

## Timescape 721

### Chapter 721: The Blessing of Becoming an Immortal

In Sea-Sealing County's county capital, security was very tight on the Governor's Mansion in the very center of the city. Swordsages stood guard, but they weren't alone. There was an entire contingent of the city guard specifically assigned to the Governor's Mansion as well.

The mansion itself existed in two states. The first state was the part visible plainly in the outside world. But that was only one of the eight majestic palaces that made up the mansion complex. The rest was in a void world.

Teleportation into that void was controlled by the Governor's Medallion. At that moment, Xu Qing stood in a building in the Governor's Mansion, looking at a command medallion. On one side of the medallion were the characters Sea-Sealing, while the other side was a map of the county. This was Sea-Sealing County's Governor's Medallion.

Xu Qing wasn't alone. Marquis Yao and Master Seventh were both present, and they were currently playing a game of Go. The Captain stood obediently at Master Seventh's side, watching the game and looking for opportunities to flatter his Master.

"I already removed my personal branding mark from the Governor's Medallion," Marquis Yao said as he picked up a game piece. "All you have to do is send some divine will inside, and it'll be yours."

"Xu Qing's still young," Master Seventh said. "Don't rush him, Marquis Yao. Sea-Sealing County still has us around." Smiling, he put a piece down onto the board.

As soon as the piece clicked down, the Captain's eyes widened. "Well-played! Very well-played! Master, you're truly incredible. Even in my dreams I could never have come up with a move like that. Amazing! Completely amazing! I'm going to remember this move!"

Master Seventh's eyes widened into a glare and he snorted coldly, a clear sign that he didn't like flattery. That said, his eyes glittered with approval, and he felt wonderful inside.

Marquis Yao cast an expressionless glance at the Captain, then ignored him.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing sent some divine will into the command medallion. At roughly the same time, Master Seventh looked outside into the dome of heaven. Marquis Yao's expression flickered as he did the same. So did Xu Qing and the Captain.

Outside, clouds seethed in the night sky as the great bird Qingqin appeared. He made a few excited cawing sounds that echoed out in all directions.

Master Seventh's lips twitched. "This Qingqin.... Xu Qing, while you were gone, the bird remained in hiding. But he flew back out as soon as you came back."

Xu Qing looked out at, smiled, and clasped his hands in a respectful bow. Harnessing the daybreak light within him, he sent it glittering out to cover him. That made Qingqin even happier, as he also harnessed his life essence light and sent it shining out. After circling over the county capital a few times, he went back up into the clouds to hide.

After Qingqin vanished from view, the night became very still. Inside the building, Marquis Yao carefully placed a piece onto the board.

“Erniu,” he said, “what did you accomplish in Moonrite?”

The Captain cleared his throat. “Noble Marquis, you want to know what I accomplished in the Moonrite Region? Well, I just did a few minor things. For example, I took Little Ah Qing to the red moon to look around, and also casually summoned that son of a bitch broken face. After hē opened hīs eyes and looked at that shrew Crimson Mother, shē died. Oh, I reunited with my ex-wife, and also made some new friends.”

The Captain’s tone of voice remained very relaxed as he related some heaven-shaking, earth-shattering matters.

Master Seventh’s eyes narrowed, but he didn’t speak.

Meanwhile, Marquis Yao’s eyelids twitched briefly, and he said nothing for a long moment. When he did speak, he changed the subject. “The god of the Nightshades, Crimson Mother, will shē... come back to life?”

The Captain thumped himself on the chest. “There’s no way! Shē was completely and utterly destroyed. From here on out, the gods do not include Crimson Mother!”

Marquis Yao looked deeply at the Captain, then turned to Xu Qing.

Sensing the look, Xu Qing nodded. “Crimson Mother has indeed perished.”

Marquis Yao’s hand trembled slightly.

Marquis Yao was hesitant to believe things that the Captain said, but his attitude was different with Xu Qing. It was a struggle to control the shock he felt in his heart. He didn’t know how the Captain and Xu Qing had accomplished such an impossible task, nor was he inclined to inquire. Everyone had their secrets, and prying too deeply wasn’t appropriate. Besides, he already had come up with an idea of what might have gone on in Moonrite. Whether it was the ship named Jicang, or the fight in which Xu Qing called for ‘Grandpa Ninth,’ it gave plenty of food for thought.

Struggling to maintain his composure, Marquis Yao stood. “It’s late. I don’t want to interfere with this reunion between Master and apprentices.”

With that, Marquis Yao turned and walked off. Some distance away, he vanished from the Governor’s Mansion and materialized in Yao Mansion.

Once there, he looked back in the direction of the Governor’s Mansion.

*Someone who can produce two apprentices like that can’t possibly be some ordinary Master. Master and apprentices alike are anything but simple. And that’s a good thing for Sea-Sealing County.*

Thinking back to the news he had just heard about the Moonrite Region, his heart pounded.

*There are a lot of unknowns. There must have been someone behind the scenes pulling the strings. Otherwise, things wouldn’t have gone so smoothly.*

Back in the Governor's Mansion, Master Seventh was alone with Xu Qing and the Captain. Now that there was no one else present, Master Seventh's expression turned grim and he cast a glare at the Captain.

“You think you're ready to spread your wings? If you want to go around acting suicidal, that's your thing. But do you need to drag your little Junior Brother along to die?”

Xu Qing opened his mouth to defend the Captain, but Master Seventh interrupted him.

“Fourth Sib, I know you're a kind person. But this time, your Eldest Brother acted far too impulsively. Entities like Crimson Mother are not to be taken lightly, especially to people with cultivation bases like the two of you. And you went alone! If you run off like that again, and make even the slightest mistake, you'll end up killed in body and soul! There won't be anyone there to save you!”

Master Seventh's tone of voice caused Xu Qing to shiver inwardly. As of now, he didn't dare to step in for his Eldest Brother. That said, he got the impression that his Master's concern was only partly over himself and his Eldest Brother. The other aspect seemed to be... that Master Seventh was irritated they hadn't brought him along as well.

The Captain shivered as he suddenly got a very bad feeling. He dropped to his knees.

“Master, I missed you so much!” he wailed fawningly.

Master Seventh snorted coldly.

Seeing that, the Captain blinked a few times. Eyes bloodshot, he lowered his voice and said, “Master, my little Junior Brother and I actually had another goal in the Moonrite Region. And that was to prepare a birthday gift for you. That's why we couldn't bring you with us. We wanted the gift to be a surprise, of course!” [1]

With that, the Captain suddenly produced... two fleshy feathers.

Worried that Xu Qing might blurt out too many truthful details, he quickly continued, “My little Junior Brother and I managed to get four feathers in total. We each took one, and left the final two for you, Master, as a filial expression of birthday well-wishes. Master, we would like to offer you congratulations early. We hereby hope your longevity matches heaven, and that you receive the blessing of becoming an immortal!”

Master Seventh didn't even look at the two feathers as he continued to glare at the Captain. He was very familiar with how his apprentice operated, and knew full well that two mere feathers could only be a drop of water in the ocean compared to whatever other loot he acquired.

Seeing the look in his Master's eyes, the Captain cleared his throat.

“Master, we weren't alone earlier, so it wasn't convenient to go into much detail about what happened. But rest assured, my little Junior Brother and I accomplished some big things in the Moonrite Region. The most important of all

is that, as we always do when we accomplish big things, we made sure to boost our Master's divine reputation!"

"Oh?" Master Seventh said.

The Captain could sense his Master's tone of voice softening, so he quickly kept on speaking. "First, we made it very clear that our Master was the one who made sure Crimson Mother was asleep. After making sure your banner was hoisted high for all to see, we woke up the Heir Apparent and his brothers and sisters.

"We told them that our Master is unparalleled under heaven, and that he not only put Crimson Mother to sleep so deeply she couldn't wake up, but also, he had sent us on a secret mission to destroy Crimson Mother. Master, you might not have been there, but your name turned out to be our biggest safeguard.

"Am I right, little Ah Qing?"

Xu Qing nodded and earnestly said, "Master, the Heir Apparent gave us a message to pass along to you now that we're back."

With that, Xu Qing took a golden jade slip out of his bag of holding and respectfully offered it to Master Seventh.

On the way back, both Xu Qing and the Captain had closely examined that jade slip, only to find it was impossible to pry into the contents without destroying it.

Expression neutral, Master Seventh accepted the jade slip.

Xu Qing and the Captain had been unable to open it, but he opened it with complete ease. After checking the contents, Master Seventh looked surprised. Then his gaze softened, until he finally revealed a look of pride.

When Xu Qing and the Captain saw that, they breathed sighs of relief.

The Captain even crawled over to Master Seventh's side and quietly said, "Master, in the end, little Ah Qing and I managed to unify the Moonrite Region. We even summoned Imperial Sovereign Li Zihua. I invited a High God to help us, and the amazing little Ah Qing also invited one."

Xu Qing refrained from adding anything.

The Captain blinked a few times and continued, "Ultimately, a past version of Li Zihua stepped through time, sacrificed himself, and caused the broken face's eyes to open. The red moon became a god world, and disappeared from Revered Ancient!

"Master, things went very smoothly because of Li Zihua.... Although it seemed like the two of us made everything happen, the reality is that in researching every step of the plan, I found evidence of Li Zihua's hand. I actually made a deal with him in the past, and got a similar feeling. It was like... he was waiting for me this whole time."

The Captain's expression looked very serious.

It was Xu Qing's first time hearing the Captain talk like this, and it was very thought-provoking.

Master Seventh put the jade slip away and didn't ask any more questions. He took the two feathers, then suddenly reached toward the Captain and made a grasping gesture.

The Captain shivered as a blue scepter emerged from his forehead and flew over to Master Seventh's hand.

Next, Master Seventh looked at Xu Qing and made another grasping gesture. The Spike of Misfortune flew out and landed in Master Seventh's hand.

"I'm going to take these feathers and integrate them into your weapons. It will push them to a higher level, and will also benefit the spirit automatons." Having said that, Master Seventh stood. "Alright, I'm leaving now. Going forward, you two, remember that when you go on big jobs, you have to be careful. Don't be impulsive!"

With a final cold harrumph, Master Seventh turned, walked off, and vanished into thin air.

When he materialized, he was in the Lieutenant Governor's Mansion. He was alone there, and it was very quiet. Standing with his hands clasped behind his back, he looked up into the dome of heaven.

After a while, the wind blew, stirring his hair and robes, and making him feel like he might drift away with the breeze. A very complex expression finally overtook Master Seventh's face. It almost seemed like he wasn't even looking at the canopy of heaven over Revered Ancient, but rather, the endless starry sky beyond it.

"Li Zihua did it..." Master Seventh murmured.

Chapter 722: As Moonlight Falls, She Arrives

The dim light of night stirred in the wind. That wind blew across the lands, sweeping through the buildings of the county capital, whimpering as it kicked up bits of dust. It stirred the hem of Master Seventh's garment as it continued on its way to the Governor's Mansion.

There, it caused Xu Qing's hair to sway. Xu Qing looked out into the night, his heart calm. It was a type of calm he hadn't been able to experience in the Moonrite Region. After everything he had experienced in Sea-Sealing County over the years, the place was largely his hometown. He felt like he had come home, and that put him at ease. Of course, as usual, there was a voice that penetrated that calm.

"Little Ah Qing, what was that thing you gave the old man that you claimed was a jade slip from the Heir Apparent?" The Captain seemed very curious. "I noticed just now that when he looked at it, he smiled like a blooming chrysanthemum...."

Xu Qing couldn't help but clear his throat and instinctively scan the surroundings.

The Captain waved his hand complacently. "You don't need to check anything. The old man isn't here. If I was to guess, I would imagine that the jade slip probably contained praise for the old man from the Heir Apparent. Given how well I know the old man, that would definitely explain why he looked so pleased. How shallow! How oh so very shallow!"

The Captain shook his head in a very disapproving manner.

Xu Qing didn't say anything, and was convinced he shouldn't weigh in at all on this topic. After all... if their Master was around and heard....

The Captain clearly didn't feel the same way, as he lowered his voice and prepared to elaborate on his opinions. However, that was when Xu Qing suddenly detected a very familiar aroma drifting inside along with the wind.

Along with that fragrant aroma came a slim, refined figure, who approached the building with graceful steps. She wore a long white gown, and was flawlessly beautiful, with flowing black hair that danced in the wind and eyebrows like crescent moons. Her lovely eyes, straight nose, and tender cheeks made her immaculately attractive. As she neared, moonlight faded. Her skin seemed so fair the wind might make it shatter, and would cause anyone who looked at her to be lost and unable to break free.

There weren't very many people who could enter the Governor's Mansion unannounced. Master Seventh was one and Marquis Yao was another. Other than those two, there was only one other. Plumdark. Her arrival seemed to brighten the building. It was as if the moonlight was automatically drawn to her presence.

Xu Qing's heart started to race.

As for the Captain, he blinked a few times and, thinking about Ling'er and the clay fox, started to do a bit of analysis.

Ling'er is pure and simple. The clay fox is slutty and coquettish. Plumdark is elegant and flirtatious.... Who else is there? Oh right, that psycho Yanyan. And of course Ding Xue, who's dead set on winning Xu Qing. And how could I forget Qing Qiu?

With such thoughts on his mind, the Captain sighed as he came to the realization that all of those women were beautiful and had their own merits. A prickle of jealousy suddenly appeared in his heart.

Now that I think about it, though, little Ah Qing is actually in a bad position with so many tigresses focused on him. It must be so stressful! Exhausting! The slightest mistake could end up in a hellish slaughter!

I'm different. I'm free! Unrestrained and unfettered. Only I can enjoy the winds of freedom. Only I can soar to the highest heights in heaven and earth. Here in Revered Ancient, neither the lowest mortal nor the highest god could ever put shackles on a noble figure like myself. I will be free forever and ever!

The Captain was really feeling proud of himself, and marveled at his own virtuous way of thinking. He cleared his throat. The more he convinced himself of how virtuous he was, the more he realized that his way of thinking was correct. Heart swelling with pride, he looked down his nose at Xu Qing. His gaze contained compassion, as well as a gleam of wisdom regarding his understanding of life. In fact, he was just about to explain his most recent enlightenment to Xu Qing when Plumdark's voice reached his ears.

"Erniu. Li Shitao wants to see you."

The moment the words left Plumdark's mouth, the Captain's eyes went wide. He looked like a blooming flower as his heart started racing. "Lady Peachy wants to see me right now? In the middle of the night?"

The Captain licked his lips excitedly. As of that moment, thoughts of enlightenment, virtue, and freedom didn't seem very important. Looking like a fire had been lit within him, he hurried away, having completely forgotten about his analysis of Xu Qing. As far as he was concerned, meddling in the affairs of others wasn't nearly as entertaining as his Lady Peachy. As he rushed off, he took out a peach and helped himself to a bite.

I'm on my way, Peachy!

Xu Qing watched the Captain disappear, unsure of what to say. Nor was he in the mood to pay much attention to the Captain. His heart was currently racing as Plumdark slowly walked up to him.

Xu Qing had grown up a lot... but in the presence of Plumdark, he acted just the same as he always had. He stepped back. Then back again. Eventually he reached the edge of the room and couldn't go back any further. Steeling himself, he clasped hands.

"Greetings, Arch-Immortal."

Laughing softly, Plumdark approached, until she was standing right in front of him.... Her sweet fragrance filled the building, entering Xu Qing's mind and heart. The wind couldn't dispel it.

As she looked into his eyes, it seemed like time froze. His mind went blank, and he felt incapable of moving. He had never felt this way around Ling'er, and wasn't even sure why he always reacted this way around Plumdark.

"Turn around," she said softly.

Xu Qing turned so his back was to Plumdark.

Plumdark smiled gently. Reaching out with her delicate hands, she collected Xu Qing's hair together and bound it with a headband. Once it was in a ponytail, she took a moment to make a few adjustments.

It felt strange to Xu Qing. However, if any other person had been there to look at him, they would have been stunned. This hairstyle was perfectly suited to Xu Qing, as it accentuated his handsome features and also made him seem more carefree and uninhibited.

"That looks good." She stepped to his side and looked with him off into the night.

The falling moonlight cast their shadows long behind him. It was a beautiful night. The building was quiet.

Then Plumdark quietly asked Xu Qing about how things went in the Moonrite Region. Gradually calming down, he started telling the story. She listened intently, occasionally turning to look at him. She didn't seem even slightly distracted. Time passed. It was very reminiscent of the time the two of them went out on their own traveling.[1]

For some reason, Xu Qing gradually started to feel even more comfortable. As the night grew deep, he got to the end of the story about the events in Moonrite Region.

Next, Plumdark told him about what had happened in Sea-Sealing County while he was gone. “I’ve been focused mostly on the Green Dark Sect. With your Master and Marquis Yao here to run Sea-Sealing County, things were getting back to normal. If only King Heaventide hadn’t shown up, your return would have been quite an amazing event. All of the initial work in setting up the Green Dark Sect is done. It’s already established a bit of a reputation in Sea-Sealing County.

“Incidentally, your Master and Marquis Yao opened up Forbidden by the Immortal again. Since there’s no god there, the mutagen levels have dropped, and a lot of ancient records and other items have appeared. Sea-Sealing County’s reserve powers are going to grow. As for me... I went into Forbidden by the Immortal a few times.”

Plumdark looked at Xu Qing, and the wind caused a few strands of her hair to brush against his face. His heart raced. “There are some very special ruins in there.... I could sense them calling to me.”

Confusion appeared in Plumdark’s eyes. She had been ruminating on this issue for a while, and hadn’t spoken about it to anyone. But today, in front of Xu Qing, she was talking about it openly.

Her voice very low, she said, “Xu Qing, do you still remember how I talked about a dream I keep having? Those ruins give me the same feeling that I experience in that dream. It’s like I was actually in that place a very, very long time ago. I can’t be sure though.... Sadly, they’re nothing but ruins now.”

Looking at how confused Plumdark appeared to be, Xu Qing thought back to the dream she had mentioned. Then he thought about Forbidden by the Immortal. That said, he hadn’t been to very many places in Forbidden by the Immortal, and wasn’t sure which one Plumdark was referring to.  
[2]

After all, Forbidden by the Immortal was full of ruins. That said, he did remember that phoenix-like temple where he had acquired the timescape bottle. Although the memories didn’t contain anything specifically related to Plumdark, he did remember that when he put that timescape bottle into his twelfth heavenly palace, he had briefly heard a sigh that sounded somewhat like her.[3]

His heart skipped a beat, and he was about to ask something when Plumdark started speaking again.

“While I was in those ruins, I found some evidence that indicated you had been there.”

Xu Qing’s pupils constricted. “I didn’t go to many places in Forbidden by the Immortal,” he said. “But there was one place that, the closer I got to it, the clearer it got. Eventually, it turned into a palace complex with nine palaces that resembled a phoenix. Upon walking away from it, it reverts to a bunch of ruins.

“I lost three days of memories while I was there, but I ended up getting a timescape bottle. Afterward, the place really did turn into ruins. If you found evidence that I’d been there, then I’d say it’s highly likely the ruins you just mentioned are the same place I went.”



Xu Qing waved his hand, causing a god trove to appear behind him. The timescape bottle within it slowly floated out toward Plumdark. A sensation of time spread out that would immediately attract the attention of anyone present. Light shimmered from it, mixing with the moonlight to make everything even more beautiful.

As it shone on Plumdark's face, her eyes glistened and her eyelashes quivered. Her feelings finally shone through her fair skin, causing it to turn slightly pink. Her lips glistened like dew on roses.

A long moment passed, after which she exhaled softly. Looking away from the timescape bottle and into Xu Qing's eyes, she said, "Shall we take a trip there together?"

Chapter 723: Together We Open, Our Hearts in Unison

Forbidden by the Immortal, which was located in the depths beneath the old Corrections Division, was one of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity's old palaces. There were other such locations throughout Revered Ancient, and in the ancient past, every single one of them was considered a holy palace. Only the imperial clan was allowed inside.

Forbidden by the Immortal was the only such palace located in the Holytide Region. After the broken face of the god arrived, and Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity left, it became the resting place of the fish skeleton god. That was when the imperial clan's Immortal Estate became Forbidden by the Immortal.

The many treasures inside became completely inundated with mutagen. Neither mortals nor cultivators could get inside easily. Later, Emperor Eastglory didn't want to risk starting a war with the god inside, and thus kept the place sealed.

Some years ago, the reigning emperor ordered Forbidden by the Immortal to be opened. That was when Crimson Mother awoke in the form of Zhang Siyun to devour the god inside. After that event, humans once again had full control of Forbidden by the Immortal. It was only natural that, after Sea-Sealing County gained autonomy, they decided to explore the place. Although the majority of the treasures inside had been taken away by Seventh Prince, there were still some left behind that were extremely valuable.

Xu Qing and Plumdark currently stood at a formation located beneath the old Corrections Division that formed the entrance to the place.

There was no way Xu Qing could have refused Plumdark's offer. That was especially true considering he really wanted to know why that timescape bottle had a familiar sigh inside. The sigh almost didn't seem real, but as Xu Qing thought back to that moment, he was certain he had heard correctly.

What was most relevant was the fact that he had lost three days of memories there. Even now, his memories of that phoenix-shaped temple complex weren't very clear. Everything seemed to revolve around the timescape bottle. It was a very thought-provoking sensation. After everything he experienced in the Moonrite Region, especially gaining enlightenment of the will domain of amnesia, he had a much better understanding of memory.

I must have encountered something there that was too much for me to actually look at, and therefore, I don't remember it.

He told everything he knew to Plumdark along the way. Upon arriving, they didn't hesitate at all to drop down. A moment later, a majestic underground palace appeared below them.

It looked a bit different than the last time Xu Qing saw it. Back then, the mutagen was so dense it was like a mist that distorted everything around it, and most of the ground had been covered by creeping flesh. As of now, the mutagen was ninety percent gone, and the ground didn't have any of that flesh covering it. That said, there were few palace structures that were whole. Most had collapsed. The sensation of ancient time filled the entire place. There were numerous pillars that loomed over the landscape, casting out brilliant light to illuminate everything.

Apparently Plumdark had been here on more than just a few occasions, as she knew her way around very well. Taking a deep breath, she headed in one specific direction, and Xu Qing kept pace. They moved quickly. Before long, a crumbled section of ruins appeared up ahead.

“This is the place,” Plumdark said softly.

Xu Qing's heart was already pounding. This was definitely the place where he'd acquired the timescape bottle. After looking around, he walked forward without saying a word. He approached until he was standing right in front of the ruins. The strange effect he had discovered on his first visit didn't occur again.

After I took the timescape bottle, the effect went away. It doesn't transform as you get closer. It's an actual ruin now.

Looking at the crumbling walls, he felt a sense of familiarity and a sense of unfamiliarity, both at the same time. Within the familiarity, there was unfamiliarity. And within the unfamiliarity, there was familiarity. More than ever, he got the feeling that his memories had been altered. Eventually, he recalled how the stone lion and the head retrieved the timescape bottle.

He looked back at Plumdark. She stood a short distance away, her garments whiter than snow, her features beautiful but somewhat cold. Her eyes were like black jade, within which swirled a mist of confusion. She seemed extremely lonely.

Xu Qing's heart thumped. A long moment passed.

“Plumdark.” This time, he didn't use the title Arch-Immortal.

She slowly turned to look at him.

“This is where I got the timescape bottle. I'm not sure what will happen if I put the bottle back in its spot. Maybe my memories will be affected again. Are you sure you want to find out why this place is familiar to you? Is it possible the only reason you feel that way is because of that dream? What if you *wanted* to forget about everything from the past?”

Plumdark didn't seem sure how to respond at first. Eventually, she tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and looked at Xu Qing with eyes that glistened like the deep waters of a lake. “The dream has been bothering me for years. I want to know... what exactly that lamp has to do with me.”

Xu Qing closed his eyes. A moment later, his god trove rumbled as the timescape bottle flew out from it, drifted over, and landed on the spot where it had once been. The moment it touched the

ground, the bottle trembled and emitted a field of dazzling light that illuminated the surrounding ruins. Instantly, everything blurred.

Phoenix-like palaces with bright red walls rose up. A courtyard formed. And there was one palace that was larger than all the others, which formed the center-most palace. There were a total of nine palaces.

As Xu Qing looked at the scene, splitting pain filled his head. It was as if what he was seeing was awakening a memory within his sea of consciousness.

Plumdark trembled as she looked at the big phoenix palace and everything around it. Her heart was racing.

“I’ve been here before...” Plumdark murmured. “I came here in my dream....”

She walked forward slowly, passing the other palaces as she walked toward the large, central palace. In front of it, she stopped and looked back at Xu Qing.

Speaking in a tremulous voice, she said, “I think... I used to live here once.”

The biggest secret in her life was that recurring dream of darkness. Because of that dream, she had always been seeking light, in the hopes that it would drive the darkness away and bring warmth. And now, it seemed that the source of that dream was right in front of her. Yet for some reason, all she felt was sadness building up within her. The sadness got stronger and stronger, turning into a deep loneliness that threatened to overwhelm her.

Her words struck Xu Qing to the core. His gaze shifted from her to the big palace, and all of a sudden, it was like a lightning bolt flashed through his mind, illuminating memories that had previously been erased. They were the lost three days of memories from this place.

Within those memories, Xu Qing saw himself walking through the entrance of that big palace. The memories of what lay inside were blank.

Xu Qing looked at Plumdark and saw that she was shaking physically. It was hard to take the sight of it. In his mind, Plumdark was emotional, but confident and peerlessly graceful. She took the initiative in things, and was definitely not the type of person you would use the word ‘weak’ to describe.

But right now, he was seeing a different side of Plumdark. She was like a little girl, trembling in anxiety, nervousness, and fear. What was more, she seemed profoundly lonely.

Xu Qing walked to her side, reached out, and took her delicate hand in his, using the warmth of his body to dispel the icy cold in her.

She turned to look at him, tears in her eyes. She squeezed his hand like a drowning person clinging to life. In fact, she squeezed so hard that her hand turned white, and she didn’t give any sign that she wanted to let go.

After a long moment passed, she took in a shaky breath and then forced a smile onto her face.

“Forgive me for being so rude.”

He shook his head. He didn't release her hand.

Plumdark closed her eyes for several breaths of time. When she opened them, all signs of weakness were gone. She seemed determined. And with that, she put her hand on the door to push it open.

Xu Qing reached out with his other hand and put it on the door next to hers.

“Together,” he said.

Heart racing, she looked at him. He looked back at her. Finally, they pushed it open together, and a loud creaking noise filled the courtyard as the door opened.

The dark, inky interior swallowed them up.

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What had once been the capital city of Emperor Heavengale in the Holytide Region now belonged to Seventh Prince. He had made the place his government headquarters, and it was now full of his countless subordinates. In addition to his personal attendants, there were also many people present from his mother's clan. That, coupled with the godly might of King Heaventide, ensured that there was no other place like this in the Holytide Region. It really was just like a personal fiefdom.

Even Grand Duke Holytide had to back down in the face of King Heaventide. Although it wasn't a case of outright servitude, the relationship between the two was very peaceful.

The only thorn in Seventh Prince's side was Sea-Sealing County. It had once been a random county that Seventh Prince didn't care much about. But Sea-Sealing was different now. That was the place where he had suffered his first major setback. That was the place where a person named Xu Qing was from.

Because of that, Seventh Prince had been paying very close attention to Sea-Sealing County during the conscription efforts. Everything had been going according to plan; the county had slowly been fractured, making it ripe for invasion.

As the Nightshade war went on, Sea-Sealing County had been put into the position to either acknowledge allegiance or be crushed.

When the conscription forces there were routed, Seventh Prince was surprised, but at the same time, not very surprised. Because information was locked down, he didn't know the details of what happened to the armed forces he had sent there. That was what he found surprising. Obviously, Sea-Sealing County had been holding reserve powers in secret this whole time. What wasn't surprising was the choice made by the county. He had predicted all along that something like this might play out. Therefore, when he received news that his army had disappeared without a trace, he ordered his subordinates to pass the news on to King Heaventide. Then he looked outside of his palace.

There were two people there waiting for an audience, dressed in scholarly fashion. One of them was the president of the Eight Sect Coalition.

“Sir Dust-Sun!” Seventh Prince said in a cool voice.

The president immediately bowed at the waist and stepped into the palace. There, he clasped hands reverently. “Here, sir!”

Fiddling with a jade slip, Seventh Prince continued, “You can go ahead and fetch that cauldron you mentioned from Sea-Sealing County. I’m curious to see if it’s as profound as you claim.”

Sir Dust-Sun wasn’t eager to comply, but at the same time, felt somewhat relieved. Smiling, he bowed again.

“Yes, sir!”

#### Chapter 724: Reaching Out to the Sun

After that final bow, Sir Dust-Sun respectfully left. It wasn’t lost on him that Seventh Prince had actually been watching him closely the entire time. That was why he hadn’t made any effort to conceal his reactions. Whether it was his reluctance, or his feelings of relief, he allowed them all to show plainly on his face.

After he was out of the palace and some distance away, he straightened up, smiled, and headed in the direction of his residence. Along the way, he would call out friendly greetings to people he recognized.

He didn’t use his second-stage Void Returning cultivation base as a reason to be arrogant. From beginning to end, he carried himself in a gentle and refined manner. Once inside his residence, he lit some incense, then sat down at his Go board to play a casual game with himself. If you looked closely at his eyes through the swirling smoke of the incense, you would see something innately sinister. It was like a viper hidden in the belly of a sheep!

The first day I came, I mentioned the cauldron issue with Seventh Prince. Back then, he didn’t seem to care.... But today, he suddenly summoned me and brought it up again....

Sir Dust-Sun smiled warmly. That was an instinct of his. Whenever he pondered tricky situations he would always smile.

The High Commander and his army, along with Soaring Cloud... went missing in Sea-Sealing County. And now, Seventh Prince wants me to go get the cauldron....

His smile became even warmer, and the sinister look in his eyes became even more deeply hidden.

He was fully aware that Seventh Prince was no simpleton. The prince was young, but he was born into the imperial clan, and as a result, had learned from a young age how to be a profound schemer. In other words, there were always going to be layers hidden beneath layers.

On the surface, it seems like he wants me to get the cauldron. But the reality is that I’m just a pawn. He’s using me to probe Sea-Sealing County and see what’s really going on there. He hopes to use me to figure out what happened to his missing army. As for him, he puts himself in the position to either attack, retreat, or defend at will. And if something happens to me, he can claim that I was acting on my own.

Sir Dust-Sun smiled and picked up a game piece. Then, though he didn’t actually make a move, two pieces appeared on the board in front of him.

Although that might not seem impressive, if another Void Returning expert had been present, they would have been shocked. That was because that simple action contained magical laws so sublime in their usage that they surpassed the level of Transform 10,000 Veracities.

The Void Returning level consisted of the following stages: Space-Shattering 1,000 Daos; Transform 10,000 Veracities; 100,000,000 Thoughts Split Heaven; 1,000,000,000 Magics Combined.

“I really like the number three,” Sir Dust-Sun murmured with a warm smile.

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Back in Sea-Sealing County, in the underground Forbidden by the Immortal, the door of the large phoenix palace opened. As it did, darkness swallowed up everything. It wasn't just the physical forms of Xu Qing and Plumdark that were engulfed. Their minds were also made one with the darkness. Then, they saw a scene playing out that they had no way to confirm the reality of.

The hall was spacious, and also as empty and cold as a dungeon. In the middle of it was a statue. It depicted a middle-aged woman who resembled Plumdark to a degree, but obviously wasn't her. The woman's features were elegant, and she was smiling faintly. Her eyes seemed merciful, and she had crow's feet visible at the corners of her eyes. She was looking down at her hands in front of her.

In her hands she held a lamp.

The lamp seemed to be an incredibly valuable treasure to her. Perhaps the most valuable. It was made of violet stone, and resembled a blooming baubinia flower. Resting atop the flower was a violet phoenix with its wings spread. It was very life-like.

Upon seeing the lamp, Xu Qing's mind reeled as his lost memories suddenly returned. He turned to look at Plumdark, all while thinking back to the images he had seen that related to her. He remembered seeing a young woman standing in front of this statue that looked exactly like Plumdark. He also remembered the door opening and a man walking in. He remembered them talking. That man... was Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity's son! All of that entered Xu Qing's mind, becoming like a lightning bolt that smashed into his psyche.

Meanwhile, Plumdark trembled as she looked at the statue. Her expression was one of sorrow as she released Xu Qing's hand and murmured, “In my dream, everything is dark except for a lamp. It's extinguished, but I imagine that it looks like a blooming baubinia, with a violet phoenix resting atop it. This is the same lamp from my dream. My dark, lightless dream. The world of the dream is this place.”

Plumdark's voice seemed somehow empty, as though it were being projected into this life from countless years in the past. She walked forward to stand in front of the statue. At the same time, the version of Plumdark that Xu Qing remembered seeing... suddenly appeared.

She was an illusion, and she was currently standing in the same spot as the real Plumdark, so the two were superimposed. She looked at the statue, her eyes full of both admiration and bitterness.

The same scene played out that Xu Qing remembered. The imperial prince appeared, walking through Xu Qing to stand in front of Plumdark. He wore an imperial robe with a four-clawed dragon on it, and an imperial crown with nine pearls. Overall, he seemed impressive and mighty.

The imperial prince said something, but Xu Qing couldn't hear it. All he could see was Plumdark looking out at the world beyond the palace, her eyes full of sorrow and the reluctance to part.

This time, something different happened compared to last time. He could hear Plumdark speaking.

“I’m not leaving!” she said furiously. “Father is making the wrong decision. He’s abandoning the people and abandoning our home. He’s turning the heaven beyond heaven into a holy land. But what’s the point of living out there all alone? He’s turning a blind eye to the catastrophe striking Revered Ancient all just to save his own life? He... doesn’t even deserve to be an Ancient Emperor!”

Her words caused Xu Qing’s heart to pound.

After a long moment passed, the imperial prince reached out, as if making one final attempt to convince her. Plumdark decisively shook her head. In the end, the desolate prince took out a violet bottle and used it to place a few drops of liquid onto the lamp in the hands of the statue. Depositing the bottle on the ground off to the side, he turned and left, his face a mask of sorrow and bitterness.

He left, walking through Xu Qing, and then making his way off into the distance.

After he was gone, the doors of the hall slowly closed. The palace was completely and utterly silent. However, the flame in the lamp burned, issuing a soft hissing sound as it illuminated the palace hall.

It also illuminated the sorrowful face of Plumdark as she approached the statue, knelt in front of it, and wept silently.

This was where Xu Qing’s memories stopped. However, there were more events playing out now.

Time didn’t seem to have any meaning in this palace. It slipped by silently, until anguished wailing could be heard outside. Blood-colored light spread everywhere. People screamed for help.

Plumdark stood. A suit of armor appeared on her as she strode through Xu Qing and out of the palace.

Xu Qing couldn’t do anything other than watch. Time passed, and the sounds from outside faded away. Plumdark appeared again. She looked exhausted and weak as she trudged back into the palace. Her armor was battered and mostly broken. She was covered in wounds. But she had the head of a fish in her hands. The moment Xu Qing saw it, he realized it was the head of the god that had been sleeping in Forbidden by the Immortal.

Holding the head, Plumdark walked back up to the statue. Her face was ashen, but her expression was tender.

“Mother,” she said softly, “all I could do was behead the outsider god once. Years from now, hē’ll awaken here. That said, when hē does, hē’ll no longer have the personhood of a High God. What’s more, I used the curse you taught me to make sure that hē’ll die the same brutal death again in the future. Sadly... I won’t be here to see it.”

Plumdark wanted to pick up the violet bottle and use it to add some oil to the lamp. Unfortunately, she was too weak. In the end, all she could do was slump down in front of the statue and close her eyes. Her spiritual souls took flight. Her physical souls dissipated. The lamp continued to burn, but without any oil added to it, the flames dimmed and eventually winked out. The palace once again became pitch black. With the fire gone, the cold returned. Darkness devoured everything.

Time passed. Years and years went by. After an indeterminable amount of time in Forbidden by the Immortal, everything suddenly trembled. A will of awakening appeared, joined by the howl of a god. Flesh appeared in Forbidden by the Immortal, spreading out, covering all the palaces.

More time passed. A lot of it. One day, in the darkness of that palace, in front of the statue, a violet circle of light appeared. The moment it did, an intense rumbling filled Forbidden by the Immortal.

A roar of rage echoed out, along with a terrifying divine will that filled the depths of the place. As the divine will swept out, a hand reached out of the violet circle of light. It grabbed the extinguished lamp and dragged it into the circle. The hand wanted to grab the violet bottle, but didn't have time, as the divine will of the god arrived with mountain-toppling, sea-draining force. It slammed into the circle and the hand.

The circle shattered, becoming innumerable fragments that dissipated into the air. The hand shivered, and though it kept its grip on the lamp, the wick fell off and disappeared into nowhere.

Everything ended.

Xu Qing's vision ceased. Everything vanished, including the palace and the statue.

The entire area became ruins once again. Like a dream.

With the dream over, everything was gone except for Plumdark, standing there in the ruins, like a lone plum in a snowy ravine. It didn't matter whether or not there was someone else present looking at her. She looked like the picture of loneliness as she looked up into the sky, her expression desolate.

After a long time, she said, "Let's go."

Xu Qing walked over to her. And together, they left Forbidden by the Immortal. Neither of them spoke.

They had come when it was nighttime. When they emerged, it was daytime, several days later. The sky was azure, and the sun shone down brightly.

Xu Qing looked at Plumdark as she walked away forlornly.

"Plumdark," he said.

She stopped and looked back at him.

"Can I see your palm?"

As the sun shone down, she held out her hand. Every line and crease was visible. Like fate.

"Do you know what's in your palm?" Xu Qing asked.

Confused, she shook her head.

Looking into her eyes, he said, "Sunlight."

Her eyebrows fluttered as she looked at her palm. And then... she smiled.

Chapter 725: Past and Present in the County



*Spring has flowers, autumn has the moon. Summer has cool breezes, winter has the snow.* [1]

That saying was a perfect encapsulation of beauty. But right now, the sunlight outside the old Corrections Division seemed ordinary in nature. The only beauty present was a woman in a white garment, her dimples visible as she smiled.

Plumdark couldn't help but smile. Her face was slightly flushed, like a blooming peony. A gentle fire could be seen in the depths of her eyes as she looked deeply at Xu Qing. Then she turned and started walking away. After only taking about seven steps, though, she stopped and looked back at him.

“You've picked up some bad habits, Xu Qing.”

Xu Qing wasn't sure how to respond.

Seeing Xu Qing react that way caused her beautiful eyes to fill with tenderness. Her smile was like a crescent moon as the haze of emotion within her was cleared out, leaving her mind and heart clear. That change filled her, causing her to again seem completely elegant and refined. She once more was so beautiful that anyone who looked at her would experience feelings of inferiority. And she was so charming that anyone would feel drawn to her.

This was the Arch-Immortal Plumdark that Xu Qing remembered.

“Why are you just standing there?” she asked.

Xu Qing's heart once again started racing, and he quietly walked over to Plumdark's side. As she smiled, they returned to the city. Maybe it was the breeze, or maybe it was the emotion, but either way, a few strands of Plumdark's long, black hair drifted over to intermingle with Xu Qing's ponytail.

At the same time, Plumdark spoke in a soft voice. “Xu Qing, I don't remember that past life, not even after what just happened. So I'm not sure if my past life was as the daughter of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity, or as the wick of that lamp. If I had a choice, I would choose the latter. Therefore, let's just assume it is the latter. Okay? I can sense that lamp. It's... very far away. And based on the direction, I'd say it's probably in the Imperial Region. One day in the future, I'm going to go get it.”

“I'll help you!” Xu Qing said.

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Time passed. Over the following half-month, Xu Qing was very busy.

He had learned a lot when he was a swordsage, and he also had the help of Master Seventh and Marquis Yao. Unfortunately, Sea-Sealing County was a huge place, and there were constantly matters that the governor needed to attend to. There were many things that Xu Qing needed to learn.

For most of the half-month that passed, Xu Qing was immersed in official business, for instance, going through reports that came in from all over. At the moment, the palace lord of the Administration Palace was in the Governor's Mansion giving a report, along with some of the honor guards. After they left, Xu Qing picked up his cup of tea. However, he only managed to take a single sip before a swordsage entered.

The palace lord of the Justice Palace had come for an audience.

Xu Qing cleared his mind and then went out to personally receive the palace lord, who was an old woman. As the afternoon sun shone down, the palace lord arrived, led by a swordsguard, and accompanied by another woman.

This palace lord had previously been a deputy palace lord. She had plain features and a stalwart personality; she was a meticulous person. Xu Qing had seen her before, but wasn't very familiar with her. The moment he laid eyes on her, he couldn't help but think of the old palace lord of the Justice Palace, who had died in battle along with the palace lord of the Administration Palace. Bai Xiaozhuo had turned their corpses into puppets. After the Lieutenant Governor's Coup, those two puppets' soul remnants had been freed, and they had chosen to remain as reserve powers for Sea-Sealing County.

Sighing inside, Xu Qing somberly clasped hands and bowed to the palace lord. Xu Qing had a Spirit Trove cultivation base, and was also the governor. His act of bowing was a show of respect.

Seeing that, she hurried forward and returned his bow. "Greetings, Governor."

"Please, come in," Xu Qing said courteously, leading the way into the palace hall. As he sat down, he seemed to emanate a calm dignity, and his eyes glittered like starlight. That was the majesty of the governor. Not everyone could do that. What was more, Xu Qing wasn't doing it intentionally. It all came completely naturally.

Of course, Xu Qing hadn't been born like that. Rather, he had learned a lot from his experiences in the Moonrite Region. Not very many people had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with Smoldering Gods, much less save their lives. Besides, he was also one of the Archbishops of Moonrebel, and had participated in the battle with the godchild and the fight with Crimson Mother. How could someone who had beheaded gods possibly not be calm and dignified?

The palace lord was actually surprised. This was her first time personally meeting with Xu Qing, and it was turning out a bit different than she had expected. Seeing how calm he was caused her to shift her way of thinking in some regards. And thus, she went into her report about the latest work going on in the Justice Palace.

Xu Qing listened attentively. After the report was over, Xu Qing felt like he knew a lot more about the Justice Palace.

"Next, Governor, we'd like you to review our latest recruitment roster."

The palace lord looked at the woman standing next to her.

That woman was none other than Yao Yunhui. She was now an honor guard in the Justice Palace, and she worked closely with the palace lord. That was why she had come along on this formal visit to the governor. She had been nervous from the very beginning. She was no stranger to Xu Qing, and in fact, the very first conflict Xu Qing experienced upon arriving at Sea-Sealing County was all because of her. [2]

Never in her wildest dreams could she have guessed what would eventually happen in Sea-Sealing County. Xu Qing had risen to the highest heights, the point where she could only look up at him. She had mixed feelings regarding Xu Qing, and it was especially confusing to her that she always thought good things about Xu Qing.

When the palace lord indicated that she was to take action, Yao Yunhui took a deep breath, suppressed her complicated feelings, and respectfully held out a jade slip with both hands.

Xu Qing looked at Yao Yunhui.

Yao Yunhui had clearly taken time to put on makeup. Her lustrous black hair swayed behind her. She had delicately curved eyebrows, a straight nose, rosy cheeks, and lips like glistening cherries. Overall, she was extremely attractive. However, her expression was very serious, and she wore the official black-and-white daoist robe of the Justice Palace, which was a symbol of righteousness and made her seem even more solemn. However, the daoist robe couldn't hide her sensuous curves, and that contrast created a sensation of taboo beauty.

That said, Xu Qing wasn't affected by that. Taking the jade slip, he scanned it with divine sense.

Yao Yunhui struggled to deal with the complex feelings inside of her. As she looked at Xu Qing, her mind was in chaos.

Xu Qing, meanwhile, had no way of knowing what she was thinking. He was focused on the list of names in the jade slip.

The list contained the names of cultivators who had joined the Justice Palace over the past few years. Every month, thirty people were selected from various sects to become new members. The three palaces in Sea-Sealing County had the right to handle their own recruitment and training, but it was also customary to let the governor have a say.

After scanning the jade slip, Xu Qing was about to hand it back, when something caught his eye. About a year before, there was one particular month in which the Justice Palace didn't get thirty new members, but rather, twenty-nine. And there was one name in that list that Xu Qing recognized.

Ding Xue.

Looking at Yao Yunhui, Xu Qing asked, "Why was there one fewer recruit than normal last year in the seventh month?"

Yao Yunhui again suppressed any complicated feelings within herself. Thinking back to the month Xu Qing had asked about, she remembered that there were people from Seven Blood Eyes in the list. Given that, it made sense that he was asking about that specific month. After recalling the details of why they had one less recruit than normal, a strange look appeared on Yao Yunhui's face.

"Exalted Governor," she said, "in the seventh month of last year, we originally did have thirty recruits. One of them was named Zhao Zhongheng. He should have passed inspection with no problems. Unfortunately, in an attempt to be assigned to the same department as a female cultivator named Ding Xue, he was caught attempting to bribe one of the department managers. In fact, it was Ding Xue who reported him. As a result, Zhao Zhongheng was stripped of his qualifications.... To date, he's still in the probation period." [3]

Xu Qing shook his head. The moment he saw Ding Xue's name on that list, he had thought about Zhao Zhongheng. And to think that the trouble was all caused because Ding Xue reported him.... Xu Qing actually felt bad for Zhao Zhongheng. That said, it wasn't his place to interfere, so he handed the jade slip back to Yao Yunhui.

Then he discussed a few more matters with the palace lord. After enough time had passed for an incense stick to burn, the palace lord left with Yao Yunhui. Xu Qing personally escorted them out.

As for Yao Yunhui, after she was some distance away, she couldn't help but look back at the palace. Xu Qing stood there, the sun shining down on him, creating an image she would never forget.

In the following days, work slowed down a bit for Xu Qing, giving him time to finally catch up with old friends.

The first person he went to see was Zhang San.

Given how the county capital was such a bustling and prospering place, there was no way that Zhang San, who had really good business sense, would stay away from it. Using the profits from their port in Seven Blood Eyes, he had opened up a handful of flying ship dealerships in the capital. Years ago, there had been a change to the Seven Blood Eyes dharmaships. There were now two versions. One version was the type disciples would use in their cultivation, while the other version could be sold to outsiders as magical devices.

Because of who Master Seventh and Xu Qing were, the Seven Blood Eyes flying ships were now common, not only in the county capital, but also in surrounding prefectures. As a result, the number of dealerships in the capital skyrocketed.

Zhang San was very excited to see Xu Qing, but at the same time, acted somewhat reserved as he led him into the back courtyard of the dealership.

Only after catching up for a bit did Zhang San start to get a bit comfortable. That said, he still maintained a bit of formality. The reality was that, over the past half a month, he would constantly laugh himself awake from dreaming. That investment from years ago had been paid back in droves....

Rubbing his hands together, he lowered his voice and said, "Gov— um, I mean, Elder Brother Xu Qing, a few days ago the Captain came to visit. And he had a really beautiful girl with him."

Xu Qing grinned. He hadn't seen the Captain lately, and it didn't take much guesswork to conclude that he was probably with Li Shitao. Just like years before he squatted down next to Zhang San.

Zhang San shivered as he looked at Xu Qing. Then he took out a pipe and started puffing it furiously. As the smoke swirled, he sighed. Within that smoke, he could almost see himself and the Captain back in Seven Blood Eyes, and a youngster cautiously approaching them. [4]

I never could have guessed it would turn out like this. Never, ever....

Chapter 726: Milord... Obedient... Me

In the swirling smoke, Zhang San saw that young man from the past. Xu Qing saw mountains of corpses and seas of blood. The smoke slowly dissipated, and the two of them looked at each other.

Xu Qing grinned. Zhang San grinned back, tapping his pipe onto the ground to clear the ash from inside.

“What am I going to make for you this time?” Zhang San asked.

Xu Qing waved his hand, causing his dharmaship bottle to appear. He put it down in front of Zhang San. He hadn't used his dharmaship much in recent years. Given how high his cultivation base had climbed, dharmaships weren't of much use. That said, he didn't want to abandon it. Thus, he had come to Zhang San, not just to catch up on old times, but also to ask for his help in making a significant change to the dharmaship.

Zhang San looked at the dharmaship and didn't need any explanation from Xu Qing. Just looking at the dharmaship, he could tell it hadn't been used much. His eyes glittered.

“Dreadnaught?”

Xu Qing nodded.

Zhang San rubbed his hands together excitedly. “I won't be able to do it myself. I'll need help from the Sixth Peak experts. Except not even that will be enough. I'll need spell formations.... Xu Qing, making a dreadnaught for you is probably going to require the cooperation of all of Seven Blood Eyes!

“For most people, that would be a difficult thing. But all you need to do is say the word. The most critical aspect of a dreadnaught is its power source. Using a magical treasure will do. But if you have some flesh from a godly entity, that would be perfect.”

As Zhang San puffed on his pipe, Xu Qing took out a feather and put it down in front of Zhang San. The feather caused a wave of majestic godly might to explode out in all directions. Thankfully, Xu Qing was prepared, and made sure that little happened other than some ripples.

Zhang San's eyes went wide, and the smoke from his pipe spilled out of his mouth. He even dropped his pipe, which hit the ground and clattered to the side. He looked like his head was about to explode, and to him, it felt like his heart was being struck by 1,000,000 bolts of lightning. He had seen flesh from godly entities before on more than one occasion. For instance, there was Joine's flesh from years ago. But this feather was so terrifying that he knew he had never encountered anything like it. In fact, everything else he had seen in the past was now like trash compared to this feather.

“Th-that... that....” Zhang San shivered a few times before clearing his throat. He could hardly look away from the feather.

“It's the flesh of a god,” Xu Qing said calmly.

Zhang San's expression became completely blank. A long moment passed, and he picked up his pipe and puffed it so hard that sparks tumbled down onto him. His face was turning red, and his eyes were completely bloodshot. After a long moment, he spoke in a hoarse voice.

“That’ll do! Xu Qing, I can make you a dreadnaught the likes of which no one has ever seen before. With that feather as the power source, trust me, your dreadnaught will definitely—”

“Elder Brother Zhang San,” Xu Qing interrupted, “what I actually want is for you to design the dreadnaught based on the feather’s aura. As for the power source... it’s not the feather.”

Stunned, Zhang San looked at Xu Qing, then the feather. Then he thought about how the Captain usually operated... and he understood. That understanding left him rooted in place, so still he looked like he’d been petrified. He didn’t recover until after Xu Qing was gone. Inhaling deeply, he thought about the conclusions he had reached, and he shivered.

He thinks the feather won’t make a good power source. That seems to indicate he has more of those feathers. There are a lot of ways to get a little bit of a god’s flesh. But to get a stockpile.... Could it be that they actually killed a god?

A wave of excitement swept through Zhang San, but he immediately suppressed it. As he well knew, there were some things that were fine to know about, but there were other things that he definitely shouldn’t know about!

After leaving Zhang San that evening, Xu Qing strolled through the county capital. He didn’t conceal his aura. However, the fluctuations coming off of him ensured that mortals couldn’t see him. As he walked through the bustling crowds, he became calm. He saw cultivators, swordsages, and mortals.

And at one point, he saw Yanyan stalking down the street angrily. She didn’t notice him. Wrapped up in thoughts of death, she walked right past him. Xu Qing followed her for a short time, then turned and left.

After he walked off, Yanyan stopped walking, turned around... and then quietly bowed her head.

It was night, and the crowds were thinning. As Xu Qing continued on his way toward the Governor’s Mansion, he stopped in place and looked over his shoulder.

Some 300 meters away, a person squatted in the street. From the way he carried himself, he almost looked like a dog. He had stopped in place the moment Xu Qing stopped walking. He seemed suspicious as he looked in Xu Qing’s direction. He actually couldn’t see Xu Qing. But he could sense his aura. That was an innate ability of his. Though he couldn’t see Xu Qing, he could follow him. However, only a moment later, the aura he had sensed vanished. It caused his mood to sink as he squatted in the street feeling abandoned.

Little did he know that Xu Qing was actually standing right next to him, looking at him.

This person was the Mute.

Xu Qing had long since sensed him, and could tell that his cultivation base had reached the level of three life flames. He had opened a lot of dharma apertures and was only two away from his fourth flame. Given his qualifications, he would be considered a top chosen in most sects. Considering the scars that crisscrossed him, he had obviously done a lot of fighting and killing. Add in his innate

ability that allowed him to sense things that others couldn't, it ensured that the Mute had a promising future.

"You can form heavenly palaces at any time," Xu Qing said calmly.

When the Mute heard those words on the seemingly empty street, he shivered and kowtowed, knocking his forehead onto the ground with significant force.

However, a gentle force lifted him up. He could sense Xu Qing now, and his eyes filled with reverence. Lifting his hands, he extended all five fingers.

Xu Qing understood immediately.

The Mute was saying that he wanted to ignite five life flames. He wanted to follow in Xu Qing's footsteps.

Xu Qing nodded. He was more than willing to have someone from Seven Blood Eyes follow in his footsteps. It would be an extremely difficult path to follow. After considering the matter briefly, he turned and left.

As he did, a jade pendant appeared in the air in front of the Mute. At the same time, Xu Qing's voice echoed into the Mute's mind.

*"When it comes time to open your final dharma aperture, take this jade pendant to the Seazombie lands to seek the spot between life and death. If you succeed in igniting your fifth life flame, and then forming a heavenly palace, go to the Corrections Division to become a jailer."*

A tremor passed through the Mute as he took the jade pendant. Gripping it tightly, he looked off into the distance, his eyes gleaming with determination. He had long worshiped Xu Qing, and still did, which was why he wanted to walk the same path. It was also why he sought Xu Qing's approval. He wanted to walk by his side. That was especially true considering that the terrifying entity in Xu Qing's shadow that he had sensed in the very beginning, though still terrifying, was not as terrifying as before. And that was because that entity now looked at Xu Qing with reverence. It even seemed pleading.

Xu Qing returned to the Governor's Mansion. Sitting down in one of the buildings there, he looked out at the night sky. Everything was peaceful, and the wind stirred his ponytail. His heart also stirred.

I don't have as many old friends as I imagined. So many have continued on their way in life.

He closed his eyes. He had seen Zhang San and the Mute today. And also Yanyan.

Yanyan was a swordswoman now. Xu Qing had not interacted with her. But he had seen the source of her illness. From the very beginning, Xu Qing had witnessed her cruel personality. She treated herself cruelly, and her enemies even more cruelly. She wasn't just sadistic, she was masochistic. That seemed to be the only way for her to be happy.

In the past, Yanyan's grandmother, Guru Eastnether, had told Xu Qing that Yanyan was ill. Back then, Xu Qing wasn't sure of the reason. But now he knew. In all the years that had passed, Yanyan

was the only person Xu Qing had ever encountered that had absolutely no mutagen in them. If there were people who lacked mutagen, it was because they had purged it all. But that was only temporary. The mutagen always came back. That wasn't the case with Yanyan.[1]

Yanyan's body had never had any mutagen in it. That was because with Yanyan, the mutagen went straight into her soul, invading it, infecting it, and turning her mad. She became twisted and masochistic. It was easy to imagine that, as time passed and she grew up, she would become more and more demented. That was why her grandmother doted on her. She knew that her granddaughter wasn't going to live for very long.

However, after everything Xu Qing experienced in the Moonrite Region, he could see that Yanyan's infected soul actually had scraps of godly characteristics. And that was why, though he hadn't interacted with Yanyan, he had carefully inserted one of Crimson Mother's feathers into her soul. After he walked off, he had left her with a few words to encourage her to cultivate the power of the feather.

*"You would make a good god cultivator."*

Xu Qing opened his eyes and looked off in the direction of the Ghost Emperor mountain in Emperor-Receiving Prefecture.

Master Seventh had left three days ago in that direction. Third Sib was there working on his cultivation, along with that gruish boy.

As the wind blew, Xu Qing's thoughts wandered. He recalled old times and thought about old friends. For instance, Qing Qiu, who was currently in Emperor-Receiving Prefecture.

Finally, Xu Qing looked toward the continent of South Phoenix. At that point, the wind died down. Xu Qing settled his thoughts.

"You've been begging me constantly since I got Crimson Mother's flesh," he said coolly. "And ever since my Master took Master Freespirit away, your eyes have been shining. So... are you hungry?"

In the moonlight, Xu Qing's shadow twitched, then spread out to form a black coffin. A host of eyes stared out from within. Every single one of them radiated reverence and even pleading. And then the emotional fluctuations reached Xu Qing.

*"Milord... obedient... me.... Eat, eat... strong... I... offer sacrifice.... Godfire...."*

Chapter 727: Me, Dark Nethervoid

"Godfire?" Xu Qing's eyes glittered as he looked at his shadow beneath his feet. The shadow twitched a few times, then cautiously sent out some more emotional fluctuations.

"Fire... rummmmbbble...."

Xu Qing frowned slightly and realized he actually missed Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior a bit. Occasionally he could understand the shadow's fluctuations, but more often than not, he wasn't sure what they meant.



What was more, 'godfire' was a very sensitive term. Based on what Xu Qing had learned in the Moonrite Region, one of the paths to godly ascension involved lighting godfire. Both Crimson Mother and the godchild walked that path. That said, the former succeeded, while the latter didn't manage to fully ignite the godfire, and ended up burning himself to death. Therefore, hearing the shadow say 'godfire' was a surprise to Xu Qing.

"You can form godfire?" Xu Qing asked.

The shadow nodded, then shook its head. Suddenly getting nervous, it added something.

"Ruuuummblee...."

Xu Qing frowned. After considering the matter, he took steps to secure the area, then took out one of Crimson Mother's flesh feathers.

When the shadow saw the feather, it got excited and spread out on the ground, until the building's ground floor was like a black pond.

After sensing the emotions from the shadow, Xu Qing tossed the feather toward it.

Before the feather could reach the ground, the shadow stretched up, forming a large mouth that devoured the feather. It became like a black hole that could consume anything and everything. The feather disappeared in the blink of an eye, and then the shadow started twitching and expanding.

Xu Qing paid close attention the entire time. About an hour later, the shadow's fluctuations started dying down. The shadow seemed to get anxious, shrinking back to gather beneath Xu Qing's feet. Then it sent him fluctuations of incomparable longing.

"Delicious... devour... need...."

After some more thought, Xu Qing checked his stockpile of Crimson Mother flesh. Though it pained him slightly, he took out another fist-sized chunk. To see a piece that large caused the shadow to instantly surge with elation. It formed a host of shadow spikes that undulated up and down, and its numerous eyes shone with excitement. It also opened its mouth wide, from within which drifted the sound of flowing saliva. In fact, in the hope of securing a shot to eat the flesh, the shadow made a shadow tail for itself, which it wagged back and forth almost like a puppy.

It was hard to know what it had devoured in the past that gave it the idea to do this.... Regardless, it was an effective tactic.

After noting the shadow's wagging tail, Xu Qing tossed the meat to it.

Instantly, the shadow spikes pierced the flesh and dragged it down, where vicious swallowing sounds could be heard. The shadow's fluctuations were ebullient by this point.

Unfortunately, it actually proved difficult for the shadow to handle such a large piece. Soon, it started to destabilize, until a boom rang out and the shadow exploded, shattering into hundreds of pieces that splattered around like ink onto a table. The piece of flesh the shadow had just swallowed was now in the open. A fraction of a moment later, the hundreds of pieces of the shadow became like starving wild dogs that lunged back onto the flesh and started devouring it again. They exploded again. The cycle continued after that as the shadow stubbornly persisted.

The night passed. Around dawn, after the shadow had exploded numerous times, it finally devoured the last bit of flesh. It had to struggle, but it managed to prevent itself from exploding. Yet it didn't seem satisfied. While managing to stay whole, it sent some fawning fluctuations to Xu Qing.

“Milord... obedient... I... need....”

“You ate a whole piece and yet didn't transform,” Xu Qing replied coldly. “What good are you?”

Xu Qing was convinced that there was a distinct possibility the shadow actually *could* transform, but was holding back. And that didn't please Xu Qing at all. He was just about to tap into the violet crystal and force the shadow to spit up what it had devoured, while simultaneously teaching it a hard lesson.

Seeing the violet light build up on Xu Qing, the shadow shivered and quickly sent out pleading fluctuations.

“Not that... no eat... forbidden region... can do.”

Xu Qing ignored the shadow. Violet light surged out from him and slammed into the shadow, which let loose a howl of grief. Then the shadow exploded, and a half-chunk of flesh appeared.

Xu Qing reached out to grab it.

The shadow trembled anxiously as it watched its food about to be taken away. Then it began swirling anxiously around Xu Qing, forming a black vortex.

“Devour... devour.... Ruuuuuumble. I... stronger... useful!”

Xu Qing looked coldly at the anxiety-wracked shadow. “You don't need more flesh?”

“No... forbidden region... can....” the shadow cautiously projected.

Xu Qing didn't ask any more questions. Based on the previous times the shadow had reached a higher level, he could only conclude that its breakthroughs were related to mutagen. Mutagen existed in other places than in this flesh. Any forbidden region would have a lot of it.

Considering it related to the shadow reaching a higher level, and also given Xu Qing's speculation about the use of the term godfire, he quickly vanished and materialized outside of the county capital. As soon as he appeared, he started moving. It was as if the ground beneath his feet were contracted significantly, as every step he took propelled him a vast distance. Spirit Trove cultivators were able to take initial forays into manipulating natural and magical laws.

Two hours later, Xu Qing was far from the county capital, and was nearing another prefecture. This prefecture was named Spiritsoil, and it was the smallest prefecture in Sea-Sealing County. It was so-named because it had a number of forbidden regions with spirit soil inside.

In this case, the 'spirit' in the name didn't refer to spirit energy, but rather, to departed spirits of the dead. Those forbidden regions were like playgrounds for grues and spirits. Usually, cultivators could traverse the outer regions, but going too far inside would be risking almost certain death. Only cultivators in Nascent Soul or higher, who also had a bit of luck, could come out alive. This was also a route taken by the ghost galleons that traveled between ghost wards. [1]

Upon arriving, Xu Qing actually saw a ghost galleon. Though it was currently daytime, the black clouds covering the sky, and the thick mist filling the air, reduced visibility and light in all directions. The massive, dilapidated ghost galleon appeared through the mist, making its way through the dome of heaven.

Xu Qing observed it, his facial expression the same as ever. His cultivation base wasn't anything like it was years ago. His status and identity were completely different as well. As the governor, he could draw on the destiny aura of Sea-Sealing County. Besides, he wasn't interested in causing any trouble for the ghost galleon.

Meanwhile, the ghost galleon treated Xu Qing with deep respect. After detecting him, the mist around it went still, and then a host of ghostly figures rose up from the ship and bowed deeply to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing nodded, passed it, and headed into the spirit soil forbidden region. After he was gone, the mist around the ghost galleon seethed again, and it continued on its way. It vanished, and the dome of heaven turned bright again.

Sometime later, Xu Qing spotted the spirit soil forbidden region up ahead.

In Spiritsoil Prefecture, there were a total of thirteen spirit soil forbidden regions. Every one of them was ancient, with a history going back countless years. According to certain ancient records, these forbidden regions went back to the time of Emperor Eastglory. At one time, it was actually a spirit soil forbidden ground. But then something changed. Overnight, the forbidden ground collapsed and turned into thirteen smaller forbidden regions. The ancient records didn't go into the reasons for that. However, there were certain bits of evidence left behind, and later analysis led people to the conclusion that it was probably the result of a battle between gods. The truth of the matter was buried in history.

The forbidden region up ahead wasn't very different from the forbidden regions back in South Phoenix that always had scavenger basecamps near them. From a distance, it looked like a black jungle. All plants and vegetation within it were the color black, and they emanated a sensation of decay. The mutagen was strong, making a black fog that filled the forbidden region. From within it came howls that touched the soul. Even just getting close, it was possible to spot skeletons trudging about in the jungle. There were also a variety of grues.

As Xu Qing stood on the border, he noticed an old woman inside.

She wore burial garments, and had a pale complexion. Grinning, she rushed toward Xu Qing. Her grin turned wider, until her gaping mouth opened to reveal a host of fangs. The noxious stench of a corpse surrounded her.

Xu Qing's expression was the same as ever. He had encountered many, many grues on the path that he had walked, and wasn't surprised by those here. They could all be considered food for his shadow.

"I'll give you one chance. If you don't achieve a breakthrough, then I'll have no further use of you."

The shadow shivered, then sent out fluctuations of determination. Without hesitation, it spread from Xu Qing's feet and into the forbidden region.

The moment the shadow appeared inside, the old woman who had been rushing toward Xu Qing stopped in place. Suddenly seeming like she had spotted a deadly archenemy, she turned to flee. She was too slow. The shadow sped into the forbidden region, swept over her, and swallowed her up. The shadow didn't stop there. As chewing sounds rang out, it spread out in all directions.

Xu Qing didn't follow. He stood outside the forbidden region, using his connection with the shadow to monitor its actions. Soon, his expression became one of curiosity.

What's it doing?

Based on what he could sense, the extent to which the shadow could spread was now far beyond its previous limit. In fact, it was almost unbelievable. The shadow had filled the entire forbidden region! And then, the forbidden region blurred as though the entire place was being devoured. It only took a moment for Xu Qing to realize that it didn't 'seem' like the place was being devoured. Rather... it *was* being devoured!

It grew fainter and more blurry, and then the border regions started to disappear. A day later, Xu Qing was stunned by what was right in front of him. It was... absolutely empty. The forbidden region was gone!

As of that moment, Spiritsoil Prefecture didn't have thirteen forbidden regions. It had one less!

The shadow had devoured the entire thing. The lands were gray, without a scrap of life force. Nor did it contain death, or any energy at all for that matter. The entire world was just gray.

There was also a writhing black shadow. Chanting like that of a god drifted out from it.

“Three primordials nurture nine energies make up five earthly things form into seven stars as apertures; all beings' souls reach the peak of three laws with starlight shining on me, Dark Nethervoid.”

Chapter 728: A Fishing Expedition in Sea-Sealing County

The voice seemed simultaneously proud, restrained, rushed, and slow. The combination made the voice extremely gruish. Clearly, the shadow was inherently a grue! The moment it spoke, the sky shifted colors, rumbling sounds echoed out, and all the plants and vegetation outside the forbidden region were ripped to shreds.

Because of the forbidden region in this area, there weren't many people who lived nearby. But there were animals and even bugs. The animals and bugs who lived nearby were changed by the presence of the forbidden region. Mutagen would build up within them, and they would eventually mutate, becoming much stronger. And now, as the chanting spread out, they devolved into madness. From a distance, it was possible to see countless bugs and animals burrowing out of the ground, surrounding Xu Qing and letting loose shocking and ghastly cries.

Xu Qing's facial expression didn't change. After looking around at the bugs and animals, he realized that the shadow was controlling them. The shadow's powers of control now had a much greater range, and could affect a larger number of targets. Most importantly, it didn't require the shadow to possess the target. Instead, its chanting provided the control.

“You can devour forbidden regions and use sound to exercise control....” Xu Qing’s eyes narrowed as he looked at the gray lands in front of him, and the writhing shadow.

As time passed, the shadow’s writhing slowed down, and it eventually became calm again. Its form was now stable, and it looked like a head. And despite being pitch-black, the head clearly had a totem on its forehead. Its shape was exactly the same as the forbidden region that had just been devoured.

Wait, it’s not a totem. It’s....

As Xu Qing studied the shadow’s forehead, he was shaken to realize that it wasn’t a totem there, but rather, the actual forbidden region. The forbidden region that the shadow had devoured became a part of it.

This realization was so shocking that Xu Qing’s pupils constricted. What was more, in the very middle of that tiny, shrunken forbidden region, there was a tree that looked different from all the other trees. It was the very first form the shadow had assumed, that of a huge, shadowy tree. There was a coffin hanging from the tree, which was the shadow’s second form. The coffin rocked back and forth almost like a huge bell, and from within it came two sounds: that of claws scraping against wood, and more chanting.

“I, Dark Nethervoid spirit accumulation body perfection soul missing god birthing starry light descending destruction living beings follow orders!”

As the last words echoed out, a boundless spirit power swept out of the coffin and headed right toward... Xu Qing!

Xu Qing did react visibly. He stood there looking coldly at the shadow, his eyes turning pitch-black as taboo poison built up. In response to his gaze, the boundless spirit power lurched to a halt only a few meters in front of him. It twitched as if struggling between a rising malicious intent and the refusal to take further action.

Xu Qing snorted coldly.

The terrifying spirit power then shot up into the sky, where it caused the clouds to form into a short message.

Milord is a good person.

Then, the shadow sent fawning fluctuations to Xu Qing.

“Milord... obedient... me....”

Xu Qing looked at the shadow and realized that it could chant fluently, but when it tried to speak normally, it had trouble. Apparently, its speaking ability didn’t improve automatically with its general level.

Xu Qing wasn’t interested in teaching a lesson to the shadow right now. What he was mostly interested in was the godfire it had mentioned.

“What about the godfire?” he asked calmly.

A mouth cracked open on the shadow, and it howled, “Sacrifice!”

As the word echoed out, the countless bugs and animals controlled by the shadow shivered. And then, they viciously lunged at each other and started ripping each other apart. Agonized shrieks and howls of anguish rang out. This was a case of 'self devouring self,' and it was completely brutal. The process continued without pause as they ripped each other apart. After about a dozen breaths of time, all of the bugs and animals around Xu Qing were dead. They had sacrificed themselves!

Xu Qing looked on with a serious expression as brown motes of life emerged from the corpses and rushed toward the shadow.

Based on what Xu Qing could sense, those motes of light were similar to the power provided by the living beings of the Moonrite Region, just different substructurally. However, the differences weren't necessarily visible to the naked eye. It was a cultivation base reaction, and wasn't easy to notice. But Xu Qing's gaze was full of taboo poison, so he saw the differences.

The brown motes of light merged, becoming a ball of light roughly the size of a fingernail. Glittering brightly, it expanded and then contracted rapidly, as if it were unstable. But what was really shocking was that it affected the canopy of heaven. The clouds turned dark, thunder rumbled, and lightning bolts snaked back and forth.

The fluctuations from the shadow grew more submissive. Then it breathed in the direction of the ball of light, causing it to move toward Xu Qing until it floated in front of him. Thunder crashed overhead, and it seemed locked onto the movement of the ball.

Xu Qing frowned slightly. He wasn't sure exactly what was happening, but he could sense danger. In fact, it was as if every inch of his flesh and blood had independent thought, and was screaming at him that he was in danger.

Xu Qing looked at the shadow.

The shadow summoned the tail again, and even created a black tongue to loll out of its mouth. It really did look like a puppy. Looking at Xu Qing, it nodded repeatedly.

"Milord... sacrifice... milord... good... godfire."

Xu Qing didn't trust the shadow at all, and the sense of danger was causing him to look suspiciously at the brown ball of light. Taking a few steps back, he prepared to lift his hand. But even then, he didn't feel safe enough, so he backed up another few hundred meters. Finally, he lifted his right hand and pushed it gently toward the ball of light.

The brown ball of light floated off into the distance. Finally, the thunder overhead seemed to reach a peak level of fury. In the blink of an eye, a host of lightning bolts shot down like rain, slamming the ball of light into the ground.

The already-unstable ball of light exploded. Terrifying lightning flames erupted in all directions, along with a sensation of godliness. It quickly turned into a tempest that raged in all directions, destroying everything it touched.

The level of power was incredibly majestic. Even with Xu Qing's current cultivation base, he felt shaken, and kept backing up as quickly as possible. That said, he was a bit too late to act. Despite how cautious he was, and despite how far away he was, when the brown ball of light burst with surpassingly ferocious energy, he was caught up in the effects.

Glittering light surrounded him as he entered the first-level god state, and raced back a few hundred more meters.

As the brown light dissipated, the roughly 30,000 meters in front of him became visible, and there was a huge crater there.

Fear still lingered in Xu Qing's heart. Meanwhile, the shadow had used some sort of concealment ability to avoid being hurt. Now it appeared again on the ground, unharmed. At the same time, the fawning fluctuations it sent to Xu Qing contained a big dose of pride.

“Fierce... I'm... badass!”

Xu Qing's expression became grimmer. “That's the godfire?”

The shadow immediately nodded. Sensing that Xu Qing wasn't very pleased, it then switched to shaking its head, as if it wasn't completely sure. It started to get more anxious. And then, it had no other choice....

“Ruuuuuumble! Ruuuuuumble! Ruuum—”

“Enough rumbling!” Xu Qing said coldly.

The shadow looked slightly confused, as if it wasn't sure what it had done to provoke Xu Qing. Finally, it looked embarrassed.

Seeing that reaction caused Xu Qing to sigh. *I really do miss Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior.*

As of this point, he realized why the shadow had mentioned the ‘ruuuuumble’ when describing godfire. When the brown ball of light exploded... it made a big rumbling sound, right?

Xu Qing looked at the shadow and decided not to try to get more answers. Instead, he went in the direction of the spot where the brown ball of light had exploded.

The moment it exploded, the ball of light emitted some godliness....

He floated into the center of the crater, then reached down to touch the soil underfoot. A thoughtful expression appeared on his face. Then he looked at the clouds dissipating overhead, and a new idea occurred to him.

It's a sort of taboo material that's inherently unstable. It can provoke lightning, but even if the lightning didn't come, it would eventually collapse even under the force of the wind. A piece the size of a fingernail unleashes terrifying power.... Could it be possible that it... is actually fuel that can ignite godfire?

The moment the thought took hold in Xu Qing, his eyes started shining, and he thought back to the way the shadow had acquired the fuel.

Sacrifice. All of the gods I know about require some sort of sacrifice.... Don't tell me that I've discovered the reason why gods like sacrifices?

Xu Qing had no way to confirm his theory, but was nonetheless shaken by the fact that the shadow's latest breakthrough gave it the ability to proactively create a sacrifice.

First comes control. After that is the forced sacrifice....

Xu Qing looked at the shadow.

The shadow emitted pleased fluctuations. "I... am... useful!"

Xu Qing couldn't think of a counter argument. This transformation for the shadow was a big one, whether it was the ability to devour forbidden regions, or the ability to control things with its voice, or the final ability of sacrifice. All of them were extraordinary. They were godly abilities.

*So what exactly is the shadow?* Xu Qing thought, his eyes narrowing. After a time, he stopped worrying about that question.

"Get the hell back here," he said coolly.

The shadow looked very happy as it flew back toward Xu Qing's feet, where it turned back into an ordinary shadow. Without another word, Xu Qing flew up into the sky and then headed back in the direction of Sea-Sealing County.

Due to the bright sunlight, as Xu Qing flew in the sky, his shadow flitted across on the ground beneath him. As he flew up, it grew larger and larger, until it was several thousand meters wide. The forbidden region on its forehead was blurry. It had two rows of blood-red eyes, and when its mouth split open, it cackled. It was like a devilish god. Anyone who saw it would be shocked to the core. After all, Xu Qing was the one raising this devilish god.

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Sometimes results come only as time passes. Sea-Sealing County was preparing for war thanks to the actions of Seventh Prince and King Heaventide. Those two were like sharp blades hanging above the heads of the local cultivators.

Xu Qing had previously wanted to make an announcement about the situation to calm down the populace. But both Master Seventh and Marquis Yao had tactfully prevented him. They... were in the middle of a huge game of Go. Although they didn't go into details about the game and the game board, after everything Xu Qing had experienced, he had an idea of what they were doing.

Master Seventh and Marquis Yao were on a fishing expedition. And on this day, they hooked the first fish.

News came from the Nightshade front lines that the five waves of Sea-Sealing County cultivators who had been sent to war, though having experienced many deadly war missions, were not wiped out.

There were about 10,000 survivors.

Of 5,000,000 Sea-Sealing cultivators, only 10,000 remained. After their deadly experiences, and all the pain and suffering they went through, they were ultimately cast aside. Kong Xianglong and a number of swordsages were among them. Eventually, they managed to escape from the danger, and instead of returning to King Heaventide's war camp, they decided to go back to Sea-Sealing County.

It was strange and illogical. In fact, it seemed completely unexplainable. It was as if a pair of shadowy hands were guiding them from behind, ensuring that the survivors had a way forward. Regardless, news reached Sea-Sealing County, and there were even recording jade slips that showed their exhausted forms on the move.



They were being chased by King Heaventide's personal guard. They had been accused of serious crimes, and had just barely made it out in time. But now they were surrounded and had no choice but to wait to die.

Sea-Sealing County had a choice to make. Save the survivors? Or don't save them? How should the situation be handled? And how should the news be presented publicly?

Saving them was obviously the right thing to do, but would involve taking a concrete stand on certain issues. What was more, it would completely erode the morale in the county to just stand by and watch them be executed.

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Therefore, Zheng Kaiyi and Yao Tianyan... what choice will you make?

In Seventh Prince's imperial capital, former Eight Sect Coalition president Sir Dust-Sun sat in front of a blank Go board. He put a piece down.

Based on what I know of your style and how you make decisions, I think you'll choose to save them. But considering they're in such a remote location, you won't be able to rescue them with ordinary methods. The person who actually goes to their aid... needs to be a powerful expert. And one won't be enough.

Therefore, who will you send? Will Plumdark be with them, perhaps? If so, then you'll be falling into a trap of your own making. Things will be very simple.

Sir Dust-Sun chuckled. The reality was that he didn't care at all about what happened with the trapped Sea-Sealing forces. It would be ideal if Plumdark showed up. And if she didn't, then he would have to *lure the tiger from its domain in the mountains*.

In all of Sea-Sealing County, the only two people who I couldn't defeat in combat are Zheng Kaiyi and Marquis Yao. One of them will probably come along, otherwise the rescue effort will be doomed to fail. And then there's those two puppets.... I should plan how to deal with them as well.

Eyes gleaming with anticipation, Sir Dust-Sun looked in the direction of Sea-Sealing County. There was no way he would recklessly go to Sea-Sealing County himself. That said, Seventh Prince's mission had to be accomplished.

Surround the enemy.

Pull them into a trap of their own making.

Lure the tiger off the mountain.

Those three tactics formed an overall strategy that he could use to accommodate any potential developments. In the end, he would be in complete control.

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Back in the county capital, Xu Qing stood with Master Seventh and Marquis Yao, looking in the direction of Seventh Prince's imperial capital, which had once been the Kingdom of Heavengale.

"What do you think, Xu Qing?" Master Seventh said coolly.

“Master, I think we’ve already hooked the first fish,” Xu Qing replied softly.

Master Seventh laughed heartily, his eyes overflowing with praise.

Marquis Yao looked at Master Seventh. “So... do you go? Or do I?”

“You do it,” Master Seventh replied. “I want to see what our opponent’s second move will be. After all, if we both go, he’ll suspect things are going too smoothly. Remember to bring those puppets. And don’t get careless.”

Marquis Yao nodded. As one of the old guard in Sea-Sealing County, he always acted with caution. Taking a step forward, he vanished. Before long, the Administration Palace and the Swordsage Palace, along with their respective palace lords, were making their way over the horizon with Marquis Yao.

A few days later, Master Seventh received news about the second move they’d been waiting for.

More sects in Sea-Sealing County had turned traitor. They were scattered throughout different prefectures, yet they acted in unison. Rumors spread like mad. The sparks of a great fire were now burning. There was more. Quite a few nonhumans on the Forbidden Sea had mobilized their forces, and were making landfall in coastal regions. That included Emperor-Receiving Prefecture. In addition to that, lots of Forbidden Sea nonhumans were gathering outside Seven Blood Eyes’ port in the continent of South Phoenix. There were even Void Returning experts among them. The people of Sea-Sealing County trembled with fear at the prospect of more war breaking out.

Because of the crisis, swordsages were deployed, personally led by Master Seventh. Because he left right after Marquis Yao, the county capital seemed uncharacteristically empty.

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“Things are going too smoothly...” said Sir Dust-Sun, putting down a second game piece. After mulling it over, he put down a third game piece.

Chapter 729: A Gift for the President

A few days later, after Marquis Yao and Master Seventh were gone, and the three palace lords and loyalist sects were working hard to deal with the uprisings, news started to come back.

For example, details were filtering in about the extent of the rebellion, the circumstances with the Forbidden Sea nonhumans, and the real reason the Sea-Sealing County survivors had fled the Nightshade front lines.

It was all related to the Lunisolar Dao Palace from the Eight Sect Coalition! The former president wasn’t the only one to have sought asylum with Seventh Prince. He took the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect and the Lunisolar Dao Palace with him.[1]

After joining Seventh Prince, the forces of the Lunisolar Dao Palace, which excelled in the use of spell formations, were sent to the front lines to handle formation maintenance. That, of course, was a very safe assignment. Ultimately, when they saw the other troops from Sea-Sealing County in such a bad position, with heavy casualties being suffered by the roughly 5,000,000 front line cultivators, they secretly gave Kong Xianglong and the survivors a way to get through the spell formations. That was how they made their escape.

Normally speaking, it wouldn't have been easy to uncover the truth of what happened. However, sentiment was mixed in the Lunisolar Dao Palace. Some members couldn't stand what was happening in Sea-Sealing County, but others were already loyal to Seventh Prince.

The result was a clash of personal ideals and a storm of power struggles. It was forces in the Lunisolar Dao Palace itself that were the first to reveal how the survivors escaped. Blame was immediately directed toward the sect leader. That infuriated both the Lunisolar Dao Palace's patriarch and Seventh Prince. A cleanup operation commenced in which all guilty parties were executed. However, the sect leader, who was named the ringleader of the operation, went missing.

As rumors spread, the matter became the focus of a lot of attention.

Around that time, because of the fact that Marquis Yao and Master Seventh had left the county seemingly defenseless, a person arrived at the capital. He was an old man in a brown daoist robe. He looked exhausted, and he was heavily injured, travel-worn, and completely vigilant. The moment he stepped into the county capital, he contacted two people.

One was Plumdark. The other was Sir Bloodsmelter. They had stayed behind to defend the county, and as soon as they received their respective messages, their expressions flickered. They knew who this person was.

He was the same sect leader of the Lunisolar Dao Palace that Seventh Prince was searching for. He was in the great circle of Spirit Trove, and was known as Sir Lunisolar. Any other person who just showed up in the county capital and asked to see Sir Bloodsmelter or Plumdark, they would have a hard time doing so. But war loomed, and things were different.

Sir Lunisolar of the Lunisolar Dao Palace had made efforts to save the lives of many Sea-Sealing County cultivators on the Nightshade front lines. His allies in his sect had been executed by Seventh Prince. Over a thousand people were dead, and blood had flowed like a river. It was extremely brutal and tragic. As for Sir Lunisolar, he barely escaped with his life, and even then, was seriously injured.

He was seeking asylum, leaving no choice for them but to honor his request for a meeting. What was more, he claimed to be privy to a huge secret.

Before long, Sir Lunisolar appeared at the Governor's Mansion, where Xu Qing, Sir Bloodsmelter, Plumdark, and other leaders from Sea-Sealing County were waiting for him.

His injuries were obviously serious. His internal organs were mostly shattered, and he was struggling just to stay in the Spirit Trove level. After catching sight of Xu Qing and the others, he looked somewhat dazed. Clearly, he was thinking back to the first time he laid eyes on Xu Qing.

“Greetings, Governor!” Sir Lunisolar suppressed his feelings of regret and respectfully bowed. Inside, he was trying hard to prevent his injuries from flaring up, causing his face to be extremely pale.

Xu Qing waved his hand, sending out a gentle force that lifted Sir Lunisolar from his bow. Then he courteously offered some medicinal pills.

“Many thanks for your assistance on the Nightshade front lines, Sect Leader. We heard what happened with the Lunisolar Dao Palace. These are healing medicines from the county capital, including a heaven pill. Take them first and focus on stabilizing your wounds.”

Sir Lunisolar accepted the pills graciously. As he did, he noticed Sir Bloodsmelter and Plumdark looking at him. Though their gazes weren't hostile, he knew full well that they were suspicious of him. Without the slightest hesitation, he consumed all of the pills, not bothering to check if they were safe.

Sir Bloodsmelter's eyes narrowed. Plumdark looked at him expressionlessly.

Xu Qing's face remained the same the entire time. After watching Sir Lunisolar consume the pills and then sit down cross-legged, he refrained from saying anything further.

After enough time had passed for an incense stick to burn, Sir Lunisolar opened his eyes. His injuries were less severe now, making them easier to suppress. Taking a deep breath, he once again bowed deeply to Xu Qing. His expression was one of sorrow and guilt.

“How time flies. It's already been more than a year.... I remember when you first arrived in the Eight Sect Coalition, Governor....” Sir Lunisolar sighed and shook his head. “Unfortunately, my Lunisolar Dao Palace followed the wrong person. Step after incorrect step....

“Governor, I escaped with my life and came here for one reason. I have news. As for what you do with it, that will be your choice.

“First. I hated to see the miserable situation of the Sea-Sealing County cultivators on the Nightshade front lines. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to take disciples of my sect to rescue them, nor could I personally take action. The only reason I managed to save the final 10,000 was that the spell formation was malfunctioning. During the repair process, there was an opportunity for people to use it without being detected. And even were they to be detected, it shouldn't have led back to me. That's why I chose to help.

“There's no way any outsider could have figured out what happened. In fact, not even people from the Lunisolar Dao Palace should have realized the truth so soon. Unfortunately, almost as soon as the 10,000 survivors left, word started spreading in the Lunisolar Dao Palace. In the resulting slaughter, I barely escaped with my life. That's when I realized that it was all a big trap. Someone had used my soft-heartedness to set me up.

“Someone wanted those Sea-Sealing County survivors to escape, then use them as a bargaining chip. They wanted to force Sea-Sealing County to come to their rescue; *pull them into a trap of their own making and lure the tiger down from the mountain.*”

Not a word could be heard in the room.

Eyes bloodshot and teeth gritted, Sir Lunisolar said, “That ‘someone’ is the former president of the Eight Sect Coalition, Sir Dust-Sun!” Hanging his head bitterly, he continued, “That’s the second piece of news I have, and it relates to all of you here. The chaos in Sea-Sealing County, as well as in the Forbidden Sea, is all the work of Sir Dust-Sun. I know this because... I was previously tasked with facilitating communication with the Forbidden Sea nonhumans.

“The third piece of information is from the front lines. King Heaventide’s army will soon return victorious! The Bloodsport immortal skills he sought have been found and set up. By unleashing the might of immortal magic, he’s sent the Nightshades reeling with setback after setback.

“As of now, King Heaventide’s army has used the Bloodsport immortal skills to advance into the underbelly of the Nightspirit Region. The mission will be accomplished soon, and afterward, the army will return. Then, all it will take is a word from Seventh Prince to send Sea-Sealing County... into grave danger!”

Xu Qing and the others present were surprised. This was their first time hearing such information.

However, Sir Lunisolar wasn’t finished yet. “The fourth piece of news is related to Sir Dust-Sun. His primary mission is to uncover Sea-Sealing County’s true strength before the return of King Heaventide. And he has another goal, specifically, Arch-Immortal Plumdark. Sir Dust-Sun wants to capture her.”

As his words drifted through the hall, Plumdark’s expression turned grim, and Xu Qing narrowed his eyes.

Sir Bloodsmelter looked at Sir Lunisolar. “What does all of this have to do with Fellow Daoist Plumdark?”

Sir Lunisolar hesitated briefly, then gritted his teeth and explained everything he knew. “When Sir Dust-Sun defected to Seventh Prince, he mentioned that Arch-Immortal Plumdark has a unique background and unusual cultivation methods. Practicing dual cultivation with her as the cauldron can cause both cultivators to break through the shackles of the next cultivation level. After that, Seventh Prince told Sir Dust-Sun to bring Arch-Immortal Plumdark to him. And that’s what led to all of this.”

Plumdark’s eyes glittered with killing intent. Xu Qing didn’t say anything, but his aura turned extremely cold.

Everyone from Sea-Sealing County present in the hall pulsed with baleful auras. Sir Bloodsmelter even laughed coldly.

Sir Lunisolar’s injuries suddenly twitched, causing him to gasp for breath as he tried to suppress the effects.

“The fifth piece of news is that this time—” Before he could finish speaking, his eyes went wide and his belly expanded dramatically. In the blink of an eye, his clothing ripped as he became a huge ball of flesh. It was extremely ghastly! A

bloodcurdling scream filled the hall, causing everyone to react with shocked surprise. And then Sir Lunisolar completely exploded!

Sir Bloodsmelter quickly threw out some defenses, as did everyone else.

The rumbling boom sent an invisible shockwave in all directions, carrying with it the shredded flesh and blood of Sir Lunisolar. The shockwave rapidly spread out, leaving the palace and sweeping through the entire county capital. It didn't contain deadly power, but instead, seemed to be searching for something.

After the search was complete, the flesh and blood in the hall rose into the air and turned into a blood-red vortex. All of this takes a bit of time to describe, but in reality, from the time Sir Lunisolar exploded until the vortex formed, hardly enough time passed for a spark to fly off a piece of flint.

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Far away in the imperial capital, in a very secure residence, Sir Dust-Sun looked at the game board and smiled.

As it turns out, there really aren't four Void Returning experts in Sea-Sealing County.

A blood-colored vortex hovered above the game board, projecting an image of what had just happened in the hall in Sea-Sealing County. Sir Dust-Sun's smile widened. Everything was happening according to plan, from beginning to end. He had controlled everything, and it was all pointing to an impending victory for him.

Now I just have to pluck the fruit.

Looking very calm, he reached into the blood-colored vortex above his game board.

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To everyone's shock, a pitch-black hand stretched out of the vortex in the hall in Sea-Sealing County. It hardly looked human. It was more like the clawed hand of a bird. It was, in fact, a golden crow claw. [2]

Whether in terms of energy or might, it surpassed Xu Qing. The moment it appeared, it unleashed incredible pressure and terrifying fluctuations as it singled out Plumdark in the crowd and headed right toward her!

The pressure of the third stage of Void Returning swept out from the claw. Heaven-destroying, earth-extinguishing force surrounded it.

Blood sprayed out of Sir Bloodsmelter's mouth, and similar things happened to everyone else. There was no way they could fight back against third-stage Void Returning. It was the same with Plumdark.

Sea-Sealing County's taboo treasure net flickered, and Qingqin let loose a cry of rage from the dome of heaven. But the expanding shockwave ensured that none of that was fast enough to help.

The huge hand was just about to grab Plumdark.

But then the destiny aura of Sea-Sealing County erupted from Xu Qing, dispelling the pressure. He stood from his chair. Face calm, he produced a small ball that he threw toward the vortex from which stretched the hand.

That ball had a name. It was called Medium Roundy. Some people even called it a mini Dawning Sun.

Chapter 730: How Ruthless You Are, Xu Qing!!

Medium Roundy's explosive power had always been impressive. It had always had its limits. However, back in the Moonrite Region, when it absorbed some of the godfire coming off the godchild, it resulted in heaven-shaking, earth-toppling transformations. Those transformations affected its internal structure, and gave it even more of the characteristics of Dawning Sun.

As of now, its mightiness had reached a terrifying level. When Xu Qing threw it out, it ignored all obstacles, including the pressure coming off the golden crow hand, to pierce right into the blood-red vortex. It appeared in the imperial capital above Sir Dust-Sun's Go board. There, it rotated a few times, all while emanating bright white light and a terrifying aura.

Sir Dust-Sun had been completely confident, and had looked very relaxed. Everything had been going according to plan, and he was certain his plan would work. But when he looked at Medium Roundy and sensed the aura coming off it, his pupils constricted, and his heart pounded as loudly as thunder. He wasn't sure exactly what he was looking at, but the intense sensation of life-or-death crisis it caused made his hair stand on end.

Danger. Incredible danger! Every inch of his flesh and every scrap of his bones trembled as a sensation of critical danger filled his heart and mind. Death loomed over him.

He knew there wasn't enough time to react. He knew he couldn't fight back. His only hope of surviving lay with the Go board itself.

The moment the white light flared, he decisively severed the arm that he had stuck into the vortex. But before he could do anything else, a sea of white light swept out from Medium Roundy with heaven-destroying, earth-extinguishing power.

It instantly filled Sir Dust-Sun's chamber. Everything in his residence, including the walls, the furniture, the Go board, and Sir Dust-Sun himself, were incinerated. The heat was so intense that even the ashes were destroyed.

And the explosion of white light had only just begun. The sea of light filled Sir Dust-Sun's residence and then continued expanding in all directions. Soon, it had swept over the nearby buildings. And it kept going. Buildings were incinerated. The sky turned red. The sea of light destroyed everything in its path.

From a distance, it was possible to see the sea of light expanding like a dome, wiping out everything within its borders. And it just kept expanding.

The imperial city that had once been the Kingdom of Heavengale actually didn't have any mortals in it. They had long since been relocated. The only people in the city now were Seventh Prince's subordinates and other organizations that supported him. There was no lack of powerful experts among them, including Void Returning cultivators. There were even more in Spirit Trove. They

were either completely loyal to Seventh Prince from the beginning, or had thrown their lot in with him out of practicality. Regardless, they were the foundation Seventh Prince planned to use to carve out a power structure for himself.

Every one of them was important to his future plans. That was why he hadn't sent them to the front lines, and had instead kept them in reserve here. But now, as the light exploded out, unleashing terror, the entire imperial capital erupted into chaos. Astonishment filled the hearts of all as they sensed impending doom.

In the imperial palace, Seventh Prince had called a meeting to discuss the current situation on the front lines.

One person in attendance was from Sea-Sealing County, and was currently in the middle of speaking. "I'm certain that Sea-Sealing County can provide all the supplies needed for the front lines. After all—"

Before he could finish speaking, a terrifying aura erupted from Sir Dust-Sun's residence, causing the sky to turn bright red. The lands quaked. Everyone in the meeting hall looked around with surprise. Then a massive heat wave swept past them, causing their hair to catch on fire.

Seventh Prince instinctively shot to his feet and looked off into the distance, shock on his face. In his pupils could be seen the reflection of an ever-growing dome of light.

"Dawning Sun???" he blurted hoarsely.

The disaster continued. The burning sea of light surged out, quickly covering half of the city. And then... it spread out through the rest of the capital, covering everything.

The Kingdom of Heavengale's taboo treasure was activated. But it only lasted for a short time before being destroyed. Countless cultivators tried to flee. They hardly made it into the air before the sea of light swept over them, wiping them out of existence.

The heat wave expanded, devouring everything and burning people alive. Anguished howls rose up into the sky. The city had become a hell on earth. After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, the light dissipated, leaving behind lingering heat and the smell of cooked flesh.

The imperial capital... didn't exist anymore. It was scorched earth, with no buildings and no corpses. Everything had literally been incinerated.

The amazing capital of the Kingdom of Heavengale, which had stood proudly for countless years, had been completely wiped out in a day. There weren't even a thousand survivors. Seventh Prince was among them, of course, but he was completely bedraggled and obviously severely injured.

Looking around at everything with disheveled hair, he didn't look even remotely under control. He was shaking physically, his eyes bloodshot as his emotions surged out of control. His normal demeanor, his pride, and his superiority... had all been shattered.

"Aaaagggggghhhh!! Who did this? Who?? Who unleashed a Dawning Sun here??"



His eyes were completely bloodshot and he had totally lost his composure. He couldn't possibly keep his cool. Even now, he almost couldn't believe what had just happened. He couldn't accept it. What had moments ago been a magnificent city was now nothing but ruins.

What was especially noteworthy was that he had kept nearly a million loyal followers here. They were the subordinates he had planned to use to level all opposition. That included the forces of the groups and species that had sought asylum with him. They were precious resources that he had prepared.

But right now... they didn't exist anymore. His years of preparation had been flushed down the drain!

Pain filled him. His face turned ashen. Blood sprayed out of his mouth as he stood there trembling, veins bulging on his forehead. Then he screamed a scream that came from the raw pain in his marrow and soul!

He couldn't imagine how this had happened. He didn't understand. Why? Why... had a Dawning Sun been detonated here to destroy everything that was his?

Fear lingered in his heart. Terror. Dread. Just now... he had almost perished. He was an imperial prince who had taken over an entire region. He had a bright future. He had never even considered that he might die. But today... death came very, very close to him. Were it not for some measures taken by King Heaventide, he might not have seen the next day!

As Seventh Prince trembled in anguish, his subordinates were already investigating. It didn't take long to determine where the blast originated.

A figure appeared in the rubble behind Seventh Prince. Kneeling, he wiped the blood from his lips and grimly said, "Your Majesty, we discovered where the blast started...."

Seventh Prince swiveled. Glaring, he grabbed his subordinate and growled, "Tell me!"

"The Dawning Sun explosion started... at Sir Dust-Sun's residence.... He was working on a mission you assigned him regarding Sea-Sealing County. Maybe... this was a case of revenge...."

The subordinate didn't dare to say anything further. Given the level of Sir Dust-Sun's cultivation base, no self-detonation of his could have released power like that of a Dawning Sun. Therefore, considering the mission he was on, it wasn't hard to make some speculations about what happened. That possibility left the subordinate terrified, and caused fear to well up in the hearts of all the survivors.

Seventh Prince's hand shook, and his heart was beating out of control. As he looked in the direction of Sea-Sealing County, his eyes raging with killing intent. If looks could kill, or if they could turn into a Dawning Sun, then Sea-Sealing County would already be half razed to the ground. Unfortunately for Seventh Prince, looks couldn't do that.

*Sea-Sealing County must have the ability to make Dawning Suns! Maybe they're not as powerful as the original, but they're still strong enough to shake heaven and earth. This... this is why the High Commander's army went missing in Sea-Sealing County!*

Seventh Prince wanted to calm down. He wanted to dispel the pain in his heart. But he was shaking so hard, and he was so deeply terrified that his true inner nature was revealed. He was afraid.

*I just wanted him to bring Plumdark to use as a cauldron. I wanted to probe Sea-Sealing County... But then Sea-Sealing County went and detonated a Dawning Sun.... This was definitely Xu Qing's doing. He's warning me not to provoke him and not to touch his woman.... How ruthless of you, Xu Qing!*

The mere thought caused blood to spray from Seventh Prince's mouth. Though he wanted to look away, he couldn't stop from looking at the scorched earth around him. Finally, he gritted his teeth.

“We're leaving. We're going into hiding... until my uncle returns!”

Seventh Prince felt humiliated. But his fear overwhelmed that humiliation. He was worried... about a second Dawning Sun being unleashed on him. He didn't want to cause any trouble for Sea-Sealing County before King Heaventide returned. In fact, he didn't dare. As far as he was concerned, he was dealing with a bunch of lunatics. A bunch of lunatics who could unleash Dawning Suns.

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A great distance away in Sea-Sealing County, the blood-red vortex collapsed. Sir Dust-Sun's golden crow hand fell to the ground, where it writhed as it turned into Sir Dust-Sun himself.

He was incredibly weak. However, after your cultivation base reached a certain level, you could experience the complete destruction of your body while still having the ability to regenerate. The cost was incredibly high.

Sir Dust-Sun hadn't been left with any other choice. His only option in the heat of the moment had been to sever his arm and use that as the foundation for regeneration. That was his only way out of a lose-lose situation. However, after his body formed anew, Sir Dust-Sun scrambled backward, his face pale, his gaze vigilant. Looking in shock at the crumbling vortex, he then turned to Xu Qing.

“W-what... what did you throw in there?”