

## Timescape 731

### Chapter 731: The Extremely Experienced Grandpa Ninth

At first, Xu Qing didn't feel inclined to answer Sir Dust-Sun's question. But then he noticed the look on Plumdark's face, and he thought about everything this 'president' had done. He also noted the expressions on the faces of the other Sea-Sealing County cultivators present.

Voice cool, he said, "A Dawning Sun."

Every person present in that hall in the Governor's Mansion reacted with open shock. Sir Bloodsmelter. Plumdark. All the Sea-Sealing County cultivators. Numerous gasps and expressions of disbelief appeared.

"Dawning Sun?"

"Th-that... that..."

There was a minor uproar. And yet, the ear-piercing exclamation of Sir Dust-Sun drowned them all out.

"DAWNING SUN?? Y-y-you..." A tremor passed through Sir Dust-Sun. At first, he didn't believe it. But then he thought about that destructive blast, and what he had witnessed in the final moments, including that terrifying heat. And in the end, he couldn't fool himself.

Then he thought about the fact that he had been located in Seventh Prince's imperial capital.... He thought about the nearly 1,000,000 loyal subordinates Seventh Prince had gathered there, along with sects from throughout the region who had sought asylum with him. He thought about Seventh Prince's personal staff, and all the countless ways he had prepared over the years....

Sir Dust-Sun shivered uncontrollably from head to toe, and goosebumps broke out all over him as his heart raced. It was easy to imagine the detonation of a Dawning Sun affecting the entire imperial capital. The deaths and other casualties had to have been terrifyingly severe.

And though Sea-Sealing County was responsible, the fact was that his own blood-red vortex had been a major factor. Actually... if people started naming him as an accomplice, claiming that his 'surrender' had really been part of a complex plan to humiliate Seventh Prince, then it would be completely believable.

There was no question that Sir Dust-Sun would be in a very tenuous position going forward. King Heaventide's wrath would be vented on him without question. Most importantly, what if Seventh Prince perished...?

"How could you dare do such a thing?" Sir Dust-Sun shrieked. "And how did you get a Dawning Sun??"

He had completely lost his composure, and was looking at Xu Qing with disbelief, all while mountain-toppling, sea-draining terror battered him from inside. Blood sprayed out of his mouth and he staggered backward, his heart full of overwhelming bitterness. He felt humiliated, wronged,

and worst of all, helpless. All of his own plans had worked out very smoothly. But in the end, the unthinkable happened.

**“I was just testing you out! But you... y-you actually unleashed a Dawning Sun?”**  
**More blood sprayed out of Sir Dust-Sun’s mouth.**

There was something else in his heart that he wanted to say, but couldn’t. *Xu Qing, if you wanted to use a Dawning Sun on me, that’s one thing. But how could you possibly use one on Seventh Prince? Now that you have, do you really think you can avoid trouble? Why...?*

His thoughts led him only into further bitterness. Thanks to his true form crumbling, his cultivation base was in severe decline. He had dropped from third-stage Void Returning down into the second stage, and even that second stage was unstable. His aura was in such chaos that he was actually in between the first and the second stage. What was more, he wasn’t going to be able to sustain himself in that position for very long.

Therefore, it was without the slightest hesitation that he turned to flee. It didn’t matter that he could technically start fighting right now if he wanted to. His cultivation base declined, and Xu Qing’s ruthlessness filled him with fear. It was a fear that came from his bones and his soul. He was worried about a second Dawning Sun. And he was worried... about Qingqin in the sky, as well as Sea-Sealing County’s taboo treasure. After seeing how much his cultivation base had dropped, he knew that this day was the biggest crisis he had ever faced.

The moment he turned to flee, Sir Bloodsmelter lunged forward, joined by Plumdark. Qingqin let loose a loud caw from the sky, and sent down a fearsome energy that locked down on Sir Dust-Sun and his surroundings. Qingqin was descending.

An instant later, Qingqin appeared over the hall, sending pressure down in all directions. He let loose another powerful caw.

Considering that, Sir Dust-Sun had no choice but to suppress his terror.

Expression flickering, he said, “Xu Qing, don’t you know that I’m the one who set free those 10,000 Sea-Sealing County cultivators? I marked all of them with a special soul-sealing symbol. If I die, they’ll all be killed in body and soul! Maybe you can negate those symbols, but it’ll take time. And if you try to capture me, I’ll self-detonate my soul! And when that happens, they’ll die with me! But let me go, and you’ll still have plenty of time to remove the symbols. Letting one person live can save the lives of 10,000 Sea-Sealing warriors. That’s a fair price!”

Sir Dust-Sun was a cautious person, and was skilled at schemes and plans. Even at a moment like this, he still had moves to make. Upon hearing his words, Sir Bloodsmelter and everyone else stopped in place.

Even Qingqin was hesitant to kill Sir Dust-Sun at that point. He was just a bird, and wasn’t exactly proficient in dealing with sealing symbols.

The situation seemed to have evolved into a deadlock. However, Xu Qing’s expression remained the same as he ignored the pleading of Sir Dust-Sun and looked up into the sky.

Others might be hamstrung, but Grandpa Ninth could resolve the situation as easily as turning over his hand. All Xu Qing needed to do was ask. But then, Xu Qing’s expression flickered slightly as he

received a response from Ninth Sib. It was only words, but it still caused a very odd expression to appear on Xu Qing's face.

Then he looked at Sir Dust-Sun, who was backing away from him hysterically, his hair completely disheveled. And Xu Qing decided to just listen to Ninth Sib.

“Slap him!” he said coolly.

Instantly, the sky changed colors, the wind picked up, and lightning crashed. The world blurred. A majestic force descended, causing the entire hall to tremble, and provoking looks of astonishment from the onlookers.

At the same time, Sir Dust-Sun trembled from head to toe, and his face fell. It seemed as if Xu Qing's voice contained natural and magical laws, plus the will of heaven. When he gave orders, they had to be strictly enforced. And thus, the swell of force turned into an invisible hand which viciously slapped Sir Dust-Sun.

A boom rang out along with a miserable scream from Sir Dust-Sun, as the slap turned half of his face into a meat paste and sent him flying backward. It was a terrifying sight, and everyone could virtually feel the pain he was experiencing. He screamed instinctively, his mind going blank. He felt like he had been struck by an unimaginable force, something like an entire mountain. He couldn't fight back or evade. Before he could react, and as he was still tumbling backward, Xu Qing spoke again.

“Slap him again!”

Natural law descended. Another boom rang out along with another howl of anguish from Sir Dust-Sun. This time, the other side of his face was struck, and it nearly ripped his head off his shoulders, making him hard to identify as human. The slap sent him flying from off in the distance back to Xu Qing. As blood poured out of his mouth and neck, a golden crow appeared around him, only to quickly crumble into nothing.

After struggling for a moment, he weakly said, “Using natural laws like that? W-w-what... what cultivation base do you have??”

His face was a mask of terror, and his head was about to fall off his shoulders. He was more astonished now than earlier when he had first heard about the Dawning Sun. And that was because he knew that when it came to natural laws, magical laws, and the will of heaven, they were things that could only be used in this way by Void Returning experts....

Xu Qing didn't answer his question. He just calmly said, “Kneel.”

Sir Dust-Sun shrieked in agony as his legs shattered. However, they didn't disappear, they just bent at awkward angles, forcing him to kneel.

“Smoldering God...” Sir Dust-Sun said, his mind crumbling. He looked at Xu Qing, then looked at Plumdark, his eyes pleading. “Junior Sister, for the sake of us being fellow disciples, and out of respect for our Master, let me off the hook, just this one time....”

Plumdark said nothing. She just shook her head.

Despair and madness filled Sir Dust-Sun's eyes as he prepared to self-detonate and end things in mutual destruction.

“Strip it away!” Xu Qing said calmly.

Heaven and earth rumbled as another huge hand formed. It grabbed Sir Dust-Sun, who screamed as his body shattered, and spirit energy poured out of him. As of that moment, his cultivation base had been stripped away. Left behind was only a puddle of blood and gore. And a soul.

“Let the flesh be the candle. Let the soul burn.”

In response to Xu Qing's words, Sir Dust-Sun's flesh rippled, squished together, and then took the shape of a candle made of bloody flesh! The candle lit up, using the soul as the wick. Agonized screaming rang out from the burning flame of the candle.

Xu Qing picked it up, turned, and walked over to Plumdark. He held the candle out to her.

After a brief moment of hesitation, he said, “A gift for you.”

Plumdark looked at Xu Qing feeling slightly surprised. This wasn't the way he usually did things. But that was fine. An unusual feeling rose up in her. She accepted the candle, her eyes shining brightly. Her plan was to place the candle above the outer door of her mansion grotto, to serve as a lamp that burned day and night.

The hall was completely silent save for the screaming coming from the candle.

Sir Bloodsmelter's eyes gleamed with praise as he looked at his grand-apprentice. He was truly impressed with Xu Qing, who reminded him a lot of himself when he was young, and knew what 'blood-red romance' was all about.

As everyone looked on, Xu Qing turned to the sky and bowed.

Simultaneously, he heard the cold voice of Ninth Sib speaking into his mind.

*“Some enemies need to be put to the sword. But when someone makes a move on your woman, killing them too quickly can be unsatisfying. Instead, torment them brutally, and ultimately, offer them as a gift. That's the way to move a woman's heart. I have experience in this. Back in the day, I helped quite a few people in this same way.”*

An odd expression could be seen on Xu Qing's face. He had never heard Grandpa Ninth talk so much, nor could he have guessed that the ice-cold Grandpa Ninth would have such experience.

All he could do was nod. But then he noticed the look in Plumdark's eyes, and realized that Grandpa Ninth was clearly right. That said, he still felt the best thing to do was kill your enemy as quickly as possible, and not drag things out.

*This'll be the only time,* Xu Qing thought.

Chapter 732: Someone's Mount Grew Up

After Sir Dust-Sun was turned into a candle and Seventh Prince went into hiding, the crisis facing Sea-Sealing County was temporarily abated. The uprisings in the county were quickly put down.

One aspect related to how Master Seventh struck like lightning. But the bigger reason was how a Dawning Sun had been used to wipe out the imperial capital in the old Kingdom of Heavengale. There was no way such an event could be kept under wraps; before long, rumors were raging throughout the Holytide Region. Even nonhumans out on the Forbidden Sea heard about it, and they were left trembling and terror-struck. More than ever, they feared and respected Sea-Sealing County.

All species were pessimistic to a certain degree. And a Dawning Sun was particularly effective on the pessimistic. It was a threat that could destroy any and all plans. It could shake everyone to the core. And of course... when unleashed, it would kill anyone present to see it.

No one could figure out how Sea-Sealing County managed to create Dawning Suns, nor did anyone know how many they had left. And no one wanted to gamble to find out.

When the Dawning Suns first appeared, there had been a species that gambled on it. They were called Nightshades. They suffered severe losses, to the point where they nearly faced extinction. That alone was a message to any species later on who might think about gambling with Dawning Suns.

As a result, the nonhumans who had besieged Seven Blood Eyes quickly retreated. And they did so very respectfully, by offering gifts of recompense in the hopes of dispelling any potential grudges.

But could things really be resolved that easily? War wasn't a situation in which you could just attack someone whenever you wanted, and then go back to being peaceful just because you felt like it. Therefore, Master Seventh personally visited most of the nonhuman species and forced them to enter into some very one-sided treaties. After all was said and done, those nonhumans ended up in a worse position than the Merfolk Isles had been in years ago. They were completely under the control of Sea-Sealing County. In a very short time, Sea-Sealing County's prestige in the Holytide Region skyrocketed.

Xu Qing's name once again made the rounds, and not just in Sea-Sealing County, but in the Forbidden Sea, in South Phoenix, and in the Holytide Region as a whole.

Around that time, it occurred to historians from many species that these circumstances were very similar to something else that happened years ago. It was akin to an earlier era, when the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan existed, and the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan was just as famous as Emperor Mirrorcloud. Now, after countless years, Sea-Sealing County was rising to prominence again. And Xu Qing... was also rising to prominence.

What was more, because the "Qing" in Xu Qing's name was the same character as "Cyan" from the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan, some species started to speculate if his bloodline stretched back to that ancient kingdom. Of course, it was only a guess.

Meanwhile, Marquis Yao and his people easily rescued Kong Xianglong and the 10,000 Sea-Sealing County cultivators. Considering the deadly trials those cultivators had faced, it was no surprise that Xu Qing met them outside the city, joined by the cream of the crop from Sea-Sealing County.

When the two groups caught sight of each other, excited cheering rang out in all directions. Most of the survivors had assumed that they would all end up dead. Therefore, being able to return to Sea-Sealing County was like a dream come true. In fact, tears flowed as they looked at their home.

As for Xu Qing, his heart swelled with emotion, as he recognized many fellow veterans in the crowd, as well as a good friend.

That friend was Kong Xianglong.

Kong Xianglong had been injured badly, and he looked a lot older than before. His personality had changed as well. He wasn't wild and unruly like before. He seemed old-school and solemn. When Xu Qing looked at him, it almost seemed like he was looking at Palace Lord Kong.

Kong Xianglong had long since experienced a cultivation base breakthrough. As the former number one chosen in Sea-Sealing County, it made sense that he was in the great circle of Nascent Soul, and was half a step into the dao begetting phase. Cultivation progress like that was secondary only to Xu Qing. From that it could be seen how hard he had worked over the years. He must also have come across some destined opportunities.

Spotting Xu Qing, his eyes glittered, and he made his way through the crowd. Xu Qing also walked forward. Excited cheering swelled as Xu Qing and Kong Xianglong met each other and embraced.

Then Kong Xianglong took three steps back, dropped to one knee, and offered a formal swordstage salute.

“Greetings, Governor!”

The entire army behind him dropped to their knees and said the same thing.

Xu Qing took a deep breath, looked out at the crowd, and nodded.

“Welcome home!”

The cheering became deafening. As of this moment, everyone in Sea-Sealing County was united.

On the seventh day after Kong Xianglong's return, Xu Qing received word from Zhang San that his dreadnaught was ready.

Zhang San wasn't capable of crafting such a dreadnaught on his own, so he had returned to Seven Blood Eyes to build a team. And after that, he'd gone to the Seazombie lands. It was with the help of the Seven Blood Eyes taboo treasure that he had crafted Xu Qing's dreadnaught.

Although Sir Dust-Sun's schemes and the Forbidden Sea nonhuman uprising had caused some setbacks, in the end, the construction process went fairly smoothly. After the construction was complete, the only thing the dreadnaught lacked was a power source from Xu Qing.

When Xu Qing got the news, his heart filled with anticipation. He'd had a dharmaboat from the very beginning of his path of cultivation, and thus, they were very significant to him. After all, in the past, he had lived on his dharmaboat, and it had helped him to resolve many crises.

Without any hesitation, Xu Qing left the county capital, standing atop Qingqin as they whistled through the air toward Seazombie lands. Qingqin was very pleased to be able to head out with Xu Qing once again. His constant thunderous caws as they flew along made it seem like he was chatting with heaven. Xu Qing was in a good mood as well, and occasionally laughed out loud. The two of them matched well. Occasionally, Qingqin would harness light and then release it in all

directions, and Xu Qing would harness his seven-colored light to augment it. Qingqin was very pleased.

It only took about a day for them to cross most of Sea-Sealing County. Along the way, they passed the Ghost Emperor mountain. Xu Qing looked at it from a distance and sighed in his heart. He knew Third Elder Brother was there working on his cultivation, though it wasn't possible to spot him from this far away.

Xu Qing was very different than he had been in the past. As of now, he knew exactly how powerful a Smoldering God was that could shoulder two major worlds. The Heir Apparent only had a single major world, while Princess Brightblossom and Ninth Sib each had two. The Ghost Emperor was obviously like Ninth Sib, being an expert in battle. A second-stage Smoldering God who was an expert in fighting and had such incredible battle prowess was obviously terrifying.

*“He doesn't have two major worlds!” Ninth Sib said, his voice cold. “He has lingering traces of an additional three major worlds. Sadly, they were all destroyed. But in his prime, he was a five-world Smoldering God! He's not a cultivator from my era. He came later. Regardless, he's breathtaking.”*

Though Ninth Sib's voice was cold, it also seemed somewhat melancholy.

*“He wasn't killed by a god, but rather, by an Imperial Sovereign. Xu Qing, since you've taken up his mantle, it's entirely possible that you might provoke karma from him when you travel in foreign lands in the future. That said, his soul experienced a catastrophe before you came along. Remember. If one of his physical or spiritual souls dies, you need to get back to Moonrite immediately.”*

Xu Qing shivered as he looked at the Ghost Emperor mountain.

Qingqin didn't appear to notice anything. They passed the Ghost Emperor mountain, reached the Forbidden Sea, and eventually arrived at the Seazombie ancestral lands. In the past, the most eye-catching thing there was the Seven Blood Eyes taboo treasure, which was formed from all the Seazombie ancestor statues. That included the enormous blood-red mirror hovering in the sky with its nine closed eyes.

But now there was something that surpassed that by far.

It was a huge sphere, about half as big as the entire island itself. It was violet, and it glowed brightly with dazzling light. It looked almost like a sun that had descended into the mortal world. It also emanated intense heat in all directions. Tempest winds circulated around it, carrying the heat with it. It was actually correct to say... that this thing *was* a sun.

The construction was complete. Also on the island were 100,000 Seven Blood Eyes cultivators who were assembled and waiting for Xu Qing to arrive.

When Xu Qing caught sight of the sun, his jaw nearly dropped. But then, as expected, he caught sight of the Captain standing next to Zhang San. The two were talking to each other. When they spotted Xu Qing, the Captain laughed heartily and walked over to him.

“What do you think, little Ah Qing?” the Captain said proudly. “Are you pleased with this dreadnaught, or are you pleased?”

Xu Qing looked at the huge violet sun, and realized that he could sense within it the very same ancient sun he had carried at his waist for so long.

The Captain had taken it before the battle with Crimson Mother, except, when he released the Dawning Suns, he hadn't used it.

Off to the side, Zhang San chuckled wryly. “My original design didn't look like this,” he said with a sigh. “But the Captain said you like suns.... So he took out something called Big Roundy to serve as the core. He said it's one of the Dawning Suns.... I didn't believe it at first, but now I do.” Pointing at the violet sun, Zhang San said, “This thing really is a Dawning Sun now!”

Xu Qing didn't say anything.

The Captain threw his head back and laughed uproariously. Looking very pleased with himself, he threw his arm around Xu Qing's shoulders and loudly said, “From now on, whenever we go traveling, we'll take this thingy. I look forward very much to seeing who would dare cause problems for us while we're riding a Dawning Sun. It'll cause all light to dim, and will cast terror into the hearts of countless species.

“Now, you usually blow up your dharmaboats, right? Well, that's fine. You can blow it up any time you want! If anybody causes problems for us, then you can just blow them the hell up! Furthermore, I heard that some species in the Holytide Region have been claiming that we *don't* have a second Dawning Sun. Well, who the hell would dare to say that now, huh? We can just take this Dawning Sun and put it right on their doorstep, the fools!”

Xu Qing opened his mouth to speak, but realized he wasn't sure what to say. On the one hand, he had to admit that riding a Dawning Sun around would be impressive. But it would also be dangerous. After all, what would happen if it really did explode...?

This definitely was not the dreadnaught he had imagined. It was more like a fortress. That said, having something as threatening as this... really was astounding.

Qingqin gasped and made a few cawing sounds. This time, Xu Qing understood what he meant. Qingqin was calling it 'terrifying.'

“Little Ah Qing, I already thought of a name for it. It's called Violet Roundy. Good name, don't you agree? And now, Violet Roundy just needs a power source. I know what you're going to use. Hahaha! I can't wait to see what happens when you put some of Crimson Mother's flesh into Violet Roundy. Then it'll really shine!”

The Captain's eyes shone brightly and without an ounce of fear.

Chapter 733: God of the Nightshades

Xu Qing looked at the enormous dreadnaught, then walked toward it. As he neared, its reflection appeared in his eyes. Flames surrounded it, with the high heat causing everything to ripple and distort. The fluctuations coming off it seemed to encompass two aspects.

The first aspect was Xu Qing's mark that came from his old dharmaship. Although the old ship had been dismantled in preparation to make the dreadnaught, those pieces had been reused as the new foundation.

The second aspect of the fluctuations were that of the ancient sun. Xu Qing had carried that ancient sun at his waist for a long time in the Moonrite Region, and had therefore developed a close connection to it. After sensing the fluctuations, Xu Qing realized that the dreadnaught didn't seem anything at all like a stranger. All he had to do was mark it as his own, combine the two aspects of the fluctuations, and then he would have full control of what was essentially the same ancient sun as before, just upgraded.

As everyone looked on, he floated up until he was over the ancient sun, then took a deep breath and sent his divine sense into the sun. There was no resistance at all.

In hardly more than ten breaths of time, Xu Qing's divine sense filled it, causing rumbling sounds to echo out from inside. It was like a gigantic sleeping beast waking up. The flames surged, and the energy grew more shocking. The sun trembled as it floated up, passing Xu Qing like an actual rising sun.

Xu Qing hovered there, his hair whipping about, his aura connected to the huge violet sun, causing him to feel great pressure. Everyone looking on felt immense weight pushing down on them.

Around then, the Captain spoke. "Keep it up, little Ah Qing! It's time to witness a miracle! Although Violet Roundy is mighty, it's not quite on the level of a real Dawning Sun. The explosion of a Dawning Sun can take out half a region! But if Violet Roundy detonates, it won't take out more than half a prefecture.

"But that's fine. Based on my calculations, after it absorbs some of Crimson Mother's flesh, it will become vastly more powerful. Although, I suggest you don't do any experiments here. Let's go somewhere else. Perhaps Forbidden by the Zombie?"

The Captain licked his lips, and his eyes shone bright with craziness. Truth be told, because that violet sun had Xu Qing's fluctuations, he was the only one who could actually control it. The Captain had already confirmed that personally.

Xu Qing looked down at the Captain, then blurred into motion. An instant later, he appeared atop the sun.

A throne rose up beneath him, and he sat down. He sent his divine will out. The ancient sun rumbled loudly, like a roaring god.

The anxious Captain quickly flew up to join Xu Qing, and then the sun zipped away, quickly leaving the Seazombie ancestral land. The violet sun was gone, leaving behind only a few expanding ripples.

When it appeared again, it was far out over the Forbidden Sea, in the air above Forbidden by the Zombie. Though there was no blood visible in the black seawater, a powerful stench of gore filled

the air. The mutagen here was different from other places, roiling with such intensity that it formed a mist on the water. In the past, that mist was so thick it blocked out the sun. But the events which played out not too long ago had affected the forbidden ground significantly.

“This place’ll do. Alright, it’s go time, little Ah Qing! Let’s see what that piece of Crimson Mother’s flesh will do.”

The Captain glanced down at Forbidden by the Zombie, the craziness in his eyes shining more brightly than ever.

Xu Qing turned to the Captain. “Eldest Brother,” he said coolly, “does this positive attitude of yours have something to do with certain plans you have regarding Forbidden by the Zombie?”

The Captain’s expression suddenly became very somber. “Little Junior Brother,” he said solemnly, “how could you say something like that? I’m your Eldest Brother, so of course I’m interested in you improving your battle prowess. In fact, I’m more concerned about your own breakthroughs than my own.”

Xu Qing’s face remained completely without expression. He didn’t believe the Captain’s nonsense. And given how well he knew the Captain, he could easily guess what was really going on. After Xu Qing just looked at him for a very long moment, the Captain awkwardly smiled.

Lowering his voice, he said, “Little Ah Qing, there’s no one in charge of Forbidden by the Zombie right now, so it’s the perfect place for experimentation. After all, what happens on the off chance that... Violet Roundy explodes? It could very well break open the lair of the previous master of this forbidden ground. And that fellow must have a ton of treasure stockpiled!

“Now, I’ll give it you that if Violet Roundy doesn’t power up and instead explodes, it would be dangerous. But what in life *isn’t* dangerous? And could that danger possibly surpass dealing with Crimson Mother? I’m not scared! Worst case scenario, this life ends, and I have to start a new life. And when I do, I’ll resurrect you!”

Licking his lips, the Captain thumped himself on the chest. “Besides, based on my speculations, after you put Crimson Mother’s flesh inside, there’s only a thirty percent chance that Violet Roundy will explode. And that means there’s a seventy percent chance of success! Think about what success would mean! This thingy would be more powerful than an actual Dawning Sun. You won’t even need to worry about cultivation! You could use it alone to crush countless species.”

The more the Captain talked, the more excited he got. “You’ve got to take the chance, little Ah Qing!”

Xu Qing’s face twitched slightly. He knew the Captain was crazy, and he knew the Captain liked to risk his life. But Xu Qing wasn’t interested in putting his own life on the line for something as meaningless as this.

Just as he was about to refuse, the Captain suddenly pulled out a piece of Crimson Mother’s flesh and jammed a golden jade slip into it. It surged with teleportation fluctuations.

Xu Qing looked at it.

The Captain cleared his throat, then removed the jade slip and tossed it to Xu Qing. “That’s a new invention of mine. After absorbing Crimson Mother’s godsource, it can sustain the pressure of personhood and allow for safe teleportations away. Don’t worry, we won’t die.”

Xu Qing mulled it over. He looked at the jade slip, and then at the violet sun. The reality was that he was really interested to see what would happen after he put Crimson Mother’s flesh into the sun. And a look had appeared in his eyes that mirrored the Captain’s craziness.

Finally, his eyes shone with determination and he lifted his right hand. A violet worm emerged from his palm and entered the teleportation jade slip. The worm teleported away safely. After the cultivation base reached a certain level, all cultivators could be reborn through regeneration to a certain extent. Having accomplished that, Xu Qing took out a fist-sized piece of Crimson Mother’s flesh. Mutagen instantly erupted. Colors flashed in the sky and winds kicked up.

Looking enlivened, the Captain backed up and took out a second golden jade slip. Noticing what Xu Qing did, he sent a blue worm into the jade slip, and sent it teleporting away.

Seeing that the Captain was ready, Xu Qing took a deep breath and prepared to send Crimson Mother’s flesh into the violet sun. Before he could, a cold voice echoed out.

“Do you two have a death wish? If so, you picked a good spot. The feng shui makes this a very unique location. It’s the perfect place for two graves.”

As the Captain blinked a few times, Xu Qing looked in the direction the voice came from. Ninth Sib appeared, floating down toward Xu Qing. Looking at the violet sun, he nodded.

“Not bad. If you add Crimson Mother’s flesh, then it’ll definitely be enough to send you on your way. In fact, I’d say there’s a ninety-nine percent chance that will be the outcome. You might have sent some of your godsource away, but your true forms will be wiped out in an instant, so whether or not you end up regenerating will be up to chance.

“That said, you do have those teleportation jade slips. They should get some of your treasure away. I have to admit, the two of you are really skilled at being suicidal. By the way, do you two have any last words?”

Ninth Sib looked at Xu Qing and then the Captain.

Xu Qing didn’t say anything, but he put away the piece of Crimson Mother’s flesh and dispelled any thoughts of putting it into the sun. If the chances of it detonating were that high, then it made more sense to explode the sun in a place where it would make a difference. It wasn’t something that should be wasted.

Most importantly, he needed to be far enough away to be safe. Either that, or make sure he could teleport away before the detonation.

The Captain shrank back a bit. He hated to admit it, but Ninth Sib’s prediction seemed a lot more reliable than his own. If the chances of success were that small, then putting his life on the line didn’t make that much sense. Having reached the conclusion that this was definitely the best idea, the Captain smiled sarcastically.

Ninth Sib laughed coldly. “So you’re not going to attempt suicide?”

Xu Qing shook his head. The Captain was just as quick to do the same.

Ninth Sib snorted coldly, then vanished into thin air, leaving Xu Qing and the Captain behind on the open sea. The two of them looked at each other.

The Captain sighed. Lowering his voice, he said, “What a pity. How come I feel like a kid that was caught by the adults before he could set off some fireworks? I mean, if we’d succeeded, then we would have such an amazing destructive force to use as a threat! Even the emperor would have had to treat us politely! I just can’t accept this!”

Xu Qing nodded. He also felt it was a pity. With the wave of his hand, he pulled the ancient sun toward him. It shrank down into a little sphere that dropped onto his palm. After hanging it at his waist, he looked around and then projected a divine will message to the Captain.

*“Be patient, Eldest Brother. With some additional preparation, and a bit more confidence, we can try again!”*

The Captain nodded earnestly. “You’re absolutely correct, little Junior Brother. I’ll make some additional preparations. And when we have the chance, we can go visit my ex-wife. We can put on a really big fireworks show for hēr!”

With that, he threw his arm over Xu Qing’s shoulders, and the two of them made their way off into the distance.

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Up in the air, Ninth Sib sighed. As far as he was concerned, these two really were far too suicidal. That said, the two of them had plotted for years against Crimson Mother, and had gone up against hēr with mere Nascent Soul cultivation bases.... Thinking of it in those terms, he realized things weren’t as dramatic as he’d imagined.

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In the Nightspirit Region, on the front lines with the Nightshades, the war had reached a critical juncture. King Heaventide had led his forces against the Nightshade cultivators. Blood flowed like rivers, and immortal skills descended like rain. Deceased souls floated up constantly.

After suffering defeat after defeat, the Nightshade forces had gathered together. In the middle of the army were seventeen Nightshade priests in long violet robes, who prostrated to the canopy of heaven in some sort of ritual.

*“The new moon, lord to me; Revered Ancient’s true trustee; the living hosts suffer; they have a blissful guarantee.*

*“Give myself to my Lord, no bitterness for me, from bitterness I’m free, undecayed for all to see.*

*“The new moon, lord; from the Revered Ancient community; all living beings far and near; as Violet Lord do address thee.*

*“Souls offered, lord to me; pāramitā an actuality; sing with joy when you see; the return to our world ends happily.”*

When King Heaventide saw that, he sneered. “Trying to summon a god? Your god is asleep and can’t pay any attention to you.”

Despite his words, King Heaventide was shaken. After all, he had heard the litany and realized that Crimson Mother wasn’t mentioned. Instead, there was some new figure named Violet Lord.

His eyes narrowed, but at the same time, he didn’t want any delays. With the wave of his hand, he sent hordes of cultivators surging forward to wipe out the Nightshade army. Yet at that exact moment, the sky which previously contained the glow of a Dawning Sun now shone with a violet glow. Then, a huge violet moon appeared in the sky, pulsing with terrifying pressure.

Chapter 734: Losing One’s Head to Greed

Waves surged across the surface of the Forbidden Sea as Xu Qing and the Captain went back toward Sea-Sealing County. All of a sudden, Xu Qing stopped in place and looked off into the distance. He felt like he could hear a voice in his mind, and could just barely make out some images floating in front of him. Unfortunately, the images were blurry, like runny ink.

When Xu Qing suddenly stopped in place, the Captain looked over in surprise. Then he followed Xu Qing’s gaze off into the distance. He didn’t see anything.

Curious, he asked, “What’s going on, little Ah Qing? Did you see something?”

Xu Qing didn’t respond at first. After seeing Xu Qing just looking blankly off into the distance, the Captain was about to ask another question. That was when Xu Qing’s expression returned to normal.

Realizing he was looking in the direction of the Nightspirit Region, he said, “It seems like something is calling out to me. Something I originally assumed didn’t exist.”

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On the Nightshade front lines, a violet moon descended, casting violet light in all directions, and causing the previously bright canopy of heaven to suddenly dim. Down below, all living beings trembled as the violet light grew stronger. At the same time, a terrifying aura spread from the violet moon. From a distance, it looked like the violet moon took up about half of the sky. Cultivators on both sides of the conflict could look up and see all the various craters and depressions that covered its surface. A huge stone stele could be seen on the violet heavenly body, shining with shocking, dazzling light.

A godly aura caused heaven and earth to distort. It blurred the world as clouds of mutagen rose up, within which could be seen innumerable violet worms that seemed to phase back and forth between illusory and corporeal.

Down on the battlefield, King Heaventide and his subordinates were deeply shaken. Many gasped for breath, and many trembled physically.

On the Nightshade side, the priests in the violet robes looked more pious than ever, and they raised their voices exuberantly. The other Nightshades also started to get excited, and one by one, they

dropped to worship the violet moon. To them, the arrival of the violet moon indicated that their god hadn't abandoned them. They...still had a god!

In contrast, King Heaventide was struck as if by countless bolts of lightning. He was a Smoldering God, so he knew how terrifying actual gods were. What was more, he knew that his own battle prowess didn't qualify him to even fight back against a real god.

“How could this be?? Don't tell me Crimson Mother woke up? No, that can't be. They weren't chanting about Crimson Mother. They mentioned Violet Lord! I've never heard of this Violet Lord before. Could he be an embodiment of Crimson Mother? Or maybe some ancient god nobody has heard of before?”

King Heaventide was particularly shaken considering that he could sense how true and real this violet moon was. The pressure it exuded, and the mist of violet threadworms, couldn't have been more real.

This really was like the arrival of a god! The fluctuations and the feelings became a tempest in his heart, raging out of control. Without any hesitation, and without any regard for the lives of his subordinates, he found himself thinking of only one thing: run away! He had to run away before this Violet Lord arrived. That was his only chance to survive.

Gritting his teeth, he shouted, “Withdraw!”

Turning, he shot off into the distance at top speed. He was a Smoldering God, and as one of the eighteen heavenly kings leading the fight against the Nightshades in this war, he had no desire to die.

As he well knew, humankind was bringing the fight to the Nightshades from over a dozen directions. As the war was fought over two huge regions, each heavenly king was in charge of one line of offense. In other words, a defeat here wouldn't be a fatal blow. It would make things a bit more difficult in his attempt to earn the emperor's approval, and for Seventh Prince's plans to become the true leader of the Holytide region. But compared to dying... those things seemed trivial.

In the shortest of moments, King Heaventide vanished from beneath the violet moon. After he was gone, the subordinates he'd left behind looked around with bitterness and despair before following him. Unfortunately, they were also aware that the chances of them escaping from a god were minuscule.

The Nightshades didn't take advantage of the moment to launch a counter attack. After finishing with their chanting, they withdrew from the battlefield under the cover of the violet moon.

Time slipped by slowly but surely. Eventually, the Nightshades were long gone. King Heaventide's forces were still in retreat, yet they seemed confused, as... they hadn't seen any god at all. In fact, the violet moon above was starting to ripple and fade into nothing. Apparently, it had done little more than release some mutagen. It had not been as deadly as its aura and pressure made it seem like it would be.

Apparently it was... *as unreal as flowers in a mirror or the moon in the water*. In fact, it wasn't long before the violet moon disappeared altogether, and everything went back to normal.

King Heaventide's subordinates looked around in confusion. However, it didn't take long before people realized what had happened. They... had been tricked! There had never been a god on the way. It was simply an illusion.

However, that realization shook them to the core. Then, rumbling filled the sky as King Heaventide returned. He was scowling deeply, and his eyes burned with rage. His baleful aura couldn't have been more intense as he raced along at top speed. He had fled on instinct, but after getting a certain distance away, he realized that something was off. After carefully checking behind him, he realized that the violet moon was gone. As of that moment, he realized that he... had fallen into a trap!

Eyes bloodshot with fury, he glared off into the distance. There, he saw the fleeing Nightshade army with their seventeen high priests. Were it not for his big mistake in judgment, that army would already have been wiped out. And the seventeen priests that had been his main target would be dead. At that point, he would have accomplished his mission in the war.

He would have heard the approval of the emperor, and Seventh Prince would have acquired the Holytide Region as his personal fiefdom. And in the end, he would have returned triumphant. But then this unexpected turn of events occurred.

Under the eyes of all present, he had fled in fear from the Nightshades. It was a humiliation. An outright humiliation. That thought caused his fury to burn. Some of it was because of the terror he had felt, and some of it was because of how much face he had lost.

King Heaventide immediately issued new orders.

“Everyone, heed my command. Chase down the Nightshade stragglers. Kill any Nightshade cultivators you come across. All of them! Leave none alive!”

His subordinates did not respond with the same excited fervor as before. The sight of King Heaventide turning and running away left them with very mixed feelings. However, the orders came from a Smoldering God, so they had no choice but to comply.

That said, the deputy general in charge of the immortal skills couldn't help but fly up to King Heaventide. Lowering his voice, he said, “Heavenly King, the immortal skills can't reach that far. We need more time. Chasing the enemy now will be risky....”

King Heaventide's face was as cold as ice as he looked at the deputy general. “Are you refusing to obey orders?”

The deputy general bowed his head. “Your humble servant would never.”

“Then get moving!” King Heaventide shouted in a voice as loud as heavenly thunder. The army immediately surged into motion to chase after the fleeing Nightshades.

King Heaventide led the charge.

However, things didn't go very well. The Nightshades were relying primarily on teleportations to make their escape, so pursuing them meant constantly tracking the lingering teleportation signals. And thus, after three days of pursuit, King Heaventide's forces found themselves deep inside the Nightspirit Region, surrounded by thick, dark fog.

Clues they had come across on their journey seemed to indicate that the Nightshade army were preparing to make their last stand, and that included the seventeen high priests.

King Heaventide looked out into the fog for a time. Upon sensing the fluctuations of teleportations, his eyes shone with determination and he issued more orders.

Before long, he and his army were racing through the fog. The fog seethed as it swallowed them up.

Seven days later, the fog in that part of the Nightspirit Region churned. Rumbling sounds rose into the dome of heaven. And then a deafening boom echoed out, accompanied by a huge mushroom cloud.

A group of bedraggled figures stumbled out of the fog, led by King Heaventide. He no longer looked as awe-inspiring as before. His eyes glittered defiantly, but his armor was smashed and his complexion wan. He was clearly wounded, and was bleeding all over. His subordinates were all in the same condition, being severely injured and extremely weak. As for the size of his army... only one in ten had survived. Ninety percent of his forces were not coming back.

Looking back at his subordinates, his heart burned with fury. Then he thought about what happened after they raced into that fog, and his fury rose to such a high level that blood sprayed out of his mouth.

First the Nightshades summoned an illusory god to startle me, making me lose face and lose the initiative. Then, allowing anger to surpass reason, I chased them past the range of the immortal skills to this spot. The immortal skills were what prevented the Nightshades from detonating weapons with large areas of effect. As it turned out, they had domain treasure fragments here that they could detonate at will.

King Heaventide felt deep regret. Considering how badly he was injured, he was now worried about what else the Nightshades might have planned. Gritting his teeth, he focused on getting to safety.

After reaching the border of the Holytide Region, he had his army set up camp. Then he stewed in his defiance, rage, and regret as he tried to decide how to explain all of this to the emperor.

It was at that exact same moment that he was finally given a few jade slips that had been sent by Seventh Prince. The first one was a message explaining that the High Commander had gone missing in Sea-Sealing County, and that Sea-Sealing County had refused to send further troops. The second one notified him that Sea-Sealing County had some Dawning Suns, and that Seventh Prince's garrison had been wiped out, resulting in severe casualties. Those two jade slips caused killing intent to erupt in King Heaventide. However, he now had a way to explain this disaster to the emperor.

It was all Sea-Sealing County's fault. Because they didn't send reinforcements, he wasn't able to fully deploy the immortal skills in time to foray into the Nightspirit Region. That left his army somewhat stranded, and thus led to the big defeat.

Chapter 735: Kicking an Iron Block

“Sea-Sealing County.”

King Heaventide put down the jade slip, closed his eyes, and started mentally calculating the probability of succeeding at what he was now planning. Sometime later, he opened his eyes, and they shone with cold light as he looked in the direction of Sea-Sealing County.

He needed a justification. Something to sweep his own failures under the rug. A way to explain things to the emperor. The justification didn't need to be perfect. After all, the emperor was the type of person who would be able to poke holes even into a perfect explanation. That wasn't important. As one of the heavenly kings, much of his explanation would come in the form of his attitude. He needed to do something that made his attitude toward the emperor very clear.

Furthermore, what the emperor cared most about was winning the war. If he could recover from his losses and quell the chaos, then his 'problem' wouldn't be a problem anymore. Most importantly...

*Sea-Sealing County has Dawning Suns! They're not quite as impressive as the real Dawning Suns, although that's only what we know on the surface. They could have more assets that we don't know about.*

King Heaventide looked down at the jade slip, and his eyes grew colder.

*Sea-Sealing County was lax in sending reinforcements, which is one of the main reasons I was defeated. And though I don't know how they made their Dawning Suns, that's an even greater crime. I have to go to Sea-Sealing County, confiscate their illicit Dawning Suns, then come back here and break the stalemate with the Nightshades. That's my only option.*

Having come to the conclusion that this was definitely the best course of action, King Heaventide immediately issued orders, and his army started the return trip to the Holytide Region, and within it, Sea-Sealing County.

It was a given that King Heaventide had already considered the possibility that Sea-Sealing County would detonate a Dawning Sun to kill him and end things in mutual destruction. That didn't seem likely to him, as long as he didn't push them too far and make them think they were going to be wiped out. He needed to put some pressure on them, offer to exempt them from punishment over the Dawning Suns issue, and recognize their autonomy.

If he did that, Sea-Sealing County would bend the knee. That was, unless they were planning to rebel against humankind. If that was the case, it wouldn't have anything to do with him.

*Just putting the right amount of pressure on them should do the trick.*

Wrapped up in such thoughts, King Heaventide led his army toward Sea-Sealing County.

From a distance, it was an army millions strong, capable of destroying anything in their path. War banners snapped in the wind as they made their way along, organized into over a dozen legions. Each legion was different. Some were mounted on enormous birds. Some sat cross-legged atop mutant beasts. Some soared along in clouds and fog.... In the back was a legion of nonhumans, including giants fully 300 meters tall, clad in armor from head to toe, their every step shaking the lands.

Up front was a 30,000-meter black dragon that snaked through the clouds, pulsing with stupefying power. Seated cross-legged on the dragon's head was King Heaventide, his eyes closed, his expression cold and somber.

Wherever the army passed, heaven and earth trembled. It crossed right through Grand Duke Holytide's territory, then reached the ruins of the imperial capital in the old lands of the Kingdom of

Heavengale. From his position atop the black dragon, King Heaventide surveyed the area thoughtfully. Then he closed his eyes, and the army moved on.

Eventually it reached the border of Sea-Sealing County, specifically, the three prefectures that Seventh Prince had originally taken, but been maneuvered into returning. The living beings in those three prefectures trembled in fear. That included mortals and cultivators alike. The grim army swept through with mountain-toppling, sea-draining force, kicking up wind and dust, and trampling the terrain.[1]

The three prefectures' spell formations were crushed in an instant, and any species, organizations, or sects who found themselves in the way of the army were smashed. The Swordsage Divisions in those prefectures were no exception.

Tyrannical. Mighty. Invincible.

Words such as that described the advance of the army as they got closer and closer to the county capital of Sea-Sealing County. Almost overnight, Sea-Sealing County was thrown into a very unstable and dangerous situation.

Of course, Sea-Sealing County had long since received news of King Heaventide's impending arrival. And no one was really surprised by what was happening. From the moment the High Commander's army was captured, everyone in the county knew that this day would come. Therefore, war preparations hadn't ceased.

Once the news came in about King Heaventide arriving, Sea-Sealing County's taboo treasure was activated. The magical treasures from all the subsidiary sects were also turned on, causing a huge net to cover everything for 50 kilometers around the county capital. Cultivators from all three palaces put on their armor and made preparations to fight back. Spell formations were set up that glowed with the light of divine abilities. Magical devices designed for warfare were activated, and could be used at any moment. War puppets were activated.

Master Seventh's dreadnaught glided in the air amongst a host of flying ships from a variety of sects. What was more, a huge palace floated in the sky, within which were Master Seventh, Marquis Yao, the three palace lords, and Void Returning experts from different sects. Xu Qing and the Captain were also there. They were all looking toward the horizon.

In contrast, the various organizations in the Holytide Region were looking in their direction. In the past, everyone would have assumed that Sea-Sealing County was about to be erased from existence. But then Sea-Sealing County went and used a Dawning Sun, and that shook everyone to the core.

Everyone wanted to see what happened when King Heaventide showed up, and what course of action Sea-Sealing County would take to weather the storm.

Grand Duke Holytide was the one who was taking the most open interest in the proceedings. He himself wouldn't ever provoke King Heaventide, but he was actually very interested in Sea-Sealing County's Dawning Suns. He actually didn't care who came out on top of this clash. He was more interested in taking advantage of the situation to see who the superior force really was.

*Sadly, Sea-Sealing County just isn't strong enough. If they were a bit more daring, maybe they would detonate all of their Dawning Suns. That would be interesting.*

Grand Duke Holytide smiled faintly. None of this had anything to do with him as far as he was concerned. Nor did he think it would affect him going forward. Unless... Sea-Sealing County got truly daring. However, that would be complete madness, and seemed incredibly unlikely. So in the end, he just sighed and waited.

Of all the people watching to see how things would play out, there was one person who was more excited than anyone else, and that was Seventh Prince. He knew that Sea-Sealing County shouldn't be underestimated. However, he had faith in his uncle, who was, after all... a Smoldering God. He was very much looking forward to seeing how it all turned out.

*What will you choose to do this time, Xu Qing?*

And thus, everyone in the Holytide Region looked on with various attitudes as King Heaventide's army arrived outside the county capital. Their arrival caused Sea-Sealing County's sky to dim and its lands to tremble violently. The seemingly innumerable soldiers exuded a pressure that shook the hearts of all the cultivators observing the situation.

Most shocking of all was the cross-legged figure seated atop the head of the black dragon. On the Sea-Sealing County side, everyone was silent. No one spoke. Everyone focused on the imposing, middle-aged man atop the dragon. As all gazes focused on King Heaventide, he opened his eyes. They were like two furnaces that caused everything in the area to shake.

A cry of alarm echoed out from the sky as Qingqin backed up rapidly, not daring to be subjected to that gaze.

A majestic major world appeared over the county capital, becoming its sky, blocking out all light and casting the city into shadow. But then fire started to burn within that major world, and it was accompanied by never-ending screams as if from devils and monsters. All living beings who heard it were shaken.

Instantly, Sea-Sealing County was illuminated by the fire from King Heaventide's major world.

The city's taboo treasure emitted piercing sounds as it started to crumble, then struggled to rebuild itself. The cultivators in the city were in a similar situation. Every single one could feel the terrifying power of a Smoldering God, and stimulated their energy to resist.

Unfortunately, that did no good in the face of a Smoldering God. If King Heaventide wanted to, he could exercise a single thought to wipe out everything in front of him. That said, it was obvious he hadn't come for purposes of destruction and extermination. Nor did he want to push Sea-Sealing County into unleashing their Dawning Suns, and end things in mutual destruction.

Though he was emitting immense pressure, he wasn't actually using it to crush Sea-Sealing County. It was only a warning.

Behind King Heaventide, a general in a suit of black armor emerged from the army. His mount was a flood dragon, and he had a fourth-stage Void Returning cultivation base, which caused an illusory world to appear overhead.

He flew out until he was between the two armies. There, he looked up at the forces of Sea-Sealing County, a complicated expression on his face.

Sounding very calm, he said, “Governor Yao Tianyan of Sea-Sealing County. Lieutenant Governor Zheng Kaiyi. You are hereby ordered to accept the punishment of a heavenly king. You have committed five crimes.

“The first is that of disrespecting the imperial clan.

“The second is failure to comply with conscription orders.

“The third is your suspected involvement in ambushing the conscription army of the high commander.

“The fourth is ordering your troops to flee on the eve of battle.

“The fifth is, by means of the above actions, delaying the war and affecting the war effort in a major way, and thus aiding and abetting our enemies!”

With that, the general looked up at the figures in the floating palace. “Do you admit to your crimes?”

Behind him, the cultivators in King Heaventide’s army shouted, “Admit your guilt!”

Their voices crashed like thunder, shaking everything, and even stirring the garments of the Sea-Sealing County forces.

Everyone was shaken. However, nobody said a word. Xu Qing’s expression remained the same as ever as he stared at the army.

The silence caused King Heaventide’s eyes to turn even more cold and grim. It was the same with the gaze of the general.

“Because the heavenly king recognizes you as humans,” the general continued, “and does not wish humans to kill each other, he is issuing four orders that you must comply with. If you do, you can turn your crimes into deeds of merit.

“One. Transfer all deserters into our custody for later trial and judgment.

“Two. Immediately release the high commander’s army.

“Three. Yao Tianyan and Zheng Kaiyi will join the army forthwith, conscript 1,000,000 troops, and go to the front lines.

“Four. Deliver all of your Dawning Suns to us.”

With that, the general backed up into his original position in the army. Meanwhile, the forces of Sea-Sealing County remained as silent as before. Seeing that, King Heaventide rose to his feet on the head of the black dragon. Looking down at the county capital, he spoke in a voice that boomed like thunder.

“If we win the war with the Nightshades, I will personally exempt Sea-Sealing County from all punishment. Furthermore, Sea-Sealing County can remain

autonomous as part of the Sea-Sealing County fiefdom. But if you refuse to cooperate....”

King Heaventide’s eyes turned colder, and his Smoldering God cultivation base caused the sky to shake. With a single thought, he could devastate the county capital and put all the people there in a terrible situation.

In the floating palace, Master Seventh turned to Xu Qing. Marquis Yao did the same. Everyone did. The Captain, of course, looked more proud of himself than ever.

King Heaventide noticed that and he frowned slightly. He had sensed earlier that something unusual was going on in Sea-Sealing County, and that feeling was now stronger than ever. He let loose a cold harrumph.

“Apparently you have additional assets you feel confident in relying on. Fine. Bring them out. I’m curious to see what they are.”

Xu Qing’s expression remained the same as ever as he looked, not at the imposing King Heaventide, but rather, at the sky. Clasp hands, he bowed.

“He’s calling you out, Grandpa Ninth.”

Chapter 736: Three Swords Execute Heaventide

King Heaventide calmly sent some divine will into the dome of heaven. He was curious to see what assets Sea-Sealing County had to rely on other than their Dawning Suns.

Regardless of what those assets were, they didn’t relate to him. He was a heavenly king, not because of his clan standing, but because of his Smoldering God cultivation base. Although he wasn’t the strongest of the thirty-three heavenly kings of humankind, his identity, position, and battle prowess left him feeling confident that he could deal with whatever circumstances might arise.

That was especially the case considering he was in this backwater Holytide Region. As he knew, before Grand Duke Holytide became a Smoldering God, it had been countless years since any Smoldering Gods had existed in the Holytide Region. To the people here, Smoldering Gods... were almost no different from real gods. Both were as mighty as heaven, and simply couldn’t be defied or shaken.

He also knew that humans were the last species to conquer all of Revered Ancient. Although they had experienced a lot of setbacks, they could still be considered one of the top species. And when compared to the Nightshades, they had more Smoldering Gods.

In the past, if humankind had wanted to forcibly retake the Holytide Region from the Nightshades, it would have been simple. The enclaves they had in other areas would also enable them to retake other regions if they wanted. That said, such actions would be very costly, and the overall political situation made it challenging. There were a lot of nonhuman species that put pressure on humans.

The seven counties they controlled in other regions were embroiled in complicated circumstances. What was more, all of the regions involved were controlled by major species with domain treasures.

In the past, humankind didn’t have a domain treasure, and thus, had to be patient. It was only by having a domain treasure that a species could truly have the power to protect itself.

That was why humans had so many problems with the nonhumans back when Sea-Sealing County first went to war. However, after the first Dawning Sun was unleashed, the other species trembled and backed down.

Of course, just having a domain treasure wasn't enough on its own. What surpassed a domain treasure in terms of importance was a god. Gods were what truly decided if a species was strong or not. When a god became involved, Smoldering Gods and domain treasures didn't count for much. That was why, though the Nightshades actually weren't as strong as humankind, they were still able to make humans tremble in fear. Gods could overturn anything and everything.

The ultimate reason for the Nightshades' defeat was that their god, Crimson Mother, was put to sleep thanks to a complicated plot hatched by the human emperor. As one force declines, another will flourish. And thus, it was no surprise that humans started getting stronger.

Of course, there were many other factors at play that foolish people couldn't see. Such people had simple ways of thinking, and would often ask ridiculous questions such as: if humans were so strong, why didn't they take back the Holytides sooner? Only intelligent people with good observation skills and all the right information would be able to see the truth.

*So, what is this asset that Sea-Sealing County is relying on?*

King Heaventide hadn't actually looked up into the sky, but rather, was scanning it with divine will. He looked as calm as ever.

However, just as he was about to scan even more deeply, a cold snort echoed out, piercing into his divine will in domineering fashion. It turned into something like heavenly thunder crashing into King Heaventide's mind.

His expression turned serious as he looked up into the canopy of heaven. There, above his major world, the sky emitted a massive cracking sound as a huge rift appeared on its surface. It obviously hadn't appeared naturally. It was perfectly straight, almost as if it had been cut out by a blade. In terms of the size, it was roughly 30,000 meters long.

Looking from below, that rift was extremely prominent. But even more shocking was the heaven-shaking, earth-shattering stream of sword energy that emerged from within it and spread out in all directions.

Clouds collapsed. The land shook. Living beings trembled. Everything else seemed to disappear, turning dark and blurry. The only thing visible was that stream of sword energy emerging from the rift.

It was as if a heavenly sword had slashed into King Heaventide's major world above the county capital.

Instantly, the major world trembled violently, emitting deafening rumbling sounds that resembled 10,000,000 thunderclaps all happening at the same time. The outer walls of the world crumbled, turning into an infinitude of debris that rained down into the terrain of the world like falling meteors.

The world shook, and yet, the sword energy didn't stop. After slashing through the outer walls, it pierced through its sky and then hewed into its lands. The mark left by the sword caved in on either side. Mountains collapsed, rivers evaporated, and living beings howled in anguish as they turned into the color of blood.

However, this sword energy was truly mighty and terrifying. It continued on, its effects spreading until... the entire major world was cut clean in half by the sword! The world had been destroyed! From a distance, it was possible to see two halves of a major world, slowly separating in the sky above the county capital.

It was a shocking and ghastly scene. The two blood-red halves of a major world were filled with howls of anguish and falling debris. Then the two halves became transparent and started falling down. As they fell, they collapsed. The ground shook as King Heaventide's major world became a hail of rubble that fell down into Sea-Sealing County. All of this takes a bit of time to describe, but it all happened in an instant.

As the major world collapsed, everyone in Sea-Sealing County was stunned. Also stunned were King Heaventide's subordinates. Everyone in the army was shaking as badly as if they were witnessing the end of days. Their minds were complete blanks. What they had just witnessed was so terrifying and so sudden that they couldn't possibly have been prepared mentally. What was more, even if they had been prepared mentally, it still wouldn't have been possible to watch the major world of a Smoldering God be destroyed with one sword move and react with anything but disbelief.

More shocked than anyone else was King Heaventide. His heart was battered by waves of astonishment, and he also felt a sensation of unprecedented danger. He stepped off the black dragon, which howled in anguish as it was unable to sustain the might coming off him.

As the dragon fell to the ground, King Heaventide grew larger. He went from being the size of an ordinary person to being 300 meters tall. Then 3,000. Then 30,000, making him like a giant that could prop up heaven and earth. Compared to him, the county capital of Sea-Sealing County looked like a child's bouncy ball. However, King Heaventide wasn't calm because of his extraordinary size. Instead, his expression was very serious.

**“Who are you, Fellow Daoist? Are you really trying to start a war with humankind?”**

As the words left his mouth, King Heaventide reached toward the rift in the canopy of heaven and made a grasping gesture.

Boundless pressure erupted from him. Suns, moons, stars, and heavenly bodies swirled around him. Countless natural and magical laws appeared. It was as if he was heaven. It was as if he was the dao.

The response he got was a cold snort.

**“Didn't you say you wanted to see me?”**

A second sword fell! Scintillating sword light formed a dazzling sea that rushed toward King Heaventide. King Heaventide's heart raced as natural and magical laws converged on his palm and

then surged forward. However, the sea of light disregarded everything in its path, passing through King Heaventide's palm attack and entering into his body. A tremor passed through him, and his eyes suddenly lit up with disbelief.

“Second stage—?”

Before he could finish speaking, a sword emerged from his mouth. Then a sword emerged from his legs and his hands. Then his legs, his torso, his neck, and his head. Countless swords stabbed out from inside of him. After innumerable swords were stabbing out of him everywhere, he exploded.

It was the same thing that happened to his major world. He couldn't even stand up to one sword move. His fleshly body had been destroyed.

Heaven and earth shook. All living beings were astonished.

As the blood and flesh fell down, King Heaventide's god soul flew out. A god soul was different from an ordinary soul. It looked just like the fleshly body, although, if you studied it closely, you would see that it was actually made up of magical and natural laws. [1]

Terror appeared in King Heaventide's eyes. He had never encountered a sword that sharp, and had also never met a second-stage Smoldering God who was this terrifying. Without any hesitation, he fled in god soul form. He wanted to get far, far away. He had sensed the impending arrival of death, and he didn't want to die.

However, before his god soul could back up more than 30,000 meters, a wall of sword energy rose up to block his path, rising high into the sky.

King Heaventide's expression flickered, and he turned to flee in a different direction. A second wall of sword energy appeared to stop him. Then a third, a fourth, and a fifth. In the shortest of moments, King Heaventide had nowhere to run to. He was completely surrounded by walls of sword energy.

From high above, it was possible to see five walls of sword energy formed into a pentagonal shape. In the middle of it was King Heaventide in god soul form, trembling in despair and disbelief.

He just couldn't believe that he, a Smoldering God and a heavenly king... was actually about to die.

“Who are you??” he screamed shrilly.

The only response he got was a single word. “Execute!”

The five walls of sword energy shrank toward King Heaventide's god soul. In the blink of an eye they converged, and he was slashed through by the sword energy. His god soul had been destroyed!

Heaven and earth dimmed, and rumbling echoed out like the roar of heavenly daos. There were no clouds overhead, yet a blood rain began to fall. The effect spread rapidly until it was roughly the size of half a prefecture. That area was filled with a rain of blood, which made it seem like the dome of heaven was weeping. The blood rain nourished the lands it fell on, ensuring that they would be very different going forward.

This was the spot where a Smoldering God had perished, and the fragments of that Smoldering God's major world had become spirit energy. As a result, that half-prefecture sized land now abounded in spirit energy.

There were also mountains rising up in that area. They were made from the flesh of King Heaventide. They were becoming spirit mountains! King Heaventide's shredded god soul turned into the spirit foundation for a century of children born in that area. Their spirit foundation would be different from other people. All of them would conform to the dao of King Heaventide.

That was what happened when a Smoldering God died, similar to what happened in Sea-Sealing County when the Ghost Emperor passed away into meditation. The effects weren't as pronounced as with the Ghost Emperor, but they would still provide nourishment to countless living beings.

Chapter 737: A Leader in Holytide!

A rain of blood fell amidst complete silence.

King Heaventide's army of subordinates were shaken to the core, and stood there in shock, almost as if they were frozen. Something momentous had occurred! They couldn't believe what they had just seen. It seemed completely impossible that a heavenly king had perished in such a simplistic fashion. Based on their understanding, the Holytide Region didn't have anyone strong enough to be a threat to King Heaventide. As a result, it really should have been impossible for the heavenly king to die. Yet it happened right in front of them!

It was easy to predict that King Heaventide perishing would cause a huge commotion in the Holytide Region. It would definitely shake the Imperial Region, and would almost certainly result in a violent tempest in the imperial capital. The rage of the emperor and the fury of King Heaventide's clan would shake everything near and far. It really surpassed imagination.

The army forces were deeply flabbergasted. Also shocked were all of the other groups from the Holytide Region who had been watching things play out.

"That's not possible!"

"K-King... King Heaventide was actually executed!"

"Three sword moves! All it took was three sword moves...."

"A Smoldering God! Sea-Sealing County also has a Smoldering God! And it's an almighty expert even among Smoldering Gods!"

"I can't believe that Sea-Sealing County has such impressive backing!"

All species in Sea-Sealing County who were capable of observing the fight were stunned to witness King Heaventide die right in front of them. It overwhelmed them and left them trembling in fear.

King Heaventide had given his life to ensure that all the other forces knew that Sea-Sealing County didn't just have Dawning Suns. They also had... a Smoldering God!

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Blood sprayed out of Seventh Prince's mouth. He trembled, and his eyes went slack. All of a sudden, he felt even more uneasy than he had when that Dawning Sun detonated. The way Sea-Sealing County established their strength sent him a clear message. And that was... his schemes, his strategies, and his calm attitude were all useless in the face of someone with enough power.

He'd experienced a similar sensation when the Dawning Sun exploded. But even then, he'd still felt confident in himself. After all, his uncle would eventually come and crush all obstacles. He could never have guessed that things would actually turn out this way. How could he accept that a heavenly king had perished? How could he face this outcome?

Terror and bewilderment filled him like a storm, threatening to send him into an abyss of hopelessness. But he was Seventh Prince, after all. Even in the depths of despair, he would still struggle as hard as necessary to get a chance to fight back.

Sea-Sealing County. Xu Qing.... Maybe you do have a Smoldering God on your side that can slaughter heavenly kings. But that doesn't have anything to do with me. This relates to humankind as a whole. My father won't just let this slide. Whether for the dignity of humankind or his personal face, this... is going to cause a major upheaval!

Seventh Prince glared in the direction of the county capital. Ultimately, he suppressed his reluctance, defiance, and heartache. Taking out an ancient jade slip, he crushed it. That jade slip was not a product of modern times. It was a treasure from the time of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity, and it was a life-saving asset of Seventh Prince's. Its function was to teleport the user to the Imperial Region, regardless of where they were.

Items like that were extremely valuable and also extremely rare. They were disposable, so when one was used, there was one less in the world. Even back in the time period in which they were created, they were considered extraordinary precious treasures. Normally speaking, not even Seventh Prince would qualify to have an item like that. But given the battle credit earned by his mother's clan, he had been able to take one from the imperial treasury.

“Things aren't over between us, Sea-Sealing County. I'll be waiting in the imperial capital... waiting for you to be reduced to ashes!”

An ancient light swept out from the broken jade slip, which surrounded Seventh Prince. He disappeared. He was the only one to leave, as the jade slip could only teleport one person. All of his followers were left behind in the Holytide Region.

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As everyone trembled in response to Ninth Sib's actions, the subordinates of King Heaventide were swept up in a maelstrom of terror and unease.

Down on the ground, King Heaventide's black dragon moaned in anguish. With some struggle, it got to its feet and kowtowed to the sky. In response, a cold snort shattered the air. Ninth Sib emerged from the rift in heaven and hovered over the lands below. The black dragon ducked its head and remained in place unmoving. The humans in the army trembled.

Face expressionless, Ninth Sib looked at the army, then turned his attention to Xu Qing. His gaze caused anyone he looked at to bow with respect and fervor. Marquis Yao was no exception.

There were only two people who caused Ninth Sib's gaze to pause momentarily.

The first was Master Seventh. Ninth Sib looked at him closely for a long moment, then nodded slightly. It was deliberate but so faint that, other than him and Master Seventh, no one noticed.

The second person was Xu Qing.

“You should be able to gain enlightenment of those three sword moves,” Ninth Sib said.

Xu Qing clasped hands and bowed. His heart was currently pounding. Although he had seen Ninth Sib in action before, the high commander had been too weak. As a result, Ninth Sib didn't need to unleash his true battle prowess. In contrast, Crimson Mother had been too strong, making it fundamentally impossible to tell how mighty Ninth Sib really was. But it only took three sword moves for him to execute King Heaventide! All of a sudden, Xu Qing realized why the godchild had sealed Ninth Sib with more force than all of the other siblings. Ninth Sib was just too strong!

After the fight with Crimson Mother was over, and Li Zihua departed, Ninth Sib had obviously benefited as much as Xu Qing had. That said, Xu Qing knew that it wasn't time to sit around pondering the situation. The most important thing right now was what to do with the huge army.

Thankfully, he had already discussed the matter with his Master and Marquis Yao. Thus, Xu Qing turned and stepped back to make way for someone.

It was Ningyan.

He was dressed in the robe of an imperial prince, with an imperial crown on his head. He pulsed with the bloodline fluctuations of the imperial clan, and had an incredibly grave expression on his face. Seeing that Xu Qing had stepped aside, he strode forward proudly until he was hovering in midair above the army.

“I am Guyue Ningyan, the reigning emperor's twelfth son!”

When the cultivators in the army sensed Ningyan's bloodline fluctuations, and then heard his words, they were visibly moved. That was especially the case considering that Ningyan was hovering right in front of the statue of an Ancient Emperor. To them, it was almost as if Ningyan and the statue of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity were one and the same.

“My brother, Seventh Prince, used imperial troops to benefit himself. He disregarded the needs of humankind and caused chaos in the Holytide Region. Therefore, I had no choice but to detonate one of my Dawning Suns to stop him.

“King Heaventide, despite being a heavenly king, was incredibly selfish. After suffering a huge defeat in battle, he tried to frame Sea-Sealing County to cover his mistakes and bully those weaker than him. Heaven and earth cannot tolerate such behavior. Thus, at my behest, he was executed! The causes and effects of karma all point back to me personally!”

This wasn't exactly what Xu Qing had asked Ningyan to say. But Ningyan had taken inspiration from his instructions and had gone a bit further, as he believed that there were some things that he needed to take personal responsibility for.

Surprised, Xu Qing looked at Ningyan. Marquis Yao and Master Seventh did the same, their expressions both thoughtful and approving.

As for the huge army, they were even more shaken than before.

Taking a deep breath, Ningyan moved forward until he was right in front of the army. He was one person facing 10,000,000.

“Henceforth, you do not belong to Seventh Prince. Nor do you follow the orders of a heavenly king. You are warriors of humanity! You are your own masters!

“And your swords and sabers shouldn’t be pointed at fellow humans. They should be pointed toward the enemy! Our war with the Nightshades isn’t over. If you’re willing... then follow me and fight for humankind! Let us wage war on the Nightshades!”

Ningyan’s speech ended in a loud battle cry.

As the sound echoed out, the army stood there quietly for about ten breaths of time. But then someone clasped hands and bowed. Then another and another, until finally, every cultivator in the army of 10,000,000... bowed and joined their voices in a mighty shout.

“Yes, sir!”

Just as with the 10,000 troops led by the high commander, as long as there was a human government in existence, then status was very important. For example, if Ningyan had tried to motivate Sea-Sealing County, it wouldn’t have worked, as he wasn’t the governor. As for Xu Qing, though his words were law in Sea-Sealing County, he couldn’t do so much as get the army to offer greetings to him. Only an imperial prince had the status to deal with the imperial army.

As King Heaventide’s subordinates saluted Ningyan, the clouds seethed as a figure rushed through the sky at top speed. In the blink of an eye, that figure appeared in the sky over Sea-Sealing County.

It was none other than Grand Duke Holytide! Face pale, he appeared in front of Ninth Sib, toward whom he bowed formally.

“I am your humble servant An Mulan. Greetings, Prince Ninth of Moonrite!” [1]

Grand Duke Holytide was acting very respectfully. In fact, his eyes showed a hint of fear. Given his words, it was very obvious... that he knew exactly who Ninth Sib was. And considering he knew that, it went without saying that he knew what had played out recently in the Moonrite Region.

In fact, it was likely that powerful experts throughout the Revered Ancient mainland had sensed what happened. After all, the red moon had vanished from Revered Ancient.

From the way Grand Duke Holytide glanced at Xu Qing, it was obvious that he had only just come to realize what happened. Deeply moved, he bowed to Ninth Sib, then took a deep breath and continued, “Holytide forces will follow the lead of Twelfth Prince. We will send out troops against the Nightshades. We will follow Twelfth Prince as his subordinates!”

Though his words were directed to Ningyan, he was looking at Xu Qing the entire time. Based on his experience and intuition, he... could see why Sea-Sealing County had publicly revealed their ties to Twelfth Prince.

A succession struggle is about to begin!

Chapter 738: Xu Qing Is Your Younger Brother, Right?

In any other situation, Grand Duke Holytide wouldn't ever have participated in any sort of succession struggle. In any time period and among any species, succession struggles were always a huge gamble. If you won, you would bask in endless glory. But if you lost, you ended up damned by myriad tribulations.

To Grand Duke Holytide, remaining unfettered and free in the Holytide Region was obviously the best decision. But he didn't have that luxury right now. At this point, Sea-Sealing County basically represented the Holytide Region. It wasn't an option for the grand duke to stand independent. What was more... the Holytide Region was right next to the Moonrite Region.... He really had no choice. He was inextricably tied to Sea-Sealing County. And that was where King Heaventide had died.

That's how Sea-Sealing County rises above the rest.... In any other location, the death of a heavenly king would be a big deal. But after what happened in Moonrite, everyone is shaken. Even the emperor won't casually make a move. And if you add in a succession struggle, then as long as the emperor and the imperial capital get a good explanation as to why the heavenly king died, then it won't mean much.

The fight between Sea-Sealing County and King Heaventide is actually a fight between Twelfth Prince and Seventh Prince.... To the nobility, this is a family matter relating to the imperial clan. Sea-Sealing County has someone really important now!

And thus, Grand Duke Holytide chose to acknowledge allegiance. With him added into the mix, all of the Holytide Region was now united!

As of now, Sea-Sealing County was the core of the Holytide Region. No organization or species in the region had the ability to resist, or even the will to do so. When dealing with absolute power, one had no other option than to acknowledge allegiance.

It went without saying that, now that Sea-Sealing County had an army of 10,000,000, plus the forces of Grand Duke Holytide, it was at the ultimate peak in the region.

When it came to Xu Qing, it was as the saying went: *when the tide rises, the boat floats*. He now stood at the ultimate peak of the Holytide Region.

Thus it was that a dharmic decree spread from Sea-Sealing County out into the region as a whole.

***“All species and all sects will heed the call to fight against the Nightshades!”***

Not one sect or species in the region dared to ignore the orders. In the past, Grand Duke Holytide probably would have scorned such a dharmic decree. But after what happened in the Moonrite Region, and after finding out that High God Crimson Mother was dead, things were different. Xu Qing had played a role in that event. Because of that, the grand duke didn't have an ounce of scorn in him.

In fact, it went beyond that. As far as Grand Duke Holytide was concerned, there was something very mysterious about Xu Qing. He simply couldn't imagine how a Spirit Trove cultivator could reach the point of being revered by so many people.

There's definitely something miraculous going on. This Xu Qing... is no ordinary individual!

Eighty percent of King Heaventide's army was mobilized.

Time passed. The unified Holytide Region sent cultivators from numerous sects and species to the front lines. Master Seventh and Marquis Yao planned everything. Once again, the flames of war burned bright....

Word spread of what happened in Moonrite. There were two reasons why rumors began to spread so fast. One was that people finally discovered that the red moon was gone. The other... was that a message had been sent out of the Moonrite Region via jade slip.

The message was written by the Heir Apparent, and it was a notice to all of the Revered Ancient mainland. Humans and nonhumans alike all received a copy. It explained that Crimson Mother was dead and that Moonrite's Imperial Sovereign had been awakened.

It caused an instant stir in Revered Ancient. There were even hidden gods who, after finding out what happened, were worked up into a frenzy. It was easy to confirm the truth of the news. After all, everyone had noticed earlier when the broken face's eyes opened, and everything changed in the Moonrite Region.

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As expected, one of those jade slips was sent to the humans' Imperial Region.

Inside the imperial palace, in a building that rose tall into clouds and wind, the emperor stood looking off into the distance.

Behind him was a table with two jade slips on it. One of them was from the Heir Apparent in the Moonrite Region. The other was from Seventh Prince. He looked neither pleased nor angry, and his gaze was focused on the swirling sea of clouds outside.

If you looked closely, you would realize that he was looking at something absolutely gargantuan, though it was hidden beneath a thick cloud cover. It was almost like... an incomparably massive planet. As the clouds rolled over it, it resembled a majestic painting.

After some time passed, a calm voice spoke from behind the emperor.

“Your Majesty, I finished looking through both jade slips.”

The emperor didn't look over his shoulder. “What do you think?”

At some point, a person had appeared on the other side of the desk. His face was as fair as jade, and he had long violet hair that flowed down his back like a cloak. He wore a white robe as he sat there, his expression tranquil. He was the imperial preceptor.

“I noticed on that very day that someone had borrowed some of my time power,” the imperial preceptor said. He lifted his cup of tea, took a sip, then softly continued, “Isn't that what you wanted to see, Your Majesty?”

The imperial preceptor looked at the emperor and smiled faintly.

For a long moment, the emperor didn't respond. Then he said, “How confident are you in succeeding?”

The imperial preceptor smiled. “One hundred percent. All you need to do is nod, Your Majesty, and the transaction can be completed.”

The emperor looked deeply thoughtful as he continued to stare out at the clouds. The room was completely silent for a long time. Then the emperor walked out, leaving behind only some coldly spoken words that could only come from the mouth of a superior.

“That Xu Qing is your younger brother, right?”

The imperial preceptor’s facial expression didn’t change at all. He finished his tea, put the cup down, and smiled as he disappeared into thin air.

The wind blew, causing the sea of clouds to slowly sweep over the palace.

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In the Holytide Region, cultivators from all sects and species waged war with the Nightshades. This time, Seventh Prince and King Heaventide had nothing to do with the fighting. This time, it was Xu Qing who issued the orders, and Twelfth Prince who led the troops. It was time to finish things with the Nightshades.

The humans had a lot more cultivators this time, thanks to Grand Duke Holytide joining the war effort. Master Seventh and Marquis Yao split the armed forces into three legions that invaded the Nightspirit Region.

Though King Heaventide had been defeated, his reserve powers were still in place. The immortal skills could still be used, and considering how much land King Heaventide had already taken, the Nightshades were already under a lot of pressure. Besides, the Nightshades had to fight on many fronts, which meant they couldn’t expect reinforcements on any particular front line. All they could do was hold their own as best they could.

The reality was that if the Nightshades really wanted to fight back in the Nightspirit Region, the war would have been much more brutal. But strangely enough... the Nightshades hardly fought back against the invasion from the Holytide Region. Things were different than when they faced King Heaventide.

Xu Qing didn’t go to fight on the front lines. He stayed on the border of the Nightspirit Region and the Holytide Region to process the reports coming in.

As time passed, and the army advanced smoothly, Xu Qing came to a realization about the Nightshades’ overall battle prowess.

The Nightshades controlled two regions. One was called Nightspirit and the other Nightshade.

Their emperor, along with many of their other top experts, were killed by a mysterious individual before the fighting even started. Because their leadership had been taken out, when the war did erupt, the Nightshades suffered defeat after defeat.

Their species was facing the threat of extermination, but they had no strong leaders, and thus, they ultimately split into three factions.

One faction was led by the Nightshades’ imperial clan. The army they gathered was the one who faced the humans’ main forces in the Nightshade Region.

The second faction was led by the nobility. They didn't do much in the war, and instead went into hiding. They hoped to negotiate with the humans, and were active in both the Nightshade Region and the Nightspirit Region.

The final faction was the one who had been fighting King Heaventide, and they were led by the Nightshade priesthood.

Nightshade priests had godly authority, which normally meant they were superior to the emperor himself, and were the highest-ranking members of Nightshade society. But when their god magics stopped working, they suffered huge defeats. Their god was ignoring them, and soon, rumors spread that their god was sleeping.

As a result, the priests weren't as respected as before. They were now extremely weak, and were coming to be hated by their fellow Nightshades.

In the end, they chose to gather in their main temple in the Nightspirit Region, and make their stand there. They and the divine guards that formed their troops were constantly reaching out to their god to ask for help. They were the first ones to sense that Crimson Mother had died. They were also the ones who issued a dharmic decree telling the Nightshade forces to make way for Xu Qing's army, and let them enter the land of fog where their temple stood. It was the same spot where King Heaventide had been ambushed.

Having learned from the previous disaster, Master Seventh, Marquis Yao and the other leaders of the Holytide Region forces were careful not to charge in blindly. They cleared the way with the immortal skills, and also sent scouts ahead.

However, before any further arrangements could be made, someone emerged from the Nightshades' fog. He had no hair and wore a violet robe. After stepping out, he bowed to the Holytide army and then made one request.

The priests wanted Xu Qing to come personally. They wanted to meet him.

As long as Xu Qing came, then whatever happened after, they would surrender.

Grand Duke Holytide was hesitant to comply, and in the past, he would have outright refused. After all, they were talking about a mere Spirit Trove cultivator. But things were different now, as he knew who gave orders in Sea-Sealing County now.

Therefore, he deferred to Master Seventh and Marquis Yao.

Xu Qing, who was still on the border between the two regions, received a voice message from Master Seventh.

It made Xu Qing think of how he had sensed something calling out to him recently while out on the Forbidden Sea. Before long, he was heading into the interior of the Nightspirit Region.

A few days later, he stood in front of the Holytide army, just outside the fog. He was experiencing a very strange sensation. In the depths of the fog, he could sense... his own authority.

The moment he appeared, the fog seethed, and a dozen Nightshade high priests emerged wearing violet robes.

When they saw Xu Qing, they instantly got excited and bowed at the waist. In the lead was the old man, who spoke to Xu Qing in a hoarse voice.

“Please, return to your rightful position, Violet Lord!”

Chapter 739: The Majestic Grace of a God

The Holytide Region army was gathered in great numbers at the edge of the fog. War banners snapped. Animals breathed heavily. The cultivators’ energy pulsed. All of it together created an aura that rose high into the sky and caused powerful winds to sweep across the lands. Because of this mighty army, the entire world seemed still and silent.

There were powerful experts in the army from all sorts of sects and species. They were part of Grand Duke Holytide’s forces, as well as the Sea-Sealing County army in general. Hovering in midair, they exuded immense pressure. Among them were Master Seventh, Marquis Yao, and Grand Duke Holytide himself.

Blood-colored light swirled in all directions, becoming a blood-red sea that threatened to overwhelm the fog. Those were the immortal skills.

Xu Qing stood in front of the army, facing the seventeen violet-clad Nightshade high priests, his gaze focused on the old man bowing in front of him.

Xu Qing was naturally familiar with the term ‘Violet Lord.’ And it was very thought-provoking to hear it uttered by a Nightshade priest. Xu Qing’s eyes glittered with profound light as he looked from the bowing old Nightshade to the fog behind him. Xu Qing could sense his own authority there, which caused the fog to fluctuate and churn.

The Nightshades outside of the fog had initiated a ceremony involving Xu Qing himself, and it was almost over.

As the entire army looked on, and the seventeen priests stood there silently, Xu Qing spoke.

“How do you know my official title?” He didn’t beat around the bush. Given his current status, he was qualified to directly ask such questions. There was no need for guesswork.

The old Nightshade priest had a face full of wrinkles, and an expression of full piety. “Crimson Mother perished in a battle of gods,” he said softly. “A new lord was born out of hēr godly corpse. That’s how the reincarnation of gods works.

“When Violet Lord was born, hē became our new lord. Hē seized the authority of the red moon and is to be worshiped by all living beings. From that moment, the moon was no longer red. A violet moon hangs in the sky, and all subservient species and godservants have a new mission as a result. We came to know all of this because of the repeated sacrifices to plead for help from the moon.”

The Nightshade looked up at Xu Qing, his eyes burning with zeal.

“What mission?” Xu Qing asked calmly.

“To assist our lord to return to the heaven of the gods, and to help the violet moon to come to our world. All who provide aid will be given fruit of the gods, but

those who perform the most meritorious service will have a place before the gods!”

Xu Qing looked deeply at the old man.

The old man’s expression didn’t change. His face remained wrinkled and full of piety.

Xu Qing looked away from him. Perhaps other people would be fooled by such guileful words, but not Xu Qing. He didn’t believe any of it. He was inclined to believe a much different explanation....

The Nightshade priests knew that they were going to lose this war, and would likely be exterminated. After realizing the truth of the situation, they learned about what happened in the Moonrite Region. Coupled with what they knew about Xu Qing’s background and cultivation level, they realized that their only hope was to surrender. Of course, there needed to be a good story to go along with their surrender. Xu Qing really had changed the red moon litany with the help of authority. In the end, his effort failed, but he had definitely left behind evidence of what he did.

The Nightshades, who for generations had worshiped the red moon and offered sacrifices to Crimson Mother, had likely sensed the change to the litany. That was how they learned about Violet Lord.

To the priests, this ‘surrender’ wasn’t actually a form of surrender. Now as before, they were still servants of a god. As for the mission, it seemed most likely that they had fabricated that on their own. These priests were no fools. In fact, it was entirely possible that the priests weren’t even sure that he was the real Violet Lord.

But that didn’t matter. Crimson Mother had perished, so the most important thing to them was staying alive. And maintaining some dignity while doing it was of utmost importance.

Therefore, Xu Qing didn’t care whether or not the Nightshade priests really believed that he was their Violet Lord. They would change their litany, and going forward, they would convince themselves that he was. After all, there was no one around to argue with them.

Xu Qing’s facial expression didn’t change. Everything was pure speculation, and he had no way to determine what the truth was right now. However, what he did know was that since the Nightshade priests were surrendering in this way, he needed to intimidate them in some way.

That would be simple for Xu Qing. The best way to fool people like this was through direct force from a god. Xu Qing released the power of his authority, sending it into the fog to ensure that the ceremony was completed promptly.

The moment that happened, the seventeen high priests shivered, and the old man looked up with astonishment in his eyes. Rumbling sounds echoed from the depths of the fog. The fog seethed, and chanting sounds could be heard from inside.

*“The new moon, lord to me; Revered Ancient’s true trustee; the living hosts suffer; they have a blissful guarantee.*

*“Give myself to my Lord, no bitterness for me, from bitterness I’m free, undecayed for all to see.”*

Along with the chanting came violet light. As it shone, the dome of heaven trembled violently, and then ripped apart as if being torn by two huge hands. Godly might descended.

A violet moon appeared in the sky. It started blurry, but rapidly became clear, until everyone could see it. Its arrival caused a huge stir in the Holytide forces, and countless animals trembled.

Even after what happened with King Heaventide, and even knowing it was an illusion, the arrival of the violet moon still caused everyone present to tremble.

As for the seventeen high priests, all of them immediately bowed to the violet moon above. As the pressure weighed down, everything blurred and shook. Violet light shone from the moon down onto everything below.

The fog rapidly dissipated, revealing what had been hidden beneath it. Not far ahead of the army was an ancient temple. It was majestic, and had clearly seen the passage of many years. For most people present, it was their first time seeing a magnificent temple like this. But Xu Qing and the Captain... had seen a temple like this before! It looked exactly like the Moon Palace! Even the totem on the door looked exactly the same. It was a land-based Moon Palace! And of course, it was considered a holy land to the Nightshade priests. Inside of it was a statue of Crimson Mother.

There were currently over 1,000,000 Nightshade priests prostrated in front of the temple, all of them clad in violet robes, and all of them chanting. As the violet moon descended, their chanting grew louder and clearer, until it was possible to see a stone stele on the moon.

That stone stele shone with violet light, and though its back was blank, the front had writing on it. If you looked closely, you would see that the words were the same as the litany they were chanting!

Both the Holytide army and the Nightshade priests were shaken. Eventually, the violet moon descended as far as it would go, and was perfectly clear. Xu Qing walked toward it. He walked past the seventeen high priests, then ascended into midair toward the violet moon.

Many gasps could be heard as everyone focused on Xu Qing. The ripples and distortions caused by the moon didn't affect Xu Qing at all. The fact that it looked real but was really illusory didn't matter to Xu Qing either. This moon had been made by him. Whether it was illusory or real didn't change anything.

He stepped onto the moon and walked up to the stone stele. Then he looked back down to the lands below, and his gaze was like that of a god. The Nightshade priests all trembled, including the seventeen high priests. Finally, he looked at the old priest.

“Tell me your name.”

The old priest shivered but didn't hesitate to respectfully reply, “I am the senior high priest of the Nightshades, You Sang.”

Xu Qing waved his right hand, causing the name You Sang to appear on the back of the stele. It was very, very small. It was so small, in fact, that it was about 1/10,000th the size of the stele itself. However, the implication of the name was profound.

The stele vibrated, and the violet moon shook. The priests below were shaken to the core. The million priests prostrated on the ground breathed heavily, and their eyes shone with unprecedented

fervor. They looked at Xu Qing, they looked at the stele, and they looked at the name, and their hearts and minds were filled with an indescribable tempest. What was happening surpassed what any of them had anticipated. For the servant of a god to have their name inscribed in a location belonging to that god was the highest honor!

The seventeen high priests who had originally come out of the fog were so deeply shaken that their minds were completely blank. From ancient times until the present, things like this almost never happened.

Most deeply shaken was You Sang, whose face was crimson as he stood there shaking physically. He felt like he was being struck by 10,000,000 lightning bolts. How could he ever have guessed that Xu Qing would do something like this? When he looked at his name on that stele, he felt like he had years ago the first time he offered worship to Crimson Mother. He felt astonishment, reverence, and more than anything else, excitement.

Xu Qing had judged everything correctly. More than anything else, the Nightshade priests just wanted an excuse to surrender.

Many people below didn't understand the significance. But the old man wasn't just a priest. He was a high priest, so he understood the significance. Priests needed a god. And Xu Qing met all the prerequisites. As for whether or not Xu Qing was actually Violet Lord, they still had their suspicions. After all, his cultivation base was too weak. But in the end, that wasn't important.

Thus they came up with their guileful talk of a mission. They were just reacting to the circumstances. None of them could ever have imagined that Xu Qing would ask for You Sang's name, and then carve it onto that stone stele.

That act shattered all of their preconceived notions. It perfectly conformed to their holy ceremonies, and it told them that... Xu Qing was Violet Lord!

That was when Ningyan strode out from the army. "Assist Violet Lord to return to the heaven of the gods. Help the violet moon to come to our world! All who provide aid will be given fruit of the gods, but those who perform the most meritorious service will have a place before the gods!"

The priests all bowed and loudly said, "Greetings, Violet Lord!"

The seventeen high priests, and the senior high priest, were all shaken to the core as they dropped and prostrated.

"Greetings, Violet Lord!"

As their voices echoed out, the statue of Crimson Mother crumbled to the ground.

Chapter 740: Decree from the Human Emperor

After the Nightshade priests acknowledged allegiance, the war continued. But there was no more fighting in the section of the war theater that had been assigned to King Heaventide. Half of the Nightspirit Region was absorbed into the Holytide Region.

Most of the army went home, but some forces were garrisoned to oversee the Nightshade priests.

As for the senior high priest You Sang, he became the emissary of Xu Qing's godly identity. He was extremely fervent in the way he prostrated to Xu Qing and explained his mission. In the future, he planned to build temples to the violet moon in all the prefectures of that half-region, with the

purpose of gathering more and more adherents of the violet moon. Beyond that, he wanted to go to the Holytide Region, to the Moonrite Region, and to other regions to build temples there as well, to spread his gospel and make more disciples.

His identity was different now. He was the first pope of the Violet Moon Church. Of course, that was just what was visible on the surface. The Nightshade priesthood had as many powerful experts as the sky had clouds. There were even multiple Smoldering Gods among them.

That said, the priests operated differently than cultivators. They didn't cultivate the dao. They were devoted to their god, and for the most part, their strength was a gift from that god. Because Crimson Mother was dead, they had become immeasurably weak, like lamps with almost no oil left to burn. It was a struggle for them just to stay alive.

Xu Qing's arrival brought new hope for them. Because of his elevation in status, and because the violet moon had turned from illusory to corporeal, the weak Nightshade high priests were once again able to reach a peak level of power.

Xu Qing accepted that outcome, and then left the Nightspirit Region. He kept the immortal skills active. They formed a red cloud cover over the Nightspirit Region, which blocked the light and heat of the Dawning Sun. As a result, that half of the region was able to start recovering.

The war wasn't over, though. In the other half of the Nightspirit Region, as well as the Nightshade Region, were both embroiled in death and fighting. However, none of that had anything to do with Xu Qing. The Holytide Region wasn't responsible for the war in the Nightshade Region, only one part of the interspecies war.

Of course, King Heaventide had taken advantage of his part in the war to try to secure the Holytide Region for Seventh Prince. Despite him perishing, the Holytide Region still played its part in the war perfectly.

Going forward, the Holytide Region was going to be far more important than before. And Sea-Sealing County essentially had the power of one-and-a-half regions. As the governor, Xu Qing was more powerful than any previous governor in history. It was no exaggeration to call him royalty.

Most importantly, he had Ningyan at his side. Ningyan's presence meant that Xu Qing's actions were considered righteous. No one could accuse him of usurping imperial authority. The same principle applied when it came to the death of King Heaventide. When Ningyan took center stage and said the things that he said, it transformed the entire incident into friction between imperial princes.

Although there were plenty of people who realized the truth, there were some facades... that couldn't be touched. For instance, a conflict between princes. If the facade were lifted, then all the events in the Holytide Region, the Nightspirit Region, and the Moonrite Region would turn into a dangerous conflict within humankind itself. The heavy price to be paid for such a conflict would come from whoever removed the facade. But the emperor didn't want that facade touched, and thus... no one would touch it. The entire thing was a big, complicated game. A series of checks and balances. And just like an actual fight between cultivators, it all came down to the question of 'is it worth it?'

Because of that, it was only about half a month after the events in the Nightspirit Region that two imperial edicts were issued in the Imperial Region and sent to the Holytide Region.

The first imperial edict was sent to Xu Qing.

*“By the grace of the immortals, and backed by the Mandate of Heaven, these art the words of Emperor Dark War. Since ancient times, the ancestral emperors who did rule the world were aided by benevolent ministers. East Victory hadst Yan. Mirrorcloud hadst his loyal officials Zhu Xi and Chen Ken. Dao Life recruited Wang Xu due to that which he dreamt.*

*“When the ministers art responsible and the monarch just, the world is governed rightly. It hast cometh to my attention that a virtuous individual hath arisen in yond Holytide. He ruleth Sea-Sealing, bringeth order to Holytide, and createth peace in Nightspirit. He is calm and kind, hast protected the lands of humankind, and hast taken responsibility to expandeth our territory.*

*“I, the emperor, do admire his heart, value his virtue, and love his character. What is more, Holytide is where the Ancient Emperor hath built his foundation; it can well beest called the cornerstone of our lands, and is of singular strategic importance. Therefore, I hereby summon the virtuous Xu Qing to the great Imperial Region, where he shalt maketh the Imperial Academy his home, and from there issue his own rulings and proclamations. Thus speaketh the emperor.”*

The second imperial edict was sent to Ningyan. The language was much simpler than the first imperial edict, and it was obviously a form of rebuke.

*“My Twelfth Son Yan is stubborn and mischievous. He is restless both mentally and physically, and he selfishly fled the imperial capital in a very reckless act. He should have been watched over closely and not allowed to behave badly. That said, he’s still a child, and his mother passed away young. I, the emperor, failed to discipline him properly. With virtuous education and moral guidance, he will be suited to assist in the administration of Holytide.*

*“But first, he will return to the imperial palace. I shall tolerate no disobedience in this. If anything suspicious happens on the return journey, I, as the emperor, will be informed immediately. Should that happen, he will be executed forthwith, and I will not offer any chance for forgiveness.”*

In a building in the Governor’s Mansion in Sea-Sealing County, Xu Qing looked thoughtfully at the two edicts.

Master Seventh and Marquis Yao weren’t present. Xu Qing was joined only by the Captain and Ningyan.

The Captain munched on a peach as he looked at the two imperial edicts. Then he clicked his tongue and looked over at Ningyan, who was standing there looking a bit reserved.

“Your dad isn’t bad at all, Little Ningy. He started out by cursing you, but in the end, he blamed himself.... He’s basically helping you take ownership of the King Heaventide incident. That said, your dad really is quite ruthless. That last sentence shows you how strict he is. If you mess up even a little bit, you’re dead!”

Ningyan looked fawningly at the Captain, then glanced out of the corner of his eye at Xu Qing.

“Captain,” he said in a low voice, “please, don’t joke around with me, sir. My dad... doesn’t treat me that well. He just said those things for the sake of Biggest Bro. He had no other choice. In my heart, the only people who matter are Biggest Bro and the Captain. I don’t care about anyone else. And I’ve already made up my mind. I don’t want to go to the Imperial Region. But if Biggest Bro and the Captain go, then Little Ningy won’t refuse. I’ll go back immediately.”

The Captain laughed heartily, stepped over, and threw his arm over Ningyan’s shoulders. He took out an apple and placed it in Ningyan’s hand.

An excited expression appeared on Ningyan’s face. Taking the apple, he looked thankfully at the Captain. As they looked into each other’s eyes, it seemed like they connected and, in that moment, became very close friends.

Xu Qing looked at them and chose not to spoil the moment by pointing out the truth.... Regarding the summons from the emperor, he knew that he had no choice but to go. If he didn’t, then the Holytide Region would be at risk. Furthermore... based on what Plumdark could sense, her lamp was in the Imperial Region.

Both emotionally and rationally, he had to go. Besides, he was curious to see what the imperial capital was like. What type of chosen were there? What was the scenery like?

Also... Seventh Prince had escaped, which meant there were definitely going to be repercussions for what happened. That caused Xu Qing’s killing intent to stir. There had to be a reckoning, both for what happened to Palace Lord Kong, and also for Seventh Prince’s other actions.

What’s more, the Grand Emperor is also there....

He looked in the direction of the Swordsage Division in Emperor-Receiving Prefecture. He had never stopped thinking about the assessment of the heart when he became a swordsage, and the majestic image of the Grand Emperor.

I need to go pay respects.

His eyes gleamed with determination. That said, he knew that the journey to the Imperial Region was going to be a long and arduous one, and it might be a while before he returned.

Therefore, before he left, he needed to take a trip back to the continent of South Phoenix. He needed to clean Grandmaster Bai’s grave, and also visit Sergeant Thunder. And of course, he needed to see Huang Yan.

There were some questions that he had already come up with answers to, and thus, he wanted to go to South Phoenix and chat with his old friend. As he was thinking about such things, a voice spoke into his mind.

*“Fear not, milord. Master Freespirit will make sure to keep you safe and in good health on this trip to the Imperial Region. If anyone dares to harbor malicious thoughts about you, milord, I’ll immediately turn them into a ghost!”*

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior’s words were spoken with decisiveness that could sever nails and chop iron. The patriarch flew out and started circling around Xu Qing, shining with brilliant light.

Xu Qing looked at him.

A few days ago, Master Seventh had finished ensorcelling the Spike of Misfortune. The spike was dramatically different than before, being a much higher quality and much mightier. It also pulsed with an ancient aura.

Xu Qing’s iron skewer had started out as an extraordinary item, yet had been nothing more than a prized treasure. When Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was its spirit automaton, it became stronger. And after experiencing lightning tribulation, it became even mightier. But in the end, it was still made from ordinary materials.

However, combining it with the fish bone from Forbidden by the Immortal transformed it completely. Adding Crimson Mother’s flesh to it, and under the skilled workmanship of Master Seventh no less, it had reached an astonishing level.

It could still be called an iron skewer, but it was larger now. And instead of just being a little spike, it was more like a fiendish club, with a sharp tip and a thick end. It was pitch-black and emanated an icy aura that locked down the surroundings. It also shone with dazzling light. There were three carvings on its end. One of them was the god from Forbidden by the Immortal, the other was Crimson Mother, and the third was the face of Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior. The first two had their eyes closed and their godly might reigned in. But the third had a flattering look that didn’t seem to match the spike as a whole. [1]

Seeing the patriarch floating around him caused Xu Qing to think about what his Master had told him a few days ago.

*“Fourth Sib, this thing has the bones of the god from Forbidden by the Immortal and flesh from Crimson Mother. But the soul automaton is somewhat lacking. That said, the foolish thing should manage if it works hard. In some ways, it’s fundamentally an embryonic god.*

*“So I reforged it using a Summer Immortal magic I found in some ancient records. As a result, you can call it an immortal weapon now! [2]*

*“Just remember that one of the key features of immortal weapons is that if you detonate them, they release terrifying force. This spirit automaton is foolish enough that it can be easily tricked. So you should be able to take advantage of that. The best would be to get it to self-detonate. That’ll lead to the best results.”*

Of course, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior hadn't heard any of that. He just said, "*I'll do the same to the crappy shadow if I have to. If it dares to revolt, I'll poke a thousand holes in it! I'll make sure it knows it ranks second around here!*"

After some thought, Xu Qing offered a look of praise.

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior got even more excited.