

Timescape 611

Chapter 611: That Guy Looks Kind of Like Erniu

In the dome of heaven over the Moonrebel Congregation were nine majestic temples. One of them was now radiating the most dazzling of lights. Then, a tall, god-like figure emerged from it, pulsing with incredible glory. He was 3,000 meters tall, golden, with three heads and six arms. Within each arm he held a mountain of a different color, and behind him were numerous layers of shimmering projections. He shone with radiance like the sun, and clearly surpassed anything from the mortal world. His arrival shook the huge mountain below, sending the clouds scattering. And he emanated a mountain-toppling, sea-draining pressure that reached every corner of the Moonrebel Congregation. Everyone who felt that pressure shivered, bowed their heads, and clasped hands toward the canopy of heaven.

“Fourth Vice-Bishop!”

The nine paramount temples in the air above the Moonrebel Congregation were the highest existences in the congregation. Although only five of them were occupied, with four awaiting successors, those five commanded the ultimate authority in the Moonrebel Congregation. They were the ones in charge.

In recent years, the leadership of those five vice-bishops had led to the Moonrebel Congregation growing stronger, and constantly participating in secret resistance operations. Their true identities were secret, and they normally only made appearances to announce very important matters. Therefore, all of the statues below were very curious why Fourth Vice-Bishop had come, and were now waiting to see what announcement would be made.

Sitting down cross-legged, the 3,000-meter-tall statue spoke in a booming voice that echoed into the hearts and minds of everyone present. “I have not come here today to make any sort of announcement. Rather, Grandmaster Saintlowe invited me to attend the medicinal pill release ceremony. Carry on, ladies and gentlemen.”

Those words led to an even greater commotion among the statues in the Moonrebel Congregation. Grandmaster Saintlowe’s supporters got even more excited, while the supporters of Pill Nine felt their hearts starting to pound.

“Grandmaster Saintlowe is so famous and respected that Fourth Vice-Bishop personally came to attend!”

“Given all the people Grandmaster Saintlowe has shown grace toward over the years, and all the cultivators he’s saved, he’s definitely the only one who qualifies to invite a vice-bishop to attend!”

Conversation swelled in the Moonrebel Congregation, almost exclusively among those who supported Saintlowe. Those who supported Pill Nine remained silent. Even the burly neighbor and the six-eyed statue were shaken.

Meanwhile, at a location about halfway up the mountain of the Moonrebel Congregation, at a temple of pure jade that was surrounded by countless statues, the door slowly opened, allowing

scintillating light to shine out along with the sound of ringing bells. The cauldron in front of the temple suddenly flared to life with burning incense, its smoke drifting up into the air.

A statue walked out. It resembled an angry vajra warrior with auspicious clouds beneath his feet. He had a third eye in the middle of his forehead, which emanated a glow that could capture souls. Above his head floated a rotating pill furnace, and he was surrounded by a medicinal aroma.

The moment that statue walked out, all of the other statues that had been waiting nearby broke out into excited cheering.

“It’s Grandmaster Saintlowe! I can’t believe the grandmaster is so punctual!”

“That’s just Grandmaster Saintlowe! Strict self-discipline is part of his personality. It always has been!”

As highly reverential talk like that spread, Grandmaster Saintlowe strode out of his temple and up into the air. All eyes in the Moonrebel Congregation were on him, and countless people bowed in greeting.

“Greetings, Grandmaster!”

As Grandmaster Saintlowe hovered in the air receiving all the adoration, he looked around feeling very pleased.

Nodding slightly, he said, “Ladies and gentlemen. Fellow Daoists. Sorry to keep you waiting.” Turning to Fourth Vice-Bishop, he clasped hands and bowed. “Fourth Vice-Bishop, many thanks to you for coming to attend the release of my new little pill.”

The vice-bishop smiled. “I’ve been eagerly awaiting your new pill for some time, Grandmaster.”

Saintlowe smiled in response, and was about to continue speaking when, at the base of the mountain, the door of a temple opened and a statue walked out of an old man with a bottle gourd on his back. It was none other than Xu Qing. There was no dazzling light that accompanied his arrival, nor did the incense in the cauldron flare to life. In fact, not many people even noticed his arrival.

However, his followers noticed the moment he arrived. They instantly got very excited.

“Grandmaster Pill Nine!”

“Greetings, Grandmaster!”

The burly neighbor rushed over excitedly. “You’re finally here, Grandmaster!”

The six-eyed statue followed close behind him, all six of his eyes brimming with tears of excitement. Looking extremely excited, the six-eyed statue said, “Grandmaster Pill Nine, your virtue reaches the highest heavens! Your pills can conquer ten oceans, forge a hundred worlds, last a thousand autumns, and survive ten thousand generations!”

The six-eyed statue’s words were very impressive, and surpassed anything that anyone else was saying. As a result, the other followers all started saying similar things.

As their voices spread, the cultivators who had been paying attention to Grandmaster Saintlowe turned their heads.

“That’s the ‘Pill Nine’ alchemist?”

“He seems pretty ordinary to me. Not very impressive.”

“I’m very interested to see what kind of pill he releases. If he’s really just showboating, then it’ll prove that all those cheap painquelling lozenges he sold are defective in some way!”

As all the statues looked at him, Xu Qing looked back in surprise.

Because he had been so focused on recovery, he hadn’t been back to the Moonrebel Congregation recently, and had no idea that Saintlowe had also announced he would release a pill on the same day. That said, he didn’t care. Looking at the vice-bishop high in the dome of heaven, he clasped hands and bowed.

Fourth Vice-Bishop looked down at Xu Qing. This was his first time laying eyes on the alchemist that had sparked so much excitement and debate recently. He gave Xu Qing a nod, but didn’t say anything.

Xu Qing looked away from the vice-bishop and scanned the crowd of statues around his temple. He had no intention of leaving his temple, as he was currently wrapped up in thoughts about the golden crow. His plan was just to take out the new medicinal pills and put them in the sphere of light like before. Then people could inspect them as they saw fit.

However, before he could take out his pill, the followers of Grandmaster Saintlowe started making derisive comments.

“So, you really decided to show your face, Pill Nine? We didn’t think you would dare to come.”

“How could you think that? Pill Nine is a grandmaster! There’s no way he would miss an opportunity to bask in the dazzling glory of others.”

“Grandmaster Saintlowe is the one truly working toward great aspirations. He doesn’t care about fame or fortune. Nor would he stoop to bickering with others. It’s honestly a shock that this Pill Nine would pick the very same day as Grandmaster Saintlowe to release a new pill. Even a random passerby could see how narrow-minded he is.”

Their words were quite vicious and offensive.

Xu Qing looked up and took note of what all of those statues looked like.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing’s followers were starting to get angry.

“That’s complete nonsense!” the burly neighbor said loudly.

Speaking in a piercing voice, the six-eyed statue said, “Why don’t you tell us how much dirty money you took from Saintlowe to distort the truth like that? You must have plenty of spirit stones to spare now. Mind giving me some?”

Both sides were saying some very biting things. Although Pill Nine obviously didn’t have as many supporters as Saintlowe, the six-eyed statue alone seemed capable of standing against a thousand

enemies. His every single word was very crafty, and his arguments were very persuasive. In fact, he had already made a deep impression on the crowds of statues who were watching the interchange.

Xu Qing was actually a little irritated by all the commotion. He wasn't interested in wasting time on pointless debates. Therefore, he turned around with the intention of returning to the Green Spirit Pharmacy and continuing his work with the golden crow.

However, before he could do that, Grandmaster Saintlowe calmly said, "Pipe down!"

The supporters of both grandmasters all went silent. Then Saintlowe turned his attention to Xu Qing.

"Pill Nine," he said coolly, "you have walked down the wrong path!"

Xu Qing stopped in place and turned around to look at Grandmaster Saintlowe. "What do you mean?"

In the resulting silence, all eyes were focused on Xu Qing and Saintlowe. That included Fourth Vice-Bishop.

Grandmaster Saintlowe shook his head. "Someone brought one of your pills to me. At first, I was very pleased with what I saw. But in the end, I was disappointed. You think you're pretty clever. Your pill uses the flesh of the white wind as an attractant. But it's all a sham. A charade. People experimented with that method seven thousand years ago and realized it's extremely harmful. Everyone who consumed pills like that ended up dying violently a few years later! You clearly have bad intentions, Pill Nine!"

Quite a few gasps could be heard during Grandmaster Saintlowe's speech. That was especially true among cultivators who had consumed Xu Qing's medicinal pills. All of them were visibly shaken.

Xu Qing looked at Saintlowe, then turned his attention to the burly neighbor. He beckoned him over.

The burly neighbor was also starting to feel a bit suspicious thanks to Saintlowe's accusations, but he hurried over nonetheless.

"What happened over the past few days?" Xu Qing asked.

The burly neighbor was a bit nervous but he offered a very detailed explanation. After it was over, Xu Qing's eyes glittered with cold light. At the same time, Ling'er's charming voice echoed in his mind.

"Big Bro Xu Qing, they've obviously taken advantage of us during the time we've been away. This is some really ridiculous slander! They're saying we have bad intentions? It seems to me that they're the ones with the bad intentions!"

Xu Qing's face was completely expressionless, but his eyes were cold. As of this moment, he had abandoned his plan to go back to the Green Spirit Pharmacy. Walking out of his temple, he floated up into the air.

His followers were clearly less confident than before, but they still stuck close to him. The burly neighbor remained on his left side, while a statue with six eyes rushed out to join him on the right.

Xu Qing stopped in place and looked left and right, taking special note of the six-eyed statue. The statue's gaze seemed familiar. It was the same way the Captain looked at the Heir Apparent. As Xu Qing speculated what that could mean, Ling'er spoke again into his mind.

"Big Bro Xu Qing, this guy's eyes seem familiar. He kind of reminds me of Elder Brother Erniu!"

Xu Qing didn't respond. Pretending not to recognize the six-eyed statue, he continued upward until he was hovering right in front of Grandmaster Saintlowe.

"Want to have a little contest?" he asked calmly.

Chapter 612: A Pill Star Rises in Moonrite

There was no cheering or surge of support from the tens of thousands of statues when Xu Qing walked out into the open. However, his words smashed into the Moonrebel Congregation like a hurricane. All of the statues were watching closely to see what would happen next.

Grandmaster Saintlowe looked at Xu Qing and said, "I don't need any sort of contest. But I don't mind tutoring you a bit. I just hope that, after today, you'll understand deep in your heart that you should avoid crooked practices and corrupt methods!"

Not bothering to look at Xu Qing, Grandmaster Saintlowe lifted his right hand. The pill furnace hovering over his head then floated down into his hand. Next, it was with a flourish that he sent the medicinal pill inside of the furnace flying out into the open. It looked crystalline, and as it hovered in the air rotating, it let off streams of gauzy light that circled around it. It looked spectacularly beautiful, especially the crystalline exterior, which made the pill seem like a gemstone. Just barely visible within it were swirling medicinal vapors, as if the pill itself contained an immortal paradise.

Given Xu Qing's skill in the dao of alchemy, it only took one glance for him to determine that this medicinal pill was extraordinary. It also gave him a good idea of Grandmaster Saintlowe's dao of alchemy.

He really is something of a genius, he thought.

Meanwhile, when the crowd saw the medicinal pill, they started crying out loudly.

"Now *that's* a medicinal pill! It's clearly some kind of pill treasure!"

"I never imagined that Grandmaster Saintlowe's skill in the dao of alchemy would advance yet another step!"

Anyone would be shocked when judging the pill by appearance alone. In fact, one of Saintlowe's followers stepped forth, eyes shining with reverence.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Fellow Daoists!" he said loudly. "As you're all aware, high-grade pills need to be perfect. The purer they are, the more precious they are. And when a pill reaches a certain exquisite level, Revered Ancient's heavenly daos will bless it with splendid light. As for Grandmaster Saintlowe's new pill, it has already attracted that splendid light!"

As the crowd erupted with even louder exclamations and cheers, countless longing gazes locked onto the pill.

Xu Qing's followers were now really starting to lose confidence, and were exchanging awkward glances. Before, their faith in Grandmaster Pill Nine had been very strong. But after Saintlowe mentioned people dying because of the white wind, they started to get nervous. Then a pill appeared that seemed to be nothing short of a treasure, and all of a sudden, their confidence in Pill Nine was so shaken that they were starting to doubt him.

As the crowd continued to cheer, Fourth Vice-Bishop nodded approvingly.

"That's truly a treasured pill. Grandmaster Saintlowe, can you mass-produce this pill?"

Saintlowe smiled in response to the vice-bishops praise. Clapping hands and bowing, he said, "Fourth Vice-Bishop, of course the pill can be mass-produced."

"What benevolence!" the vice-bishop said with a smile.

Feeling extremely pleased with himself, Grandmaster Saintlowe turned to the expressionless Xu Qing. "This is the first lesson for this tutoring session. Remember, we pill cultivators pursue the dao of medicine because we're fully devoted to it. Abandon your clever tricks. Stow away your unrighteous desires. If you don't, then your heart won't contain a scrap of light. Concocting pills should never be about personal glory!"

Grandmaster Saintlowe's tone was one of rebuke. When everyone heard his words, they turned to look at Xu Qing, some of them shaking their heads, some of them looking derisive, some of them sighing, and some of them even angry.

Xu Qing didn't reply. Instead, he just took out his cursequelling lozenge. With the wave of his hand, he sent it floating out in front of him. The pill was pitch black and didn't look special at all. In fact, it immediately provoked laughter and criticism.

"Is that a medicinal pill or a clump of dirt?"

"That's all?"

As the mocking laughter spread, Xu Qing performed an incantation gesture and pointed out. Instantly, popping sounds rang out from the medicinal pill as cracks appeared on its surface.

Next, the outer black layer fell off, whereupon splendid light erupted that could topple mountains and drain seas. The mighty glow seemed to have no end; it was like the light of dawn, filling the world with hope. Every beam of light was like a rainbow, dazzling and beautiful. The dome of heaven was illuminated, and the sky filled with auspicious sights. It spread out over the lands, filling them with propitious tidings. From a distance, it was as if that medicinal pill was the center of a vast sea of light that spread out resplendently.

The cultivators in the Moonrebel Congregation were stunned down to the last one. It was obvious to anyone with eyes that the two pills hovering in midair were vastly different from each other.

Although Grandmaster Saintlowe's pill shone with splendid light, the light coming from Xu Qing's medicinal pill was so superior that it drowned the other pill out. Grandmaster Saintlowe's pill was dim in comparison, to the point where its existence seemed meaningless.

Loud gasps rang out left and right, and after a moment, exclamations of shock began to ring out.

“A blessing of boundless splendid light from a heavenly dao?”

“That sort of splendid light... isn’t that what Grandmaster Saintlowe always says you’ll see with the highest quality pill?”

“There really is a pill like that? If I remember correctly, only a pill that contains destiny aura, plus the converged hope of all living beings, could possibly be blessed by a heavenly dao with such splendid light!”

As expressions of incredulity rang out from the crowd, Grandmaster Saintlowe stood there staring blankly at Xu Qing’s medicinal pill. His eyes shone with disbelief, and he opened his mouth to speak, except he couldn’t think of what to say.

Up above, the 3,000-meter-tall god-like Fourth Vice-Bishop rose to his feet and looked down at the pill. He was visibly moved, and he was even breathing heavily.

“Grandmaster Pill Nine, is this pill... the cursequelling lozenge?”

It was the first time he had ever spoken to Xu Qing, and he even used the title ‘grandmaster’ when he did. That was very significant.

Xu Qing nodded.

Most excited of all were Xu Qing’s followers. Whether it was the burly neighbor or the six-eyed statue, all of them were bursting with enthusiasm. Before, their confidence had been shaken, and they even started to doubt. But now, all of that was replaced by unswerving determination and exhilaration.

That was especially true of the six-eyed statue, who loudly proclaimed, “Grandmaster Pill Nine, your virtue reaches the highest heavens! Your pills can conquer ten oceans, forge a hundred worlds, last a thousand autumns, and survive ten thousand generations!”

In response to his words, Xu Qing’s other followers excitedly started calling out the same thing.

Seeing that, Grandmaster Saintlowe’s followers offered retorts, although they seemed a bit less confident than before.

“The outside of a medicinal pill isn’t that important! After all, you’re supposed to consume them. The medicinal effect is the most important aspect!”

“That’s right. Grandmaster Saintlowe’s painquelling lozenge is twice as effective as the old version, and it has fewer side-effects. It’s truly a virtuous pill that can help quell the pain we suffer from the curse!”

As their words reverberated in the Moonrebel Congregation, Grandmaster Saintlowe took a deep breath to overcome his astonishment. Looking at Xu Qing with a complicated expression, he said, “My painquelling lozenge will reduce the pain of the curse for a full sixty-year-cycle!”

With that, he stared at Xu Qing as surely as if he were a deadly archenemy.

When the crowd heard that, the crowd seemed to gain their senses after having been stunned by the splendid light from Xu Qing's pill. After all, it was true that medicinal pills were supposed to be consumed. After hearing Grandmaster Saintlowe's explanation of his pill, their eyes started shining.

Xu Qing didn't care at all how Saintlowe was looking at him. Focusing on his cursequelling lozenge, he calmly said, "My pill will permanently reduce the curse by ten percent."

Although he didn't speak very loudly, his words had the same effect as a clap of thunder. Everyone in the Moonrebel Congregation felt like they were being struck to the heart.

Instantly, the entire Moonrebel Congregation went silent. Everyone was completely stunned. Granted, the name of the pill itself made it easy to guess what it did. But the words coming out of Xu Qing's mouth were almost completely outrageous. Some people even questioned if they had even heard correctly.

Grandmaster Saintlowe's pupils constricted, and he suddenly turned to look closer at Xu Qing's pill. His heart was currently being assailed by huge waves of shock. However, his years of experience allowed him to quickly gather his thoughts.

"Impossible! The only way it could do that is if it has massive side effects. For example, whoever consumes it will die violently a few days later!"

Xu Qing kept his gaze locked on Saintlowe as he calmly responded, "It has no side-effects."

Everyone was yet again shaken to the core. Saintlowe shivered. And yet, his eyes remained extremely suspicious as he stared at Xu Qing.

"That's complete nonsense! Who are you, the red moon godchild? Except not even the godchild could do that! Don't tell me you're a god or something? What a joke!"

"Let's test it out," Xu Qing said, remaining just as calm as before. He looked out at the crowd. "Who wants to volunteer?"

As the crowd hesitated, Grandmaster Saintlowe laughed coldly. "If you consume that pill, you'll definitely face hidden calamities!"

The crowd hesitated even more. Not even the burly neighbor seemed willing to step forward. But then, a piercing voice echoed out in all directions.

"Fine. I'll give it a try!" Everyone looked over to see a six-eyed statue proudly walking out of the crowd. Approaching Xu Qing, he clasped hands and bowed deeply. "All of you are hesitant about the grandmaster's medicinal pill. Clearly, you lack piety. But not me! I have full confidence in the grandmaster. I'll try this pill!"

Xu Qing felt a bit strange as he looked at the Captain, but he didn't say anything.

As all eyes focused on the Captain, the burly neighbor suddenly rushed forward.

"Grandmaster!" he cried. "Allow me to try the pill!! Sir, I'm the one who heard your dao reverberations for two months. That proves we have a predestined affinity! After that,

I bought your very first medicinal pill. Since I was the first to try your pill, let's continue the tradition! Please, Grandmaster, allow me to be the one!"

The burly neighbor's eyes glittered brightly as he looked at Xu Qing with a pious expression.

The six-eyed cultivator was obviously not very happy.

Xu Qing mulled it over, then waved his hand, sending the medicinal pill shooting toward the burly cultivator. The Captain had too many random things inside him, and Xu Qing was worried there could be some sort of negative reaction.

The burly cultivator caught the pill. Taking a deep breath, and eyes shining with determination, he put the pill in his mouth as everyone looked on, including Grandmaster Saintlowe and Fourth Vice-Bishop.

The vice-bishop then made a grasping gesture, causing the burly neighbor to fly up to him. There, Fourth Vice-Bishop's power enveloped him, not only to bless him, but also to make sure everyone could see clearly.

The burly man first shivered. Then sweat broke out on his forehead. His expression became one of pain. Then he began to shine with splendid light as black fluid oozed out of his statue's exterior. As the noxious, rotting smell of the fluid spread, a tremor passed through the burly man. Then his eyes opened, and they gleamed with incredulity and astonishment.

"My curse..." he murmured. "It's been reduced by ten percent!"

His words rang in the ears of the gathered crowds in the Moonrebel Congregation. Crazy looks appeared in the eyes of many, and yet, some were still suspicious and looked at Fourth Vice-Bishop.

The vice-bishop closed his eyes. Everyone waited anxiously. Then he opened his eyes and slowly descended from above until he was right in front of Xu Qing. He looked at Xu Qing for a long moment. Then, despite his extremely honored position, he clasped hands and bowed.

"You are the epitome of benevolence and morality, Grandmaster. There is no end to your virtuous achievements!"

His words struck down like a lightning bolt.

Every statue in the Moonrebel Congregation was shaken to the core, and all of their suspicions vanished, to be replaced by fervent ardor. Boundless anticipation and excitement filled their hearts, which then transformed into innumerable cheers that shook the Moonrebel Congregation.

As of this moment, Xu Qing had become like the brightest star in the sky.

Chapter 613: You and I Are On the Same Path

Now just a member of the crowd, the dazed Grandmaster Saintlowe heard the cheering of the crowd and wasn't sure how to react.

"It can really... reduce the curse?" he murmured. He didn't want to believe it. Even now, after Fourth Vice-Bishop had personally confirmed it, he just didn't think it could be real. From ancient times until now, no one had ever done this.

It had been difficult enough for him to improve the painquelling lozenge. He had worked harder on that project than anything in his life, and had read countless ancient records about the curse. And he understood the curse better than just about anyone. As a result, he knew that permanently reducing the curse was nothing short of a miracle! Saintlowe's mind and heart were reeling, and his eyes were bloodshot.

Some distance away, Xu Qing looked at him, then waved his hand, sending a cursequelling lozenge toward him. Eyes widening, Saintlowe caught the pill and looked at Xu Qing.

Everyone was watching, and everyone had their own opinion of what was happening. As for the ardent followers of Grandmaster Saintlowe, they felt bitterness deep in their heart, as they prepared to have countless humiliating words directed at them.

Except, Xu Qing didn't do anything like that.

Looking calmly at Saintlowe, he said, "Grandmaster Saintlowe, you and I are both cultivators who pursue the dao of alchemy. Because of that, we both know more than anyone else what all alchemists in the Moonrite Region dream of.

"While other people are working on cultivation, we're researching the curse. While other people are enjoying themselves, we're studying old books. The reason is that we want to get rid of that curse. And even if we can't, we record our research and leave it for the next generation. To give them hope. That is the mission of alchemy cultivators in the Moonrite Region."

There was no sarcasm in Xu Qing's words. He understood Grandmaster Saintlowe.

Shivering, Saintlowe looked at Xu Qing and opened his mouth as if to speak. No words came out. Many emotions had flitted through him on this day. At first, he had been proud and arrogant. Next he was shaken. And finally, he was filled with intense doubt and defiance. Now... all of those emotions clumped together into something very complicated. And that was because Xu Qing's words had struck home. Although he did like fame and recognition, behind that, there was a personal dream.

"Grandmaster Saintlowe, consider that pill a gift from me," Xu Qing continued. "I can't figure out how to get rid of the curse on my own. So let's do it together..."

Xu Qing clasped hands and bowed at the waist.

Saintlowe could sense Xu Qing's sincerity, and it only made the feelings within him more complex. He was confused, and more than that, ashamed. All of his followers looked similarly filled with mixed emotions.

Fourth Vice-Bishop looked at Xu Qing, his eyes gleaming with respect. He could tell that this Grandmaster Pill Nine was being sincere, and was speaking the truth from his heart.

Saintlowe took a deep breath. Looking very solemn, he approached Xu Qing, then clasped his hands together and bowed deeply.

"Grandmaster Pill Nine, just now I... ai." Shaking his head, he bowed again.

Xu Qing nodded. Without another word, he went back into his temple. The reality was that Xu Qing didn't like dramatic situations like this. If Saintlowe hadn't openly provoked him, he would never have taken the spotlight. In the blink of an eye, he was inside his temple and out of sight. Taking out ten cursequelling lozenges, he put them in the sphere of light. Then, just before leaving, he distributed a cursequelling lozenge to each of his followers.

His departure did not reduce the excitement in the hearts of the members of the Moonrebel Congregation. It was really true that, in the entire history of the Moonrite Region, no one had ever been able to reduce the curse. And Pill Nine's final words to Grandmaster Saintlowe established a pattern that left a deep impression on everyone.

Before long, the members of the Moonrebel Congregation were respectfully filing through Xu Qing's temple to examine the cursequelling lozenges and see how much they cost. The asking price... left everyone feeling even more deeply respectful. It was basically the same price as his old painquelling lozenge. All he wanted were some medicinal plants and research information.

"Now that's a grandmaster..." someone said, and those words were echoed in the hearts of all the cultivators of the Moonrebel Congregation.

From that moment on, the name 'Pill Nine' became embedded deeply in the hearts of everyone in the Moonrebel Congregation. It was easy to imagine how many more people would want to consume whatever new pills he concocted in the future. The impression he had made seeped down into the soul.

Xu Qing had an idea of all that, but didn't care very much. Back in the Green Spirit Pharmacy, he returned his focus to the golden crow research. He really wanted to know what an imperial-class technique was on a substructural level. And he wanted to know how to dig deeper into the truth of the golden crow.

He still wasn't exactly sure how to pursue that understanding. And the process wasn't going very smoothly. However, he had the feeling that, as he did further research, and as he provoked further transformations in the golden crow, he would be able to survive longer in the pearl. At first, he died instantly. But by the seventh time, he could last for six breaths of time.

Unfortunately... I only have two shots left.

A few days later at dawn, as he sat cross-legged in the back room, he opened his eyes. As blood oozed out of the corners of his mouth, he consumed a medicinal pill and tried not to feel completely frustrated.

It wasn't very often that he felt like this. But the repeated failures, and the fact that he only had two chances left, resulted in him feeling extremely exasperated. After all, the tenth attempt... would be when he lost the golden crow forever. He could sense the revulsion and greed in Guru Blackeyes getting more intense.

If I can't make this work, I might just have to stop at the ninth attempt. Taking a deep breath, he walked out of the back room and into the main floor of the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

He needed to clear his head.

When he stepped out, he saw Ling'er working on accounting. It seemed like there was never any end to the bookwork Ling'er needed to do. Xu Qing had long since come to realize that Ling'er enjoyed accounting more than just about anything else.

Ning Yan was scrubbing the floor. Li Youfei was organizing the medicinal pills on the shelves. The Captain was standing guard. And Wu Jianwu was standing next to the Heir Apparent, reciting some poetry.

“Grandpa’s eyes glitter aesthetically; the ladies cluster around him protectively!”

The Heir Apparent took a sip of tea and smiled at Wu Jianwu.

Wu Jianwu bowed at the waist, a flattering expression on his face. As he straightened up, he cast a lofty glance at the Captain and Nethersprite. He had finally found a way to curry favor with the Heir Apparent. Every morning at the start of the day he would recite a poem for ‘grandpa.’ Day after day of such hard work really seemed to be having an effect. With that accomplished, he hurried to his spot outside the door and started reciting poems into the wind.

Xu Qing was used to the daily routine in the medicine shop. Nodding at Ling'er, he sat down next to the Heir Apparent.

“Any progress?” the Heir Apparent asked. The parrot sat on his shoulder, looking arrogantly at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing shook his head. “Senior, what exactly is an imperial-class technique?”

Xu Qing had been pondering that question for a while now, but this was the first time he'd asked the Heir Apparent.

The Heir Apparent didn't respond immediately. Instead, he shifted his gaze to Chen Erniu. Xu Qing did the same.

The Captain with his sword didn't notice Xu Qing and the Heir Apparent looking at him. He was currently looking at Wu Jianwu and thinking, *What an obedient little child.* That said, the Captain wasn't inclined to argue with Wu Jianwu about his behavior, so he turned his attention to Nethersprite.

“You boil water every day!” he said. “Haven't you learned a thing? Why are you so slow? Don't you realize you can blow on the fire??”

Nethersprite shivered. She was reaching her limit of tolerance with Chen Erniu, and was about to snap.

However, with the Heir Apparent around, all she could do was grit her teeth and daydream about chopping Chen Erniu into tiny little pieces.

One of these days I'm going to rip him in two! I'll boil one half and turn the other half into meat pills! I'll chew and chew as he screams. And when the water is boiled, I'll have some lovely soup to sip.

Those were the thoughts that ran through Nethersprite's mind on a daily basis, and they gave her at least a bit of inner comfort.

The Captain snorted. "What are you shaking for? You're always shaking, every single day. Didn't you notice that the water is boiling already? Hurry up and give grandpa his tea! And why are you always walking around swishing your big booty back and forth? Who are you trying to seduce? Doesn't it get annoying? And let's not talk about how you eat more than everyone else!"

All of a sudden, Nethersprite stood up, her eyes blazing and her cultivation base pulsing. Glaring at Ning Yan, who was scrubbing the floor right in front of her, she snapped, "Get out of my way!"

Forcing herself under control, she carried the kettle over to the Heir Apparent and started another cup of tea for him. Then she stood off to the side.

"Xu Qing," the Heir Apparent said, pushing the cup of boiling tea in front of Xu Qing and pointing at it. "Tell me, what is water? And why does it get hot? What are tea leaves? Why does the water change color when you pour it onto the tea leaves? Why does it taste different?"

Xu Qing's gaze hardened as he looked at the cup of tea in front of him. "It's because—"

"That's not the point," the Heir Apparent interrupted. He held out his hand toward Sprouty, who was on the table next to him.

Sprouty swayed back and forth obediently until a tiny leaflet fell down. The Heir Apparent put the leaflet into the tea. It floated on the surface.

"Understand now?"

Xu Qing sat in thought quietly, his eyes closed.

Ning Yan had stopped scrubbing and was standing there looking introspective. He knew that advice from a Smoldering God was a rare thing, and he didn't want to miss out. It was the same with the Captain, who also looked thoughtful. Li Youfei was similarly paying close attention.

After a long moment, a tremor passed through Xu Qing. Eyes opening, he looked at the leaflet in the tea for a moment. Then he stood up.

"I understand, Senior!" Struggling to control his breathing, he bowed. He knew where he had been going wrong, and also knew what to do about it. Turning, he returned to the back room.

The Heir Apparent smiled and nodded slightly. He was impressed with Xu Qing's powers of understanding.

The Captain sighed in a way that seemed to say he understood everything that just happened. Ning Yan blinked a few times and looked similarly enlightened. In contrast, the parrot seemed confused as he looked at the tea, then the leaflet. Finally, he looked around at everyone else.

"Grandpa," he said quietly, "I don't get it. What do they understand that I don't...?"

The Heir Apparent lifted the cup and took a sip. "I was explaining coexistence. When the tea leaves and the water combine, they make something better. And when Sprouty's leaflet dropped into the water, it was about loss and acceptance."

The parrot got it. Ning Yan nodded. The Captain seemed deeply understanding.

In the back room, Xu Qing's eyes gleamed as he sat down cross-legged. As the solution rocked his mind, he contemplated what he had learned.

When the tea leaves and the water combine, it's like the consolidation of a great dao. However, everybody can return to their original state. All living beings have an original essence. Therefore, the Heir Apparent was pointing out that, in reality, everything can be separated.

Sprouty's leaflet is the same. Even after falling down, that leaflet is still part of Sprouty's essence. In other words... he was telling me that they're still a unified whole!

He wants me to deepen my research. To magnify it. Then break down the golden crow into all its parts. To peel it down. Find the golden crow's essence! I understand now. That's the essence of an imperial-class technique. It's substructure! I was focusing on the wrong thing. I shouldn't be observing things from the outside. And the same goes for instigating transformations. Instead, I should focus on the inside! On the finer details!

Moved, Xu Qing looked in the direction of the main sales floor, and his respect for the Heir Apparent grew even deeper.

Meanwhile, as the Heir Apparent lifted his tea cup again, he could sense that something was happening in the back room.

Hold on, what did he gain enlightenment of?

Chapter 614: The Secret of Imperial-Class Techniques!

Xu Qing took a deep breath. Eyes shining, he sat cross-legged and immersed his thoughts in the golden crow. This time, he didn't focus on transforming the golden crow. Nor did he concern himself with the golden crow's history or sun memories. He peeled away all such thoughts. Everything else faded away from his senses, until the only thing he perceived was the golden crow, glimmering brightly. The black body and resplendent flames became the only thing of concern to Xu Qing.

If I'm being truly thorough, then I might as well ignore the flames. They're essentially illusory and meaningless!

As those thoughts took hold in Xu Qing, he could sense the exterior flames surrounding the golden crow dimming until they were gone. When the flames winked out, Xu Qing shivered. He had never done anything like this with the golden crow. As pain wracked his body, the damage being inflicted on the golden crow affected the associated nascent soul.

In the past, Xu Qing would never have proceeded past this point. He could sense that he was in extreme danger. But with the advice from the Heir Apparent, he suppressed the uncomfortable feelings and focused on the black-colored golden crow, which now really looked like an ordinary crow.

It looked at Xu Qing, trembling.

Xu Qing looked back, frowning. As far as he was concerned, for the golden crow to look like this was a bit superfluous. He sent out a thought, and the golden crow trembled as its feathers started vanishing, leaving behind a featherless body.

The backlash for doing that was even more evident. Xu Qing struggled to breathe, but reminded himself that he was going in the right direction. Gritting his teeth, he squashed all extraneous thoughts in his heart.

Next, a boom rang out as the golden crow exploded. Countless bits of flesh and blood splattered everywhere. Blood sprayed out of Xu Qing's mouth, and yet his consciousness remained as firm as ever as the gore enveloped him.

What was more, he was now able to sense countless colorful threads within the flesh and blood, like a tangled skein that intertwined with everything. Every one of those threads contained spirit fluctuations of intelligence. Within himself, Xu Qing could sense his nascent souls, the flames of the Heavenfire Sea, and the souls of hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of lifeforms. That was the accumulation of everything the golden crow had ever devoured.

"That's the combination of the tea leaves and water!" he murmured. "Now I just have to filter out everything from inside!"

He sent his thoughts out again, and the flesh and blood shrank down rapidly. Countless threads were separated, which piled up on the side. As it played out, the golden crow howled in anguish.

Xu Qing kept coughing up blood, but his eyes shone with determination, and he gritted his teeth and continued.

As time passed, Xu Qing was like a person possessed. He forgot all about his surroundings, and was focused only on whittling the golden crow down. Days went by. Eventually, more than ninety percent of the chaotic threads that made the golden crow were gone.

There were actually only three left. One was black. One was red. One was violet!

The tea leaves and water are almost completely filtered!

Xu Qing could sense that the violet represented his own nascent soul, the red represented the flames, and the black was the golden crow's life essence. Those things formed the substructure of the imperial-class technique.

The Heir Apparent was telling me that, even though the leaflet went its own way, its essence remained the same. It was still part of the whole. Therefore, despite having been separated, it could still be returned to normal.

Although it was a suggestion from the Heir Apparent, it was through the actions of separating the parts of the golden crow that Xu Qing came to experience it for himself. Threads that he had separated out hadn't disappeared; they were still there. They were connected to him in myriad ways, and therefore, all it took was a thought to get them to fly back to where they came from. This again went to confirm how realistic the Heir Apparent's advice was.

I guess I should start with separating out the fire!

Xu Qing gritted his teeth, converged his divine sense, and then slowly began peeling away the red thread. It was immeasurably painful, causing him to tremble from head to toe. But he didn't give up.

Days passed. Given how focused he was on his cultivation, he had no idea that, during the past seven or eight days, he had been releasing some significant fluctuations. The back room had slowly

become full of violet spirit power fluctuations, which manifested as countless threads that whipped about and released cracking booms.

He was currently soaked in blood! His clothes had been burned off, and the golden crow totem tattoo that covered him howled in grief. Every single brush stroke that made up the tattoo oozed with blood.

However, that wasn't what was most noteworthy. Over the past few days, his aura had become dramatically outrageous. Occasionally, it would release terrifying fluctuations, and occasionally, the life force within it would vanish. And it was just barely possible to sense the consummately terrifying power that was awakening. It was a power that seemed unpermitted by heavenly daos, and something that Revered Ancient could not tolerate.

During the past week or so, the sky above the Green Spirit Pharmacy in the Bitter Life Mountains had transformed constantly. Winds and clouds swirled, and the sound of rumbling thunder echoed out. The living beings in the Bitter Life Mountains were stunned, and had no idea what was going on. The thunder almost sounded like incomprehensible words being spoken.

Few people could understand those words. However, the Heir Apparent could understand them. And because he could, he was increasingly astonished by Xu Qing.

Ling'er was extremely nervous. The Captain was both fearful and shocked. Ning Yan was astonished and terrified. Wu Jianwu was so stunned he wasn't sure what to do.

The Heir Apparent... was now in the back room, seated cross-legged in front of Xu Qing, watching him closely. He had mixed emotions on his face. On numerous occasions, he had lifted his right hand as he considered interrupting Xu Qing's enlightenment. But in the end, he forced himself not to.

This kid is gaining enlightenment of Revered Ancient's unbelievable, unspeakable taboo! I... I didn't say anything! The Heir Apparent hesitated as he thought back to everything he had said. After a while, he breathed a sigh of relief. This was his first time coming to the realization that there was something very strange about this kid.

The booming thunder outside reached the Heir Apparent's ears, as if the heavenly daos of Revered Ancient were giving him a very strong warning.

Every imperial-class technique contains a sealing mark put in place by one of Revered Ancient's heavenly daos.... Except, I was clearly giving him some advice regarding coexistence and abandonment....

The Heir Apparent sighed, then waved his hand to seal the aura from Xu Qing and act as dharma protector for him.

Xu Qing was still immersed in his own senses, and was working hard. At a certain point, he finally managed to peel off that red thread. As of now, the golden crow didn't look anything like before. There were only two threads left, one black, one violet.

Next is my violet one.

Without the slightest hesitation, he started extracting his own violet thread. That process was so painful that veins bulged out all over him, and he trembled down to his soul. However, his intuition was telling him that the key to all of this was to extract that violet thread.

Get out here!

Xu Qing's mind reeled as he worked hard for an indeterminable period of time. Eventually, the violet thread peeled off. When that happened, the only thing left of the golden crow was the black thread!

The thread vibrated, sending out fluctuations of extreme terror.

This....

Soul trembling, Xu Qing focused his senses and then started making that black thread bigger. Then bigger. Then even bigger! Eventually, the black thread was vastly bigger, almost like an entire world in Xu Qing's senses. When it was big enough, he saw it for what it really was! It wasn't just a single black thread. It was actually made of countless black chunks, all converged together. And between each chunk was something like a bolt of lightning.

The lightning bolts were like ropes, piercing through the infinitude of black chunks. That was why, after they all clumped together, they looked like a black thread. The chunks were irregularly shaped, but if you put them together... they looked like a shocking black spear!

When Xu Qing sensed it, a new understanding filled his mind.

Taboo weapon!

It was a weapon that could crush heavens, shatter earths, destroy daos, and massacre gods! The sight of it sent Xu Qing's thinking into turmoil. It shook his soul. No matter what ideas he could have come up with, he never would have guessed that within the golden crow's essence was... a host of fragments of a terrifying weapon!

Do all imperial-class techniques have a similar substructure? Is this the golden crow's essence? Does that mean that every single imperial-class technique is, in reality, formed from the sealed fragments of a terrifying weapon? Who sealed it? A heavenly dao? And why? Also... who owns this taboo weapon?

If that's the case, why do people cultivate imperial-class techniques? Don't tell me... that imperial-class techniques are fundamentally a method of repairing a taboo weapon? And the ultimate goal is to control such weapons?? How many secrets are wrapped up in the Revered Ancient mainland?

Xu Qing shivered as his mind reeled. Gradually, he retracted his senses, and with it the violet thread, then the red thread, and then all the other threads.

In the blink of an eye, they were all clumped together. The flesh and blood of the golden crow gradually formed again into the outline of the crow. Then its feathers appeared, and it ignited into flames.

As heat pulsed out, Xu Qing slowly looked up. His eyes opened, and he coughed up some blood. As he gasped for breath, he realized that, at some unknown point, the Heir Apparent had come in and was sitting in front of him.

Before Xu Qing could say anything, the Heir Apparent said, "Don't say anything. And don't ask anything."

As fear lingered in Xu Qing's heart, his eyes glittered. He took some time to control his breathing, then looked around. He could sense the fluctuations that still existed, and could also sense the

dramatic things happening outside. Finally, he looked at the Heir Apparent and nodded. Then he took out the pearl with Guru Blackeyes in it.

“Senior, I don’t need this thing anymore. I can’t beat Blackeyes, and I don’t want him devouring my golden crow. Most importantly, I’ve found my dao of the golden crow!”

“You really don’t need it...” the Heir Apparent said, taking the pearl. He looked at Xu Qing with a complicated expression. He could sense the golden crow within Xu Qing, and knew that it now possessed an unprecedented sharpness that it didn’t have before. And just barely, he could discern that it now looked like a spear. This was the trump card for Xu Qing’s golden crow nascent soul!

“Many thanks for your advice, Senior. It helped me refine my enlightenment!” Xu Qing took a deep breath, struggled into a standing position, then bowed to the Heir Apparent. He was truly grateful. Without the Heir Apparent’s words earlier, he would never have gained enlightenment as deep as this.

The Heir Apparent suddenly said, “Did your Master ever give you advice in this manner?”

“Yes,” Xu Qing said with a nod, surprised and wondering why the Heir Apparent would ask something like that.

The Heir Apparent said nothing for a moment. Then he sighed. “It must not be easy being your Master.”

Chapter 615: The Heir Apparent’s Way Of Setting Things Up

The Heir Apparent sighed and left the back room. He needed some time to get used to Xu Qing’s freakishly unimaginable powers of understanding.

After Xu Qing regained his senses, the thunder in the dusky sky over the Bitter Life Mountains faded away, and the pressure disappeared. The entire thing had attracted a lot of attention in the area, and many people were speculating about what was going on. But other than the people in the Green Spirit Pharmacy, no one had any idea that it was all because of Xu Qing.

When Xu Qing found out everything that happened while he was focused on enlightenment, he felt lingering fear, and at the same time, even deeper respect for the Heir Apparent.

All it took was one bit of advice and I gained all of that enlightenment. I guess Smoldering Gods are Smoldering Gods, after all....

In the following days, he focused on recovering. At the same time, he went out a few times to do some experimentation with his golden crow trump card.

And thus, half a month went by.

One afternoon, Xu Qing went out and found a valley a short distance away from the mudbrick city. After entering the valley, he checked it carefully to make sure it was safe. Whenever he went out to experiment with the golden crow trump card, he went to a different location.

This new trump card was spectacularly mighty. What was more, any loss of control resulted in it raging out of control like a bucking bronco. In turn, that would cause the golden crow to grow dim. Every time it happened, the golden crow got very close to withering up and collapsing. Because of that, Xu Qing observed it carefully every time he experimented with it. By locking down to a certain range, he could make sure the power was something that the golden crow could sustain.

With a few dozen more adjustments, I should get it right.

He doffed his tattered garments, leaving him wearing only a pair of undershorts. Looking down at his near-naked body, he grimaced helplessly.

It's like this every time. I have to get it under control....

Gathering his thoughts, he closed his eyes for a moment and reviewed what he had learned. Sometime later, his eyes opened, and they shone brightly. He quickly performed a right-handed incantation gesture, whereupon a shocking aura erupted from him.

The golden crow tattoo appeared on his back, swirling in movement. It now covered most of Xu Qing's torso. The golden crow as depicted in the totem tattoo was intelligent, and it sent out pulses of a terrifying aura. That aura became a tempest and swept in all directions, withering the ground and melting boulders for thousands of meters in all directions. A sea of flames came to exist in that area, something that the wind couldn't touch. It was as if those flames existed outside of the natural and magical laws of heaven and earth.

Xu Qing stood in the center of the sea of flames, trembling, his attention focused as he controlled the transforming totem tattoo that represented his golden crow nascent soul. This was the method of control he had been working with. If the shape transformed externally, he couldn't control its power. But if the transformation occurred on his own body, then the results were a lot better.

As he exercised control, the totem tattoo moved about with increasing speed. Eventually, it wasn't possible to see its shape clearly. All that was visible was something that looked like a dark spear. It wasn't very easy to see any details, the moment that black spear formed, it caused a terrifying aura to surge off Xu Qing.

As of this moment, Xu Qing wasn't using any of the external power of the golden crow. All of it was formed by the golden crow nascent soul, and its terrifying will surpassed the combined power previously revealed by all thirteen of his nascent souls. Suffice it to say, even a dao begetting expert would be astonished by this. From that it was possible to see how immeasurably shocking the golden crow nascent soul trump card was. And that was when he only released a scrap of the power of the golden crow taboo. It was also his current limit. Thus, it was easy to imagine how much more he would be able to utilize later on when his cultivation base improved.

With such thoughts on his mind, he looked up and put his right hand on his chest where the shaft of the illusory black spear was. Gripping hard, he pulled!

A blurry black spear slowly emerged from Xu Qing's tattoo.

The moment it was out in the open, wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. Thunder rumbled. Xu Qing ignored it all. In his hand was a black spear that looked like a dragon that could destroy the world. He began swinging it.

The ground quaked. Boulders shattered. The valley trembled.

The black spear looked like a spear, but also like a golden crow. It was surrounded by flames, and what was more, at its tip there was a second gleam of sharpness. It was The Emperor's Sword! The same Emperor's Sword the golden crow had consumed! Thanks to Xu Qing's adjustments, it was now part of the trump card. [1]

The rumbling caused ripples to spread out in all directions. Xu Qing inhaled sharply, and staggered in place slightly. However, his mind was clear. After checking to make sure the golden crow could sustain all of this, his eyes gleamed with excitement. With that, he prepared to leave.

However, that was when a calm voice spoke from overhead.

“Not bad at all!”

As the words rang out, the Heir Apparent drifted through the ripples being sent out by the black spear. As he neared, the ripples faded away until no one would even notice they were there.

“Senior!” Xu Qing said respectfully, clasping hands and bowing. He was happy to accept any guidance from the Heir Apparent. Whether it was the third tribulation early on, or the growth to his soul after the deadly fighting in the church temple, or the help with the substructure of the imperial-class technique that was the golden crow, it all went to show that the tempering provided by the Heir Apparent was extremely effective.

In only a few months, Xu Qing had *shed his body and exchanged his bones*. And of course, his battle prowess was vastly superior to before.

“It looks like you've mostly recovered from your injuries. Therefore, the time has come to proceed to the next step!” The Heir Apparent approached Xu Qing and measured him up, eyes sharp but heart full of admiration. Inside, he was musing that this boy had some of the most advanced powers of understanding he had ever seen.

And he was very interested in honing this unpolished gem. Considering his one casual statement had led to some serious complications, he had decided that in the future, he would be more careful about what he said. That said, he had finally gotten over his astonishment from before, and was actually feeling proud.

Giving advice to this kid must be a big headache for his Master. Of course, that's because of his low level. I'm different. Only I'm capable of truly guiding an apprentice like this. His Master's not really up to the task.

Looking at Xu Qing, the Heir Apparent coolly said, “Xu Qing, you did a good job gaining enlightenment thanks to my advice. You didn't give up. Good job. We cultivators need to face difficulties head-on. We need to persist no matter what. Only then can we cultivate a truly domineering spirit. Only then can we have the vigor necessary to defy heaven and earth!”

“Now then, since you have a trump card for your golden crow nascent soul, the next thing we need to do is look more deeply into your taboo poison nascent soul!”

Xu Qing's eyes shone. Truth be told, he didn't need the Heir Apparent to tell him to start looking into his other nascent souls. After what happened with the golden crow, he'd already planned to do

that. Unfortunately, each of his nascent souls were independent entities, and each was different from the others. It wasn't necessarily possible to apply what he had learned from the golden crow to the others.

Therefore, after hearing the Heir Apparent's words, Xu Qing respectfully said, "Please, give me your advice, Senior!"

Eyes shining with anticipation, he looked at the Heir Apparent.

Seeing that gaze, the Heir Apparent smiled. "Xu Qing, I can sense the power of a god in your poison."

Xu Qing nodded.

"A shocking poison like that definitely has incomparable potential. Considering it didn't exist in my time, it was probably created while I was sealed away. That's why I'm not familiar with it." The Heir Apparent's gaze turned profound when he looked at Xu Qing. "However, I have seen taboo poisons that are even more poisonous than yours. In fact, you could say that I've seen the strongest poison to ever exist in the Revered Ancient mainland! I suppose you could also conclude... that you have too!"

There was obviously deep meaning in the Heir Apparent's words. Hearing them, Xu Qing shivered, and suddenly started trying to figure out what he meant. However, the answer seemed to be obscured from him, making it impossible for him to grasp it.

When the Heir Apparent sensed that Xu Qing was having trouble, he felt very proud at heart.

"Xu Qing," he said coolly, "look up into the sky. Look beyond the dusky sky at something that hangs there eternally. Look at... the broken face of the god!"

Reeling, Xu Qing looked up at the canopy of heaven. Although the sky over the Moonrite Region was dark, which was unlike the sky in other regions, it was still possible to make out the enormous outline of the broken face of the god.

"Look at that broken face. Why is it that, whenever hē opens his eyes, all living beings howl in grief? Why do the places hē looks at turn into forbidden regions? It's because that gaze is poisonous! And therefore, why not imitate that?"

"Why only release a simple version of your taboo poison? Why spread it with the power of the wind? Why combine it with your other methods? All of those are mortal actions, not the actions of a god! Using the thoughts of a mortal to unleash the poison of a god? Naturally, that won't do."

"Learn from hīm. Place your poison into your gaze. If you can do that, even just to a small degree, then the power of your taboo poison, similar to the golden crow, will undergo a heaven-shaking, earth-toppling upgrade!"

Xu Qing struggled to breathe steadily. The Heir Apparent's words were just too astonishing, and had opened his mind. They were like a lightning bolt to the brain that ripped open all of his previous ways of thinking.

That's right! When the broken face's eyes open, the mutagen levels there become stronger. And substructurally speaking... my poison is the same! If I could do that....

Xu Qing's heart was racing as that line of thought expanded rapidly. Shortly after, he looked at the Heir Apparent, his eyes shining with matchless reverence. The Heir Apparent's way of setting things up, and his manner of analyzing things, helped him see things differently. In the past, Xu Qing had never been able to do this. Not even help from Master Seventh had helped him reach such a high level.

"Many thanks, Senior!" Xu Qing said excitedly, bowing at the waist.

Seeing Xu Qing's expression, and understanding the emotions behind it, caused the Heir Apparent to smile. Once again he felt very proud. *Yep, my assessment of his Master was spot-on. Only I am capable of educating an unpolished gem like this!*

"In that case, you take it from here. Seek enlightenment of what I just mentioned. This isn't a bad location. Work here for three days. If you can't make any progress, come find me."

The Heir Apparent set up some warding spells that would last for three days. Clasping his hands behind his back, he left proudly.

Xu Qing stood in place for a long time before finally sitting down cross-legged and closing his eyes.

But how do I get the power of the taboo poison into my gaze...?

Releasing the power of the taboo poison, he sent it flowing into his eyes.

Chapter 616: Goal - Vision of a God

Xu Qing had faced many challenges in his life. Some he had resolved, others he couldn't.

But when it came to cultivation, Xu Qing couldn't remember very many situations in which he truly got stuck. That was especially true of matters relating to enlightenment. It was the same with his Sea and Mountain Incantation in his early days, and then all the other various techniques he'd picked up. All of them went fairly smoothly. [1]

The same went for his enlightenment of the Ghost Emperor mountain. Even when attempting to project it externally, he didn't encounter many significant obstacles. Then there was the golden crow from earlier. Although that process had been difficult, in the end, he just followed through with his idea and soon gained enlightenment. Of course, much of that had to do with advice given to him by someone else. But fundamentally speaking, the actual enlightenment was his own doing. He had always had astounding powers of understanding compared to other people.

But this time, he had no direction to pursue. No outline to fill in. It was easy to say "turn your gaze into taboo poison." But actually doing it seemed more like a fantasy than a reality. In fact, after three days of constant attempts, he didn't come close to succeeding.

He could put the taboo poison into his eyes. After all, the poison was already part of him, so he wasn't worried about it hurting him. Any damage he sustained would eventually be healed by the violet crystal. In some respects, his eyes had always had poison in them. But causing that poison to erupt along with his gaze was different.

“The gaze...” Xu Qing murmured.

There were things he didn't understand. For example, the word for 'gaze' had the character for 'light' in it. But what exactly was that 'light'? And how could he get poison into it, so that whatever he looked at ended up being poisoned?

How would a god do that?

Xu Qing looked exhausted. When he felt the Heir Apparent's warding spell disappearing, he stood up and walked back toward the Green Spirit Pharmacy. Just when he was about to reenter the mudbrick city, his heart suddenly thumped in his chest.

What if I'm focusing too much on my eyes?

Stopping in place, he closed his eyes and took a moment to assess himself with his other senses. Everything about himself felt the same as before. Closing his eyelids didn't seem to provide any deeper level of understanding. Everything was dark, which was the result of his gaze being covered.

In that case, what if I didn't have eyes?

Xu Qing had always been able to treat himself ruthlessly, so without any hesitation, he reached up and dug both of his eyes out of their sockets.

Pain erupted into him as blood flowed out of the empty sockets. He was now blind. As for the pain he felt, it didn't really count for much compared to some of the other types of pain he had experienced in the past. After digging his eyes out, the power of the violet crystal went to work and started repairing the damage. However, Xu Qing suppressed the violet crystal; he wanted to spend more time exploring the sensation of having no eyes.

That was when he noticed that the darkness in front of him was different from the darkness he saw when closing his eyes.

A tremor passed through him. It was obviously something he had never thought of before. Closing one's eyes was very different than having no eyes at all. When he closed his eyes, his vision was blocked, and he saw darkness. But right now, he had no vision at all, and therefore, no way to even perceive darkness.

It's not actually darkness....

He wasn't even sure what he was sensing at the moment. It was like when an ordinary person closed one eye, which altered their vision because it was missing one section. And that missing section wasn't dark, nor did it have any color. It didn't have any information at all. It was as if it just didn't exist.

“Nothingness...” Xu Qing whispered.

That was the word that popped up in his mind. That was what he experienced after removing his eyes. It felt unsettling.

Shortly after, he sent out his divine sense, and gradually, the world around him appeared in his mind. However, it wasn't the result of his gaze. It came from energy, the touch of the wind, the resonance of his soul, and the overlay of divine will. Divine will was like an invisible web made from infinite ripples, with him in the middle. Anything that touched that web would, in turn, cause the web to vibrate. The result was a different type of consciousness that existed in his mind.

But it wasn't an image. An image was something he could see with his eyes. What he perceived with divine will was a sensation. Because of divine sense, most cultivators had a hard time distinguishing between an image and a sensation. As a result, they would just assume that divine sense was an aspect of vision. But as Xu Qing now realized, they were different.

As the feeling continued, a representation of everything around him appeared in his mind, formed from his senses.

The land. The sky. All the buildings in the mudbrick city. The pedestrians on the streets. The distant mountains. He could sense them all, and thus, he could 'see' them. However, some things existed in color, while others had no color, and were mere outlines.

Eventually, Xu Qing started walking. He entered the city, and eventually, reached the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

Along the way, he took note of everything he was sensing with this gaze that was no gaze.

"If destiny calls, come buy some medicine; if it calls not, at least look at a specimen!"

Xu Qing heard Wu Jianwu talking up ahead. He looked up, and Wu Jianwu appeared in his senses. He was in full color, with his clothes, hair, and facial expression all accurate.

When Wu Jianwu saw the blood flowing out from Xu Qing's closed eyelids, his eyes went wide and he stammered. "W-w-what... what's wrong?"

His exclamation caught the attention of everyone else. Moments later, the Captain, Ling'er, and Li Youfei all saw Xu Qing.

"Big Bro Xu Qing!" Ling'er cried anxiously, rushing over and throwing her arms around him.

Xu Qing tousled her hair and smiled. Ling'er was also represented in color to him.

"It's fine," he said. "It's just cultivation."

Sounding confused and sad, Ling'er replied, "But... what kind of cultivation involves ripping your own eyes out?"

Xu Qing said a few more comforting words, and then walked into the medicine shop with her.

Based on what he could 'see', the Captain looked astonished, Li Youfei was visibly stunned, and Ning Yan's eyes were wide. Nethersprite was boiling water, and the Heir Apparent sat there looking at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing patted Ling'er's back, then walked over and sat down next to the Heir Apparent.

After a moment of thought, he said, "Senior, I can't do it. Even after digging my eyes out, I can't get the poison into my gaze. And when sensing the world around me, I'm unable to create a poison onslaught with divine will."

The Heir Apparent lifted his cup and took a sip of tea. He was about to launch into another cryptic bit of advice, but then he looked at Xu Qing's mangled eyes and decided to be a bit more direct.

"Digging out your eyes was a good idea! Now you need to figure out a way to experience the vision of a god. Use it to look at the true world around you."

“Vision of a god?” he murmured. “True world?”

“That’s right,” the Heir Apparent said, sounding very profound.

Xu Qing thought about it for a bit, then stood and bowed. As Ling’er looked on anxiously, he went into the back room, sat down cross-legged, and pondered the situation.

How come the world I perceive has some color, but other things aren’t in color...?

He had the feeling that the key to everything lay in the answer to that question.

The night passed.

The next morning he looked up. He felt like the answer was forming within him. After checking his surroundings and confirming that everything was in color, he sent a voice message to the Captain.

“Eldest Brother, do you have anything on hand that I haven’t seen before?”

When the Captain, who was on the main floor keeping an eye on Nethersprite, listened to the message, his eyebrows shot up. Smiling enigmatically, he strolled into the back room, looked down at Xu Qing, and then produced an item with a flourish.

Xu Qing scanned it with divine sense. Based on the smell alone, he could tell that it was a medicinal pill. Specifically, it was a cursequelling lozenge.

“Something else,” he said.

The Captain’s eyes glittered. Flashing a very meaningful smile, he thought for a moment and then took something else out. “How about this?”

Xu Qing looked over and saw a bodice. A moment later he shook his head.

Intrigued, the Captain kept taking things out. When Xu Qing saw the growing collection of random things, he wasn’t sure what to say. Eventually, the Captain took out something that didn’t register as being in color.

Xu Qing looked up. “What’s that...?”

Resting on the Captain’s palm was a small blue statue that he had acquired a long time ago. It was an item of worship from a small, random species. There wasn’t anything particularly special about it, and it had been in the Captain’s bag of holding for so long he’d forgotten about it.

“It’s a statue,” the Captain said.

Xu Qing nodded. His senses were telling him that the Captain was indeed holding a statue, though it was little more than an outline to Xu Qing.

“What color is it?” Xu Qing asked.

“Red,” the Captain said with a meaningful smile.

All of a sudden, Xu Qing’s senses were telling him that the statue was red. He nodded and was about to say something.

Before he could, the Captain said, “Huh? Oh, my bad, little Ah Qing. It’s actually white.”

Xu Qing frowned.

Chuckling, the Captain put the blue statue down in front of Xu Qing. "Little Ah Qing," he said quietly, "for certain reasons, I can't give you any advice. But I'm leaving this statue here for you. When your eyes recover, take a look and see what color it actually is."

The Captain left.

Xu Qing's heart raced as numerous thoughts proliferated in his mind. Releasing his hold on the violet crystal's powers, he let his eyes start recovering.

A few days later, he opened his eyes and looked down to find a blue statue in front of him. The sight of that statue caused him to reel. Any thoughts of a red or white statue collapsed, replaced by the color blue. This process left him feeling profoundly shaken.

Colors can be deceiving.... Is what I'm seeing true and real? In my previous state, the things I saw around me in color were only that way because I'd personally seen them before, or at least had a concept of what they were like. That's why I could form an image of them.

But I couldn't form an image of something I hadn't seen before. They were just outlines, without any color....

What's more, my perception of the color of this statue changed based on what the Captain told me. And that goes to show... the thing that determines what you can see, and in fact, the very structure of the world around you, is not your eyes. For mortals, it's the brain that actually determines what is seen. For cultivators, it's the soul that determines what you sense.

Xu Qing inhaled sharply, and his eyes shone with enlightenment.

The eyes are basically a window. I was going down the wrong path. Putting poison in the window will do nothing more than create a stockpile there.

If I want the poison to be part of my gaze.... I need to put the poison in my soul. If the soul has poison, then when the window opens, whatever I look at will be invaded by my gaze!

Except now I can't help but wonder... is the world I can see the true and real world the Heir Apparent was talking about?

Chapter 617: The Depth of the Soul

Xu Qing was well aware of how he differed from ordinary cultivators.

It came down to his body. Although his fleshly body was his own, it had been remolded by the god's finger to make it easier to possess. Then, thanks to the violet crystal, that body became like a garment that he could wear. It was essentially the fleshly body of a god.

I suppose it's nothing incredibly special. Who knows how many clones that god from Forbidden by the Immortal had, and we're talking about the finger of one of them. That said, its personhood was still that of a god.

Eyes glittering, he continued to ponder the situation.

In some respects, the eyes of my fleshly body could be said to be the eyes of a god. Therefore, theoretically speaking, I should be able to use the vision of a god to look at the world around me.

Lifting his hand, he kneaded the bridge of his nose. Inside of him, he could sense his soul. And yet, the truth was that he didn't have a very deep understanding of souls. All he knew was that the soul

represented the psyche, as well as divine sense. It was an aggregation of intangible things within him. The strength or weakness of his soul was determined by however much psychic power he had.

Xu Qing wasn't really sure about the details. After all, such things weren't important to study, given the low level of his cultivation base. But now he was coming to a realization of how important his soul was. And as he analyzed it from different angles, he was able to come to a conclusion.

If I raise my soul to a higher level, then insert the taboo poison into it, then I should be able to have poison in my gaze. Except, what exactly is a soul?

Different people would answer that question in different ways. Some people thought that souls were made from energy. Others thought they were convergences of the psyche. Still others believed that they were made from invisible fluctuations. Regardless, in the end, all of those things were intangible.

Xu Qing closed his eyes and unleashed the will of the taboo poison within him, sending it to fill his sea of consciousness. In that manner, he searched for his soul. He could do that because, in the depths of his sea of consciousness, at the limit of his psyche, there was a conglomeration of fiery light made from divine sense.

Where there was light, there was fire. The light was the light of his soul, and the fire was the flame of his life force. Their intersection formed the nucleus of everything about him. If they changed, his consciousness would be affected. If they were extinguished, his life force would become dark. That was what Xu Qing had previously assumed to be his soul. But now he was starting to suspect he had been wrong.

That was because, when he tried to put the taboo poison into the fiery light, he could sense the light and fire swaying. Though the poison did effectively merge into it, the result wasn't what he had been hoping for. A moment later, he went back to analyzing the situation.

It seemed like he was doing little more than putting the poison in the outer layer. It was as if... that fiery light was just a projection. It was not actually the source of his soul.

Xu Qing sat there thinking. Time went by as he devoted all his attention to the situation. Seven days passed. During that time, his physical body grew visibly gaunt. None of his contemplation brought any answers. All that happened was that his psyche withered and his energy faded.

Cultivators and mortals are different. Cultivators have nascent souls and divine sense. And given my current cultivation level, I can possess people. After possessing someone, I would still be myself. In that case, my soul... obviously isn't in my fleshly body!

Frowning, he thought back to when the god's finger tried to possess him. He remembered that he'd felt his soul being whittled away, and his consciousness scattering.

Might as well do some tests.

His eyes glittered. If he wanted to put poison into his soul, then he needed to have a much clearer understanding of what souls were. Taking a deep breath, he prepared to send some divine will to his shadow. But then he paused. The shadow had been in a state of terror recently. It could sense that, thanks to the Heir Apparent's advice, Xu Qing was growing terrifyingly stronger. And his aura was also transforming.

Seeing that Xu Qing was about to give orders, it prepared to follow those orders immediately. Except the orders never came.

After some more thought, Xu Qing looked out at the main floor of the medicine shop.

“Li Youfei!”

Li Youfei, who had been in the middle of cleaning the shop, hurried into the back room. A moment later, he rushed back out and left the medicine shop. He returned that night with an unconscious middle-aged cultivator, who he put down in front of Xu Qing.

“Milord,” Li Youfei said respectfully, “this is a vicious criminal who plagues the Bitter Life Mountains. He rapes, pillages, and perpetrates just about every evil crime you can imagine. Because he’s close to Patriarch Inkrule, most people don’t dare to do anything to him.”

Xu Qing looked at the middle-aged cultivator, who was in the Gold Core level and was a nonhuman. He had a scar running down his face that made him seem unusually ferocious. He also smelled of blood and gore.

Xu Qing nodded. Li Youfei wasn’t suicidal, so it seemed unlikely that he would try to deceive Xu Qing. Therefore, he sent him away. Then, after looking briefly at the unconscious middle-aged cultivator, he put his hand on his forehead. Then he sent divine sense into him. Along with that divine sense, he sent his aura and all other fluctuations into the cultivator. He even sent projections of his nascent souls inside. He was possessing him!

Before long, Xu Qing’s senses revealed to him a sea of consciousness that couldn’t be considered very bright. He saw six heavenly palaces glittering there, all of which were trembling.

Completely devoid of emotional fluctuations, Xu Qing had his divine sense completely cover the sea of consciousness. It didn’t take long for him to find that convergence of fiery light.

In the blink of an eye, that fiery light rippled and distorted. An anguished, bloodcurdling scream echoed out from inside. At the same time, memories flooded into Xu Qing’s divine sense as he saw this cultivator’s life playing out. Image after image appeared, some blurry, some clear. Regardless of their form, Xu Qing devoured them, causing them to disappear. It was almost as if he was stealing them....

Eventually, the middle-aged cultivator’s eyes opened. Face expressionless, he stood and looked down at his true form.

“So, this is possession?” Xu Qing murmured in the voice of the middle-aged cultivator. The sensation was unusual and even uncomfortable, as if he were wearing a set of clothing that was a size too small.

That said, the ‘clothing’ was also eerily familiar to him. He knew exactly how that scar on his face had formed. In fact, when Xu Qing closed his eyes, he knew everything about this body’s past. However, without much effort, he erased such things, leaving himself feeling a lot more comfortable. As he realized what was happening, a tremor passed through him and he opened his eyes.

Memories? I think I get it now. If the soul is a synthesis of one's life force, aura, and psyche, then it really is intangible. It's like a collection of innumerable unreal things that are then turned into something true and real!

The moment you're born and can sense yourself and the world, your memories begin! If you liken the soul to a blank bamboo slip, then the memories are the writing on that slip... and they're all part of the same thing!

In the moment of possession, the limitations of my cultivation base ensured that I didn't sense myself devouring his soul. But I was clearly devouring his memories.... When mortals die, their memories disappear, almost like they're severed. That's why the souls that enter the underworld are so muddleheaded. Their memories are severed. Broken down.

Xu Qing struggled to breathe steadily as he sat there cross-legged, his eyes closed. Finally, he brought his divine sense back into his true form. When he opened his eyes as his true form, they gleamed with enlightenment.

What are souls? Maybe my understanding isn't completely correct. As my cultivation continues, I'll need to spend more time contemplating the subject and confirming my understanding.

But... I can say with certainty that memories determine the depth, the scale, the medium, and the aura of the soul!

In other words, if I want my soul to contain poison, and by extension my gaze, then I need to make sure the taboo poison is deeply within my memories!

I need to change my memories so that, from the moment of birth, I have a deep understanding of taboo poison. I need to fill my memories from then until now!

Unbeknownst to Xu Qing, on the other side of the door curtain, the main floor of the medicine shop was like another dimension thanks to the Heir Apparent.

And in that other dimension, his thoughts were being spoken out loud by the parrot.

"... from then until now!"

The parrot was obviously connected to Xu Qing's emotions, as he was speaking with deep excitement.

Ling'er seemed deeply apprehensive as she looked in the direction of the back room. To her, it seemed like her Big Bro Xu Qing had gone a bit crazy lately.

Wu Jianwu was thinking something similar to Ling'er. Xu Qing really seemed to have gone mad. After all, ordinary people didn't go around pondering things like souls all the time. And when he heard the parrot repeating what Xu Qing was thinking, he got even more confused.

I understand all the words, yet I don't understand what they mean when they're put together. What's he talking about...?

Eventually, Wu Jianwu decided that it wasn't his problem. Then he looked around and realized that Li Youfei seemed to be reacting in a similar way. The only difference was that Li Youfei didn't just seem confused, he also seemed scared. Clearly, he was worried about Xu Qing performing similar experiments on him one day in the future.

Ning Yan was overwhelmed with shock. He had heard his father talking about such things before.... Never could he ever have imagined that Xu Qing, who was only in the Nascent Soul level, would also ponder such matters. Clearly, the enlightenment was coming from Xu Qing's personal analysis.

The Captain had a thoughtful look and a dazzling smile on his face. *Little Ah Qing, the reason I brought you to the Moonrite Region wasn't just to devour Crimson Mother.... This is where both of us are going to fly to new heights!*

Nethersprite looked in the direction of the back room, mixed emotions on her face. *Could it be that this Xu Qing is like me? Is he the embodiment of a soul fragment of some unknown entity?*

Everyone was thinking different things, but all were dealing with varying levels of astonishment. Meanwhile, the Heir Apparent smiled. He wasn't surprised at all by Xu Qing's enlightenment; everything was within the range of what he had predicted. He had assumed from the beginning that, given Xu Qing's powers of understanding, he would gain enlightenment of this step.

That's just the difference between me and the little punk's Master. His Master's understanding is limited, so he has a hard time giving advice on things like this. I guess you can't blame him for that. If any random person could hone an unpolished gem, then it wouldn't be unpolished.

Smiling, the Heir Apparent got to his feet. He knew that the next step would involve Xu Qing remembering that the Heir Apparent had perception-altering powers. Therefore, he was planning to give Xu Qing some options.

Having someone else alter memories isn't the perfect way. It's not possible to truly enter the consciousness. It's only possible to stay on the outside. Besides, then he would have my mark on his soul. The upside would be that he would have poison in his eyes. Given the little punk's temperament, he probably won't agree to that. In that case... he's much likelier to accept the second option.

Just as he was about to walk into the back room, the parrot started repeating what Xu Qing was thinking in the other room.

"There's only one way to do this. I need to imprint my body with innumerable poison marks. Every bit of my flesh, every drop of my blood, and every inch of my bones need to contain poison!

"I can't change my own memories, but memories aren't just made up of experiences and observations. They also contain the body's instincts!

"If I imprint every part of myself with poison, making it part of my instincts, then I can affect my memories in the opposite direction! I don't need to do anything to my eyes. I'll use feedback from my fleshly body to imprint information eternally in my memories!

"I already have poison!"

Xu Qing's eyes glittered with bright light.

On the main floor of the medicine shop, everyone was flabbergasted. Ling'er looked worried, Ning Yan gasped, the Captain was visibly moved, and the Heir Apparent stopped in place and then sat back down.

I don't need to alter his perceptions... this kid... he knows how to alter them himself?

Chapter 618: Blood-Red Dome of Heaven; Withered and Decaying Mortal World

When Xu Qing said he was going to do something, he would do it. Now that he had a direction, he immediately took out some poisonous plants and poison pills from his bag of holding. Some he consumed, some he rubbed on himself, and some he put directly into himself by slicing open his skin. He even crushed some poison pills into liquid, which he put into his eyes. He included some of his taboo poison in some of the medicinal pills as well. He was making sure that every part of him was infused with taboo poison, thus developing his fleshly body memories and tempering his fleshly body instincts.

Half a month passed. During that time, he was so immersed in his work that sometimes his vision swam. However, he never gave up.

Xu Qing knew that if he wanted to attain the fleshly body memories he hoped for, he didn't just need to use a large quantity of poisons, he needed to use a huge variety. Although he had a lot of poisons in his bag of holding, he had nothing close to the variety that was required. But that wasn't a big problem since he could go to the Moonrebel Congregation.

Whenever he needed something, he would just sell some cursequelling lozenges. His asking price included both poisonous plants and poison pills.

In that manner, more and more cultivators in the Moonrebel Congregation consumed cursequelling lozenges, and the reputation of Grandmaster Pill Nine grew. He also got more and more followers. In fact, the number of his followers increased on a daily basis.

Because of the heartfelt words spoken by Xu Qing on that fateful day, many grandmasters of the dao of alchemy also became followers. That was especially true of Saintlowe. He often praised Xu Qing publicly, and when he did, his facial expression was one of deep respect.

Before long, there was hardly any member of the Moonrebel Congregation who hadn't heard the name Pill Nine. The other vice-bishops took note. And the name also spread through the armed forces of the Moonrebel Congregation that were scattered throughout the Moonrite Region.

Of course, his true identity was still a mystery. Some people claimed that he was a Void Returning expert who had spent a lifetime studying the dao of medicine. Others said that he was from another region, which was why no one had ever heard of him before. Yet others claimed that he was actually a spy from the Red Moon Cathedral, though few people actually believed that rumor.

Regardless, the mysterious true identity of Pill Nine was something all Moonrebel Congregation cultivators wondered about. Not even the vice-bishops knew any of the details, as they didn't have the authority to investigate. Only the Archbishop of Moonrebel qualified to know the identities of all members.

Sadly, for many countless years, Paramount Temple in the Moonrebel Congregation had been unoccupied. Occasionally it would glitter with light for about a year, but then it would go dark.

After that, a new vice-bishop would appear. Although some people knew what that meant, it wasn't something people talked about.

Xu Qing was aware of the dramatic reputation he was building. But at the moment, he was so focused on the poison situation that he didn't pay very much attention. And that was because he had reached a bit of a standstill with his poison cultivation. Resources in the Moonrite Region were scarce, which meant that he didn't have access to the widest variety of poisons possible. As a result, he was having trouble developing the instincts he wanted.

I need a lot more poisonous plants, plus a lot of formulas. If I was in Sea-Sealing County, it would be easy. But here.... Even with the cultivators in the Moonrebel Congregation searching for what I need, I'm still not able to get everything. That was especially true of certain poisonous plants. There are some that I've only read about, but never actually seen.

A few days earlier, the Heir Apparent had come and explained the pros and cons of having someone else alter one's perceptions.

"It would leave a mark on my soul..." he murmured. In the end, he forced himself not to even think about that option. He wanted to rely on himself alone. Although it might take longer, the results would be more suitable.

Of course, the Heir Apparent mentioned another method, something related to my violet moon.

He looked in the direction of the main floor of the shop, his heart bubbling with speculation.

He thought about all the tempering the Heir Apparent had put him through in the Bitter Life Mountains. Then he considered that second method. For some reason, he was getting the feeling that the Heir Apparent... was trying to get him to pick the second option. He thought back to what the Heir Apparent had said a few days ago.

"There's another way, boy, to experience the vision of a god, and to be able to see the true and real world. When you do it, you'll gain poison in your eyes. It's related to your violet moon.

"That said, it would be very dangerous. In fact, it's so dangerous that I'm hesitant to explain the details. However, I can tell you that if you succeed, then you'll see the world for what it really is. What I can't be certain of is whether... you'll still be you.

"The moment you acquired Crimson Mother's godsource, it became a certainty that you would have to walk this path. The only other option would be to abandon the violet moon power you have. Think about it. I'll give you seven days. If you decide to do it, then come to me at dawn on the eighth day. It has to be at that exact time.

"I'll tell you the details then, which relate to gods and karma. If you don't come, though, I won't tell you."

Xu Qing had been thinking a lot about those words lately. After all, he got the feeling that once he was finished with the golden crow and the taboo poison, the next thing to upgrade would be his violet moon nascent soul.

Unfortunately, he couldn't figure out why the Heir Apparent said that he had to find him at dawn on the eighth day. The entire thing left him feeling puzzled.

It was now deep in the night of the seventh day, only four hours before the dawn of which the Heir Apparent had spoken. Xu Qing cast his senses outside. He saw the Heir Apparent who, instead of sitting at the counter sipping tea like he usually did, was on the roof looking up into the sky.

Xu Qing vanished from the back roof and appeared on that very same rooftop.

"Wait a moment!" the Heir Apparent said coolly, glancing at Xu Qing briefly before looking back up into the sky.

Nodding, Xu Qing sat and also looked up into the sky. In the Moonrite Region, the sky wasn't very bright during the daytime. During the night, it was pitch black, almost like it was covered by a black cloth. There were no stars. Just emptiness. The whimpering of the wind echoed about in heaven and earth. The Bitter Life Mountains seemed unusually quiet. It was as if all cultivators felt that this particular night was unsafe.

Xu Qing sent his divine sense out and noticed that although Li Youfei was seated in meditation in his room, his heart was racing, and he looked confused. Curious, Xu Qing sent his senses further out. That was when he realized that there were no animal sounds in the Bitter Life Mountains. It was as if something big were about to happen.

Two hours passed.

Now there were only two more hours left until dawn. At that point, the Captain walked out from the Green Spirit Pharmacy and came up to the roof. Clasp hands, he bowed to the Heir Apparent, then sat down next to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing looked at him. "Eldest Brother."

"Shhh..." the Captain said, placing his index finger in front of his lips. Then he pointed up into the sky.

Xu Qing sat there quietly.

An hour passed.

At that point, the wind stopped. All sound ceased. The Bitter Life Mountains were incomparably silent. It was the same with the Greenhair Badlands, as well as all the other counties. As of this moment, the entire Moonrite Region... was as silent as death.

Then light appeared in the dome of heaven! It was red, and it was very faint. But considering it was the only color in the empty darkness, it was very eye-catching. Almost blinding. It started out as one tiny beam. But then it proliferated, becoming countless blades that sliced through the sky, almost edicts proclaimed by a dead god, foretelling of impending calamity.

Feeling shaken mentally, Xu Qing realized that the violet moon power within him was trembling, almost like it was about to shake free from his control.

As the red light grew more prominent on the horizon, the light spread almost like blood, slowly filling the sky over the Moonrite Region. It brought a sense of majesty, as well as heaven-shaking,

earth-shattering momentum. And terror. Godly might accompanied the spreading red light, which then... weighed down on the Moonrite Region.

The sky was red like blood. The lands quaked. Living beings withered. The people wallowed in bitterness. The Bitter Life Mountains trembled. The Heavenfire Sea trembled. Mount Heavenly Ox trembled. All living beings in the Moonrite Region trembled. Looks of helpless despair appeared in their eyes. Waves crashed on the surface of the Yin Sacrifice River, and as the corpses rose and fell in the water, they wailed in endless grief.

However, in the various church temples of the Red Moon Cathedral, the cultivators were getting very excited. All of them stepped out into the open, and as the red light spread, they kowtowed, their expressions those of madness and piety.

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

Countless voices joined together, chanting.

The red moon was coming. It was still some distance away from the Moonrite Region. But it was closer than it had been for many years. And it was already sending its light out into the region. It wouldn’t be long before the entire sky was the color of fresh blood. The same thing would happen to the lands. And then the huge red moon would appear on the horizon. And that meant that Crimson Mother’s harvest was coming.

Shaken, Xu Qing finally realized why the Heir Apparent had said to come to him at this hour.

He also realized why the Captain was there.

“It won’t be long now before Crimson Mother... returns to the mortal world.” the Heir Apparent murmured. “When that time comes, all living beings will be food.” He looked away from the sky and fixed his gaze on Xu Qing. “What’s your decision, Xu Qing?”

Xu Qing hesitated briefly, then said, “What do I do?”

The Heir Apparent stood. “Xu Qing, I don’t truly understand Crimson Mother. What’s more, I don’t know exactly how you can use your violet moon power. Nor do I know exactly what Crimson Mother is capable of as a god. Gods all have their secrets.”

A gleam of reminiscence appeared in the Heir Apparent’s eyes, and as he looked up into the black and red sky, he seemed despondent.

“But I did watch as my father fought Crimson Mother. Back then, all I felt from Crimson Mother was... hunger. Boundless hunger!” Lingering fear now existed in the Heir Apparent’s eyes. “That type of hunger is completely terrifying. It affects not just the fleshly body, but the soul. And everything. It’s as if shē arrives with infinite, never-ending hunger.

“Perhaps you aren’t hungry enough to truly unleash the power of your violet moon. You need to experience the most intense hunger imaginable! All I can tell you is... it’s

something that overlaps between human nature and godly nature. A blending and a connection.”

Chapter 619: Human Nature, Animal Nature, Godly Nature

In the Bitter Life Mountains, no wind blew. No sand stirred. All living beings were quiet. No one made a sound. Blood-red light continued to spread through the dome of heaven, making it seem like it had been wounded and was bleeding profusely.

On the rooftop, the Heir Apparent spoke of matters related to gods and karma, his voice echoing out into the deathly silence.

“I am not a god, nor do I have any godsource. But I do have authority, though it’s different from that of a god.... My authority does not come from a lit godfire, but rather, from a blessing given by the heavenly daos of Revered Ancient. I have no way to help you control the godsource within you. But I can give you a direction. And that is hunger.” The Heir Apparent looked at Xu Qing.

“Hunger?” Xu Qing said, and a moment later he glanced at the Captain. It wasn’t lost on him that every time the Captain saw the flesh of a god, he suddenly looked incomparably hungry.

The Captain blinked a few times but didn’t say anything.

Xu Qing thought about it for a moment.

“We don’t have much time, Xu Qing,” the Heir Apparent said, looking once again at the redness spreading through the sky. He took a step forward. When he did, he vanished, along with Xu Qing.

The Captain didn’t seem surprised that they had disappeared. Stretching a bit, he opened his bag of holding and started rummaging through it. Eventually, he pulled out a metal box.

“The Heir Apparent was in too much of a hurry...” he murmured. Sticking out his tongue, he bit it and spat some blood into the box.

Can’t do anything about that, though. I’ll just have to use this. The old man really does have some amazing powers of foresight. Back when we were about to leave Sea-Sealing County, he gave me this little thingy and said it was Fourth Sib’s anchor.... It can only open using my blood. And if I ever lose track of Fourth Sib, this can take me right to him.

The Captain looked at the box and considered activating it. That said, it was too important of an item, so in the end, he suppressed that desire.

Somewhere out in the endless desert of the Greenhair Badlands, the Heir Apparent and Xu Qing appeared out of thin air.

Xu Qing immediately sent his senses out around him. The wind had stopped, and the dunes stood still. The desert was unusually quiet. For some unknown reason, the green sand underfoot actually looked gray. It gave off the sensation of death. Xu Qing had passed through this location before, and knew that it was a few months away from the Bitter Life Mountains.

“This place should do,” the Heir Apparent said quietly. He looked at Xu Qing. “I’ll ask you one last time. Did you make a decision?”

Xu Qing looked at the red glow on the horizon, and sensed his violet moon power acting fidgety. It seemed like it wanted to burst out of him and rush off toward the horizon. He didn’t want to abandon the violet moon, and thus, he realized that he didn’t really need to make a decision. He looked at the Heir Apparent and nodded.

“Great!” The Heir Apparent reached toward him. He did not release any aura, nor any cultivation base fluctuations. There was no visible surge of energy. But that simple grasping motion caused Xu Qing to shiver.

He could sense the flame of his life force going dim. Then the vital force within him, seemingly with a will of its own, became a mist that rapidly spread off him. White mist emerged from his pores, as well as from his eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. It spread out and then into the Heir Apparent’s right hand. As it happened, his body started withering. His hair shriveled, and he suddenly felt incredibly weak. The feeling intensified.

A moment later, a clump of white mist rested in the Heir Apparent’s hand. He put it away.

Xu Qing staggered backward several paces, gasping for breath. As of this moment, he no longer looked like he was twenty years old. Instead, he looked like an old man with one foot in the grave. Most of his hair had fallen out, and what remained was gray. He was gaunt, his cultivation base was incredibly weak, and his teeth were loose. His eyes were dim, and his life force was about ninety percent gone. There was an emptiness within him that became as cold as ice, then gave rise to a sensation of hunger. Yet Xu Qing didn’t feel that it was enough.

Looking at the Heir Apparent, he hoarsely said, “Senior, I know you’re not just doing this for me. I know you want me to strengthen my violet moon power, and if I’m right, sir, the reason has something to do with your brothers and sisters.”

The Heir Apparent didn’t respond deceptively. “You’re right, Xu Qing. I have my own selfish reasons for helping you. I hope that your violet moon power can improve and get stronger. And I hope you can learn to truly control it.”

Xu Qing smiled weakly. “In that case, keep going. I also want to control my violet moon power. And even more than that, I want to see what the world really looks like.”

After a moment of silence, the Heir Apparent performed an incantation gesture with his left hand. Instantly, a Smoldering God seal settled onto Xu Qing.

“Strip you of vitality, make your life force empty.

“Strip you of cultivation base, wither up your spirit power.

“Strip you of healing, and make it impossible for you to recover.

“Finally, strip you of the chance to live, leaving you immobile and defenseless, with no choice but to wait for death to arrive.”

Xu Qing’s mind spun until it was blank. At a certain point, he lost the ability to stand, and toppled onto the desert floor.

The Heir Apparent sighed. With a deep look at Xu Qing, he turned and floated up into the sky, gradually disappearing off into the distance. He left behind the silence of the desert, and a lone figure laying in the sand.

Xu Qing liked peace and quiet. It helped him think, and he liked thinking. But right now, despite the silence, he hardly had the strength to think. He felt so incredibly weak that he could barely move his fingers. And he could feel something that he truly hated: the cold.

It's been a long... a long time.... It truly had been a long time since he experienced the type of cold he had faced as a young person.

It was a cold that seeped down to his soul. He felt like ice inside and out, causing him to shiver uncontrollably. He was starting to lose consciousness. Then he saw something. Images, flitting through his mind. He saw a dirty kid climbing out of a pile of endless corpses, struggling, fighting, just to stay alive.

I experienced this same feeling when I was young... and it didn't stop me.

There had been many times when he was so hungry he thought he would die. Or times when he had been so cold he lost all hope. In order to stay alive, he'd eaten anything he could find. Back then, tree bark had been a luxury. Back then, he had been so hungry that he could find nutrition even in dirt.

Actually, the Heir Apparent was wrong. He should have left me some strength so that I could experience hunger on an even deeper level.

Forcing himself to smile, he lifted his trembling hand until it was at his mouth. Bloodshot eyes shimmering with madness, and veins bulging on his forehead, he gathered all the strength he could muster and bit deeply into his hand. Blood oozed past his teeth and lips, but before it could drop to the ground, he sucked it inside and swallowed it.

His bite had also ripped out a chunk of his own flesh. Instead of chewing it, he just forced it right down his throat. The flesh wriggled as it slid down into his stomach, where his stomach acid met it like a parched desert meeting a morning dew. Xu Qing could feel his stomach twitch. The familiar sensation made him smile again.

That's what I'm talking about. If you want to be really hungry, you need to have a bit of energy.

His smile was more than a little terrifying. But as he smiled, and as his eyes turned more bloodshot, he started breathing more heavily. And with the tiny bit of energy he had now, the coldness and the empty hunger grew more intense.

Xu Qing shivered. He felt like his insides were so profoundly empty that his view of the world was distorted. Thankfully, he had a lot of experience in this regard. Looking up into the sky, he suddenly let loose a curse.

"Son of a bitch!"

Back when he was young, whenever he got really hungry, he would curse at the face in the sky, just like this. Cursing some more allowed him to focus his thoughts and control the madness that had been growing inside him.

Controlling my hunger this way isn't enough. The hunger I feel now isn't the hunger of a god that the Heir Apparent mentioned. I've had other experiences with hunger.

He thought back to when he devoured those Red Moon Cathedral cultivators, and the sudden impulse he'd had to continue with that. It had almost felt like an addiction; the more he devoured, the more he wanted to devour.

Back then, I controlled the feeling. But if I had just kept devouring, then I would have lost control.... And then there's Eldest Brother's hunger. And Emperor Ancient Spirit's hunger! Or the hunger shown by Crimson Mother back in Forbidden by the Immortal, when using Zhang Siyun as a doppelgänger.

Their hunger is both similar to mine and different. In that case, what happens if I don't keep it under control?

After some thought, he stopped trying to control it. Looking down, he gasped for breath as the sense of hunger overwhelmed his rationality, taking over everything.

Opening his mouth wide, he bit another chunk out of his arm. It was almost as if he didn't realize it was his own flesh and blood. He took bite after bite, and as he chewed, he went further and further away from rationality. His instincts took over.

As of this moment, he was like a wild animal!

As his blood dropped down onto the sand, he instinctively got on all fours and then started wolfing down the blood-stained sand. Despite that, the hunger within him wasn't abated at all.

“Hungry... so hungry....”

Trembling, he started crawling forward. He wanted more to eat! Unfortunately, he was in a very desolate location, where there weren't even any animals present. After crawling for a few meters, he collapsed, overwhelmed by darkness and insanity. As a feeling of weakness and death spread through him, he gained a moment of clarity.

The Heir Apparent talked of an overlap between human nature and godly nature. But right now, I'm like an animal. The fact that I'm lucid now is more like an overlap between human nature and animal nature. It just proves that I'm not doing the right thing. In that case, what is human nature? And what is godly nature?

Three days passed.

While Xu Qing wandered the Greenhair Badlands in a state of extreme hunger, all other living beings in the Moonrite Region felt despair at the coming of the red moon. And out of despair was born chaos.

Things were devolving in the Moonrite Region, with madness becoming the order of the day. Since the final doom of death was just around the corner, there was only a short period of time to live, and in such circumstances, anything and everything could happen. Razing, killing, looting, raping, and plundering were going on everywhere. The ugliest side of life was playing out everywhere as countless people of the Moonrite Region wantonly gave vent to their insanity.

There were no restraints. No limitations. Howls of grief and pain became a tempest that swept over everything.

Human nature was collapsing. Benevolence was crumbling. Animal nature proliferated. Madness erupted.

The cultivators in the Greenhair Badlands were no exception.

Chapter 620: Secrets of the Gods!

When the light of the red moon first appeared in the Greenhair Badlands, the wind died down. It returned the next day. It started out very faint. But by the third day, the green wind was blowing so hard that the dunes of green sand started shifting, until the desert resembled a sea. The wind seemed to carry the weeping of all living beings to fill heaven and earth.

Xu Qing was half-buried in the sand, unmoving. He looked like a corpse. But his mind was alive as he thought about human nature and godly nature. It was a profound question, and Xu Qing was having a hard time wrapping his mind around it. Especially the latter topic.... After all, he wasn't a god. As a mere human, it was difficult to understand the godliness of gods.

However, Xu Qing had certain advantages. In his short twenty years of life, he had seen more than his fair share of evil, bitterness, and, of course, the inexhaustible ugliness that humans were capable of. Because of that, he already had a good understanding of human nature. In the three days that passed, he had been thinking back through all of his memories, trying to recall everything he could ever remember experiencing.

Greed. Madness. Cannibalism. Ruthlessness.

Of course, there were also beautiful and wonderful things, but they were like sparks that were easily extinguished. Regardless, he could remember what it felt like when those sparks appeared. For example, there was the peace and tranquility of his youth in Peerless City, or the deep impression his father and mother made on him. He would never forget the warmth Sergeant Thunder provided and the emotion in Duanmu Zang. And there was... the towering image of Palace Lord Kong Liangxiu. There were many things like that.

Human nature includes both good and evil. Human nature also involves emotions connected to other things, and the fetters thus created.

He thought about his Master, the Captain, Plumdark, Ling'er, and all of the other people he'd come to know on his journey. He had experienced both hatred and gratitude, loathing and joy.

I was alone at first. But now... without even realizing it, I've come to have many things to be concerned about. They are also fetters, like countless threads connecting into a huge web. Human nature is the source of that web. It's the reason why I feel happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy.

He opened his eyes and looked up into the sky. He listened to the sobbing wind, which seemed to him to be the weeping of all living beings.

Human nature contains all the hope we have for life, and the fear we have of death. Ever since I was young, I always felt the desire to keep on living. Our emotions, and the way we live our lives, are fundamental aspects of human nature. Back in Peerless City, I didn't even understand what killing was. I never worried about the future. And I never considered the consequences of my actions. But after experiencing life, I changed.

As Xu Qing lost himself in his memories and analyzed himself, his understanding of human nature grew deeper.

One of the differences between human nature and animal nature is that we can exercise restraint.

He looked down at his bare arm and thought back to how he had sunk into madness earlier. It seemed to him that the ability to exercise restraint came from self-control. But where did self-control come from? He pondered the question for a while.

I have self-control because of my moral system. I guess it's just one of the characteristics that make us human. Human nature revolves around order. Animal nature is the opposite. It's chaotic, and relies on instinct. Here in Revered Ancient, that's the state of existence of the animals infected by the aura of the god above.

Xu Qing felt somewhat enlightened.

But what is godly nature? Godliness?

He still didn't understand. However, he knew that the body he possessed was actually the body of a god. And his taboo poison came from a god domain, while his violet moon was actually godsource.

If I fill my body with violet moon power, then to a certain extent, you could say that godliness exists within me. Except... it's not something I'm aware of. Or perhaps you could say that it isn't visible. After all, I'm a human, not a god.

The Heir Apparent wants me to experience hunger in the same way that Crimson Mother experiences it. Is hunger really the key to unlocking godly nature? What causes the hunger of a god?

Xu Qing was still confused. By now, he actually didn't feel hungry. His body had grown used to surviving in a weak state, and was now just waiting for death to come.

A long moment passed, and he sighed. He couldn't find the answer, and he didn't feel like lying around, so finally, he struggled into a seated position in the sand. By this point, the beasts of the desert were active again. In fact, he could see one of the giant mushrooms off in the distance. It was currently heading in his direction, full of malice.

Terrifying energy and frightening fluctuations rolled off the mushroom. From what Xu Qing could sense, it wasn't in the Nascent Soul level, but rather, more like the dao begetting phase.

There weren't a lot of these gruish mushrooms in the Greenhair Badlands. But because of the way their roots formed a humanoid shape, like a giant, few people would dare to provoke them.

Xu Qing had come to realize that very early on when he first arrived in the desert.

Unfortunately, simply sitting up had taken almost all of the scant energy he had remaining. And the shallow pit left behind him after he sat up was already filling in with sand. When Xu Qing noticed that, he was stunned. His mind reeled as if it were being struck by numerous lightning bolts. Forgetting all about his dangerous situation, he stared at the sand filling in the spot where he had been lying.

It's being filled in. When I was laying there, I was part of the desert. When I sat up, I left an empty spot. Therefore... the sand is tumbling back in to return that spot to its original state. If I likened that

empty spot to myself, and the sand as human nature... then I could liken the replacement sand as godliness....

Xu Qing struggled to control his breathing. He felt like he had latched onto something important, and was currently thinking deeply about it. That was when a huge scorpion tail emerged from the sand next to him and stabbed into him.

Then it flung him to the side, causing him to flop like a kite with its string cut off into the distance.

A moment later, three scorpions burrowed out of the sand, raced toward him, and dug into him with their mandibles.

Xu Qing wasn't paying attention. Though he was currently in a very weak state, he still had some inherent toughness. The scorpions wouldn't be able to rip him apart that easily. Though pain filled him, his current line of thinking was more important.

As the scorpions tore at him, he closed his eyes.

If I remove my human nature, I won't have self-control to suppress my animal nature. But if I replace it with godly nature, then I can use godliness to surpass the animal nature!

Xu Qing's heart pounded. Now he understood.

I don't need to understand godliness. I just need to integrate it into myself and sense it. Use the vision of a god to understand it. At that point, maybe I won't be able to control my animal nature. But that's because I won't need to. It will instinctively listen to my commands.

Therefore, the Heir Apparent is actually telling me to overlap human nature and godly nature. It's a combination. A mixture! Except, where does hunger come into it?

Xu Qing felt that he had a preliminary solution to the problem. Although there were still things he didn't understand, when all was said and done, he had a decision to make.

Should he try out his new idea?

A moment later, he thought about the first bit of advice the Heir Apparent had given him using the tea leaves and the water. Then he thought about the experiments he had done with the golden crow, and the inspiration he'd received when the Heir Apparent used one of Sprouty's leaflets to demonstrate a point.

The tea leaves and the water are a mixture. But you can still separate them. And even though Sprouty's leaflet is separate, it's still part of Sprouty. The essence is the same. In other words, if I try out this idea, I can still reverse it if necessary.

Xu Qing's eyes shone with determination. He knew that, unless he wanted to abandon hope of controlling the power of the violet moon, he had to pursue this path.

As for how to get rid of my human nature....

He closed his eyes. Getting rid of his human nature meant removing the restraints on his instincts.

He slowly started to make the change. Soon after, he was gasping for breath and trembling from head to toe. Then his eyes opened, and they shone with the crazed madness of a wild animal.

He no longer exercised restraint over his instincts. He no longer guided his actions with self-control. He no longer considered morality, evil, or goodness. He didn't have any sense of self-respect. What

was more, he wasn't thinking about memories of the past, and wasn't affected by emotions. He was set free. His instincts were completely free.

An animalistic roar erupted from Xu Qing's mouth. Eyes crimson, he looked at the scorpions that were ripping into him.

Saliva poured from his mouth as unbounded hunger rose within him. He had no idea where he got the energy, but he reached out, grabbed a scorpion, and ripped it apart with his teeth. Sand flew everywhere. Rumbling sounds echoed out. Piercing cries could be heard for the time it takes an incense stick to burn. Then, a figure could be seen racing out of the dust.

It was none other than Xu Qing. His hair was disheveled, and he gasped for breath. His face was splattered with blood. The arm that he had previously bitten chunks out of was now gone.

But that didn't make him any less fast.

He wasn't thinking. He was guided by instinct alone. And he wanted to eat. Everything. The hunger within him had plunged him into a state of madness. But it wasn't just a desire to devour flesh that filled him. There was something deeper he needed. He wasn't sure what it was, but he could sense that his body felt completely empty. It was as if there was some indescribable thing he needed, something that was hiding from him.

And the more deeply it hid, the more intense his hunger grew. It came from his body, but also from his soul.

All of a sudden, his body flickered with violet light! It was violet moon power! It fluctuated like never before, glimmering brightly. It was infinitely close to Xu Qing, and more a part of him than ever before. His surroundings rippled and distorted. Heaven and earth were a blur. The power of a god rumbled, exploding out from him.

The sand vibrated, and the green wind lurched to a halt, then rushed in the opposite direction, not daring to get close to him.

A howl erupted from Xu Qing's mouth as he started racing directly toward the distant mushroom. Before, it would have taken all of his energy, unleashed at his peak state, to just pierce the mushroom's surface. But now, the mere wave of his hand caused it to instantly crack open.

An agonized shriek rang out as Xu Qing burrowed inside, taking bites left and right. His remaining hand swept back and forth, grabbing chunk after chunk of flesh and stuffing it into his mouth.

"Hungry... so hungry..."

The mushroom instinctively fought back. The roots that formed the shape of a giant beneath the mushroom tried to grab him. Its energy alone was enough to crush all of Xu Qing's nascent souls. In the past, he would have been forced to go all out to defend himself. But right now... the pressure coming from the roots collapsed before it could even get close to him.

The mushroom couldn't do a thing to Xu Qing. Terrifying fluctuations erupted from within it. It cried out in anguish again, yet Xu Qing just kept eating mouthful after mouthful.

Xu Qing's belly swelled up, yet the sensation of hunger within him hadn't been reduced at all. Instead, it had grown even more intense. Eventually, it was as if every empty spot within him had combined, creating a gigantic black hole that could devour everything.

The godliness from the violet moon began to flicker even more dramatically. A violet will spread out around him in all directions. Godsource was erupting.

Xu Qing's movements were slowing. In his maddened state, his crimson eyes were now gaining some cold clarity. Apparently, he was finally starting to sense godliness.

It was something beyond description. Xu Qing didn't fully understand it, but he was aware of the sudden, new sensation. In his mind, it now didn't matter whether or not Crimson Mother showed up. It didn't even matter who he himself was.

Emotions. The past. Good and evil. Gratitude and grudges. All people. All things. He remembered all of those things, but as of this moment, they weren't important at all. His view of all matters and all things had changed.

This is why the Heir Apparent said that if I succeeded, I might not be me anymore. Because when godly nature replaces human nature, things that were important to me before, even people, will become insignificant.

Those thoughts flitted through his mind in an instant, and as they did, he realized they weren't important to him. Neither was the act of thinking about them. The pervasive, corrosive, degenerative wind around him wasn't important. Heaven and earth were filled with vicious illusions. The world was full of bones and maggot-ridden corpses. And none of them were important.

The blurry, broken face in the sky had changed. His eyes were looking down, almost as if they had never closed. But that wasn't important either.

What was important was that Xu Qing was hungry. Immeasurably hungry. His hunger was limitless, with no beginning and no end. He finally understood the source of his hunger.

It was an instinct to pursue the evolution of life. It was also a farewell to the past, but at the same time, a reluctance to part with it. In this process of getting rid of his human nature and suffusing himself with godly nature, he had not fully lost his human nature. That was the reason the imperfect black hole had come to be.

If I want to abate this hunger, I need to perfect myself. I need to completely get rid of my human nature. I haven't done that yet. But neither has Crimson Mother. Neither has Emperor Ancient Spirit. Neither has the Captain... That's why they're all hungry.

Xu Qing apathetically wondered why he was thinking about unimportant things. And then he quickly cleared his thoughts.

And yet, even after that, he still felt that those things were important.

The two types of thinking clashed, causing struggle to appear in his eyes. One moment, his eyes contained apathy. The other, they revealed human nature.

The conflict caused veins to bulge on his forehead. He released a howl of anguish. The clarity in his eyes faded, replaced by madness. The pursuit of perfect instincts returned, along with his attempts to completely get rid of his human nature.

Xu Qing had gone mad again. Violet light flared, like the coming of a god. He raced off into the distance. There was more food there. There was no mushroom left behind. He had eaten the entire thing.