

Timescape 581

Chapter 581: The Beginnings of Moonrite's Most Badass Medicine Shop (part 1)

In the Greenhair Badlands, winds screamed everywhere, and green sand stretched out like the sea. It seemed to go on forever and ever.

For some reason, though, the sand and wind were a lot less prevalent in the mountains, which drastically improved the visibility there. In fact, from a distance, the towering mountains looked like they existed in another world. The Bitter Life Mountains were so expansive that there was even less sand and wind there than most other mountains. That said, the sound of the wind was still clearly audible. It sounded like countless demonic monsters, howling in defiance of death.

The mountain hollow Xu Qing had selected was in a rather remote part of the Bitter Life Mountains. Before Xu Qing could even use the mirror, the shadow spread out to keep guard.

Seeing the shadow's quick reaction to the situation caused Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior to suddenly feel more on guard than ever. He quickly flew out, trying to look like the type of dharma protector who would willingly be crushed out of existence if necessary to prove his loyalty. Ling'er was also looking around vigilantly, her eyes shining with white light.

As they stood guard, Xu Qing's expression became vigilant. He could sense the personhood in the will pulsing in the mirror, and it gave him the same feeling as if he was looking up into the starry sky. Boundlessly majestic.

D-132 vibrated, and the god's finger looked out briefly, then seemed terrified and quickly went back into hiding.

The might pulsing from the mirror fragment then converged as it flew out in front of Xu Qing.

The will turned into a voice that spoke into Xu Qing's mind. It sounded like it was coming from a very great distance away, but soon it superseded the sound of the wind.

“Prehistoric rising constellation, unceasing changes and transformations, assess evil and bind demonic, safeguard and protect the body.”

“Wisdom that is pure and bright; test the heart for peace and security; three spiritual souls for eternity; physical souls untoppled and preserved.”

The voice was so indistinct it was impossible to say if it was the voice of a man or woman. In fact, it sounded like many people speaking together. For some reason, it imparted a sense of calm into Xu Qing. It was as if the words that had been spoken had the ability to cleanse the heart and mind. Almost immediately, he felt incredibly peaceful and grounded. On the one hand, it felt like a lot of time had passed. At the same time, hardly any time had passed at all. The voice continued to echo in his mind, repeating the same thirty-two words. However, in Xu Qing's perspective, the meaning of the words changed. [1]

That was because two of the words were clearer than the others.

“... assess.... test....”

Xu Qing didn't do anything rash. He just took his time to listen to the words. Gradually, he got the very distinct impression that if he allowed himself to be drawn into those two words, it would begin

some sort of test. After considering the matter, he decided not to proceed. For one thing, he wasn't in the appropriate environment for something like that. What was more, he had no idea what sort of test he would be taking.

Reaching out, he grabbed the mirror fragment and broke the connection. The sense of peacefulness faded away, and he looked up. Once again, the sound of the wind reached him.

Ling'er looked over at him. "What's wrong, Big Bro Xu Qing? Did it work?"

Xu Qing reached up and stroked Ling'er's head. Looking thoughtful, he said, "I think this is the right method, but I need some time to make sure."

That seemed to placate Ling'er. And considering how Xu Qing seemed lost in thought, she didn't do anything further to disturb him. She quietly went back into his sleeve, found a comfortable spot, and coiled up. Soon, the warmth of his body heat had her feeling very relaxed. It was as if his warmth was the source of all peacefulness to her.

Sometime later, Xu Qing's eyes shone with determination. He had made his decision. He would find somewhere in the Bitter Life Mountains to settle down temporarily, both to study the mirror fragment and also do research on the curse. If he was alone, he would have just found some random cave in the middle of nowhere. But he wasn't alone. He had Ling'er.... After some consideration, he decided to find one of the mudbrick cities. He didn't want to force Ling'er to live isolated from the world while accompanying him.

And thus Xu Qing left the mountain hollow and eventually found a rather small mudbrick city on the outskirts of the mountain range.

It was located about halfway up a mountain, and was so small it didn't even have a name. There weren't even a thousand residents. Virtually everything was made from mudbricks, with hardly any color visible anywhere. It was quite monotonous. Most residents were locals, although there were some outsiders who had settled down for various reasons. All sorts of species were present.

There were a few shops here and there, none of them very busy. At a glance, it looked like about a third of the buildings in the city were empty. Either the people who had occupied those locations had moved on, or had died.

Xu Qing's first impression of the place was that it was a bleak and lonely place. However, the people here seemed more tolerant than those in other places. Although his arrival attracted some hostile gazes, no one bothered him.

Xu Qing, who was still wrapped up in clothing that left only his eyes visible, took some time to study the occupants of the city. After a while, he realized there were a lot of people with deformities. Some people were extremely obese, with massive rolls of flesh all over them. Others had multiple limbs, while some had extra faces on them. Some had growths that dragged on the ground as they walked, making them difficult to cover up with clothing.

They seemed like they had extra flesh growing on them. Perhaps it was natural, or perhaps it was some kind of mutation. Either way, they all had numb expressions on their faces. At first, Xu Qing assumed they were some strange nonhuman species he had never seen before. But eventually he realized that wasn't the case.

They weren't born with these deformities.

The Greenhair Badlands only seemed to get more gruish as he saw more of it.

After walking around the city for a while to get a sense of the layout, he found an abandoned building that he took over. It was very dusty, and there were broken bottles and jars everywhere. There were also some rickety shelves. From the look of it, the place used to be a medicine shop.

After looking around, Xu Qing started cleaning up. Ling'er took human form, examined the place curiously, and then started helping.

“Big Bro Xu Qing,” she said excitedly, “are you planning to open a medicine shop?”

Xu Qing thought about it and smiled. After all, the very first time he ever saw Ling'er was when she and her father were running an inn on Plankspring Way. To Xu Qing, it didn't make much of a difference whether he was just living there or running the place as a shop. But since Ling'er had suggested the latter, he decided it wouldn't hurt.

“Yeah,” he answered.

“Awesome! Let me tell you, Big Bro Xu Qing, I actually know a lot about running businesses. I can handle everything!”

Ling'er's eyes glittered with excitement as she dusted, cleaned up the debris, and then took out some rags to start cleaning more deeply. Such things could be accomplished with magical techniques, but Ling'er clearly enjoyed doing things herself.

When Xu Qing saw that, and noticed how happy Ling'er was, he sighed inwardly. He had come to understand Ling'er a lot more during their travels together. She was very smart, but at the same time, humble and innocent. Sometimes, very small things could keep her happy for days on end.

With Ling'er in charge, all it took was a day before the abandoned little medicine shop was open for business again. Ling'er came up with the name for it. It was the Green Spirit Pharmacy. [2]

Xu Qing already had a big collection of medicinal pills, the majority being white boluses. After all, that was the first pill formula he had mastered. Though white boluses weren't of any use to him, they were a staple for virtually all other living beings in the world, and were thus common everywhere. Xu Qing had learned a lot by studying Bai Xiaozhuo's methods in Sea-Sealing County. Although Bai Xiaozhuo had ultimately changed white boluses to add poison to them, the reality was that he truly had improved them in terms of quality and purity.

Thus, the Green Spirit Pharmacy focused primarily on selling white boluses.

After taking human form, Ling'er disguised herself as an ugly girl who looked exactly like a shopkeeper's assistant. That said, there weren't many people in this city, and considering the shop had just opened, they didn't get many customers. That didn't do anything to curb Ling'er's enthusiasm.

When Xu Qing saw how much Ling'er looked forward to running the shop, he gave her free rein to do whatever she wanted. After taking the seed the Captain had given him and planting it in a flower pot, he went into the back room of the shop to focus on cultivation and research. He needed to do more experiments with the mirror fragment, and also wanted to use some local animals to start studying the curse.

Time slipped by slowly but surely.

At first, hardly any customers showed up. But eventually a few people came to buy white boluses. After all, the white boluses were both cheap and effective.

After the shop started making money, Ling'er got even more motivated. Every day she would carefully calculate all the spirit coin profits, and even started keeping accounts in a little book.

Every so often, Xu Qing would take a break from cultivation. When he saw Ling'er working so hard to balance the accounts, he felt peaceful and calm. Ever since his time in the city of fireflies by the Heavenfire Sea, he had come to realize that he enjoyed life when things were calm. And living in such peace and tranquility did something to his heart and mind. He wasn't exactly sure what changed, but he could sense something different deep inside himself.

He started spending more time on study and research. Things went well with the mirror, but progress was very slow with the curse. On multiple occasions, he sent the power of the violet moon into animals to try to suppress the curse. The results weren't good. His efforts failed every single time.

At the moment, he was studying a trembling scorpion. Putting his hand onto the scorpion, he sent violet moon power inside. The scorpion's color changed. It went from brown to violet. At the same time, Xu Qing could sense the curse inside of it.

The curse in Moonrite Region affected all living beings. It existed in the blood, which made it very hard to extrude. When it flared up, it quickly dissolved the subject.

When Xu Qing's violet moon power contacted the curse, it would instantly change from being dormant to active. It was almost like it was a living being that would quickly absorb his violet moon power. Apparently, Xu Qing's violet moon was extremely attractive to the curse. After doing quite a few experiments, Xu Qing confirmed that if the curse in a subject devoured enough of his violet moon power, it would flare up. When that happened, the test subject would dissolve rapidly into a pool of blood. The process was irreversible.

He could suppress the effect by constantly sending more violet moon power into the subject. However, that would only work to a certain point, whereupon the flare-up would occur. The difference was that when he didn't attempt to suppress the flare-up, the subject would dissolve into blood. If he did suppress it, then when the flare-up occurred they would melt into black ashes.

It's almost like they're burning up.

After watching the scorpion collapse into black ashes, he frowned. He had studied the black ashes in detail, all to no avail. The feeling he got was that the curse, after being suppressed temporarily, chose to end itself along with the blood of the subject.

I need to do more experiments, and also use more species.

With that, Xu Qing took out an animal the shadow had captured and continued working.

Chapter 581: The Beginnings of Moonrite's Most Badass Medicine Shop (part 2)

Days passed.

The city was small, but there were still occasional conflicts between residents. However, Xu Qing kept to himself, and in that state of isolation, managed to avoid trouble.

The seed he had planted eventually sprouted, then quickly turned into a flourishing little sapling. It was a very strange plant, as it was slightly intelligent. Whenever Xu Qing appeared in its presence, it would tremble. In contrast, it would sway back and forth for Ling'er, causing her to laugh with delight. In response to her laughter, it would work harder to amuse her. She took to calling it Sprouty.

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was on guard duty. For the most part, he stayed in the rafters and kept his eye on the front door.

As for the shadow.... It was not very pleased at all with how Sprouty was getting on Ling'er's good side. On a few occasions when Ling'er and Xu Qing weren't watching, it would show up next to Sprouty and glare murderously at it. When that happened, Sprouty would shrink in on itself and stop moving.

However, the shadow didn't do that very often, as it had another mission. It had to leave the city and go out into the Bitter Life Mountains, and even the Greenhair Badlands in general, to find animals for Xu Qing. Thanks to the shadow's efforts, Xu Qing's research could continue nonstop. It would also bring back news from the area.

Those were occasions when Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was able to prove his usefulness. He was always there to translate, although he would occasionally slip in some extra things to get the shadow in trouble. The shadow had matured quite a bit, yet still lacked experience. As a result, it only noticed what the patriarch was doing about thirty percent of the time.

Xu Qing didn't pay much attention to it all. He had long since grown used to the two oafs and their bickering.

Regardless, thanks to the shadow and the patriarch, Xu Qing was learning a lot more about the Greenhair Badlands. For example, he now knew why the mudbrick cities were always on the mountains. There were a lot of grisly phenomena in the desert that were capable of completely wiping out entire cities. Because of that, only the mountains were safe.

For example, every so often in the desert, illusory regions would appear. Sometimes they were oases, sometimes they were floating cities, and sometimes they were other worlds. Regardless, they would move about bringing death with them wherever they went. If you entered one of those illusory regions, it wasn't easy to get out alive. And when an illusory region finally vanished, it would leave behind bare bones that had been scraped free of all flesh and blood.

The shadow brought some information about the giant mushrooms Xu Qing had spotted before. The shadow had seen one such mushroom standing up and moving around. The mushrooms had root systems that resembled human bodies, which allowed them to rove about in the desert looking for illusory regions.

But those weren't the most terrifying things to be found in the Greenhair Badlands. Thanks to the shadow, Xu Qing learned that the desert wasn't always the same color.

Occasionally, the wind would turn pure white, whereupon all living beings in the desert would scramble to find refuge in the nearest mountains. If they failed, they would be in great danger, as the mountains were the only places where the wind and sand didn't reign supreme.

Over the many years that had passed, the white wind had appeared numerous times. And occasionally, people would fail to make it to the mountains quickly enough. Although such people

didn't die, they were changed. Their bodies would be deformed, and they would become extremely ugly. Later generations would inherit those deformities. It made Xu Qing think of the people he had seen when looking around the city.

There wasn't just a white wind. Sometimes the wind in the Greenhair Badlands would turn black. It hadn't happened for hundreds of years at this point, but the stories about it persisted. When the black wind appeared, all living beings in the Greenhair Badlands were put into great danger. Even people who fell back to the mountains were still at risk.

That said, there were few places in the Moonrite Region that weren't dangerous. Death was always lurking around the corner. Considering that, a black wind that came around every few hundred years wasn't anything special.

Yet there was another type of wind. The gray wind, which was really just a legend. Xu Qing learned about it from the very first customer who came to buy medicinal pills. Supposedly, the gray wind had only appeared once in all the history of the Greenhair Badlands. What was more, it had been such a long time since it happened that nobody knew any real details about it.

Because of all that, Xu Qing got to know a lot more about the desert. In addition to his research into the curse, he also did more experiments with the mirror fragment. After a lot of tests, he was coming to a much better understanding of the Moonrebel Congregation's test.

That one-eyed cultivator wasn't lying about this part. Any mirror can be used in the Bitter Life Mountains to find an entrance to the Moonrebel Congregation. It also serves as the way to start the test. Only by passing the test can you get in.

Xu Qing sat in the back of the little building, looking at the mirror with determination in his eyes.

Thanks to his research, he now realized that the test to enter the Moonrebel Congregation involved three subtests.

The first subtest involved a sacrifice. It was really more like a blood tribute. Any person who wanted to enter the Moonrebel Congregation needed to kill two cultivators of the same level as themselves from the Red Moon Cathedral. By sending the corpses into the mirror, one completed the first part of the test. It made sense to Xu Qing. The first subtest was intended to prove the applicant's strength, and also provide a measure of protection against outside forces.

Because of the requirements, people from the Red Moon Cathedral who wanted to infiltrate the Moonrebel Congregation would have to pay a heavy price to do so. What was more, the higher the cultivation base, the more difficult it would be. And that was just the first subtest. If someone completed the first subtest, but failed the subsequent subtests, then it would all be a big waste. That was why the subtests were ordered in that way.

The second subtest to enter the Moonrebel Congregation was an expression of faith. As for the third subtest, Xu Qing wasn't sure about the details. His intention was to get the first subtest out of the way.

With such thoughts in mind, he looked up into the hazy dome of heaven. Eyes shining with determination, he put the mirror fragment away and then left the medicine shop.

His target destination wasn't the Red Moon Cathedral's church temple in the Bitter Life Mountains. He knew that he couldn't afford to underestimate the church temple in these mountains.

All in all, the blood tribute was a hard requirement to get into the Moonrebel Congregation. For all intents and purposes, anyone who wanted to get in was forced to first deal with the Red Moon Cathedral. Only fools would fail to exercise caution in such a situation. Based on Xu Qing's previous dealings with the Red Moon Cathedral, he figured it was highly likely the cathedral would set traps for people just like himself.

Of course, everyone had their own way of thinking, and it seemed unlikely to Xu Qing that the people trying to get into the Moonrebel Congregation would be idiots. In all likelihood, most of them would search for cathedral cultivators outside of the desert.

Regardless, Xu Qing wanted to play it safe.

After putting on the immortal skill mask, and also using his Gruegloom abilities, he left the mountains and started combing the desert for animals with the same cultivation base as himself.

Just like that, days passed.

There were all types of animals in the desert. And while the shadow had been hunting on Xu Qing's behalf, it had noted where some of the most dangerous areas were. As a result, Xu Qing knew exactly where to go.

Two days later, in a region full of quicksand, rumbling booms echoed out as a huge red worm burrowed out of the ground. It emanated fluctuations equivalent to the Nascent Soul level, and was howling in grief. Beneath it, Xu Qing shot forward and launched a blow with his right hand. The red worm was blasted in two, with each part dropping to the ground twitching. Xu Qing collected it and then proceeded on his way.

Five days later, a huge scorpion that was dozens of meters in length burst out of the ground. A shadowy figure chased it, flanked by countless heavenfiend clones. The scorpion let loose a grating cry as it realized it couldn't escape. Booms rang out for the time it takes an incense stick to burn. After that, the shadowy form resolved into Xu Qing. Turning, he headed back toward the Bitter Life Mountains.

About half a day later, he was back in the medicine shop. It was business as usual for Ling'er, although she'd been worried about Xu Qing being gone. Now that he was back, she breathed a sigh of relief and flashed a bright smile.

Xu Qing tousled her hair, then went into the back and sat down cross-legged. There, he activated a defensive spell formation, produced the mirror, and took a deep breath. He wasn't interested in ambushing cultivators from the Red Moon Cathedral. If his true identity was revealed as a result, it could lead to big trouble.

Instead, he planned to use his own methods to 'create' a cultivator from the Red Moon Cathedral. One of the reasons he had spent so much time doing research was that he was hoping to fool the Moonrebel Congregation's test.

All of my experiments have proven that the test isn't proctored by a person. It's more like a machine. However, since my blessing provokes the curse, I have to do it all very quickly.

After blinking a few times, he took out the scorpion and the worm, both of whom were barely alive. Without any hesitation, he blessed them with the power of the violet moon. It was very similar to what he'd done with Mu Ye.

In the blink of an eye, the two animals shivered. As the image of a violet moon appeared on both of them, the curse inside of them stirred. Thankfully, Xu Qing was very quick. Before any flare-up could occur, he threw them into the mirror.

The mirror was small, and they were big. But as soon as they touched it, the mirror exuded a gravitational force that sucked them inside.

Xu Qing backed up a few steps. Although he had done a lot of experimentation, and was confident that this would work, he still felt a little nervous as he kept his eyes on the mirror. The mirror trembled as it floated in midair, glittering a bit as if it were deciding what to do. Ten breaths of time passed in which Xu Qing's heart started racing. Then a boundless will emerged from the mirror.

"You pass!"

Xu Qing breathed a sigh of relief.

The truth was that he didn't want to use a cheap trick like this. But it was just too dangerous to go hunting people from the Red Moon Cathedral, especially when they would be on the lookout for that. Even the slightest mistake could lead to a lot of trouble. Besides, leaving the Greenhair Badlands would waste a lot of time. Probably half a year. Considering that, his own plan seemed a lot better.

I'd say using such a special way to pass the first subtest probably doesn't count as cheating.

Thinking back to the education he had received from his Master, he decided that he had definitely made the right decision.

Chapter 582: Plucking a Tiger's Whiskers; Breaking Ground above Taisui (part 1)

Xu Qing felt like his line of reasoning made a lot of sense. After all, the basics had been taught to him by his Master, and there was no way his Master would make any mistakes in teaching him. Sighing, he felt his heart becoming very calm, all while his eyes sparkled translucently.

Conscience clear, he focused on the majestic will in the mirror. As the mirror glittered in front of him, it seemed to let off some curse power, as if it were rejecting it. Xu Qing blinked but remained calm. After the curse power was all rejected, the mirror didn't shine as brightly. However, the majestic will in the mirror continued to flow into Xu Qing and inform him about the second subtest.

"Faith," he murmured. Thanks to his previous experiments, he already knew what the second subtest was about.

The second subtest of faith was something that ninety-nine percent of cultivators in the Moonrite Region wouldn't have a problem with. It was primarily designed to weed out cultivators from the Red Moon Cathedral. If you had faith in the red moon, or had blessings from the red moon within you, then you couldn't pass the test.

Xu Qing sighed. He knew full well that, considering how he had passed the first subtest, the second subtest was going to be incredibly difficult.

The first subtest basically proves that the Moonrebel Congregation can't distinguish between my violet moon and the red moon....

It made sense considering that both the violet moon and the red moon were essentially the same type of authority. Their affiliations were different, but to Xu Qing, it was still going to be a frustrating conundrum. He obviously didn't exercise faith in either the red moon or Crimson Mother. However, his violet moon power would make it seem like he was a red moon cultivator. In fact, it was possible it could make him seem like a godchild.

I need to think of another way to pass the subtest.

He didn't want to perform any casual experiments, but at the same time, wasn't ready to give up. After spending some time thinking about his Master's style of doing things, he came up with some ideas. However, he needed more time to contemplate the finer details.

Just like that, days passed.

The shadow kept going out to hunt for Xu Qing. Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior worked hard from the rafters to keep a close eye on all customers. And Sprouty kept growing; every day it would sway back and forth almost like it was dancing. Ling'er seemed to be in a better mood each day as she ended up spending more and more time on bookkeeping.

Now that their medicine shop had been open for a while, and word had spread about their white boluses, they were starting to get some repeat customers.

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior made sure to stay more vigilant than ever. That said, he never had to actually do anything. Most of the cultivators who came to buy medicinal pills were in the Qi Condensation level, with only a handful in Foundation Establishment.

White boluses were most commonly used by Qi Condensation cultivators. Although there were a few high-level cultivators among the residents, most such customers were rogue cultivators stopping by on their travels through the Bitter Life Mountains. People like that could easily get white boluses through a number of channels, and generally looked down on small medicine shops.

There were scattered organizations based in the Bitter Life Mountains. Some were made up of people from the same species, while others had been started by teams who worked well together. Low-level cultivators from such groups, as well as ordinary residents of the city, were the most common customers.

At the moment, a young man had just entered the shop. He wore a voluminous robe, and was roughly in the fifth level of Qi Condensation. He came from a mid-sized organization nearby, and had heard about the shop from a friend who had previously purchased pills.

Upon entering, he looked around vigilantly. The first thing he noticed was the ugly girl behind the counter doing bookkeeping. Seeing that the place wasn't dangerous, he walked up to the counter.

"I want ten white boluses!" he said, putting ten spirit coins down in front of him.

Eyes lighting up, Ling'er quickly scooped up the spirit coins, examined them carefully, and after she was sure they were authentic, handed the customer a bag.

"Come back again!" she said with a smile.

The young man looked through the bag and found that, just as his friend had told him, the pills were different from the kind commonly available. They had no impurities. Taking out a pill, he put it in his mouth. Ten breaths of time later, he was covered with a sheen of sweat. His eyes widened.

They're so effective! With that, he took a few steps toward the door, then stopped and looked back at Ling'er.

Ling'er smiled back at him. "Is there any other way I can help you, sir?"

The young man hesitated. Acting a bit more respectfully than before thanks to how effective the pill was, he lowered his voice and asked, "Do you have any antidote pills? During my daily cultivation routine lately, I keep coughing up black, noxious blood. Also, I feel pain in my chest near my heart. Sometimes it hurts so badly I can't even meditate. I suspect I've been poisoned."

Ling'er looked him up and down, then opened her mouth to speak. Before she could, the young man said, "I have a whole spirit stone here!"

Ling'er blinked a few times then looked toward the back of the shop. "Big Bro, we've got a high roller here!"

In the back room, Xu Qing opened his eyes. He wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry at Ling'er's cheeky comment. Knowing how quick she was to pity people, he stood and walked out into the main floor of the shop.

The moment the young man saw Xu Qing, he backed up with a vigilant look on his face. Just looking at Xu Qing made him shiver from the indescribable terror that rose up within him. He didn't sense any cultivation base fluctuations, such that Xu Qing almost looked like a mortal to him. However, he knew that it was highly unlikely that a mortal could produce medicinal pills of such high quality.

Xu Qing wasn't bothered by the young man's vigilance. After looking at him, he could tell what was wrong. The young man really had been poisoned. And the specific poison... was familiar to Xu Qing. It was the very same kind of poison the one-eyed cultivator had used, although it had been diluted significantly, and hadn't been activated. Because the young man had a weak constitution, he was suffering some of the effects early.

Xu Qing hadn't forgotten about that one-eyed cultivator, and thus, when he noticed the poison, his interest was piqued. He took out an antidote pill.

"Go home and prepare a wooden barrel of water. Add in nine drops of early-morning dew. Take this antidote pill and then do breathing exercises in the water for two hours. When the water has turned completely black, it will mean the poison is extruded."

The young man took the medicinal pill. Despite looking a bit suspicious, he gave the spirit stone to Ling'er then hurried away.

Ling'er took the spirit stone and smiled sweetly at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing shook his head and went back to working on his curse research and the Moonrebel Congregation test. Of course, he left a slip of divine sense on the young man. It wouldn't do anything unless the young man ran into that one-eyed cultivator. If that happened, Xu Qing would know immediately.

As Xu Qing focused on study and research, half a month passed.

The Green Spirit Pharmacy had now been in business for nearly two months. Because of how cheap and effective the white boluses were, the shop was starting to get fairly popular. More and more customers were coming in every day. Eventually, when there were upwards of ten customers coming in every day, the shop really started to attract the attention, not only of the local residents, but of nearby organizations.

Sometimes, *the tree may crave calm, but the wind will bother it anyway*. And many times, popularity only results in unwanted frustration. The principle applies just about anywhere and everywhere. It was especially true in a place with so many random organizations. And thus, one day at around noon, an unwanted guest arrived in the medicine shop.

He was a nonhuman cultivator in the great circle of Qi Condensation. He wore a black robe and had a necklace with a skull on it, making him look quite dramatic. The moment he entered the shop, he released the power of his cultivation base, while simultaneously kicking a chair that was in his way. The chair sailed through the air and hit the counter, damaging it before shattering into pieces.

Ling'er looked up from her accounting book, a slight frown on her face.

Slamming his hand down onto the counter, the cultivator coldly said, "Starting today, you'll give the Skull Syndicate 300 white boluses every month. Got that? I'm only going to say it once!"

He hadn't come alone. There were four other cultivators keeping watch outside, all dressed the same way as him. Passersby who saw the men and their distinctive clothing quickly left in the opposite direction.

"It's the Skull Syndicate!"

"They're vicious and merciless. I heard that any store in this little city that offends them ends up getting slaughtered overnight."

"Their leader is in the great circle of Foundation Establishment! Ai. They don't dare to cause problems for anybody that's truly strong. They just bully hardworking and honest people."

Ling'er didn't say anything.

In the rafters, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior trembled excitedly. A long time had passed with no action, and now someone had come looking to get killed. It seemed like it was finally his chance to shine. Just as he was about to fly down and poke the cultivator full of holes, he stopped in place. Ling'er had just waved him back.

Ling'er looked as pale as death, as if she were terrified. Quickly taking out a bag, she held it out and nodded.

"Of course, of course. We'll give you whatever you want."

The Skull Syndicate cultivator laughed coldly at how easily he had succeeded. This was how they normally operated. First they would observe their target for a while to make sure they weren't dangerous, then they would extort them. They'd been watching the Green Spirit Pharmacy for about half a month, and had only been planning to come inside and probe for information. To the cultivator's surprise, he actually succeeded immediately. Casting a glare at Ling'er, the cultivator grabbed the bag and hefted it to gauge its weight.

“So, you do know what’s good for you!” With that, he turned arrogantly to leave.

After the Skull Syndicate cultivators were gone, the alarmed look on Ling’er’s face vanished. Making a notation in her accounting book, she said, “Master Freespirit.”

“Here!” the patriarch replied from the rafters. “What is your command, milady?”

“Killing them here could hurt business,” she replied coolly. “Later tonight, I want you to track them down and slaughter them all. Remember to bring back the medicinal pills. I don’t want even a single one to go missing. If you see anything valuable there, take it. It’s too bad Little Shadow isn’t back to help.”

The patriarch glanced at the back room, then Ling’er. All of a sudden, he felt like he had learned a lot more about Ling’er.

My lady and mistress only seems like a harmless angel!

Back when Xu Qing had been dealing with the one-eyed cultivator, Ling’er had casually said to ‘just get it over with.’ That had surprised the patriarch a lot.

“Milady, I guarantee success in this mission!”

Ling’er smiled and started cleaning up the broken chair. “Oh, by the way, make sure to bring back a replacement chair. No. Three of them.”

The patriarch blinked a few times. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Another thing,” she added. “Bring back some heads for Big Bro Xu Qing to use in his research.”

Chapter 582: Plucking a Tiger’s Whiskers; Breaking Ground above Taisui (part 2)

In the back room, Xu Qing looked up from the Gold Core scorpion he’d been experimenting on. Checking on the situation outside and noting how considerate Ling’er was, he felt warmth in his heart.

The truth was that he really was starting to get sick of studying animals.

The scorpion wasn’t dead yet; terror gleamed in its eyes as it looked at the figure that had been slowly slicing it open. Of course, all fluctuations had been locked down, ensuring that no one outside of the back room could sense what was going on. Otherwise, that Qi Condensation cultivator from the Skull Syndicate would have gone weak in the knees from fear.

The time has come to see what the curse does to cultivators. Xu Qing crushed the scorpion’s head, ending its life.

That night, when the dusky sky turned pitch black, a dark streak shot out of the city. It was none other than Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior. He was flying the Spike of Misfortune right toward the headquarters of the Skull Syndicate.

That crappy shadow is always running around like an idiot. But it did one thing right. It started sucking up to our lady and mistress.... It was foolish of me to not do the same. I always assumed the girl was naive and innocent. But the reality is that her heart is as dark as that of the Fiendish Xu. In

the books I've read, women like that are characters that cannot be trifled with. The crappy shadow has someone to rely on now, which is why it's been getting so arrogant lately.

The patriarch thought back to everything he knew and remembered about Ling'er and came to realize that she definitely wasn't as simplistic as she seemed. Going forward, he would need to focus more on currying favor.

I missed out on one opportunity... but that's fine. Once we get back to Sea-Sealing County, there's another lady and mistress I can suck up to. That way, if the Fiendish Xu starts to dislike me, I'll have a secret weapon ready to go.

The patriarch was thinking about many things as he pierced through the sky and eventually closed in on the Skull Syndicate.

Even before he got close, his expression flickered as he detected the aroma of blood and gore.

The patriarch grunted in surprise. Although he was certain he could kill these cultivators with hardly any effort, he still felt the need to remain cautious. Moving undetectably, he eventually entered the Skull Syndicate. That was when he saw all the corpses on the ground.

Everyone in the entire Skull Syndicate was dead. The patriarch didn't see one living cultivator. What was more, the entire place had been looted.

Looks like they died about an hour ago. The person who attacked them had to be in Gold Core at the very least. The killing was done very quickly.

He turned and went back to the medicine shop, where he reported all of his findings and analyses to Ling'er and Xu Qing. Ling'er was shocked, and Xu Qing looked thoughtful. It all seemed too coincidental.

The explanation came the next day.

At around dawn when the Green Spirit Pharmacy opened for business, two people were waiting outside. Ling'er saw them as soon as she opened the shop. Both of them clasped hands and bowed to her.

"Well met, Shopkeeper. Is the grandmaster present?"

Ling'er blinked and examined the two people. She had seen one of them before. He was the very same young man who had asked for an antidote pill. The other person was middle-aged and dressed in a green robe that made him look scholarly and refined. It was clothing that set him apart from other residents of the city. His cultivation base was profound, being in the late Gold Core stage, though he clearly hadn't been in that level for very long.

The person who had just greeted her was the middle-aged man. His young companion looked reserved as he glanced in the direction of the back room.

When the middle-aged man saw that, he clasped hands in the direction of the back room.

"Grandmaster," he said respectfully, "yesterday people from the Skull Syndicate bothered you, so I got rid of them. Here are all the medicinal pills they stole from you."

The man produced a bag which he handed to Ling'er.

Ling'er's eyes lit up. Last night she had been thinking about the medicinal pills, and had assumed she just lost them. However, she didn't immediately take the bag, but instead, waited to see what Xu Qing wanted to do. Given her Big Bro Xu Qing's personality, she knew that she should let him make the decision.

"Please, come in," Xu Qing said from the back room.

Ling'er backed up a few steps to let the two of them enter. They stepped inside respectfully, but didn't make any attempt to open the door to the back room.

Seeing how polite they were being, Xu Qing couldn't just stay out of sight. A moment later, he walked out.

The Gold Core cultivator was surprised to see how young Xu Qing looked. But that didn't affect his respectful behavior. Looking very serious, he clasped hands and bowed.

"Well met, Grandmaster. I am Sect Leader Chen Fanzhuo from the local Epactic Soil Sect. This disciple of mine recently came to realize how skilled you are in the medicinal arts, Grandmaster. I took the liberty of coming here because all of the disciples in my sect have been poisoned. In fact, so have I. Grandmaster, is there any chance you have more antidote pills? I would be willing to pay handsomely for them."

[1] [2]

He knew that it was best to keep things simple and direct, and that he shouldn't try to hide anything. His disciples had been falling victim to poisoning one after another, and even after seeking help from quite a few local alchemists, he hadn't been able to help them at all. He had been getting increasingly nervous about the situation until he unexpectedly found that one of his disciples was cured.

After getting the explanation, he made the decision to personally come ask for help. He wasn't convinced that a mortal could make medicinal pills like that. What was more, the person who made the pill had to have some skill in dispelling poisons. That all indicated that he was dealing with someone extraordinary. That was why he was being so courteous.

Xu Qing's face remained expressionless as he looked at Chen Fanzhuo. He wasn't inclined to try to find out if the man had actually orchestrated the situation with the Skull Syndicate just to earn some good will. His current attitude was enough for Xu Qing.

Xu Qing waved his hand, sending out a bag of antidote pills.

Chen Fanzhuo accepted the bag with both hands. After inspecting it briefly, he took out a bag of holding which he put off to the side. Then he respectfully left.

After he was gone, Ling'er quickly checked the bag of holding. "Wow, Big Bro Xu Qing. There's a hundred thousand spirit stones in here!"

Xu Qing's eyebrows shot up as he suddenly felt his estimation of Chen Fanzhuo improving. With that he beckoned Ling'er into the back room.

Ling'er wasn't sure what was going on. Blushing a bit, she hurried to close the front door, then took a deep breath and followed Xu Qing into the back. Puffing out her chest, she said, "Big Bro Xu Qing, what are you calling me back here in the middle of the day for?"

Sitting down cross-legged, he took out a mirror fragment. "Ling'er, I want you to go into the Moonrebel Congregation."

"Huh?" Ling'er said, stunned. Her mood immediately dipped. This wasn't exactly what she had expected would happen....

"I've been doing a lot of tests, but I can't get in." No matter what Xu Qing did, when he tried to pass the second subtest, he failed. None of his ideas were working.

This was the final option that he hadn't tried yet. If Ling'er could pass the test, then maybe he could use her life-sharing skills to do the same.

It was problematic because even the weakest people in the Moonrebel Congregation were in the Nascent Soul level. At the moment, Ling'er was only in Gold Core. Because of that, the first subtest was going to be a problem.

The first subtest required a blood tribute in the same cultivation level as the person offering it. If there was a level disparity, it would make it obvious the person had help. At the same time, the requirement placed some limitations on the cultivation bases of the people who could get into the Moonrebel Congregation.

Of course, that was an easy thing for Xu Qing to deal with.

After he explained everything, Ling'er understood. Shoving her disappointment into the back of her mind, she nodded earnestly.

"No problem, Big Bro Xu Qing," she said, thumping her chest confidently. "I can do it!"

Xu Qing was now completely focused on getting into the Moonrebel Congregation. He had put a lot of thought into it, and based on all of his analyses, he was confident this wouldn't be dangerous for Ling'er. After he explained the process to her, they got started.

First he had her activate the mirror shard. Then he took out two animals that were in the same cultivation level as her. After blessing them, he had her throw them into the mirror before the curse flared up.

With the first subtest out of the way, the next subtest was about faith. Because Ling'er had no connection to the red moon, she passed that subtest very easily.

At that point, the mirror made a cracking sound as a rift opened on its surface. A gravitational force instantly pulsed out.

Looking at the mirror, she said, "Big Bro Xu Qing, the voice from the mirror said that this is the way to the Moonrebel Congregation."

Xu Qing looked at the rift, but didn't attempt to go inside. If someone tried to unlawfully enter the Moonrebel Congregation, given the personhood of the people inside, it was likely they would kill trespassers instantly.

Xu Qing looked at Ling'er. Her eyes glittered with anticipation. Back when Xu Qing dispelled the life-sharing power that connected them, she had been very disappointed, though she never said anything. Now that she could do the same thing again, she was feeling very blessed. Without any hesitation, she turned into a little white snake and flew onto Xu Qing's wrist.

A moment later, a thread appeared.

The two of them were connected again. However, Xu Qing had changed a lot since the last time. He had the blessing of destiny aura now. What was more, this time the connection wasn't one-sided. Both parties participated willingly.

The moment it was accomplished, Xu Qing could sense Ling'er, almost as if they were sharing a body.

“This is my Ancient Spirit innate ability, Big Bro Xu Qing. It works... for life. You can only be connected to one person. Even if the connection is removed, it can't be switched to someone else. Going forward, our lives are connected. If you live, I live. If you die, I die. We're connected in both life and death. In both the glow of dawn and the shade of the Yellow Springs, we are... companions!”

Xu Qing looked at the mark on his wrist and nodded. Taking a deep breath, he shot toward the mirror. The moment he neared, he turned into a streak of light that entered the rift. And found himself in a very strange land!

Chapter 583: You're Scared? Me Too (part 1)

The Green Spirit Pharmacy was absolutely still and silent.

Sprouty swayed back and forth a few times. Then, sensing that no one was around, it curiously sent its branches out to get a closer look. A moment passed in which Sprouty waited to see if anything would happen. When nothing did, it very carefully pulled its roots out of the soil. It was as if it had been waiting for just such an opportunity to flee.

However, after it pulled its roots up and jumped out of its flower pot, but before it could leave, it suddenly sensed killing intent from the rafters.

The Spike of Misfortune appeared right in front of Sprouty, with the bone tip almost touching it.

Sprouty shivered, then slowly climbed back into the flower pot. After putting its roots back in place, it started swaying back and forth fawningly.

The Spike of Misfortune flew a few circles around it, then returned to the rafters.

If the little miscreant escapes, the Fiendish Xu will definitely vent his anger on me when he gets back. Chuckling inwardly, the patriarch glanced at the back room.

Because of the concealing magics Xu Qing had left in the room, it wasn't possible to see many details about it. However, due to the innate connection between them, the patriarch could tell that Xu Qing's aura was no longer present. No one was in the back room at all. What had entered the rift in the mirror were not streams of divine sense, but the true forms of Xu Qing and Ling'er. That was one of the mysterious aspects of the Moonrebel Congregation.

However, the path to that mysterious location had Xu Qing feeling a bit uncomfortable. He felt like he was in an extremely cramped location, with lots of pressure weighing down on him. Glittering light around him formed walls that hemmed him in.

The walls were curved, forming a concave floor and an arched ceiling above him. It was almost like a big circle, and it was so tough that Xu Qing couldn't even move. He was wedged in place. The

more he struggled, the tighter he was stuck. It was as if he was being given no option other than to go back.

Xu Qing frowned and wondered why the rift would take him to such a forsaken place.

Could this be the third subtest?

During his study of the mirror fragment, he had come to a general understanding of the first two subtests, but hadn't gleaned any details about the third. After mulling the matter over, he experimentally sent out some divine sense. It wasn't easy, as the pressure restraining him didn't just affect his fleshly body, but also his senses. What was more, the glowing walls were too tough for his divine sense to pierce through. Thankfully, he was able to send his divine sense forward, though it was difficult. With some work, he was finally able to get a sense of where exactly he was.

I'm in a pipe?

His divine sense didn't have the range to see the end of the pipe. However, based on the fluctuations coming from ahead, he was fairly certain that was the direction of the Moonrebel Congregation.

Interesting. I guess this is the third subtest. If you aren't able to follow the pipe to the end, you don't qualify to enter the Moonrebel Congregation.

From the very beginning, he had wanted to join the Moonrebel Congregation because, as Duanmu Zang had told him, members had done research on the curse for generations, and understood many things about it. Xu Qing wanted to go there to get information. After all, it seemed a lot more efficient for a bunch of people to consider a matter over many years, compared to one person trying to figure it out on their own. The ability to save time in that way was key to Xu Qing's confidence in being able to do something about the curse. Of course, in addition to information about the curse, he was also generally curious about the Moonrebel Congregation.

No wonder Eldest Brother wants to get in here.

Eyes gleaming with determination, Xu Qing tapped into his cultivation base. He also tapped into the explosiveness of his god body to fight back against the pressure.

Rumbling sounds echoed out, and Xu Qing trembled. The light walls seemed to grow stronger; no matter how much force he used against them, it didn't do anything. And he could only physically grow to a height of a bit more than two meters. The sense of pressure on his body and soul was causing a perverse energy to build up in him. He quickly huddled up so that he was back to normal height.

The walls around him also shrank down, but there was some gap left.

Taking advantage of that gap, Xu Qing reached out with his right hand and tapped into his cultivation base. Leaving out his violet moon nascent soul, he went full force with everything else to launch a fist strike. The blow contained the power of taboo poison, the Ghost Emperor mountain, the heavenly dao, the timescape bottle, the golden crow, as well as his personal life lamps.

Cracking sounds could be heard as Xu Qing shot forward by several meters. Then he felt himself being restrained again. Gritting his teeth, he used the same method to continue forward.

He wasn't sure how much time passed as he used that method to force his way forward. Although progress was slow, he eventually reached the point of 300 meters. At that point, he was exhausted.

Sensing how far away the end of the path was, he had no choice but to sigh and give up. After going back to the medicine shop to rest for a bit, he returned.

The path he had cleared so far was still there when he went back. At the 300-meter mark, he gritted his teeth and started blasting his way forward again.

In that way, days passed.

Ling'er didn't need to come along. With her mark on Xu Qing, he could come and go as he pleased while she worried about keeping the Green Spirit Pharmacy open for business. Of course, she would occasionally look toward the back room to see how her Big Bro Xu Qing was progressing in his efforts.

It's so hard to get to this Moonrebel Congregation! Even considering how hard Big Bro Xu Qing is working, he still hasn't gotten there! While Ling'er sighed in her heart, similar sighing rose up in Xu Qing.

Half a month of rumbling booms later, Xu Qing had progressed 9,000 meters along the path to the Moonrebel Congregation. At that point, he returned to the medicine shop, where he sat down cross-legged to catch his breath.

I'm only about thirty percent of the way there. There's still about 21,000 meters to go. The existing members must be so amazing. Are they all in Spirit Trove or something?

Xu Qing was more interested than ever in reaching this group. After all, considering how difficult this third subtest was, it seemed clear that every member must be an incredible individual.

I can do it too!

Looking very determined, he rested for a short time, then went back in to continue forging ahead.

The constant repetition was actually useful training for Xu Qing. The pressure weighing down made him tougher physically, and it also improved his ability with his transformed state. He could now transform all the way to a size of three meters. Because of that, his progress improved. Another half a month passed, during which time he successfully reached a distance of 24,000 meters.

As he stood there and looked back at the path he had traveled so far, all he could think about was how hard it had been. Then he looked ahead. 6,000 meters away was the Moonrebel Congregation, whose members he only continued to revere more and more.

Another 6,000 meters. I really hope that's where the Moonrebel Congregation is!

After forcing his way almost to the very end of the path, he realized that it was indeed just up ahead!

The Moonrebel Congregation existed as a standalone dimension, within which was a massive, majestic mountain. Hundreds of thousands of ancient temples covered the mountain, closely packed together with paths running between them.

Some of the temples glittered brightly, while others were pitch black. Those which were lit apparently had stone statues in them that shone with splendid brightness. Occasionally, a statue would walk out of a building, take to flight for a time, then return to its spot. They were usually

surrounded by softly glowing light that made them seem extremely holy. At the same time, they all had their own shape and look, and from a distance, it made them seem like a horde of devils.

There were more temples at the base of the mountain than further up, half of them bright, half of them dim. One of the temples seemed much brighter than the others. Before, it hadn't stood out much. But over the past month, it had attracted the attention of the statues in other nearby temples.

The reason was: it was too loud.

As Xu Qing was inside the tunnel battering his way forward, loud booming sounds erupted from that temple, spreading out in all directions.

"He's at it again!" Four or five statues walked out of some of the nearby temples and glared at the temple with the loud noise coming from it.

"Dammit, this guy's still not done? What's he doing?"

"A whole month! If he's going to come in, he might as well hurry it up. Is he banging around constantly to attract more light? Just what is he thinking?"

"He must be insane!"

"Yeah, he's definitely got mental problems."

The banging grew louder, and more statues walked out to see what was happening.

"I've never seen anything like this. People like us should be able to just go right through the entry channel. What's he banging around for?"

"Don't tell me he's trying to show off his battle prowess?"

"How exactly does that count as showing off? The Moonrebel Congregation has been masterless for years now. The spirit automaton is asleep and only provides the most basic functionality to maintain operations. The guiding light is supposed to be based on the cultivation base of whoever's taking the test. And it's supposed to just lead them inside."

"This fellow could just come in, but instead he's banging around with each step he takes. It's almost as if he's having trouble!"

As the discussion raged, the booms got more intense.

The statues frowned helplessly. Before a new temple was officially opened, they couldn't go inside. So the only thing to do was go back into their own temples to avoid the racket.

This time, the booms didn't last for very long. About four hours later, things got quiet again.

Xu Qing was tired. Gasping for breath, he looked at the final 3,000 meters, then turned and went back. Outside in the medicine shop, his eyes glittered with resolve.

Three days. Four at the most. Then I'll reach the end!

The idea of finally being able to pass the third subtest made him sigh inwardly. It really had been a very difficult process.

Once I'm inside, I'll have to be very cautious and vigilant. The other people inside... are not to be trifled with!

Looking very serious, he settled down to meditate and catch his breath. At the same time, he used divine sense to scan the medicine shop and its surroundings. There were people lined up outside.

Chapter 583: You're Scared? Me Too (part 2)

As word continued to spread about the Green Spirit Pharmacy, business picked up even more. That was especially true after Chen Fanzhuo from the Epactic Soil Sect purchased that lot of antidote pills. Those pills resolved the crisis in his sect, and as a result, every member felt deep reverence for Xu Qing.

Thanks to the threat of that sect, a host of smaller organizations all decided not to cause problems for the Green Spirit Pharmacy. Medicinal pill sales were going great, to the point where Ling'er was selling well over a hundred white boluses per day. Thankfully, Xu Qing had built up quite a stockpile of them, although he would occasionally concoct more to keep supplies up. In terms of ingredients, he had a lot stockpiled, but he would also buy certain ingredients when he could.

What was more, Chen Fanzhuo was always very respectful when he came to visit, and would bring along some medicinal plants as a gift. If Xu Qing wasn't around when he came, he would simply hand over the plants, clasp hands to Ling'er, then leave.

When someone acted as politely as that, it was hard to feel ill will toward them. Chen Fanzhuo had come again, but instead of using his status and cultivation base to push his way to the front of the line, he just waited patiently. In fact, only when the line had died down did he finally enter the shop.

"Uncle Chen!" Ling'er said, smiling and waving.

"Miss Ling'er! Is the grandmaster busy concocting pills?" Chen Fanzhuo took out a bag of medicinal plants, put them on the counter, then glanced in the direction of the back room.

Ling'er was about to answer his question when the curtain to the back room flipped to the side and Xu Qing stepped out.

"Greetings, Grandmaster!" Chen Fanzhuo said, clasping hands in a very solemn fashion.

Xu Qing nodded. Upon scanning the man, he noted something surprising.

Chen Fanzhuo should have been able to purge all of the poison within himself by using Xu Qing's pill and method. But looking at him, Xu Qing could still see poison. Some was left over from before, but there was also new poison there.

Xu Qing thoughtfully produced a white bolus and handed it to Chen Fanzhuo.

"Put that in your mouth and then perform one minor circulation of your cultivation base, except in reverse. As you do, let the pill melt."

Chen Fanzhuo could sense from Xu Qing's wording that something was off. After a brief moment of hesitation, he put the pill in his mouth and then rotated his cultivation base in the manner Xu Qing had described. Shortly after, the pill in his mouth dissolved, and the effects spread through his body.

"Focus your cultivation base power on your index finger," Xu Qing said. "Force out a drop of blood onto this leaf."

He held out a yellow medicinal plant.

Without any hesitation, Chen Fanzhuo forced a drop of black blood out of his index finger. When a noxious odor spread out, Chen Fanzhuo's face fell. He had previously believed himself to be purged of poison, except clearly he wasn't.

Not wanting to be careless, he very carefully guided the drop of blood onto the yellow medicinal plant Xu Qing had given him. When the blood landed on the plant, it caused hissing sounds, plus a greenish smoke. As the smoke writhed up into the air, it was possible to hear a howling sound that could pierce into the soul. When Chen Fanzhuo saw that, his pupils constricted. Waving his hand, he summoned some defenses. Apparently, he was worried that the smoke could contaminate the medicine shop. Although his actions were partly a show, they were also a display of sincerity.

Xu Qing examined Chen Fanzhuo again, then took out a transparent pill bottle. When he opened it, the energy inside seemed to exert a powerful force of extraction on the smoke. A moment later, all the smoke had been sucked into the bottle. Afterwards, Xu Qing corked the bottle and looked at it. The smoke swirled back and forth inside the cramped confines of the bottle. Eventually, it converged into the form of a green centipede. It looked vicious, and if you examined it closely, you would see that it was actually made up of a host of much smaller centipedes.

"Grandmaster, that..." Chen Fanzhuo was clearly horrified. The fact that his blood had such grisly centipedes in it made him shiver.

"It's the soul of a centipeck crawler," Xu Qing said. "It's a fairly rare medicinal ingredient with mildly poisonous characteristics. It's not very dangerous, and is usually used to track or identify the location of a target. That said, by combining it with other things, it can be turned into an effective poison."

Xu Qing was actually pleasantly surprised. How could he have ever guessed that he would find a precious item from Grandmaster Bai's medicinal codex here?

"Someone has their sights fixed on you," Xu Qing continued. "Look, the centipeck crawler soul is very active, which indicates that the person targeting you probably isn't very far away."

As he spoke, the green centipede in the bottle thrashed back and forth for a moment, then smashed against the inside of the bottle.

The bottle vibrated, but Xu Qing kept his grip on it. "Hmm. The person targeting you is on the way here right now."

Expression flickering, Chen Fanzhuo bowed solemnly to Xu Qing, then turned to the door. He knew that this grandmaster from the Green Spirit Pharmacy wasn't duty bound to help him solve all his problems. It was already an expression of benevolence and righteousness for him to help with the poison. If he didn't know what was good for him, he might have dragged Xu Qing into his personal issue. But that was not how he did things.

With such thoughts on his mind, he hurried to walk out the door. However, just when he was about to push it open, Xu Qing said, "He's here."

As the words left Xu Qing's mouth, the sky above the mudbrick city filled with roiling clouds, along with a sound like the weeping of ghosts and howling of wolves. It was so horrifying that the common citizens in the city all slammed shut their doors and windows, and huddled trembling in their bedrooms. In the blink of an eye, the city streets emptied.

Meanwhile, the dark clouds swirled into the city itself, where they shrank down into the shape of a person. It only took moments for his features to become clearly visible. He was an old man in a voluminous robe, who pulsed with Nascent Soul fluctuations. He had flowing white hair, cold eyes, and a derisive smile. The edges of his robe were actually wisps of cloud, causing him to look particularly grisly.

"How dare you steal from me, ya little punk! Tired of living, I suppose?"

This old man was the true form of the same one-eyed cultivator who had provoked Xu Qing. Their initial clash had left the old man edgy and alarmed. He had gone into hiding to avoid Xu Qing, until he'd felt the coast was clear. Then he had cautiously come out, only to find that his old mansion grotto had been cleared out by someone else. Upon examining the evidence and finding that the thief was a Gold Core cultivator, his fury had burned. Given that he was accustomed to poison, he had been able to easily track down the culprit. Thanks to the connection to his poison, all it took was a glance at Chen Fanzhuo to determine that he was the thief. Eyes gleaming coldly, he prepared to approach.

However... Chen Fanzhuo was currently standing right in front of the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

During the process of looking at Chen Fanzhuo, the old man couldn't help but take in the medicine shop as well. He saw the ugly girl behind the counter, and he saw Xu Qing standing there, his face completely expressionless. The moment the old man saw Xu Qing, his pupils constricted. He stopped in place and began to shake from head to toe.

Th-th-this.... It's him! I can't believe he's here!!

The old man felt like his mind was being struck by 1,000,000 lightning bolts. Although he wasn't completely scared out of his mind, he certainly wasn't interested in escalating the situation. He was truly terrified of Xu Qing, and still felt his heart pounding in fear at the thought of the battle prowess he had sensed that day.

What was worse, he was convinced this person was a monstrous freak who had more assets to fear besides his cultivation base. For instance, Xu Qing's keen senses were definitely something to fear. Then you added in the fact that the old man's poisons were ineffective against him, and it was no wonder that he suddenly felt a deep sense of deadly crisis. Most relevant of all was that he was here in his true form!

Meanwhile, Chen Fanzhuo was as terrified as this old man. The truth was that recently, he really had led a group to plunder a mansion grotto. The mansion grotto had seemed abandoned, but there were still a lot of valuables inside. After the job was done, Chen Fanzhou had been worried that someone would come back to the mansion grotto, but hadn't ever seen it happen. At first, he had been relieved. Later, when he realized he'd been poisoned, he came to the Green Spirit Pharmacy for help.

Moments ago when Xu Qing had mentioned a poison that could 'track or identify the location of a target,' he had suddenly felt very nervous. Now that he realized the person targeting him was apparently a Nascent Soul cultivator, he felt himself descended into pure terror. Unfortunately, he couldn't flee. All he could do was stand there with the pressure weighing down on him.

Trembling, he managed to say, "Calm yourself, Senior. I know I made a mistake... I still have all your things...."

His words had absolutely no effect on anything. In fact, the old man actually seemed more scared than he was, and wasn't moving a muscle. As of this moment, the old man wasn't even thinking about the things that had been taken from his mansion grotto. The only thing he was thinking about was how to stay alive.

From a distance, it was actually a very strange scene. Chen Fanzhuo was staring fearfully at the old man. And the old man was staring fearfully at something straight ahead of him. Neither of them dared to move.

Everything was completely quiet.

The fact that the old man wasn't saying anything caused Chen Fanzhuo's terror to build. The fact that Xu Qing wasn't saying anything caused the old man's terror to reach ocean-like proportions. As the crisis feeling built, the old man's mind raced as he analyzed the situation.

This is a medicine shop. That ugly girl is the source of the fragrant aroma. From her clothes, she looks like a shop worker. This is that freakish monster's medicine shop! Given how terrified the Gold Core thief is, he's obviously not working with the freakish monster. I bet he doesn't even know the monster's actual cultivation level. Obviously the monster doesn't want his cultivation revealed. But if so, why's he hiding out here?

He must be working on some mysterious plan! My arrival could potentially force the monster to reveal his cultivation base, and thus ruin his mysterious plan. And if that happens, he's obviously going to be angry at me.

But if I just turn around and leave, the same thing could happen! I can't beat him in a fight. And I can't run away....

The old man's eyes turned bloodshot as he realized he was in a no-win situation. Gritting his teeth, he took a few steps forward and plastered an expression of solemn joy onto his face.

"Benefactor!" he said. "What are you doing here, sir?"

Chen Fanzhuo's jaw dropped.

Chapter 584: Milord, This Guy's Bad News!

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior instantly went on guard, and focused his gaze solely on the old man.

Further up the street, the old man once again called out, "Benefactor!"

His voice seemed to thrum with feeling. His expression was one of excitement, and as he trembled, tears glistened in the corners of his eyes. It made him seem like he was swept up in a moment of extreme emotion.

Voice quavering, he said, "I've been looking for you for such a long, long time! Sir, I'll never forget about how you saved my life. However, I deeply regret that I was so immersed in cultivation on that day that, by the time I gained my senses, you had long since departed! And you never even collected your medical fees!"

With that, he suppressed his immense terror and approached the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

"I've been feeling guilty about that ever since, and have thus been searching for you. Thankfully, the heavens noticed my feelings, and finally enabled me to reunite with you this day, sir."

Rubbing his eyes dry, the old man looked at the expressionless Xu Qing standing inside the shop, then clasped hands and bowed deeply! When he looked at him, his expression was pleading.

"This time around, I just hope you can give me a chance to pay you, sir. Please, you have to accept the gift I prepared for you, oh benefactor."

Heart twinging with painful regret, the old man took out three bags of holding which he held aloft.

Chen Fanzhuo watched all of this happening with blank shock. Moments ago, this old man had been bristling with frightful malice, but now he seemed full of sincerity and excitement. It wasn't lost on him that the old man only had a total of three bags of holding, yet he was offering all of them.

It was surprising, but also strange, and it caused him to slowly look from the old man to the grandmaster of Green Spirit Pharmacy.

Inside, Xu Qing rolled the bottle back and forth in his hand as he looked coldly at the trembling old man. At the same time, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior projected a message to him.

"Milord, this guy is bluffing. He's clearly treacherous, and definitely bad news! In most novels, characters like this are the kind who stab you in the back. Definitely not like me."

Ignoring the patriarch, Xu Qing slowly walked out of the medicine shop.

Xu Qing obviously saw right through the old man's little ploy. Tricks like that might work on other people, but not him.

Considering this man had escaped him before, there was no way Xu Qing had any intention of letting him go this time. Even up in the rafters, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior could sense the killing intent in Xu Qing's heart, and was egging him on, hoping to see the result.

As Xu Qing approached, the old man felt increasing pressure weighing down on him. Sweat broke out on his forehead, and Xu Qing's cold eyes caused his heart to pound.

Seeing that his strategy wasn't working, he anxiously glanced at Chen Fanzhuo, then gritted his teeth and said, "Benefactor! I, Li Youfei, owe a debt that surpasses heaven! Sire, you absolutely must accept this gift of thanks from me!" [1]

When Chen Fanzhuo heard Li Youfei's name, he frowned slightly. The name seemed familiar, but clearly, he didn't know who Li Youfei was.

When Li Youfei noticed Chen Fanzhuo's lack of reaction, he got even more anxious. *What's going on? Why doesn't he realize who I am? Is he not from around here?*

Raising his voice, he said, "I, Li Youfei, have lived in the Bitter Life Mountains for two sixty-year cycles. It's been a tough life. A struggle! But it really makes you understand the importance of repaying kindnesses. Benefactor, last time, you left before I, Li Youfei, managed to—"

Before he could finish, Chen Fanzhuo suddenly realized why the name was familiar, and blurted, "Sir, you're Senior Li, also known as the Bitter-Life Immortal. Li Youfei!" He was visibly moved. "Twenty-three years ago, the notorious Qilin Blood Sect, which had kidnapped mortal children from throughout the Bitter Life Mountains to concoct into pills, was wiped out overnight. All the mortal children were saved. Since that event, everyone in the Bitter Life Mountains says that the hero of the story was the Bitter-Life Immortal, Li Youfei!

"Forty years ago, the Blood-Worshipping Sect, known for their practice of pillaging, murdering, and raping countless mudbrick cities, was completely wiped out of existence over a period of three days. According to what most people say, it was the work of Li Youfei, also known as the Bitter-Life Immortal!

"During the entire past sixty-year-cycle, any time there were natural disasters or calamities, a mysterious person would provide food to all of the stricken mortals in the mudbrick cities. Supposedly, that mysterious person is Li Youfei!

"For the past few months, all rogue cultivators who have harbored thoughts of becoming godslaves of the Red Moon Cathedral, have died, one after another. According to the rumors...."

During the time Chen Fanzhuo had lived in the Bitter Life Mountains, he had obviously heard many stories about Li Youfei. People said that he was both righteous and evil, that he had both the spirit of a hero and the spirit of a villain. However, overall, he was more heroic than villainous.

"Senior," Chen Fanzhuo said, "the situation with your mansion grotto is all my fault. I can give back everything I took. Please, Senior, I hope you can forgive me."

Chen Fanzhuo took a deep breath and bowed to Li Youfei. He looked very excited. However, people who rose to leadership positions in organizations in the Bitter Life Mountains were generally extraordinary. As such, it was only natural that he picked up on the tension between Li Youfei and the grandmaster of Green Spirit Pharmacy. Even if this person wasn't really Li Youfei, at least he had a chance to smooth out a potentially deadly situation.

When Li Youfei heard Chen Fanzhuo explaining his identity, he breathed a sigh of relief. Normally speaking, he wore a disguise in public so that people wouldn't recognize him easily. But right now

wasn't the time to hide his identity. Given the deadly crisis he was in, it seemed like a good idea to make sure this freakish monster... realized that Li Youfei could be useful.

He knew that Xu Qing wanted to get to the Moonrebel Congregation. Normally speaking, only very determined people would try to do that. And Li Youfei wanted Xu Qing to know that he was just such a person! Although he hadn't passed the test to get into the Moonrebel Congregation, all he needed was a godslave to offer. In fact, many of the things he had done through the years were in the hopes of achieving that goal.

With such thoughts on his mind, Li Youfei looked pleadingly at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing, meanwhile, had stopped in place, and was looking Li Youfei up and down without saying a word.

His silence caused Li Youfei to tremble from head to toe.

A very long moment passed. Finally, Xu Qing made a grasping gesture, and the three bags of holding flew over to him. Taking them, he walked back inside the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

After Xu Qing was gone, the pressure weighing down on Li Youfei eased. Feeling like he had just survived a near-death experience, he exhaled slowly. Clasp hands and ducking his head, he bowed, then turned and left. He didn't notice at all that an eyeball had suddenly appeared in his shadow. It quickly closed, vanishing from sight.

For the moment, Xu Qing wasn't planning to kill Li Youfei. Instead, he left a shadow eye on him. If it turned out that Chen Fanzhuo's description of him was accurate, then Xu Qing wasn't opposed to sparing him. However, if it turned out the man was malicious and villainous, then it didn't matter what else he did, he wouldn't have any chance of surviving. The shadow could easily take control of him and make him eat himself to death.

Now that Li Youfei was gone, there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Meanwhile, Chen Fanzhuo, who had witnessed everything, suddenly felt even more reverential toward Xu Qing. Rejoicing at his previous decision to show so much respect, he turned to the Green Spirit Pharmacy and bowed at the waist. Then he left.

Inside the medicine shop, Ling'er blinked a few times and then looked at the bags of holding Xu Qing had taken. Ever since running the business, Ling'er had become very profit-oriented, to the point of being a bit miserly. Xu Qing had noticed that. Smiling, he checked the bags of holding with divine sense to make sure they were safe, then handed them to Ling'er.

Letting loose an excited exclamation, Ling'er took them and opened them with the same exuberance she would open a wish box.

Xu Qing looked on for a moment, grinning, then went into the back room, sat down, and took out the mirror fragment.

Thus, three days passed.

On the morning of the fourth day, he reached the very end of the welcoming light from the Moonrebel Congregation. There he stood, his heart full of excitement and anticipation.

It took over a month, but I've finally finished the third subtest. It was so hard!

Clenching his hand into a fist, he launched a punch straight ahead of him. Cracking sounds rang out, and the final three meters were cleared. Light shone brightly, wrapping him up as he stepped forward. It felt like being immersed in cold water.

Then he found himself in an ancient temple. It wasn't a very large temple. It was only about thirty square meters. It was gloomy, without any joss flame inside. There was a small altar present, but nothing else.

Xu Qing was currently standing atop the altar.

However, he didn't look like he normally looked. Instead, he looked like a statue. The statue depicted an old man in a long robe, with facial features that seemed threatening without being angry. He had a beard that went down past his chest, and had the demeanor of a transcendent being. Strapped to his back was an enormous bottle gourd. There was something vaguely holy about the way he looked.

After examining his appearance, Xu Qing sent divine sense out, only to find that it couldn't pierce the walls. Its range was limited to the interior of the temple. After confirming there were no other auras present, Xu Qing lifted his hand.

The stone hand looked as if it had been expertly painted years ago. However, after all the time that had passed, it was spotted with age, and there were even cracks on its surface, some deeper than others. Xu Qing put his hand down and looked around.

This is the Moonrebel Congregation?

Xu Qing wasn't sure why he'd been transformed into a statue. But he could sense that this statue form contained life force power that wasn't his own. It was almost like a suit of armor.

In other words, there was a statue here before I arrived? And after I came here, I entered the statue?

After some thought, Xu Qing did some tests.

The altar vibrated. Dust fell. But Xu Qing managed to awkwardly walk the statue off the altar. With that, he moved around a little bit to get used to the statue 'armor,' and also inspect the temple. He quickly found that his cultivation base was meaningless here, as he couldn't use it. The only way to move around was to make the statue move. That said, he could access his bag of holding.

With that, he looked at the main door of the temple. It had once been bright red, but after all the years that had passed, the paint was cracked and faded.

I guess the Moonrebel Congregation is on the other side of the door.

Eyes shining with anticipation, he sent the statue walking toward the door. He reached it in only a few steps. Taking a deep breath, he pushed the door. However, the moment he touched the door, something unexpected happened!

Outside the Bitter Life Mountains on the edge of the Greenhair Badlands, a five-colored light shot through the green wind and sand. It moved with incredible speed, occasionally flickering forward in minor teleportations to reach even higher speeds. The desert was a dangerous place, but apparently, as long as this light could move fast enough, it wasn't scared of anything.

Occasionally, the light would stop briefly as if searching for something. During those times, if you looked very closely, you would be surprised to find that the light contained one of Wu Jianwu's children, specifically, the parrot.

Every time he slowed down, the parrot would inhale deeply, then look around as if searching. Soon enough, the parrot spotted the Bitter Life Mountains off in the distance. When he did, his eyes lit up.

"Oh yeah, who's the badass now? I found them! If my dad were here to see this, he would definitely be so excited he would come up with a great poem. As the smartest of all his children, I should step in for him to do the same." Sounding very proud, the parrot said, *"When the parrot debuts, the dad sucks balls; when I show up, call me pops, ya clowns!"*

In his heart, he was just sad that no one was around to hear his amazing poem.

Chapter 585: Hundreds of Thousands of Statues

The moment Xu Qing's hand touched the door, a tremor passed through him. The same will that he had encountered earlier erupted from the door and into his mind. It didn't give him any chance to react or back away. It rushed into him like an ocean, inundating him and filling him with intense pain. The pain stabbed through his flesh, blood, and bones. It felt like countless sharp blades slicing away at every part of him.

The sudden turn of events left Xu Qing reeling. Then the pain changed; it didn't get weaker, it got more intense. It became like a fire burning every bit of him.

Then the burning sensation left, to be replaced by a feeling of decay. In both body and soul, he felt like he was sinking into the Yellow Springs. Although Xu Qing had experienced pain because of the many injuries he had suffered, at this moment, he couldn't stop himself from shivering.

That said, he didn't pass out.

Next, the sensation of decay changed. Now it felt like he was being chewed. It was like he was inside some gigantic mouth with sharp teeth that were slashing him to bits. What was most terrifying was that the pain just kept getting more and more intense, until it could only be described as a horrific torture. It only lasted for a moment. But even Xu Qing with his unswerving determination quickly reached the point where he was shaking too hard to stand up straight.

After about a dozen breaths of time, everything turned back around, and the pain vanished. Sweat dripped out of the cracks in the statue and landed on the ground, where they spread out like ink blotch flowers.

As Xu Qing gasped for breath, the majestic divine will echoed in his mind.

"That is the pain awaiting you in the future when Crimson Mother's curse activates. It is the same torment that all living beings in this region must suffer. You have passed the third subtest, which is to experience the true pain of the curse. Is that what you want for the future? If not, if you wish to fight back, if you wish to resist, then open the door. You are welcome to join us. Join the Moonrebel Congregation!"

The divine will faded away. Everything Xu Qing had experienced was an illusion. He looked up. As of now, he understood the third subtest.

Everyone who enters must experience the pain of the curse, to prove that they truly wish to rebel against the moon.

A moment later, Xu Qing's jaw nearly dropped.

If that was the third subtest, then what about blasting my way through the passage? Which subtest was that?

A strange expression appeared on his face as he looked hesitantly back at the altar. Then his eyes glittered. There wasn't any point in wondering about trivial matters like that. Putting his hand on the door, he pushed. An ancient creaking sound reached his ears as the temple door slowly opened.

He found himself looking at a strange world. The sky was blue, which was something he hadn't seen for a long time. Gentle sunlight filled the sky and spilled down onto everything below. He detected a fragrant aroma in the air. Compared to the dusky darkness of the Moonrite Region, this place seemed like an otherworldly utopia. If Xu Qing, a visitor from another region, was so moved by what he was seeing, it was impossible to imagine the reaction of people who had been born and raised in the Moonrite Region.

Heart pounding, he walked out of the temple. Directly outside the entrance was a corroded bronze cauldron.

The temple itself was located on a mountain. It was the only mountain in this world, and it was massive. Countless temples covered its surface. Some were dark, and some shone brightly, but every single one emanated a sensation of ancient time.

So, this is the Moonrebel Congregation.

As he stood at the bottom part of the mountain looking up, it made him feel extremely small.

Floating in the air above the huge mountain were nine extremely large temples. Five of them shone with brilliant light that reached 30,000 meters into the sky. It was just possible to see boundlessly auspicious divine likenesses in those temples. The other four were dark, and did not contain any statues.

Above the nine temples was a brilliant sun. If you looked closely enough, you would see that the sun itself also had a temple in it. However, the main door of that temple was closed. In fact, when Xu Qing spotted it, he instinctively realized that the temple... was dead. There was no statue inside! Or perhaps it was most correct to say that no one was stationed inside that temple at the moment!

Xu Qing saw other divine likenesses similar to his own. They were coming and going from the countless other temples on the mountain, and many were interacting with each other.

The mountain was actually a bustling place. Considering all the statues, Xu Qing almost felt like he was looking at a kingdom of divine beings. A very bizarre notion occurred to him that made him turn around and look at the temple he had walked out of.

It's like the world I live in exists only in that temple....

He shook his head to dispel the notion. He knew that wasn't possible. Taking control of the statue he was in, he flew up into the air to get a better look at the Moonrebel Congregation.

Time passed. As he carefully looked around, he started to understand more about the place.

The dark temples were unoccupied. They had not been activated, and could not be entered. The glowing temples had life in them. Even if the occupant wasn't present, as long as they hadn't restricted access to their temple, other statues could enter whenever they wanted. Most temples had glowing spheres of light in them that contained items for sale.

Is the Moonrebel Congregation mainly a marketplace?

After inspecting more temples, he confirmed that it really was like a marketplace. Each temple had a bronze cauldron, some of which were empty, but some of which had incense burning in them.

At first, Xu Qing was confused by that. But after further inspection, he realized why some cauldrons had incense. If a statue entered another person's temple and completed a business transaction, incense would appear.

In some cases, he saw temples with only a single stick, in other cases, there were many sticks.

I guess the incense shows how popular the place is.... After looking around at more temples, he felt even more like they were shops.

After looking around for a while, Xu Qing found a temple whose owner wanted poison pills, and was offering rare medicinal plants in exchange.

Some of the medicinal plants were so rare that Xu Qing couldn't help but be interested in them. It seemed to him that the owner of this temple was probably some amazing grandmaster of alchemy. As he was inspecting the glowing sphere of light with the transaction information, the statue on the altar opened its eyes and looked at him.

"Can I help you?"

Xu Qing thought for a moment, then asked, "What kind of poison pills do you need, Fellow Daoist?"

The statue glanced at Xu Qing out of the corner of its eye. "I cultivate the Ultimate Poison Resistance Body. Any kind of poison will do."

Xu Qing thought about it for a time, then took out one of his personal poison pills. "This poison pill of mine is a bit unusual, Fellow Daoist. I suggest taking it slow and easy when using it."

He put the pill into the glowing ball of light.

The statue, meanwhile, was chuckling coldly inside. *I've been consuming poison for years. Occasionally people give warnings like this, but their poisons are always average at best. In any case, based on what I can sense, this pill is also average.*

He accepted the transaction.

The sphere of light proceeded to give Xu Qing the medicinal plant he wanted. At the same time, he sensed a faint fluctuation in his mind. It was a very simple stream of divine will that allowed him to give his feedback about the transaction. He could either select *satisfied* or *dissatisfied*.

He selected *satisfied*. When he did, a stick of incense appeared in the bronze cauldron outside the temple.

Oh, I see. He walked outside, but before leaving the temple, looked back at the statue. “Be careful, Fellow Daoist. I suggest you avoid taking the whole pill at once. Start out by shaving some off and sampling it.”

“Sure.” The statue frowned a bit impatiently.

Xu Qing was surprised at how confident this person was. However, *there are always more talented people out there, just as there are always higher heavens out there.* Perhaps this was just a case in which Xu Qing didn’t know as much as he thought he did. Forgoing any further warnings, he turned and left.

As he continued on his way in the Moonrebel Congregation, Xu Qing mused that the place was definitely different than he’d imagined. And the more temples he visited, the more he came to understand it. Physical goods weren’t the only thing for sale. There were intelligence reports available, job offerings, even bounties.... In fact, just about everything imaginable could be found. That included information related to curse research.

There were also some medicinal pills for sale here and there that caught his attention due to how expensive they were.

Painquelling lozenges!

Xu Qing had first learned about such pills thanks to the bounty put on him and the Captain by the Yin-Yang Betwixt Flowers Sect. Even back then, he knew how expensive those pills were, but even still, he found the price tag shocking. Here, the pills weren’t sold for spirit stones, and they were offered in small quantities. Most people wanted various precious materials in exchange, either that, or services performed.

When it came to precious materials, Xu Qing noticed the price for one painquelling lozenge was twenty red heavenfire crystals. Xu Qing was fully aware of how rare heavenfire crystals were. Twenty was about how much a small species or sect would have to pay to the Redmoon Cathedral as an offering. [1]

In terms of services performed, most related to the Spirit Trove level. For instance, there were assassination missions that could be marked complete when you handed over a Spirit Trove expert’s soul.

Another option was to sign a soul contract to perform other services.

After looking around and buying plenty of information about the curse, he went back to his temple at the foot of the mountain. Along the way, he ran into some of his neighbors. The statues near his temple looked at him with odd expressions when he passed. In fact, as he was returning, a statue emerged from a nearby temple, pulsing with orange light.

The statue depicted a burly man, bare-chested, with colorful ribbons draped across his torso. He looked very impressive and was glaring at Xu Qing in dissatisfaction.

Noticing that, Xu Qing’s guard went up, and he flew into his own temple and stood on the altar. Closing his eyes, he returned to the back room of the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

After confirming he was safe, he opened his eyes and thought back to everything in the Moonrebel Congregation. It still seemed very strange. After a while, he took out the jade slips with curse information and started studying them.

Back in the Moonrebel Congregation, the bare-chested statue looked at Xu Qing's temple and snorted coldly.

Here I thought it was some vicious individual. After a whole month of banging, you would think he would be really impressive. I couldn't rest at all!

Meanwhile, in another small temple at the foot of the mountain, the main door creaked open to reveal a statue. The statue held a magic bottle in one hand. Its face was pitch black, and it had six eyes. There was a divine bird on the statue's shoulder, making it look even more unusual. After walking out of the temple, the statue stretched lazily.

It's not that I want to be late meeting up, little Ah Qing. It's just that your Eldest Brother is simply too amazing. Halfway through one of my tasks, I happened to earn the right to come to the Moonrebel Congregation. Ai. I really am just too amazing. But what can I do other than to just keep accomplishing amazing things?

The subtests were really hard. Given little Ah Qing's circumstances, I doubt he could get in here. What a pity. I guess I'll just have to enjoy the scenery on my own. I wonder if that dumb bird made it to the Bitter Life Mountains. It better not give up halfway there....

Chapter 586: I... Ach... You're Full of Poison! (part 1)

It was late at night. Darkness filled heaven and earth. In the mudbrick cities of the Bitter Life Mountains, lantern light flickered in the wind. The wind never ended, and occasionally sent sand swirling through the city streets. Although not a lot of sand and wind reached the cities, there was enough to create an unsettling sound when it scraped past the doors of the houses. However, long-term residents got used to the sound. Even Xu Qing, after about half a year of dealing with the wind, considered it just another part of life.

At the moment, he was studying curse information, and his eyes were shining. Three days had passed since he visited the Moonrebel Congregation. During that time, he had immersed himself in poring over curse research information.

The people in the Moonrebel Congregation have studied the curse down to the finest details.

Already, he felt that the poison pills and spirit stones he had spent to purchase curse information had been more than worth it.

The information was very comprehensive, and was obviously not the work of just a single generation of researchers. It was clearly the result of many years of study, and included data from countless experiments, as well as a variety of theories and conjectures.

After a lot of experimentation, people confirmed that the curse has life force....

After studying the effects of the curse on over a hundred species, it was determined that it affects different species in slightly different ways. Some species are inherently born with less of the curse, only to have the curse build up in them over time.

Some people focused on studying variations on curse flare-ups, ultimately identifying 137 different types of reactions that can occur. It seems the flare-ups have slightly different effects depending on the species. The curse can inflict specific types of torment on specific species. For example, the

Dingyang species have an innately high level of pain tolerance when it comes to their fleshly bodies. As a result, the curse flare-ups affect their souls.

The Moonrebel Congregation research has also confirmed a very interesting theory. And that is... the effects for different species can be mixed together. The curse in the various living beings in the Moonrite Region can change. For example, by taking certain medicines or using blood, it's possible for the curse effects to overlap.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered. The new information was already giving him new ideas. Before, it had never even occurred to him that the curse could have so many uses.

For example, people had isolated versions of the curse that targeted the soul, then mixed it with the curse from a species that didn't fear harm to the soul. The result was a reduction in the curse torment.

The curse is different in different species. And the different versions can be mixed and blended... So that's how the painquelling lozenges came to be.

Now he also understood a bit more about why painquelling lozenges were so incredibly expensive and rare.

Each painquelling lozenge contains an amalgamation of different characteristics from different species, which is then used to comprehensively cancel out the curse to a certain degree. Whoever takes the pill will have the flare-up effects of the curse quelled to an extent. More advanced versions of the pill need to be customized by an alchemist, by adjusting the various characteristics to benefit a specific species.

The long story short is that painquelling lozenges mix together the curse power from different species. To be most effective, they need to be customized. It's using the curse to fight the curse. It's mutual growth to effect mutual restraint.

Xu Qing sighed. He knew that the information he had was only the tip of the iceberg when it came to the body of knowledge available for sale. But even that little bit gave him a very deep impression of the wisdom of the Moonrebel Congregation.

If I keep up this research, it's entirely possible that one day in the future I could create a pill that completely negates curse flare-ups. And that might make it possible for people to escape this region. That's assuming... that Crimson Mother hasn't changed the curse, and that the information isn't lost when shē comes.

He took a deep breath. It seemed that painquelling lozenges were going to be key to making further breakthroughs in curse research.

I have the essence of the red moon. So, to a certain degree, I should be able to discharge the curse. Theoretically speaking, my blessing should be able to either strengthen or weaken the curse. I was on the wrong track before. What I really want is to be able to end the curse in one shot. Unfortunately, my violet moon isn't strong enough for that, so it's going to be hard. But what if I can at least weaken the curse...?

His eyes shone with determination.

I need to get a painquelling lozenge to confirm some of my speculations.

With such thoughts on his mind, he took out the mirror fragment and went back to the Moonrebel Congregation.

Back at the foot of the huge mountain of the Moonrebel Congregation, the eyes of a statue opened in a small temple.

Xu Qing wasn't the type to act rashly, so the first thing he did was stay on the altar and check his surroundings. After making sure it was safe, he sent the statue off the altar.

He stretched a bit to get used to the statue form again, and also took time to inspect the statue itself. It was still covered with cracks, and still resembled an old man in a robe, with a huge bottle gourd on his back. Everything looked normal.

Xu Qing pushed the door open and stepped out. He noted the blue sky and bright light, as well as all the statues moving around. Without the slightest hesitation, he joined the crowd.

Having a definite goal this time; he wanted to find a place that had a painquelling lozenge for sale. Along the way, he passed the temple where he had bought medicinal plants with a poison pill. As he did, he looked over curiously. The temple still shone with light, but the owner wasn't present. He looked away.

There were too many temples to quickly check them all, and even after a good amount of time passed, he couldn't find a place that was offering a painquelling lozenge at a price he was willing to pay. The temple where he had previously seen one for sale for twenty red heavenfire crystals was closed for some reason. He couldn't even get inside.

Sighing, he continued his search. Ultimately, though, all he got was more information about curse research.

Time passed.

For ten days, Xu Qing studied curse information, did research on the curse in animals, and spent about half of each day searching for a place in the Moonrebel Congregation to get a painquelling lozenge.

He went back to the place that had offered one for heavenfire crystals, but it remained closed.

Similarly, Xu Qing hadn't seen the alchemist master who cultivated the Ultimate Poison Resistance Body and had taken one of his poison pills. That said, the alchemist didn't close his temple. It was just that the statue remained on the altar completely unmoving. Xu Qing went in a few times and found that the sphere of light had not been updated in a long time. Furthermore, there were no more medicinal plants for sale. It seemed that after the deal with Xu Qing, that alchemist hadn't returned to the Moonrebel Congregation.

There's no way he actually consumed that pill, and then had some trouble. Is there? Xu Qing was surprised, and also worried that the man might come looking for him to get revenge....

That said, Xu Qing had clearly warned him.

I'm probably overthinking it. If he cultivates the Ultimate Poison Resistance Body, he must be a top expert. It was entirely likely that the alchemist hadn't come back because of some other reason.

With such thoughts on his mind, Xu Qing left.

A few more days passed, and the alchemist never returned....

One day when Xu Qing was out searching for a painquelling lozenge, the entire Moonrebel Congregation trembled. Dazzling light shone out from the sky, and terrifying fluctuations rolled out over the entire mountain.

Sensing it, Xu Qing walked out of the temple he was currently in and looked up. He wasn't the only one to do that. Statues walked out of many of the temples and looked into the sky.

There, a figure emerged from one of the nine temples that hung beneath the sun. When that figure stepped out, the entire Moonrebel Congregation shook. Auspicious signs appeared in the canopy of heaven, and brilliant light shone everywhere.

“Greetings, Vice-Bishop!”

The various statues began to call out respectful greetings, their voices joining together into a massive sound wave that swept out.

Xu Qing joined them. This was his first time seeing one of the leaders of the Moonrebel Congregation. Because of the limitations of the statue form, he couldn't sense the vice-bishop's cultivation level. But given the reaction to his presence, Xu Qing could only assume that he had a very powerful cultivation base.

As the vice-bishop's statue stepped out, boundless light glimmered, and a thunderous voice spoke.

“I have three matters to share with all of you Moonrebel cultivators.

“One. Things are really heating up in the Moonrite Region. In all locations, cultivators are rising up who refuse to accept their fate. Sparks are flying, and they'll soon turn into a huge wildfire!

“Two. Thanks to our efforts over the better part of the last year, we successfully destroyed five of the Red Moon Cathedral's church temples. We killed eleven godheralds, dozens of godservants, and hundreds of godslaves!

“Three. Verifiable information has come in which indicates that the Heir Apparent and Princess Brightblossom are recovering from thēir injuries, and are fine. We're working hard to get in touch with thēm. Once we do, the Moonrebel Congregation will rise to new heights of glory!

“Ladies and gentlemen, the red moon is by no means eternal!”

His words caused many emotions to stir in the hearts of the statues. What was more, many temple doors opened, and more statues walked out. In response to the words he had just spoken, the statues clasped hands and joined voices.

“Hope exists from time immemorial and into forever!”

The deafening sound of their voices stirred even the clouds.

More seeds of hope had been planted.

Xu Qing also felt moved. As he watched, the statue that had made the announcements turned and went back into his temple. Though the statue was gone, the news he had shared was already starting to spread rapidly into the Moonrite Region.

Xu Qing glanced at all the excited statues, then turned to leave. However, that was when he noticed that the temple that wanted heavenfire crystals was open again.

He immediately flew over. Upon entering and inspecting the sphere of light, he found that the painquelling lozenge was still for sale. Without any hesitation, he handed over twenty red heavenfire crystals to complete the transaction. With the painquelling lozenge in hand, he left.

Thanks to the news shared by the vice-bishop, many more statues had already returned, making the place even more bustling than before. From a distance, it looked like a host of devils was buzzing about.

However, the temple where Xu Qing had bought the plants with a poison pill was still empty....

Xu Qing wasn't sure what to do about that. With a final glance at that specific temple, he flew back to his own temple.

Chapter 586: I... Ach... You're Full of Poison! (part 2)

Out in the Greenhair Badlands, a five-colored beam of light was currently flying along. Behind it, the green wind looked like it was changing colors. The green wind was turning into a white wind! Inside the beam of light was a parrot who looked alarmed. As he flew along, he cursed up a storm.

What the hell? I was just fooling around by flying a bit more slowly! Okay, fine, I stopped to take a crap in a quicksand pit. How could I have known that would cause the wind to turn white?

The alarmed parrot flew on, using a few minor teleportations in an attempt to stay away from the white wind.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing appeared in the back room of the Green Spirit Pharmacy in the mudbrick city in the Bitter Life Mountains.

Sitting down cross-legged, he took out the painquelling lozenge and started studying it. The pill was multi-colored, making it look very strange. However, the curse aura in it was very prominent.

Xu Qing wasn't going to act blindly. Painquelling lozenges were far too expensive, and he wasn't in the position to buy a second one. All he had was this one single pill to study. He planned to start with simple observation. He studied the exterior of the pill. After smelling it, a thoughtful look appeared in his eyes.

It doesn't seem like a pill made from medicinal plants. There's definitely not just one type of curse. There are many.... The most important factor is the quality.

This thing is designed to absorb curse power. Each curse is used in a different amount. The pill formula basically uses the curse power from different species just like plants and vegetation.

Interesting. All of these curses have the same origin, but they have different effects. In the end, though, they're all curses. As a result, consuming this pill will quell the pain of the curse, but it doesn't reduce the curse. In fact, it adds more of it.

What's more, adding in the power of other curses will cause side-effects like the loss of life force or reduction of cultivation base.... Drinking poison to quench one's thirst.... That's basically what this is.

Sighing inwardly, he waved his hand, causing violet moon power to converge in the form of violet streams.

There were several hundred, and as they swirled in front of him, he exercised a thought, sending them toward the painquelling lozenge. They pierced into the pill, with each stream focusing on one specific curse. This was something no one else could ever do. But because Xu Qing's violet moon had the same origin as the red moon, then it could affect the same transformations.

Before, he had lacked an item to study directly, and also couldn't do enough experimentation. But now he had a general understanding, as well as the painquelling lozenge. The door had been unlocked.

As time passed, Xu Qing's expression grew more serious. He continuously sent violet strands out, transforming the different curses in different ways. He was exceedingly careful in everything he did. For one thing, he made sure that the fluctuations from the streams didn't trigger the curse power in the medicinal pill.

About six hours later, after so much time spent being careful, he finally made a slight mistake.

The incredibly valuable painquelling lozenge trembled slightly, and then the curse power activated, and the pill collapsed, turning into black ash that slipped through Xu Qing's finger and onto the floor.

He didn't regret any of his actions, and in fact, his eyes were shining. During the six hours that had passed, he had thoroughly inspected over three hundred types of curse power from different species. Sighing softly, he looked down and brushed together all the black ash. As he did, he suddenly realized it looked familiar.

"What's this...?"

Eyes glittering, he took out a bag and dumped the black ash out of it. The two types of ash looked exactly the same. The ash from the bag was what he had collected during his time doing research on the animals. When the curse power in them flared up, they would collapse into this ash. He had never found any use for the ash, but had collected it anyway. Apparently, that was the ingredient in the pill that absorbed the curse power.

In other words, each painquelling lozenge is made from the remains of a living being that died in an explosive curse flare-up.

Picking up a handful of ash, he sent several hundred streams of violet moon energy into it. Based on all the research he had done up to this point, he used them like curse power, which stuck to the ash.

During the process, the black ash shrank down, and its color changed. Soon, it was multi-colored. It also changed shape.

Xu Qing rolled it around between his hands, ultimately forming it into an oddly shaped medicinal pill. Although it didn't look exactly like a painquelling lozenge, it had the same aura. That said, it was different substructurally. That was because the 'curse power' was actually formed from Xu Qing's violet moon.

If you liken the red moon curse to an enemy army, then my violet moon power is like an enemy uniform that I can wear as a disguise. Using that method, I can infiltrate the enemy army. Once inside, if I take action with explosive speed, then I can cancel out some of the curse power before it has a chance to devour me.

Things were starting to click into place. With that, he took out a scorpion, which lay on the ground trembling, not even daring to raise its tail. Xu Qing glanced at it, then put down the new medicinal pill in front of it.

“Eat,” he said calmly.

The scorpion didn’t dare to resist, and meekly consumed the pill. A moment later, it shivered. Ten breaths of time passed, then the scorpion collapsed into black ash.

The ‘disguise’ didn’t work.

Frowning, Xu Qing reviewed everything, then started transforming more of the black ash.

Days sped by. Xu Qing tried many variations, but always failed. Every time, he would make adjustments. On the evening of the tenth day, he managed to successfully disguise his pill.

The animal that consumed it didn’t collapse, and the curse within it stabilized.

Heart racing, Xu Qing looked at the painquelling lozenge he had crafted. It was the result of about half a year of research and work. Because of the direction of his research, the pill was still not completely as effective as a real painquelling lozenge, but it was close.

Painquelling lozenges are designed to reduce the pain of the curse. But my research... is focused on completely eliminating the curse. The pain relief is just a side-effect. Although I haven’t completely succeeded yet, at least I’m going in the right direction. Also, I need to improve my violet moon power.... And I need to get more research information. The more I get, the more complete my understanding will be.

Eyes gleaming with anticipation, he prepared to create a few more of his special painquelling lozenges. But then his gaze hardened and he looked outside. He suddenly blurred, disappearing from the back room and appearing next to the counter in the shop.

Ling’er had been happily working on the accounts. When she sensed Xu Qing, she quickly transformed into a white snake and burrowed up into his sleeve.

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior suddenly pulsed with an aggressive aura. Meanwhile, Xu Qing’s expression softened slightly as he looked out the window.

He saw a five-colored light shooting through the city. It reached the medicine shop, entered, then came to a stop next to Sprouty.

Sprouty suddenly stopped swaying back and forth. Meanwhile, the light converged into the shape of a parrot. Looking around arrogantly, it said, “*When the parrot debuts, the dad sucks balls; when I show up, call me pops, ya clowns!*”

The parrot looked pompously at Xu Qing. “Hey. You, whatever your name is. That Chen what’s-his-name Er-something asked me to come tell you to light, uh, some kind of fire.”

“Light what fire?” Xu Qing said, frowning. He recognized the parrot, but had no idea what the parrot was talking about.

“How the hell would I know what fire he was talking about, fool? That Er-what’s-his-name just said to tell you to light the fire. Light it! Light, light, light that fire!”

Looking extremely arrogant, the parrot turned to Sprouty, took a big bite out of it, then slowly started chewing.

Sprouty shivered but didn’t dare to try to avoid the bite.

Meanwhile, Ling’er stuck her head out of Xu Qing’s sleeve and looked angrily at the parrot. “Hey, stop that!”

The parrot looked at her out of the corner of his eye, then looked arrogantly at Xu Qing. “I’m not stopping anything!”

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior flew out, but before he could even get close to the parrot, the parrot vanished, then reappeared on the other side of Sprouty. He took another bite.

“I said I won’t stop!”

It was a level of speed that the patriarch found completely shocking. He was about to give chase, when the parrot started zipping around Sprouty, taking more bites.

“I won’t stop. Won’t stop. Won’t, won’t, won’t!” The parrot was looking very pleased with himself. But then he lurched to a stop. Eyes widening he coughed up a mouthful of blood. “I... ach... You’re full of poison!!”

The parrot glared at Sprouty, and the sapling shivered. Then the parrot coughed up more blood and started withering up. Around then, he realized that it wasn’t Sprouty that was poisoned. There was actually poison everywhere. He opened his beak to speak, but then toppled over onto the ground. He turned to Xu Qing, a look of terror on his face.

Meanwhile, Sprouty pulled its roots out of the soil, jumped down, and started trampling the parrot angrily.

The parrot moaned and groaned as he tried to get away. Unfortunately, he couldn’t. All he could do was roll around on the ground. Then Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior arrived, and the parrot didn’t do anything other than lay there, terrified.

Sprouty didn’t dare to keep causing a scene, and climbed back into the pot and settled down again.

At that point, Xu Qing calmly walked over and sat next to the struggling parrot.

“Are you ready to talk normally now?”

The parrot nodded his head. Now he finally understood why his father was so scared of this person. Instead of talking things out reasonably, he just went around poisoning people.

“Sect Uncle Xu, um, sir, how about you get rid of this poison...?” The parrot coughed up more blood, then struggled to breathe as his body continued decaying.

Xu Qing waved his hand, causing most of the poison to leave the parrot. The parrot twitched a few times, but then noticed Xu Qing staring at him, and quickly went still.

“Sorry about that, Sect Uncle Xu. So, Sect Uncle Erniu asked me to come tell you to light that fire. I really don’t know what he meant. I think it has something to do with some suns.”

Xu Qing thought about it briefly, then looked down at the parrot. The parrot really was incredibly fast, which he found surprising. “What powers do you have?”

“I can do minor teleportations. I’m the fastest of all my father’s children. And it doesn’t matter how bad the environment is, or what sealing magics are in place. They won’t affect me at all. In the past, whenever my father was in a really dangerous situation, I’m the one that teleported him away. I’m the best there is at... um, I mean, your humble servant is skilled at being fast.”

The parrot looked cautiously at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing nodded and was about to say something, when he quickly stood and went to the window. The wind was blowing into the city, causing buildings to vibrate and doors to slam. When it reached Xu Qing, it stirred his hair.

Off in the distance, the wind screamed, and sand blew about like clouds. Lightning flashed, and thunder boomed. It almost seemed like there was a god in the wind, driving it along with the sand. It was clearly a sandstorm. What was more, it was turning from green to white.

The screaming of the wind grew more intense. It sounded as if the dome of heaven was furious, and the lands were indignant, and that they wanted to bury all living beings for all time.

Terrifying pressure came along with the white sand storm. As it spread over the Bitter Life Mountains, everything outside turned a hazy white color. It looked very inauspicious.

Xu Qing looked down and realized his shadow wasn’t there. He’d sent it hunting, and it hadn’t returned....

Chapter 587: A Terrifying Figure in the Sandstorm

“The green wind changed color..” Xu Qing murmured. Looking out the window, he could see the white-colored wind, and it left him with a very uneasy feeling. Dramatic changes like this would either be the result of magical and natural laws, or would be some unimaginable power at work. The Heavenfire Skycrossing and the nature of the Greenhair Badlands were good examples.

I wonder if the two are connected.

Xu Qing wasn’t exactly an expert when it came to the Moonrite Region, plus there were far too many mysterious things in existence for him to understand all of them. Xu Qing quietly extended his hand out of the window, grabbed some of the white sand, and pulled it back inside to look at. It was pure white, and almost seemed alive. It struggled to escape his palm, and when it failed, started burrowing into his flesh.

Golden light glittered on Xu Qing's hand, preventing the sand from digging into his skin.

After studying it for a time, Xu Qing came to realize that the white grains of sand... seemed like bug eggs.

When the green wind changes color, is it some kind of unknown entity, spreading its eggs out into the desert to provide nutrients?

Of course, it was just an unconfirmed theory. Other than the physical appearance, he had no evidence to confirm that the grains of sand were eggs. After all, there were all sorts of strange living beings in existence, and observation alone wasn't enough to prove anything.

Ling'er was also looking outside at the moment. Her eyes were full of reverence; she also sensed the inauspicious nature of the white wind.

When the parrot noticed the expression on Xu Qing's face, he looked a bit guilty. Blinking a few times, he explained how he had defecated in that pit of quicksand.

Xu Qing looked away from the sand and back at the parrot. The parrot shivered and quickly stood up a bit straighter.

"You can teleport people?" Xu Qing asked calmly.

"I can!" the parrot replied loudly. *If I'm in the mood for it*

, he added, but only in his thoughts.

"Where's the Captain?" Xu Qing asked.

"In the west," the parrot answered. "Near the shores of the Yin Sacrifice River."

Xu Qing didn't ask any more questions. He still wasn't sure why the Captain had sent the parrot with a message about lighting some sort of fire. But if it had something to do with suns, then Xu Qing could only speculate that it might relate to his golden crow powers.

Might as well go see what the situation is. Besides, the shadow hasn't returned yet.

Because of Xu Qing's curse research, the shadow was constantly going out hunting for him. Sometimes it stayed out for a day or two, other times it needed five or six days.

Xu Qing looked back out at the white haze. He issued a mental call to the shadow, but didn't get any response. Presumably the wind and sand were interfering. He could still vaguely sense the shadow, and knew that it was somewhere relatively far away, staying in place without moving.

Considering the parrot made it back through the wind, it seemed unlikely that the shadow would foolishly get spooked by the same thing.

"Big Bro Xu Qing," Ling'er said, clearly worried, "do you think Little Shadow...?"

"The shadow should be fine. But let's go check, just in case."

Xu Qing looked around the Green Spirit Pharmacy. After tidying things up and taking anything worthwhile, including Sprouty, he pushed the door open and stepped out. The parrot and patriarch followed. One hovered by his side, the other perched on his shoulder. Xu Qing locked the door,

then, after some thought, he found a sign and wrote 'closed for a few months.' After hanging the sign on the door, he left.

There weren't many people on the street in the city. Occasionally, he spotted people kowtowing to heaven and earth, all while mumbling something. As the white wind blew, most commoners in the city were hurrying inside and locking their doors and windows. It was the same with the cultivators from the various local organizations. Unless it was absolutely necessary, none of them wanted to be out in the white wind.

It was only the people with the deformities who stayed outside, where they would offer praise to the white haze.

"White Mother is awake, enjoying the fiery river.

"The godchild cometh, to bring salvation hither.

"All beings are dazzled, in confusion they quiver.

"I will become the soil, a nourishing caregiver."

The chanting of the deformed ones carried with it dedication and piety. As they kowtowed, they threw open their garments to reveal the exaggerated ugliness of their bodies. They were truly horrifying to look at. It was as if they had just started growing randomly, with strips of flesh hanging here and there. Some even had limbs or faces growing out of their abdomens. And the fleshy growths would move of their own accord, swaying back and forth oddly.

The sight of it all caused the parrot to inhale sharply.

Xu Qing took it in without any change to his facial expression. He had noticed the people with deformities before, so he wasn't very surprised, and just walked past them. Step by step, he left the city and eventually reached a nearby cliff.

From this location, he could look out at the hazy white atmosphere. The sobbing wind made the entire world look like a sea of white. And the countless particles of sand blew against him, landing on his clothing and trying to burrow into him. However, golden light would shimmer from within him, and the sand would drop to the ground.

After determining the shadow's general location, Xu Qing tightened all of his clothing, then blurred into motion, becoming a prismatic beam of light that flew out of the Bitter Life Mountains and into the desert. His garments fluttered as the sandy wind enveloped him.

He moved at top speed through the desert. There was no end to the sand, and it surrounded him voraciously, as if it sought nourishment from anything alive. It had incredible life force power within it, such that any living being it encountered would be unable to stop the bizarre growth that led to deformity.

The grains of sand never stopped their efforts to burrow into living flesh.

This white wind has a catalyzing power in it. The grains are parasitic bug eggs, and they catalyze the growth of flesh to serve as nutrition. Most people who experience that catalyzation ultimately get sucked dry and end up dead. But some of them make it to safety first. That's why all those deformed people live in the Bitter Life Mountains. That said, they can't reverse the effects. The parasitic bug eggs are still inside them. That's what those fleshy growths are.

As he proceeded through the wind and sand, Xu Qing sent out some taboo poison power, creating the lone section of black color in the white wind. When the grains of sand touched the black cloud around Xu Qing, hissing sounds resulted, and the sand dropped dead to the ground.

However, there was simply too much sand to deal with. Xu Qing was well aware that unless he came up with some other method to deal with it, he couldn't stay out in the white wind for very long. With that thought in mind, he accelerated.

Six hours passed.

There weren't many cultivators out in the white wind. Xu Qing actually felt like he was all alone in the desert. Everything looked very different than what he remembered from before.

The green desert didn't have many plants in it. But in this white sandstorm, all sorts of white plants were growing out of the ground. Their growth rate was rapid. They would start out the size of a finger, but in a very short time were about half the height of an average human.

White plants swayed in the wind everywhere. It was almost as if they were a part of the sandstorm. Xu Qing had never seen anything like it before.

The white plants bloomed with fuzzy white flowers that looked like dandelion seeds. And when they flew into the wind, they resembled white puffs that floated through heaven and earth. They made the wind even whiter.

The voracious hunger of the sand only seemed to increase. White wind. White sand. White dandelions. And the catalyzing power. As Xu Qing flew through the wind, he could feel every inch of his flesh twitching. It was as if his flesh wanted to separate from his body. To grow until it exploded. The overwhelming sense of malice caused Xu Qing to frown. Eventually, he stopped in place and sent taboo poison power sweeping out around him.

Three meters. Nine meters.... In the blink of an eye, Xu Qing's poison had expanded for 30 meters in all directions, creating a black storm around him. After that, he continued following his senses toward the shadow.

He could now sense exactly where the shadow was. The closer they got, the stronger the sensation became. By this point, the shadow could also sense Xu Qing, and was sending him feelings of humiliation along with pleas for help.

Xu Qing's eyes turned cold. His previous assumption had been correct; the shadow had run into trouble. He sped up.

The shadow was some distance away from Xu Qing in the white sandstorm, howling in pain and grief. Normally speaking, its voice wasn't audible to random people. But that wasn't the case now.

It was stuck in place! It was pinned to a white plant by a bronze dagger covered with golden blood that stabbed into the shadow so thoroughly that no matter how it struggled, it couldn't free itself. Whenever it did struggle, the dagger would send out golden light that would crush down on the shadow, resulting in further injuries.

The black canopy the shadow could create was covered with countless fuzzy dandelions. Their roots had burrowed into the shadow, and were constantly draining its life force. For those reasons, the shadow was in pure agony.

Surrounding the shadow were about a dozen figures. All of them wore white robes that obscured their facial features and covered them completely, protecting them from the wind and sand. The only thing visible were white eyes, which stared coldly off into the distance.

“Your lord and master still hasn’t come?” asked the leader of the group. He looked at the struggling shadow, then performed a quick incantation gesture and pointed at the dagger.

The dagger glittered brightly, then sank down further, stabbing deeper into the shadow. Golden light shone, and the shadow screamed even more shrilly.

“That sounds horrible,” said the leader. He was just about to continue tormenting the shadow when he suddenly looked up, his eyes shifting to the horizon. His companions noticed the same thing, and all looked in the same direction.

The shadow suddenly got excited and issued a cry for help.

A black tempest had appeared in the distance. Anything that got close to it, including dandelions or sand, were infected and turned black and either fell to the ground or became part of the black tempest. As the tempest neared, the white plants in the area turned black and wilted. It was as if the ambassador of death was on the way.

The people in the white robes were shaken by what they were seeing. They had previously been waiting for the shadow’s master in full confidence. But seeing that darkness coming for them, they instinctively thought about some of the legends that circulated in the Green Sand Desert.

As their guard went up, the leader struggled to take in a breath. Staring at the figure approaching within the black tempest, he called out, “Halt! Who goes there!?”

The tempest didn’t stop for even a moment, and the figure within it neared relentlessly. Then a cold voice spoke with was completely devoid of any sort of emotion.

“Do you people have a death wish?”

Chapter 588: Let This Kid Go!

As Xu Qing’s words rang out, the black tempest rumbled and spread out to cover the area. Bolts of lightning snaked back and forth, casting electric light everywhere.

The shadow was already incomparably excited, and was trembling. It was deeply moved. As of this moment, it felt like all of its hard work and loyalty were paying off. Its lord and master hadn’t abandoned it. It didn’t matter that three of its white-robed captors were in the great circle of the Nascent Soul level, or that the leader was a Spirit Trove expert. Its lord and master had still come to rescue it. It quickly sent out some emotional fluctuations to convey its thankfulness, as well as explain the humiliation and pain it felt. It also started struggling even harder.

The figure in the tempest strode forward, and as it neared, terrifying pressure built up.

The white wind would show up in the Greenhair Badlands every so often. In contrast, it had been hundreds of years since a black wind appeared. Yet right now, the group of white-robed cultivators could clearly see the black tempest in front of them, and it filled their hearts with bewilderment. What was more, they all could see how the dandelions and the sand would change color and become part of that black tempest. It was exactly like the legendary black wind that everyone talked about. In their shock, some of them were already starting to back away from the figure in the tempest.

These people were a very unique species. Their mission was to guard the desert. What was more, all of the beasts in the desert were kept by them as pets. That was why they had targeted the shadow. Over the last half a year or so, the shadow had been constantly coming out and capturing animals, thus attracting the attention of this species. However, because there was no white wind, they had to abide by the ancient treaties and stay in hiding beneath the surface of the sand.

Their species' ancient records gave them insight into the shadow's powers, and therefore, once the white wind appeared, they sent out a squad to track down the shadow. After finding it, they used a holy weapon to pin it to the ground.

Originally, they had assumed their mission was complete. All they needed to do was take the shadow back to be punished.

However, the leader didn't want to end things like that. He could tell that the shadow had a master, and wanted to take advantage of their time in the open to capture both the shadow and its master. But the arrival of this black tempest had him and his squad feeling very uneasy. For generations, their species had lived beneath the sands of the desert, and were innately immune to the white wind. What was more, they understood more about the desert than any outsider. Because of that, they knew all about the white and black winds.

The squad leader looked at the figure in the tempest, and could tell that he didn't have very strong cultivation base fluctuations. But the black tempest made him leery.

As a result, they didn't blindly take action. Instead, they started communicating with hand signs that only their species understood. Then, the leader spoke.

“Sire, over the past half year, this vile spirit of yours has been killing our pets, harming the desert environment, and stealing our food. This behavior is considered *wicked beyond redemption*

to our species, so we were given the mission of capturing it. What's more, our patriarchs and other leaders tasked us with asking you a question, Sire. Why are you doing this? Our species has no quarrel with you. We demand that you compensate us!”

The figure in the tempest stopped in place.

Xu Qing was a reasonable person, and what these people were saying seemed to make sense. After a moment of consideration, he said, “That's fine. What do you want?”

The white-robed cultivators' eyes narrowed. This was not what they had expected at all.

“First. You have to pay us back for the pets we lost. You killed 153 of them, and each one is worth 100,000 spirit stones! Second. You have to let us take the vile spirit with us.”

When the shadow heard that, it seemed to become terrified. Only a moment later, it seemed to notice something unusual nearby. A fraction of a second, later, it pretended it hadn't noticed anything, and continued to howl in grief and terror.

The figure in the tempest shook his head. “I can't afford that. Can you accept a bit less?”

The white-robed cultivators stared back at Xu Qing.

“If you tell us how you made that tempest,” the leader said, “then we can cut the price by thirty percent. But we won't give back the vile spirit.”

Xu Qing thought about it. He couldn't afford that many spirit stones, even after the discount. It seemed that he wasn't being the unreasonable one. And since the other party was being unreasonable, then he didn't see the need to compensate them. As calm as ever, he took another step forward.

The moment he moved, the white robed cultivators jumped into the air and simultaneously performed incantation gestures. The white wind grew more intense as a result, with large amounts of white sand flying toward the black tempest.

The leader was thinking, *We haven't been out in a while. Are all the cultivators out here as dumb as this nowadays? I can't believe we're actually getting a chance to fight!*

As he and the other members of his species sprang into motion together, the white wind blew with astonishing intensity, whipping the sand into the shape of a huge worm that lunged toward the figure in the black tempest.

When they slammed into each other, a loud boom rang out.

However, because the white-robed cultivators were paying such close attention to the black tempest, they didn't realize something unusual had just happened to the shadow. Someone had appeared invisibly next to it. And that person was squatting next to the shadow, and was closely examining the dagger pinning it to the ground.

That person was Xu Qing.

The figure in the tempest was actually a projection of Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior.

The fact that these people managed to trap the shadow indicated to Xu Qing that they were nobody to take lightly. He had assumed from the beginning that there would be complications, which was why he'd had Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior take point in the tempest and keep the enemy's attention focused elsewhere.

Concealed in invisibility, he'd come here. He had hoped to just secretly free the shadow. Unfortunately, the golden dagger was an extraordinary item, and the aura on it didn't just suppress the shadow; it also left Xu Qing feeling jumpy with fear.

He could tell that the dagger was controlled by means of blood, and anyone without the right bloodline would have a hard time doing anything with it. The dim light it exuded allowed it to sense the world around it, and if the wrong person tried to touch it, they would be rejected.

And thus, he squatted off to the side trying to figure out how to remove it.

Without the right bloodline, I can't pull it out. I would be discovered, and would also have to deal with a backlash. The dim light flickering on it connects to the user. But during the moment in which it switches between light and dark, as long as I'm fast enough, I should be able to reach in and grab it. I'll only have one chance. In that case... I'll have to freeze time!

As Xu Qing's eyes glittered, booms rang out not too far away. The black tempest was being ripped apart by the white worm. The figure inside backed up, transforming into a fish bone before disappearing off into the desert. At the same time, the power of Xu Qing's sundials exploded.

It locked onto the dagger and froze it in place!

As the dim light on the dagger flickered back and forth between dark and light, it suddenly stopped in a moment of darkness. Xu Qing's hand then shot out and grabbed the dagger. His cultivation base erupted, as did his fleshly body power. Using both, he pulled as hard as he could.

In the blink of an eye, the dagger was out of the shadow. The shadow issued a sound like a cheer, and as the dandelions faded away from it, it shot back to its spot beneath Xu Qing's feet.

Having done that, Xu Qing put the dagger into his bag of holding, and without a backward glance, fled at top speed. Having already circled around, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior joined him.

Meanwhile, the moment the black tempest collapsed, the white-robed cultivators realized something was going on with the shadow. Their faces fell.

"It was a trick!"

Despite their astonishment, they quickly gave chase. Instantly, terrifying Spirit Trove fluctuations rolled out across the desert. Meanwhile, the top experts from their species sensed what was going on, and rushed to help.

In that moment of crisis, the parrot prepared to flee for his life. He didn't care whether Xu Qing lived or died, and was actually feeling very pleased with himself. He had accomplished his task, after all. *You poisoned me, fool! So don't even think of getting help from me. If you want to court death, then that has nothing to do with me!*

However, just when he was about to flee via teleportation, Xu Qing reached out and grabbed him.

"Teleport me away," he said calmly.

The shocked parrot was already cursing in his heart, but had no choice other than to begin a teleportation. However, it didn't quite act fast enough.

Xu Qing squeezed a bit harder, and the parrot let loose a squawk. One of his feathers collapsed into ashes, and then the power of teleportation surged out. They vanished. Only the ashes of the feather remained behind, drifting away with the wind.

A moment later, a massive boom rang out as a vortex appeared in that spot. Astonishing fluctuations rolled out, filled with intense rage. It didn't just happen in that spot. There were other vortexes in other nearby spots, all of them searching for the same thing.

As it turned out, the parrot had exaggerated his teleportation abilities to a certain degree. He wasn't capable of teleporting very long distances. Only a few hundred kilometers away, the parrot and Xu Qing popped into existence.

Xu Qing wasn't actually surprised, and had actually assumed something like this would happen. The moment they materialized, he squeezed down hard on the parrot.

The parrot let out a yelp and used another feather to initiate a second teleportation.

The process continued after that. At Xu Qing's urging, the parrot would howl in grief as he lost a feather and teleported further away, taking Xu Qing racing toward the edge of the desert. Eventually, the parrot stopped howling so much, and instead started cursing.

"You're not even human, are you? You're completely deranged! You're more of an animal than I am! Y-y-you... you schmuck! I'd tell you to go to hell, but all dogs go to heaven! This is outrageous! Duck you, motherclucker! I'm gonna die! Heeeelp!"

After a few dozen additional teleportations, they were getting close to the edge of the desert. The parrot could hardly breathe. "Stop, I beg of you! I'm still just a kid! I can't handle this...."

He was now trembling with fear, and barely had any feathers left, leaving him looking naked. As he looked in terror at the expressionless Xu Qing, he came to the conclusion that he was the most diabolical monster in existence. A terrifying nightmare.

"Bastard!"

Chapter 589: The Hunger from Red Moon Authority

Despite the parrot's inner anguish, he didn't dare to continue with any more cursing. In a weeping voice, he continued, "Sect Uncle, I really can't handle this. I can't do any more. Please, let me off the hook...."

Xu Qing looked at the parrot.

"Sect Uncle," the parrot wept, "I-I-I... I can only teleport by using feathers. Look at how young I am! I haven't even gotten married yet! See, I hardly have any feathers left. If other birds see me they'll laugh to death!"

The parrot wasn't lying. His teleportation powers did rely on his feathers, and he had long been very proud of his multicolored look. In fact, whenever he had run into other birds, he had always sneered derisively at their drab coats. As far as he was concerned, he was the most beautiful bird in heaven and earth. One of a kind! But now... he looked naked and bald, which filled his heart with sorrow and indignation.

Xu Qing, meanwhile, was paying attention to the distant fluctuations. Then he checked to see how many feathers the parrot still had left.

"You have a few more, don't you?" he said, squeezing the parrot.

“Drop dead!” the parrot screamed as he initiated another teleportation. Xu Qing and the parrot vanished, leaving behind a single feather crumbling to ash in the wind.

A moment later, they materialized a few hundred kilometers away. Before the parrot could say anything, Xu Qing squeezed him hard.

Another scream echoed out across the lands....

A dozen or so teleportations later, the parrot only had a single feather left. At long last, Xu Qing had, with the help of the parrot, shaken the pursuit of the white-robed cultivators. The edge of the desert was only about fifteen kilometers away. The white wind here was very weak, and hardly any dandelions could be seen.

Xu Qing breathed a sigh of relief.

The parrot sagged weakly in Xu Qing’s hand. He looked like a slab of meat, his expression despairing, his face ashen, and his skin red, swollen, and covered with dots. Each of those dots was a spot where a feather had once grown. But now... the parrot only had a single feather left on one of his wings. He looked blankly at that feather. A few months ago when he started out on his journey, he could never have imagined in his wildest dreams that something like this would happen.

“Thank you,” Xu Qing said softly. It probably would have been better if he didn’t say thank you. The moment he did, the parrot started crying again.

“My feathers.... How will I ever get married now? All other birds will despise me....”

Xu Qing was thinking that this parrot was actually very useful, and he was contemplating having a chat with Wu Jianwu later, to ask if he could borrow the parrot for a few decades. He wasn’t sure how long the feathers would take to grow out again, but regardless, he decided he ought to comfort the parrot a bit.

“It’s fine. They’ll grow back.”

“Sure,” the parrot wailed, “but it’ll take a really, really long time...”

As Xu Qing pondered the situation, the parrot’s single feather rustled back and forth a bit.

Meanwhile, Ling’er actually felt bad. “Poor little parrot. Big Bro Xu Qing, look, he only has one feather left! We really didn’t take his feelings into consideration.”

When the parrot heard that, his heart swelled with gratitude, and he was about to say something.

But then, Ling’er continued, “I think the lone feather actually looks pretty bad. Big Bro Xu Qing, why not teleport us one more time?”

The parrot’s eyes went wide and it instantly lapsed into a fit of rage.

“If I had a face like yours, I’d sue my parents! Calling you an idiot would be an insult to all the stupid people! The last time I saw something like you, I flushed it!”

The parrot had already lost its mind a bit, so Ling’er’s expression of compassion pushed it over the edge into madness.

Ling'er slid back into Xu Qing's sleeve. Sounding hurt, she said, "Big Bro Xu Qing, this thing is vicious. But you can't blame the little parrot. He's just a kid. I probably misspoke...."

When the shadow heard that, it spread out and hovered menacingly over the parrot. Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior also flew out and locked onto the parrot.

The parrot shivered, all while feeling even more enraged. At the moment, all he wanted to do was get back to his dad. He missed his dad.

Stroking Ling'er, Xu Qing ignored the parrot and turned to look off into the distance, and his eyes glittered. He sensed familiar fluctuations in that direction.

"Little Shadow," Xu Qing said calmly.

The shadow shivered. After sensing what was happening, it twisted to form the shape of an old man being chased by two moons.

"Li Youfei?" Xu Qing murmured. He had left a shadow eye on the old man, which was how he could identify him.

A few moments passed, then Xu Qing started moving in the direction of the fluctuations.

Instead of killing Li Youfei, he'd put a shadow eye on him so the shadow could help determine if the old man was telling the truth. As it turned out, he was more heroic than villainous, and had not revealed Xu Qing's presence to anyone. After that, Xu Qing's killing intent toward him had died down, and he'd had the shadow keep tabs on him while Xu Qing did his curse research.

It looked like cultivators from the Red Moon Cathedral were chasing him right now, and Xu Qing planned to go see exactly what was happening. It wasn't very often he got a chance to deal with a couple of godslaves. He had done a lot of curse research on animals, but was also interested in doing research on cultivators from the Red Moon Cathedral.

Based on all my work from the better part of the last year, my guess is that the Red Moon Cathedral cultivators don't have the curse in them. Either that, or the curse isn't as strong. But the question is whether or not I can absorb it....

Licking his lips, he put on the concealment of invisibility and began the hunt.

A few dozen kilometers away at the edge of the Greenhair Badlands, a freakish being was speeding along. The thing was about fifteen meters tall, and looked like a mountain of flesh. It had over a dozen arms growing out all over it, as well as seven or eight tumor-like heads. Shockingly, one of the growths that hung down over its chest had an almost unrecognizable face on it.

If you looked closely, you would probably recognize Li Youfei. However, he was as ashen as death, and his aura was very weak. He was suffering from some serious mutations, and also had some very wicked wounds. It seemed that every rotation of his cultivation base caused his internal organs to hurt, and caused him to cough up blood uncontrollably. Most notable, there was a huge wound on his chest, within which was visible shattered bone.

Most astonishing of all was that there were a host of dandelions all over him, madly absorbing his life force. All the while, flesh grew out from him all over, spreading out constantly. Anyone who

looked at him would find him exceedingly gruish. This was what happened when one went out into the white wind.

He was being chased through the hazy whiteness by two figures in red. They seemed to be slowly catching up to him. They had Nascent Soul fluctuations, and were surrounded by a red mist. The power of Crimson Mother protected them, allowing these two godslaves to move around freely in the white wind.

It was obvious that they could catch up to him if they wanted. But they seemed very relaxed, as if they were just out taking a dog for a walk.

“Run, Li Youfei! The edge of the desert is just ahead!”

“Once you reach the border, you won’t be tormented by the wind of the White Mother. Just a few more kilometers now. Hurry!”

“Then again, even if you escape, our Lady’s curse is about to explode out of control in you. Don’t forget to tell us which hurts worse, the curse, or the White Mother’s wind.”

“Or you could beg for your life. Maybe we’ll suddenly feel merciful and end things for you right away.”

Brutal gleams could be seen in the godslaves’ eyes. They were lucky to have run into Li Youfei out in the white wind. He was well-known in the Red Moon Cathedral, having killed many rogue cultivators who wanted to work for the cathedral. Although he hadn’t caused a huge amount of trouble, he was still annoying to them.

However, *when fishing for a small fish, the fisherman won’t do much until the bait is bit.* And Li Youfei was good at staying out of sight.

That said, Li Youfei could still be of value to the two godslaves. If they could keep him alive but torment him to the point of causing the curse to erupt, then they could take his remains back to the cathedral, they could exchange it for rewards. That was what had led to the current situation.

Li Youfei currently felt wrapped up in despair.

He knew that there was no way for him to escape. The white wind had allowed him to escape the Bitter Life Mountains and the person he had offended there. However, he ended up badly hurt in the process. That injury just kept weakening him. And then he ran into the godslaves from the Red Moon Cathedral, which removed just about any hope he had of surviving.

I’m not going to make it out of this....

All he could do was laugh bitterly in his heart. There had been a lot of twists and turns in the Bitter Life Mountains over the past few years. All he had wanted to do was join the Moonrebel Congregation. But godslaves weren’t easy to kill, and they rarely went out alone.

That was why he had never been able to meet that specific qualification to join the Moonrebel Congregation. But recently, he had learned that one of the most powerful rogue cultivators in the Bitter Life Mountains had an apprentice that had secretly become a godslave. So he had taken a risk and set up an ambush.

The ambush actually succeeded. But before he could collect the body, the Master's divine sense arrived and destroyed his traction avatar. Then it started chasing after his true form. If it weren't for the white wind covering some of his tracks, he would have definitely died. He was left with no choice but to flee into the wind. Right now, the despair in his heart caused his eyes to glimmer with ferocity and determination.

"If I'm going to die, I'll take you fools with me!"

Killing intent surged in his heart, and he was about to lure the godslaves close to him when, all of a sudden, he heard a bloodcurdling scream from behind him. Not even the wind could drown out the terror in that cry.

Stunned, Li Youfei turned. What he saw caused his pupils to constrict!

A massive hand had appeared in the white wind. It was violet, and around the size of an average person. It had grabbed one of the godslaves, and then yanked them back into the wind. It happened so quickly that the godslave couldn't even struggle or fight back. As the miserable shriek rang out, the godslave's body rapidly withered, as if his life force were being sucked out of him. The other godslave was visibly shocked, and was so taken aback he started trembling.

Li Youfei struggled to control his breathing. He had no idea what exactly was happening, but he did know that the death of even just one godslave meant he now had a chance to survive. Therefore, without the slightest hesitation, he ignored his severe injuries and unleashed everything his cultivation base was capable of to speed away in the opposite direction.

The other godslave was not inclined to go chasing after Li Youfei. Right now, he was dealing with massive waves of shock as he realized he had just sensed the aura and fluctuations of Crimson Mother. And they surpassed anything that he had ever sensed from any godservants or even godheralds.

A god!

The godslave's heart was already pounding. His energy, blood, and cultivation base vibrated, and based on the blessing inside of him, he knew that his senses couldn't be deceiving him. The hand that had just killed his companion was definitely emanating the High God aura of his lady and mistress. As he trembled, a seemingly empty voice drifted through the wind.

"Come to me, my servant. Over here... come..."

Li Youfei was too far away to hear that voice. But the godslave heard it clearly, and it made him tremble even harder. That voice contained the aura of Crimson Mother, and it made him lose any ability to fight back against it. Shaking, he instinctively walked forward, disappearing into the white wind.

Sometime later, a person emerged. Violet light glittered in his eyes, and violet moon fluctuations rolled out in all directions from him. Within the white wind, that violet color made it seem like a god had arrived. After walking about thirty meters out from the wind, the violet light in Xu Qing's eyes faded, and he burped.

It's just as I expected. In the bodies of the cultivators from the Red Moon Cathedral, the curse is turned into a blessing. It's the source of their faith. The more faith they show in Crimson Mother of the red moon, the stronger the blessing gets, allowing them to summon corresponding power from

the red moon. And just now... I devoured their faith power, thus augmenting my violet moon godly authority. It wasn't much... but it was delicious.

He licked his lips. Devouring two Nascent Soul godslaves hadn't been very complicated. Because of the faith in them, all he had to do was emit the godly authority of the violet moon, and they became like walking food that came right to him.

However, if it was a Spirit Trove godservant, it wouldn't have been as easy. Thinking back to the red-garbed woman he'd encountered at the bottom of the Heavenfire Sea, he sighed. *I can actually do the same thing with any living being in the Moonrite Region, because all of them have the curse. The difference is just that it hasn't been turned into faith in Crimson Mother.*

As he continued, gurgling sounds drifted out from within him, along with a sense of hunger. Apparently, eating that red moon faith left him with the desire for more. Stopping in place, he took a moment to sense himself, then frowned.

Why does eating their faith make me hungry...?

At least the hunger wasn't very intense, and with a bit of effort, he suppressed it. Then he sped up and vanished into the wind. Half a day later, Xu Qing used the shadow eye to track down a certain mountain of flesh.

It was none other than Li Youfei.

Chapter 590: How Very Rare!

The white wind blew, stirring the sand and swaying the white plants.

Li Youfei lay on the ground, as still as a corpse. His fifteen-meter frame emanated a nauseating stench that the wind couldn't dispel, and could be smelled from quite a distance away. Even from a distance it was possible to see parts of his flesh rotting away to reveal bones beneath. He was completely enveloped in an aura of death. He was in this state because of a combination of the grisly nature of the white wind and the flare-up of Crimson Mother's curse. He was stricken both in his physical body and his soul. He wasn't very far away from being actually dead. Or more precisely, he was already half a step into the Yellow Springs. Only a scrap of defiance within him kept hold of the very last bit of life force he had left. However, that defiance and struggle also inflicted more pain and suffering on him.

Xu Qing approached, checked his condition, and then shook his head.

Can't be saved.

Xu Qing had some painquelling lozenges, but all they did was reduce the torment of curse flare-ups. They didn't actually treat the curse itself. In fact, as far as Xu Qing could tell, they actually made it worse.

If Li Youfei ate a painquelling lozenge, it wouldn't just fail to save him. It would probably overwhelm the last scrap of life that existed within him.

Since Li Youfei couldn't be saved, Xu Qing took back the shadow eye and turned to leave. However, after taking only a few steps, he stopped walking, turned, and looked again at Li Youfei. A thoughtful look appeared in his eyes.

Hold on. Something's off about this situation. He shouldn't have lasted so long with a curse flare-up like this. And he also shouldn't have a scrap of life force left in him. It doesn't make sense.

Suddenly curious, Xu Qing walked back. This time he looked more closely. A moment later, he grabbed Li Youfei and sped away.

Leaving the Greenhair Badlands, he went to a mountain some 500 kilometers away, quickly hewed out a cave, and put Li Youfei inside. After going back to get rid of all traces of his passage and presence, he returned to Li Youfei and studied him even more closely. He even went so far as to cut some of the rotting flesh off him to study it.

The next day, Xu Qing's eyes shone brightly. He had found the answer to the question.

It's the white wind. That wind is a catalyst that actually bolsters life force and leads to the chaotic growths. The point of it is to nourish the bug eggs and facilitate their growth.

That's why Li Youfei hasn't died from the curse flare up. The white wind and the curse are actually at odds with each other. Although the white wind isn't a match for the curse, it's strong enough to keep him alive.

Xu Qing was visibly moved.

So, this white wind can actually resist the curse? What is it?

Eyes shining, Xu Qing squatted next to Li Youfei and started slicing his flesh open to extract the bug eggs and the dandelions. It was a gruesome process. He needed to make a lot of incisions, and much of the flesh was rotting so badly that merely touching it caused it to turn into a noxious black sludge.

However, Xu Qing was very patient. He was like an extremely focused artisan who paid no heed to the materials he was wasting as he carefully sculpted away. Before long, Li Youfei was covered with countless wounds. In some cases, Xu Qing just cut the flesh completely off.

With each bug egg that was taken away, less of his life force was being taken away by them, which meant he was able to resist the curse even more. Although that power couldn't surpass the curse, at least the life force within him was able to last a bit longer.

Unfortunately, it wasn't going to have much effect in the long run. From what Xu Qing could tell, it would only be between three to five days before Li Youfei's life force ran out, and he was overcome by the curse. However, that gave Xu Qing some inspiration.

Li Youfei is actually lucky. Given his current state, it actually makes sense to try a painquelling lozenge.

After thinking it over, Xu Qing took out a painquelling lozenge and put it into Li Youfei's mouth. Then he waved his hand, sending hundreds of violet threads out, which stabbed into Li Youfei. But the painquelling lozenge was only the first step. Xu Qing planned to thoroughly study Li Youfei, using the same methods he'd used to refine painquelling lozenges.

Chances are he's going to die anyway. But if he lives, maybe I can consider using the white wind as a new direction in my research.

Sitting down cross-legged, he got to work.

The next day, he left the cave. Following the directions of the hapless parrot, he traveled and experimented on Li Youfei at the same time. Thanks to his work, the curse in Li Youfei was slowly fading. He was also able to make medicinal pills made from Li Youfei's flesh. Every time the curse flared up, Xu Qing would feed one of those pills to him. The result was that the life force within him would be bolstered.

Xu Qing was absolutely delighted. It was like he finally had material to experiment with that he'd previously only dreamed of.

A month passed.

Xu Qing was now deep into the western part of the Moonrite Region. On one particular evening in a random valley, he finished experimenting on Li Youfei. Extracting all of the threads, he fed Li Youfei another painquelling lozenge made of his own flesh. This particular pill was different from the ordinary variety. Thanks to his research on Li Youfei, he had dramatically altered the painquelling lozenge formula. Although there was still more work to be done, he was close to being finished.

After feeding Li Youfei the pill, Xu Qing quietly said, "If you're awake now, there's no need to pretend to be dead."

Li Youfei shivered. Having no other choice, he opened his eyes and looked fearfully at Xu Qing. The reality was that he had regained consciousness three days before....

He'd realized Xu Qing had been experimenting on him, but was too terrified to say anything. And then he realized that Xu Qing was actually feeding him strange medicinal pills that seemed to be dispelling the curse power within him. He was completely shocked. But at the same time, he wasn't stupid. Given his wealth of experience in life, he quickly guessed what the medicinal pills were made from. It left him so stunned that even now he hadn't fully recovered.

During the three days he'd been conscious, he'd counted how many pills Xu Qing fed him. Eight.

Even if I sold myself, I wouldn't have enough to buy one of those pills... what exactly is his goal...? That was what Li Youfei had asked himself multiple times during the three days.

Now that he couldn't fake death any more, he couldn't hold back from asking about his speculations.

"Grandmaster, were you feeding me...?"

"Painquelling lozenges," Xu Qing replied calmly.

Even though that was what Li Youfei had suspected, hearing the answer confirmed caused him to reel mentally. Shivering, he asked, "And... how many did you give me?"

Xu Qing did some calculations and then looked at Li Youfei. "It's been a month. I gave you a bit over a hundred."

Li Youfei's eyes went wide and he twitched. He knew full well how expensive painquelling lozenges were. Even Spirit Trove experts would go crazy for them. And he'd consumed over a hundred....

He had no reason to doubt Xu Qing. After all, he knew for sure that he'd consumed eight pills in three days.

If news of this spread, it would cause pandemonium. At the moment, he felt like a beggar who'd been fancied by a rich businessman who casually gave him a billion spirit stones. All of a sudden, he didn't want to think about it. He didn't want to consider why Xu Qing had done this. Trembling, he got to his feet then immediately dropped to his knees to kowtow.

“Grandmaster! Sir, I'm not sure why you did this for me. But it doesn't matter. Sir... you've done too much!”

Xu Qing looked at him and opened his mouth to speak, but then his eyes hardened and he looked toward the entrance of the valley.

They were in the depths of the western part of the Moonrite Region. The sky was dusky, and there was very little light. Because of that, it wasn't possible to see much more than the weeds growing around the valley. The whispering night wind carried with it the sound of distant drums and gongs. It seemed like there was a large group of people heading in the direction of the valley.

Li Youfei noticed Xu Qing's flashing eyes, and quickly jumped up to take a defensive position in front of him. Which was what Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior usually did.

The patriarch immediately flew out, glared scornfully at Li Youfei, and then turned his attention to the valley entrance.

The cacophony grew louder, and soon a group of people entered the valley. They looked like they were made from clay. However, they wore clothing, and there were over a hundred of them. Gongs were being beaten in the front of the procession, and drums were being banged in the back. In the middle, a group of a few dozen of the clay people were carrying a stone shrine. [1]

Inside the shrine was a fox made of clay, wearing a red robe. It had makeup on its face, and wasn't moving at all, as if it were dead. [2]

The arrival of the procession caused a sinister wind to blow through the valley, stirring the weeds and leaves. However, the clay people didn't pay any attention to Xu Qing and Li Youfei as they walked right down the middle of the valley.

Xu Qing looked them over. He was already used to the many freakish and grotesque things that existed in the world, so he wasn't surprised. Beings like this were usually the type who would only bully the weak and fear the strong, so there was little point in paying attention to them. However, there also wasn't any point in creating a conflict by blocking their path. Expression calm, he released some cultivation base fluctuations and then took a few steps back to make way.

And thus the procession passed by. However, when the shrine was going right in front of Xu Qing, the clay fox inside turned and looked at both him and Li Youfei.

The clay eyes rippled, transforming into something like glittering gemstones that could pierce all the way to the soul.

Then the fox spoke in the languid, sultry voice of a woman. [3]

“Primal yang? I can't believe you have a Nascent Soul cultivation base, but still have primal yang! And it's so pure! Completely unplucked! How very rare....” [4]