

Timescape 601

Chapter 601: You're In Trouble!

Ning Yan, Wu Jianwu, and the Captain had no idea where the Green Spirit Pharmacy was located. But seeing the ruins of the city left them astonished.

Xu Qing suddenly blurred into motion, vanishing from inside the sun and appearing in the city right in front of the former location of the Green Spirit Pharmacy. His expression was grim. The medicine shop had long since been reduced to rubble. The entire area was in shambles. The sign was still there, but it was broken into a handful of pieces.

Ling'er appeared next to Xu Qing, a dazed look on her face as she looked at what was left behind of the shop.

The Captain and the others appeared one after another. Looking around at the devastation, the Captain cleared his throat.

"Little Ah Qing, um... did we go the wrong way? There's no medicine shop here!" He took a few steps forward, squatted down, and picked up a few of the pieces of the sign. He looked back at Xu Qing. "Actually, it looks like there really was a medicine shop here at one time.... Hey, check out this sign. It looks like one of the characters is 'Green.'"

Xu Qing's expression became grimmer.

Ning Yan blinked a few times and then quietly said, "My condolences, Biggest Bro...."

Xu Qing's eyes turned ice cold.

Meanwhile, there was no way Wu Jianwu could possibly pass up an opportunity like this. Sighing, he said, "*The sea of life becomes a cesspit; the beautiful flowers have turned to shit. Don't believe me, just take a look—*"

Before Wu Jianwu could finish his poetry, the parrot flew out and excitedly said, "*The great heavens spare none from sorrow!!*"

Xu Qing radiated intense coldness as he glanced at the parrot.

And then Ling'er finally reacted; her face swelled with fury. This was her shop. Her home! And now it was destroyed. Sensing Ling'er's anger, the shadow also pulsed with emotional fluctuations of rage.

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior flew out into the open, thrumming loudly. "Milord. Milady. Say the word and I'll go slaughter whoever did this!"

Not to be outdone, Li Youfei stepped forward and furiously said, "That's right! I want to see who had the outrageous gall to do something like this!"

He called the Bitter Life Mountains home as well, and considering that the grandmaster's medicine shop had been razed to the ground, he felt like it was his responsibility to help. It didn't matter who was responsible, he would do everything possible to deal with them.

The arrival of Xu Qing and the others had now caught the attention of the gray-robed cultivators who were bustling about in the area. With malicious gazes, they started surrounding them.

Before they could get very close, though, a prismatic beam of light approached at high speed. Ignoring the gray-robed cultivators, it shot to Xu Qing and resolved into the leader of the Epactic Soil Sect, Chen Fanzhuo.

After the grandmaster's medicine shop was destroyed, he had been keeping a close eye on the area, and therefore, hurried over as soon as he realized Xu Qing was back. Expression one of fury, he clasped hands and bowed.

“Grandmaster, I wish I could have done something, but I was powerless to keep your medicine shop safe.”

Face expressionless, Xu Qing looked at Chen Fanzhuo. “Who's responsible?”

“It's a new group that decided to take over this area. They drove everyone away and then started building their sect headquarters here. The leader is a dwarf who calls himself Sir Tree-Dao.”

Upon hearing his words, Li Youfei's eyes went wide. He felt like his mind had just been struck by 100,000 lightning bolts, leaving him reeling mentally. Rushing over to Chen Fanzhuo, he said, “Are you sure it's a dwarf called Sir Tree-Dao?”

Looking surprised, Chen Fanzhuo nodded.

After seeing that nod, Li Youfei no longer felt like he had been struck by 100,000 lightning bolts. Instead, it felt like 10,000,000 lightning bolts smashing into him. Grief welled up within him. Trembling from head to toe, he flopped to the ground in front of Xu Qing.

“Grandmaster.. this is a misunderstanding. It must be a misunderstanding.... Sir Tree-Dao is a novitiate apprentice of mine.... I can handle this. I'll deal with it! Right now!!”

Li Youfei was actually terrified. The thought of his own novitiate apprentice causing a disaster like this left him shaking to the core. He wished he could track that apprentice down right now and slap him to death.

Xu Qing looked calmly back at Li Youfei.

That gaze made Li Youfei think about all the experiments Xu Qing had carried out on his own body. Then he thought about everything else he had seen and experienced recently, and he couldn't help but look over at 'grandpa.'

Shivering again, he raised his voice and said, “Grandmaster, I'll handle this post haste!”

He quickly sent his divine sense out and locked onto a specific location. Then, throwing all caution to the wind, he unleashed the power of his Nascent Soul cultivation and shouted, “I'm the Master of your sect leader, fools! Back down now! Make a single wrong move and you're all dead!”

Such words backed by a Nascent Soul cultivation base left the gray-robed cultivators feeling so shaken that none of them dared to do anything.

With that, Li Youfei unleashed all of the power he was capable of to rush toward the spot his divine sense had locked onto. Inside he was cursing to death. *You damn unfilial apprentice! Where did you get the outrageous gall to destroy the medicine shop of someone as terrifying as this??*

Truth be told, he actually liked this apprentice a lot. But because he had so many enemies, he had never told Sir Tree-Dao his true identity and background. As a result, he couldn't just stand by while his apprentice did something so suicidal. Moving at top speed, he quickly arrived at Sir Tree-Dao's sect headquarters. Not holding anything back, he made a beeline for the building where he sensed his apprentice's aura.

Sir Tree-Dao was still there kneeling respectfully in front of the black-robed old man, receiving some cultivation pointers.

"Sir Tree-Dao, your cultivation base is passable. But your techniques are all random. If you want to cultivate my personal techniques, you need to do something about all of those miscellaneous things you learned before. You're talented, but sadly, you became an apprentice to the wrong Master. That's why you haven't made much cultivation progress in the past few years."

Deep within the black-robed old man's eyes was a flicker of greed. He actually had his own reasons for accepting Sir Tree-Dao as an apprentice. Just as he was about to continue speaking, he noticed something outside and frowned.

Meanwhile, Sir Tree-Dao very respectfully said, "I was a fool in the past, Master. Ai. If only I'd known that *there is always someone better out there*. But instead, I became an apprentice to the wrong Master." The moment he finished speaking, he heard a familiar voice from outside.

"Sir Tree-Dao, get the hell out here right now to talk to your Master!"

Sir Tree-Dao's eyes went wide, and his jaw nearly dropped. Turning, he watched as the door of the building slammed open and Li Youfei appeared there.

Sir Tree-Dao didn't recognize Li Youfei's appearance, but he definitely recognized his gaze, his voice, and his fluctuations. In the blink of an eye, Sir Tree-Dao realized that this was the mysterious person he had previously called Master. Stunned, he opened his mouth to speak. However, Li Youfei wasn't in the mood to sit around pondering the situation. As soon as he laid eyes on Sir Tree-Dao, he reached out to grab him.

"Come with me right now, you rebellious apprentice! If you apologize to the grandmaster this instant, and offer compensation, you might still get out of all this alive!"

There was no way Sir Tree-Dao could resist. That said, he wasn't even sure what was going on. However, before he could do anything, the black-robed old man snorted coldly.

"How impudent!" Backed by his Spirit Trove cultivation base, the black-robed old man's cold snort echoed like heavenly thunder.

Li Youfei staggered backward, blood oozing out of his mouth as he finally looked at the old man in black. "Guru Blackeyes!"

“Li Youfei!” Guru Blackeyes said coolly. “So, you’re the one who had Sir Tree-Dao as an apprentice before. Well he’s my apprentice now. As of now, he’s not your concern!”

Li Youfei could obviously see that his apprentice had left his tutelage to join another Master, so he nodded. Looking at Sir Tree-Dao, he said, “Well, what are you going to do?”

Sir Tree-Dao hesitated for a moment, then clasped hands to Li Youfei. “Senior....”

“Fine, I get it,” Li Youfei interrupted. If things had been like they were before, he would have continued to vent his anger. But now, he could breathe a sigh of relief. “Very well. As you said, this doesn’t have anything to do with me. You’re no longer my apprentice. But considering that we used to be apprentice and Master, Sir Tree-Dao, let me give you a little warning.... You really pissed off the grandmaster.”

Li Youfei shook his head. At almost exactly the same time, footsteps could be heard outside, along with some agonized shrieks. A moment later, Xu Qing arrived with everyone else.

Sir Tree-Dao was clearly surprised at that.

However, Guru Blackeyes simply looked over the group quickly, then said, “A few measly Nascent Soul cultivators? Since when did people like that think they could start showing off? Sir Tree-Dao, you’ll now get a chance to see that technique I taught you in action.”

Guru Blackeyes stood, his expression tranquil. Clapping his hands behind his back, he walked out of the room with a single step. There, his Spirit Trove cultivation base erupted, causing a secret trove to appear over his head. The secret trove seemed full of erupting volcanoes. And it was just possible to hear the roar of a heavenly dao within it, which caused the surrounding natural laws to stir. Meanwhile, innumerable projections appeared behind him, vicious and howling with rage.

It was a very impressive sight. Then Guru Blackeyes took a second step forward, placing him right in front of Xu Qing and the others. Behind him, his secret trove emanated astonishing pressure, causing rumbling sounds to fill heaven and earth. What was more, a black magical symbol began to form in the sky overhead. It was fully 3,000 meters in size, and pulsed with enough might to shatter boulders.

“Watch closely, my apprentice. This is the technique I just imparted to you. The Grand Devil Seal!”

Guru Blackeyes casually waved his hand with the intent of crushing the pitiful animals in front of him.

A strange expression appeared in the Captain’s eyes. Ning Yan sneered and Wu Jianwu stood there with his chin stuck up. Xu Qing’s face was completely expressionless. And then, all of them turned to the Heir Apparent and clasped hands.

“Grandpa.”

The Heir Apparent, who had been playing with the parrot, turned and looked at Guru Blackeyes.

One look.

That was all it took for Guru Blackeyes' mind to start spinning. Going numb from head to toe, he flopped to the ground, all while his Grand Devil Seal faded from existence. Then, all the blood in his body sprayed out of his mouth. Clearly, he didn't have as much blood as the Captain, making it hard to tell how badly he was injured. Everything went deathly silent.

Chapter 602: A Cozy Little Medicine Shop (part 1)

Sir Tree-Dao's eyes were wide and blank with astonishment. As he watched Guru Blackeyes coughing up blood, he almost couldn't believe that what he was seeing was real. In his mind and heart, Guru Blackeyes was unsurpassably powerful.

"W-what's... what's going on...?" Trembling, Sir Tree-Dao struggled to breathe, and he felt like the world was spinning around him. Then he started to go weak at the knees. He really couldn't understand how all of this could be happening. What kind of a person could do this to Guru Blackeyes with a single look? What was more, why would a person like that be looking for him? He hadn't done anything to offend any powerful experts!

As Sir Tree-Dao stood there, completely dumbfounded, Li Youfei sighed.

Although Sir Tree-Dao had deserted him, he was still his apprentice. Therefore, he strode forward, grabbed Sir Tree-Dao, and dragged him over to Xu Qing, where he slapped him across the face. Then he slapped him again. And again. After slapping him until his face swelled up so much his features were unrecognizable, Li Youfei bowed respectfully to Xu Qing.

"Grandmaster, shall I kill him?"

Those words caused Sir Tree-Dao to finally regain his senses. He was wracked with pain, yet didn't dare to moan. Voice trembling, he said, "M-mas... Master, this is a misunderstanding. I-I-I... I didn't offend anyone!"

Glaring angrily at his rebellious apprentice, Li Youfei gritted his teeth and replied, "Are you the one who destroyed the Green Spirit Pharmacy?"

"Green Spirit Pharmacy?" Shivering, Sir Tree-Dao tried to figure out what Li Youfei was talking about. Only after thinking about it for a moment did he remember that little medicine shop in that city. His eyes widened again, and rumbling sounds exploded in his mind. All of a sudden, he recalled how Chen Fanzhuo had warned him not to even touch the Green Spirit Pharmacy. And he had ignored that advice....

How could this be? What medicine shop was that? Why is this happening...?

Sir Tree-Dao's heart filled with both remorse and terror. His out-of-control emotions, coupled with the severe beating from Li Youfei, caused him to pass out.

When Li Youfei saw the look on Sir Tree-Dao's face, it made him think back to the days when he had instructed him in the ways of cultivation. Sighing inwardly, he cast a pleading glance at Xu Qing. He knew full well that his former apprentice's life would be determined by a single thought.

Xu Qing noted the look on Li Youfei's face, and then looked over at the unconscious Sir Tree-Dao.

“He has two hours to put it back like it was,” Xu Qing said tranquilly.

Li Youfei exhaled slowly. Clasp hands, he bowed gratefully to Xu Qing. There was no way Sir Tree-Dao would die from a little beating, so Li Youfei slapped him awake, then grabbed him and flew off.

Two hours later, thanks to Sir Tree-Dao working hard and screaming at his subordinates to do the same, the Green Spirit Pharmacy was back. It wasn't just the medicine shop. The entire city was back to its original state. For that to happen in only two hours went to show that everyone involved in the rebuilding work didn't dare to dally.

In order to ensure that the interior of the Green Spirit Pharmacy was the same as before, Li Youfei found Chen Fanzhuo. After all, Chen Fanzhuo had been inside before and knew what it looked like. With Chen Fanzhuo's help, the Green Spirit Pharmacy looked just like it did before. The sign was fixed, and the door even had the notice Xu Qing had put there saying that the place was temporarily closed.

In terms of the citizens of the city... Li Youfei demanded that Sir Tree-Dao and his subordinates dress up to play the part. In the end, the city basically became their new sect headquarters.

Xu Qing currently stood outside his little medicine shop, looking around at the familiar sight. He felt a little better now. Clasp hands to the Heir Apparent, he said, “Many thanks, grandpa. Please, after you, sir.”

Ling'er stood next to him looking very pleased. Looking at the Heir Apparent, she proudly said, “Thank you, grandpa, for helping my Big Bro Xu Qing rebuild his medicine shop.”

The Heir Apparent smiled, clasped his hands behind his back, and walked inside.

Xu Qing followed. Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu looked at the sweat-soaked Li Youfei. Then each of them patted his shoulder on the way through the door. Once everyone was inside, Ling'er gave a short tour to the Heir Apparent.

“Grandpa, this is the back room where Big Bro Xu Qing concocts medicine. And this is the counter where I keep the books. Business has been great!” As she spoke, she took out the little sapling and put it back in its normal spot. “This is Sprouty. He's very cute, and when he's happy, he dances.”

The parrot immediately looked over. The little sapling shivered and then started swaying back and forth.

As Ling'er showed off the shop, the Captain looked around a bit. Then he lowered his voice and leaned over to Xu Qing. “Little Ah Qing, this shop is a bit small, don't you think? How many people can stay here anyway?”

When Li Youfei heard that, he immediately took out a jade slip and sent orders to some of the surrounding ‘citizens’ to come expand the medicine shop on either side. Within moments, the shop was much larger than before.

Later that evening, as the city quieted down, the lamps in the Green Spirit Pharmacy lit up, filling the shop with warm light. Within that lamplight, everyone sat around the table in the shop.

The Heir Apparent was playing with the parrot. Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu were trying hard to get used to having a Smoldering God around. Sadly, they were just too nervous to relax in such a situation. Xu Qing and Ling'er had already gotten used to the situation, and the latter had no trouble at all bringing a smile to the Heir Apparent's face.

The Captain, meanwhile, blinked a few times as he looked around. It had already become obvious to him while traveling that the Heir Apparent had two reasons for coming to the Bitter Life Mountains. Although he wasn't sure exactly what those two goals were, he knew one of them had something to do with Xu Qing.

Maybe he's optimistic about Xu Qing's violet moon power. Perhaps he wants to make it stronger, and help little Ah Qing grow up faster. That way, he can make use of Little Ah Qing's strength to unseal his other brothers and sisters. Although, the problem obviously can't be solved that easily. The Red Moon Cathedral definitely has their guard up now.

The Captain thought back to the journey, and everything the Heir Apparent did. Obviously, the Heir Apparent enjoyed the mundane affairs of daily life. And he seemed to like the medicine shop.

That makes sense. He's all alone and without any real family, so of course he enjoys the warmth of living with a bunch of grandkids....

Having reached this point in his train of thought, the Captain looked at Ning Yan and the others.

"You lot!" he said. "Which of you can cook? Hurry up and make something to eat for grandpa."

Ning Yan looked back, stunned. Wu Jianwu shook his head. Li Youfei hesitated. But Ling'er's eyes glittered and she jumped up. She had learned a lot about cooking from the women in Duanmu Zang's city of fireflies. And her Big Bro Xu Qing always loved the dishes she made. Therefore, she opened her mouth to speak.

Before she could, Xu Qing held out his arm in front of her.

"I'll do it," he said. He stood. But then he hesitated for a moment. "Except we don't have any food."

When Xu Qing said he would cook, the Captain was intrigued. "Alright, who has some food?" he asked.

Wu Jianwu suddenly looked at the parrot, who grimaced a bit before finally producing a pile of big fish. The parrot loved eating fish. Back on his journey to find Xu Qing, he had caught quite a few. And even now, he would often find opportunities to go out and catch some fish to eat. It was only natural that his own father would know about that.

After the parrot handed over all his surplus food, he stared impatiently at Xu Qing. There were some things he really wanted to say to Xu Qing, but didn't dare to. Instead, he turned his angry glare upon the Captain and the others.

"What are the rest of you sitting around for? Can't you see how dirty this place is! Start cleaning!"

The Captain smiled. Ning Yan's eyes glittered profoundly. Wu Jianwu pretended to see neither of those things, as they knew that Erniu's plan was still on the verge of being implemented.

Therefore, everyone got to work. The floor needed to be scrubbed. The table needed to be wiped down. The medicinal pills needed to be organized. And the parrot demanded that all of them change into rough hemp garments while they were working, the result being that nobody even looked like a cultivator.

When the Captain saw how much work there was to be done, he felt that the Heir Apparent could do with another maidservant. Nethersprite came to mind, so he brought her out of the world fragment.

When Nethersprite appeared in the medicine shop, her aura flared and she ground her teeth furiously.

“Chen Erniu, you goddamned—”

Ning Yan and Wu Jianwu didn't even spare a glance for Nethersprite. They just kept working.

And before she could even finish speaking, the Captain glared at her and interrupted, “Behave yourself, Little Spritey! Look around! Can't you read the room?”

Feeling very pleased with himself, the Captain pointed over Nethersprite's shoulder. Nethersprite's eyes went wide as she realized that something was very off about the situation. Without even thinking about it, she looked briefly over her shoulder.

One look....

Shortly thereafter, there was a new maidservant in the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

It was in that manner that time passed. Soon, it was dark outside and the wind had picked up. It was a cold night, but it wasn't possible to see much lamplight in the mudbrick city. Everyone just sat shivering in their houses. But in the little medicine shop, Xu Qing's cooking caused a fragrant aroma to spread. The flickering lamps created a very warm atmosphere.

After about two hours in the kitchen, Xu Qing carried out a handful of dishes and placed them on the table.

It smelled delicious. It was a fish banquet! There was fish stew, broiled fish skin, fried fish, braised fish.... [1]

The Captain was very surprised to see such a sumptuous feast laid out.

Ling'er started salivating at the mere sight of it. Quickly grabbing some chopsticks, she looked eagerly at the Heir Apparent. [2]

The Heir Apparent smiled, picked up some fish with his chopsticks, and put it in his mouth. A moment later, he nodded.

“Don't hold back. Everybody dig in.”

Chapter 602: A Cozy Little Medicine Shop (part 2)

Curious, the Captain carefully tried a piece of fish.

“Incredible!” he said, though inside he was thinking that though it was good, it wasn’t as delicious as the flesh of gods.

Ning Yan took a bite and looked visibly moved. Inside, he was thinking that it was only so-so.

Wu Jianwu took a sip of broth and then sighed. It had been a long time since he ate mortal food, and he was inclined to spout some poetry. However, after glancing at Xu Qing, he held back.

Nethersprite, who was dressed as a maidservant, was also part of the group, took a bite. However, after that one bite, she didn’t eat anything further. She preferred human flesh. In fact, the most delicious thing she could imagine eating was Chen Erniu.

Li Youfei and Ling’er ate the most. The former made sure to say lots of flattering things, while the latter ate with her eyes shining brightly.

“I had no idea you could cook such delicious food, Big Bro Xu Qing!” Ling’er blinked a few times, all while musing that though her own cooking was actually a bit better, in the coming days, she would make sure to try her own hand at making a meal like this.

Meanwhile, the Heir Apparent swallowed a mouthful of the fish stew.

“Xu Qing, your culinary method seems to conform to the southern tradition. The flavor of this stew is unique. Normally speaking, it would be a snake stew, right? If you replaced the fish with snake, the flavor would be a lot better.”

Ling’er froze in place.

“And then there’s this fish skin dish,” the Heir Apparent continued. “It should really be snake skin instead. It’s the same with the meat. All of your culinary techniques are best applied to snakes, but instead, you created a fish banquet.”

The Heir Apparent looked curiously at Xu Qing and Ling’er.

Xu Qing looked back at the Heir Apparent. He didn’t say anything.

Ling’er inhaled sharply, and her eyes suddenly glittered with terror, and she edged slightly closer to Xu Qing. Leaning over, she quietly said, “Snakes taste disgusting, Big Bro Xu Qing. Really disgusting.”

Xu Qing nodded.

The Heir Apparent smiled. Right now, he didn’t seem at all like some mighty heir apparent to an Imperial Sovereign. Instead, he was just a kindly old grandpa. As the meal wound to an end, everyone realized that they really were getting used to living in the presence of a Smoldering God. Nethersprite washed the dishes, and the night passed uneventfully.

The next morning at dawn, the Green Spirit Pharmacy opened for business for the first time in more than half a year. In the past, it had been Ling’er who would open the main door, but today it was Wu Jianwu, dressed in his rough hemp garment. [1]

Expression flickering a bit as he stood next to the door, he gritted his teeth and then called out, *“Time passed in a blur, the sun rises again; our shop is open, how long has it been; from north and south come and spend; get a free white bolus if you buy ten!”*

His voice drifted up and down the street for all to hear.

This was the Captain’s idea. As he had pointed out, their medicine shop lacked a host out front, and Wu Jianwu was naturally the best choice. In response to Wu Jianwu’s voice, the trembling ‘citizens’ of the city emerged onto the street and looked over. Not only did they see Wu Jianwu, but also, they saw that there was a pudgy shop assistant scrubbing the floors. The fat shop assistant looked very strange, with a belly bulging so dramatically it seemed like his clothing was stuffed with something to make it so fat. Next to him was Li Youfei, who had the lowliest position of all in the group, and thus, had to play the role of the handyman.

Standing off to the side was the Captain, who had appointed himself as the guard.

“Our medicine shop is located in the extremely dangerous Bitter Life Mountains. Considering the vicious and evil cultivators that live in this area, we have to have a guard to keep the peace in our little shop.”

That was the Captain’s work manifesto.

The Heir Apparent was the elderly shopkeeper. In his hand was a pearl with which he fiddled as he smiled and looked around the shop. A person was sealed inside that pearl, and if you looked closely, you would see that it was Guru Blackeyes.

Xu Qing was the alchemist, of course, and Ling’er continued to keep the books, which she absolutely loved to do.

In the newly reopened shop, there was also a maidservant who waited on the shopkeeper. She was Nethersprite....

Business was better than ever. On the very first day, over two hundred people came in with spirit coins to buy white boluses. As a result, Ling’er was very busy with the books.

A few days passed.

Other than working on his cultivation, Xu Qing spent time on curse research.

Wu Jianwu got used to his assignment. After all, the only thing he needed to do was stand outside and come up with new poems. He was actually quite good at it.

Ning Yan sometimes got very tired and just leaned up against the door frame to rest. As he listened to Wu Jianwu’s poetry and enjoyed the down time, he unwittingly came to realize that he understood some of Wu Jianwu’s poetry. That realization filled his heart with alarm.

Li Youfei worked the hardest of all. In addition to all the random jobs he had to do, he also had to give orders to Sir Tree-Dao. He needed to make sure that Sir Tree-Dao and his subordinates worked on their act. It was simply too weird to have subordinates coming in with their legs shaking.

Meanwhile, the Captain stood there with his arms crossed, a sword in one hand, looking coldly at everyone who came and went. He really did seem like a martial arts master.

And then there was Nethersprite.... Because 'grandpa' liked to drink tea and play with the parrot, her work primarily consisted of brewing tea and attending to the bird.

That was how things went in the little medicine shop.

Seven days later, as business for the Green Spirit Pharmacy went well, Xu Qing finally recovered from the injuries he had suffered during the tribulation. The time had come to continue his tempering.

"Now that you've recovered, Xu Qing," the Heir Apparent said, "you're going to come with me. It's time to really dig out that potential in you."

Xu Qing took a deep breath and stood up. Then, he vanished along with the Heir Apparent. When they materialized, they were up in the air.

The Heir Apparent clasped his hands behind his back and started moving. Xu Qing looked down at the Green Spirit Pharmacy, then followed.

As they flew through the Bitter Life Mountains, they encountered other cultivators. Some were just flying along, others were engaged in combat. None of them even noticed the presence of Xu Qing and the Heir Apparent. Even those who almost ran right into them didn't actually see them, and would just go about their business.

Xu Qing wasn't surprised at all by that. It was obviously the power of the Heir Apparent.

Given the direction they were moving in, Xu Qing had an idea of their destination. It was the Red Moon Cathedral's church temple in the Bitter Life Mountains. He was right. Several hours later, they were hovering in the air above that church temple.

The Red Moon Cathedral occupied the highest peak in the Bitter Life Mountains. The godherald in this church temple was terrifying, and emanated a faint pressure that could weigh down on the entire desert. To the people in the Greenhair Badlands, there was no more important location than this. It represented a god.

That wasn't the case for the Heir Apparent, though. It was with a bit of a swagger that he led Xu Qing directly inside.

Inside the temple were cultivators clad in red robes. However, just like the cultivators outside, they didn't see the two newcomers. And thus, they soon arrived at an open square in the depths of the church temple. The place was busy, with a lot of cultivators coming and going. Everything was very orderly, as if any outbursts would be considered blasphemous and profane.

The Heir Apparent scanned the open square, then extended his right hand in the direction of a middle-aged dao begetting cultivator. When the Heir Apparent made a beckoning motion with his index finger, the middle-aged cultivator swiveled and walked in Xu Qing's direction. He stopped moving when he reached the middle of the square.

Seeing the grisly scene play out, Xu Qing looked at the Heir Apparent.

"One hundred breaths of time," the Heir Apparent said coolly. "Xu Qing, tap into all of your cultivation base and fight him to the death. Kill him, and devour his red moon faith. If you don't succeed within a hundred breaths of time, everyone here in this

church temple will be able to see you, and I won't be able to help. If you succeed, you succeed. If you fail... then your life is in your own hands."

With that, the Heir Apparent flew up, hovered above, and closed his eyes.

The unmoving dao begetting cultivator's eyes then turned bright red, and he looked furiously at Xu Qing. He looked like he had just spotted his archenemy. Howling, he unleashed the power of his cultivation base.

Vortexes started popping up around him, until there were nine. They were like nine stars which formed the outline of an illusory secret trove.

The secret trove seemed to contain erupting volcanoes which resulted in muffled rumbling sounds that spread out in every direction. Blood-colored light pierced into the cultivator's fleshly body, surrounding him and connecting to heaven and earth, ultimately forming a projected image several hundred meters tall.

The image was that of a treant, with a sturdy torso, brown branches, and black leaves. The ground trembled as roots stabbed into it, spreading out. In the blink of an eye, the entire square was filled with countless branches. The ground shattered as innumerable blood-red blades of grass sprouted up, covering everything to create a crimson grassland.

From a distance, it looked like a massive treant standing atop a plain of grass, imbued with a spirit that could conquer mountains and rivers. His eyes gleamed with ruthless light as he emanated terrifying pressure. Lightning bolts even started crackling around him. Anyone who saw this scene would be shocked. As for Xu Qing, it was his first time actually facing a dao begetting enemy!

And then, all of the blades of grass and innumerable branches shot toward Xu Qing, moving with such speed they were little more than blurs. They obviously surpassed the limits of the Nascent Soul level, and weren't giving Xu Qing any chance to react.

Xu Qing's pupils constricted as danger closed in from all sides. A feeling of mortal peril filled him. He knew that his battle prowess wasn't at the proper level, and that if he didn't move quickly enough, he wouldn't have any hope of dodging.

His god body erupted, and he instantly reached a height of 15 meters. At the same time, taboo poison and violet moon power erupted from within him, slamming into the branches and the grass.

Rumbling booms echoed out. Xu Qing was extraordinary, but he wasn't on the same level as a dao begetting enemy. In the blink of an eye, countless blades of grass surrounded him, as sharp as swords. At the same time, the innumerable branches were like tentacles trying to grab him.

His violet moon power and the corrosive taboo poison had an effect, but there were just too many blades of grass and branches. Every time one vanished, more would replace it. In the shortest of moments, grass and branches were piling up around him. They piled into a mountain of dead vegetation, soon reaching a height of 300 meters. Then, the top spread out like an umbrella, eventually forming a hand.

That palm shot down toward Xu Qing, who was already buried in the plants and vegetation. As the hand descended, the grass and branches collapsed, crushed out of existence by the terrifying power at work. And it seemed like Xu Qing would also crumble within moments.

But then, a huge figure appeared out of nowhere. It was the Ghost Emperor mountain! In that moment of crisis, Xu Qing sent all of his cultivation base power into the Ghost Emperor mountain. When the projected Ghost Emperor appeared, he threw his arms up to meet the descending hand.

A deafening boom rang out as the hand collapsed. In the blink of an eye, it turned into something like a rain falling down onto the square below. At the same time, cracks spread out over the Ghost Emperor, until it collapsed, revealing Xu Qing within.

He was coughing up blood and his face was pale. The crushing pressure from a dao begetting enemy had his internal organs quivering, and he was gasping for breath. However, his eyes were as cold as usual.

Without any hesitation, he rocketed toward the dao begetting cultivator.

Up above in the dome of heaven, the Heir Apparent said, "Eighty breaths of time left."

Chapter 603: Bluegreen Dragon Takes Charge

The Red Moon Cathedral's church temples in the Moonrite Region favored a black color scheme in their architecture. And they would always have a statue of Crimson Mother. Given the dusky nature of the sky in the region, that dark color scheme made the church temples seem even more forbidding. Anyone who looked at them would feel indescribable pressure weighing down on them. As the sobbing wind blew through the mountains and landed on the statue of Crimson Mother, the crescent-moon-shaped earrings on the statue jingled like bells. It created a discordant sound in the Heir Apparent's ears.

Xu Qing didn't respond to the words the Heir Apparent had just spoken. All of his focus was on the dao begetting cultivator surrounded by endless bolts of lightning. He felt very clear-headed. His cultivation base was fully deployed, and his thirteen three-tribulation nascent souls were all completely active. He was like a black thunderbolt, piercing through the sea of lightning like a hot knife through butter.

As he closed in with incredible speed, his right hand shifted into a transparent Gruegloom state. His fingers curled into hooks as he reached out toward the enemy cultivator.

"My laws cannot be defied," the treant said with a cold chuckle. He didn't dodge out of the way. Instead, his secret trove rumbled, causing his right hand to burn with bright red flames. It was a convergence of red moon faith! The invisible power of natural and magical laws erupted from the secret trove, spreading out in the area. Then he lifted his right hand to grab Xu Qing.

Xu Qing's cultivation base and battle prowess were inferior, but he did have the power of the violet moon, which allowed him to negate much of the godly might of the red moon. But not even that helped very much. Xu Qing trembled as the treant's vice-like grip locked onto him.

Terrifying fluctuations rolled into Xu Qing, while at the same time, the treant began to chant a curse. It was complicated and virtually impossible to understand. Filled with a gruish sensation, it spread out, causing pulses of sinister wind to sweep toward Xu Qing, filled with ghostly figures.

It was a moment of deadly crisis. However, that was when the decisiveness and ruthlessness of Xu Qing's killing style were revealed. Ignoring the hand that had locked on to him, he jerked back.

A cracking sound rang out as his shoulder popped out of its socket, and his entire body twisted in an unexpected way. Then his right leg shot up in a vicious kick. Hundreds of heavenfiend clones appeared around him and lunged forward. Beneath him, his shadow stretched out. Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior shot forth. The two of them closed in from both sides.

All of this takes a bit of time to describe, but actually happened in the time it takes a spark to fly off of a piece of flint. In the blink of an eye, the heavenfiend clones slammed into the ghostly figures. Golden Vajra Warrior Sect stabbed into the body of the treant. And Xu Qing's foot smashed into the treant's head.

Except, Xu Qing's face fell as his foot passed right through the head. Similarly, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior didn't hit anything solid.

"It's not his true form!"

Simultaneously, a few dozen meters behind Xu Qing, the treant cultivator suddenly appeared out of nowhere. *That* was his true form.

"What a pity. You really don't understand the natural laws that surround dao begetting cultivators." Grinning coldly, he reached out toward Xu Qing.

Instantly, countless lightning bolts appeared, becoming a horde of lightning dragons that closed in on Xu Qing, coming from so many directions there was no way he could evade them. Especially noteworthy was the huge hand that had locked onto Xu Qing. It had transformed, becoming a huge maggot that suddenly exploded. As a rumbling boom echoed out, the treant cultivator's true form shot toward Xu Qing. He waved his right hand, and a mass of branches snaked out, turning into a massive battle ax.

Xu Qing lurched backward, but he couldn't avoid the lightning or the exploding maggot. Thankfully, Xu Qing had ample fighting experience, and thus, he instantly erupted with seven-colored daybreak light. Reaching up with his hand, he shoved his shoulder, ignoring the pain as his shoulder loudly snapped back into the socket.

As the daybreak light shone out, sweeping away most of the lightning, his shadow reared up in the shape of a coffin. It surrounded him, allowing him to avoid most of the remaining attacks. Then the shadow coffin tumbled backward a few dozen meters. When it landed, it opened, and Xu Qing emerged.

Without a moment of hesitation, he looked at the treant cultivator, who was already speeding toward him. In his mind, he calculated the time, and then he unleashed the power of his five sundial life lamps.

Time Reversal!

As light flared from the sundial life lamps, a tempest of time swept over Xu Qing. Then, shockingly, he appeared seven breaths of time in the past. Now he was located right behind the enemy cultivator.

"A magical law of time? Impossible!" The cathedral cultivator's pupils constricted.

Obviously, this development was something that completely surpassed anything he could have predicted. Although his battle prowess surpassed that of Xu Qing, their simple interchange just now

made it clear that Xu Qing had a lot of tricks up his sleeve. And he clearly had a lot more fighting experience.

And the main reason the cathedral cultivator had the upper hand was that Xu Qing obviously didn't have much experience dealing with dao begetting enemies.

For Xu Qing to do something like this right now made it obvious he was using a trump card. And the cathedral cultivator didn't have enough time to figure out how to deal with it. Therefore, instead of continuing the fight, he tapped into the power of magical laws in his secret trove to try to flee. He acted too late.

Xu Qing unhesitatingly used the power of the sundials on the treant cultivator.

Instantly, the treant cultivator found himself locked in place in time.

Xu Qing's right hand flashed, and his dagger ripped through the cathedral cultivator's throat. As the familiar slashing sound rang out, he added in the power of taboo poison in the hopes of making it a true killing blow. At the same time, five gnomons flew out, becoming five streaks of light that stabbed into the cathedral cultivator. Booms rang out as Xu Qing put everything on the line.

The cathedral cultivator's head flew up into the air, and thanks to the gnomons stabbing into his body, it exploded.

Having accomplished these things, Xu Qing gasped for breath, looked around at the carnage, and then turned to eye the Heir Apparent.

The Heir Apparent was actually shocked, but didn't show any sign of it on his face.

"Thirty breaths of time left."

Xu Qing's pupils constricted as he looked back at the surrounding carnage. Waving his hand, he sent flames out to scorch everything around him, all while backing up at top speed. However, the moment he started moving, nine crimson vortexes appeared, in the spot where the cathedral cultivator had exploded. Glittering, they shot toward Xu Qing.

It didn't matter what Xu Qing did to try to dodge them. Nothing worked. They surrounded him in the blink of an eye. The nine vortexes glittered brightly, emitted resounding booms as they formed into an illusory secret trove. From a distance, it was possible to see Xu Qing trapped inside of it!

"Secret Refinement Combination!" the cathedral cultivator said. A boundless force erupted from within the illusory secret trove, transforming into countless magical and natural laws, and forming suns, moons, stars, and heavenly bodies. Ice, fire, lightning, and thunder became a cage that started assimilating Xu Qing.

Suns and moons could lock down gods. Ice and fire could assimilate the body. Thunder and lightning assisted. A heavenly wind became profoundly mighty!

Xu Qing shivered down to his soul. His senses were telling him that he was standing in the same spot as before, except he felt like he was in a different dimension. The pressure and sensation of assimilation seemed like it was going to crush his soul and immolate his body. The pain levels skyrocketed, filling every square inch of him with intense pain.

Xu Qing looked around, his facial expression the same as before.

Up above, the Heir Apparent looked down thoughtfully for a moment, then said, “You’re facing a true dao begetting enemy. If you don’t free yourself, you’ll be assimilated and crushed. You’ll perish.”

As the Heir Apparent’s words rang out, the sensation of being assimilated grew more intense. At the same time, the illusory secret trove transformed into the cathedral cultivator.

In that moment of crisis, Xu Qing’s eyes glittered coldly.

“So, you have a secret trove but no heavenly dao. In that case, how about I gift you a heavenly dao? Bluegreen dragon!”

Chapter 604: Just In Time

In the square in the Red Moon Cathedral’s church temple, nine dazzling vortexes glittered like heavenly bodies, surrounding Xu Qing and emanating the might of assimilation. Suns, moons, ice, fire, lightning, thunder, and a heavenly wind all surged.

There was also the enormous figure of the treant, visible outside of the illusory secret trove created by the vortexes. He was fully 3,000 meters tall, looming over the square in terrifying fashion. A dao begetting aura was fully on display. Wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. Gale force winds screamed. A sound like heavenly thunder echoed out everywhere.

Yet the moment Xu Qing spoke, all of those things were deeply shaken by the roar of a dragon. That draconic cry resonated with the dome of heaven, causing ripples to appear in the sky that resembled fish scales. The ground started to shake violently.

The whiskers of a massive bluegreen dragon appeared from within Xu Qing, followed by the majestic head, and then the entire body. As its massive form leaped out, it began to swim through the illusory secret trove. Its bluish body, countless razor-sharp teeth, and shocking draconic fins were divinely graceful. At the same time, the aura of a heavenly dao spread out everywhere. There was a pleasing exuberance in the dragon’s cry, as if it had finally returned to the sea, its most suitable environment.

Its arrival caused the secret trove to tremble. It was as if the natural and magical laws within it were soldiers that were now in the presence of a general, and were instinctively inclined to be obedient. The sky shook as heavenly thunder boomed.

The cathedral cultivator’s face fell, and his eyes filled with unprecedented disbelief.

“A heavenly dao??”

Massive waves of shock filled him at the unimaginable sight. He had long dreamed of forming a heavenly dao, yet never had. But now he was seeing one in the hands of a Nascent Soul cultivator. What was even more shocking was that this person wasn’t from a minor world, but rather, was a native of the Revered Ancient mainland. That was absolutely ridiculous.

How can a Nascent Soul cultivator have a heavenly dao? That means that when this kid reaches the great circle, he can basically skip the dao begetting phase and go right into having a secret trove!

The cathedral cultivator was not only shocked. He was also starting to feel very uneasy, even terrified.

The secret troves of dao begetting cultivators don't have heavenly daos. During that time, though they seem impressive, they're actually incredibly vulnerable. After all, they can easily be occupied by someone else's heavenly dao.... This is the perfect place to form a heavenly dao....

A tremor passed through the cathedral cultivator as he quickly performed an incantation gesture. As a result, the nine vortexes that formed his secret trove began to fade away. And instead of pulsing with the power of assimilation, they were trying to open up and eject Xu Qing and his heavenly dao.

But it was too late!

The bluegreen dragon was already here. As it cried out exultingly from within the secret trove, it started to take over all of the subservient magical and natural laws. This was like a dream come true. After all, normally speaking, a dao begetting cultivator would never, ever bring someone else's heavenly dao into their secret trove.

Eyes glittering, Xu Qing fought back against the power of expulsion. After all, right now, he had no desire to leave.

Waving both of his hands out in front of him, he said, "Take control, bluegreen dragon!"

The moment the words left his mouth, the bluegreen dragon roared, growing larger and simultaneously sending out countless beams of light to connect to the secret trove.

The nine vortexes were the key.

Innumerable threads of light shot toward the vortexes. Though many of them collapsed as they neared, there seemed to be no end to their replacements. Considering how badly the bluegreen dragon had been injured recently, and how hungry it had been for so long, it was as crazed as a starving person at a banquet. Eyes glittering with greed, it held nothing back to start viciously devouring everything around it. As it did, its color started turning to a darker blue.

Crunching sounds rang out as the secret trove shook violently. To the cathedral cultivator, those sounds were like the sounds of its own heart being devoured. Each bite took away nourishment that he had been building up for years. What was even more painful was that the heavenfate that he had been accumulating for so long was now being wolfed down by the bluegreen dragon. As a result, the bluegreen dragon's godly resonance grew more prominent, and its aura surged. Then it changed colors again, with bits of silver appearing on it. It wasn't much silver, but there was enough to impart the sensation of the Spirit Trove level.

Up above, the Heir Apparent noted that, and a thoughtful expression appeared on his face.

As for the cathedral cultivator, he was on a higher level than Xu Qing, so when he saw what was happening, his heart filled with madness.

"Devouring my secret trove might be an opportunity for you. But it's also an opportunity for me! If I can assimilate you and take your heavenly dao, then I'll be the one in charge of it. And that means that today... is the day my first complete secret trove will be formed!"

His illusory body shrank down, turning into nine clones that bolstered the nine vortexes. As a result, the secret trove once again surged with power. Suppressing the bluegreen dragon's ability to devour the natural and magical laws, they once again erupted with the power of assimilation.

He had been working on this secret trove for many years, and though the bluegreen dragon did have a big advantage, the cultivation base discrepancy was too great. As of now, it had only absorbed about twenty percent of the secret trove.

Now that the cathedral cultivator was truly going all out, everything had turned around.

“Six breaths of time left,” the Heir Apparent said calmly.

As the words left his mouth, Xu Qing looked deeply at the heavenly dao bluegreen dragon. He could sense that the bluegreen dragon had only absorbed twenty percent of the secret trove. However, the heavenfate that it had taken was more than enough.

Good enough, even if I just use it for a self-detonation!

Xu Qing stowed his greed. He got the feeling that the Heir Apparent wasn't joking around, and that if he really did go past a hundred breaths of time, he would end up in a deadly situation. Given his own personality, he didn't want to let his own safety come down to someone else's whim.

As the cathedral cultivator continued his assimilation efforts, the bluegreen dragon was having trouble doing any devouring. Therefore, the most important thing at the moment was to end this fight quickly.

With those thoughts on his mind, Xu Qing sent the command to the bluegreen dragon to self-detonate. The bluegreen dragon shivered and let loose a moan of disappointment. Then it shivered, and to the shock of the cathedral cultivator, it suddenly erupted with a terrifying shockwave. The shockwave grew stronger and stronger, until it was a loud rumbling sound that filled heaven and earth. And then the bluegreen dragon exploded.

A deafening boom shook everything. Miserable shrieks rang out from both the bluegreen dragon and the cathedral cultivator. Xu Qing, meanwhile, let loose a muffled grunt of pain.

It wasn't just the bluegreen dragon that exploded. The secret trove, having already been connected to the bluegreen dragon by countless threads, was directly impacted. Instantly, six of the nine vortexes collapsed. The three that survived were now very dim. As they raced to converge, they formed the cathedral cultivator, who coughed up mouthful after mouthful of blood. Eyes full of alarm, he backed away.

All that was left of the bluegreen dragon was its head. The rest of it was flying around in all directions.

However, there was a lot of silver on that head. Though it seemed very weak, it was actually stronger than before. Howling in grief, it became a silver streak that shot back into Xu Qing.

Xu Qing was also badly hurt. Whether it was the injuries from fighting or the effects of the assimilation, he was in bad shape. What was more, the bluegreen dragon was his life essence, so self-detonating it would obviously result in a backlash. Blood dribbled out of the corners of his mouth. He had numerous wounds all over him. Yet even as he staggered backward, he released all of his taboo poison and sent it shooting toward the cathedral cultivator.

Then he lunged forward and slashed his dagger out. A head flew through the air!

That sudden burst of movement caused more blood to spray out of Xu Qing's mouth. He was currently gasping for breath, and could barely see. Gritting his teeth, he looked up at the Heir Apparent. Voice hoarse, he said, "Just in time!"

The moment words left his mouth, the perception-altering power that had been covering the church temple vanished. Everything went back to normal. Everyone turned to look at the square. Nothing was there.

The dead dao begetting cultivator was gone. Xu Qing was nowhere to be seen. Only the ripples in the air and the wrecked ground bore any evidence that something had happened recently. However, in the memories of everyone present, the ground had always been cracked and crumbled. And none of them paid much attention to the ripples. Things in the church temple were the same as usual.

High in the sky over the church temple, the Heir Apparent hovered with hands clasped behind his back. Xu Qing was next to him, trembling and working hard not to pass out as the shadow and Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior supported him on either side.

"You revealed many weaknesses in that fight," the Heir Apparent said calmly.

Xu Qing didn't respond.

"In Spirit Trove, having a secret trove and not having one is similar to having or not having the profound radiance state in Foundation Establishment. Therefore, you should now understand that if you fought an actual Spirit Trove enemy, you would be killed with a single blow. That said, you did finish it in a hundred breaths of time, even though you ended up seriously hurt.

"Your first weakness is your lack of battle experience against dao begetting cultivators. You still don't understand how to fight against people with natural and magical laws on their side. What was more, your opponent's laws weren't very impressive. They were even simplistic.

"Your second weakness is all the random assets you use all the time. You haven't unified them to create a true trump card for yourself.

"Your third weakness is that you haven't taken the time to truly explore what you're capable of with those powers of yours. Long story short, your methods are too one-note.

"You do have some combinations, but they're not good enough. And you don't have any divine abilities that you can use to truly threaten someone in a higher level than yourself. I can tell that you have experience fighting people stronger than you. But the reality is that you didn't 'use weakness to defeat strength' in this fight. You won by going all out. That's not the way to do things."

The Heir Apparent looked at the teetering Xu Qing and waved his hand. Everything blurred, and then they reappeared outside the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

Eyes glittering with anticipation, he softly said, “When you can truly ‘use weakness to defeat strength,’ then you’ll be up to standard.”

Expression tranquil, he entered the medicine shop.

Xu Qing followed, but after stepping inside, he coughed up a mouthful of blood and finally lost control, toppling over unconscious. Just before everything went black, he heard Ling’er cry out in alarm, and heard the parrot complaining.

“Grandpa! Grandpa! You’re finally back! When I was out playing recently I ran into some mysterious cultivators! They ripped out all the feathers I’d just regrown....”

Chapter 605: Back to the Moonrebel Congregation

When Xu Qing opened his eyes the next morning, Ling’er was there taking care of him. She’d been there the entire night. When she noticed that he was awake, she hurried over looking very concerned.

“Big Bro Xu Qing....”

“I’m fine.” Smiling, he reached out and tousled her hair, then checked his injuries. Thanks to the violet crystal, he was already halfway to being fully recovered. However, he still felt very weak. It was especially bad thanks to the backlash damage from self-detonating the bluegreen dragon. That said, even though the bluegreen dragon only had its head left, it still had more heavenfate power than before. What was more, it existed on a higher level now. Therefore, Xu Qing’s recovery process was also an upgrade.

According to what he could sense, once he passed this stage of weakness, his soul would be tougher and stronger.

It should take about twenty days for me to fully recover. At that point, my battle prowess will be significantly improved. If I have to fight another dao begetting expert at that point, it’ll go much more smoothly.

Xu Qing took a deep breath and sat up. As he did, the Captain strolled through the door, munching on a peach. Looking at Xu Qing, he smiled.

“I went out for a walk, and upon returning, you somehow seem different. Your gaze seems sharper than before.” He tossed an apple to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing caught it and took a bite. Then he slowly got out of bed and walked out into the main room of the medicine shop.

Ning Yan was scrubbing the floor and sighing. When he caught sight of Xu Qing, he forced a smile onto his face. Nethersprite was irritably boiling some water. Obviously she could do that with her cultivation base, yet wasn’t permitted to do so. All she could do was squat in front of the stove and stare at the iron kettle, waiting for the water to heat up. Li Youfei was introducing some medicinal pills to a trembling Qi Condensation cultivator. Wu Jianwu was at his spot by the door in his hemp garment. He had long since grown used to his role, and was proudly reciting some poetry.

And then there was the ‘grandpa’ who sat behind the counter fiddling with his pearl and smiling as he looked at all the activity. Perched on his shoulder was the indignant, featherless parrot.

The parrot spotted Xu Qing, and the Captain behind him. Glaring at the Captain, he leaned over to the Heir Apparent and grumbled, “Grandpa, I really think that Chen Erniu was behind it...”

The Captain smiled and ignored the parrot. Walking to the door, he made sure his sword was clearly visible as he crossed his arms, stuck his chin up, and resumed his guard duty.

Xu Qing felt warmth in his heart. Everything was the same as before he’d left. The coziness of the Green Spirit Pharmacy made him feel peaceful and safe.

The water finally reached a boil, so Nethersprite hurried over to the ‘grandpa’ and poured him a new cup of tea.

The Heir Apparent lifted the cup, took a sip, and nodded. Then he looked at Xu Qing. “In twenty days, your tempering continues.”

“Yes, sir,” Xu Qing said. He was actually looking forward to it. Although tempering like this was very dangerous, as long as he could struggle through it and learn some things, then he would make incredible advances.

Days passed.

Xu Qing’s injuries healed, and he could already tell that his soul was different. Specifically, he could now analyze problems faster. In the past, difficulties he needed to think about deeply could now be solved quickly. Because of that, he was able to make some progress in his curse research as he recovered.

As a result, Li Youfei was even busier than before.

Ten days later, Xu Qing was able to take advantage of the upgrade to his soul to achieve some new results. Using Li Youfei’s blood, as well as what remained of the chaotic flesh growths, coupled with his violet moon power, he improved his painquelling lozenge.

This improvement was different than before. Thanks to everything that had been leading up to this, his new painquelling lozenge could significantly reduce the curse. The previous versions of his painquelling lozenges did the same thing. However, they could only remove about 1/10,000th of the curse. But now, if assigned a value of 100 to represent the curse inside of a person, the pill would reduce that value to 99. Because of that, the pain-relieving effects were also significant.

Xu Qing got the feeling that once he put this pill on the market, people would definitely notice what it could do.

Sadly, that’s still nowhere near good enough. But at least I’m going in the right direction. Going forward, as long as I keep improving the pill’s medicinal efficacy, I’ll eventually be able to produce something that completely removes the curse.

After some thought, Xu Qing finally returned to the Moonrebel Congregation. It had now been several months since he was there. This time, he didn’t go alone. Ling’er had been so wrapped up in taking care of him recently that she hadn’t been keeping up with the books. She spent all her time with him. Because she was so curious about the Moonrebel Congregation, he decided to take her with him. [1]

There were seven or eight statues seated in meditation inside Xu Qing's temple in the Moonrebel Congregation. Most were either neighbors or huge fans of his who had purchased his painquelling lozenges in the past. Even though Grandmaster Pill Nine hadn't shown up for months, they still piously returned every day. It was almost as if they believed meditating in his temple would help them suppress the curse within them.

That was especially true of the burly bare-chested man. As someone who had heard the full 'dao reverberation,' he had experienced a change in personality, and now declared himself to be a follower of Grandmaster Pill Nine.

He was disgusted with all of the verbal attacks being made on the grandmaster. At the moment, he had a very stern expression on his face as he calmly spoke to the other followers present.

"It's true the grandmaster hasn't been back for some time. But as his followers, and as people who have benefited from his work, we have to have faith. Don't foolishly believe all the gossip you hear. I've always had faith that the day the grandmaster returns, he'll quell the pain of the Moonrebel Congregation to an even greater degree!"

The other followers nodded gravely. However, one of them was a statue of a female immortal. After a moment of hesitation, she said, "Although a few alchemist cultivators have criticized Grandmaster Pill Nine, overall, they're in the minority. However, a few days ago Grandmaster Sagelowe pointed out some very valid suspicions...." [2]

Everyone went silent.

The cultivators of the Moonrebel Congregation thought very highly of Grandmaster Sagelowe. The main reason was that he sold more painquelling lozenges in the Moonrebel Congregation than anyone else. Some people had even calculated that about thirty percent of all painquelling lozenges on the market were his. As a result, any suspicions he voiced were taken very seriously by most people.

As the small crowd of followers went silent, the burly neighbor snorted coldly. Then he opened his mouth to speak. Before he could, the altar in the temple vibrated. All of the statues seated cross-legged in the temple turned in shock to look at the altar. Atop the altar was the statue of the old man with the huge bottle gourd on his back. His eyes opened.

"Grandmaster!"

"Grandmaster Pill Nine!"

Shaken, the other statues got to their feet, clasped hands, and bowed in greeting. That was especially true of the burly neighbor, who was now very excited.

"Grandmaster, you're finally back, sir!"

A bit surprised, Xu Qing simply stood there for a moment taking in his surroundings. Focusing his gaze on the bowing statues, he said, "Who are you people?"

“Grandmaster,” the burly neighbor said respectfully, “all of us here have benefited from your grace. Over the past few months, we’ve taken it on ourselves to stand guard here. We hope to learn from your example and become your followers!”

Xu Qing didn’t respond. Looking outside of the temple, he saw that the bronze cauldron had lots of incense smoke swirling up from it. Beyond the cauldron, a few dozen statues were seated in meditation. Although Xu Qing had heard from the Captain about all this, it was very thought-provoking to see it in person.

When the statues in the temple saw that Xu Qing wasn’t saying anything, they started to get nervous. Based on everything they knew, Grandmaster Pill Nine had to be an eccentric cultivator with a very high cultivation base. Normally speaking, eccentric cultivators had unusual personalities that differed from average people. Therefore, they weren’t sure if he would be pleased with the fact that they were all sitting around in his temple meditating.

However, it made sense to at least see what would happen. If it turned out that the grandmaster was pleased with them, and approved of them being his followers, then it could be profoundly meaningful to them. Thus, they all sat there nervously, waiting to see what he would do.

For about ten breaths of time, Xu Qing stood there looking at them, his face completely expressionless, but his heart pounding.

Finally, he spoke, his voice cool. “Tell me the news from the past few months.”

When they realized Grandmaster Pill Nine wasn’t rejecting their followership, they all breathed inner sighs of relief. That was especially true of the burly neighbor. And he was the one to quickly explain all the important news from recent months, including the suspicions and gossip that had been floating around.

Xu Qing nodded. Everything aligned with what the Captain had told him, though there was more detail. After some thought, he prepared to take out the new medicinal pill. However, that was when Ling’er’s voice echoed in his mind. She sounded angry.

“Big Bro Xu Qing, after hearing all the news, I get what’s going on. The people saying all those things about you are definitely up to no good! But I have an idea.... Since you have a new pill, let’s use their own mouths against them! Just make an announcement saying that you have a new pill coming out in a few days.

“Those bad guys will definitely start bad-mouthing you, but that will just cause word to spread. And then, when you finally release the new pill, all of them will be completely humiliated! Whenever my papa’s inn got investigated in Seven Blood Eyes, it would cause all sorts of rumors to spread. But that would just make the place a lot more popular!”

Xu Qing grinned. Truth be told, he didn’t care about rumors and popularity. But considering how angry Ling’er was, he nodded. Looking at the gathered statues, he said, “In ten days, I’m going to release a new and improved version of the painquelling lozenge. It’s actually so different from the current version that it has a new name: cursequelling lozenge. Over the next ten days, spread word about this. Do well, and I’ll give all of you one of the new pills as a reward.”

Having said that, Xu Qing closed his eyes and left the Moonrebel Congregation.

After he was gone, the statues in the temple all inhaled deep breaths and exchanged shocked looks.

“It has a significantly different medicinal effect?”

“It’s not a painquelling lozenge, it’s a cursequelling lozenge?”

“That name....”

The mere name of the pill gave all of them an idea of what the pill could do.

“The pill can quell the effects of the curse?” Despite being so passionate in his devotion to Grandmaster Pill Nine, the burly neighbor couldn’t help but feel some disbelief.

“What if it’s true?” one of the statues said.

The other statues were breathing heavily.

“If it’s true...” the burly neighbor said, his heart racing, “then going forward, we followers of Grandmaster Pill Nine are going to be like gods in the Moonrebel Congregation!”

Chapter 606: Patriarch, the Thief is in that Medicine Shop!

About an hour after Xu Qing left the Moonrebel Congregation, the followers in his temple made up their minds and left with excited expressions on their faces. They were immediately noticed by those who had become accustomed to waiting outside the temple

“Grandmaster Pill Nine has issued a dharmic decree!” the burly neighbor announced in a booming voice. “In ten days, the grandmaster will be releasing an amazing and innovative medicinal pill! This pill carries on the traditions of the painquelling lozenge, but has very different effects. It’s a type of pill that’s never been seen in the Moonrebel Congregation, despite all the years that have passed. This shocking pill will change everything!”

The statues present were visibly taken aback, and were listening very carefully.

Seeing that, the burly man took a deep breath. Eyes gleaming with anticipation, he raised his voice even louder.

“I can’t go into any more detail, ladies and gentlemen. But I can reveal the name of the pill. The name is not painquelling. It’s cursequelling! Cursequelling lozenge!”

Every single statue outside the temple was visibly moved. At the same time, it was possible to see many expressions of disbelief.

“Cursequelling lozenge? It can suppress the curse?”

“That’s not possible!”

“Who would dare to undo Crimson Mother’s curse?”

An uproar was already building. There were clearly only a few dozen statues outside Xu Qing's temple, but the monumental news resulted in a commotion that sounded like it came from hundreds of voices.

The reaction caused the burly man to inhale sharply. Then he continued, "Ten days! When the grandmaster returns, he'll release the pill. Ladies and gentlemen, all you have to do is wait ten days, and then you'll bear witness to a true miracle!"

With that, he hurried away. The other followers also scattered. All of them were going to do everything in their power to spread the word as widely as possible in the Moonrebel Congregation. They had ten days.

Of course, they all knew that they didn't need to do much. All they had to do was start spreading the word, and it would naturally spread like wildfire. After all, Grandmaster Pill Nine was already quite well known in the Moonrebel Congregation, and a lot of people were paying attention to his name. Considering the monumental nature of the news, word would spread as surely as *one stone creating a thousand ripples*. It was easy to imagine what would happen over the next ten days.

Sure enough, after the followers scattered, the statues who had been waiting outside the temple also went their separate ways to spread the astonishing news. Truth be told... the name 'cursequelling lozenge' was profoundly significant. Actually, the reaction to the news surpassed what the burly neighbor and the other followers had predicted. By the fourth day, the entire Moonrebel Congregation was abuzz. Everyone who heard the news was shaken to the deepest level. However, it also led to endless doubts and suspicion.

"Only a dumbass would believe stupid crap like that!"

"People are claiming this pill will quell the curse? That's complete and utter nonsense!"

"It's the curse of a god! What, is this Grandmaster Pill Nine also some kind of god?"

"But... what if it's true? If it really can quell the curse, even just a little bit?"

Even within all the doubts and suspicion, many people were also saying "but, what if?" After all, the flame of hope still burned in the hearts of everyone in the Moonrebel Congregation. In the Moonrite Region in general, that flame had been extinguished in most people. But people who joined the Moonrebel Congregation were people who wanted to defy fate. Therefore, because the flame existed in their heart, they were all moved.

That said, the hope didn't stop the doubts and suspicions. The more hope one had, the more one would fear disappointment, and the more one would become suspicious. And that was especially true among members of the Moonrebel Congregation who were skilled in making medicinal pills or doing research into the curse.

"We cultivators despise show-offs. This Fellow Daoist Pill Nine is saying some really irresponsible things!"

"He's giving people hope, but if they end up being disappointed in the end, his reputation is going to hit rock bottom!"

“Cursequelling lozenge. Cursequelling lozenge.... That’s easy to say, but from ancient times until now, no one has ever succeeded in something like that. Neither will he, unless he’s either a god or a godchild!”

Rumors raged, rocking the Moonrebel Congregation. Even the high-level leaders heard about what was happening, and were paying close attention. Although some people believed the rumors, about ninety percent of the rumors were negative. Among the other grandmasters who had very good reputations, some fed the rumor mill, while others focused on research, trying to determine how realistic it was that such a pill could be concocted.

In the eastern part of the Moonrite Region, not far from the Heavenfire Sea in the Ninehues Plains, was the hiding spot of one of those grandmasters.

Someone had just flown up to the entrance of his secluded meditation facilities in his mansion grotto, and they were holding aloft a medicinal pill bottle.

“Master, I managed to purchase one of those painquelling lozenges that Pill Nine concocted.”

Shortly after, the door of the mansion grotto opened, and a gravitational force emerged from within, grabbing the bottle and pulling it inside.

Within the mansion grotto was a middle-aged man in a white robe, seated cross-legged in meditation. Circled around him, also cross-legged, were a few dozen squirrels with red eyes, all of them pulsing with extraordinary auras as they also meditated. The man snatched the bottle out of the air. Face expressionless, he opened it and inhaled. Then he looked at the pill inside.

“It has the aura of the Greenhair Badlands’ white wind,” the man said coolly. “The life force in the white wind establishes an equilibrium with Crimson Mother’s curse. However, the truth is... that this method was explored years ago and subsequently abandoned. People who consume this pill will initially suffer no ill side-effects. However, after enough time, it will result in a severe backlash.”

The cultivator outside the mansion grotto nodded respectfully. “So that’s how it is. No wonder they’re so cheap. You’re as knowledgeable and wise as ever, Master.”

The man continued to inspect the pill, going so far as to squeeze it between his fingers. Finally, he shook his head.

“There are some random medical plants inside, plus some other unknown substances. But in the end, the fundamental composition is incorrect. Alchemists nowadays don’t spend enough time on their cultivation. They use cheap tricks to show off and play to the crowd. There are definitely going to be a lot of people who get hurt by this pill.”

The man tossed the pill to one of the squirrels. Without any hesitation, the squirrel consumed the pill.

“Nothing out of the ordinary,” the man said. Looking outside of the mansion grotto, he said, “Distributing pills like this is downright evil. Go to the Moonrebel Congregation and announce that I’ve recently improved the painquelling lozenge as well. In six days, on the same day that Grandmaster Pill Nine releases his pill... I’m also going to release a new pill. My new painquelling lozenge is also amazing and innovative. It’s twice as effective as the old painquelling lozenge. And I’ve cut the side-effects in half!”

The apprentice outside was visibly moved. Inhaling sharply, he gave a respectful salute, then raced away to spread the news in the Moonrebel Congregation. Before long, more shocking news was making the rounds.

“In six days, Grandmaster Saintlowe is releasing an improved painquelling lozenge!”

“With such amazing medicinal effects, and such a reduced rate of side-effects, this pill is going to be nothing short of a miracle. It’s going to be far, far superior to the cursequelling lozenge!”

“Grandmaster Saintlowe has a sterling reputation, unlike Pill Nine with his vile theatrics!”

In contrast to the cursequelling lozenge, there were no doubts or suspicions regarding this news. Just about everyone reacted with praise and anticipation. Of course, it also prompted more discussion about Xu Qing’s cursequelling lozenge. In the briefest of moments, the tempest in the Moonrebel Congregation became more intense. The waves even reached beyond the Moonrebel Congregation.

Two days before the release date for the pills, Xu Qing was in the middle of doing some research when the Captain showed up with a cryptic look on his face.

“Something really big happened, little Ah Qing!” he said with a jaunty grin.

Xu Qing looked up at him. “Oh? What is it?”

Looking very pleased, the Captain sat down in front of Xu Qing. “What? You don’t know? I thought you said you were actually my dear friend Grandmaster Pill Nine! Shouldn’t you already know what’s going on? Well, let me tell you. Right now, ‘you’ are the hottest topic of conversation in the Moonrebel Congregation.”

Grinning maliciously, he took out a peach and bit into it.

Xu Qing nodded expressionlessly.

“Still trying to sell the act?” The Captain laughed heartily and patted Xu Qing on the shoulder. “Oh, little Ah Qing. I’ve been paying very close attention to you recently. I haven’t detected even the slightest hint that you went to the Moonrebel

Congregation. What's more, the very day the grandmaster returned, I was right there at his temple!

"After everything went down, I came back and found that you were here playing Go with grandpa the whole time. Look, you and I are close friends, so there's no need for all this showboating."

The Captain grinned arrogantly.

Xu Qing thought for a moment but couldn't remember ever playing Go with the Heir Apparent. After glancing in the direction of the Heir Apparent's room, he thought back to the statues he'd seen when he went back to his temple. Sadly, thanks to the properties of the Moonrebel Congregation, he had no idea of confirming whether or not the Captain was one of the statues at his temple. However, seeing how the Captain was in such high spirits, he decided not to be the one to rain on his parade.

"Did something happen with this best friend of yours?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing much," the Captain said, looking down his nose. "In a few days he's going to release a new type of medicinal pill. I went to see him today and he actually showed it to me. I think it's so-so, nothing more." The Captain cleared his throat. "I mean, it's not bad, so I comforted him a bit. You see, he's somewhat depressed at how everyone is suspicious of him. I told him that all those doubts just go to show how important people think he is.

"Thanks to my advice, Ol' Nine came to his senses. Then, in order to thank me for my help, he promised to give me one of those pills after he releases them. After I get it, little Ah Qing, I'll pass it on to you!"

Xu Qing nodded. He was now determined to pay much closer attention to those followers next time he went to his temple, and try to determine if any of them were acting like the Captain.

The day before the pill was to be released, rumbling sounds filled the dome of heaven outside the mudbrick city. At the same time, a majestic pressure spread out from the desert. The green wind was picking up dramatically, and it was just possible to see bolts of lightning dancing within it.

Astonishingly, closer examination would reveal the presence of numerous cultivators in the wind. They wore white robes with hoods that covered their faces. Apparently, they had greenish bloodlines that allowed them to fuse with the wind, and travel anywhere it went. There were a lot of them, probably several thousand at the minimum. What was more, their presence made the green wind seem a bit whiter.

Among them were five individuals with shocking Spirit Trove auras.

The person leading them, though in the Spirit Trove level, emitted shocking pressure that was on the very cusp of the Void Returning level. He was a white-haired old man with a cold expression on his face, who kept his hands clasped behind his back as he sped toward the mudbrick city.

Among the members of the younger generation that accompanied him was the very same person in the great circle of Nascent Soul who had impaled the shadow to the ground during the white wind.
[1]

These people were from the mysterious species known as the Wind Guardians!

“Patriarch, that’s the city up ahead! After we issued the bounty for the vile thief who stole our species’ holy relic, we got information indicating he operates a medicine shop in this city!”

“Our species has laid low for a long time,” the patriarch said coolly. His eyes were already fixed on the mudbrick city, and within it, the little medicine shop. “Apparently, the cultivators in the Greenhair Badlands have forgotten how mighty we are. Let’s set an example with this fellow. That way, the locals will once again remember the Wind Guardians!”

Chapter 607: Supremely Confident Patriarch Wind Guardian

The Wind Guardians were a very mysterious species in the Greenhair Badlands that rarely went out in public. And though most cultivators in the Greenhair Badlands had heard of them, few had ever seen them. It was only when outside forces threatened to harm the desert in some way that they would rise up in force to mount a defense. They had very gruish methods and ancient powers. Even Void Returning experts who ran into them would find them difficult to deal with. Because of that, people eventually started calling them the guardians of the desert.

However, the true name of their species was Wind Guardians. That was because they weren’t really standing guard over the desert. Rather, they were the guardians of the wind. The reason they were so protective of the environment in the desert was that changes to the desert would affect the wind. When the green wind changed color, and filled the sky with white sand, their species would emerge. Though it might seem like they were doing so to welcome the wind, the reality was that they were searching for something within that wind.

As history marched on, people forgot about their reasons for doing that. And therefore, the Wind Guardians eventually just became one of the unique features of the Greenhair Badlands.

It caused quite an uproar when they put a bounty on Xu Qing. After all, the reward, even just for information leading to Xu Qing, was a command medallion. Anyone who had that command medallion could be spared from death when the white wind came. A reward like that was attractive to just about everyone.

Although Xu Qing had taken efforts to hide his identity when dealing with them, there were plenty of extraordinarily talented people in the world. And it was someone like that who used some unknown and mysterious methods to dig up some clues about who he was.

That was why the Wind Guardians were now on the move. In order to establish some prestige for their species, they weren’t going to strike a blow in secret. They were going to handle the situation with great fanfare.

Organizations throughout the Bitter Life Mountains noticed what was going on. That was especially true of the various sects near the mudbrick city. Many of them monitored the situation with divine sense, while others approached the city itself to watch things play out.

When they saw the figures moving through the whitening wind, they gasped.

“The green wind is changing color because of those figures in white. That’s the mysterious species that shows up along with the white wind!”

“I heard that this species... issued a bounty recently.”

“Apparently someone stole one of their holy relics....”

“Given what’s happening, is the thief hiding out in that city?”

Quite a few cultivators had gathered in the area and were watching closely. Some looked surprised, others sneered, and there were other varied reactions.

“The thief is doomed. If you want to screw around, fine, but whatever you do, don’t screw with the Wind Guardians.”

“I read a description of this species in one of the ancient records I was studying. They’re ruthless and brutal, and they do everything in a very domineering way.”

“Aren’t they supposedly really rich?”

As people looked on with both mundane eyes and divine sense, the mudbrick city was quiet in the darkness of night. The pressure from the dome of heaven, as well as the green-and-white wind, created a very stifling atmosphere. Sir Tree-Dao and his subordinates all felt it. The low-level cultivators were shaking in their boots, and didn’t dare to even open the doors of their houses. The only building in the city that was lit with lamps was the Green Spirit Pharmacy, making it seem like the lone source of warmth in the area.

Inside the medicine shop, Ning Yan was bored to death as he scrubbed the floor. Li Youfei looked outside for a bit, and though he noticed something strange was going on, he was ultimately so bored that he decided to help Ning Yan.

Wu Jianwu was sprawled out with his eyes closed as he mentally composed new poems.

Ling’er was hunched over the counter, her abacus clicking and clacking as she calculated the day’s profits. Occasionally she would make notes in her accounting record book. She seemed to be having a very good time.

The Captain stood next to the door like a door god. Though he also noticed that something unusual was happening, he didn’t seem to care much. Nowadays, he seemed to take the most pleasure out of watching Nethersprite make tea. [1]

When Nethersprite realized he was staring at her, she glared angrily at him.

The Captain glared back at her. “Hey, get back to work! Otherwise I’ll call your husband out to deal with you!”

A tremor passed through Nethersprite as she thought back to how she'd been toyed with by that vile thing.

Eyes glittering with killing intent, she glared at the Captain. To her, Chen Erniu was the most wicked person in existence. In fact, her hatred for him far surpassed anything she felt toward Xu Qing.

The Captain snorted. "What are you looking at? All you know how to do is laze around and boil water. Get grandpa's tea ready immediately!"

Nethersprite grinded her teeth, but had no choice other than to take the tea kettle and walk over to the Heir Apparent, who was currently watching Sprouty. Instinctively calming herself, she obediently poured a new cup of tea.

Seeing that, the Captain smiled and was about to say something further when, all of a sudden, a loud knocking rang out from the door.

Wu Jianwu frowned. The noise had interrupted his train of thought. Waving his hand, he opened the door and looked out impatiently.

"Grandmaster!" Chen Fanzhuo said, rushing inside. He looked very alarmed. Quickly clasping hands to the back room he loudly continued, "Grandmaster, this is bad! The Wind Guard—"

Before he could finish speaking, the rumbling sound of an intense wind could be heard outside. Sand kicked up everywhere in the city, beating against the houses and making everything hazy.

Then, figures in white dropped out of the wind and into the city. Some appeared on the streets, others on the rooftops. Still others hovered in the air. There were thousands of them, with many of them being powerful experts. Their intimidating energy became a mighty pressure that was focused completely on the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

Of their number, four in specific landed about 300 meters away from the medicine shop. Those four had white robes inlaid with gold. Though it wasn't possible to make out their facial features, their clothing made it obvious that they were different from other members of their species. It was the same with their cultivation bases. All of them had passed the dao begetting phase and were fully in the Spirit Trove level.

And yet there was one who surpassed even them. As he landed only about 30 meters away from the Green Spirit Pharmacy, his golden robe made him very eye-catching. Another difference between him and the other Wind Guardians was that he had no hood on his robe. His white hair was very clear, and despite his hunched back, he seemed threatening without being angry.

In his presence, the four Spirit Trove cultivators as well as the thousands of other white-robed figures all bowed their heads.

"Patriarch," they said.

He pulsed with the aura of the great circle of Spirit Trove, and he also had numerous threads connected to him that were dao lineaments. When he managed to contain all of those dao lineaments in his eyes, then he would be able to break through from the Spirit Trove level and into Void Returning. At the moment, though, he was only halfway to that point.

The wind was getting stronger, screaming like an angry beast and shaking the hearts of all onlookers. The people watching from outside the city felt a suffocating sensation, and they couldn't help but focus their attention on the golden-robed old man.

The old man looked with cold eyes at the Green Spirit Pharmacy. As his energy surged, it was just barely possible to see the image of a divine dragon roaring. It made the old man seem like he could surpass any tribulations and crush anything in his path. After studying the Green Spirit Pharmacy briefly, he started walking forward. Every step he took caused the ground to quake, and sent the wind screaming about. No one else seemed capable of even moving. He didn't speak, nor did he pulse with terrifying fluctuations. It was as if the people in the Green Spirit Pharmacy were so unimportant to him that he didn't need to say anything.

Now that he was here, all he had to do was reach out and take back the holy relic, then crush the entire medicine shop. When all was said and done, cultivation base was the foundation of everything. Hands clasped behind his back, he walked forward and, without even a moment of hesitation, entered the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

As soon as he did, the door slammed closed behind him.

No one took the slamming of the door to indicate that something bad might happen to the patriarch. Whether it was the Wind Guardians or the people who were just watching the commotion, no one felt that something unexpected had happened. After all, the cultivation base disparity was so great that it was like watching a gigantic beast deal with a tiny rabbit. No matter what the rabbit did, it wouldn't be able to escape the fate that awaited it.

The Wind Guardians all felt that way, and stood by excitedly waiting. Because the wind was connected to their emotions, it started blowing even harder through the mudbrick city.

Meanwhile, the onlookers were shaken. Every time the Wind Guardians took to action and revealed some of their reserve powers, everyone was stunned.

"They're establishing their might and giving a warning to everyone."

"The thief in that medicine shop doesn't stand a chance."

"Want to steal stuff? Have fun. But don't steal holy relics from the Wind Guardians..."

"If the thief knows what's good for him, he'll hand over the holy relic and the evil spirit. If he does, he might enjoy a quick death. Otherwise, he'll definitely suffer."

Some onlookers sighed. Others reveled in the thief's misfortune. Most pleased of all were the white-robed Wind Guardians who had previously clashed with Xu Qing. The Wind Guardian who had led that group was on the same street as the Green Spirit Pharmacy, smiling broadly. He felt wonderful, and was visualizing what would happen when his patriarch walked out with that evil, savage thief.

You got lucky and made off with our holy relic, thief. As a result, I was punished by the elders. But now you'll learn the consequences of offending our species! And not just you. That evil spirit of yours, plus that teleporting parrot, are both going to die! That's what happens when you provoke the Wind Guardians!

If you need to blame someone, blame yourself! This is what you get for pissing off truly powerful experts! Starting today, all cultivators in the Greenhair Badlands are going to remember how mighty and powerful the Wind Guardians are!

The white-robed young man started laughing coldly. He simply couldn't wait to see what was going to happen next.

Chapter 608: Sorry to Bother You, I'm Just Here to Buy Some Pills

After the Green Spirit Pharmacy's door slammed shut, the golden-robed Patriarch Wind Guardian looked around coldly. The shop wasn't very large, and didn't look unusual in any way. There was a little oven off to the side with a steaming kettle of water boiling atop it.

He noted the young man sprawled out to the side, clad in a hemp garment. The young man's expression flitted between a frown, a thoughtful expression, and a pleased look. He seemed to be mumbling some sort of incoherent, nonsensical poetry. Surprisingly, he hardly took note of Patriarch Wind Guardian.

The patriarch scanned him and found that he was nothing more than a measly Gold Core cultivator. Ignoring him, he turned his attention to the next notable person, who stood next to the door holding a sword. He was also a young man, and he was smiling broadly at the patriarch.

"Welcome to our establishment! Don't mind me, I'm just the guard here. If you want to buy something, step on in!" Turning to look in the direction of the counter, he yelled, "Hey, Ling'er! We have a customer!"

Ling'er was behind the counter settling the accounts. Hearing her name, she looked up.

The counter was rather large, and she was petite, so when her tiny head suddenly popped up from behind the counter, it looked a bit strange. Seeing the patriarch by the door, her eyes lit up.

"Welcome, sir!" she said enthusiastically. "What would you like to buy? The white boluses here are the most famous in all of the Bitter Life Mountains. They're a single spirit coin each. If you buy a large number, I can give you a discount."

Patriarch Wind Guardian frowned slightly. After looking coldly at the young man with the sword, he glanced at the girl. It had been many years since anyone would dare to be so relaxed in his presence. The people here weren't reacting quite the way he'd imagined they would. Thankfully, not everyone was behaving in that manner. There was one little cultivator in the corner who was trembling in terror. That was a more appropriate reaction.

Next, the patriarch shifted his attention to two people who were currently cleaning the floor.

One was fat, the other was old. They were hard at work scrubbing this way and that. All of a sudden, the fat one turned to look at Patriarch Wind Guardian.

"I just scrubbed over there, so it's wet! *Don't* leave your footprints there!"

Patriarch Wind Guardian's eyes turned even colder. All people who had ever dared to speak to him in this manner were dead. However, he didn't immediately take action. He could crush a bug like that with no effort at all. Next, he turned to look at the old man seated at the counter, who was

playing with a parrot. The old man looked like any other mortal hovering on the brink of death. After looking at him for a moment, Patriarch Wind Guardian ignored him. In his opinion, it didn't matter who these people had backing them. The fact that they were basically ignoring him wasn't important.

Clasping his hands behind his back, he coolly said, "I have no interest in buying medicinal pills. How much are your lives worth? Give me a number and I'll pay it."

Tapping into power that was a half a step into Void Returning, he lifted his right foot and then stamped it onto the ground. As he did, he prepared to watch the entire medicine shop be leveled. Everyone would be shredded out of existence, leaving behind nothing but bones. And the fat one was going to turn into ashes.

A moment later, the old man's jaw dropped, and he looked down at the ground. Not one thing had happened to the medicine shop. It looked exactly the same as before. It was as if the explosive energy that had flowed out of his foot was *a stone ox thrown into the ocean*. There weren't even any lingering ripples, or any other sign that anything had happened.

But then the kettle slipped off the stove, clanging onto the ground and spilling all the hot water. The fatty scrubbing the ground suddenly looked up with a deep frown.

"Hey, you old codger!" he snapped angrily. "I just scrubbed the floor there!"

Bewildered, Patriarch Wind Guardian sent his divine sense out to check the spot where he had stamped his foot down. Then he looked over at the kettle. Something was off, and it caused his pupils to constrict. The fact that his burst of energy hadn't resulted in anything was obviously a cause for concern. Realistically speaking, that stamp of his foot shouldn't just have incinerated the medicine shop. It should have turned the entire city into ruins. But instead, the only thing that happened was that a kettle fell.

A feeling of deep unease welled up in his heart. But before he could do anything, he turned to find someone hurrying in from another room with an armful of firewood.

It was a girl dressed like a maidservant. She looked extremely angry, like a volcano about to erupt, as if she and the patriarch were enemies who couldn't tolerate living under the same sky as the other.

"You damned geezer!" she yelled. "I went out for a few seconds to get some firewood, and the water was already boiling. Then you came along and knocked over the kettle! You fool! Do you know how hard it is to boil water without using your cultivation base??"

The maidservant's cultivation base suddenly flared to life, sending out fluctuations in the great circle of Spirit Trove, just on the edge of Void Returning. At that moment, Patriarch Wind Guardian's suspicions were all cleared up, and he knew why the stamp of his foot had been ineffective. He also understood why all these people hadn't reacted in the way he expected. It was all because of this girl. She was clearly very strong. Although it was unusual that she was dressed up like a maidservant, top experts often behaved freakishly. Although, truth be told, he had never seen anyone behave in this freakish manner.

He had already abandoned his previous arrogant attitude. Trying to be calm and even-tempered, he waved his hand to send the kettle back to its previous position.

“I’m here because my species lost a holy relic,” he said calmly, “and I’d like to broker a fair resolution to the situation. Since *you’re* here, Fellow Daoist, let’s discuss the matter.”

“I don’t care if you lost a holy relic or an unholy relic, idiot!” the girl shot back. “That doesn’t have one goddamn thing to do with me. Hurry up and get the water boiling, otherwise I’m having you for dinner!” She flashed a grim smile.

Patriarch Wind Guardian frowned. He had shifted to being polite, but considering how rude the maidservant was being, it was obvious she didn’t fear him. Sending out his divine sense to check and make sure there weren’t any Void Returning experts in the medicine shop, he turned to look coldly at the back room.

“Get the hell out here, thief!” he snapped, walking directly toward the back room. He didn’t want to waste any more time. Therefore, it only took a moment for him to reach the curtain that led to Xu Qing in the back room. Reaching out, he grabbed the curtain to yank it aside. However, at that moment, his face fell. Out of nowhere, a wave of force hit him, and before he could do anything, it had completely wrapped him up.

Trembling, he walked backward several paces, his internal organs shivering with pain. Turning to the maidservant with killing intent surging, he coldly said, “You’re protecting him?”

The maidservant rolled her eyes and impatiently said, “Kill him if you can. And I’d love it if you killed that guy by the door. If you do, I’ll offer you my thanks.”

By that point, bubbling sounds could be heard from the kettle as the water started boiling. The maidservant picked up the kettle and walked over to the mortal man with the parrot. As she neared the old man, she made sure to walk very quietly.

Patriarch Wind Guardian looked on, stunned. Here was a fellow daoist with the same cultivation base as himself, who had suddenly changed personalities. The vitriol in her eyes transformed into something pure and tranquil, and she seemed like the picture of obedience as she made tea for the old man.

Patriarch Wind Guardian’s heart started pounding, and he suddenly felt a very gruish sensation. Trying to be as surreptitious as possible, he took out a jade pendant that he used to scan the old man. That jade pendant was a special treasure belonging to his species, which could be used to identify cultivation base fluctuations from anyone under the Smoldering God level. However, the jade pendant wasn’t giving him any unusual information.

He was really puzzled, but could tell on an instinctual level that there was something wrong with this medicine shop. Something profoundly wrong. Feeling more suspicious than ever, he looked at the two people scrubbing the floor, the young man with the sword, and the cultivator mumbling poetry.

Finally, he looked at the counter. All of them were behaving exactly the same as before. And all of that seemed extremely bizarre.

As Patriarch Wind Guardian hesitated about what to do, the old mortal behind the counter stopped playing with the parrot and lifted his cup to take a sip of tea.

That action revealed his left hand, within which was a pearl. Looking closely, it was possible to see a terrified face in that pearl, and it belonged to none other than Guru Blackeyes. Although Guru Blackeyes' cultivation base wasn't that impressive, to see him so terrified in the hands of another caused Patriarch Wind Guardian's scalp to go numb. He started edging his way backward. All he wanted to do now was leave. This medicine shop was a scary place. And the lack of information from his jade pendant could mean only one thing. Although it seemed extremely unlikely, as he looked around, he realized that the unlikely possibility... was actually very likely.

Beads of sweat popped out on his forehead, and he started shaking. His heart also started racing. As it turned out, this was the exact same reaction he'd expected from the people inside the shop when they saw him. Feeling wildly nervous, and full of deep regret, he realized that he had been extremely careless. And he should never have charged through the door of this little medicine shop.

If I'm right, this is no medicine shop. This is the freaking Nine Serenities underworld!!

Seeing the patriarch trembling, Ling'er sighed. "You're really not going to buy any of our medicinal pills? They're truly amazing!"

Patriarch Wind Guardian hesitated, then took out a bag of holding and put it on the counter.

"Sure, I'll buy some!"

Ling'er's expression brightened up. Scooping up the bag of holding, she handed him a white bolus.

The patriarch took it, then slowly backed away, trying to retrace his footsteps so that he didn't make the floor any dirtier than he already had. What was more, he couldn't help but glance at the old mortal with the tea.

The old man looked up at him.

When their gazes met, Patriarch Wind Guardian felt like his mind had been struck by 1,000,000 lightning bolts. He started shaking even harder than before, and sweat began to soak through his golden robe.

S-smoldering... God....

Waves of terror swept through him, battering his mind. Every inch of his flesh, blood, and bones were screaming at him that he was in incredible, incredible, incredible danger.

In fact, those numerous sensations of danger felt like they had lives of their own, and they were chewing at his flesh, soul, and senses. Filled with incomparable, unsurpassable regret, he came to the realization that coming to this little medicine shop was the worst mistake he had ever made in his entire life.

How could this be happening...?

As sweat poured off of him like rain, he instinctively dropped to his knees.

That was when the Heir Apparent spoke. "Come here."

Chapter 609: A Very Polite Patriarch

The piercing wind still howled outside the Green Spirit Pharmacy, bringing with it a sense of terror. The thousands of cold, haughty Wind Guardians filled the city with a very somber and frigid aura.

“The little thief is probably on his knees begging the patriarch for mercy right now!”

“Hmph! Pleading for forgiveness might work if we lived in a world of peace.”

“Considering he stole our holy relic, the patriarch will do as usual and skin him alive. Maybe turn him into a decorative lantern. The fat from his corpse can be the oil, and his soul can burn forever within it.”

The Wind Guardians were all sneering grimly, especially the ones Xu Qing had clashed with before. All of them felt full of excitement and anticipation.

“However arrogant the little thief was that day, that’s how miserable he’ll be today!”

“He stole our holy relic and then evaded our pursuit. He’s got some skill, I’ll give him that. But it won’t do him any good right now. When faced with overwhelming power, he’s doomed to suffer.”

“If the patriarch turns him into a lamp, I’ll definitely borrow that lamp and have lots of fun with it in my mansion grotto.”

“And then there’s that detestable parrot and the evil spirit!”

The Wind Guardians who had clashed with Xu Qing were gathered in the same area, and were chuckling with each other as they kept eyes on the medicine shop.

Patriarch Wind Guardian had been inside for a while, but none of them were worried, not even the four Spirit Trove Wind Guardians.

As they watched the door of the Green Spirit Pharmacy, they didn’t detect the tiniest fluctuation from inside. But that wasn’t unusual. Given Patriarch Wind Guardian’s cultivation base, no one outside should have been able to detect him taking any action.

“Sadly for the culprit, our patriarch will be able to crush him with a single glance.”

“According to what I heard, years ago when the patriarch was out adventuring, he liked to turn his enemies into little toys and gadgets. I imagine he’s just coming up with something new to turn this guy into.”

“Well, isn’t this interesting.”

As the four Spirit Trove Wind Guardians joked and chatted, the people observing from outside the city were sighing as they looked on. All of them knew that the Wind Guardians were doing more than just destroying a little medicine shop.

“This mudbrick city is going to turn into a hell on earth.”

“Given this species’ tendencies, I bet they’re going to turn this city into a never-ending windstorm, just to show everyone else how strong and terrifying they are.”

“That said, have any of you noticed that... it’s been quite a while since Patriarch Wind Guardian went inside?”

As the cultivators on the outside and the Wind Guardians inside the city discussed the matter, time passed. Eventually two full hours had gone by.

Around then, people started to realize that something strange was going on. Cultivators inside and outside the city were now paying even closer attention to the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

Eventually, the four Spirit Trove Wind Guardians started to realize that the time really was stretching out too long. After exchanging glances, they prepared to approach the medicine shop. However, that was when the door of the shop slowly creaked open. Countless gazes locked onto the door, most of them filled with anticipation, excitement, and concentration. But then, only a moment later, countless eyes widened.

Patriarch Wind Guardian was visible inside the door. His face a mask of politeness, he slowly backed out, bowing and scraping as he said, “Sorry to disturb all of you. I didn’t understand the situation. Please forgive me for any trouble.”

Even after he was outside, he kept bowing deeply in the direction of the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

“I’ll send our other holy relics over immediately. They function as a set, so it’s best not to keep them apart for long, and besides, I can’t do as good a job of keeping them as safe as you. Going forward, if you need assistance in anything, just press that jade pendant. It doesn’t matter what it is, I’ll rush over immediately. And now, I’m really going to say farewell. I truly apologize!”

The trembling patriarch bowed yet again. Then the door slammed shut. The cold wind blew through the streets of the city. No one made a sound.... The Wind Guardians were dumbfounded. The cultivators outside the city were stupefied. Because the wind carried the patriarch’s polite words through the city, everyone heard them. It almost didn’t seem real. None of them could have predicted that Patriarch Wind Guardian would do or say anything like this. It seemed completely and utterly impossible. Yet, it was clearly happening.

Patriarch Wind Guardian stood outside of the Green Spirit Pharmacy in the cold wind, and he could feel himself trembling. As the chill spread through his body, it combined with the pounding of his heart to create an intense level of terror. Because his cultivation base was so high, it had been a long time since he felt the type of coldness that mortals would feel. But right now, he felt it. Deeply. He didn’t want to think any more about what happened inside. Nor did he want to stick around this place. Shivering, he slowly turned around.

The four Spirit Trove Wind Guardians looked at him hesitantly.

“Patriarch...?”

“Patriarch, what happened?”

The patriarch shook his head. Eyes shimmering with terror, he lowered his voice and said, “Don’t ask. Don’t ever bring it up. We’re leaving. Now!”

Deeply shaken, the four Spirit Trove cultivators clustered around the patriarch and flew off. The leader of the Wind Guardians who had clashed with Xu Qing before was flabbergasted, and couldn’t help but give voice to his concerns.

“Patriarch, that little thief—”

Before he could finish speaking, Patriarch Wind Guardian turned and waved his hand. Blood sprayed out of the young Wind Guardian’s mouth as he was knocked off into the distance, where he flopped to the ground unconscious.

“He’s a grandmaster!” the patriarch said furiously. “I dare anyone to talk about him casually!”

As the surrounding Wind Guardians trembled in confusion, their patriarch flew off into the distance. Before long, thousands of figures were seen leaving the mudbrick city and disappearing into the wind.

The observers from the various factions who had been watching from outside the city couldn’t help but gasp in astonishment. And then they looked at the Green Spirit Pharmacy with new eyes.

“What’s going on??”

“Am I seeing things? Is this a figment of my imagination? Why did it seem like the patriarch of the Wind Guardians was shaking...?”

“What happened to him? How could Patriarch Wind Guardian go into the place looking so arrogant, then come out looking like that?”

“There’s something very unusual about the Green Spirit Pharmacy!!”

As the gasps rang out, countless eyes filled with dread, and soon people started looking away from the Green Spirit Pharmacy. They didn’t dare to keep their eyes on it for too long. The events which had played out were simply unbelievable.

The mysterious sensation that their incredulity brought led, not only to intense terror, but also incredible curiosity about the little medicine shop.

“Just what exactly happened inside that place?”

Trembling with fear, the gathered crowds quickly left the area.

Inside the Green Spirit Pharmacy, everything was the same as usual.

However, there were more bags of holding, about a dozen or so, which Ling’er was excitedly going through. Others in the shop had gathered around curiously to see what the bags contained.

Nethersprite just sneered and tended to the boiling water.

Ning Yan sighed and went back to re-scrub the parts of the floor that had been walked over. Because of all the cleaning he had been doing lately, he’d become somewhat obsessed with cleanliness.

Whenever he spotted any part of the shop that was dirty, he would rush over to clean it. Only when everything was spotless would he feel at ease.

The Heir Apparent, meanwhile, chuckled as he rolled two pearls in his palm. Just like before, one of them contained Guru Blackeyes. But there was now a second pearl, and the face within it was none other than Patriarch Wind Guardian. Of course, it wasn't the patriarch as a whole, but rather, a strand of his soul.

Xu Qing hadn't made an appearance the entire time. He stayed in the back focusing on recovering from his injuries.

Chen Fanzhuo was acting extremely respectfully. After paying his respects and wishing everyone good health, he said farewell. Just before he left, Ling'er took some treasure out of one of the bags of holding and gave it to him. Looking excited, he offered thanks over and over again.

Patriarch Wind Guardian, in order to apologize for his intrusion, had given a lot of good things in those bags of holding. There were spirit stones, medicinal pills, and magical devices, all of them extraordinary.

As everyone split the loot, the Heir Apparent went into the back room where Xu Qing was meditating.

Xu Qing quickly got to his feet, clasped hands, and bowed.

The Heir Apparent waved his hand and produced a pill bottle, which he tossed to Xu Qing.

"Those are some divine soul pills provided by our respectful little friend who just came to visit. There are ten in total. Take one of them, and you should recover much more quickly. Keep the remaining nine for the upcoming healing you'll need to do."

Xu Qing took the bottle and opened it. Considering his skill in the dao of alchemy, he could immediately tell that the pills were amazing. The medicinal effect was specifically focused on healing injuries to the soul. This category of medicinal pill was both rare and expensive.

Without the slightest hesitation, he consumed one of the pills. As it melted, an eruption of warmth filled him before rushing toward his sea of consciousness. Rumbling sounds filled his sea of consciousness, like an erupting volcano. It reached his soul, then sent waves of heat through him. Before, his soul had been dim, but now it was rapidly becoming clear. Only a moment later, he had not only fully recovered from his injuries, but also, his soul had improved compared to before. Moved, he opened his eyes and looked at the Heir Apparent.

"Since you've recovered," the Heir Apparent said calmly, "we might as well continue your tempering now. Xu Qing, you have a lot of random skills and abilities. Unfortunately, you haven't come to a deep understanding of any of them. If you do that, then your battle prowess will advance by leaps and bounds!

"If you continue to make progress in the same way as before, you won't get stronger fast enough. You need to force yourself to reach the highest level. And the only way to unlock your true potential is to walk the fine line between life and death.

“This time, I’m not taking you to the Red Moon Cathedral. Instead, I want you to send your golden crow nascent soul into this pearl and fight the little fellow inside.”

As he spoke, the Heir Apparent handed Guru Blackeyes’ pearl to Xu Qing.

“Only use the golden crow nascent soul, and as you walk that line between life and death, see what transformations you can dig up from deep within it! You’ll have nine chances. You can use those pills to recover after each time, but you only have nine of them.

“I promised the fellow inside the pearl that after the tenth battle begins, he can directly devour your golden crow nascent soul. If he succeeds, I’ll let him go free. Therefore, you must either gain enlightenment of the deeper transformations of the golden crow nascent soul, and use it to create a personal trump card, or... you’ll lose your golden crow nascent soul forever. It all comes down to your personal good fortune.”

Eyes glittering, the Heir Apparent turned and left.

Xu Qing sat there quietly for a moment looking at the pearl. Then, eyes shining, he said, “Golden Crow.”

Instantly, black light glittered above his head as the golden crow shot out, streaming flames behind it and pulsing with a holy aura. As Xu Qing directed it mentally, its eyes gleamed and it shot into the pearl.

Chapter 610: Tracing the Essence Back to the Beginning

Xu Qing sat cross-legged in the back room of the Green Spirit Pharmacy, his mind linked with the golden crow nascent soul. As of this moment, he *was* the golden crow.

Upon entering the pearl, he found himself in a strange dimension. Everything was blurry and filled with roiling mist and muffled thunder. Then, only a moment after he arrived, the mist parted to reveal a huge face rushing toward him.

It was none other than Guru Blackeyes. His eyes were crimson and bursting with madness. After being sealed in the pearl, he had experienced unending torment that made him wish he could die. He had assumed that his life would be like that forever going forward. But then, the terrifying Smoldering God had unexpectedly told him that he would have ten chances to devour a golden crow and thus free himself. He had no choice but to believe the Smoldering God. Therefore, as soon as he laid eyes on Xu Qing, he didn’t hesitate for a moment to unleash his cultivation base, causing a full secret trove to appear.

“Hurry up and die!” he howled. “Hurry up and die ten times!”

Then he lunged toward Xu Qing with his mouth wide to devour him.

Xu Qing fell back, his golden crow body flaring with unending heavenfire. However, given he was facing a Spirit Trove cultivator with a complete secret trove, there was no way that heavenfire could mount any sort of effective defense.

Guru Blackeyes exhaled, and in the blink of an eye, the golden crow's flames were swept aside. Then Guru Blackeyes' face grew larger until it filled the entire dimension. His forehead touched the sky, his chin touched the ground, and his mouth opened wide, closing in on Xu Qing like a black hole.

From a distance, Xu Qing as a golden crow looked like a bird from the mortal world, completely incapable of fighting back. As his vision grew dim, he felt intense pain in his soul. The golden crow collapsed, and as Xu Qing lost consciousness, he heard a voice.

"Nine more times...."

Back in the Green Spirit Pharmacy, Xu Qing opened his eyes as he sat cross-legged in the back room.

"It happened in an instant!" he murmured, scowling. His golden crow was still there. It hadn't been devoured. But his soul, which had just recovered, was inundated with intense pain.

Xu Qing took out one of the divine soul pills and consumed it. Closing his eyes, he meditated for about two hours. After he was fully recovered, he looked at the pearl in his hand and thought about the experience of directly facing a Spirit Trove expert.

This isn't going to work. How am I supposed to transform the golden crow to be able to avoid being devoured?

A thousand thoughts ran through Xu Qing's mind. Eventually, he sent his consciousness back into his golden crow nascent soul.

The golden crow can assimilate myriad spirits. It can become a sun.... The former isn't going to help much. But the latter....

Xu Qing thought about all of the suns he had seen close up.

Back in Daybreak Prefecture in Sea-Sealing County, I got to see a sun close up for the first time. Granted, it was only the dead remains of a sun.... Later, here in the Moonrite Region, I saw four artificial suns. Little Roundy was the first. The one with eternal power was the second. The round ring was the third. And the ancient sphere was the fourth.

After some more thought, his eyes glittered.

Wait, there was another. When I gained enlightenment of the golden crow, there was that young man depicted in the carvings in the dragon chariot. What if I transform the golden crow into a sun? Return it to its original essence....?

Xu Qing felt a lot of pressure. If he wanted to do this, he needed to deeply consider how to use the golden crow.

The night passed.

The following morning at dawn, the sky was still dark, just not as dark as at night. As the Green Spirit Pharmacy opened for business, Xu Qing made his second attempt. As the golden crow, he entered the pearl. Instantly, the strange dimension unfolded in front of his eyes. He started backing up.

The mist in front of him seethed, and Guru Blackeyes' rushed toward him as a giant face. Just like last time, he rapidly grew bigger until he filled the dimension. Then he rushed toward Xu Qing, bursting with destructive power as he opened his mouth wide.

This time, just before he devoured Xu Qing, the golden crow emitted a piercing cry as it exploded into four chunks of flesh.

The first of those chunks rippled into the shape of a door frame, within which was a spring. As the spring bounced up and down with increasing speed, it ignited and became a sun. The second part became a round ring which started spinning around rapidly until it caught fire. The third piece of flesh became a sphere which also burst into flames.

These were the three suns that Xu Qing had seen at the Yin Sacrifice River. The suns rushed toward Guru Blackeyes' gaping maw. As they burned with intense heat, they suddenly self-detonated.

A massive boom filled the entire dimension, and Guru Blackeyes' giant face stopped moving briefly. Though that face briefly caught fire in a few places, it returned to normal very quickly.

However, Xu Qing had successfully avoided being devoured, at least temporarily. The final chunk of flesh wriggled wildly as it transformed into a young man. His face was as fair as jade, and he wore an imperial robe and crown. He was surrounded by heavenfire, and a dragon chariot formed beneath him. Looking very imposing, he prepared to launch an attack. Before he could, the entire dimension seemed to collapse. The sky seemed to become the top jaw, and the ground was the bottom jaw, and when they snapped shut, everything turned black.

Back in the Green Spirit Pharmacy, Xu Qing opened his eyes and coughed up a mouthful of blood. There was a voice ringing in his ears.

"Eight more times!"

Expression grim, Xu Qing consumed another pill and then analyzed his defeat.

There's absolutely no way a three-tribulation Nascent Soul cultivator could ever beat a Spirit Trove expert. It doesn't matter that the latter is sealed in a pearl and restricted. The difference between the two levels is something that's fundamentally impossible to surpass. But the Heir Apparent is right. I clearly haven't come to a deep understanding of my nascent souls. For example, the golden crow... After transforming it into a sun, it's clearly on a much higher level than before.

Xu Qing could sense that he was exploring the right direction.

In that case, how do I dig down to an even more profound level? What is the golden crow made from? And substructurally speaking, what exactly is an imperial-class technique?

Xu Qing was just about to send his mind back into the golden crow to do further study when Ling'er excitedly ran into the back room.

"Big Bro Xu Qing," she said in a whisper, "today's the day you're supposed to release your new pill!"

Xu Qing's eyes went wide. He'd already forgotten about the new pill. The Heir Apparent had changed everything. Instead of a quiet life, things were now moving ahead at breakneck speed. That said, he'd already finished concocting all the pills he needed, and they were even more effective than he'd hoped they would be. They significantly reduced the curse.

Xu Qing nodded at Ling'er, took out the mirror, and then brought her with him as he went to the Moonrebel Congregation.

The Moonrebel Congregation was like a boiling cauldron of voices. Ten days had passed in which everyone was talking about how Grandmaster Pill Nine was going to release a new medicine called a cursequelling lozenge, all while Grandmaster Saintlowe was going to release his own pill on the same day. Everyone in the Moonrebel Congregation was caught up in the hubbub.

Tens of thousands of statues hovered in the air above the Moonrebel Congregation, all waiting for Xu Qing and Grandmaster Saintlowe to arrive. Though each statue looked different, collectively, they shone with dazzling light, like magnificent devils. A constant buzz of conversation rippled through the air.

"I had no idea there would be such a clamor of activity. I'm also really curious to see how things play out between the two grandmasters."

"People's expectations are too high for the painquelling lozenge and the so-called cursequelling lozenge. I guess it's understandable. Overall, I don't believe in this Pill Nine fellow."

Among the countless discussions, there were obviously altercations between supporters from either side.

"Grandmaster Saintlowe is a person of virtue and prestige. Countless people have benefited from his grace. His dao of alchemy is incomparable. How could some random alchemist like Pill Nine possibly compare to him?"

"A person of virtue and prestige? Cut the crap! Saintlowe's medicinal pills are outrageously expensive. I once had to spend a year of income just to buy one of them!"

"Such impudence! If you hadn't purchased that pill, you'd be a corpse right now! Yet you dare to spout such absurd rhetoric?"

"Exactly! Grandmaster Saintlowe is my personal benefactor! Anyone who says anything bad about him is an enemy of mine!"

There was a lot of arguing. Overall, it seemed that about eighty percent of the people supported Grandmaster Saintlowe, which meant that in many cases, the supporters of Grandmaster Pill Nine were drowned out. However, there were two of Grandmaster Pill Nine's followers whose voices were so loud they couldn't be drowned out.

One of them was Xu Qing's burly neighbor. Glaring at the crowd, he spoke in a booming voice that thrummed with gratefulness.

"Grandmaster Saintlowe might be able to save a person's life. But he leaves them destitute afterward! All of us live bitter lives, and we struggle just to stay alive! We shouldn't have to suffer exploitation like that!"

“But take a look at Grandmaster Pill Nine. He clearly *bemoans the state of the universe and pities the fate of mankind*. He has a heart of mercy! All he charges for a painquelling lozenge is a hundred drops of godservant blood. Is that because he doesn't know how valuable painquelling lozenges are? He absolutely does know! But he can't stand to see us in pain! That's why he charges such a low price. He wants to help us relieve our bitterness!”

Meanwhile, not far away, another statue spoke in a piercing voice.

“You bunch of idiots! You've been scammed into poverty by that brat Saintlowe, yet you insist on kissing his stinky feet! While Saintlowe bathes in wealth, you lot are like obedient children!”

The statue that was speaking was very thin and held a precious bottle in his hands. His face was black and had six eyes, all of which glittered with scorn. That was especially true when he said 'obedient children.' The statues listening to him bristled with anger at the sarcastic insult. The six-eyed statue actually seemed pleased at how angry everyone was getting. [1]

“What was that, you obedient little children? Say it again, grandpa couldn't hear you, you bunch of brainless Little Spriteys.”

That got everyone even angrier. Although none of them understood what 'Little Spritey' meant, they could tell it was some sort of insult.

Meanwhile, some of Grandmaster Pill Nine's most ardent followers and supporters started gathering around the six-eyed statue, forming something almost like a home base. They had found their pillar upon which to rely.

When the burly neighbor saw that, his eyes gleamed with admiration. He recognized the six-eyed statue as someone who had frequently come to Grandmaster Pill Nine's temple. However, he had never spoken to him. Never could he have guessed that the statue would be able to speak in such an incisive manner. Seeing that this six-eyed statue was a kindred spirit, he resolved to make friends with him.

Right at that moment, the entire Moonrebel Congregation suddenly trembled. The mountain shook and the temples vibrated as a shocking pressure descended from above.

All of the arguments ceased as everyone looked up.