

## Timescape 711

### Chapter 711: The Meaning of Moonrite

The transformations to Moonrite began after Crimson Mother reached godly ascension and fought Li Zihua. Perhaps their battle did not end as neatly as people in subsequent epochs believed. Perhaps their fight pierced through space-time from the ancient past until modern times, continuing all along in a way that ordinary people couldn't comprehend. Perhaps it went on for countless years....

But in the end, the battle concluded, and the final exclamation point was added. The dark haze that had covered the region for too many years to count finally disappeared along with the red moon.

Where did the red moon go? Was Crimson Mother actually dead? Would Li Zihua appear again...?

No one knew the answers to such questions, not even the people who had personally participated in the battle.

To all the other living beings in the Moonrite Region, the main thing that was certain was that the battle was going to become a thing of legend, talked about from generation to generation in the years to come. It was also possible to imagine how, years in the future, people born in this region would read about the battle in various ancient records. There, they would read about how their region had once been afflicted with a curse. They would also learn about how the curse was ended by that legendary showdown.

If, one day, later generations in the region earned the qualification to step through time, maybe they would return to this day to see how the Moonrite Region changed when the red moon disappeared.

Living beings began to recover. Hope had returned. The waters of the Yin Sacrifice River were already changing. They were no longer blood-red, but rather, clear. The innumerable corpses that once filled the river turned into silt that sank to the bottom. The people no longer had the red moon curse in their blood. There was no need for painquelling lozenges, nor any need for cursequelling lozenges. The people were no longer forced to stay inside the region. Once again, the people of Moonrite had freedom.

And yet, after the countless epochs of torment and despair, even though they now stood at the beginning of a new era, and were cheering excitedly, that couldn't erase the exhaustion in their hearts. They were tired. Moonrite needed to rest and recover.

The Heir Apparent stepped forward. Given his identity, he had to live up to his responsibility and mission. His cultivation base was up to the task. As hope returned to everyone, the Heir Apparent accepted the power and authority that had once belonged to his father. He would be the ruler of Moonrite. [1]

The Heir Apparent had a new Moon Palace built in the Bitter Life Mountains. Henceforth, that is where he would rule from, and it was the location from where he would safeguard the entire region.

In the depths of the Moon Palace was an ordinary medicine shop. No special explanations were necessary regarding the shop. It was part of the entire legend, going back to the very beginning. The owner of the medicine shop wasn't the Heir Apparent. It was a person named Xu Qing.

In terms of the Moonrite Region's allegiance, the Heir Apparent chose not to join with the rest of humankind. His region would be independent.

The name Moonrite remained the same. However, the meaning was different.

The 'rite' wasn't about a rite of sacrifice. It was a rite of offering. And the offering *was* the red moon! That was the decision made by the Heir Apparent and his siblings, and it was a decision backed by the people of the region.

Princess Brightblossom had her set of responsibilities. She went to the northern ice plains, to the spot where she had been previously sealed. There in the north, she established an educational establishment called the Northbright Palace. In the years to come, she would teach the people everything she knew.

Fifth Sister had her own mission. She tapped into her abilities to repair the Mirror of Moonrebel. After the work was done, she lifted it high into the canopy of heaven over the Moonrite Region. It became a sun. She chose to enter the Mirror of Moonrebel and sit there in meditation for all eternity. By releasing her authority and making herself part of the light of that sun, it ensured that the sunlight that shone onto the Moonrite Region was full of nourishment and life force.

The cultivators of the Moonrebel Congregation were free again. They could now choose their own path. Some of them decided to end their affiliation with the Moonrebel Congregation, and return to their species to lend their strength to the recovery efforts. Others chose to stay in the Mirror of Moonrebel, gain unlimited life force, and stand as guardians of the sun. The final portion chose to join the Heir Apparent in standing guard over their home.

Eighth Sib made a different choice compared to his siblings. His personality didn't suit a sedentary life, and his years in imprisonment had given him a unique view of the transformations in the outside world. Thus, he chose to wander. He left the Moonrite Region to see all the familiar and unfamiliar things out in the Revered Ancient mainland.

Then there was Ninth Sib.... As the strongest of the siblings, he went to the Penitence Steppes to find the mountain of flesh that had once been his father, and was now the foundation of the forbidden region. There, he sat down cross-legged and unmoving. His divine will filled the forbidden region, then spread out through the Moonrite Region. He was working on his cultivation, but at the same time, seeking to find the path his father had once walked.

And thus, events wound to a conclusion in the Moonrite Region.

Everyone who had participated in the final battle with Crimson Mother benefited in different ways. Such details weren't made public. But everyone seemed pleased with how things turned out.

Emperor Ancient Spirit didn't seek out Xu Qing. Clearly he had benefited handsomely. Moonfire and Starfire didn't show up again either. There was no doubt that they had profited as well.

The Heir Apparent and his siblings didn't talk about that subject. But given what they did after things were over, it seemed likely that they had received additional benefits from their father.

As for Xu Qing and the Captain.... On the surface, it seemed like they benefited the least of all. All they got was Crimson Mother's doppelgänger, Zhang Siyun. They had both worked incredibly hard in this effort, whether Xu Qing with his red moon authority, or the Captain with his past-life body or

his Dawning Suns. Therefore, though the rewards they received were appropriate given the level of their cultivation base, it wasn't commensurate with their overall effort.

As a result, the Captain repeatedly pleaded his case to the Heir Apparent and his siblings. He attempted to magically summon High God Moonfire in the hopes of laying out his argument. He even went so far as to ask Xu Qing to talk things out with Emperor Ancient Spirit and the clay fox. The Captain was like a worker hounding the boss for his paycheck. Sadly for him, High God Moonfire ignored him. Emperor Ancient Spirit never responded.

And after some thought, Xu Qing decided not to reach out to the clay fox.

However, the Heir Apparent and his siblings ended up looking at the Captain in the same way that an adult would look at a child who had behaved well.

Just about anyone else would probably be embarrassed having others look at them that way. But not the Captain. He just kept trying to convince them, all while looking resentful and sighing constantly. Eventually, the Captain took Xu Qing to a remote area, where he took out his two remaining Dawning Suns. Then he begged Xu Qing to bring out his own remaining sun. Still not convinced they were safe, the Captain spat out several mouthfuls of blood, sealed the area, then had Xu Qing unleash his red moon authority.

Although the red moon was gone, Xu Qing's authority... was still there! There were some differences compared to before, although Xu Qing would need to do some research and study to figure out the specifics. Regardless, with that hard work done, the two of them had a safe place to split up the rewards they did have.

Eyebrows dancing up and down, and his face full of excitement, the Captain said, "Did you pick up on all that, little Ah Qing? We want everyone to think we didn't make out with much in terms of rewards. That way, they won't get jealous. Gods might be omniscient and omnipotent, but when it comes to Crimson Mother and Li Zihua, those effects are greatly diminished. And therefore... after this, we need to make a huge deal about not getting our fair share!"

Xu Qing nodded. He had known all along the Captain was putting on an act. Truth be told, although he wasn't sure exactly how they had benefited, the way the Captain had blinked three times made it clear that they had done well.

"This time, little Ah Qing... we made out like bandits!!" The Captain's voice trembled, and he was breathing heavily. Looking around to make sure the coast was clear, he lowered his voice and continued, "Our reward isn't just Crimson Mother's doppelg?nger Zhang Siyun. We also got this!"

With a flourish, the Captain produced three fingernails....

"Do you know what these are, little Ah Qing? They're Crimson Mother's fingernails! They're from a god body! These surpass any kind of precious treasure, even the fish bone weapons the old man gave us. They're completely beyond the comparison of anything like that. Once we get back and the old man sees how we made out, he'll be drooling nonstop. Hahaha!"

The Captain smiled proudly at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing looked expressionlessly at the three fingernails. Then he looked up at the Captain. He said nothing.

The Captain blinked a few times and then cleared his throat. "Little Ah Qing, do you know what the greatest pleasure in life is? It's called being pleased! You should learn a bit about that. You see, I'm the kind of person that's easy to please. Think about it. Crimson Mother is a High God. Not only did we eliminate any threat from Crimson Mother, but also, we got her doppelgänger. And even better than that, we got these three fingernails. They're rare items, and yet, since you're my Junior Brother, little Ah Qing, it's my job to take care of you. Therefore, I'll give you two of them. One's enough for me."

Looking like the epitome of generosity, the Captain gave Xu Qing two fingernails. Then he turned to leave.

Xu Qing's facial expression had remained extremely calm the entire time. After taking the two fingernails and putting them away, he took out a bamboo slip and started carving something onto it.

When the Captain noticed that, his heart suddenly started pounding. Hurrying over to Xu Qing's side, he looked at the bamboo slip and saw his own name.... He blinked a few times and then cleared his throat.

"I was just joking around with you, little Junior Brother! Hahaha! Put that bamboo slip away... you really don't need it." Expression turning serious, the Captain lowered his voice again. "Our real reward obviously couldn't just be three fingernails. It's actually...."

The Captain once again waved his hand out in a flourish. Three bubbles appeared on his palm, within each of which was a finger covered with bloody feathers made of flesh. It was hard to say which finger was gorier than the other, but the godly power they emanated was incredibly intense.

#### Chapter 712: Brothers With Unique Abilities

Xu Qing looked at the fingers in the bubbles. Then he looked up at the Captain.

The Captain looked back at him with a sincere expression. "What do you think, little Ah Qing? We really did well, didn't we? Hahaha!"

Xu Qing didn't reply. He tapped into his cultivation base, causing his energy to surge. At the same time, a secret trove appeared behind him, causing everything around them to tremble. His eyes became pitch black as taboo poison spread. A sun and moon rose in his secret trove, and the heavenly dao bluegreen dragon roared as flames rose up around it. The furnace was burning.

At the same time, threads of natural laws spread through the secret trove, surrounding Xu Qing. The natural and magical laws of his secret trove were turning the entire area around him into his own personal battlefield. As he stood on that battlefield, he pulsed with a heavenly dao sensation. Things weren't over yet, though. Mutagen flourished around him, the aura of taboo poison.

The Captain saw all of that, and though it caused his heart to sink, he plastered a glaring expression onto his face.

"Little Ah Qing! Are you telling me you don't trust me, your Eldest Brother?"

The Captain tapped into his own cultivation base, causing a secret trove to appear behind him as well. His secret trove was different from Xu Qing's. It didn't contain a world, but rather, a pitch-black hell like the Nine Serenities. It echoed with howls that could shake the heart and mind, which created personal natural laws for him that spread out and squared off against Xu Qing's magical laws.

“Apparently, little Ah Qing, I need to assert my dignity as the Eldest Brother!”  
The Captain waved his hand, and his eyes glittered with blue light.

However, Xu Qing wasn't done yet. The violet moon glittered as it rose out of his secret trove and into the sky. As it rose, it cast violet moonlight down. It wasn't made of ordinary beams of light, but rather... violet threadworms. The threadworms filled heaven and earth, sometimes revealing their original form, other times appearing as mere moonlight. It was extremely gruish.

When the light touched the Captain, his mind spun. His blue light was being covered by violet light! And yet, he was the Eldest Brother, so he quickly unleashed a new power. Faces appeared within his pupils, which also had faces in their own pupils, and so on. Blue light shone brightly, spreading out to cover him. And where it touched him, blue worms appeared, their eyes glittering with anticipation.

“The two of us haven't fought each other in a long time, little Ah Qing. The last time was on the Forbidden Sea! Come, come. Let's see who will win and who will—” [1]

Before the Captain could even finish speaking, thunderous rumbling sounds echoed out from Xu Qing. Violet light exploded as he lifted his right hand and pointed at the sky. He was pointing directly at the broken face of the god. It was very reminiscent of the scene back in the Moon Palace when he had summoned the broken face from inside his violet crystal. It almost looked like he was doing the same thing over again. Except there was no image of the broken face inside the violet crystal.....

That said, the Captain didn't know that. Eyelids twitching and heart racing, he swallowed his words, blinked a few times, and then laughed heartily.

“Don't be so impulsive, little Junior Brother. I just have a bad memory, that's all. Ahemmm.” The Captain's hand snapped out in front of him to reveal three feathers.

“There were six, not three,” Xu Qing said, the violet light growing more intense.

The Captain's heart rate increased yet again, all while his confidence fell. Keeping a serious look on his face, he took out three more feathers from his bag of holding. “Errrrm, right. Well, anyway, little Ah Qing, this really is all we got.”

The Captain sighed, calmed his cultivation base, and then looked helplessly at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing's energy also faded away. The violet moon returned to his secret trove, the secret trove faded away, and everything went back to normal.

Seeing that, the Captain breathed an inner sigh of relief, but at the same time felt very pleased with himself. *Oh, little Ah Qing. You're just too inexperienced.*

Despite all that, the Captain managed to keep a helpless expression on his face. "Little Ah Qing, how about... you take seventy percent! I was in the wrong here. I shouldn't have been greedy."

Xu Qing thought for a moment, then looked at the Captain. Gradually, his gaze changed. He looked bleak, even lonely. The look in his eyes caused the Captain's heart to seize.

"Eldest Brother..." Xu Qing began softly, finally breaking his silence.

The Captain listened, trembling.

"I don't want any of it, Eldest Brother," he murmured in a hoarse voice. "You can have all of it. I just miss Sea-Sealing County. I'm going back now."

With that, he slowly turned and started walking off, looking more and more lonely, more and more bleak, more and more desolate.

Apparently, the Captain didn't realize that he had used a very similar tactic on Xu Qing in the past.... As the Captain watched Xu Qing walking away, his heart filled with guilt. He suddenly realized that he had pushed things too far. If he wanted to get greedy with random people, that was one thing, but what need was there to get greedy with his little Junior Brother? Although it was a natural instinct for him, considering how Xu Qing was reacting, the Captain had no choice but to stamp his foot.

"Little Junior Brother, I apologize!" The Captain waved his hand again, and this time, a host of feathers poured out into a pile. Terrifying godly might surged in the area, far surpassing what happened when he took out the six feathers. The majesty of this pile of feathers was astonishing to say the least. Throwing caution to the wind, the Captain yelled, "Thirty percent! This is thirty percent of Crimson Mother's total flesh. All here! We do things the same as ever. 50/50!"

Xu Qing stopped walking. Adjusting his facial expression, he turned around and looked at the Captain. Eyes shining with sincere gratitude, he softly said, "Eldest Brother!"

Breathing a sigh of relief, the Captain quickly waved at Xu Qing to come over and collect the loot. Soon, the two of them were standing next to the pile of flesh. After dividing it cleanly in half, the Captain gave Xu Qing a special leather bag of holding to store it in. The flesh of a god couldn't be kept inside an ordinary storage device. As for the bags the Captain used for that purpose, they appeared to be made from his own skin....

Seeing the actual results of all the hard work in the Moonrite Region, Xu Qing actually started to get excited.

Sensing the sudden change in Xu Qing's mood, the Captain looked over suspiciously at him. "Little Junior Brother, were you pulling a fast one on me just now? Why does this whole situation seem so familiar....?"

Xu Qing quickly suppressed his excitement. Looking the Captain very sincerely in the eyes, he shook his head.

The Captain hesitated, as something seemed very strange about the situation. Finally, he blinked a few times. *Hey, I can do the same thing!*

Suddenly, his facial expression became one of loneliness. He opened his mouth to speak.

But then, Xu Qing's expression became pure bitterness.

The two of them looked at each other silently.

Finally, the Captain sighed.

"You've picked up some bad habits, little Ah Qing...." He cleared his throat.

"Well, anyway, down to business. There's no way our rewards could possibly be limited to just this. There's more." After looking around again to make sure they were alone, he lowered his voice. "Everything so far is from Crimson Mother. But we got something from Li Zihua as well. Hē promised to come back later on and give us a god world!"

Hearing that caused Xu Qing's gaze to harden. "A god world?"

"A god world!" the Captain said, nodding earnestly.

At first, Xu Qing wasn't inclined to believe the Captain. However, the Captain seemed very serious. Although Xu Qing had some suspicions, he didn't give voice to them. And with that, they had a friendly discussion. Xu Qing ultimately didn't want Zhang Siyun's flesh and blood. However, he did take the violet thorn from the vine that had been wrapped around Zhang Siyun.

The Captain was fine with that distribution. After everything was split up, the Captain's eyebrows shot up and he looked at Xu Qing.

"Little Ah Qing, we're pretty much done here in the Moonrite Region. Just wait for me for a couple days. My ex-wife hasn't returned any of my messages, but I know shē's still around. I'm going to find hēr to catch up on old times. Once I return, we can head back to Sea-Sealing County!"

Licking his lips, the Captain waved and vanished off into the distance.

After watching the Captain leave, Xu Qing settled down cross-legged. The area had been sealed by the both of them, using the Captain's blood, making it a very suitable place for a session of secluded cultivation. What was more, the Heir Apparent and his siblings were watching over the Moonrite Region now, so things were relatively safe.

Not bothering with anything else, Xu Qing looked down at the violet thorn in his hand. It glittered with a light that looked very similar to what the violet crystal emanated. Most importantly, holding that violet thorn caused the violet crystal to pulse with distinctive fluctuations.

They must have the same origin.

Eyes shining with determination, he tapped into the violet crystal. Violet light surged around him, spreading to cover him and everything in the area. Then, the violet thorn glittered as he absorbed it. Violet light scattered as Xu Qing looked at his empty hand. Eyes gleaming, he focused on the violet crystal.

The crystal didn't look very different compared to before. Except... the inside of the crystal didn't have a gauzy mist like it usually did. Instead, there was a vortex. The vortex spun silently. There was no way to tell where it led.

Xu Qing wasn't very sure what this change meant. He inspected the violet crystal with divine sense, but the vortex seemed to go on forever. No matter how far he sent his divine sense into it, he couldn't find the end. However, as he got deeper, he felt a sensation of danger. It was almost as if there were gazes inside that were shifting in his direction. After a short time, he retracted his divine sense. He didn't want to do anything rash.

Taking a deep breath, he took out the bag the Captain had given him.

Crimson Mother's flesh can provide powerful nourishment for other gods. But it can be considered massive good fortune for me as well. The only question is how much it will benefit my cultivation base to put it in my secret trove and burn it in the heavenly dao furnace.

His heart filled with anticipation. After everything he had experienced in the Moonrite Region, and after personally witnessing a battle between gods... Xu Qing was more determined than ever to become stronger.

That was especially true considering... what Li Zihua's fourth son had said to him before dying.

*“Could it be that my past is actually your future...?”*

Xu Qing sat there quietly as his secret trove thrummed behind him. His eyes glittered coldly. Only by getting stronger could he qualify to search for the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan and kill him. Only by getting stronger could he delve into the secrets of this world, and uncover the truth about everything. Only by getting stronger could he qualify to turn everything around!

Xu Qing hefted the bag and put it into his secret trove!

Chapter 713: A God in the Trove

The moment the bag entered the secret trove, it opened, and a chunk of Crimson Mother's flesh flew out. It was a clump of fleshy feathers covered with blood, which emanated a glow that was a mixture of golden and red. It instantly erupted with boundless godly might. Heaven and earth blurred. All living things distorted. Everything shook as gale force winds blew.

The sun in Xu Qing's secret trove was currently the golden crow in its original form. It released a piercing cry that echoed throughout the secret trove, filled with unprecedented longing. At the same time, the violet moon blurred, vibrating as the flesh tugged at it. The fact that they had the same origin resulted in a common resonance. The Ghost Emperor mountain made up the lands in the secret trove, and the arrival of the chunk of flesh caused those lands to tremble. Daybreak light flickered dazzlingly. The power of taboo poison, D-132, and the timescape bottle all stirred, filling the world of the secret trove with tempest-like winds.

Xu Qing's secret trove rumbled loudly as everything that made it up erupted, and transformation began.

It was all because of the chunk of flesh. The moment the flesh landed on the ground, a sound like a bell filled the world, echoing in every corner of the secret trove. Crimson Mother was a High God, with the ability to change the face of heaven and earth. Even though that chunk of flesh was very small, it still contained terrifyingly majestic power. Ordinary magics couldn't be used to absorb it, and thus, ordinary cultivators couldn't pay the price to do so. Even a Void Returning expert who did so would need to take things very slowly.

That said, it would be incredibly helpful. In fact, a fourth-stage Void Returning expert who absorbed this piece of Crimson Mother's flesh would instantly break through all barriers and likely step into the Smoldering God level.

Although Xu Qing was only in the first stage of Spirit Trove, his secret trove was anything but ordinary! It contained the violet moon, which already had the same origin as Crimson Mother. Plus he had the taboo poison, which had an even higher level of personhood. The overall structure of his secret trove surpassed anything that an ordinary person could compare to. And thus, Xu Qing experienced something very unique.

That wasn't even to mention his heavenly dao, which had close ties to one of the 100 ancient heavenly daos. In fact, as the heavenly dao bluegreen dragon appeared, it spread out, covered with flames as it served as the world's furnace. Added in was the blessing of the violet moon and the taboo poison, as well as the power of all living beings in the world.

The burning of the furnace caused Crimson Mother's feathery flesh to slowly start melting, releasing pulses of terrifying power that nourished the secret trove! It was the power of essence! Every aspect of Crimson Mother's flesh and blood turned into pure essence.

The golden crow went wild to absorb it. The Ghost Emperor mountain trembled as it did the same. Everything else the world also joined in. To Xu Qing's secret trove, that flesh was a massive destined opportunity, a massive good fortune, and a massive bolstering.

The golden crow's tail fanned out as it changed colors from black to golden. As it hung high in the secret trove's canopy of heaven, it was like a golden statue filled with holiness. The lands below also turned golden. It was the same with the mountains and the rivers!

The daybreak light transformed, with its multiple colors changing into something golden. The entire secret trove changed!

At first, the changes were just on the surface. But as Crimson Mother's flesh burned, those changes went deeper. It was easy to imagine what would happen when Xu Qing fully succeeded. When that happened, his secret trove would be golden from the inside to the outside. Even the fire was turning golden.

When it was complete, it would be different in terms of both substructure and essence. The dramatic process continued.

Xu Qing could sense that, as his secret trove changed, his energy grew more and more majestic, far surpassing anything from before.

My secret trove is changing in a very fascinating way....

Xu Qing struggled to control his breathing as he was struck with the premonition that, when this transformation to his secret trove was complete, he would be on an entirely different level. Except... the process only went on for a short while before it wound down and stopped. The golden color that had overtaken both sky and land started to fade, and everything began to return to its previous state.

Xu Qing frowned as he tried to ascertain why it was happening.

Crimson Mother's flesh had been half burned away. After that, it wouldn't burn any more, and the essence resonance was breaking down. Muttering to himself, he looked into the bag and pulled out a second piece of flesh. Everything trembled as the flesh fell into the sea of flames. Nothing changed. Looking down at the two chunks of flesh, Xu Qing realized what was going on.

The fire isn't strong enough.

As everything in the secret trove rapidly returned to its original state, Xu Qing came up with a way to resolve the situation.

If the fire isn't strong enough, then I should add some better fuel!

Eyes gleaming, he thought back to how they had dealt with Crimson Mother's totem on the door of Paramount Temple. Sending out his divine will, he caused chasms to open up in the lands of his secret trove, out of which poured numerous bloodbeasts. Lunging into the fire, they self-detonated.

The explosions resulted in muffled booms that caused the secret trove's furnace to burn even hotter. At the same time, the fire burned with the color of blood. The beasts were connected to Crimson Mother, and they also were inherently corrosive, so they seemed like the perfect fuel as far as Xu Qing was concerned. Endless streams of the bloodbeasts served as oil, causing the flames to rage madly around the two chunks of flesh.

Only a moment later, the two chunks of flesh disappeared, and massive amounts of essence power swept out into Xu Qing's secret trove. The color gold appeared everywhere. In the blink of an eye, the exterior layer of everything became gold again. At the same time, the effects seeped deeper. After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, Xu Qing's entire secret trove was golden from inside to out!

A golden secret trove. A golden world! Golden flames flickered, and the power of essence reached a peak level. It was domineering and absolutely paramount!

Just sensing it caused Xu Qing to feel deeply moved.

This was godsource! And it was a godsource that didn't belong to any god. It belonged to Xu Qing, and had been brought about because of him. It contained Xu Qing's energy and life force. Because of it, Xu Qing's secret trove rose to a higher level. It went from being a secret trove to a god trove! Places where gods were born were god troves!

Xu Qing's mind spun as, before he could even examine the god trove closely, the sea of flames pulsed with a domineering godsource that filled the entire god trove.

It was obviously establishing sovereignty. The golden crow bowed its head. The lands did the same. The dome of heaven went silent, and the rivers flowed obediently. The heavenly dao joined, and all the living things approved. Even the god's finger in D-132 trembled and prostrated obsequiously. Only the violet moon seemed to have a conflict with the godsource, and was forced out of the god trove. Next came the taboo poison mist, which was also driven away by the domineering godsource.

After being upgraded, the world of Xu Qing's god trove contained godsource created solely by him. Thus, power from any other gods were forced to either submit or leave the god trove.

Xu Qing could sense what was happening, and it caused his heart to pound. He could tell that this god trove belonged solely to him, and that the power vastly surpassed the old version. It was like the difference between a mortal and a cultivator.

So do I cultivate the path of the immortal, or do I cultivate the path of the god? I'm obviously in the Spirit Trove level of the cultivation system. But I have godsource manifested as a god trove! It's not because of authority, but rather, because of the godsource that was born....

Xu Qing suppressed the shock in his heart and looked at the taboo poison power and violet moon authority that had been ejected.

Regardless, I can sense that I'm stronger thanks to this god trove. In that case... can I make another god trove?

Eyes narrowing, he thought back to when he first gained enlightenment of the red moon authority, and the illusory god trove that had appeared. Later, he merged that authority into his secret trove, where it became moonlight.

With such thoughts on his mind, Xu Qing's eyes glittered with determination as he took out a third chunk of Crimson Mother's flesh, which he put into the violet moon. Violet color erupted, accompanied by a thunder rumbling sound. Once again, the same illusory god trove from before appeared. And it was rapidly turning from illusory to corporeal! Although it had no heavenly dao, with Crimson Mother's flesh and Xu Qing's violet moon authority being of the same origin, they had no problem fusing together.

Seeing that he was going in the right direction, Xu Qing didn't hesitate to take out a fourth chunk of flesh. Then a fifth. The god trove trembled as it transformed even more rapidly. Then, as Xu Qing's energy soared, terrifying fluctuations erupted as the violet moon god trove formed!

This god trove was different from the world of Xu Qing's first god trove. It contained towering violet light, as well as an indistinct roar as a furnace formed.

As of this moment, Xu Qing was very different from before. He sat cross-legged, his hair whipping about him, two god troves behind him, like god mountains sucking in everything around them.

Within each god trove it was just barely possible to make out a figure seated cross-legged in meditation. The figure in the world of Xu Qing's first god trove looked divine and holy, bursting with magnificent energy and a domineering air. Within the violet moon god trove, the figure was blurry. It was possible to see flesh and feathers clumped together into wings that slowly flapped. And there was a pair of very cold eyes. It was a ghastly sight that few would stare at directly.

Might as well move on to the third!

Xu Qing's eyes opened, then filled with pitch black as taboo poison power erupted. Behind him, a poisonous miasma built up.

Xu Qing took out two more chunks of flesh and fed them into the miasma. The poison cloud exploded in all directions. But then the poison exploded with power, and the taboo element surged.

Deafening howling sounds swept out in all directions. About an hour later, a pitch black god trove could be seen within the poison mist!

Inside of that god trove was a seated figure, with underworld fire for eyes, and a black suit of armor. It looked like a world-shaking devil. Together with the other two shadowy gods, it would protect whoever was in front of it.

Seated cross-legged up front was an exceedingly attractive young man. His facial expression was cold, and his gaze was hidden in the mist. Black hair swirled around him, and he emanated a faint violet color.

Like an immortal. Like a god.

#### Chapter 714: Xu Qing's God States

The secret trove was the defining characteristic of the Spirit Trove level. Building the secret trove was as significant as lighting life flames in Foundation Establishment. A Foundation Establishment cultivator without a life flame was really just a pumped up Qi Condensation cultivator. Only by igniting life flames could a cultivator truly achieve a significant transformation.

It was similar in Spirit Trove. The secret trove provided a comprehensive improvement. With a heavenly dao inside burning as a furnace, the cultivator could unleash astonishing power. It allowed the Spirit Trove cultivator to use natural laws, and also provided terrifying battle prowess.

At least, that was Xu Qing's previous understanding about the secret trove. Today, now that he had a true god trove, his perception changed. He could tell that the difference between the life flame and the trove was more like the gap between mortals and cultivators. As for the precise usage of the trove, he would need to do more practice and study before he gained full mastery. At the moment, he had a very basic understanding, which informed him that all he could do was use his trove like a basic secret trove to crush all living things.

*I doubt that's the right way to use it.*

Xu Qing looked around. The sealing marks in the area had already crumbled, and his surroundings had been scorched bare.

*Understanding of the true function of my god trove will come over time.*

He stood. Now wasn't the time for study and research, as he had something far more important to do. There was still more of Crimson Mother's flesh in the leather bag, but he put it away for the time being as he knew he was in a bottleneck, so it wouldn't do any good. He needed a fourth god trove to continue.

*This flesh is so valuable it's hard to even measure. But once I can begin that fourth god trove, it will form almost instantly.*

Xu Qing took a deep breath, made sure the leather bag was secure, adjusted his clothing, and then started walking. Every step he took seemed to cause the land around him to shrink down. It was an effect of natural law, which caused everything around him to transform according to his thoughts.

In that manner, Xu Qing could do things that ordinary cultivators couldn't even imagine. And thus, he took a hundred steps. That was all it took for him to reach the border of the Penitence Steppes.

Previously, this place had featured a sea of blood with an island in the middle. But after the battle of gods, and Li Zihua's sacrifice, it had turned into a forbidden region. Where once had been a sea of blood now existed an overflowing mass of vegetation, as dark as night, and coldly sinister. The mutagen was very strong here, and as a result, the forbidden region was already giving birth to endless mutated life forms. The ruins of the Red Moon Cathedral were in the depths of the forbidden region.

As Xu Qing stood on the border, he looked inside for a time, then started walking toward the middle of the forbidden region. The plants looked like demonic monsters, and they were so dangerous they could instantly kill any mortal who got close to them. And if cultivators threatened them, they could use mutagen as a weapon to kill them.

But to Xu Qing, traveling around here was as easy as traveling around in the outside world. The greenish plants would tremble when he got near, and some of them would even move away from him. They didn't want to even be close to him. It was the same with the other greenish life forms. There was one pitch-black creature that resembled a flying snake, which failed to move away from him quickly enough. As a result, it turned into a skeleton..... Its life force, mutagen, and aura were extracted, swept toward a spot behind Xu Qing, and then vanished.

If you looked at that spot behind Xu Qing, you wouldn't see anything unless you had a cultivation base. But if you did have a cultivation base, you would sense something like three massive black holes behind him, devouring everything. Perhaps it was the case that, from the perspective of this forbidden region, Xu Qing was himself a forbidden region.

Xu Qing continued forward through what had once been the blood sea to what had once been the island. Eventually, he stood in front of the mountain of flesh. There, he stopped, clasped hands, and bowed.

“Well met, Grandpa Ninth.”

This mountain of flesh was like a combination of black and red. It was part of the forbidden region, and also formed its nucleus. It was the foundation of the forbidden region.

It was made from Li Zihua's flesh, which had been given new life thanks to the gaze of the broken face. At the moment, it twitched and wriggled, though that didn't indicate it was awakening, but rather, that it was deeply asleep. Even still, its terrifying pressure spread out, causing the surroundings to ripple and distort.

A person sat cross-legged atop the mountain. He wore a black robe, and had stern facial features as cold as ice. Resting on his knees was a long sword.

He was Ninth Sib.

He opened his eyes and looked calmly at Xu Qing. Noticing what was behind Xu Qing, his eyes gleamed with surprise.

“What do you want?” he said coolly.

Xu Qing knew that Ninth Sib had a cold personality, and wasn't given to words. Most of the time he didn't say anything. But Xu Qing also knew that his heart was quite the opposite of his cold exterior.

“Grandpa Ninth, when I first arrived in the Moonrite Region, I accepted an apprentice. She died unexpectedly. Back then, someone told me that the souls of the dead in the Moonrite Region don’t enter the cycle of reincarnation, but instead, they gather at the Red Moon Cathedral. Senior, I came here hoping to find the soul of my apprentice.”[1]

“What’s her name?” Ninth Sib asked tranquilly.

“Shi Panyan,” Xu Qing replied softly. “Her name is Shi Panyan.”

Ninth Sib closed his eyes and cast his senses out. A moment later, he opened his eyes, reached out, and closed his fingers in a grasping motion. The forbidden region trembled as a huge vortex materialized.

Intense rumbling sounds echoed out as a stream of white light slowly emerged and floated over to Xu Qing. In the white light was a little girl, her arms wrapped around her knees, her eyes closed as if she was asleep. Her brow was furrowed, and her expression was one of terror. She was Shi Panyan.

Xu Qing’s gaze softened and he reached out to her. “Panyan.”

His voice entered the white light and touched the girl’s soul. She shivered, and her eyelashes stirred. She slowly opened her eyes, confused. After looking at Xu Qing for a moment, her little face lit up with joy.

“Master....”

She stood, clasped hands, and bowed. Her soul was clearly very weak, making it difficult for her to even move.

“Master is here to take you home,” Xu Qing said. He reached gently into the white light. Shi Panyan’s eyes closed again, and she went back to sleep. Unlike before, she wasn’t frowning, and she didn’t look terrified. In fact, she seemed peaceful and happy. After taking the sleeping Panyan, Xu Qing turned to Ninth Sib and bowed again. Then he turned to leave.

“You have three god troves behind you,” Ninth Sib suddenly said.

Xu Qing stopped walking and looked back.

Ninth Sib’s face was as cold as ever. However, his gaze contained even more surprise than before as he looked deeply at Xu Qing.

“One is yours. Another is made from red moon authority. And the last was formed from a god curse. Unfortunately, you have no way of fully fusing with thēm. As a result, you can’t unleash thēir true potential. So I’m going to help you out.”

Ninth Sib’s sword floated off his knees and shifted to point at Xu Qing. A sword energy pulsed off it that could shake heaven and earth. It caused everything to tremble as, pulsing with extermination

and destruction, the sword energy shot toward Xu Qing.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered as a sensation of deadly crisis filled him. The blood in his body seemed to coagulate, his cultivation base sank under the pressure, and his flesh went rigid. It was like he was sealed in place. However, the god trove behind him became clearer in his mind. And then... the first god trove appeared in the open.

It caused wild colors to flash everywhere, and shook the surrounding forbidden region. Inside of it was a holy figure, facing the outside world and howling to fight back against the sword energy. The sword energy faltered.

“Not enough!” said Ninth Sib in a cold voice. More sword energy raged toward Xu Qing.

Facing such deadly crisis caused Xu Qing to tremble. But his cultivation base was suppressed, meaning that this god trove was all he had to deal with the threat. Veins bulged on his forehead as he focused all of his attention on his god trove. As the sword energy neared, the god trove erupted like volcanoes, sending terrifying godsource directly into Xu Qing. All of a sudden, a roar escaped Xu Qing's lips that could shake the dome of heaven. As the godsource flowed through him, his body seemed to rip apart. New flesh spread out as he grew taller, bigger, and more astonishing.

A moment later, a majestic figure stood in front of the mountain of flesh. Upright and tall, this figure looked similar to the Ghost Emperor, except with Xu Qing's face. On his head was an imperial crown, which was made from D-132. Blinding, golden light shone off it, except, that golden light was actually made of seven colors. Where the heart would be was a heavenly dao furnace, thumping with thunderous volume. And it sent out burning flames that covered the entire figure. Even more noteworthy was the long, black spear in the figure's right hand, which was covered with lightning.

As the figure's fingers tightened around the spear, his eyes opened. He was Xu Qing!

Xu Qing's heart pounded. Never could he have imagined that his god trove would actually work like this. He could sense that this state was like a different form of body, a state like that of a god. His battle prowess rose dramatically, such that if he faced Spirit Trove enemies right now...

*I could crush all of them!*

Xu Qing looked up at Ninth Sib. Heart racing, he clasped hands and bowed deeply.

Eyes still glittering, Ninth Sib nodded. “That's more like it. However, this is only the first level of your god state. Since you have three god troves, then theoretically speaking, you should have three god states. Unfortunately, your foundation isn't sufficient to support that now.” Ninth Sib looked thoughtfully at Xu Qing for a moment. “I can help you experience it early, though. It'll be a bit of a waste, but at least it will give you an idea of the direction to pursue.”

With that, Ninth Sib waved his hand, sending a fleshy feather toward Xu Qing. It was Crimson Mother's flesh. Before it could get near, and before Xu Qing could say anything, Ninth Sib's sword energy swept forth, causing the flesh to detonate into a mist of blood, which surrounded Xu Qing.

“Take that flesh and put it into your god trove. Bring out your second god state. Remember, don’t bring it out alone. Instead... you need to add it to your first-level god state! Combine them!!”

Reeling mentally, Xu Qing watched as the blood mist swept into his taboo poison god trove. An instant later, the god trove erupted with clouds of black smoke that roiled toward Xu Qing. In the blink of an eye, it fused with Xu Qing’s first-level god state body.

Next... a terrifying aura shot out of Xu Qing’s mouth, along with a bitter howl.

Chapter 715: Your Majesty, Do You Mind Paying the Meal Fee

The moment the terrifying aura emerged, the entire forbidden region trembled. All the grues in the forbidden region fell to the ground and prostrated in the direction of the mountain of flesh. Clouds appeared in the dome of heaven, which swirled together into a rumbling vortex. A tempest filled the forbidden region, connecting to the vortex in the sky, creating a terrifying scene.

Being the source of it all, Xu Qing was in the middle of the tempest, below the vortex. His body, rippling and distorting, he shook violently as he howled in a voice that almost didn’t seem human. Indescribable pain filled him in body and soul, the type that could destroy the heavens and crush the earth, as his god body was ripped apart and infused with poison mist.

The mist grew thicker and stronger, until Xu Qing’s first-level god state was completely covered by it. Then, he became an even taller figure. As he slowly stood up, he found that his head was on the same level as Ninth Sib atop the mountain of flesh.

The moment the body was complete, it was obvious there was no skin visible on it. It was covered completely by a pitch-black suit of armor. Even the head and face. Where the eyes would normally be were two convergences of netherworld flame, cold and extremely prominent.

The first impression people would get upon seeing it was that it was a manifestation of ancient darkness and gloom.

Black steam rose off the armor, which converged behind it to form a cloak that could hide the sky and cover the earth. As the cloak swayed, decay and poison spread out everywhere. Any living thing that stood in front of his suit of armor would decay and die. It was like the ultimate devil. Now there was only the violet moon god trove behind Xu Qing.

Ninth Sib was visibly moved.

Xu Qing’s first-level god state had prompted a nod from him. But the second one was shocking to him.

I feel like... I’ve seen this before.

Looking down at Xu Qing, he closely assessed his soul fluctuations. He muttered an exclamation of astonishment, then said, “Tell me your real name.”

His voice contained a mysterious type of power that made everything in the area vibrate. Ninth Sib wanted to confirm whether or not the person in front of him was really Xu Qing.

Xu Qing stood there with Ninth Sib looking at him. Eyes flickering with underworld fire, he spoke in a hoarse voice.

“Xu Qing.”

Ninth Sib nodded. “What do you feel right now?”

Xu Qing took a moment to sense this new state. He felt a sense of cold apathy with no desires or requirements. It felt completely analytical. It immediately made him think about god-glimpsing.

Voice cool, he said, “Very good.”

After a moment of thought, Ninth Sib produced another piece of Crimson Mother’s flesh. Looking at Xu Qing, he said, “Want to see what the third-level god state is like?”

Xu Qing waved his hand to produce his own chunk of Crimson Mother’s flesh, which was the same size as the piece in Ninth Sib’s hand. “I can handle it.”

Without any hesitation, he sent the chunk of flesh into the violet moon god trove behind him. The moment it entered, the god trove emitted thunderous rumblings. Next, the violet moon god trove erupted, sending its godsource pouring into Xu Qing, filling him, and yet again causing his body to rip apart. He stood there, unmoving.

It wasn’t because he didn’t feel pain. Instead, he used his completely analytical mind to suppress the pain. Then, his body started to transform. The hair beneath his armor started to grow, becoming so long it reached the ground. And it kept growing, spreading out around him. Its color was deep violet. Even more shocking was that his back split open, and it looked like feathers were about to appear there. It also seemed as if a violet moon were about to rise above him. An aura vastly more terrifying than the second-level god state exploded out. Violet bolts of lightning crashed above, imparting a sense of forbidden taboos.

Ninth Sib shot to his feet atop the mountain of flesh, looking at Xu Qing with shock in his eyes.

He’s... rising to a higher level??

As Ninth Sib reeled, Xu Qing shivered. His body was showing signs of imminent destruction, to the point where bits of flesh were peeling off him and collapsing into ash. The third-level god state hadn’t reached its completion, but Xu Qing had reached his limit.

“My soul and body can’t take this,” he said calmly, almost as if he weren’t talking about himself. “If I keep going, I’ll be reduced to ashes.”

With that, he exhaled some violet energy. As a result, time seemed to flow backward. His hair grew back, the violet moon set, and his energy declined. A moment later, he was back in the second-level god state. The godsource within him left, returning to the violet moon god trove.

The third-level god state had failed. Given Xu Qing’s current foundation, not even Crimson Mother’s flesh could sustain the third-level god state.

Meanwhile, his second-level god state had reached the limit as well. The armor melted, turning into taboo poison godsource, all while the taboo poison within him retreated. The taboo poison god trove returned.

Only his first-level god state remained. Thanks to those transformations, Xu Qing’s human nature returned. Breathing heavily, and heart pounding, he looked at Ninth Sib, clasped hands and bowed.

“Many thanks, Grandpa Ninth!” he said in a serious voice.

Thanks to Ninth Sib’s help, though he hadn’t fully manifested the third-level god state, he had experienced something extremely valuable. Not only had he learned how to use his god troves, but also, he had an advanced look at the mental state that came with a god state. What it meant for Xu Qing was that the next time he unleashed his god states, the process would be much easier.

And then there was his first-level god state. Xu Qing could already sense that it was a good trump card, even though he couldn’t maintain the state for long.

Ninth Sib looked closely at Xu Qing, then nodded and closed his eyes.

Xu Qing didn’t disturb him any further. Taking out one of his own pieces of Crimson Mother’s flesh, he placed it off to the side. After some more thought, he put down a second piece. Then he left. Along the way, his appearance transformed again. He left the first-level god state and returned to his original form. Then he vanished from the forbidden region.

The mountain of flesh remained there just as before, with Ninth Sib atop it, still and unmoving. Though his expression seemed the same as ever, inside, he was filled with astonishment. Xu Qing’s body transformation had given Ninth Sib a new line of thinking to consider.

What happened with this kid’s states is completely and totally unprecedented. It seems like a new path. Or, I wonder... did father actually walk the same path?

He opened his eyes and looked in the direction Xu Qing had left. Then he looked down and saw the two chunks of Crimson Mother’s flesh. A bit of warmth appeared in his cold eyes.

He’s a good kid.

Sometimes, liking a person is something that happens suddenly. But more often than not, it’s because of the tiny details. And getting to know them better involves those same tiny details.

Xu Qing’s path in life had taken him from Peerless City to the Moonrite Region. The fact that proper etiquette and gratitude were built into his personality was why he had received so much help along the way. Sadly, it didn’t matter what world or what era you referred to, people like that weren’t very common. What was more, there would always be people who didn’t match up to him in that regard that saw his behavior and hated it. That was just human nature, and a revelation of the ignorance that existed in the hearts of many.

But Xu Qing didn’t care about any of that. As he walked through the forbidden region, he looked off in the direction of Sea-Sealing County.

“It’s time to go home,” he murmured. Turning, he headed toward the Bitter Life Mountains. His plan was to get Ling’er, and then go home.

Just when he was about to enter the mountains, he stopped in place. He had just remembered something.

Emperor Ancient Spirit promised to give me some imperial energy.

Eyes narrowing, he took out the command medallion given to him by Emperor Ancient Spirit and fiddled with it for a moment. Previously, he had acquiesced to the Captain’s wishes and tried to

contact Emperor Ancient Spirit with divine will. He'd never received any response. After some more thought, he sent some divine will into the command medallion.

*“Your Majesty, sir, are you going to join the next meal?”*

There was no response from the command medallion. He might as well have *thrown a stone ox into the ocean*. Xu Qing's expression was the same as ever as he waited for about ten breaths of time. Then he sent another message with divine will.

*“Since Your Majesty didn't respond, I guess that means you won't be joining us for the next meal.”*

*“I'll join!”* Emperor Ancient Spirit responded immediately in his ancient voice.

Sounding very respectful, Xu Qing said, *“In that case, Your Majesty, do you mind paying the meal fee now? It'll be one bit of imperial energy.”*

There was no response from the command medallion. That said, Xu Qing wasn't in a rush, so he just waited quietly.

After enough time passed for half an incense stick to burn, the command medallion vibrated, and a stream of imperial energy appeared, which turned into a small dragon. The dragon didn't look very happy, and was taking its time emerging.

Xu Qing didn't mind. He grabbed the dragon of imperial energy and dragged it out despite its struggles, and then tossed it into one of his god troves.

Feeling satisfied, he continued into the Bitter Life Mountains. Eventually, he entered the Moon Palace, and shortly after, was at the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

Upon stepping inside, he saw the Heir Apparent sipping tea in his usual spot. Ningyan was scrubbing the floor, Nethersprite was boiling water. Wu Jianwu had recently lost his job because of all the changes. Sprouty was there, dancing like always, and the parrot was featherless off to the side.

Ling'er threw down her accounting book and rushed over to him.

*“What took you so long, Big Bro Xu Qing?”* she said, her eyes red as she wrapped her arms tightly around him. She had been thinking a lot about Xu Qing recently, and had been constantly looking out the door hoping to see him returning.

Xu Qing smiled and tousled Ling'er's hair. Then he took out the imperial energy and put it in her hands.

*“A gift for you,”* he said.

Her eyes lit up and she let loose an exclamation of surprised shock. Ling'er was easy to please. As long as her Big Bro Xu Qing was around, she was happy. And whatever gifts he gave her made her even happier.

When the Heir Apparent saw all that, he smiled and took another sip of tea. A gleam of reminiscence appeared in his eyes, as if he were thinking about something from his own past.

Off to the side, Wu Jianwu shook his head, and though he was inclined to keep his mouth shut, couldn't help but recite a poem.

*“Man and snake make heaven shudder; are they even a good match for each other?”*

Xu Qing turned to look at Wu Jianwu, his eyes cold.

Wu Jianwu shivered and quickly said, “They're a good match!”

Ningyan laughed coldly, and was about to help the boss teach a lesson to Wu Jianwu when, all of a sudden, the Captain's voice filled the shop.

“Hahaha! I'm back! And would anybody like to guess who I happened to run into on the way here? Little Ah Qing! Your father-in-law is here to see you!”

The Captain strode along looking very pleased. In his arms was a bruised and battered figure that was currently unconscious. He was none other than the innkeeper from Plankspring Way.

Chapter 716: I'll Accompany You Back to Sea-Sealing County

Upon stepping into the medicine shop, the Captain dumped the innkeeper onto the floor and walked over to Xu Qing. Throwing his arm over his shoulders, he grinned complacently.

“Little Ah Qing, do you want to know what happened when I met up with my ex-wife?”

Xu Qing ignored the Captain and looked at the innkeeper. Ling'er had already let loose an exclamation of shock and rushed over to him. Hoisting him up, she looked at him with an expression of mixed surprise and worry. She also stuffed some medicinal pills into his mouth.

“Papa!”

The medicinal pills were extraordinary in nature, and they even included some painquelling lozenges. It only took a moment for the innkeeper's aura to stabilize.

Xu Qing could tell that he was suffering from nothing more than flesh wounds. It didn't look like he had been attacked and beaten, more just jostled around. As for why he had been unconscious, it looked like a situation in which he succumbed to the invasion of the red moon curse. Later, the curse departed, but that just left behind room for more mutagen to enter him. Most relevant of all was that he had a special body constitution.

His constitution attracts mutagen.

Xu Qing could tell that now because of the level of his cultivation base. Thinking back, he remembered the time in Seven Blood Eyes when he had clashed with the innkeeper. The old man's face had split open, revealing that he was actually a nonhuman. What was more, the old man's inn was actually a grue. Later on, Xu Qing came to find that the innkeeper had an ability that could put grues to sleep and seal them. He had moved that inn to Seven Blood Eyes in order to sell it to the First Peak. Beyond that, the innkeeper had helped bolster the Captain's seals in the early days. [1]

That said, the innkeeper seemed like he was fine, so Xu Qing wasn't too worried. Looking at the Captain, he saw a look of keen anticipation. Clearly, the Captain wanted Xu Qing to treat him like the Eldest Brother he was. So Xu Qing asked, "Did shē ask to get back together with you?"

The Captain's eyes gleamed, and he threw his head back and laughed loudly. He had been waiting for Xu Qing to answer his question, that way he wouldn't have to soliloquize. "You really are a smart one, little Junior Brother. You're totally right. Shē might be a god, and shē might have made a promise that would have ensured I didn't need to do any fighting for the next ten thousand years. BUT. In the end, I refused. My past-life affairs are gone with the wind. And in this life, I don't care about riches or power. I just care about my Lady Peachy!"

The Captain was clearly trying to look sorrowful, but couldn't prevent himself from smiling radiantly.

Xu Qing was well aware that the Captain often said the opposite of what was true. But the truth didn't matter in this situation. As long as his Eldest Brother was happy, that was what mattered. And thus, Xu Qing plastered a look of surprise onto his face. That made the Captain even happier, and he was about to launch into some further bragging.

But then the innkeeper coughed up some impure vital energy and opened his eyes.

"Papa!" Ling'er said happily. Of course, she also looked a bit nervous. After all, when she parted with the innkeeper, she had snuck away without saying anything.

Xu Qing and everyone else looked over at the innkeeper.

At first, the old man looked confused, and had no idea where he was. But then he saw Ling'er, and emotion swelled within him.

"Ling'er! I finally found you!" He pulled his daughter into a hug and checked to make sure she was okay. Then he breathed a sigh of relief and looked around the shop. He saw the Captain. He saw Ningyan. He saw Wu Jianwu. And he saw Nethersprite.

The first three weren't much of a surprise, but he was definitely not expecting to see Nethersprite. Then he spotted Xu Qing, and his eyes widened into a glare. He was about to start speaking, but then happened to notice the Heir Apparent sipping tea off to the side. The innkeeper's eyes went wider, and then his pupils constricted. He instantly retracted all of his energy, and without even thinking about it, turned to his daughter.

"Ling'er, where are we?"

Seeing what her father was looking at, Ling'er quickly explained, "We're in the Bitter Life Mountains, Papa. This is Grandpa Heir Apparent!"

The innkeeper hadn't just arrived in the Moonrite Region. During the process of searching for Ling'er, he had naturally come to learn about the battle of gods. Though the names of Xu Qing and the Captain hadn't been included in the story, he had obviously heard about the Moonrebel Congregation. And the Heir Apparent and his siblings had also been a part of the story. He also

knew about the Bitter Life Mountains, and was well aware that they were now the core of the entire region. Ling'er's words caused him to start blinking like mad.

Then Ling'er, hoping to brush over the fact that she had run off with Xu Qing, launched into a long explanation.

“Papa, things used to be really busy around here. We had Third Grandma and Fifth Grandma. There was also Eighth Grandpa, too. They all treated me really well. Oh right, we have a whole bunch of chickens in the backyard. I've been doing great here, Papa. Me and Big Bro Xu Qing opened this medicine shop together!”

The innkeeper felt like his mind was being struck by lightning. After all, the stories he had heard about the Bitter Life Mountains also mentioned that there was a medicine shop there that most people viewed as a holy land. Now that he was coming to find out the true story behind that medicine shop, he started shaking from head to toe.

“By the way, Papa, it's very safe here. I've been totally fine. And guess what? Big Bro Xu Qing just gave me a gift!”

Ling'er waved her hand to reveal some of the imperial energy that she'd just absorbed.

“There's more,” Ling'er said proudly. “Big Bro Xu Qing is super ferocious. A while back, Crimson Mother and her people came and surrounded this whole area. But Big Bro Xu Qing drove them away. After that, Big Bro Xu Qing and all the grandpas and grandmas went to the moon and actually destroyed Crimson Mother!”

Her words were like repeated bolts of lightning striking the innkeeper directly in the heart. Eventually, it felt like 1,000,000 lightning bolts battering his soul. Around the point where Ling'er mentioned the ‘grandpas and grandmas,’ he gasped. Struggling to his feet, he bowed to the Heir Apparent.

“Well met, Senior!”

The Heir Apparent nodded. Looking the innkeeper up and down, he said, “You're one of the ancient Hex-Sealers? Your species always coexisted with emperors. Every Ancient Emperor had an official Hex-Sealer on call, who could use imperial energy to seal the many heavens. They were very important people. But your bloodline doesn't seem pure.” [2]

The innkeeper bowed his head. Sounding very bitter, he said, “When the gods came, my species changed. Instead of being Hex-Sealers, we called ourselves Nether-Sealers. What's more, since there are no Ancient Emperors anymore, our species has nowhere to use our skills.” [3]

“Is that why you chose Ling'er?” the Heir Apparent asked, glancing at Ling'er.

For some reason, Ling'er's eyelids had closed, as if she didn't understand what was being talked about. Then she yawned.

As the innkeeper looked on in surprise, Xu Qing hurried over, scooped up Ling'er, and checked to make sure she was okay. As it turned out, the imperial energy within her was in the process of being absorbed.

The Heir Apparent smiled and took another sip of tea, but didn't say anything further.

Seeing that, the innkeeper breathed an inner sigh of relief. Just being in the presence of the Heir Apparent put a lot of pressure on him. Turning to Xu Qing, he suppressed his feelings of irritation and sighed.

“Xu Qing, I didn't just come here looking for Ling'er. Marquis Yao also wanted me to pass a message to you. He said... to stay away from Sea-Sealing County for a while.”

Upon hearing that, Xu Qing's eyes suddenly glittered. Off to the side, the Captain frowned and suddenly pulsed with a faint pressure.

“Marquis Yao?” Xu Qing said. “What happened in Sea-Sealing County?”

The innkeeper sighed again. Then he went into a detailed explanation of everything that had happened in Sea-Sealing County and the Holytide Region while Xu Qing was away.

After Xu Qing, the Captain, and everyone else left, the political situation in the Holytide Region was stable for a while. Because Grand Duke Holytide didn't have the backing of the Nightshades, he fully submitted to the human emperor and didn't dare to act out.

But Seventh Prince's army still occupied about half of the region. Meanwhile Princess Anhai was put in charge, as a way of keeping Seventh Prince in check. Because of the unusual circumstances that had played out in Sea-Sealing County, the place was unique. It was autonomous. But because of the general peace and stability, Seventh Prince and Princess Anhai were accepted by the county.

However, all of that changed dramatically thanks to the political undercurrents affecting the imperial capital. It started with Princess Anhai suddenly being called back to the Imperial Region. She gave up leadership of the Holytide Region, and handed all authority over to Seventh Prince. It didn't take long for news to spread in Sea-Sealing County about why that happened. Seventh Prince's mother came from a very important clan in the Imperial Region, and they somehow brokered a deal with the emperor regarding the imperial prince. It resulted in the emperor recalling Princess Anhai, which was a tacit show of approval, allowing Seventh Prince to have the position and authority to control the Holytide Region.[4]

At the same time, someone else came from the Imperial Region to take over the military in the Holytide Region. He was one of the backbones of the clan that Seventh Prince's mother came from. He was Seventh Prince's blood uncle, and was one of the thirty-three heavenly kings of humankind.

He was King Heaventide, a Smoldering God with a very high rank in the human species. After bringing his troops to the Holytide Region, he took control of all the forces there, then waged war on the Nightshades. That was what he had agreed with the emperor to do, and it was also the agreement that had been brokered between his clan and the emperor. He was to pave the way into Nightshade lands from the Holytide Region, all in the name of the emperor. When the Nightshades were at their weakest, he would devastate them and help the emperor to expand human territory.

When face-to-face with the majestic King Heaventide, even Grand Duke Holytide had to back down and meekly obey orders.

As for Sea-Sealing County... although it was technically autonomous, that didn't matter much to King Heaventide. When he showed up, a simple order was enough to shake the county so badly it became like a leaf on an angry sea. Everyone was scared, and almost overnight, numerous species, sects, and organizations chose to acknowledge allegiance to the heavenly king.

That included the president of the Eight Sect Coalition. Without any hesitation at all, he abdicated his position in the Eight Sect Coalition and took his closest followers to switch loyalties to King Heaventide.

After that, King Heaventide issued a call of recruitment to cultivators from all species in the region to go to the field of battle and slaughter the Nightshades. Since Sea-Sealing County was part of the region, there were no grounds to refuse the call.

“Around the time I left, Sea-Sealing County had already sent three waves of reinforcements. They all died in battle. It's basically a war of attrition in which King Heaventide is throwing human forces against the Nightshades to wear them down.”

As the innkeeper's words echoed in the shop, Xu Qing's facial expression turned cold. The Captain narrowed his eyes. Everyone else maintained silence. That was especially true of Ningyan, who opened his mouth as if to speak, but then closed it.

“That's why Marquis Yao told me to warn you not to return. If you do... Seventh Prince will definitely try to conscript you. And if that happens...” The innkeeper was about to sigh again, but then he looked at the Heir Apparent sipping tea, and suddenly realized that, based on what he had heard and what Ling'er said, maybe he didn't need to sigh. “Uh... so, that's how things are.”

Xu Qing looked in the direction of Sea-Sealing County for a moment. Then he turned to the Heir Apparent and clasped hands.

Smiling, the Heir Apparent put down his tea and opened his mouth to speak. Before he could, a cold voice swept through the Bitter Life Mountains.

“I'll go with you to Sea-Sealing County.”

The voice sounded like a sword, full of slaughter, capable of shaking heaven and earth. When the Heir Apparent heard that voice, he sighed and picked up his tea again. That voice came from Ninth Sib!

#### Chapter 717: Returning to Sea-Sealing

The canopy of heaven had long since turned dark. However, countless stars illuminated the night, sending starlight cascading down onto the river that surrounded the Moonrite Region. The starlight was reflected on the water, creating a dazzling scene that made it seem like the stars were falling into the mortal world. It was actually hard to tell what was in the sky and what wasn't.

This was the Yin Sacrifice River. It had once been as red as blood and filled with countless corpses, as well as gruish river spirits. But now that the red moon had disappeared, and the curse with it, the river was different. The grues were gone. The fetters had vanished. And what was left behind was a peaceful, beautiful river.

The sound of gurgling water could be heard as a huge ship sailed across the water toward the Holytide Region.

Wu Jianwu sat on the boom, looking quietly off into the distance, where another, smaller ship was fading from view. Looking at the distant ship, Wu Jianwu sighed disconsolately.

Ningyan was at the bottom of the boom. He had a hemp rag in his hand which, out of force of habit, he was using to scrub the deck clean. He had never been a germaphobe. However, his time in the Moonrite Region had left him with a new habit that allowed him to spot even the tiniest speck of dirt or dust around him. After finishing with his scrubbing, he looked up at Wu Jianwu. He considered making a sarcastic quip, but considering the mood Wu Jianwu was in, he shook his head and held back.

He knew exactly why Wu Jianwu was acting like this. Six hours ago, they had still been in the Green Spirit Pharmacy in the Bitter Life Mountains. But because of the situation in Sea-Sealing County, they were now on this ship.

In what appeared to be a big coincidence, shortly after they set off, they encountered a smaller ship, upon which sat a young woman. In the past, she had been called by the name Mistress Rosyclouds.

Wu Jianwu had looked at her. She had looked at Wu Jianwu.

Then she closed her eyes.

Sighing, Ningyan said, *“What is love, I’d like to know...?”*

*“It depends on who’s the first to say no!”* Wu Jianwu snapped bitterly. He produced a jug of alcohol and took a drink, resulting in a few drops landing on the deck.

Irritated, Ningyan started scrubbing again.

Xu Qing sat cross-legged at the prow of the ship, his expression serious. The Captain leaned on the rail next to him, shaking his head as he sized up both Xu Qing and the water.

*“Well, little Ah Qing, it seems someone didn’t want you to leave so soon! But that’s fine. Ling’er’s not here. Hahaha!”*

The Captain’s eyes glittered in anticipation of what was about to happen.

As he had said, Ling’er wasn’t onboard. Neither was the innkeeper from Plankspring Way. It wasn’t that Ling’er had declined to come with Xu Qing back to Sea-Sealing County. Rather, absorbing Emperor Ancient Spirit’s imperial energy had put her into a deep sleep. She needed time. It was as if she was in secluded meditation, and wasn’t to be disturbed.

Therefore, Xu Qing had left her in the Green Spirit Pharmacy. As expected, the innkeeper chose to stay with her. Nethersprite also stayed behind, not because of Ling'er, but because she had no intention of returning to Sea-Sealing County.

Because of that, there were only the four of them on the ship.

In response to the Captain's words, Xu Qing frowned. He knew what the Captain was talking about. This ship was a gift from the Heir Apparent, and it should have been able to make the trip across regions in a very short time. But almost as soon as they set off, some muddy clay started building up on the hull of the ship. As it gathered, it pulsed with a miraculous power that caused the ship to slow down dramatically.

Ninth Sib never showed up at the shop, and even after they set sail, he was nowhere to be seen.

Given the circumstances, Xu Qing was fairly certain he knew who had caused the ship to slow down. His speculations were soon confirmed. After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, enough clay had built up on the hull that the ship stopped in place.

“Get ready!” the Captain said, his eyes glittering.

Xu Qing looked up.

After the ship stopped, the clay fell off, swept across the water to the front of the ship, and then formed into a huge clay fox. Though made from clay, the fox emanated a seven-colored glow, as well as a holy sensation that would make anyone it touched feel the urge to bow in worship.

This was a god. Hēr arrival caused the river water to go still. The waves died down. The sky went dark. It was as if the clay fox were the only thing left on the river. Shē was the source of everything.

Wu Jianwu was so startled he fell off the boom and onto the deck below. Ningyan wasn't sure what to do, and just trembled, his face a mask of terror. They had no idea who this clay fox was.

Only the Captain was looking forward keenly to what was to come. As he looked on intently, the clay fox's eyes opened. They were phoenix-like eyes, inherently seductive and deeply charming. Ignoring the Captain, the clay fox looked at Xu Qing.

“Why did you run away, you naughty little boy? You didn't even say goodbye. Don't tell me you forgot about me?”

The tender voice caused magical laws to back away and natural laws to go into hiding. Even space-time was affected, as all four seasons appeared at the same time in the area, along with what appeared to be suns, moons, stars, and heavenly bodies. Godfire burned, releasing a terrifying aura, and causing everything to ripple and distort. Mutagen appeared in the sky.

The clay fox seemed even stronger than during the battle of the gods. Crimson Mother's flesh had clearly benefited hēr a lot.

Seeing all that, the Captain cleared his throat and quickly said, “Big Sis, the reality is—”

“Shut up, Kidney Boy!” the clay fox interrupted in a flirtatious voice. “Say one more word and I'll take both kidneys this time.”

The Captain gasped and then snapped his mouth shut.

Xu Qing hesitated, then opened his mouth to speak. Before he could, the clay fox laughed softly and gave Xu Qing a profound look.

“Li Zihua saw the future upon reaching godly ascension. When I reached godly ascension, what future do you think I saw, naughty boy?”

Xu Qing’s expression flickered.

The clay fox was already fading from view, and in the end, left behind only some words spoken in a flirtatious voice.

“Take care of your primal yang, naughty boy. When you have the time, come to the Firemoon Darkheaven people and find me. We can have some fun together.”

Shortly after, the world returned to normal.

As Ningyan shivered, Wu Jianwu gaped, and the Captain muttered under his breath, the ship blurred. Then, a thrumming sound rang out over the water as it burst forward with incredible speed, entering the Holytide Region and racing toward Sea-Sealing County.

The Holytide Region was covered by a beautiful starry sky. The glittering stars were like scattered flower petals. Also in that sky was a figure keeping pace with the ship. He had a black robe and long black hair. He had stars in his eyes, a body like a sword, and an expression like ice. He was none other than Ninth Sib.

Chapter 718: Swordsages, Report For Duty!

The Revered Ancient mainland was a vast place. The Holytide Region, which was located in the south, was only a small corner of the larger continent. And it was far from the central region. Before the catastrophe of the broken face, it was relatively famous. It was connected in the north to the Spiritsky Region, in the west to the Moonhope Region, in the northwest to the Firedark Region by means of an ancient desert road. It bordered the Sea of Endlessness both in the south and the east, and thus, was very wealthy because of shipping and products that came from the sea. In its heyday, it was one of the top ten regions controlled by humans.

However, after the broken face of the god came, everything changed. The never-ending Forbidden Sea didn’t bring abundant wealth to the Holytide Region anymore, but instead, nonstop mutagen and other dangers. And that was just the beginning. The brilliant light of the Holytide Region faded into darkness. The human species declined, and as the human emperors came and went, they ultimately became weak.

The Moonhope Region became the Moonrite Region. Spiritsky Region became the home of the Nightshades, and came to be called the Nightspirit Region.

As for that ancient desert road that led to the Firedark Region, it became a no-man’s land. That was because the Firedark Region... didn’t belong to humans anymore. Instead, it was a frontier region connected to the lands of the Firemoon Darkheaven people.

Eventually... the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan rose up, and what had come to be a region of darkness and gloom again shone with dazzling light, striking fear into the hearts of the countless

other species in Revered Ancient. But that glory was short-lived. After the ignominious death of the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan, human splendor drifted away like smoke in the wind.

Eventually, Seventh Prince came, and as humans and Nightshades warred, Dawning Suns were unleashed. The Nightshades were defeated, and the reigning Grand Duke Holytide chose to return to humanity. That said, this development wasn't very monumental. When taking into consideration Revered Ancient as a whole, it didn't attract much attention. Things like that weren't enough to give rise to a storm of controversy.

No one knew what would happen in the future. No one knew if the Holytide Region would manage to cast dazzling light over Revered Ancient, the way that the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan had done in the past.

At the moment, war was spreading like wildfire north of the Holytide Region, in the Nightspirit Region, which had once been called Spiritsky. Beneath what was now a brightly shining sky, the Nightshade species suffered setback after setback. Although the Nightshades had many top experts, the fact was that Dawning Suns were profoundly debilitating to them. In fact, Emperor Nightshade and other top-level experts were actually assassinated by a mysterious cultivator.

All of that put the Nightshades in a passive position. Then the red moon disappeared, and though it would take time before outsiders knew the truth of what happened, there were plenty of pious Nightshades who sensed it immediately. To the Nightshades, that development was like *hail added to snow*, and sent them into a state of deep sorrow and grief.

The Nightshades were in a position of unprecedented weakness. In contrast, the warring humans shone with scintillating majesty. King Heaventide wasn't the only one on the warpath. The human emperor had sent a total of thirteen heavenly kings to surround the Nightshade's two major regions. Then, they invaded those two regions, from thirteen different directions.

Most notable was King Eastcauldron, who was a heavenly king from the maternal clan of Princess Anhai. His battle prowess was astonishing, and he personally led his troops into battle, leaving the Nightshades feeling deeply oppressed.

At the same time, he put pressure on King Heaventide, whose clan paid a huge price to earn tacit approval from the emperor for Seventh Prince. There was a stipulation in the agreement, and that was that King Heaventide needed to conquer half of the Nightspirit Region. That was why King Heaventide conscripted so many cultivators after arriving at the Holytide Region. To him, it didn't matter if the humans in the Holytide Region lived or died. Worst case scenario, the population could be replenished later. The most important thing was to win the war. Only in that way could Seventh Prince permanently secure his fiefdom.

The subordinates King Heaventide had brought with him weren't sufficient to secure victory. To do that, he needed to gain access to taboo immortal skills. And those techniques required the blood and souls of countless living beings.

Therefore, Seventh Prince issued conscription orders one after another, and sent conscription officers throughout the region to gather troops. Seventh Prince was notified of anyone who refused to cooperate, and he would send troops to deal with the offenders.

This had already been going on for about half a year. Living beings from countless species in the Holytide Region were giving their lives to push the Nightshades back inch by inch. That included the forces of Sea-Sealing County.

Considering that this war was being waged for the honor of humankind, and that there was a heavenly king involved, there was no way Sea-Sealing County could refuse to cooperate. It didn't matter that King Heaventide was holding back his own elite troops, and was using blood to unlock the taboo magic; they still couldn't do anything.

During the half year that had passed, five waves of troops had been sent to the battlefield. Of those five groups, about half were swordsages.

There were many sects and species in Sea-Sealing County who, after the bitter war that had been fought, and all the other tumult, didn't hesitate to offer loyalty to Seventh Prince.

It had reached the point in which Sea-Sealing County couldn't muster a sixth wave of troops, unless... they sent the best scions of the sects and swordsages. But if they did that, Sea-Sealing County wouldn't have a future. Sadly, Sea-Sealing County wasn't in the position to question orders.

Right now, a conscription contingent sent by Seventh Prince was closing in on the county capital of Sea-Sealing County.

The group was made of over 10,000 troops organized into two sections. The group in the front wore black robes embroidered with golden swords. Over half of that group was made of humans, although there were also nonhumans. They were all cultivators from sects that had once been part of Sea-Sealing County.

They had chosen to switch loyalties to Seventh Prince, and thus, their identities had changed. They now took orders from him, effectively making them imperial envoys. And they had come to conscript troops. They were all very relaxed, and were even chatting and laughing with each other. Most looked in the direction of the county capital with disdain in their eyes, and some even cracked sarcastic jokes.

The second group, which followed behind them, was made of warrior cultivators clad in blood-red armor and robes. They had cold expressions, and pulsed with baleful auras. Wherever they went, they were like dark clouds who weighed down oppressively on everyone around them. They were not cultivators from the Holytide Region, but rather, from the imperial capital. They were members of the imperial guard that Seventh Prince had brought with him. They rode gigantic black monitor lizards who were clad in black armor, and pulsed with a domineering air of pure destruction.

Among this conscription force was a white flying elephant with a fancy canopy over it.

Seated on the white elephant was a middle-aged cultivator wearing a suit of armor. He wasn't very good-looking, and his eyes flickered with cold, sinister light. He was flanked by about a dozen figures in golden armor, each of which pulsed with terrifying Void Returning fluctuations that caused dark clouds to swirl around them.

There was also an old man seated on the elephant. His face was a mass of wrinkles, and his eyes had streaks that resembled shooting stars. He was looking at the distant statue of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity holding the county capital, his expression one of venom and hatred.

“Sir Bloodsmelter!” he growled through gritted teeth. “Zheng Kaiyi! And that scum Xu Qing!”[1]

Clearly, the desire for revenge burned hot in his heart.

The middle-aged man looked over at him and smiled faintly. “You have a lot of old friends here, don’t you, Soaring Cloud?”

The old man quickly ducked his head down, clasped hands and bowed. “High Commander, I hope you can allow me to have a very nice reunion with my *old friends*.” [2]

When the old man said ‘old friends,’ he was virtually gnashing his teeth.

The high commander smiled and nodded.

The old man was none other than Master Shengyun’s grandfather, Patriarch Soaring Cloud from the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect in the Eight Sect Coalition.

Because of what happened with Master Shengyun, he had been ousted from the senate and punished in other ways. However, after King Heaventide showed up and the coalition’s president defected, the president personally gave amnesty to the patriarch. After coming to understand the situation, Patriarch Soaring Cloud chose to follow the president and seek asylum with Seventh Prince.

He had pleaded fervently to be allowed to come along to the county capital. He wasn’t worried about running into trouble. Given his current circumstances, anyone who defied him would end up dead. In fact, he was actually looking forward to arriving.

Defy me, and you’ll die! Don’t defy me, and you’ll just delay your death! My poor grandson was clearly on the path to becoming an Ancient Emperor. But that scumbag Xu Qing was jealous and viciously persecuted him!

And my son died a horrible death thanks to Zheng Kaiyi! But the ultimate source of it all is Sir Bloodsmelter! The whole lot of you can just go ahead and die!

Killing intent glittered in Patriarch Soaring Cloud’s eyes. Glaring at the county capital, he waved his right hand. The clouds in the dome of heaven churned as lightning bolts formed, streaking together to create a lightning dragon. With a deafening roar, it shot toward the county capital. It was clearly about to tear the county capital to bits.

Just as the lightning dragon was about to hit the county capital, a figure appeared in front of it. The figure reached out and touched the dragon. The dragon struggled in resistance, but it did no good. An instant later, it exploded, becoming a shower of sparks that rained down onto the city below.

All of the streets and alleys in the capital were silent and empty. The mortals had been told to stay indoors. Only cultivators from the three palaces were visible, as well as elite experts from the sects that had remained loyal to Sea-Sealing County. Eyes burning with anger, they looked up into the sky.

Among them were Yao Yunhui, Li Shitao, as well as Seven Blood Eyes disciples. There were plenty of people that Xu Qing would recognize. [3]

Kong Xianglong was nowhere to be seen. [4]

As the oppressive army loomed overhead, the dark clouds seethed. From a distance, the county capital looked like a rowboat in angry waves, just on the verge of capsizing.

Within that army, the high commander atop the white elephant yawned and then said, “You know more than me what reserve powers Sea-Sealing County has. I’ll give you an incense stick’s worth of time to conscript the troops. I want to get moving to the next stop.”

With that, he took out a book and started reading; clearly, he wasn’t interested at all in what happened next. The warrior cultivators all held their positions with cold expressions.

In contrast, the former Sea-Sealing County cultivators let loose wild war cries. That included Patriarch Soaring Cloud. He looked down at the person who had destroyed his lightning dragon, his eyes pulsing with killing intent.

“Zheng Kaiyi!”

The person who had stopped the lightning was none other than Master Seventh. Looking up at the army with a grim expression, he waved his hand, dispelling the sparks that were raining down. At the same time, the air behind him rippled as several people appeared.

First was Marquis Yao, followed by the three palace lords, the honor guards from the various palaces, and the top experts from numerous sects. Every single one of them was a Void Returning expert.

Sir Bloodsmelter was there with Yanyan’s grandmother Guru Eastnether, along with three sect leaders from the Eight Sect Coalition. [5]

All of them had serious expressions on their faces.

There were fewer people than before Xu Qing left. Some had switched loyalties, others had died in battle.

Also in the crowd was a woman wearing a plum-colored gown. She looked like a blooming bauhinia tree, and was spectacularly beautiful. She was none other than Plumdark. She stood out from the crowd, making it obvious that her position was far above those around her. However, there was a touch of worry visible on her brow, making her seem anxious. At the same time, she wore a cold frown as she looked up at Patriarch Soaring Cloud and the army with him.

The county capital was silent. The arrival of the army had cast a pall over the city. It wasn’t that the people of Sea-Sealing County weren’t willing to help the war effort. Rather, they had already given everything they could.

“Yao Tianyan! Zheng Kaiyi! You two have got a lot of gall!” Patriarch Soaring Cloud strode off the elephant to hover in front of the army. His eyes pulsed with killing intent, but inside, he was feeling wonderful. He smiled coldly. “It’s been seven days since Seventh Prince sent you new conscriptions orders. Here in Sea-Sealing County, you just watch while the forces of humankind suffer on the battlefield. All you know how to do is protect yourself! You refuse to send even one soldier to the front lines! Behavior like that makes you the same as the enemy! You people are the garbage of humanity!”

“The high commander personally led his forces here, yet you obstinately persist in going about things the wrong way. Are the people of Sea-Sealing County even human anymore? Do you still serve the emperor? Do you still care about humankind?”

Patriarch Soaring Cloud had a lot of experience in life, and was both astute and circumspect. Every single word he spoke carried a lot of meaning, and emphasized loyalty to humankind. There were few people who could compare to him.

As his proudly spoken words echoed out, the High Commander on the white elephant looked at him with praise in his eyes.

Meanwhile, the people of Sea-Sealing County were starting to get angry. The cultivators from the three palaces gritted their teeth, their faces ashen and their eyes burning with fury.

Up above them, Marquis Yao stepped forward, his expression one of fury. “You say that Sea-Sealing County only knows how to protect itself? That we’re not willing to give one soldier? Over the past half year, we’ve sent five waves of troops to the front lines. That’s millions of our young ones. We also sent the palace lord from the Administration Palace, as well as numerous honor guards from all of the palaces!

“The millions of young ones we currently have here are the future of Sea-Sealing County, and they’re the only reserve troops we have! Every sect, especially the human ones, are lamps about to run out of oil. You’re turning black into white here!

“You talk of a war of honor? Let me ask you, of the five waves of young ones we sent, how many are still alive? The palace lord of the Administration Palace died in battle! Multiple honor guards have died and been buried in foreign lands. Didn’t they die honorably?

“In recent years, Sea-Sealing County has dealt with many things. We fought back against the Holytides all on our own! We had three palace lords die at almost the same time! The governor died mysteriously, and then Seventh Prince swooped in and reaped the rewards. On the surface, it seemed like he was coming to the rescue, but everybody knows what really happened!

“Isn’t it enough that millions of young ones from Sea-Sealing County have died? Don’t tell me you want to take our final wavering spark and extinguish it?”

Marquis Yao stood tall and straight. As he spoke, he wasn’t looking at Patriarch Soaring Cloud, but rather, at the high commander. He spoke from his heart, clear and loud for everyone to hear.

Then Master Seventh stepped forward. Looking at the white elephant, he calmly said, “We all care about the honor of humankind. And we can make sacrifices. But only if it’s worth it. High Commander, let me ask you something. How many of Seventh Prince’s subordinates have been sent to the battlefield?”

The high commander didn't even look away from his book. Speaking to Patriarch Soaring Cloud, he said, "You have half an incense stick left."

Patriarch Soaring Cloud's eyes flashed. After looking over the county capital, his gaze came to focus on Master Seventh and Marquis Yao.

"Swordsage Palace. Administration Palace. Justice Palace. All three palace lords. All of the deputy palace lords. All honor guards. Every single swordsage cultivator. However many of you there are, that's how many will mobilize. The sect leaders of all sects will fight.

"Also... in His Majesty Seventh Prince's first conscription order from half a year ago, he demanded that Xu Qing participate in the fighting. You made the excuse that he was in seclusion, but this time, that won't work. Xu Qing must fight! You have the time it takes half an incense stick to burn. Xu Qing and everyone else I just mentioned must be assembled in ranks by then!"

Patriarch Soaring Cloud took a step forward. That step resounded like heavenly thunder. Winds screamed as a huge vortex spun into existence above. Below, everyone in Sea-Sealing County seethed with anger.

Meanwhile, Marquis Yao's eyes gleamed with determination as he shared a glance with Master Seventh.

"Three palaces!" he said. The three palace lords floated up into the air, where they called out similar orders to muster their forces.

Most noteworthy was Palace Lord Li Yunshan of the Swordsage Palace, who had been the deputy palace lord not too long ago. Speaking in a somber and desolate voice, he called, "Swordsages, report for duty!"

As his words echoed through the county capital, figures appeared one after another.

"Swordsage Sun Chenwu, reporting for duty!"

"Swordsage Zhang Hao, reporting for duty!"

"Swordsage Lu Tao, reporting for duty!"

As the voices rang out, they were joined by a particularly distinct voice that echoed like thunder into the ears of everyone present.

"Swordsage Xu Qing, reporting for duty!"

Chapter 719: A Spring-Like Breeze

They were only six words spoken among a cacophony of other voices. But Xu Qing's name was deeply meaningful! In Sea-Sealing County, and especially to the swordsages there, his name carried profound significance! He was a fellow veteran who had fought life-or-death battles by their side! He had experienced the cruel baptism of war with them! He was a hero to all of Sea-Sealing County, and was also its future governor. It was the same with the mortals. No one could possibly forget his name for a moment. In an instant, the swordsages who had been furious and ready to die

fighting were all shaken to the core. The person they had all been thinking about was now out of seclusion!

Excited expressions appeared everywhere as people looked around for the figure that they all remembered clearly. It wasn't just the swordsmen who reacted in that way. The cultivators from the other two palaces were just as stunned, and the elite cultivators from sects throughout Sea-Sealing County were all shaken. There were plenty of people who had never seen Xu Qing, but knew his name well.

If that was the reaction from the crowd in general, it was easy to imagine the shock visible on the faces of the three palace lords, Marquis Yao, and everyone else hovering in midair.

That one name struck astonishment into the hearts of countless citizens of Sea-Sealing County. Meanwhile, an even more majestic vortex appeared overhead, so large it filled almost the entire dome of heaven. Intense rumblings were accompanied by the crash of thunder. Winds screamed everywhere, connecting land and sky in a huge tempest.

To the shock of everyone present, a massive ship emerged from the vortex! It was pitch black and pulsed with terrifying pressure. Innumerable streams of black mist surrounded it, like tentacles that formed together into a pair of massive wings.

The prow was carved to look like a dragon in motion, with a vicious, domineering expression. The dragon had six-clawed hands, making it profoundly noble. It was the type of dragon that would strike fear and shock into the hearts of anyone who saw it. [1]

Someone had written two characters on the ship's sail.

Jicang!

Few people could possibly understand what those characters meant. But the calligraphy was mighty and domineering. The truth was that this ship had been given to Xu Qing as a gift by the Heir Apparent, who had personally written those characters onto the sail. They were his name! [2]

The moment the ship appeared, heaven and earth seemed to shatter, and thunder crashed. Everyone in Seventh Prince's army was shocked. The high commander seated on the white elephant put down his book and looked up, bewildered.

In the lead position was Patriarch Soaring Cloud, who was completely stunned. However, before the patriarch could even react, the gigantic ship shot directly toward him with heaven-subduing, earth-startling force.

There was no way to avoid it and no way to block it! The ship had been created by the Heir Apparent, who had stupefying personhood. As a result, it was capable of unimaginable speed. It appeared on the scene so suddenly that it could only be described in the following way: although it took quite a while to describe, in reality, it happened in the time it takes a spark to fly off a piece of flint!

In the blink of an eye, the stunning ship became like an actual dragon, raging with fury and murder as it bore down on Patriarch Soaring Cloud. The air shattered because of the violent pressure weighing down. At one moment, the ship was high in the sky. The next moment, it was right in front of Patriarch Soaring Cloud, about to crush him.

Patriarch Soaring Cloud was a first-stage Void Returning expert, yet his face still fell from the sense of deadly crisis that filled him. He screamed and tried to defend himself, unleashing the wild power of his cultivation base, causing the falling stars in his eyes to shoot out into the open in the form of a thousand dao lineaments. But those dao lineaments collapsed, as did everything around them.

The traitors behind him didn't have cultivation bases near the patriarch's, so they didn't stand a chance of fighting back. Screams rang out everywhere as the air around them collapsed, and they were destroyed in body and soul. A cloud of gore floated through the air in the opposite direction. Then, an even greater mightiness swept toward the white elephant and the troops surrounding it.

Patriarch Soaring Cloud's face was as pale as death. Then it turned red, and blue veins bulged out everywhere. Finally, blood sprayed out of his mouth along with an agonized shriek as he was sent tumbling down toward the ground. As he fell, his body cracked and split. His chest caved in. Blood sprayed constantly out of his mouth. And his cultivation base deflated permanently. At the same time, he was being pulled at by the ship, so though he tried to fall back, he had a hard time doing so.

Things weren't over yet. After the ship seriously injured Patriarch Soaring Cloud, a figure emerged from it. Shining with scintillating blue light, he shot toward the patriarch like a blue meteor.

A proud voice echoed out.

“Swordsage Chen Erniu, reporting for duty!”

As the blue meteor closed in on the patriarch, the Captain's face became visible. There were faces in his eyes, the eyes of which also had faces, and that pattern continued. Tentacles appeared, made of blue bugs, which converged into the shape of a right fist.

The Captain used that fist to punch Patriarch Soaring Cloud. More blood sprayed out of the patriarch's mouth. He wanted to fight back. To defend himself. But in the blink of an eye, a second figure emerged from the ship. At first, he was the same size as an ordinary person. But then flesh split apart as he turned into a majestic giant.

He was none other than Xu Qing in his first-level god state! He had the body of the Ghost Emperor, incomparably grand, with an imperial crown on his head. He looked as dignified as an emperor. Blinding golden light shone off him, causing everything around him to gleam with seven colors. A heavenly dao furnace burned in his heart, its every beat sounding out like heavenly thunder. And intense flames surrounded him from head to toe.

He had a long, black spear surrounded by lightning, which he threw straight toward Patriarch Soaring Cloud. A thrumming sound echoed out as the spear pierced through the air, crushing everything in its path, and bringing destruction with it as it stabbed into the patriarch's chest and came out the other side.

A shrill scream escaped the lips of Patriarch Soaring Cloud as a massive hole appeared in his chest and his dao lineaments were scattered. Indescribable pain filled him as his eyes turned crimson. The sensation of deadly crisis grew so intense his mind went blank. All he could think to do was flee for his life. However, before he could tap into whatever remained of his cultivation base, the Captain stepped in.

After the spear shot through the patriarch, the Captain transformed into a heavenly dog that shimmered with blue light. His jaws clamped down onto the patriarch.

Patriarch Soaring Cloud shivered from head to toe as he rapidly transformed into an ice sculpture. Life force poured out of him, entering the Captain. The patriarch began to go mad. However, it did him no good.

Xu Qing closed in and launched a full-force blow onto the ice sculpture.

The sculpture exploded with a pop. Blood sprayed out of Patriarch Soaring Cloud as his hair became completely disheveled. Never before had the patriarch been in a position as bad as this.

The Captain went in for another attack. He and Xu Qing worked together perfectly, attacking one after the other. In a very short time, they had unleashed mountain-toppling, sea-draining force on Patriarch Soaring Cloud.

The high commander and his forces were about to interfere, but then Master Seventh and everyone else surged with energy.

Patriarch Soaring Cloud let loose a deafening howl as he went all-out with everything he had left. However, it wasn't an attack. Instead, he tried to escape. From that it could be seen how shocking the attacks of Xu Qing and the Captain were. But he actually had no opportunity to escape.

The Captain shivered, and as blue light flared around him, he turned into countless blue worms, forming a vast sea. The worms converged, becoming a huge blue hand that swept toward Patriarch Soaring Cloud.

Next to him, Xu Qing erupted with black energy that quickly surrounded him, turning into a black suit of armor. His eyes burned with fire of the underworld as his energy rose to an even more shocking level.

This wasn't the complete version of the second-level god state, only a partial version. It wasn't worth it to waste another chunk of Crimson Mother's flesh to unleash the full version of the second-level god state, if the purpose was only to kill Patriarch Soaring Cloud.

In the blink of an eye, the two of them erupted with power, causing heaven and earth to shake and filling the sky with the sound of heavenly thunder. Closing in on the patriarch, Xu Qing lifted his right hand, causing black energy to swirl around the long spear, transforming it into a heavenly saber.

The saber then slashed through Patriarch Soaring Cloud's neck, severing his head. Taboo poison raged, causing the patriarch's body to rapidly decay. Soaring Cloud moaned in agony as even his dao lineaments began to decompose.

Simultaneously, the Captain's gigantic blue hand grabbed the patriarch's severed head and crushed it into a bloody paste. Then the Captain's face appeared in the hand and he opened his mouth to devour what was left of the head. But then he realized it was full of poison and decided not to.

The blue light faded away, and the Captain's true form appeared, glowering at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing rapidly transformed as well. He went from the second-level god state to the first level. Then he hovered there, pulsing with a baleful aura as he stared at the army.

Everything was very quiet. Countless eyes were now focused on Xu Qing and the Captain.

The sudden, ferocious development left everyone shaken. Spirit Trove had vanquished Void Returning. This... was something that should have been impossible. Yet everyone present saw it with their own eyes!

The 10,000 cultivators with the high commander all shivered. And the high commander himself looked out with a grave and somber expression.

Meanwhile, Master Seventh chuckled, and his eyes shone with approval. He looked thoughtfully in the direction of the Moonrite Region, then glanced up at the sky. He said nothing.

Sir Bloodsmelter stroked his beard, his expression one of great pride. In some ways, he looked very much like the Captain often did.

Marquis Yao looked surprised, especially by the name written on the ship's sail!

Everyone had different facial expressions. The three palace lords, the honor guards, and the experts from the various sects were all paying rapt attention to the events. Down below, Yao Yunhui's heart was in chaos. In recent times, she often found herself thinking good thoughts about Xu Qing, to the point where it was a permanent aspect of her. Right now, she had a blank look on her face.

Meanwhile, the slim, graceful Plumdark wasn't looking at the ship or the people in the area. She was looking at one person who was everything to her.

As long as he's back, that's all that matters.

Her face, which was beautiful enough to move entire nations, gradually ceased to be anxious. Somehow, she seemed even more beautiful than before. Her smiling eyes seemed to contain blossoming flowers and a spring-like breeze.

Chapter 720: The Stars Fade; Suns and Moons Cower (1)

As Xu Qing and the Captain made their stand, a feeling of excitement spread. The hearts of the swordsages surged as they were reminded of the dramatic day of the Lieutenant Governor's Coup.

Now as then, Xu Qing hovered in midair, visible to the eyes of everyone present. The only difference was that on this day, he was vastly more grand and majestic.

As the excitement built, the swordsages flew up into the air and gathered around Xu Qing, forming a growing crowd. As of this moment, all of Sea-Sealing County pulsed with a desire to do battle.

Although Master Seventh and Marquis Yao were superior to Xu Qing in terms of cultivation base, they were the type of lofty and distant people that ordinary cultivators wouldn't even dare to approach.

But Xu Qing was different. Xu Qing was a fellow veteran. He had walked the line between life and death with them. They were familiar with them, and they backed his decisions and attitudes. That was why they treated him, not just with incredible respect, but also, with deep familiarity. Every single swordsage present rose up and took a place by Xu Qing's side.

Looking around his fellow veterans, Xu Qing's heart swelled. He would never forget what Plumdark told him back when he first got to Sea-Sealing County. Back then, he didn't know much about the swordsages, and thus, didn't care much about them one way or another. He wasn't even sure he wanted to be a swordsage. Plumdark said that when he developed a bit of admiration for the

organization and the people in it, and then turned that admiration into respect, he would figure things out. [1]

That admiration came as he began to understand the swordsages. And the respect came because of Palace Lord Kong Liangxiu of the Swordsage Palace.

A host of emotions rose up in Xu Qing, but he took a deep breath and suppressed them. Now wasn't the time to sit around reminiscing. This crisis for Sea-Sealing County hadn't yet been resolved.

The only people who had died were Patriarch Soaring Cloud and a few of the Sea-Sealing County traitors. They were people who had thought a lot of themselves, and believed that they could call the wind and summon the rain. They also thought of themselves as being important. But the reality was that to the high commander on his white elephant, they were little more than rustic country bumpkins. To him, a person from the Imperial Region who was used to lording it over everyone else, they weren't important at all.

The only one he valued even slightly was Patriarch Soaring Cloud. But only a little bit. Therefore, the sudden development caused a serious expression to overtake his face. Xu Qing and the Captain were only in Spirit Trove, yet they had just cut down a Void Returning expert. Even in the Imperial Region, that was so rare as to be unheard-of.

As a result, he was thinking, Only the superpowers in Revered Ancient can do things like that, and even then, it's as rare as phoenix feathers or qilin horns.

The high commander looked at Xu Qing and the Captain through narrowed eyes. He had heard the name Xu Qing before, and knew its significance in Sea-Sealing County. He had to admit that a chosen cultivator like this really did deserve his reputation in the county.

*He's not far from reaching his potential. But as for this guy next to him, I've never heard of him before.*

With such thoughts on his mind, he casually said, "You're Xu Qing? Before coming here, I heard about you from Seventh Prince. He had good things to say. What's more, your 30,000-meter light during the Grand Emperor's assessment caused even His Majesty to heap praise on you.

"Because of that, I'm not going to hassle you over killing Soaring Cloud. You earned grade-one battle credit, a golden command medallion, a yellow robe, and the right to attend the Imperial University. Given that, you obviously know what honor means.

"Therefore, I'm putting you in charge of conscripting troops in Sea-Sealing County. I want you to lead your forces to the field of battle. Turn your crime into a service. Are you willing to do that?"

As the words left the high commander's mouth, the over 10,000 warrior cultivators on the monitor lizards inched forward. Their slight movement instantly created a very perilous situation. Even the

dome of heaven reacted, as the winds swirled to create a tempest. A somber and desolate aura built; one order, and these people would level everything in their path.

On the other side, killing intent intensified among the forces of Sea-Sealing County. The swordsmen were drawing their swords; all they were doing now was waiting for orders from Xu Qing. The cultivators from the other two palaces, plus the elites from the sects, also waited somberly.

Xu Qing didn't immediately respond to the high commander. He turned to look at the swordsmen, and then all the other cultivators from Sea-Sealing County. Finally, he turned his attention to Master Seventh and Marquis Yao.

The praise in Master Seventh's eyes grew stronger. He smiled. "You've grown up."

That simple statement made clear how he felt. He would let Xu Qing make the decision.

Marquis Yao looked at Xu Qing, and he felt slightly dazed. All of a sudden, he realized that Xu Qing reminded him a lot of Kong Liangxiu. Smiling, he nodded. "You've already performed amazing services for the people of Sea-Sealing County. If your cultivation base was a bit higher, you could officially take over as the governor. Before, when you had yet to grow up, your Master and I were running things in Sea-Sealing County. But now... you can decide the future of the county."

After those two spoke, everyone else, including the three palace lords, all the honor guards, and the experts from the other sects, all looked at Xu Qing, their gazes warm.

Xu Qing took a deep breath and bowed to Master Seventh and Marquis Yao. Then he took a moment to look over the crowd of Sea-Sealing County cultivators. The look in their eyes told him their attitude. Eyes glittering, he turned to the high commander on his white elephant.

"The emperor issued orders naming Sea-Sealing County as autonomous. Therefore, sire, please excuse our inability to comply with your demands!"

The spirits of Sea-Sealing County surged in response to his words. Xu Qing had given voice to the thoughts that everyone in the county had been forced to suppress instead of speak out loud. When Xu Qing spoke them, they echoed out like heavenly thunder.

The High Commander's eyes shone with cold light. "Arrest Xu Qing and send him to the heavenly king to be dealt with. Any who interfere with the arrest will be considered traitors and can be executed on the spot."

The warrior cultivators in blood-red armor surged with baleful energy. Staying in tight formation, they emitted mountain-toppling, sea-draining force as they faced off against the forces of Sea-Sealing County. From a distance, they collectively resembled a gigantic monitor lizard, howling a deafening howl toward Sea-Sealing County. The noise of it shattered the air and caused a tempest to spring into being. In the blink of an eye, the lands quaked, the clouds seethed, and the sun and moon faded.

However, the forces of Sea-Sealing County had been holding things in for too long. They also erupted with energy, which rose up into the air to create three spell formations, one for each of the three palaces. The energy from the Swordsman Palace created a formation that looked like a sword,

so fearsome it could sever mountains, rivers, and all living beings. The Administration Palace and Justice Palace had their own impressive formations. A host of huge puppets also appeared, each of them piloted by a team of cultivators. Overhead, a massive net appeared, which was the manifestation of Sea-Sealing County's taboo treasure. Many other sects also activated their taboo treasures to bolster it.

Humans in other regions didn't have much experience with full-scale war. At the most, they had participated in small battles. But it had only been a few years since the cultivators of Sea-Sealing County had been part of a huge war. And the survivors were all elite veterans. They were very familiar with war.

As killing intent rose from both sides, Xu Qing looked up to the sky and bowed, hoping that Ninth Sib would do something. He got no response.

He sighed inside, but at the same time, knew that Ninth Sib wasn't the type of person you could just summon to get help. Much of it would depend on how powerful an enemy was involved.

And thus, rumbling filled the battlefield. The High Commander's subordinates in the golden armor flew out from their positions by the white elephant, their eyes gleaming coldly and their Void Returning cultivation bases surging. Master Seventh, Marquis Yao, and everyone else in the same level also flew forward.

The Void Returning experts started fighting fiercely.

The Sea-Sealing County traitors who had not been killed by Xu Qing's previous attack with the ship could see the fighting breaking out, and it filled them with deep anxiety. However, they had already made their decision, so they cleared their minds and joined the fighting.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed, then he burst into motion, heading right toward the incoming group. The air around him shattered as he appeared in front of a Spirit Trove cultivator.

Xu Qing's first-level god state was simply too fast. His shocked opponent couldn't even back up before Xu Qing's left fist descended. Before the fist could make contact, it transformed the surrounding magical and natural laws, which latched onto the Spirit Trove cultivator and turned his motion of retreat into the opposite.

In the blink of an eye, the Spirit Trove cultivator coughed up a mouthful of blood. His own natural laws were fighting back, but they couldn't stop what was happening. He was pulled violently toward Xu Qing, and could do nothing but watch in despair as a black spear shot toward him. There was no way to evade or block the attack. The taboo spear stabbed through his neck, unleashing explosive power as it did. The cultivator's body and secret trove both shattered. He had been destroyed in body and soul.

Without a pause, Xu Qing turned and killed another enemy.

The Captain was already in motion. He sent blue light to surround an enemy, and when that light faded, the enemy disappeared along with it. The Captain licked his lips, then lunged in another direction.

There were swordsages present who had been part of the original Secretariat Division. They had taken it upon themselves to act like Xu Qing's personal guard, and were keeping pace with him and the Captain as they all unleashed slaughter.

The traitors were already suffering grievous casualties, and many unleashed bitter curses before they died.

“Seventh Prince must have known this would happen! We'll be waiting for you in the Yellow Springs, Xu Qing!”

“When King Heaventide returns, he'll put you all to death!”

Xu Qing was unmoved by their words. After slaughtering the traitors, he looked up at the fighting above.

The fighting had only been going on for a short time, but thanks to the taboo treasures and the elite skills of the Sea-Sealing County cultivators, it was clear that the Sea-Sealing side had a huge advantage.

The warriors in blood-red armor were on the defensive the entire time. It was the same with the fighting between the Void Returning experts.

When the high commander saw how things were playing out, his eyes glittered coldly. He now realized that he had underestimated Sea-Sealing County. That said, it wasn't a big deal to him. As the high commander, he had come from the main battlefield to conscript troops, and he had never intended to rely on his own forces to establish authority. Rather, he was here on orders from King Heaventide. Therefore, he calmly raised his hand, revealing a golden jade pendant that emitted dazzling light.

Chapter 720: The Stars Fade; Suns and Moons Cower (part 2)

Blinding golden light spread out rapidly, causing Smoldering God pressure to weigh down heavily. The dome of heaven dimmed. The air blurred. The lands quaked. Hearts trembling, the Sea-Sealing County cultivators backed up. Though they were furious, their cultivation bases were being restricted, and their souls were being affected. That was how weak they were in the face of a Smoldering God aura.

“Do some piddling sparks dare to vie with the full moon?” the high commander said coolly from his white elephant. As he looked out coldly, a host of gigantic golden characters formed in front of him. “The people of Holytide Region are hereby conscripted to fight in the war.”

Twelve golden characters appeared, all of which pulsed with the aura of a Smoldering God, causing everything around them to shake.

That was the moment in which Xu Qing chose to again look up into the sky, clasp hands, and bow.

“Grandpa Ninth. Please.”

As the words left his mouth, a beam of heaven-sundering sword light dropped down from the dome of heaven. This was a dazzling sword that could overturn heaven and undermine earth! This sword could make the stars fade, and the sun and moon cower. Heaven split open, a massive rift appearing

like a black hole. All light. All sound. All thoughts. All feelings. The sword tugged on all of them and pulled them into the black hole. Everything disappeared. Time went still.

The sword light descended noiselessly, filled with breathing, consummate power. And then it reached the Smoldering God energy coming from the jade pendant in the hand of the High Commander.

King Heaventide's aura collapsed, and the golden light faded into nothing but normal light.

The twelve characters in front of the white elephant that had been shaking everyone to the core were suddenly made incapable of emitting light. They crumbled like dried weeds before turning into drifting ash.

The jade pendant was hit next. That pendant contained orders from King Heaventide, yet cracks spread out over its surface before it collapsed into dust in the hand of the high commander.

The high commander himself couldn't stand up to the force. He started shaking, a look of astonishment in his eyes as he looked up into the sky. He saw nothing. But he could imagine what type of entity was up there.

“|—”

He tried to speak, but didn't have the chance. A breeze hit him, and he collapsed into ash.

He was the only one that died. The white elephant wasn't harmed. Trembling, the elephant dropped down in prostration. The warrior cultivators in blood-red armor were not harmed either.

That was how Ninth Sib operated. His sword skill was at such a high level that, with a single thought, it could eradicate entire armies. Or, it could bypass the army and kill a single person, leaving everyone else unhurt. Clearly, Ninth Sib valued humankind deeply, and didn't want to see people die needlessly.

One was enough.

The sword light vanished. The high commander had been wiped away. Everything went quiet. The high commander's subordinates shivered in obvious terror and astonishment. They had seen the sword attack, and they knew what it signified. And that realization left their minds empty of everything except fear.

It was the same with the forces of Sea-Sealing County. The swordsages, the cultivators from the three palaces, and the sect elites were all shaken to the core, their hearts pounding with astonishment. The gathered sect leaders, the palace lords, and the honor guards reacted the same. They were absolutely flabbergasted, and looked at Xu Qing with disbelief in their eyes.

Thinking back, they vaguely remembered that, just before the heaven-shaking, earth-shattering sword descended, Xu Qing had bowed to the sky and called out to someone named Grandpa Ninth....

Plumdark was stunned, and looked at Xu Qing with a blank expression.

Marquis Yao's heart was pounding. The name 'Jicang' written on the sail of Xu Qing's ship had seemed familiar. He was from the aristocratic clan of a heavenly marquis, and though his clan was

in decline, they still had a lot of ancient records. When he thought about where Xu Qing had been recently, he recalled that many, many years ago, the heir apparent of the Imperial Sovereign of the Moonrite Region was named Li Jicang! What was more, that Imperial Sovereign's ninth son had been an expert in the sword.... Having reached this point in his train of thought, his heart started pounding even more.

Master Seventh had an odd expression on his face as he looked up into the dome of heaven. Looking wistful, he sighed, shook his head, and then turned to Xu Qing and his senior apprentice, his eyes filled with praise.

The Captain noticed that, though Xu Qing didn't. Xu Qing was focused on the trembling warrior cultivators in blood-red armor.

Ninth Sib obviously didn't want to kill them, but that left Xu Qing wondering what to do with them. After a moment of silence, Xu Qing looked back at the huge ship.

Ningyan and Wu Jianwu were there, crouching behind the rails and secretly watching what was happening outside. Noticing Xu Qing's gaze caused Ningyan to blink a few times. Grimacing, he looked down, not daring to meet Xu Qing's gaze. That said, he couldn't pretend that he didn't notice Xu Qing looking at him.

Seeing that caused Xu Qing's eyes to grow colder. He frowned.

The Captain looked over and smiled enigmatically.

Ningyan's heart raced. He feared the Captain, but he feared Xu Qing even more. The Captain might bite him, but even when they had only just met, Xu Qing nearly killed him.

Considering that both of those people were looking at him, Ningyan knew that he had no choice but to follow orders. It seemed like a lose-lose situation, but he still sighed inwardly, gritted his teeth, and rose to his feet. He stepped off the ship.

Off to the side, Wu Jianwu blinked a few times. He knew what Ningyan was doing, and he immediately started composing some poetry.

At first, nobody had been paying attention to Ningyan. But as he stepped off the ship, his bloodline activated, causing a golden umbrella to appear over his head. His bloodline also caused a four-clawed golden dragon to appear, swirling in the air and roaring in a way that shook heaven and earth. That golden dragon was enough to shake everyone. But next, an imperial robe appeared on Ningyan, instantly making him the center of all attention.

The cultivators of Sea-Sealing County all looked at him, their expressions those of utter shock. Even more shocked were the terrifying Void Returning subordinates of the High Commander, plus the warrior cultivators in blood-red armor. That one sword move put them in an impossible situation. And now, seeing Ningyan, they were even more shocked.

Ningyan's bloodline fluctuations, plus the four-clawed golden dragon, was something that they, people who had come from the Imperial Region, were completely familiar with. They knew the aura of the imperial clan.

The army cultivators weren't sure what to do. None of them recognized Ningyan. Although he was one of the emperor's sons, he had never stood out much. Therefore, Ningyan just hovered in midair feeling embarrassed. And since it would be strange for him to introduce himself, he just remained in place releasing as much of his bloodline aura as possible. Gradually, the aura grew stronger, and the imperial clan's fluctuations spread out majestically in all directions.

That was when the Captain flew up to stand a few paces behind Ningyan. Glaring down at the army in blood-red armor, he snapped, "How dare you people! You're looking right at Twelfth Prince but you're not offering formal greetings?"

The Captain's words only increased everyone's shock. As for Ningyan, he breathed an inner sigh of relief. Maintaining a somber facial expression, he looked out at the army and coolly said, "I am indeed Guyue Ningyan, twelfth son of the human emperor. Presumably you people know my name."

Ningyan's words caused a stir among the imperial forces. That was especially true when it came to the Void Returning experts. When they thought about the imperial princes, they remembered that there was one whose mother died shortly after childbirth. That prince very rarely appeared in public, and he was Twelfth Prince. There was no way to fake his bloodline fluctuations, and what was even more noteworthy was that the huge monitor lizards were all bowing their heads to the golden dragon. No further proof was needed.

After a brief moment of hesitation, they also bowed their heads and clasped hands to Ningyan.

**"Well met, Twelfth Prince!"**

The forces of Sea-Sealing County were just as stunned, and they also offered formal greetings by bowing. Marquis Yao did the same.

Seeing all that caused pride to well up in Ningyan's heart. He even stuck his chin up a bit. In fact, he almost forgot his standing in Sea-Sealing County until the Captain cleared his throat, bringing Ningyan back to his senses. Immediately squashing any feelings of arrogance, Ningyan looked over the imperial forces.

**"My father the emperor issued orders proclaiming Sea-Sealing County as autonomous. Although you were tricked, you still committed grave offenses. Bind yourselves. I'll submit an official request to the court and let my father make the final decision about what to do with you."**

The army was silent in response to his words. First came the shocking sword, then the sudden arrival of an imperial prince. Whether on an emotional level or a rational one, they had no choice but to follow orders.

The reality was that they were all breathing sighs of relief. If you ride a tiger, it's hard to get off, and they had been in a very delicate and deadly situation. Following the lead of an imperial prince was obviously the best choice. Without the slightest hesitation, they sealed their own cultivation bases and began tying each other up. It didn't matter that they were the trusted followers of a high commander. What was important was that... a single sword move had stricken them to the core.

Having accomplished that, Ningyan secretly glanced at Xu Qing out of the corner of his eye. Seeing that Xu Qing had no expression on his face got him worried, so he looked at the Captain.

The Captain threw his arm over Ningyan's shoulders and chuckled grimly. It was a clear message that Ningyan had performed well.

Ningyan let loose a sigh of relief. Given the current circumstances, this was the ideal way to wrap up the situation. Before long, Marquis Yao had made arrangements for the Sea-Sealing County cultivators to take the captured imperial forces to the Corrections Division. They weren't to be mistreated. After all, they were all humans.

In that manner, a big crisis in Sea-Sealing County was handled. Next, Marquis Yao made an announcement proclaiming to the entire county that Xu Qing would be acting as the new governor.

Because of the delicate political circumstances, there was no formal ceremony. But Xu Qing was the hope of Sea-Sealing County, and also its reserve power. So there wasn't really a need for a ceremony. For all intents and purposes, he was now the governor of Sea-Sealing County.

Some of the cultivators from the various sects, or from distant parts of Sea-Sealing County, only had vague memories of how Xu Qing had acted in the past. In their hearts, they believed that someone with a cultivation base as low as his couldn't possibly be the governor. But after seeing that sword fall from the sky, such doubts were shattered.

It just made Xu Qing seem more mysterious. And then there was the way Twelfth Prince treated Xu Qing. That made them even more curious. Xu Qing didn't refuse the honor. He knew what kind of a responsibility it was to be the governor, and he was ready to accept it. After taking his rightful place in the Governor's Mansion, he issued a string of dharmic decrees.

First: everyone in the county was to prepare for war.

Second: the taboo treasures were to be kept active.

Further orders were given, sending swordsages out to quell the unrest in the county. And preparations needed to be made for the arrival of Seventh Prince and King Heaventide.

Sea-Sealing County had been in a state of confusion. But the new orders brought life back to the county, and unified the hearts of the masses.

The great bird Qingqin chose to leave seclusion. That night, he soared in the sky above the county capital, where he looked down at the Governor's Mansion and let loose a long, crisp call.

“CAAAAWWWWW!”