. Even the whites of his eyes seemed strange. They were yellow as if with sickness. Some patches of skin on him seemed to be decaying, and he even oozed necrotic corpse fluids in some places, making it hard for anyone to look at him for long.

This man hardly seemed a good complement for the young woman. That said, he was also impressive in his own way, with a strong baleful aura. What was more, his strangely mismatched eyes contained an inherent apathy toward life. All-in-all, he had his own type of dignity that few people would dare to underestimate.

Eventually, they arrived at their destination. There, the man stood, and the woman rose with him.

They looked at each other. One pair of eyes was cold. The other abounded with emotion. They kissed, and it was hard to imagine how the woman could stand the dark energy he exhaled. And when their tongues touched each other, it was appalling to say the least. If nothing else, it seemed to show that these two loved each other very deeply.

Eventually, the man stepped away and flew to the nearby mountaintop. The surrounding cultivators bowed respectfully, and then left with the sedan chair.

Meanwhile, on a plant leaf below, there was an eye that slowly closed and then dissolved into liquid.

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In a nearby valley, Xu Qing looked at the image being projected by the eyeball.

Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan didn't seem very surprised by what they had just seen. After all, they didn't recognize either of the people.

However, the Captain turned to Xu Qing, his gaze somewhat vacant. "Little Ah Qing, did that girl look familiar to you...?"

Xu Qing almost couldn't believe what he had just seen. From what he remembered, that woman was completely obsessed with the pursuit of beauty. Yet now she was apparently on intimate terms with a person who oozed necrotic fluids. Though it seemed unbelievable to Xu Qing, when he heard the Captain's words, he nodded.

"She looks just like the same person whose house you ruthlessly plundered. The same person who hates you to the core of her being. Nethersprite." [4]

Xu Qing stopped talking, but then added one further thought. "Captain, any chance you still have some of her clothes?"

Chapter 574: Predestined Relationship; Too Wonderful for Words (part 2)

The look on the Captain's face was strange. It flitted back and forth between ferocity and incredulity. Xu Qing could understand his reaction.

"The man with her...?" Xu Qing said hesitantly.

The Captain sighed bitterly. "That guy, well it's highly likely that he... is my body from that previous life."

Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan didn't know who Nethersprite was. But after hearing the conversation between Xu Qing and the Captain they could guess at what was going on. Both of them inhaled sharply.

Ning Yan hesitated, then quietly said, "Congratulations on your big day!"

Wu Jianwu was deeply moved. Thinking back to stories he'd heard about matters related to predestined relationships, he couldn't help but get excited and say, "*The situation causes shock and confusion; the Ox wonders if his life's a delusion! In the past they were nothing but foes and aggressors; in the present they've chosen to grow old together!*"

Xu Qing sat there quietly. The Captain sat there even more quietly.

There was no way Ning Yan was going to let an opportunity like this slip away, so he asked, “If the two of them have children, Elder Brother Erniu... what will the kids call you?”

Veins bulged on the Captain’s forehead.

Seeing that, Wu Jianwu decided that he could temporarily forget his revulsion for Ning Yan. After a moment of thought, he looked meaningfully at the Captain and said, “*My son’s dad is not his dad, my son’s mom is not his mom; ask my son what he calls me and he’ll say, biological dads and stepdads are all still dads!*”

The moment Wu Jianwu finished with his poem, the Captain clenched his hand into a fist and punched him in the face. With a howl in grief, Wu Jianwu was sent flying backward 300 meters. Ning Yan was about to turn and run when the Captain launched a kick and sent him flying over to join Wu Jianwu. Eyes bloodshot, the Captain then looked up into the sky.

Xu Qing looked sympathetic. He could imagine what complex emotions the Captain was dealing with. Reaching out, he clasped the Captain’s shoulder. A long moment passed.

“What the heck is going on here?? Why did Nethersprite fall for my past-life body?” The Captain’s complex feelings were reflected in his facial expression. There was really too much to put into words.

“Don’t be too upset, Eldest Brother,” Xu Qing said. “If Nethersprite knew the truth, she’d probably have mixed feelings as well.”

His words seemed to have a positive effect. After a moment of looking surprised, the Captain gritted his teeth.

“It doesn’t matter. All it took was a single glance and I could tell that my past life body was actually possessed by the spirit automaton of one of the funerary objects in the tomb. As for which exact funerary object it was, I can’t tell at the moment. But that doesn’t matter! I’m taking my body back. All I have to do is touch it!”

A crazy light flashed in the Captain’s eyes as he pulled Xu Qing closer to discuss the details.

It was going to be a difficult job. For one thing, Nethersprite’s aura made it clear she was in the great circle of Spirit Trove. Based on what Xu Qing remembered from various war reports, that was likely a result of how Nethersprite had severely injured herself on the battlefield to make her escape.

“Her ‘escape’ was a tactic,” Xu Qing said, “used by the swordsage grand elder of Emperor-Receiving Prefecture to keep Seventh Prince in check. But I always assumed the grand elder had her held captive secretly somewhere. As it turns out, he really did set her free. That said, I’m sure the grand elder has other contingencies in place. Unfortunately, we’re too far away from Sea-Sealing County to ask him for details.”

Eyes narrowing, the Captain said, “My past-life body has a very strong aura of death, and no fluctuations of any magical techniques. That’s as I expected. That body has been dead for long enough that whatever damned thing possessed him only has access to the shell. That said, that fleshly body power is comparable to the great circle of Spirit Trove.”

The Captain frowned. The past-life body alone would have been too much for him to deal with. And now Nethersprite was in the picture. For all intents and purposes, getting close enough to his past-life body to touch it was going to be impossible.

“Considering how intimate Nethersprite was with him, Eldest Brother, it seems to me that your past-life body must be the number-one expert in the Unfinished Mountains that we heard about. Master Darkfate. But I’m really curious as to how Nethersprite ended up here. And how could she really fall in love so deeply at first sight?”

Xu Qing got the feeling something suspicious was going on. He looked at the Captain. “We need some intelligence reports about this Master Darkfate.”

“I have some,” the Captain said. “Before, I didn’t pay much attention to the small fries around here. But I did get some basic information.” The Captain rummaged through his bag of holding and eventually produced a jade slip that had some information about Master Darkfate.

He had founded a sect in the Unfinished Mountains, its name being the Darkfate Sect. Master Darkfate himself spent most of his time in seclusion in his sect. He rarely made public appearances. It went without saying that his secluded meditation facilities had very tight security. Infiltrating them would be very risky. And they would only have one chance to do it. If they were discovered, all of them would be in incredible danger.

After Xu Qing and the Captain discussed matters at length, they decided that they had no choice but to cut a few corners.

“Eldest Brother,” Xu Qing said thoughtfully, “your past-life body and Nethersprite are supposed to be getting married soon....” A plan was already starting to form in his mind.

Hearing that, the Captain got a very bad premonition.

“Eldest Brother, didn’t we hear that Nethersprite is going for a month-long baptism at the spirit spring in the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect? If we could think of some way of capturing her there, then she wouldn’t be able to go through with the wedding.... And then, Eldest Brother, you could disguise yourself as Nethersprite!”

The Captain’s eyes went wide. Around that time, Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan had just run back. Hearing the last bit of dialogue caused both of their eyes to shine. That was especially true of Ning Yan, who couldn’t stop a grin from spreading out on his face. But then, fearful of being whacked again, he wiped the grin away.

“Eldest Brother,” Xu Qing continued, “you know your past-life body better than anyone. And you know Nethersprite fairly well too; after all, you’ve been in her house before. What’s more, you’re really an expert in dressing up like the opposite sex. You have experience, remember? You know, that Seazombie princess? Back then, your disguise was remarkably true to life. Incomparably realistic!” [1]

Keeping his eyes on the Captain, Xu Qing slowly took out an apple and handed it to him. “And that’s why I think,” he went on, “that you should disguise yourself as Nethersprite and go to the wedding with your past-self body. That would be the perfect way for you to lay hands on him, right? Of course, it’s all based on the presumption that we can figure out how to restrain Nethersprite and also pull the wool over the eyes of your past-self body.”

The Captain reflexively took the apple. His expression was one of hesitation.

On the one hand, he had to admit that Xu Qing’s plan seemed feasible. On the other hand, the idea of getting married to his past-self body seemed patently absurd. The end result was that he wasn’t sure what to think.

Sighing, Xu Qing squeezed the Captain’s shoulder. “Eldest Brother, this is the only plan I can come up with right now. But it’s pretty crazy. I understand if you can’t do it.”

Gritting his teeth viciously, the Captain started breathing heavily. Then he looked at Xu Qing with a crazy look in his eye.

“I can do it! However, we have a lot to prepare before we go through with it. Little Ah Qing, can you lend me that world fragment of yours? That’s going to be how we restrain her. Ordinary methods won’t work if we want to capture Nethersprite. I’m going to set up a grand spell formation in that world fragment. Then I’m going to have to undo some of my seals. We’ll add in my treasured skin patch, plus the might of my sun and... right, your Ghost Emperor nascent soul! We’ll need that as well.

“We’ll combine all of those things and then trap her inside the world fragment! In terms of tricking my past-self body, I have my ways!”

The Captain’s eyes were bloodshot; he was clearly willing to go all-out to retrieve the body that had once been his. With that, he and Xu Qing went on to discuss more details about the setup, including ways to avoid attracting the attention of the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect.

One suspicion Xu Qing brought up was the possibility that this entire thing was a big trap. Like a fishing expedition. Xu Qing knew from experience that traps like that weren’t obvious from the outside.

The Captain nodded and looked at Xu Qing with a strange look in his eyes. However, only a moment later, he brimmed with confidence as he explained that he had everything under control.

Xu Qing looked at the Captain. Ever since coming to the Unfinished Mountains, it seemed like the Captain’s confidence levels were different than before. That said, Xu Qing was used to his overconfident words.

A few days later, they had hashed out all the details and had a plan in place. With that, they headed toward a branch of the Southern Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect located in the Unfinished Mountains.

The Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect was a very large organization in the Moonrite Region. Because they worked with the Red Moon Cathedral to provide sacrificial dances, they had a good amount of authority. Also, they were so large that they had eastern, western, southern and northern branches.



Among their disciples were people both righteous and wicked, and as a result, it wasn't hard to infiltrate them. That was one of the reasons that the Captain, during his initial preparations, had arranged secret identities in that sect.

Their destination was one of a number of branches of the Southern Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect in these mountains. Its patriarch was in Void Returning, and he spent most of his time on the Penitence Steppes in the headquarters of the Red Moon Cathedral. The sect leader was his heir, who had a Spirit Trove cultivation base.

Because there were so many branches of the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect, it wasn't possible for all of them to get along. Though there were some dealings between the various branches, most stuck to themselves, and even guarded against the others. As a result, even though the Captain and Xu Qing had identity medallions from the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect, when they presented their identification, they were refused entry.

The headquarters of this branch was located on a tall mountain with twin peaks. It featured carved jade railings and extravagant decorations. On the back side of the mountain was a spirit lake formed because of how the local spirit rivers converged in the area. Because of that, the place was well-known.

At the foot of the twin peaks, a blur of light appeared in front of Xu Qing and the Captain, blocking their path. Three sect disciples walked out of the light.

The leader of this group of three was a middle-aged cultivator with his hands clasped behind his back. "Your identity medallions aren't from the southern branch here in the Unfinished Mountains. In accordance with our rules, we can't just let you inside. Go back to wherever you came from."

Of course, they had already planned how to deal with this exact situation. Smiling, the Captain took a few steps forward and put his hand on his bag of holding to take something out.

Before anything else could happen, Spirit Trove fluctuations rolled down from above, followed by a light sigh.

Xu Qing's gaze hardened, and the Captain froze in place. Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan both had uneasy feelings.

A figure appeared in the sky, floating down to hover above them. It was a good-looking middle-aged woman in a daoist robe. The moment she appeared, the disciples on guard duty dropped to their knees to kowtow.

"Greetings, Sect Leader!"

Xu Qing and the Captain quickly clasped hands respectfully. However, even as Xu Qing bowed, he pondered how odd it was that this person showed up at this exact moment.

The middle-aged woman wasn't looking at Xu Qing or the Captain. The moment she appeared, she smiled, looked at Wu Jianwu, and softly said, "This is our second meeting, young sir. Yet your poetry is still fresh in my mind from our first meeting."

Chapter 575: It's All Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity's Fault (part 1)

The gentle voice spoke from above, almost chanting. "*Floating clouds are the mountains' halos; in my heart a field of boulders glows!*"

Xu Qing was shocked, and the Captain was clearly taken aback.

Wu Jianwu looked up at the woman in the sky. Raising his eyebrows, he said, *“The mountains ask not the depths of the gloom; only heaven knows of the setting of the moon.”*

The woman clearly understood what Wu Jianwu meant, as she softly replied, “Forgive me for being rude. You can call me Mistress Rosyclouds.”

This time, it was Wu Jianwu’s turn to be stunned. A gentle afternoon breeze swayed the plants and vegetation on the mountain, and sent clouds drifting lazily through the sky. It stirred the hair of everyone present, and also brushed against Wu Jianwu’s heartstrings. How could he have guessed that there would actually be a person in existence who could understand his poetry and appreciate the emotion it contained? The fact that such a person had suddenly appeared was nothing short of a surprise.

Ever since he started imitating Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity, nobody ever understood him properly, not even his own Master. Yet he never gave up on his ideals and never forgot about that Ancient Emperor’s unique style. From early on, he became used to the crude and tasteless response of people who didn’t understand him, and had long since stopped hoping to have his poetry acknowledged.

Yet now...

A fierce light shone in Wu Jianwu’s eyes as he clasped his hands behind his back. The breeze picked up slightly, stirring his hair and causing his robes to ripple. At the moment, his attention was completely focused on the woman.

*“The world, society, and the universe dominate; will the mist obscuring the bridge evaporate?”*

Visibly moved, the woman landed on the ground in front of Wu Jianwu. The sunlight shone down onto her simple daoist robe, causing it to glimmer as if with seven beautiful colors. The way that light shone in her eyes made her attractive features even more beautiful, like that of an immortal fairy. She nodded slightly.

“You guessed correctly, young sir. I am indeed the sect leader of the Southern Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect.”

Eyes glittering, Wu Jianwu said, *“Yesterday the starry wind blew early; might cats and dogs fall from the sky?”*

The woman laughed. “I understand.”

Turning, she waved her hand, causing the sect’s defensive shield to open slightly. At the same time, bells tolled thrice. It was nothing insignificant in terms of ceremony.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing and the Captain were dumbfounded, and Ning Yan stood there with a blank look in eyes. Ning Yan looked at Wu Jianwu, then the sect leader, and could reach no other conclusion than that both of them were off in the head.

Ning Yan wasn’t the only one to be thinking that. The three sect disciples on guard duty were all reeling mentally. They literally couldn’t understand one bit of Wu Jianwu’s poetry, yet their sect leader seemed to understand it down to the core. It made them think of the stories they had heard

about their sect leader. Supposedly, she had absolutely adored Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity, who was a human. She was also very fond of literary and artistic talents, and was even known to compose poetry of her own.

That said, the details didn't matter. The three guards were extremely respectful as they stepped aside to clear the path. They were especially careful to give Wu Jianwu lots of room.

"Please, come with me, young sir!" the woman said softly. Clearly, she wasn't worried about the vast difference between her cultivation base and Wu Jianwu's. In fact, in her experience, the higher someone's cultivation base, the less likely that they could be a literary or artistic genius. As far as she was concerned, Xu Qing and the Captain were nothing more than foils to Wu Jianwu's superiority.

Wu Jianwu looked very enlivened as he stuck out his chest and courteously walked along with Rosyclouds.

Xu Qing and the Captain exchanged a glance, then followed politely behind. Ning Yan hurried to do the same, but before he could get inside the sect, Wu Jianwu stopped in mid stride.

*"Half a piece, one piece, two pieces, three; the squat little dog ought bow its head to me!"*

Upon hearing that, Mistress Rosyclouds turned to look at Ning Yan. He shivered, and before he could say anything, the sect's defensive shield slammed shut in front of him.

"Hey, what's going on? I don't even understand what he just said. You can't do this!" Ning Yan knew that Wu Jianwu was petty. But despite Ning Yan's fury, he didn't dare do anything but meekly watch Xu Qing and the others walking away.

Thus, they entered the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect. They saw large groups of tiger-headed butterflies everywhere, far more than they'd ever seen in the wild. From a distance, they looked like multicolored clouds swirling around the mountains.

Xu Qing was surprised. He had seen these types of butterflies a few times in his recent travels. But he had never seen as many as this. Then, as he continued after Wu Jianwu and simultaneously looked at the distant butterflies, his vision suddenly swam. He stopped in place. A moment later, everything went back to normal.

A few paces ahead, the Captain stopped and looked back questioningly.

Xu Qing shook his head. He looked just the same as before, but now he was far more on guard. He knew that he was hale and healthy from head to toe, which meant that the unusual sensation from moments ago was the result of something gruish. However, now wasn't the time for discussion about it. Lowering his gaze, he continued following Wu Jianwu. After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, the sect leader had led them to the sect's guest housing area, which was where they were to stay.

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The sect leader watched them enter the guest houses, then turned and left. As she walked through the sect, a host of butterflies swept toward her, then swirled into the shape of two illusory figures that walked by her side. One of them leaned over and spoke in a low voice.

“Sect Leader, this group showed up out of nowhere in Ox-Receiving City about ten days ago. They’ve never been around here before. The first thing they did in the city was go to a spirit spring facility. Nothing out of the ordinary happened there. Later, they left and went into the Unfinished Mountains. After that, their trail went cold. We have no idea why they’re here. Their disciple identities check out. They’re really from the Eastern branch of the sect.”

The other figure then said, “The talented young poet doesn’t have a high ranking in their group. That said, he doesn’t seem to be with them under duress. He’s traveling with them of his own accord. All of them have signs of the curse on them, which means it’s unlikely they’re from out of the region. That’s especially true of one member of their group, who has very strong curse levels. In fact, they’re so strong they could erupt at any moment.”

Hearing all of this, Mistress Rosyclouds nodded. “Just keep an eye on them. If they’re really just here for lodgings, and they don’t reveal any malicious intentions toward our sect, then you don’t need to do anything.”

“But if...” one of the figures said hesitantly.

“But if they do have malicious intentions,” Mistress Rosyclouds said, stopping in place, “then... chop them up and feed them to the butterflies. Except for the poet. You can give him a proper burial.”

“Yes, sir!” The two figures blurred, then vanished into thin air.

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Seven days had passed.

Xu Qing, the Captain, and Wu Jianwu settled in and didn’t do anything to overstep their bounds. Though they did leave their residence a few times, they didn’t pry into any secrets of the sect.

They knew full well that since they had shown up out of nowhere, the sect would be watching them. Though the unexpected development with Wu Jianwu ensured a quick and easy entry, in the end, they were not disciples of this branch of the sect. Therefore, they were confined to the lower half of the sect’s first mountain peak. The deeper parts of the sect were closed to them. Although the sect leader obviously liked Wu Jianwu a lot, she wasn’t going to break the sect rules casually.

In the end, just being able to stay in the sect was enough to fulfill the first part of the plan.

That was because the spirit spring in the back of the sect was open to all disciples as long as you had the spirit stones to pay for entry.

Xu Qing and the Captain had gone twice already. By soaking in the spirit spring and doing breathing exercises, they were able to keep the curse within them under control. The curse was the excuse they had come up with on the way to the sect. If you wanted to sell a lie, you needed to have some realistic bits of evidence to go along with it. By mixing the false and the true, you were much more likely to succeed.

Although the spirit spring wouldn’t directly affect the power of the curse, it could nourish the fleshly body, and thus provide indirect benefits.

There were a lot of places like this scattered throughout the Moonrite Region, and they were one of the big reasons there was even a Heavenly Ox Alliance to begin with.

There was one other occasion in which Xu Qing experienced that same blurred vision and strange sensation as before. It was always when the tiger-faced butterflies were around. As he had come to learn, the butterflies had a specific name.

They were 'dancing butterflies,' and they were a unique life form that was crucial to the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect's sacrificial dance.

Xu Qing secretly consulted with the Captain about why he was experiencing those strange episodes. The Captain took it very seriously, and analyzed it from a lot of angles. However, not even he could come up with an explanation. There was definitely something suspicious going on, but since empty speculation wasn't going to do any good, Xu Qing decided to pay closer attention going forward.

During the seven days that passed, Xu Qing and the Captain had to deal with unexpected circumstances affecting their plan.

For one thing, the sect leader Mistress Rosyclouds frequently visited the spirit spring. Considering that, it didn't matter how careful they were in making preparations to deal with Nethersprite, they had to hold back, otherwise Mistress Rosyclouds would definitely notice what was going on.

It was now less than a month until Nethersprite would come for her baptism.

The Captain was starting to get very anxious. Even though he and Xu Qing had come up with a very comprehensive plan, given the circumstances, it reached the point where they knew they needed help from Wu Jianwu.

Therefore, on the eighth day, the Captain found Wu Jianwu, threw his arm over his shoulder, and quietly said, "This isn't going to work, Brother Jianjian."

Wu Jianwu looked at the Captain out of the corner of his eye but didn't say anything. The past few days had been wonderful, and he had already mentally composed several volumes of poetry that were now waiting at the ready.

Clearing his throat, the Captain continued, "Big Jianjian, I need you to seduce the sect leader. Just a bit. Get her away from the spirit springs...."

Chapter 575: It's All Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity's Fault (part 2)

Wu Jianwu sneered. Now that they were in this sect, his status among the three of them had changed. Arrogantly waving his hand, he summoned one of his children, the parrot, who perched on his head.

Wu Jianwu didn't say a word after that. Instead, his parrot stuck his chin up and spoke for his father.

"What kind of immature, bullshit plan is that? You think Mistress Rosyclouds is an idiot or something? If my dad tries to seduce her, she'll definitely get suspicious! Then all she'll have to do is scan the spirit spring, and she'll know exactly what you two are up to! If you want to court death, that's fine. But leave my dad out of it! He refuses to go along!"

Xu Qing looked at the parrot, and noted the way it held its head arrogantly and looked down its beak at them.

The Captain, meanwhile, looked visibly surprised. "I never said that we would set stuff up in the spirit spring after your dad seduced her! It's the opposite! Of course she'll get suspicious when your dad seduces her. And then when she checks the spirit spring, she'll find that there's nothing out of the ordinary there. It'll be the same way every time. After that happens a few dozen times, then her suspicions will naturally fade away. Am I right, or am I right?"

The parrot was stunned, and Wu Jianwu's expression seemed a bit more solemn than before.

"It will take time to set things up in the world fragment," the Captain continued, "But as far as the spirit spring goes, getting the spell formation ready will only take about six hours."

The parrot surreptitiously looked down at his father. Wu Jianwu, meanwhile, looked a bit hesitant.

The Captain, who knew Wu Jianwu very well, went on to make some more persuasive arguments. Toward the end, as Wu Jianwu finally seemed to be wavering, the Captain made his final move.

"Worst case scenario, we can forget about my past-life body. I have other alternatives ready. It's just sad that I won't be able to get those five volumes of ancient records left behind by Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity. Ai. There are just so many descriptions of the Ancient Emperor in there, such as his ambitions when he was young, all of which were recorded in the form of poetry....

"You know, I actually remember one poem from in there. I can even recite it for you! *Heavenly daos bend the knee, sun and moon shine so clear; purge the imperial lands and bring order to the frontier.*" The Captain spoke in a soft voice, but there was something magnificently powerful about his words. [1]

Wu Jianwu shivered from head to toe, and he suddenly looked fascinated. Quickly putting away the parrot, he took a deep breath and nodded.

"I'm in!" The determination in his eyes, and the forcefulness with which he spoke those two words, made it clear that he had made a firm decision.

The Captain's eyes glittered with approval as he stepped over to start discussing some details with Wu Jianwu.

Off to the side, Xu Qing sighed inwardly and went over to the door to stand guard.

Normally the nights were dark, but right now, there were countless shimmering lights in the air. They were the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect's special dancing butterflies, which not only pulsed with curse power and dangerous poison, but also shone brightly at night.

Disciples in this sect are good with dangerous poisons, so they aren't bothered by the dancing butterflies' poison. But what exactly caused me to feel that strange sensation? And not once, but twice.

After some thought, Xu Qing reached out to the god's finger in D-132 inside of him. He found that it was sleeping soundly....

Don't tell me that provoking that heavenfate tribulation created some potential calamity?

Xu Qing frowned as he analyzed the situation.

The night passed.

The next morning, the Captain's new plan was carried out. As the sun climbed over the horizon, Wu Jianwu strolled out of their guest accommodations, a placid look on his face. He was on his way to carry out the mission as devised by the Captain: to seduce Mistress Rosyclouds!

It was obviously a very formidable task, and succeeding at it related directly to Wu Jianwu's personal dreams. Therefore, he took the mission as something sacred. As he walked out of the door, the sunlight illuminated him, and he turned to look at the Captain and Xu Qing.

The Captain clenched his hand into a fist and pumped it in the air encouragingly. "You've got this!"

Wu Jianwu stuck his chin up and nodded slightly, then turned and walked off into the distance.

The Captain watched him go. After a few breaths of time passed, and Wu Jianwu was definitely out of sight, the Captain took out an eyeball and then squatted off to the side, where he beckoned at Xu Qing. Xu Qing wasn't surprised at all by this. There was no way the Captain would ignore his own curiosity and refrain from spying. In fact, it seemed entirely likely that he was recording everything.

"Hahaha! Big Jianjian has his uses after all!" Looking very pleased, the Captain took out a recording jade slip which he used to record everything the eyeball was showing.

Xu Qing said nothing. He just looked at the image of Wu Jianwu as projected by the eyeball.

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As Wu Jianwu walked through the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect, he was actually quite nervous, and had to keep saying encouraging things to himself. Eventually, he stopped by a small pavilion. After taking a deep breath, he took out a jade slip to send a voice message to Mistress Rosyclouds. Back when she first escorted them into the sect, they had exchanged jade slip information.

*"The birds are nowhere to be seen in the firmament; oh immortal, this pavilion can make destiny permanent!"*

After sending the message, Wu Jianwu clasped his hands behind his back and looked up into the sky. The wind blew, stirring his long hair. Shortly after, he heard a kind, smiling voice from behind him.

"Did you call for me, young sir?"

Wu Jianwu didn't turn around. Instead, he proudly said, *"In heaven, glowing clouds meander and flow; on earth, the minstrel is joined by the rosy glow."*

Mistress Rosyclouds eyes shone as she walked up to Wu Jianwu. Looking at him from the side, she said, *"The royal spring basks in the light of the moon; in this life, cleanse the heart to bring a boon."*

Wu Jianwu shivered and turned to look at Mistress Rosyclouds, his eyes glowing. He previously had assumed that there was little more to the situation than Mistress Rosyclouds understanding his poetry. Because of that, the poem he had sent as a voice message was something he casually composed on the fly. Little did he know that Mistress Rosyclouds was also adept at speaking in poetry.

Getting even more excited, he quietly said, *“With no dark gales, who can speak in verse? The green waters’ ripples will never disperse!”*

As the sun shone onto Mistress Rosyclouds’ face, she seemed to flush slightly. Looking off at the horizon, she replied, *“Heaven trembles but green mountains stand; in this dream of life, what can be planned?”*

Wu Jianwu thought for a moment. Not being ready to give up, he continued, *“The unripe plums have a violet glow; brew them into wine and toward home we go!”*

Mistress Rosyclouds hesitated. Emotions rising and falling, she quietly said, *“We met by chance, and follow the wind; yet we can still discuss the principles of Zen.”*

Wu Jianwu’s mood sank slightly, but he forced himself to smile brightly. Mistress Rosyclouds also smiled. Then the two of them walked off together. The wind accompanied them, and the sun lit their path. Dancing butterflies swirled in the air. Altogether, it was a dazzling and beautiful scene that defied description. And yet, despite the beauty of the scene, it still resonated with a feeling of heartbreak.

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“What were they saying to each other?” the Captain said. Looking blankly at Xu Qing, he continued, “Why did it seem like they were passing secret messages?”

Xu Qing’s eyes looked just as blank as the Captain’s. Up to now, there was only one person they knew of who could understand Wu Jianwu’s poetry, and that was Mistress Rosyclouds.

A moment passed. Xu Qing and the Captain exchanged a glance, and then went back to spying on Wu Jianwu.

The day passed and evening approached. That was when Wu Jianwu returned. His expression was one of pain and grief. He didn’t say anything once he was back. He just sat in a chair and stared blankly at nothing.

Seeing that, the Captain went over to offer some encouraging words. Wu Jianwu just shook his head and sighed. Some time passed.

Finally, Wu Jianwu said, *“No flower blooms for a hundred years; the stars before pāramitā shed gauzy tears.”*

The Captain frowned and looked at Xu Qing. Xu Qing’s eyes turned cold.

“Speak like a normal person!”

As Wu Jianwu just sat there scowling on the verge of tears, his parrot flew out and landed on his head. Sighing, the parrot said, “My dad got rejected.”



“That’s fine!” the Captain said, sliding his arm around Wu Jianwu’s shoulders. “That’s just how women are! Look, Big Jianjian, the trick is to play hard to get. I can teach you a few things that will definitely secure you the victory!” With that, the Captain went on to discuss some strategies.

By dawn, Wu Jianwu was completely enlivened, and hurried out to ask for another date.

Slowly but surely, twelve days passed. It was now less than a week until Nethersprite was supposed to show up.

Xu Qing and the Captain would occasionally visit the spirit spring, but still hadn’t done any work toward their plan.

As for Wu Jianwu, he had made some progress. On just about a daily basis he would ask Mistress Rosyclouds out on a date. The two of them would go for outings or recite poetry together. And a few times, they had long, intimate talks in which they praised Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity’s literary and artistic talents. In that manner, the two of them unwittingly got closer to each other.

Mistress Rosyclouds would get daily reports about what Xu Qing and the Captain were up to, and as time passed without anything unusual happening, she slowly started to get less suspicious of them.

Three days before Nethersprite was supposed to show up, Xu Qing and the Captain finally took action. As usual, they went to the spirit spring for a soak.

After settling down cross-legged, the Captain snapped off one of his fingers and sent it wriggling through the water like a caterpillar. After quietly circling the spirit spring once, it went to the middle, settled down, and transformed into what looked like a little clump of mud.

Xu Qing’s eyes were closed as he absorbed the nourishing power of the spirit spring, and didn’t give off even the slightest suspicious feeling. However, just when the Captain finished with his work, a group of dancing butterflies flew in their direction. Xu Qing’s heart flip-flopped, and as he looked over at the approaching butterflies, he yet again felt a strange sensation sweep over him. His vision blurred. The world seemed like it was superimposed over itself, including the rocks, terrain features, and even the spirit spring itself. It was the same with the people present as well. Only the Captain remained clear!

His head suddenly throbbed, and at the same time, felt like he had become the center of the world, and everything else was spinning around him. The sensation prompted him to close his eyes again and try to get rid of the feeling. Waves of weakness and revulsion swept through him, and without him even realizing it, sweat started dripping down his forehead.

Not even soaking in the warm spring water could get rid of the coldness within him. The sounds that reached his ears were faint, to the point where he almost couldn’t hear them. The sensation lasted for longer than before. It was a full ten breaths of time before he recovered.

Eyes snapping open, he breathed heavily as he looked around. His face was ashen, and he found himself leaning up against the stones that lined the spring. The Captain was there, supporting him.

“What’s wrong?”

“Eldest Brother, is there something you’re hiding from me?” Xu Qing said quietly, looking at the Captain.

The Captain didn’t answer the question. Smiling sincerely, he said, “Just trust me, little Ah Qing.”

Xu Qing nodded and didn’t ask any more questions. Shortly after, they got out of the spirit spring and went back to their room. Nothing unusual happened the entire time. In fact, Xu Qing felt like things went too smoothly. It was as if every single element of their plan was succeeding perfectly. Wu Jianwu had established a close relationship with Mistress Rosyclouds, ensuring that she didn’t notice anything suspicious about them. With all the preparations made, all they needed to do now was wait for Nethersprite to show up.

Xu Qing didn’t give voice to any of his misgivings. The next day, it was time for them to leave the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect.

Wu Jianwu was clearly reluctant to part with Mistress Rosyclouds. But for the sake of the greater good, he gritted his teeth and left, not even looking over his shoulder as she saw them off.

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Three days after they left, Nethersprite appeared.

From a distance, it was possible to see the grand procession escorting her, including handmaidens dancing and scattering flowers.

No one seemed to notice that, as she neared, a pair of ancient eyes opened on the twin peaks. There was deep meaning in those eyes as they looked out.

“How amusing.”

Chapter 576: A Big Show (part 1)

A melodious, joyous song filled the air. Nethersprite was incomparably beautiful and elegant; anyone who even merely caught sight of her would feel like they were smelling the sweet fragrance of flowers.

Bells tolled thrice in the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect. It was a sign of courtesy for visitors, and a sign of deep respect toward Master Darkfate.

Mistress Rosyclouds personally went out to meet Nethersprite, a smile on her face.

“I hope all is well, Fellow Daoist Sweetfrost,” she said.

“Well met, Sect Leader Rosyclouds,” Nethersprite replied. She hurried forward, a smile on her flawless face. Also visible was a prominent birthmark on her neck, which would leave such a deep impression on anyone who saw it that they would never forget it.

“The spirit spring is ready for you. Please, follow me.” Smiling, Mistress Rosyclouds gestured, whereupon the entrance to the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect opened. With that, she led the way to the spirit spring.

They soon reached the back part of the mountain, where the spirit spring had been prepared for her. For the next month, no sect outsiders would be allowed inside while Nethersprite received her baptism in preparation for her wedding. The only people who came with Nethersprite were some handmaidens. Generally speaking, there wasn't any way something could go wrong. For one thing, it wasn't as if her cultivation base was weak. What was more, Master Darkfate's name was always there, keeping her safe.

All the arrangements seemed very reasonable. Upon arriving at the spirit spring, Nethersprite noted the water vapor languidly drifting in the air, and she could sense the spirit resonance in the area. She was clearly pleased. For the next month, all of the spirit ponds in the Unfinished Mountains would be redirected to this spot. Master Darkfate had specially arranged for that just for her, as an expression of his love.

When Nethersprite thought about what Master Darkfate had done for her, her heart raced, and she found herself subconsciously smiling in the direction of the Darkfate Sect.

Hubby Darkfate really does treat me well.

Nethersprite's eyes glittered with anticipation for the future. After Mistress Rosyclouds bid farewell, Nethersprite knelt, revealing even more of her curves as she tested the temperature of the water. Then she slowly entered the spring.

The warm water caressed her skin as it wrapped around her, creating an image that would cause anyone to see her to palpitate with eagerness. After wading to the very center of the pond, she settled down.

Dozens of handmaidens sat around the edges of the spring. Some played music, some scattered flower petals, others used magical techniques to stir the water, creating numerous tiny hands that gently scrubbed Nethersprite.

Nethersprite felt so comfortable that she immediately closed her eyes contentedly. Unbeknownst to her, there was a little bit of mud not too far away from her. Before long, a crack spread out over the surface of that mud, opening to reveal an eye. What was more, a spell formation hidden in the bottom of the spring surreptitiously activated.

It was impossible to say how the Captain did it, but he successfully masked the fluctuations so they weren't noticeable.

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In a valley not too far away from the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect, the Captain and Xu Qing had both put on masks to disguise themselves.

"Big Jianjian, you go find Ning Yan," the Captain said, sounding very serious. "That little brat obviously ran off somewhere. We can't have him out there alone and starving. We're all friends, right? We should stick together! Just like those years ago when he went looking for you!"

"Little Junior Brother, you need to take care of all the handmaidens there at the spirit spring. Don't kill them, obviously. Just knock them out."

“As for Nethersprite, I’ll drag her into the world fragment. You don’t need to worry about that, though. Just wait until ‘she’ comes out. At that point, ‘she’ won’t be Nethersprite anymore.”

Everything about their plan had been going smoothly so far, but now they were reaching the most critical part. Success was going to come down to whether or not the Captain really could trap Nethersprite. If it didn’t work, then they would have to come up with a good way to flee the area.

Wu Jianwu was starting to feel nervous. After hearing all of the Captain’s arrangements, he nodded. *If these two fail, and I don’t manage to escape, I should plan now what to say to prove my innocence.*

With such thoughts on his mind, Wu Jianwu hurried away and had his various children use all of their abilities to try to find Ning Yan.

Xu Qing didn’t speak the entire time. He just looked the Captain in the eyes and tried to figure out why the entire situation seemed so strange to him.

“Just trust me, little Junior Brother!” the Captain said, giving Xu Qing a meaningful look. Chuckling, he produced an eyeball which he looked at closely. Only a moment later, his eyebrows shot up as he caught sight of something unexpected on the other side. His eyes even lit up.

As Xu Qing looked on, surprised, the Captain cleared his throat and quickly crushed the eyeball. A moment later, a vortex sprang up in front of him which he entered. Without pausing for a moment, Xu Qing followed. He was still suspicious, but he also trusted the Captain. After both of them entered the vortex, it vanished.

Next, both of them appeared in the spirit spring!

The moment they were there, the spell formation the Captain had set up in the spirit spring activated, creating a force of concealment that covered the entire area. At the same time, the clump of mud at the bottom of the spring transformed into a vortex with a shockingly powerful gravitational force.

Without any hesitation, Xu Qing and the Captain shot forward.

Xu Qing was to target the handmaidens, while the Captain would handle Nethersprite.

As water sprayed everywhere, the handmaidens reacted with astonishment. Nethersprite’s expression flickered wildly. Despite the mask the Captain was wearing, she still recognized him.

“It’s you!”

The Captain didn’t say a word. His entire person shone with blue light, and countless eyes popped open all over him, within the pupils of each was a face. And each of those faces had pupils with faces in them. He looked incredibly gruish, almost like a gigantic bat, dripping with fluid as he closed in on Nethersprite.

Xu Qing had no time to check on what the Captain was doing. As soon as he burst out of the water, he locked onto the nearest handmaiden. As he did, the countless droplets of water in the area swept together to form a sphere that shot toward the handmaiden. It happened very quickly. In the blink of

an eye, he was in front of her. She tried to back up, but didn't move quickly enough. Xu Qing swept his hand through the air, and then blood sprayed out of the handmaiden's mouth as she tumbled backward, unconscious.

Xu Qing wasn't landing fatal blows. His shadow spread out from his feet, creating a pitch black canopy of heaven as he accelerated to the next handmaiden.

The handmaidens were all in Gold Core, except for two of them who were in Nascent Soul. Because they were so much weaker than Xu Qing, he was able to get instant results when he attacked. Of the dozens of handmaidens, not a single one escaped. All were rendered unconscious, and were soon laying around haphazardly. Once they were all out of commission, Xu Qing turned to check on the Captain.

What he saw was Nethersprite snorting coldly and waving her hand, which caused the Captain's entire body to collapse.

He instantly turned into countless blue bugs which swept through the air toward Nethersprite. There were tens of thousands of them, and when Nethersprite waved her hand again, they collapsed, turning into even smaller bugs. In the blink of an eye, the number of bugs went from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands. They became like a sky-obfuscating, land-enshrouding vortex spreading out over Nethersprite and sinking down to connect to the water.

A moment later, the vortex vanished. Nethersprite was nowhere to be seen.

Ripples spread out over the water, and water droplets gently drifted down. After about a dozen breaths of time passed, everything was completely silent.

Xu Qing stood at the edge of the spring, studying the area. Things seemed even more unusual at this point, but all he could do was scan the area to make sure no signs of the brief struggle had reached the outside.

This was too easy. Nethersprite was a Void Returning expert! Even if she has slipped down to the great circle of Spirit Trove, things shouldn't have gone this smoothly!

As he pondered the situation, a thought occurred to him.

The Captain has all sorts of mysterious, gruish assets. And he went all out in preparing for this. I guess it's possible things have just gone really well. Maybe that's why he's been so confident.

After some further thought, Xu Qing figured it made sense. Thus, he kept his eyes on the concealment magics, and also paid attention to the water as well as the world fragment. Because of everything the Captain had set up, it wasn't possible to tell what was happening inside. There were only terrifying fluctuations that rolled out occasionally.

Time passed.

Xu Qing waited quietly for about ten hours. The more time that went by, the more likely something could go wrong. But though Xu Qing knew the Captain was crazy, he also didn't have any reason to think the Captain would make simple mistakes.

Another two hours went by, and then waves suddenly rolled out over the surface of the water.

Xu Qing backed up a few paces, keeping his disguise up. He was ready to flee at any moment if necessary.

The water roiled, sending ripples out everywhere as a head slowly rose up from the water. It was the head of a woman, bewitchingly charming, with extremely fair skin. It was none other than Nethersprite. After floating up, she looked at Xu Qing, then slowly stood, revealing clothing plastered tightly against her beautiful body. She had half a head in her hands.

It was... the Captain's head.

Fluctuations rolled off of her that were clearly the great circle of Spirit Trove. Looking coldly at Xu Qing, she tossed the half head over. It landed on the ground and rolled to a stop at his feet.

"That Elder Brother of yours is useless," she said.

The Captain wasn't dead. Eyes full of bitterness, he weakly said, "Run, little Junior Brother... it was a trap...."

Chapter 576: A Big Show (part 2)

Xu Qing looked down, his face completely expressionless. "Stop fooling around, Eldest Brother."

"I'm not fooling around," the Captain's half-head said urgently. "You have to run! This is no joke. Master Darkfate is on the way. He planned this whole thing to target me!"

Xu Qing looked at Nethersprite and sighed. "You should have shaved your legs. That's the same mistake you made with that Seazombie princess. It's... a big hole in your story."

Nethersprite stopped walking and looked down at the shapely legs beneath her garment. Sure enough, they were as hairy as if she were wearing fur leggings. Even with the clothes atop them, it was very obvious.

Nethersprite cleared 'her' throat, then looked venomously at Xu Qing. That look was enough to cause Xu Qing to take a few steps back. Meanwhile, Ling'er poked her head out of his sleeve and looked in amazement at Nethersprite.

"Hahaha! I was just joking around!" It was the Captain's voice that came out of Nethersprite's mouth. Meanwhile, the half-head at Xu Qing's feet melted, turning into a handful of blue bugs that jumped back into the water and returned to the Captain.

"How's Nethersprite?" Xu Qing said calmly.

"Her?" the Captain said, plopping down and starting to shave his legs. "Oh, she's fine. After I explained the whole situation to her, she had very mixed feelings. And then we engaged in some very friendly discussion and negotiation."

The image of the Captain casually shaving his legs while speaking so complacently was very jarring.

"Long story short, I resolved any potential misunderstandings. She was very grateful to know the truth, and agreed to cooperate. In fact, she took the initiative to seal herself. See? I always said I'm a very reasonable person."

The Captain finished with one leg and moved on to the next, allowing the hair he shaved off to dissipate in the wind.

Xu Qing said nothing. He just rolled his eyes and sat down cross-legged.

In response to Xu Qing ignoring him, the Captain chuckled, produced an apple, and took a bite. Then he took out a second apple and tossed it to Xu Qing. Xu Qing caught it, looked closely at the apple, then shifted his gaze to the Captain.

The Captain smiled.

Xu Qing closed his eyes and focused on keeping the concealment magics working.

Days passed, and nothing out of the ordinary happened. When the handmaidens regained consciousness, they were confused and suspicious. But seeing that Nethersprite seemed fine, they didn't dare to ask any questions.

The Captain's disguise was perfect. Apparently, he really did manage to get a lot of details out of Nethersprite, because whenever he talked, there was no hint that he was an imposter.

Eventually, even Xu Qing wasn't sure how to tell if he was really dealing with the Captain.

And thus, the month passed. Soon, it was time for Nethersprite to complete her session of baptism. Brightly colored fabric and dazzling lights appeared in the sky as the bridal procession arrived to receive her. Yet again, the sedan chair was made from a huge skull. Thirty-two Lionfolk cultivators in red robes carried the sedan, and there were countless servants in the procession, playing rousing music. The group of hundreds of people came to a stop outside the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect. They were there to pick up Nethersprite and escort her to the Darkfate Sect. The wedding day had arrived! [1]

Mistress Rosyclouds hadn't made any appearances for a while, but she waited outside the spirit spring with a smile when Nethersprite emerged.

After the month-long baptism, Nethersprite's skin looked healthier than before. She had also changed into a new outfit that made her look even more alluring than usual. She wore a long red gown and had her hair bound in a phoenix crown, which somehow made her seem unusually flirtatious. In fact, she drew the attention of countless eyes in the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect.

After bidding farewell to Mistress Rosyclouds, she let the handmaidens and guards cluster around her as she left the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect and stepped into the skull sedan. The burly sedan-bearers let loose loud growls as they hoisted up the sedan and strode up into the air. Music surrounded the procession, and flower petals rained down. As they disappeared over the horizon, countless cultivators in the Unfinished Mountains looked up in surprise.

All of the major sects in the Unfinished Mountains had been given invitations to come to the Darkfate Sect to bear witness to the ceremony.

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Neither the departing bridal procession nor the disciples in the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect noticed that a very meaningful chuckle echoed out from the twin peaks on the mountain.

Specifically, that chuckle came from a cave temple near the twin peaks.

The temple was large enough that it essentially occupied the entire interior of the mountain. Inside was an old man with disheveled hair and a five-colored robe, hovering in a cross-legged position near the entrance. He was so emaciated he almost looked skeletal. However, he did not emanate any

aura of death, but instead, a profound life force. He was also surrounded by Void Returning fluctuations, although it wasn't possible to glean any details of his cultivation beyond that.

Directly beneath him was something profoundly shocking and simultaneously horrid. It was a three-dimensional map. Most people wouldn't know what it depicted, but any locals who saw it would know it instantly. It depicted the Unfinished Mountains. Other than the difference in size, it was exactly the same as the real mountains. Every single plant, tree, ridge, and rock was extremely realistic. There were birds flying in the sky, cities at the bases of the mountains, and sects here and there. Even the living beings who occupied the Unfinished Mountains were in the projection.

It contained all living things in the area! That included both mortals and cultivators. Everything was in motion, making it seem like this protection was a real-time depiction of the Unfinished Mountains.

Xu Qing and the others were present, and the bridal procession leaving the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect was plainly visible.

Even more spectacular was that every living being in the projection had something like a thread attached to it. They were like threads of fate or destiny that swirled within the cave temple. The countless threads were grisly enough. But what was even more grisly was the old man in the five-colored robe, who had thrown out his arms and was gesticulating wildly. His movements caused the threads from the countless living beings to sway back and forth and occasionally touch each other.

Because of that, situations where predestined affinities shouldn't exist... were created. Emotions that shouldn't have been displayed... were displayed. Interconnected relationships which should not have been... inexplicably formed. The fates of countless living beings, and their path in life, were being changed. And it was all happening in accordance with the thoughts of that old man. It was as if everything happening in the Unfinished Mountains were part of a big show.

And this old man was in charge of that show. Everything that happened in that show was because of him. Although they retained their memories and personalities, everything they did was according to the old man's script.

Sparks of life were generated in that way, like the light of fireworks, and they transformed into dancing butterflies which flew this way and that. Some flew within the cave temple in that mountain, others flew out of the mountain and into the outside world. The dancing butterflies emanated strange powers wherever they went, and the powder that drifted off of them as they flew spread to fill the mountains.

Occasionally, outsiders would appear. However, once they stepped into the Unfinished Mountains, they would appear in the projection, and threads would form, connecting them to the old man's show. Their fates would then be transformed, and they would be given a new mission.

Sometimes the old man would stand up and move around bizarrely. When he flailed his arms and limbs, the threads connecting to the people in the projection would vibrate. As his facial expression flitted between various emotions, the people in the projection would become embroiled in various instances of love, hatred, passion, and revenge. He had created this show, and yet he was also part of it, as he had inserted himself into it, and used his own life force to carry out a performative dance. On the one hand, it was incredibly grisly, but at the same time, imparted a sense of holy piety.



That was because this was the sacrificial dance of the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect! The sacrificial dance wasn't for the benefit of the members of the church. It was a dance of offering to a god, and was for the benefit of a god. Many regions that had gods in them had similar arrangements. One reason was that many gods had the custom of sleeping. Crimson Mother was no exception. That said, while shē would normally be able to awaken at any time, right now, shē was in a state in which awakening couldn't be accomplished quickly.

Regardless, when gods slept, it resulted in the power of dreams seeping out. The dreams of gods were the real reason why sacrificial dances had become common. The dancers could use the god's dream to influence an entire region.

Everything within that region would be affected. Fate. Life. People's minds could be made blank and then their thoughts could be rewoven by means of the sacrificial dance. And then it would turn into a dazzling, five-colored dream reality. The god in question wouldn't be able to sense that dream when sleeping, only upon awakening. If the god was happy, it would give out blessings.

That was one reason why there were so many subsidiary branches of the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect. Every single branch had one of their sacrificial dancers. The blessings they could bring varied based on their cultivation bases, as did the range of their power. As for the dream playing out in the Unfinished Mountains, the creator, that old man, was convinced that the god would definitely like this particular sacrificial dance.

Then the old man spoke, all while hovering in the air cross-legged, his eyes gleaming profoundly.

"Those outsiders make this dream... a lot more interesting!"

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Strangely, the exact same words were coming out of the Captain's mouth in the sedan chair. He also had a very profound look in his eyes. Stretching, he looked around until his gaze came to rest on one particular guard. That guard was none other than Xu Qing in disguise.

Xu Qing's mind was in a fair amount of chaos, as he was still convinced that something unusual was going on. Everything was playing out too smoothly.

For example, he had just looked up into the sky and noticed a bird. The bird had been flying, but then it stopped in place for several breaths of time. It just remained in place, unmoving. Xu Qing was suddenly overwhelmed with a sensation of vertigo, and his vision swam. When everything returned to normal, the bird was flying along as if it had never stopped.

Xu Qing narrowed his eyes, reached out, and made a grasping gesture. His goal was to see if the bird was real or not. The bird shivered, then started tumbling through the air toward him.

As soon as the bird landed in his hand, his vision swam even more dramatically, and he felt extremely dizzy. This time, the sensation was even more intense and shocking than before. Everyone in the bridal procession stopped in place, and then all of them turned to look mutely at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing shivered. Considering how he was gripping the bird, it seemed real. He could even feel its heart beat and body warmth. As everyone turned to look at him, his scalp went numb. He stood in place quietly for two breaths of time, then opened his hand and let the bird fly up into the air. It flew

right back to where it had originally been flying, and started moving along the same path. It was almost as if its fate had already been determined.

Everyone in the bridal possession looked away. It was almost as if nothing had just happened. Expressions the same as before, they continued joyfully on their way. The music continued. Flower petals drifted through the air.

Fear lingered in Xu Qing's heart as he turned to look at the Captain. The Captain looked back with a profound gleam in his eyes.

That look caused Xu Qing to think back to what the Captain had told him multiple times already.

“Just trust me, little Ah Qing.”

Chapter 577: Life is a Show; It All Depends on your Acting Ability

The wind from heaven blows, bringing a fragrance like a bouquet.

Lovely music plays, bringing happy guests to the wedding day.

Xu Qing's heart raced as he kept pace with the bridal procession. He was no longer looking at the Captain. Xu Qing had witnessed strange behavior from the Captain ever since they arrived in the Unfinished Mountains. And he had done some experiments.

Whether it was by means of conversation, or the action of giving him an apple, Xu Qing had confirmed that there was something unusual going on with the Captain. And it wasn't something he was doing subconsciously. He was intentionally doing things to attract Xu Qing's attention.

He's warning me.

His senses were telling him that the Captain wasn't doing anything to harm him. That was evident based on everything that had happened so far. The two of them had done so many big jobs together that Xu Qing had long since grown used to the Captain's general style.

It's not a cry for help. More like he had some things to say, but it's not convenient to say them. So he's sending a message this way.

Xu Qing pondered the situation, especially what happened with that bird. When he grabbed the bird, everyone in the bridal procession had turned to look at him.

That bird was a real, living being. Living beings are unpredictable. Yet it flew right back to where I'd taken it from, then continued on its way. It almost seemed like it wasn't in control. As if its actions had been predetermined.

Xu Qing frowned and checked D-132. The god's finger was sleeping as usual, which seemed to indicate it hadn't noticed anything unusual.

And why did everyone look at me just now? Is it that my action broke the coordination of the group? Or is it that... the person I'm disguised as just wouldn't do something like that normally?

Everything had gone so smoothly after entering the Unfinished Mountains that, if he hadn't specifically thought about it in that way, everything would have seemed completely normal.

It's the normality that's the most grish.

His eyes narrowed as he continued moving with the procession and prepared to see how the wedding ceremony would play out.

Time passed as the procession flew through the sky. About two hours later, they were nearing the Darkfate Sect. Even from a distance, it was possible to see that the place was decorated with lanterns and colored banners. Magical techniques had been used to decorate the mountains. The trees were festooned with red lanterns, and magic was also used to send fireworks shooting up into the sky.

Representatives of sects and clans from throughout the Unfinished Mountains had responded to the invitation, and were gathering outside the sect. There were men, women, young, and old, and everyone was smiling. The sound of happy conversation rose into the air, filling the area with the clamor of activity. Laughter and chatting could be heard everywhere. It was a very joyous atmosphere.

As the bridal procession neared, the buzz grew louder, creating sound waves that spread through the clouds.

The Darkfate Sect was clearly prepared for a special event. The main headquarters glowed with seven-colored light, and atop the highest mountain, the sect's grand hall had been turned into a wedding chapel. Countless red lanterns were hung everywhere, and there was even more sunlight in the sky than normal. The disciples of the Darkfate Sect were all very excited, and were out in full force to welcome the wedding guests. A colorful band of silk had been laid on the stairs from the top of the mountain to the bottom.

As the wedding sedan approached, bells tolled in the Darkfate Sect, and a solemn atmosphere spread out. People stopped talking, and all eyes came to focus on the sedan.

"Immortal Fairy Sweetfrost, please, come in."

"Yes," a melodious voice responded, and the Captain, looking eager, with his cheeks flushed, stepped out of the sedan and onto the stairs leading up into the sect.

Looking elegant and charming, 'she' started walking.

Most of the members of the bridal procession dropped to their knees to kowtow. Only Nethersprite's personal handmaidens and a few special guards followed along.

Xu Qing was one of them. As he watched the Captain swaying along, he sighed inwardly at how amazing the Captain's acting abilities were. If Xu Qing hadn't personally seen the Captain's hairy legs, he would never have guessed that he wasn't in the presence of the real Nethersprite.

As the bells tolled and the sound of singing filled the sect, the Captain slowly walked up to the summit. It was his big day. Everything was about him. All the Darkfate Sect disciples that he passed dropped to their knees to kowtow.

As Xu Qing watched all of that, some of the joyous spirit started to infect him a bit.

After the bells rang for the twenty-first time, the Captain reached the top of the stairs.

The Captain's past-life body stepped out of the grand hall. He looked different than the last time Xu Qing saw him. He was dressed in all red, and looked very festive. That said, the noxious odor and

rotting bits of flesh were just the same as before. And the black energy he exhaled was downright ghastly.

*He's marrying his past self.* Xu Qing was slightly disappointed that Wu Jianwu wasn't around. If he was, he would definitely have come up with some amazing poetry.

With that, the formalities began.

“As cultivators, heaven bears witness to us, while earth solemnly observes. We are joined as one by means of the dao. And now, the couple will pay respects to each other!”

The Captain bashfully ducked his head down and bowed to the groom. The groom also bowed his head and clasped hands. After bowing to each other, to heaven, and to earth, the crowd roared its approval. Colorful fireworks exploded, the sky shivered, and the lands shook.

Amidst the joyous uproar, the Captain was led to the bridal chamber. That was where the bride would burn incense while waiting for the groom.

It was also time for the banquet to begin. All the important people from the big sects and organizations gathered in the main square of the Darkfate Sect. Only these people who had been specially invited had that privilege. That said, the lower-ranking members of those organizations weren't treated poorly. There was an even larger banquet underway outside the sect where the other guests were entertained. Before long, the sounds of rejoicing filled the air.

As one of Nethersprite's guards, Xu Qing didn't qualify to join the banquet. Instead, he was assigned to work with Darkfate Sect guards to keep the banquet orderly. As he watched the guests toasting each other and laughing, he thought back to the blank expressions on the faces that had looked at him when he grabbed that bird. It was quite a contrast to what he was seeing right now, and it made the strange sensation in him grow even more intense.

There's another way I could try to figure out what's going on in the Unfinished Mountains.

He looked at the bridal chamber off in the distance.

As of this point, the entire plan came down to what the Captain did.

Xu Qing looked away and focused on the crowd.

*What if all the people here are like that bird...?*

Eyes narrowing, he reached out to the shadow and told it to try to take control of one of the cultivators. A moment later, his shadow stretched out across the floor toward a Gold Core cultivator. The possession was complete in an instant. However, the cultivator in question continued to behave as before, eating, drinking, and chatting.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered as he sensed the intense emotional fluctuations coming from the shadow.

*“Can't... interfere... forcing would be fatal... weird...”*

Xu Qing told the shadow to try again with someone else. And it did. Every single time, the result was exactly the same. Xu Qing was starting to come to an understanding of what was going on.

He wasn't done testing things out though. Next, he told the shadow to try to forcefully take control. Shortly after, the shadow possessed a Foundation Establishment cultivator and tried hard to do just that. The cultivator shivered as, instead of reaching out to grab his drinking vessel, he used his chopsticks to pick up a piece of food. The laughter and chatting nearby stopped as countless guests turned to look at that cultivator.

Xu Qing's pupils constricted, and he instantly told the shadow to relinquish control.

The cultivator in question didn't seem to notice anything out of the ordinary. He put the piece of food back in exactly the same spot, returned his chopsticks, and then picked up his drinking vessel. After he took a drink, everyone in the area went back to talking as if nothing had happened.

Xu Qing closed his eyes. Now he understood.

Everyone is on a fixed track. It's just like that bird. They have to follow the set arrangement, and if anything interferes with that, they'll correct their own course and go back to what they were supposed to do. All of this grisly phenomena started when we entered the Unfinished Mountains...

It seems all the living beings in these mountains have had their fates tampered with. Someone else is pulling the strings. It's like a big show. And I'm stuck in it. Without even realizing what happened, my thinking and actions have made me part of the show. I suppose that's even more the case with Wu Jianwu and Ning Yan.

And that's why I've been having those strange episodes. There are things inside me such as the god's finger or the violet moon that are rejecting the force of influence. That's why I was able to see what happened with that bird, and it's also why I can sense that something unusual is going on.

*But the Captain....* He looked up toward the mountain summit.

*He probably knows what's going on. He joined the show intentionally....*

Xu Qing looked down and waited.

Time slipped by slowly but surely. The banquet began to wrap up, and as evening fell, guests began leaving. But then, a bloodcurdling scream rang out from the bridal chamber at the summit of the mountain. The scream caused wild colors to flash in heaven and earth.

What was more, Xu Qing experienced that sensation of vertigo again. At the same time, all of the guests turned and looked woodenly toward the top of the mountain. Apparently, something was happening there that did not conform to the script!

Meanwhile, all living things in or near the Darkfate Sect, whether it was birds, blades of grass, or anything else, all turned in the direction of the mountain summit.

The screaming ended, to be followed by the sound of footsteps. Then the Captain walked out, still clad in red. He was leading his past-life body behind him by the hand. Stopping outside the hall, he looked around.

Ignoring the blank expressions on the faces of everyone looking at him, he found Xu Qing in the crowd and smiled.

"Did you figure it out, little Junior Brother?" As the words left his mouth, a peach appeared in his free hand. He took a bite.

## Chapter 578: Dance for a God; the Skilled are Praised, the Unskilled Die!

Xu Qing's sense of vertigo grew more intense. However, after experiencing it so many times, he was getting used to it. He glanced around, then focused on the peach in the Captain's hand. He laughed.

"I figured out some," he said. "Everything in the Unfinished Mountains is part of a show."

The Captain's eyes gleamed with admiration. He laughed heartily. "Yes, definitely a show. Little Junior Brother, all of this is a show put on for Crimson Mother. The two of us are lucky to be able to perform!"

Xu Qing nodded. He had taken special note of what the Captain said about the show being put on for Crimson Mother.

"In the Moonrite Region," the Captain continued, "locations where Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sects exist are places where the dream power of Crimson Mother is strong. The sect scripts out dramas there that serve as the dream of a god." He grinned. "This is the 'sacrificial dance' of the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect."

In all of Xu Qing's speculations, he hadn't thought to connect any recent events with the 'sacrificial dance' that he had heard about before.

"The dancing butterflies...?" Xu Qing asked, looking at the Captain.

"The dancing butterflies?" the Captain replied. "When the dancers use the dream power of a god to affect other living beings, the resulting friction brings dream animals to life."

The Captain continued to eat his peach as he dragged his past-life body toward Xu Qing one step at a time.

"The butterflies are illusory, as they're part of the dream power. They record the story of what's happening, and when the god awakens, they're like mediums to transfer that information."

Xu Qing inhaled sharply. What the Captain was saying seemed absolutely outrageous, and yet it did make sense.

"Before the god awakens, the dancing butterflies cannot return to whence they came. They have no way to relate the events of the show. I knew all of this, yet still chose to come here. Do you know why, little Junior Brother?"

The Captain was looking very pleased as he came to a stop in front of Xu Qing.

Xu Qing looked at the Captain's past-life body, and the answer occurred to him.

“You never lost your past-life body. That tomb we went to wasn’t even real. As you yourself said, Eldest Brother, in order to stave off tomb raiders, you set up a number of facade tombs. The place we went to... was actually one of the facade tombs.

“Ning Yan even asked you about what the final two facade tombs were like. You just laughed and didn’t answer the question, the reason being that the tomb we went to was the eighth facade tomb. The reality is that the Unfinished Mountains... are the ninth facade tomb! How many people have you offended, Eldest Brother, and how many big jobs have you done, that you’re so worried about people stealing your past-life body?”

The Captain was initially surprised by Xu Qing’s assessment, but toward the end he started laughing.

“Just what I would expect of my little Junior Brother. Hahaha! You’re right. That tomb we went into was the eighth facade tomb. And the Unfinished Mountains are the ninth!”

Xu Qing frowned. “Eldest Brother, you picked up some bad habits from Bai Xiaozhuo. It’s bad form to give the answer ahead of time.”

The Captain chuckled darkly. The truth was that he had learned this little trick from Bai Xiaozhuo. It seemed really badass to be able to reveal your plan secretly ahead of time. [1]

“Want to know where the real tomb is?” the Captain said, his eyebrows dancing up and down enticingly.

Seeing that familiar facial expression, familiar attitude, and familiar style made Xu Qing feel a bit more relaxed. Looking expressionlessly at the Captain, he said, “It’s the dream.”

He wasn’t interested in playing along with the Captain’s games.

The Captain’s eyes went wide. This whole reveal wasn’t exactly going as he had planned. *You used to be a lot more charming than this, little Ah Qing!*

Noting that Xu Qing seemed to actually be getting angry, the Captain laughed heartily, threw his arm around Xu Qing’s neck, and then lowered his voice.

“You’re incredible, little Junior Brother. I can’t believe you even guessed the part about the dream.

“You see, there was a very mysterious High God years ago who took my past-life body and put it into Crimson Mother’s dream... and even destroyed some of the dancing butterflies in that dream.”

Xu Qing’s gaze sharpened. He was particularly interested in this High God that had been mentioned.

Meanwhile, everything around them was changing. The guests’ facial expressions were turning from blank to vicious. Even the plants, rocks, and other terrain features seemed to radiate a sense of

malice. That malice seemed to grow stronger and stronger, emanating from the Unfinished Mountains until it formed a voice.

“Get the hell out of here!”

The sound of it shook the Unfinished Mountains, causing the ground to quake and rocking the cities at the bases of the mountains.

The Captain chuckled. He didn't go into an explanation of the mysterious High God he'd mentioned. Nor did he seem worried about what was happening around them. Instead, he went into some more detail about his past-life body.

“Getting inside is easy. You just have to join the dream. That's why I didn't say anything to you in the beginning. Everything was for the sake of conforming to the requirements of the dream. That's the only way I could truly be a part of the show. That said, I did give you a warning earlier, right, little Junior Brother? So... calm down and don't get mad.” Smiling ingratiatingly, he held up the hand of his past-life body.

“See? He really was my goal all along. He's the key to unlocking my real past-life body. Now, I bet you can't guess what this fellow really is!”

With that, the Captain waved his hand, and his past-life body melted into a puddle of black liquid. And right in the middle of that liquid... was a rotting butterfly! It emanated a sense of ancient time, making it clear it was very old. It also seemed to have a very high level of personhood hidden so deeply in it that Crimson Mother had overlooked it.

This was the key. The moment it appeared, screaming winds swept through the Unfinished Mountains, and everything shook violently. Looks of ferocity and pain appeared on the faces of all living beings. Boulders cracked, and plants wilted. At the same time, shocking fluctuations rolled out from the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect, along with a furious shout.

“Awaken. Awaken!”

The living beings in the area began to tremble. From the look of it, the sacrificial dancer that had created this show was ready to end the dream to stop the Captain's plan.

“Too late.” The Captain laughed heartily as he picked up the 'key' and then waved his hand toward the sky. “Open!”

Thunderous rumbling sounds filled the dome of heaven. The clouds seethed, and it seemed like the cosmos itself was being split open. Then a rift appeared overhead. It didn't start out very large, but it rapidly expanded, accompanied by deafening ripping sounds.

It looked extremely ghastly. A sense of decay emerged from the rift, filled with ancient time. The sky changed color, and the lands seemed like they might shatter, as a blue coffin emerged from the rift.

It was a coffin made, not from wood or metal, but rather, blue ice! Inside the ice coffin was a body wearing an extravagant blue robe embroidered with golden thread. He emanated terrifying pressure, but at the same time, seemed incredibly majestic. In his hand was a scepter!



The sky seemed to explode, and the land quaked violently. At the same time, a howl of grief erupted from within the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect.

“The original scepter of the sacrificial dance! You used to be the Grand Dancer!!”

As those words rang out, the old man in the five-colored robe in the cave temple had a look of abject terror in his eyes. With almost frantic anxiety, he was severing all of the threads connecting himself to the projected image of the Unfinished Mountains. He knew full well that as a sacrificial dancer, he looked strong, but was actually weak. The strength came because of the power to create dreams for a god; but that was also a source of weakness.

If the created dream ended normally, it counted as the conclusion of the sacrificial dance. But if the process was interrupted, it would result in a backlash. The so-called sacrificial dance was actually a very unique ceremony. There was a massive difference between that ceremony being interrupted actively versus being interrupted passively.

He was actively interrupting it to awaken everyone in the dream. Although there was a backlash, it wasn't too much for him to deal with. That was why, when he realized something unusual was going on, he had taken the initiative to call out to all the living beings and prematurely end the creation of the dream.

For the dream to have been passively interrupted would be a totally different matter. He would have been affected by the decay of all living beings, the karma of all entities, and also the backlash of a god's dream power.

Not even someone in Void Returning could survive that! It wasn't something that any person could easily do.

The moment he spotted the scepter that represented the Grand Dancer, he was struck with absolute terror.

Sadly for him, he didn't have the time to fully interrupt the dream. The moment the coffin appeared, the Captain's eye shone with a strange light, and he shouted, “Show how strong you are, little Junior Brother! Send your power into that scepter. Awake all the living beings here whose fates have been transformed!”

The Captain didn't explain anything else. Xu Qing knew what he meant. The Captain wanted him to use the power of the violet moon. Fighting against the vertigo, Xu Qing walked over to the coffin.

He reached out in the direction of the scepter. The power of the violet moon erupted within him, causing the ice to start turning the same violet color. At the same time, the Captain performed an incantation gesture, using the power of the coffin to guide the violet light into the scepter. A tremor passed through Xu Qing as he sensed a majestic power bolstering his soul. The vertigo vanished, and his mind cleared. Everything around him suddenly seemed like it was covered with a gauzy veil.

He saw threads rising up from everyone present. And those threads connected to the mountains of the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect. On each thread was an illusory butterfly. Some were large and some were small, but all of them were growing.

“Wake up!” Xu Qing said calmly, his eyes glowing violet.

Those two words were like 10,000,000 lightning bolts all exploding at the same time. The threads were all severed as the words echoed in the minds of the living beings in the Unfinished Mountains.

Countless cultivators and mortals shivered as they woke up. They looked around blankly for a moment before starting to subconsciously edge backward. Daoist partners looked at each other in terror, not even recognizing each other! Close friends shivered as they suddenly realized they actually hated each other. Entire families including parents and children all of a sudden came to the realization that they weren't related. There were also some people who went back to what they were doing before. They were now awake and remembered everything. It was the same with all the sects.

Not even the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect could escape the effects of the show. There were some disciples in the sect who weren't even from the Unfinished Mountains. They had just been passing through, and the next thing they knew, they were disciples. Mistress Rosyclouds shivered, her hair in complete disarray as she looked up at the mountain summit. In reality, she wasn't the sect leader, and she wasn't the daughter of the sect's patriarch. It was actually the opposite. He was her mortal enemy!

As the living beings in the Unfinished Mountains woke up, and the threads were severed, the dream came to an end. All the karma that resulted from severing the dream of a god, all of the backlash and the malice, converged back on the sacrificial dancer.

A miserable, agonized shriek echoed into the sky.

The old man in the cave had a look of despair on his face. He struggled, all in vain. As the threads snapped and turned into butterflies, they lunged toward him ravenously. They seemed to flit back and forth between illusory and corporeal as they covered him and started eating him.

He began to rot out of existence. To his utter despair, it was simply impossible to resist the backlash of the severed dream of a god. As he was being devoured, the curse within him erupted, filling his body and soul with agony, and driving him into madness. Even if he dropped to his knees and begged the god for help, it wouldn't do any good.

After a few breaths of time passed, the dancing butterflies and the power of the severed dream had reduced him to a pool of blood on the floor of the cave temple.

When dancing for an emperor, the skilled are praised and the unskilled die!

That's even truer with gods.

Chapter 579: The Wind Picks Up In Moonrite; Sparks Seek to Start a Wildfire (part 1)

*"Gods have dreams, sacrifice to them with dance; the living are paper cutouts, all beings are art.*

*"The skilled please gods, and are blessed forever; the unskilled are hated by the gods, and are destroyed eternally."*

That was the sacrificial dance.

As the old man in the twin peaks was destroyed via backlash, he faded from existence along with all of the failed dancing butterflies. After eating their fill of his flesh, they merged back into heaven and earth, leaving behind no trace of their existence. As a result, all living beings were able to see clearly again.

That said, to the beings in the Unfinished Mountains, being awake... wasn't necessarily a blessing. Those for whom no special arrangements were made ended up extremely confused. The confusion started in the cities in the foothills, and spread rapidly from there. Mortals and cultivators alike suddenly regained clarity, and then looked around silently.

Husbands and wives. Friends. Loved ones. Masters and apprentices. In many cases, mixed emotions replaced the confusion on their faces as they struggled to reconcile the mix of familiarity and unfamiliarity. The unfamiliarity came because they didn't know the other person. They had been assigned these roles regardless of their real identity. The familiarity came because they still had all their recent memories. Upon awakening, such people weren't sure what to do with their lives.

The cities were like that, and it was the same with the sects and clans. A storm of confusion swept through the Unfinished Mountains, filling them completely. Some people chose to leave and never return to a place they now viewed with terror and incredulity. Most of those were outsiders.

However, the majority of people in the Unfinished Mountains had been born and raised there. From the moment they were born, their fates could be altered on a whim. In fact, if you went back in history, all of their ancestors had lived like this. Their lives were arranged for them. The tracks were all laid out. And thus, living in that manner had become an instinct for most such people. After all, before they woke up, they had no idea what was really happening. In that state, everything looked exactly the same as it always had to them. Normal. They were like pets in a cage. Even if that cage was somehow opened one day, they... would still choose to live in the cage.

Many of them, deep in their hearts, would foster the suspicion that the talk about the 'dream' was a sham. By doing that, they could reinforce the belief that they were always 'awake.' It was part blessing, part sorrow.

Xu Qing stood there in silence.

With the help of the ice coffin occupied by the Captain's past-life body, plus the scepter, he was able to send his divine will throughout the Unfinished Mountains. As a result, he could sense what the living beings there were thinking.

In the end, Xu Qing and the Captain chose to leave. Before departing, the Captain sensed everything and sighed.

"For the people who have lived here from generation to generation, is there really a difference between being in the dream and being awake? They'll keep on living, and things won't be much different than before. Let's go, little Ah Qing.... Perhaps to them, our presence really is an interruption."

Shaking his head, he collected the ice coffin, then floated up into the air. A moment later, he stopped and looked back down at Xu Qing. Xu Qing took a deep breath, retracted his senses, and then followed the Captain. As they flew through the sky, they stopped to look down at the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect.

Wu Jianwu was there.

The sect was largely empty. Many of the mountains in the sect had collapsed, and the spirit spring was choked with dust and sludge. More than half of the disciples had departed upon awakening.

Local cultivators who had been born in the area sat around looking at the chaos and rubble, their hearts filled with mixed emotions.

Wu Jianwu stood at the base of the mountain as Mistress Rosyclouds slowly walked away from him.

The evening glow weighed down with oppressive weight that rivaled their heavy hearts. Mistress Rosyclouds obviously had some very conflicted emotions.

Wu Jianwu stared at her blankly, not quite sure what he should say. The moment he sensed the change, he had raced back here and seen the dilapidated state of the sect. And he had spotted Mistress Rosyclouds almost immediately. A moment ago, he had spoken a few lines of poetry, only to find that she didn't understand any of it. In fact, she'd hardly looked at him.

It filled Wu Jianwu's heart with bitter pain. As he looked at her walking away from him, he suddenly raised his voice and said, "*The dark wind blows the mountain wasteland; though rain falls, I have an umbrella in hand!*"

His words reached Mistress Rosyclouds, but she didn't stop walking. She didn't even turn around. She just kept going until she disappeared.

Dazed, Wu Jianwu took a few steps back and then sat down on the ground.

Xu Qing and the Captain approached silently. When Xu Qing saw the blank look on Wu Jianwu's face, he held out a flagon of alcohol. It looked like Wu Jianwu needed a drink.

Wu Jianwu reached out with a trembling hand to take the flagon. He drank deeply. Eyes bloodshot, he murmured, "She never understood. It was all fake!"

The Captain sighed and clasped Wu Jianwu's shoulder. He said nothing. Eventually, Wu Jianwu seemed to get his emotions under control, and they left together. The entire time, Wu Jianwu didn't say anything.

At a certain point, the Captain dragged Ning Yan out of a ravine where he'd been hiding.

Ning Yan was still scared witless. What he had seen had left him with a feeling of extreme danger. After he saw Xu Qing and the others, his spirits lifted. Glaring at Wu Jianwu, he prepared to say something, only to notice that Wu Jianwu seemed to be in a very unusual state. Confused, Ning Yan thought to ask about what was going on. But in the end, he decided it didn't seem like the right time, so he buried his curiosity.

And thus, they left the Unfinished Mountains. Eventually, the Captain brought out his artificial sun, and they entered it. It shot over the horizon.

Seven days passed.

Rumors began to spread about what had played out in the Unfinished Mountains. What was more, the death of the sacrificial dancer caused some waves in the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect. The sect relied on the help of the Doorites to send top experts into the mountains to investigate. Eventually, wanted posters from the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect started spreading through the Moonrite Region.

A bounty was being offered for a group of heathen blasphemers led by Master Unfinished and Master Heavengreen.

Anyone who offered useful tips or clues would earn the friendship of the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect. And anyone who brought in the heads or souls of the culprit would be rewarded with a painquelling lozenge.

The bounty caused a big stir in the Moonrite Region. One reason was the general momentous nature of the event. The other reason was the painquelling lozenge. Such pills had only one use. They could relieve some of the bitter pain that resulted from the Moonrite Region curse. All cultivators in the Moonrite Region had to deal with the curse of the red moon. As their cultivation base improved and they grew stronger, the curse would inflict increasingly intense pain on their bodies and souls. That pain would eventually become pure torment. Few cultivators were willing to deal with such pain, and the only way to get rid of it was by using painquelling lozenges.

However, there were far too few pills to supply all living beings with them. As a result, they were exceedingly precious, to the point where you usually couldn't even buy them with spirit stones. Even just one such pill could be considered a rare commodity worth hoarding. After all, the patriarchs of the Twofold Alliance had been hoping to turn Xu Qing over to the Red Moon Cathedral and get a reward of a painquelling lozenge. From that alone it was possible to imagine how enticing a bounty reward with painquelling lozenges could be. [1]

Meanwhile, Xu Qing and the others were long gone from the Unfinished Mountains, and were now nearing the western part of the region. The Captain planned to lie low there until the fuss died down. And he had some work to do in that area anyway.

Xu Qing wasn't planning to go with him. There was something else he needed to work on. He hadn't been able to stop thinking about Duanmu Zang and his city of fireflies. There were over 100,000 humans from that city who were affected by the curse. He wanted to help them. However, it was going to take a lot of research, study, and hard work to figure out how to dispel the curse. And that meant he needed a quiet and peaceful location to work for a while.

Given the Captain's frisky personality, it seemed better to part ways. What was more, there was a specific location that Xu Qing wanted to investigate. Eventually, he explained his plan to the Captain.

"You want to study the curse?" The Captain's eyes lit up. Producing a peach, he took a bite. "Hahaha! This idea of yours is actually eighth on my list of tasks to handle. If you want to get to work now, it'll save me a lot of time and effort down the road. I think that's a great idea!"

Eyes shining with determination, the Captain handed Xu Qing an apple, then threw his arm around his neck and lowered his voice. "If you're going to go off alone, little Ah Qing, just keep in mind to avoid the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect. As for me, I have a small job to handle that shouldn't take me more than about half a year."

Xu Qing looked at the Captain. "What do you mean by 'small' job? How small?"

"Hahaha! Very small. Very, very small!" He put his thumb and index finger very close together to illustrate how small of a job he was talking about.

Xu Qing smiled. "In that case, take care of yourself."

He wasn't inclined to press for details.

The Captain laughed again and then looked off into the distance. "Alright, then. We'll part here, and meet back up in half a year in the Bitter Life Mountains. Sound good? You listen to me, little Ah Qing. Don't be late. In fact, it would be better to show up early. In half a year, your Eldest Brother is going to introduce you to a very badass organization! And that organization is going to play a very important role in dealing with the red moon!"

Xu Qing's eyes glittered. He had first heard of the Bitter Life Mountains from Duanmu Zang, which was also when he learned that those mountains were related to the Moonrebel Congregation. [2]

Xu Qing didn't know much beyond that, but he had planned to go there at some point.

As Duanmu Zang had mentioned, the Moonrebel Congregation had done a lot of research into the curse. If he could get some good information from them, it might save a lot of time in his own study. Or he might even be able to take existing ideas and expand them in different directions.

Nodding, he discussed a few more details with the Captain. Then he stood to leave.

Chapter 579: The Wind Picks Up In Moonrite; Sparks Seek to Start a Wildfire (part 2)

Before departing, the Captain had Wu Jianwu give a seed to Xu Qing.

"Little Junior Brother, if you get to the Bitter Life Mountains before me, plant this seed somewhere. That way, if I need to find you urgently, I can have Big Jianjian send his children to find you by tracking down the scent of the seed. Either way, after my current task, I can use the seed to find you."

Xu Qing accepted the seed curiously. He knew that Wu Jianwu's children were very special. In fact, it made him think back to years ago when Wu Jianwu opened that wish box. [1]

Wu Jianwu looked just as despondent as before. He just lay there listlessly, occasionally sighing.

"Don't worry about him," the Captain said. "This is just what happens with a bad breakup. He'll be fine in a few days." He took a deep breath and looked at Xu Qing with encouragement in his eyes. "Well, little Junior Brother, time to see what fate has in store. You take care of yourself, and I'll do the same."

Xu Qing nodded.

Off to the side, Ning Yan's ears perked up as he eavesdropped, especially when he heard the word 'breakup.' That was when everything clicked, and he realized why Wu Jianwu was acting unusual. Feeling more than a little disdainful, he thought, *That's it?*

Seeing that Xu Qing was about to leave, Ning Yan got to his feet and hurried over with a hopeful look on his face. He obviously wanted Xu Qing to take him along....

Xu Qing ignored him. He left the artificial sun, then flew up into the sky and disappeared.

"He's so grown up he doesn't want to hang out with his Elder Brother anymore." The Captain sighed as he watched Xu Qing leave. Then he performed an incantation gesture, and the artificial sun rumbled to life and continued on its way.

Half a month flew by.

The bounty from the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect was still active, but no one had dug up any traces of the people on the wanted posters. They had seemingly vanished from the face of the earth. And then something happened that caused most people to forget all about the bounty. In fact, it was such a momentous and astonishing development that it shook all of the Moonrite Region!

The godchild of the Red Moon Cathedral had been grievously injured!

At first, the details were kept under wraps. Only the high-ranking members of the Red Moon Cathedral had any idea what happened. But stories spread about some sort of dramatic event in the northern ice plains, as well as supernatural phenomena at the Heavenfire Sea. For more than a month, lingering fluctuations had continued to spread out through heaven and earth. There was a lot of speculation about what happened, but no solid facts emerged.

After a few months passed, the truth about the event started to spread. Of course, the word was spread, not by the Red Moon Cathedral, but rather, by members of the Moonrebel Congregation. According to the stories being spread, the supernatural phenomena at the Heavenfire Sea were the result of the Heir Apparent of the Imperial Sovereign being freed from captivity.

The dramatic events in the northern ice plains resulted when the Heir Apparent rescued Princess Brightblossom, who was the daughter of that same Imperial Sovereign. When those two shocking individuals were freed, the first thing they did was attack the headquarters of the Red Moon Cathedral.

What played out was an incredibly shocking battle. In fact, that battle was the source of the lingering fluctuations that had been present for a whole month.

The battle ended with the Heir Apparent and Princess Brightblossom going missing, and the Red Moon Cathedral's godchild seriously injured. Most relevant of all was the fact that... Crimson Mother of the red moon never showed up. It didn't make sense. If the godchild ended up injured, he would surely have unleashed some powerful god magic during the fighting. But based on the fluctuations, it didn't seem that happened!

Before long, two rumors were spreading.

The first rumor was related to the godchild's true identity. What was more, according to this rumor, the godly souls he had collected from his imprisoned brothers and sisters ended up being taken during the fighting. Those souls were the reason that the imprisoned descendants of the Imperial Sovereigns lost their minds when in captivity. The moment they were seized, countless howls of grief erupted from inside the Red Moon Cathedral.

It was a shocking development. What was more, after analyzing the events, some people came to the conclusion that the Heir Apparent hadn't been interested in fighting a battle to the death with the godchild. There was deeper meaning. And apparently, the godly souls were one of his main targets. No one knew any more than that.

The second rumor was more momentous, and had a much bigger practical effect.

"Crimson Mother of the red moon is sleeping in an outside region. For the time being, shē can't wake up!"

This rumor was incredibly astonishing, and led some people to wonder if leadership was going to change in the Moonrite Region.

Some people believed the rumors, others didn't. But either way... all of the Moonrite Region was shaken to the core by the various developments. The region was like a pool of still water that was suddenly disturbed by rolling waves.

Almost overnight, secret societies sprang up in prefectures and counties all over the region. They preached about 'rebellling against the moon,' and urged the commoners to defy the leaders of the region. They were hoping to spark a wildfire.

However, the Red Moon Cathedral sent all of its affiliate organizations out to crush such movements, and they were joined by large numbers of godslaves, godservants, and godheralds.

After the godchild was injured, the cathedral's pontiff awoke from slumber to take charge. He was the type of person who controlled things with an iron fist, and almost immediately, blood was being spilled through the Moonrite Region.

At long last... the wind was blowing in Moonrite.

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In the west of Moonrite Region was Greensand County. At the moment, a green sandstorm filled that area, stretching from the ground all the way to the dome of heaven.

Greensand County was one of the seven counties in the western part of the Moonrite Region. It was located near the center of the region. The reason for the name was that the entire county was a desert with very unique sand. It wasn't yellow sand. It was green. And green sandstorms covered the place year round. The people who lived there had long since grown used to the local climate, and could not only survive, but also flourish amidst the endless green sandstorms.

There were a lot of legends related to the sandstorms, but there was only one that the majority of people believed to be true.

According to the legend, long ago, this place wasn't home to a desert. Instead, it was an enormous basin filled with countless towering mountains. Back then, the soil was black, and the place was so full of mist that it was said to be home to a sea of mist.

One day, a strand of green hair fell from the sky, which transformed into sand that filled the basin and gave it its green color. After that, the place was a desert. The once towering mountains had been mostly covered in sand, but the exposed parts were still connected into a rough collection of mountain ranges. The largest of those mountain ranges was called the Bitter Life Mountains.

As for the desert, it was called the Greenhair Badlands. Because of the horrific climate, the population in the Greenhair Badlands wasn't very large. However, because of the place's unique qualities, there was no shortage of visitors. [2]

And over the years, mudbrick cities had sprung up in numerous places. The cities were all built on the mountains, not the sand. Of course, the Red Moon Cathedral also had territory staked out in the area.

As the green sandstorms blew, it was just possible to see a figure moving through the haze.

The wind blew strong and loud. It felt like a host of hands pushing against whoever it touched, blocking forward progress, and making one's clothing whip wildly. However, the wind couldn't stop this figure from moving. He seemed to be moving at a leisurely pace, yet each step propelled



him dozens of meters forward. Occasionally he would stop in place and take out a jade slip to check his position and course.

“It’s just up ahead,” Xu Qing murmured. After parting ways with the Captain, he had thought for a time about how exactly he wanted to proceed. Eventually, he decided to fix his sights on the Bitter Life Mountains. He was planning to try to make contact with the Moonrebel Congregation, and hopefully identify a good path to follow in his curse research.

This was his third day in the Greenhair Badlands.

He no longer wore a daoist robe. Instead, he wore local attire. He had a cloth scarf wrapping up his head and face, leaving only his eyes visible, as well as wide-legged trousers, knee-length animal hide boots, and a voluminous gray cloak that he could wrap around his entire body. The cloak also served to keep Ling’er safe. The wind here could be painful even to cultivators, and it had to be defended against using one’s cultivation base. For short periods of time, it wasn’t anything worth worrying about. But if you were exposed for long periods, you could easily exhaust yourself.

Thanks to the endless wind, the spirit power in this desert was scattered and weak. There was also something desolate in the wind, something that would slowly eat away at life force, until the victim was left as nothing but a skeleton pulsing with death energy.

Of course, there were some unique life forms who, like fish in water, thrived in this environment.

At the moment, Xu Qing was eyeing a green scorpion that was about as big as a child. The scorpion had just burst out of the sand behind him, and was racing toward him at top speed. As it neared, its tail glittered with cold light. Just when it seemed like it was about to stab Xu Qing, his shadow swept out.

The scorpion vanished. The shadow returned.

Xu Qing didn’t bother checking into what happened. After arriving here, he had run into quite a few beasts like this. All of them had a lot of curse power in them, so he welcomed them. He had already told the shadow to capture them alive and keep them around for later study.

After confirming his current position, he put away the jade slip with the map in it and proceeded on his way. The intelligence reports the Captain had given him about the Moonrite Region weren’t very detailed. Therefore, he had spent some of his own money to buy some more information about Greensand County.

That was how he knew some of the local legends, as well as the general location of the Bitter Life Mountains. He continued traveling for seven days, getting deeper and deeper into the desert. During his travels, he saw all sorts of gruish beings in the green sand.

For instance, he noticed some roughly 30-meter-tall mushrooms. They looked almost like huge houses standing in the middle of the desert. They were very colorful, and would be very attractive to anyone who spotted them from a distance. Xu Qing didn’t get close to them. After scanning them briefly, he decided to avoid the area. He didn’t want to get involved in any unnecessary trouble.

He would occasionally run into mirages in the desert. The sandstorms would create images of men and women, laughing with each other as they walked along. Their voices contained alluring power,

and wherever they passed, they left behind long streaks in the sand. The streaks looked like evidence of the passage of huge worms, crawling beneath the surface of the desert.

Xu Qing also spotted pillars. Corpses were strapped to the pillars like warning messages.

He took note of them and kept traveling. A few days later, he saw a group of huge animals with bells hanging around their necks. They vaguely resembled rhinoceroses. Wherever they went, the sound of tinkling bells followed them. Mounted on the backs of the huge beasts were wizened nonhumans who were wrapped up in so much cloth all you could see were their pure white eyes surveying their surroundings.

Upon noticing Xu Qing, the huge beasts stopped short, and the nonhumans atop them looked at him vigilantly. Xu Qing clasped hands respectfully and backed up a bit. They nodded at him and continued on their way without causing any trouble.

In that manner, days passed. Eventually a month had gone by.

The Bitter Life Mountains were now visible in the distance.

The sky was dusky, and in the haze, the Bitter Life Mountains looked like a dragon sleeping in the desert. One mountain after another stretched up, going from west to east, spanning more than 4,500 kilometers.

Chapter 580: The Consequences of Attempted Lasciviousness and Robbery (part 1)

Xu Qing wasn't exactly sure how to become part of the Moonrebel Congregation. Duanmu Zang hadn't provided any details about that. He had only explained where to find it.

The greater part of a year had passed since then. Surrounded by the endless green desert sand, Xu Qing looked at the Bitter Life Mountains off in the distance and thought back to what he had learned of this area, thanks to the intelligence reports he'd purchased. Unlike the Unfinished Mountains, the Bitter Life Mountains had no plant life. Endless sandy winds whimpered through the mountains, leading to a very desolate and oppressive sensation.

Xu Qing tightened his clothing a bit. He could feel Ling'er nestling against his neck, leading him to feel warmth at heart. Walking through the wind, he entered the Bitter Life Mountains and began looking for clues leading to the Moonrebel Congregation.

Ten days later, Xu Qing found himself on a towering peak in the Bitter Life Mountains, frowning as he studied his surroundings.

During the days that had passed, he had searched the mountains but hadn't found any clues pointing him toward the Moonrebel Congregation. One thing he had come to realize was that a lot of people lived in these mountains. There were all sorts of species, most of them congregating in mudbrick cities. Mortals were rare. Most local denizens had cultivation bases, although there were some exceptions. On a few occasions, Xu Qing sensed from afar the hostility in the gazes of the cultivators in the cities.

*Duanmu Zang said that the way to join the Moonrebel Congregation is to come to the Bitter Life Mountains...* In the distance was one of the tallest peaks in the Bitter Life Mountains, and it pulsed with fluctuations from Red Moon Cathedral warding spells.

The Red Moon Cathedral doesn't just randomly set up church temples. But there's one there.... It goes to show that this place is unique, probably because of being linked to the Moonrebel Congregation. But it's strange. If it's fairly common knowledge that the Bitter Life Mountains are key to joining the Moonrebel Congregation, then why wouldn't the Red Moon Cathedral seal this place, or at least prevent people from coming in and out?

Xu Qing looked down the mountain, his expression thoughtful.

From his vantage point, the green desert and the endless gritty winds made it seem like the entire world was covered in green fog.

Maybe sealings or lockdowns won't work here for some reason.

He was about to continue his search when he heard a cry carried to him through the wind, along with the fluctuations of magical techniques.

At first he planned to simply ignore them. He had encountered similar situations elsewhere in the Bitter Life Mountains, as there were always local cultivators fighting and killing each other. However, most such situations involved Foundation Establishment cultivators, and maybe a few in Gold Core. But after taking only a few steps, Xu Qing stopped in place and looked in the direction the fluctuations were coming from.

Nascent Soul fluctuations? And they're strong. Seems like the two- or three-tribulation level.

It was the first time Xu Qing had encountered any Nascent Soul fighting. And since he hadn't made much headway in joining the Moonrebel Congregation, maybe it warranted an adjustment in his search methods.

Wrapping himself up in concealing invisibility, he became one with the wind as he headed toward the fighting.

Before long, he found the field of battle. There was a ravine, through which swept the green desert wind. Two cultivators hovered in mid-air exchanging attacks with all sorts of magical techniques and weapons. Their clashes caused shockwaves to roll out in every direction.

Both of the combatants were middle-aged, and wore clothing similar to Xu Qing's. Being completely wrapped up, the only thing visible about them were their eyes. They both attacked with ruthless ferocity, and were just as willing to sustain injuries as they were to inflict them. One of them had suffered some severe injuries already. He had a huge gash in his abdomen, and one of his arms flopped uselessly at his side. His opponent had been blinded in one eye. Blood flowed out of the ruined eye socket, while the other eye glittered with ruthlessness.

The fight hadn't just started. It seemed that there had actually been a chase that led to this spot.

When Xu Qing arrived, he saw one of the cultivators exhale a black mist. His opponent was so weak and injured that he couldn't dodge out of the way, and was hit in the face by the mist. He screamed shrilly as he backed away. However, he didn't move fast enough. The one-eyed cultivator laughed maniacally as he lunged forward and shoved his hands into his opponent's torso, crushing his five yin organs and shattering his six yang organs.

It was hard to say what technique he was using, but it resulted in his opponent rapidly withering into a desiccated corpse.

Xu Qing watched as that cultivator's nascent souls tried to escape, but failed, as they were now sealed inside the desiccated corpse.

Having accomplished that, the one-eyed cultivator collected the corpse, then spun to look at Xu Qing. Shockingly, a sealing mark flickered in his pupil, which imparted a very gruish feeling. Grinning, he said, "Another one? You think *you're* going to rob me, fool?"

He was looking right at Xu Qing, despite his cloak of invisibility.

Xu Qing had not put on a mask of concealment. But his concealment abilities were extraordinary to begin with. Only someone with special abilities would be able to see him, and apparently, this cultivator was just such a person. After some thought, Xu Qing emerged from his concealment of invisibility. After taking a few steps back to indicate that he had no hostile intentions, he spoke in a very sincere manner.

"Fellow Daoist, I have nothing to do with the person you just killed. I just noticed the fluctuations of the magical techniques and followed them here. A friend of mine went missing in these mountains about a month ago, and I'm looking for him. Is there any chance you saw—"

The cultivator interrupted with a cold laugh. Backing away in the opposite direction, he said, "A lot of people go missing here. I haven't seen any damned friend of yours."

The one-eyed cultivator then turned and sped off into the distance.

Xu Qing watched him go. He had been hoping to use his cover story to get some information from this cultivator. Sadly, the cultivator was too wary.

It wasn't a big deal to Xu Qing. Turning, he started moving in a different direction. However, before he got more than a few paces, his eyes glittered coldly as he realized the wind was bringing poison with it. It was cleverly concealed, odorless, and colorless. And considering it was being carried on the wind, most people would fall victim to it before even noticing it.

The ingredients are mixed clumsily. There's blurry strawgrass, hundred-leaf deadwood, ninemerit slag... and also some corpseblooms. It's a catalytic poison, so it needs another poison to become active.

After his initial analysis, he kept moving. Enough time had passed for an incense stick to burn, whereupon he heard a whistling sound behind him, and turned to look expressionlessly over his shoulder.

The one-eyed cultivator was back. He was about thirty meters back, an expression of surprise on his face as he looked Xu Qing up and down. Then he sniffed the air.

"Something's strange about you. You smell good." The one-eyed cultivator's gaze then stopped at Xu Qing's neck. Eyes glittering, he pointed. "That thing you have there looks delicious. Give it to me, and I'll tell you what you want to know."

Ling'er shivered. The cultivator had just pointed directly at her.

When Xu Qing felt Ling'er shivering, his eyes turned cold. He had noticed that when the one-eyed cultivator pointed at him the poison around him grew more intense, as if it was about to detonate. He looked calmly at the one-eyed cultivator.

Meanwhile, the one-eyed cultivator's heart sank. The poison in the area was his, and after sensing something on this person's neck, he had come to the conclusion it was some sort of treasure. Because he feared his battle prowess, he had resorted to using poisons. Upon returning to the scene, he had found that the poison was in place and ready to activate. However, even after using the activation item, nothing happened.

The one-eyed cultivator was getting the feeling something about the situation was off. Eyes darting back and forth to study his surroundings, he backed up and said, "Given your reaction, I can only guess that the thing around your neck is important to you. In that case, forget about it. I've never been in the practice of taking things that people love. However, if you want answers to your questions, you're going to have to pay."

Xu Qing nodded and took a step forward. As he did, his cultivation base erupted with power. Thirteen two-tribulation nascent souls surged with a total of thirty-nine-soul battle prowess. Even Nascent Soul cultivators who had six heavenly palaces with nascent souls in them, and had passed five heavenfate tribulations, still couldn't match up to something like that. Their mere existence caused a terrifying tempest to spring up in the area.

The one-eyed cultivator's mind spun and he began to breathe heavily.

"Y-y-you! What kind of battle prowess is that??"

He could sense that Xu Qing was in the two-tribulation level, and that he had a number of nascent souls. However, being in the three-tribulation level, he hadn't felt completely terrified of Xu Qing. When his poison was defeated, he started getting a bit worried. And then Xu Qing's cultivation base erupted like a slap to the face. Now he was shivering, and his eyes shone with utter incredulity. In fact, he almost felt like he might pass out at any moment. As a rogue cultivator, he had never encountered a two-tribulation opponent who was as terrifying as this.

There's no way this freak is in the two-tribulation level. He's on a fishing expedition!!

The one-eyed cultivator trembled as he backed up, his mind spinning as he tried to come up with a plan to get out of this situation alive. Waving his hand, he used a magical technique to summon a host of brown worms with wings. There were roughly 10,000 of them, filling both land and sky. And all of them spat out strands of silk that combined into a large net that spread out over Xu Qing. Magical devices flew out as well, sending defensive fluctuations out to surround the one-eyed cultivator. There were also flying swords, a variety of pill bottles, and spears.

There were a lot of things, but they didn't seem to conform to any specific collection or package. They had obviously been taken as loot from different opponents. And though they looked impressive on the surface, they actually weren't as mighty as they seemed.

When he tossed out the medicinal pill bottles, they exploded, causing a corrosive poison powder to spread out and block Xu Qing's path.

As the cultivator shot backward across the ground, a vortex sprang into being, out of which emerged a host of brown vines that sought to constrain Xu Qing. All of these things together were indeed extraordinary. But they weren't enough.

Xu Qing was like a shocking beast who commanded a never-ending tempest that could shred everything in its path. The vines couldn't even get close to Xu Qing before they collapsed into pieces. The mere fluctuations coming off of him were too powerful for it. The same thing happened with the worms and the net. Xu Qing's aura formed an image of a golden crow and raging flames. The fire immediately swept over the worms. The worms screeched as they collapsed, becoming a rain of fire that landed on the ground below.

The one-eyed cultivator was coughing up blood like mad, and his expression was one of pure terror.

"Forgive me, Senior! I'm at fault!"

As he fell back, he howled in grief as he realized how perilous of a situation he was in. Never in his wildest dreams could he have guessed that a simple outing like this would result in him encountering a terrifying monster like this. What was even more unbelievable was that someone so strong would have been so courteous earlier. The fact that he had been keeping his cultivation base hidden left the one-eyed cultivator feeling full of despair.

As he fell back, the magical devices he had thrown out all exploded and scattered more poison powder....

Chapter 580: The Consequences of Attempted Lasciviousness and Robbery (part 2)

To Xu Qing, this poison was simply too weak.

Clearly, these two opponents had very different skills when it came to the use and understanding of poison. One seemed like an apprentice, while the other seemed like a master.

Xu Qing ignored all of that. He was like a descending storm as he shot his hand out. It completely ignored the one-eyed cultivator's defenses. As the magical devices shattered, his hand landed on his opponent's neck.

The one-eyed cultivator let loose a shout. Releasing the power of his seven three-tribulation nascent souls, he started a minor teleportation. His goal was clear; he wanted to get away from Xu Qing. But then a host of heavenfiend clones appeared around him, like a vortex distorting the air. The resulting interference to the one-eyed cultivator's minor teleportation caused it to slow down slightly. In a moment like this, a slight slow-down could be the difference between life and death.

In the blink of an eye, Xu Qing closed in and grabbed the cultivator by the throat and slammed him down onto the ground below. A boom rang out as the boulders shattered and a large crater opened up.

The one-eyed cultivator was like a rag doll that Xu Qing was holding in place, making it impossible for him to move. Eyes shining with terror, the cultivator blurted, "Please, calm yourself, Senior! This is my fault! I know what you want to ask about. I know! I know everything!!"

Xu Qing's expression was as cold as ice. He had always been the type of person who lived by the maxim, *don't hurt me, and I won't hurt you*. Right now, his eyes were radiating so much killing intent that the one-eyed cultivator was about to pass out from terror.

"Senior, I bet you want to ask about the Moonrebel Congregation. Am I right? *The red moon is by no means eternal, hope exists from time immemorial and into forever!!!*"

Xu Qing looked at him coldly.

The one-eyed cultivator shivered. The truth was that he had instantly recognized that Xu Qing was an outsider. And most outsiders who came to this place wanted to join the Moonrebel Congregation.

Of course, there were exceptions. But given the deadly crisis situation, the one-eyed cultivator couldn't worry about it. All he could do was try to make the best of a bad situation. Therefore, he spoke the secret signal out loud, then searched Xu Qing's eyes in hopes of finding clues that his guess was correct. Sadly, he couldn't discern anything by looking at Xu Qing.

However, there was one thing he did notice: Xu Qing didn't kill him. Therefore, he quickly continued, "Senior, I'm from the Moonrebel Congregation! We're on the same side! You want to join, right? I can help you!"

Xu Qing's gaze remained as cold as ever. If the Moonrebel Congregation was full of people like this, then he didn't have any desire to join them.

"Senior, as long as you're in the Moonrebel Congregation, all you have to do is take out a mirror—any kind will do—and say the secret signal. That will initiate the Moonrebel Congregation's assessment test. Once you pass the test, then it doesn't matter where you go. You can always use a mirror to instantly be sent to the Moonrebel Congregation!"

As the one-eyed cultivator finished speaking, his heart sank as he noticed a hole in his own story. And all he could do was brace himself for Xu Qing to notice the same thing.

"If that's true," Xu Qing said calmly, "then why did you try so hard to run away? Why not just pull out a mirror?"

The one-eyed cultivator smiled wryly. This person had instantly honed in on the very point he was worried about.

"Senior, I... I'm still in the assessment period myself. I haven't passed it yet...." Seeing that his words hadn't reduced the killing intent in Xu Qing's eyes, he quickly continued, "Senior, everything I said before is true. I was blinded in one eye, Senior, that's why I messed up!"

This one-eyed cultivator was also a ruthless individual. As he apologized, he pulled a nascent soul out of the top of his head, then presented it to Xu Qing and crushed it.

"Senior, I'm crushing my own nascent soul and offering it as an apology!"

The cultivator shivered. Blood oozed out of the corners of his mouth as his aura seemed to shrivel.

Xu Qing frowned. It all seemed like a bit of a waste. "If it's that easy to contact the Moonrebel Congregation, then why doesn't the Red Moon Cathedral lock down this area?"

The one-eyed cultivator looked back at Xu Qing, stunned. This information was common knowledge. Not daring to ask any questions, though, he quickly explained, "Senior, there are nine entrances to the Moonrebel Congregation in the Moonrite Region. This area is just one of them. In the past, the Red Moon Cathedral would lock such places down. However, after doing that, the entrance would just disappear, only to reappear later in another place.

“Entrances to the Moonrebel Congregation can appear randomly, so there’s no point in trying to block them. Rather, the Red Moon Cathedral leaves them in place to make it easier to keep an eye on them.”

The one-eyed cultivator was being very cautious in how he spoke to Xu Qing, and he was trying to look as cooperative as possible. In his mind, he was still trying to come up with a way to escape with his life. Noticing that Xu Qing’s face still abounded with killing intent, he gritted his teeth and took out another nascent soul.

Presenting it to Xu Qing, he crushed it.

“Senior... I'm crushing another as an apology.... This was really all my fault.”

The one-eyed cultivator was now very pale in the face. Crushing two of his own nascent souls was a very serious injury to himself, and he was already much weaker and even gasping for breath. Yet he was still trying to highlight his sincerity.

The sight of it caused Ling’er’s heart to soften. “Big Bro Xu Qing, I feel so bad for this guy. Maybe you should extract his other nascent souls and check to see if he's being sincere. If he’s not, just get it over with.”

Xu Qing agreed that it was for the best. It was not his style to simply free people who had tried to harm him. Before the one-eyed cultivator could say anything further, Xu Qing used his Gruegloom abilities to reach in and extract five nascent souls. He crushed them. Rumbling sounds echoed out as the heavenfate from the five nascent souls swept into Xu Qing. In the blink of an eye, they became heavenfiend clones that pulsed with baleful auras.

Meanwhile, the one-eyed cultivator let loose a miserable shriek. Having lost all of his nascent souls, he was already teetering on the verge of death.

Xu Qing had confirmed that there wasn't some trick at play, so he got things over with. By means of a dagger to the throat.

The one-eyed cultivator’s body collapsed into ashes. Although he had seemed human, from very early on, Xu Qing had been able to tell that he was a nonhuman. That said, his species had nothing to do with why Xu Qing killed him. If Xu Qing had been the weaker party, he would have been the one suffering. Ling’er would have been taken away, and would have undergone an even crueler fate.

After handling the situation, Xu Qing collected his enemy’s bag of holding and then shot off into the distance.

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A few hundred kilometers from where the fight had just played out, there was a mansion grotto carved out of stone. Inside of it, an old man sat cross-legged in meditation. His clothing covered most of him, but his face was revealed, and it was full of wrinkles.

His eyes suddenly shot open, and he coughed up a huge mouthful of blood. He swayed to the side before reaching out to support himself against the wall. But he couldn’t control what was happening inside him, and coughed up more blood. After seven or eight mouthfuls, he shivered uncontrollably. Eyes shining with terror, he looked off in a certain direction.



I escaped a catastrophe. But what a price I had to pay... my traction avatar...

The old man was a member of the Traction species, who had an innate ability that allowed them to turn dead enemies into mummies. By adding their own blood to such a mummy, and then using certain refining techniques, they could turn it into a 'traction avatar.' Traction avatars were essentially like clones, except even more lifelike, to the point where they were almost indistinguishable as doppelgangers.

Normally speaking, this old man used his Traction abilities to his own benefit. It was also one of the key ways he could evade powerful experts. Unfortunately, the traction avatar he had just lost was his primary ensorcelled avatar. It was connected to his mind and heart, and its destruction left him severely injured. His internal organs had all been badly damaged.

What was more, he didn't recall ever having met a powerful expert like this one. The mere memory caused his heart to pound with dread.

This isn't going to work. That guy is smart enough that he probably spotted the clues.

Gritting his teeth, he ignored his injuries and started moving. He didn't dare to stay in one place, and could only hope that he would be able to get far enough away to find a good hiding spot.

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About two hours later, Xu Qing appeared outside of that very same mansion grotto. After sending his shadow in to scout, he entered. Looking at the blood everywhere, he snorted coldly.

After the initial incident, something had seemed off. The nascent souls he had harvested didn't contain the right amount of heavenfate, and as a result, the heavenfiend clones they made had too much baleful energy. That made him think of the random assortment of magical devices his opponent had used, and how he had witnessed him transform his opponent into a desiccated corpse and seal him in a nascent soul. After that, Xu Qing came to suspect that he hadn't killed the true form of his enemy.

Different species had their own unique characteristics. That also counted for innate abilities and gruish skills. Just about anything was possible. Therefore, Xu Qing had cast his senses out and used the new heavenfiend clones to detect the presence of his enemy.

"He ran away quickly," Xu Qing murmured. Walking outside he looked around. His opponent hadn't left behind traces of his passage, and with the ever present green wind, not even the heavenfiend clones could lock onto him now.

*He got lucky. I guess I'll have to wait until next time to kill him.* Xu Qing turned and left. After traveling for a while, he found a remote mountain hollow without any other cultivators nearby.

He was currently contemplating how much, if any, of the information the one-eyed cultivator had given him was true. Back in the heat of the moment, the man had obviously been primarily concerned with keeping himself alive and also protecting his true identity and abilities. In moments like that, most people would say some true things in the hopes of keeping their secrets safe. Telling outright lies could lead to the other person suspecting everything they were saying.

Given that logic, I bet there's some truth to what he said. I might as well do some experimentation!

Eyes gleaming with determination, he took out a mirror fragment.

He still had fragments of some of the Mirrorlings he had killed, which he had kept with the intention of studying them later. Based on what the one-eyed cultivator had said, it seemed worth it to experiment with them now.

*“The red moon is by no means eternal, hope exists from time immemorial and into forever!”*

Almost the same moment that Xu Qing spoke the words, the mirror fragment vibrated, and then a majestic will entered his mind.