

## Timescape 811

Chapter 811: The Same Mother

“Get it done a bit more quickly?” the Captain said doubtfully. He looked at Xu Qing, then rubbed his chin. Instinctively producing another peach, he took a few bites. “Little Ah Qing, did you happen to make a friend in the Star Emperor Preeminence Sect while I was away? Which girl is it? Is she good-looking? Is she hot? Could it be... that this girl is the one that left the smell of pollen on you?”

“You know, I have to offer you some constructive criticism. Don’t ever forget that you’re the Junior Brother, and I’m the Eldest Brother!” Sounding very serious, the Captain continued, “Therefore, in the future, please allow me to handle things like this!”

Xu Qing looked at the Captain and considered explaining, then decided he didn’t feel like it. Therefore, he sat down, closed his eyes, and paid no further attention.

Seeing Xu Qing react in that way caused the Captain to blink a few times. Then he sat down across from Xu Qing.

“Why aren’t you saying anything?” he asked casually. “It’s all good! Whether or not your idea works doesn’t matter. I’ll remember your good intentions either way. I’m just looking out for your best interests, that’s all, little Ah Qing!”

Xu Qing’s eyes remained closed.

The Captain cleared his throat. Then, trying to look even more mysterious than before, he lowered his voice again. “Little Ah Qing, do you want to know the background of the Firemoon Darkheavens’ Great Hunt, and how it relates to god domains?”

Xu Qing opened his eyes and looked at the Captain.

Seemingly very pleased with himself, the Captain kept munching on his peach while he said, “As you know, the Firemoon Darkheaven people are very powerful, right? That said, they’ve never been able to match what humankind did in the past, in other words, conquer all species in Revered Ancient.

“There are four reasons for that.

“First among them is that there are actually four other species in Revered Ancient who are just as powerful as the Firemoon Darkheavens. Among those five great species, the Firemoons only rank third.

“Second among the reasons relates to the customs and lifestyle of the Firemoon Darkheavens. They actually have a relatively small population compared to the vast amount of land they control. Therefore, they wander a lot, establishing colonies and enslaving other species to wage war for them.

“Third relates to their three gods of sun, moon, and star. Each one of those gods has an individual temple that influences the mortal world. Because of that, the Firemoons aren’t truly united. They have three factions that are constantly contending with each other. They do have something called God Mountain, where the three gods’ temples are headquartered. Surrounding God Mountain is a god region that is considered supreme among the Firemoon Darkheavens. In other words, they have three main camps that exist in a tenuous balance, with the God Mountain in the middle.

“The fourth reason is that although the Firemoon Darkheavens have three gods, when it comes to overall strength and power, they don’t quite match up to other big species. Over the countless years, they’ve maintained a hunting tradition that they use to train members of their species like venomous bugs in a jar. That’s the main way they make their species so formidable, and also raise up powerful experts.

“Every sixty-year-cycle, they have a big hunting holiday. For a long time now, they’ve felt that weaker species aren’t good prey to hunt. So years ago, they set the final hunting ground as a god domain.

“And then, once every five sixty-year-cycles, they have their Great Hunt, when their three gods act together to open the entrance to the god domain. Then, the members of their species can enter the god domain and hunt the living beings inside.”

The Captain looked at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing considered the information. It was his first time hearing any of this, and it gave him a much better idea of how formidable the Firemoon Darkheaven people were. Then he thought about how humankind compared.

The Captain finished his peach and took out another.

“So now you know how their hunts correlate to god domains, right? By the way, I heard that every time the Great Hunt happens, the person who comes out on top of the various rounds of hunting will be conferred a special title by the God Mountain. And that title is darkheaven general!”

Xu Qing’s pupils constricted.

The Captain’s eyes glittered with dreamy longing. “In one of my lives, I participated in the Great Hunt. Sadly, something unexpected happened, otherwise I would have been named as a darkheaven general!”

“Even people who aren’t Firemoon Darkheavens can win the title?” Xu Qing asked.

The Captain nodded. “It doesn’t matter whether you’re a Firemoon Darkheaven or one of their subsidiary species. In fact, you can even be an outsider from distant lands. As long as you meet the qualifications and attend the Great Hunt, you have a chance. That said, from ancient times until

now, only cultivators who are actually from the Firemoons have become the darkheaven generals. My current plan is to turn the Great Hunt into my chance to get into the god domain....”

The Captain licked his lips and then looked in the direction of the door. “Little Ah Qing, has your little lover returned your message yet? I’ve been waiting quite a while. Remember, this is the Magic Legacy Pavilion we’re talking about here. The old monster who guards it has a shocking cultivation base, as well as astounding senses. Every time I’ve even gotten close, I feel like there are countless needles piercing into my soul. Do you really think this lover of yours can really help me get past the monster of a guard?”

The Captain took a bite out of his peach and looked at Xu Qing. “I guess it’s not very realistic. There’s no way that monster will ever leave the Magic Legacy Pavilion. What’s your lady friend going to do, just escort me inside? If this isn’t going to work, I really need to get going.”

Xu Qing looked expressionlessly at the door. “Here we go.”

“Hmm?” the Captain said curiously, and was about to ask some more questions when the voice of a swordswoman reached them from outside, explaining that someone had come seeking an audience with Xu Qing.

“Let him in,” Xu Qing said calmly.

“Who is it?” the Captain asked, getting even more curious as he stared at the door.

Before long, someone knocked on the door. Xu Qing waved his hand to open it

An old man entered the private chamber. He had white hair and was dressed in a daoist robe. It was impossible to deduce his identity, but his Void Returning cultivation base was incredibly powerful, and his eyes shone brightly.

The Captain’s guard immediately went up.

Meanwhile, the old man bowed deeply to Xu Qing, then took out a bag of holding. “They’re all there,” he said, putting it down in front of Xu Qing. “I don’t need them back for another seven days.”

With that, the old man turned and left. He only said that one thing, and hadn’t even cast a single glance in the Captain’s direction.

The Captain looked on doubtfully as he left, then turned his attention to the bag of holding. “Who was that, little Ah Qing? He had a very profound cultivation base. What did he mean when he said ‘they’re all there’...? What’s in the bag of holding?”

The Captain’s breathing had turned a bit irregular, and he was starting to come up with a guess about what was in the bag. And yet, he felt like the chances of that possibility being true were minimal.

“All of the jade slips from the Magic Legacy Pavilion in the Star Emperor Preeminence Sect are there.” Xu Qing flicked his sleeve and sent the bag of holding flying toward the Captain.

“Impossible!” The Captain leaned forward, grabbed the bag of holding, and scanned it with divine will. His eyes went wide and he looked at Xu Qing. His expression was one of pure disbelief.

Upon scanning the bag, he found that there were more than a hundred thousand jade slips inside. Based on the information the Captain had gathered earlier, they really did contain everything from the Star Emperor Preeminence Sect, and were truly from the Magic Legacy Pavilion.

Most importantly, within those more than one hundred thousand jade slips was some of the aura of the Wordless Book of Stone. And that meant... that the missing words were somewhere in these jade slips.

“This...” the dumbfounded Captain said.

Considering how much he knew about the Star Emperor Preeminence Sect, it was obvious that clearing out the Magic Legacy Pavilion of a branch division would be monumentally difficult. The only way it could happen would be if the leader of the branch division gave approval, or word came down from the sect headquarters. And whoever gave that word would need to be very important in the sect.

The Captain looked blankly at the bag of holding and thought about all the hard work, and all the money he had spent, and how even with all that, he’d needed another month to be able to reach his goal. And yet Xu Qing... did it by sending one single message. He didn’t feel any of the elation he should have felt at succeeding early. Instead, he felt a bit depressed. Then he looked up at Xu Qing with some hidden bitterness in his eyes.

“Why didn’t you say earlier that—”

“You just told me today.” Xu Qing looked down, his face completely expressionless.

The Captain felt even more depressed than before. “Who was that guy?”

“I don’t know,” Xu Qing replied. “Probably an elder in the Star Emperor Preeminence Sect.”

“There’s no way!” the Captain replied. “Even an elder from their headquarters couldn’t get all those jade slips. He must rank higher than an elder!”

“It doesn’t matter. You got what you want. You just need to return them in seven days.” Xu Qing stood and walked out, feeling wonderful the entire time.

The Captain held the bag of holding as he watched Xu Qing leave. He really was at a loss for words. Finally, feeling more depressed than ever, he started looking for the missing words in the jade slips. As of now, there wasn’t any point in going back to the Star Emperor Preeminence Sect.

This kind of thing can’t keep happening. As the Eldest Brother, it’s too much of a loss of face....

His eyes gleamed with determination, and yet, he actually wasn’t sure what specifically to do.

What a headache. In the past, it was all about cultivation base, so as long as I worked hard to undo my seals, I could always regain my dignity as the Eldest Brother. But what do I do now...?

As the Captain continued to search for the missing letters, he tried to come up with ideas. In the end, he ground his teeth.

This really can't keep happening! I guess I have no choice but to tap into the identity of my past-past-past-life!

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Seven days had passed.

During that time, the investigation of the God-Merging School continued. On a daily basis, students from that school of thought were taken away. Groups and organizations throughout the imperial capital were paying very close attention to what was happening.

The death of Seventh Prince came about because he was found guilty and executed by The Emperor's Sword. Therefore, he received no funeral. He was even stricken from the imperial records, and was not interred in the imperial mausoleum.

The historians were only allowed to mention something about him in passing.

*"In the year 2936 of the Dark War calendar, Seventh Prince was found guilty of heinous crimes and was executed by The Emperor's Sword."*

That was the end of the matter. The incense stick on the rainbow bridge that represented Seventh Prince collapsed into ash. Now there weren't twelve incense sticks. There were eleven.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing's name spread both inside and outside the imperial capital.

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In the aftermath of Seventh Prince's execution, Fifth Prince was summoned back to the capital. He had been away for many years as he followed the number-one heavenly king around the border regions. But now he had an assignment in the capital.

As news of the matter spread, discussions raged. That was especially true considering the death of Seventh Prince. Rumors went wild.

And that was because Seventh Prince and Fifth Prince had the same mother.

Days passed. One morning, bells tolled....

Outside the east gate of the capital, an ancient spell formation flared to life, sending dazzling light in all directions as an entire army teleported in. From a distance, it was possible to see war banners flapping.

Leading the army was a man mounted on a mutant two-headed black dragon. He wore a black suit of armor and stared at the capital with cold eyes. His long hair flowed freely behind him, and he pulsed with a baleful aura. Clearly, he had killed a lot of people. The army he led stood in ranks behind him, not making a single sound.

"I'm back," the black-armored man said softly.

Chapter 812: Guyue Qingji

On the spell formation outside the imperial capital, the smell of blood and gore surrounded the army. It was incredibly strong, having permeated their armor, their skin, their flesh, and even their

souls. So strong it was that the sky turned dark and strong winds blew. Lightning crackled, and thunder boomed. Bells tolled in the capital, their sound penetrating the minds of everyone present.

The weakest members of this army had Nascent Soul cultivation bases. None were ordinary people, and all had slaughtered countless opponents in the years they spent patrolling the border lands and defending humankind. They had led different lives than most cultivators in the capital. Most of them had been away for a full sixty-year-cycle. Their years of campaigning had made them apathetic to death, and as a result, hardly any emotion could be seen on their faces. And yet, the more apathetic they were, the more astonishing their killing intent became, until it was an instinct they couldn't suppress even standing right outside the capital.

From the look of it... not even imperial authority was important to them. The only thing that could stir their hearts... were the war banners flapping at the front of their army.

There were actually two such banners. One of them was golden, and was embroidered with the two characters that made up Guyue. The other was pitch black and had blood-red writing that read Firecrusher. Firecrusher was the moniker of the number-one heavenly king of humankind.

Beneath the war banners was Fifth Prince, clad in his black armor. His expression was calm as he looked at the imperial capital. He had been away for seventeen years.

*"Scenery remains, people change,"* he murmured. The bells in the capital tolled nine times, and then the east gate slowly opened. Officials from the Five Lesser Celestial Divisions came out to receive Fifth Prince. All of them bowed deeply to him.

"Congratulations, Fifth Prince!"

Fourth Prince was there, clad in a yellow robe with a four-clawed dragon on it. He was there with an edict from the emperor, and was representing the imperial clan to welcome his younger fifth brother to the capital. Looking very solemn, he positioned himself 3,000 meters in front of the army and then spoke in a loud voice.

"Hear this decree, Guyue Qingji."

Fifth Prince looked away from the capital and fixed his gaze on Fourth Prince. Dismounting his two-headed black dragon, he knelt on the ground. Behind him, the members of the army acted in unison to drop to their knees.

Fourth Prince nodded slightly, then extended his right hand to unfurl an imperial decree.

*"Fifth Imperial Prince Qingji hath performed outstanding services in keeping the border climates safe. He hath martial prowess as well as moral aptitude, and is well-known to be an honorable warrior. He is: handsome, erudite and skilled; respectful in serving his military superiors; filial in serving his parents; loving when dealing with his siblings; decent in serving younger family members; authoritative when dealing with officials. He is the spitting image of his father, like the shadow of the emperor cast by sunset."*

*"On this day, Fifth Imperial Prince Qingji is awarded with the right to have a majordomo manage his mansion, and the right to add 10,000 troops to his force of guards. So be it."*

When the reading of the decree was completed, Fifth Prince stood. The army also stood.

“Congratulations, Fifth Brother,” said Fourth Prince. No longer was a serious expression on his face. He was smiling. “Father is waiting for you. Hurry over to kowtow and express thanks.”

Without a word spoken in response, Fifth Prince walked past Fourth Prince, through the east gate, and onto the rainbow bridge.

The army pitched camp by the spell formation.

Seeing that caused Fourth Prince to frown slightly. However, the smile quickly returned to his face and he hurried after Fifth Prince in the direction of the imperial palace.

When the guards on the rainbow bridge saw Fifth Prince, they nodded and greeted him respectfully.

There were a lot of commoners gathered by the bridge to watch as Fifth Prince crossed it. It was hard to say who started cheering first, but soon the entire crowd was clamoring. If someone couldn't see the circumstances, they would probably assume that an army had come back victorious from a huge battle, or perhaps that the crown prince had been chosen. That was how passionate everyone was.

Fifth Prince stopped in place and looked at the crowd. He was silent for a few breaths of time, and then he bowed to the commoners before continuing on his way.

Fifth Prince reached the end of the rainbow bridge and stood before the main entrance of the imperial palace. He looked at the eleven huge sticks of burning incense, most notably the spot where there had once been an incense stick but was now empty. His expression was one of grief.

“O! Seventh's death caught us all by surprise,” a soft voice said from behind him. “He had just asked to clear his name with the Immortal Questioning Bell, but...”

The person who had spoken was Fourth Prince. Shaking his head, he stopped next to Fifth Prince.

Fifth Prince didn't say anything. Looking away from the spot where his younger brother's incense had once stood, he looked through the gate, past the plaza, and at the steps leading up to the palace hall.

“Go in,” Fourth Prince said quietly. “Father is waiting there with all the ministers, heavenly marquises, heavenly kings, and of course the region lord.”

“Enough with your games,” Fifth Prince said calmly. It was the first time he spoke to Fourth Prince since his arrival. “O! Seventh's death is my business. I don't need you trying to fan the flames. Having all the commoners show up and cheer was quite childish. I'm not returning in triumph. Father is in the prime of his life and won't easily give in to suspicion. Children's games aren't befitting of you or anyone else.”

Fifth Prince then strode into the imperial palace.

The emperor sat in his place in the hall. The thirteen heavenly kings were all there in their places, as well as the heavenly marquises. Further down was the chief minister and the officials from the Five Greater Celestial Divisions. All were seated by rank, and looked very serious.

Xu Qing was present as well, sitting in his own place, his face expressionless. He had received an imperial edict the previous night indicating that he should attend court the following morning, which was when Fifth Prince would be returning. After discussing the situation with Ningyan, he came to understand a bit more about the relationship between Fifth Prince and Seventh Prince.

They have the same mother.

In the imperial clan, a relationship like that surpassed just about everything else. In fact, it was sometimes considered more intimate of a relationship than the love between a father and mother.

Fifth Prince is the apprentice of the number-one heavenly king. And he's also the only living apprentice. He's been following the heavenly king for years to defend the border regions. As far as humankind is concerned, he's performed more meritorious services than any of the other imperial princes.

His battle prowess is second only to Grand Prince, who of course is half Firemoon Darkheaven. The two of them are equally brave and good at fighting....

Xu Qing's information came partly from Princess Anhai and partly from Ningyan. As Xu Qing pondered the situation, he heard cheering from outside. So did everyone else in the palace hall. Not one scrap of emotion appeared on the faces of anyone present. It was almost as if they hadn't heard a thing.

It seems he doesn't get along with all the other imperial princes.

Xu Qing's gaze remained placid as he looked toward the entrance of the palace.

Before long, a figure strode into view. He stood straight and tall, with a handsome face and black suit of armor that made him seem very heroic. His cultivation base fluctuations were prominent. He was in the third stage of Void Returning. As he walked, traces of natural and magical laws swirled around him, affecting the surroundings. He was none other than Fifth Prince.

As everyone watched, he walked past all the officials and stopped in front of the stairs. Kneeling to the emperor, he said, "Greetings, Father."

The emperor nodded. "Things have been rough for you."

Fifth Prince stood. He looked at the heavenly kings, then the heavenly marquises, and then Xu Qing. He revealed no emotion whatsoever. Then he bowed at the waist to his father.

"Father, the Firemoon border has been stable over the past seventeen years. During that time, I participated in ninety-seven small-scale battles. The Firemoons never showed up for any of them. All incursions were by minor species. With King Firecrusher there to keep things in check, everything went smoothly.

"Overall, the Firemoon Darkheavens have been busy preparing for their Great Hunt, and haven't had as much attention to spend on hunting surrounding species. As for the incursions by other species, they were primarily training missions or scouting parties. Nothing major.

"In terms of casualties, roughly 379,000 people lost their lives over the past seventeen years. I have the name list right here."



Fifth Prince produced a jade slip which he handed to a guard to be given to the emperor.

“Compared to the past, whether in terms of the number of incidents or the amount of cultivators who sacrificed their lives, the total number is about half. It just goes to show that your plan with the Dawning Suns succeeded in creating a meaningful threat.”

In response to those words, most of the officials present smiled approvingly.

“However...” Fifth Prince continued, “there’s bad news as well.

“First of all, the Firemoons’ subsidiary species have, for some unknown reason, improved their battle prowess. This isn’t just one species we’re talking about. All of them have become inexplicably stronger. This presents a long-term disadvantage for humans, and the clues need to be examined thoroughly by the relevant government department.

“The second bit of bad news is that every time the Firemoons’ Great Hunt is over, they pick a subordinate species to elevate to a higher status. Because of that, it’s highly possible that the subordinate species will provoke military conflict in order to attract attention. Now that I’m back, Father, I would like to submit an official request to the court to increase troop levels on the border. The Saia species, which is one of the top three most powerful subordinate species, seem to be getting restless. We should really be keeping a close eye on them.

“The third bit of bad news is that in recent years, the mutagen levels in Firemoon territory have tripled. King Firecrusher’s assessment was that... the Firemoons are grooming a fourth god!”

When he was finished speaking, silence prevailed. The officials were shaken, as news from the border regions was usually top secret, and few people knew much in the way of details. Most people had a general understanding at best, so for most people present, it was their first time hearing such specific information.

As the officials pondered the new information, Fifth Prince once again bowed to the emperor.

Normally speaking, the proper procedure would be for him to return to his spot in the hall. But after bowing, he didn’t do that. Instead, he softly said, “Father, I know that Ol’ Seventh committed heinous crimes and was executed by The Emperor’s Sword. He was guilty, so he deserved to die.

“However, he was still my blood brother! If I don’t speak up about this subject, my conscience will bother me. As a human, I value bloodline and familial love. That’s what makes us human.

“As your own edict stated, father, I am loving when dealing with siblings. Therefore, if I disregard familial love, then I might as well not have family. Those are the ideals I’ve fostered since childhood.

“Therefore, father, I would like to invite Region Lord Xu to fight. That way, regardless of who wins, I can stand by my ideals!” With that, Fifth Prince turned to look at Xu Qing, his eyes flashing coldly. “Shall we fight, Region Lord Xu?”

#### Chapter 813: Corpse Fire Ignites All

The hall was silent. No one spoke as the echoes of Fifth Prince’s words died away. There were no negative reactions to Fifth Prince’s actions. After all, he had spoken in a very clear and direct manner as opposed to speaking placidly but with hidden malice. In an open and honest way, he had directly extended an invitation to fight.

What was more, his wording was sound. He had stated clearly that Seventh Prince made mistakes and deserved his fate. But he also pointed out that as Seventh Prince’s older blood brother, he had to take some sort of action, lest he develop internal hindrances. And considering how he’d argued that familial love was what made everyone human, his points couldn’t easily be refuted.

As a result, the emperor chose not to say anything, thus overtly giving Xu Qing the power to decide how things would turn out.

Xu Qing looked down at Fifth Prince. When their gazes met, it was as if black flames surged in Fifth Prince’s eyes, filled with an inauspicious sensation of death. That said, he clearly kept the effect under control as he looked at Xu Qing.

“This fight has nothing to do with your status and identity,” Fifth Prince continued. “It’s simply an older brother acting on behalf of his younger brother! When we were young, I was always the one to step in and handle matters when he was bullied by other princes.

“Xu Qing, my brother made mistakes and deserved to die. But since you killed him, I have to fight you!” The desire to do battle surged within him as he waited for Xu Qing’s answer.

A few breaths of time passed.

Inside, Xu Qing’s heart was pounding as he thought back to his own childhood, and the times when he believed himself to have an older brother like this....

Closing his eyes, he calmly said, “Okay.”

Instantly, Fifth Prince ceased to suppress the battle spirit in his eyes, and it erupted. Black fire spread out around him, creating a sea of flames. At the same time, the entire imperial palace transformed. As if by astral redirection, it... disappeared.

The only things visible were Xu Qing seated above and Fifth Prince standing below. Apparently, they now occupied a standalone dimension of unlimited size.

As a result, the black fire from Fifth Prince continued to spread without cease, creating an infinite sea of black flames. The temperature soared as the flames continuously climbed higher. Fifth Prince himself also grew larger, and his aura skyrocketed as he unleashed all of his cultivation base power and started walking toward Xu Qing. His black suit of armor also burst into flames, making him like a human torch that could devour mountains and rivers. Every step he took caused the

dimension to tremble violently. And with every step, he accelerated, until he was like a shooting star closing in on Xu Qing.

Meanwhile, soul threads streamed out of Xu Qing, weaving together in the blink of an eye to form his third-level god state. He had bones of crystal, and flesh of soul threads, with a blood-red cape, plus a violet moon hovering overhead. Mutagen spread out, blurring the surroundings and filling the area with the will of a god. The third-level god state was an independent entity, separate from Xu Qing, which allowed him to stride forward and meet Fifth Prince's attack. They clashed, and an intense rumbling sound shook heaven and earth.

Fifth Prince staggered backward in shock.

At the same time, Xu Qing's third-level god state fell back.

Fifth Prince was in third-stage Void Returning! That was the same level of battle prowess as Xu Qing's third-level god state, and as a result, in a simple clash between the two of them, neither one would clinch a victory.

About 300 meters away, Fifth Prince stopped moving and looked up. Both of his hands flashed in a double-handed incantation gesture, whereupon one of the long hairs on his head turned gray as the black color drained from it and turned into a mist in front of him. Seething, the mist became a black oil lamp with a flame burning atop it. The flame was golden!

The shape of the lamp was simple and utilitarian. Something about it imparted the sensation of the underworld, as if this lamp wasn't intended for use by the living. It was something normally enshrined to the dead. As for the flame, it was turbid and ancient, and also contained a godly sensation. Astonishingly, this oil lamp had obviously been crafted from the corpse of a god!

Fifth Prince inhaled deeply, and then exhaled onto the wick of the lamp. Instantly, the fire jumped higher, then spread out in all directions, provoking a reaction from the surrounding sea of flames.

The sea of flames began to pour into the oil lamp.

Ultimately, the fire converged into a shadowy figure. The shadowy figure constantly changed forms. It shifted between being a human, an animal, a grue, or sometimes just an incorporeal form. Regardless, the aura it emanated was shocking and ghastly. The godly aura became like oil thrown onto the fire as Fifth Prince used his divine ability, sending the shadowy figure accelerating rapidly toward Xu Qing's god state.

As the figure neared, a tremor passed through Xu Qing's god state, and then it erupted. Countless soul threads danced as the first-level god state and the second-level god state formed and merged with the other god state. With its energy surging, it raised its right hand and pointed at the shadowy figure.

The two clashed and blurred. Afterward, Xu Qing's god state returned to normal, while the shadowy figure disappeared.

A popping sound rang out from the oil lamp in Fifth Prince's hand. Seven cracks appeared on its surface, out of which blood flowed. However, the battle spirit in Fifth Prince's eyes only grew stronger. After falling back, Fifth Prince shouted and crushed the oil lamp between his two palms, then shoved his hands toward the ground.

*"Flame to sacrifice; earth altar rises; seal divine will; suppress heavenly heart!"*

As his words rang out, the shattered bits of the lamp landed on the ground and exploded, adding a significant blessing to the surrounding sea of flames.

Rumbling sounds echoed out and flames raged. At the same time, its form changed as it became churning lava which swept out in all directions.

Then a white altar slowly rose up from the middle of the lava. There was something on top of the altar. It was a black funerary urn! It was sealed with a corroded sealing strip, and it emanated a very gruish sensation. At the same time, it seemed profoundly inauspicious.[1]

A brutal and tyrannical will pulsed from the urn, which locked onto Xu Qing's god state.

Meanwhile, the expanding lava rapidly filled the dimension.

Xu Qing had never seen any divine ability like this before. It seemed like a magical technique, but at the same time, incorporated a magical treasure.

Is this the dao of King Firecrusher?

As the thought occurred to Xu Qing, he sent his external god state shooting up into the air. There, it looked down and extended its right hand toward the altar. Intense rumbling sounds echoed out, causing the dimension's dome of heaven to blur as three mountains appeared. One was made of burning flames. One was made of frosty ice. One was made of crimson blood.

As the three mountains appeared, the sea of lava below was whipped into a frenzy.

This was the very same Withering Flame Demon Magic True Self Dao that Xu Qing had learned from the little butterfly.

As the god state's hand dropped, the three mountains descended, bringing with them terrifying pressure and impressive grandeur as they dropped down toward the sea of lava.

Fifth Prince's eyes glittered with cold light as he shot forward, both of his hands waving out in front of him as he prepared to use the lava to create a defensive barrier. Before he could accomplish that, the god state performed an incantation gesture and pointed out. In response, a spiderweb of cracks spread out to cover the three mountains, and then they exploded.

A rain of rubble turned into meteors that shot down toward the sea of lava.

Fifth Prince had led with an aggressive onslaught, yet he had still underestimated what Xu Qing's god state was capable of. The god state quickly performed another incantation gesture, and then three new mountains appeared in the dome of heaven. After that came another three. All of them exploded and created a mass of rubble. After that came yet another three. Xu Qing's god state ultimately used the magic ten times!

No matter how Fifth Prince tried to put up a defense, it didn't work. The lava exploded, and the flames went dark. Countless bits of rubble smashed down onto Fifth Prince. Ultimately, the sea of lava and the altar were completely buried. But then a furious howl erupted from underneath the uneven surface of the rubble. An instant later, the rubble exploded upward.

However, Xu Qing's god state then slammed down onto the field of rubble. The god state's right hand shoved down violently, causing a mass of innumerable soul threads to spread out everywhere. Wherever it passed, the rubble was cleared, until... everywhere was flat and level.

The soul threads then continued to expand, forming a magical sealing symbol.

That was when it occurred to Xu Qing that things were too simple. The power of the funerary urn hadn't yet been fully revealed. Until now.

"You were careless, Xu Qing," Fifth Prince said, his voice calm.

As the words echoed out, the sealing mark on the ground vibrated. Then, over a hundred locations on its surface collapsed as the ashes from the urn turned into bone chains that shot up from the soil. [2]

Most of the chains swept out over the lands to suppress the soul threads and lock them in place. The remaining bone chains shot toward Xu Qing's seated true form. They moved with incredible speed, quickly surrounding him and turning into a vortex.

"Xu Qing, as a region lord, you're very important to humankind, so I won't kill you. However... I will extract your god soul. I will also take one spiritual soul from among your three spiritual souls and seven physical souls, to burn in my god corpse lamp. Whenever you feel capable of defeating me in combat, you can come take it back!"

As Fifth Prince's words echoed out, he appeared in midair. However, there wasn't just one of him. There were eight of him, and each of them was holding one of the bone chains that surrounded Xu Qing. All of them yanked forcefully on the chains. A mysterious and profound power emanated from the bone chains, and in some unknown manner, they borrowed power from Xu Qing's soul threads to start extracting his god soul from within him. All Fifth Prince had to do was maintain balance and control.

Instantly, afterimages of Xu Qing sprang up around him as his god soul prepared to emerge from within him. Except... his expression remained completely calm as he opened his eyes and looked at Fifth Prince.

"That's a nice magical technique. Since you want to extract my soul, I might as well do a little test."

Xu Qing extended his hand from within the bone chain vortex. Pushing out gently, he spoke in a voice that might as well have been a simple exhalation.

"This world of heaven and earth can be considered a well...."

Chapter 814: Blood-Red Dark Swallow

Xu Qing's voice seemed to come from ancient times, or to pass through deep waters. Every word contained meaning, and as they combined, they created a mysterious water droplet of daoist magic that landed on the surface of the water.

It created a very crisp and clear sound.

Ping....

The sound expanded, creating ripples that spread through the dimension. It was almost as if the entire place... had become the surface of a body of water.

Fifth Prince was on that surface of water. All eight versions of him looked absolutely shocked to the core. He had never seen any divine ability like this! Nor had he experienced any sensation like this

before. However, the majestic aura that filled the dimension gave him the sensation that it was some type of dao essence. But what was most astonishing to him was that he realized that, all of a sudden, he had lost his ability to move. He was locked in place, even his cultivation base and magical techniques. Everything about him had turned completely still.

His look of astonishment was also frozen in place. His mind still worked, but that didn't help him much. Next, Xu Qing spoke again, and an even more shocking scene unfolded.

“Everything is inside the well. All divine abilities, magical treasures, all states exist in the well.... That includes the true you.”

As even more ripples spread out on the surface of the water, Fifth Prince looked down to see himself reflected there.... It wasn't just him. It was all of his magical treasures, as well as the flames from his magical technique. And there were other magical techniques, including everything he had ever cultivated. Even his heavenly dao was there, as well as all of the natural and magical laws he had gained enlightenment of. He also saw the altar and the funerary urn. Everything that belonged to him and all his secrets were there, whether they were illusory techniques or material items.

Fifth Prince was shaken to the core, as he suddenly came to the conclusion... that if his reflection sustained damage, the same would happen to his true form. That premonition prompted him to struggle to free himself, except that he couldn't move a muscle. The version of himself in the water grew clearer.

Meanwhile, though it seemed like he and Xu Qing were fighting in a standalone dimension, the reality was that they were still in the imperial palace. It was just that the palace's spell formation had interfered to keep the effects of their fighting isolated. As a result, everyone in the palace could both sense and watch everything that was happening. They saw Fifth Prince's grisly corpse fire, and they saw the bizarre bone chains from the funerary urn. They also saw Fifth Prince attempt to extract one of Xu Qing's souls.

At the same time, they saw Xu Qing's actions. On the day of the dao debate, Xu Qing had done some fighting. But all he had done was reveal his god state. Now, seeing his god state unleash magical techniques was a big shock to many people.

And the three falling mountains was only one reason for that. After all, on the day Xu Qing clashed with the butterfly, there had been people who sensed what was happening. But what really shocked everyone was the ability currently being unleashed. Not one person had ever seen anything like it!

The thirteen heavenly kings were moved, and the emperor leaned forward slightly, a strange light flickering in his eyes.

As everyone paid close attention, Xu Qing's voice echoed out again.

“He is you.”

The words caused Fifth Prince's mind to spin, and his view of the world to blur. It felt like water was flowing around him, obscuring his vision. Within that blurriness, he looked at himself, unmoving and surrounded by all of his magical techniques, natural laws, and magical treasures.

What shook him even further was the realization that... what he was looking at wasn't under the surface of the water. He was looking at his true form outside the water. Unbeknownst to him, he had

somehow come to be in the body beneath the surface of the water. In other words... he had become part of the reflection of himself.

He couldn't fight back! He couldn't resist!

Fifth Prince felt shaken to the depths of his being. He wasn't willing for this to happen, and yet there was no way for him to stop it. He wanted to struggle, yet had no will to make it happen.

Then he saw a hand. It was Xu Qing's hand, slowly reaching down into the water to fish something out. That simple motion seemed to contain a boundless daoist magic. There wasn't a scrap of any technique aura. It seemed like a fresh breeze.

After all, Xu Qing had gained enlightenment of how to use Fishing the Moon in the Well to fish the moon out of his own heart. After that, using it to extract souls from other people was downright simple. He had been spending time recently thinking about what other transformations existed within Fishing the Moon in the Well. To some extent, it was a daoist magic that could be used to fish out anything that existed, not just moons. The moon was just a reference point.

And thus, he reached his hand into the water to Fifth Prince, and gently fished out his soul. The rumbling dimension collapsed. The bone chains locked onto Xu Qing's souls had no one controlling them, so they crumbled into nothing.

The same thing happened to the chains swirling around Xu Qing himself. The seven projected versions of Fifth Prince faded from midair as the entire dimension disappeared.

As the astral redirection concluded, Xu Qing once again saw the imperial palace around him.

Fifth Prince stood motionless in the same spot as before, his face pale and his eyes listless. His soul was gone. His fleshly body remained, but without a soul, he was like a walking corpse.

Xu Qing had not even stood up from his chair, and his expression had hardly changed. He was currently looking down at the palm of his hand. He wasn't the only one. Everyone else in the palace hall had shifted their gazes to look at the same spot. Fifth Prince's soul rested on his palm.

"Guyue Qingji," Xu Qing said quietly, "as an imperial prince who guards the border regions, you're very important to humankind. Nor have you committed any grave crime. Therefore, I won't give you a hard time. I'll simply take one of your magical techniques. Whenever you feel capable of defeating me in combat, you can come take it back!"

Xu Qing waved his hand, and Fifth Prince's soul became a host of threads that shot back to Fifth Prince. The only thing that remained behind was a funerary urn. Xu Qing's hand closed around it.

Fifth Prince shivered. The blankness in his eyes faded and he looked at Xu Qing with a complicated expression. Then he bowed at the waist, took a few steps backward, then returned to his assigned spot in the hall. There, he closed his eyes.

The palace hall was absolutely silent, but everyone present was deeply shaken. The events that had just played out changed what many of these members of the human nobility thought of Xu Qing. He seemed more mysterious than before. Turning heaven and earth into a surface of water, then fishing a soul from within it, was virtually incomprehensible to them.

Unless you have a higher cultivation base than this Xu Qing, or have some very unique item....

A divine ability like that clearly has a very profound dao accumulation. It contains a very ancient will. I'd say it's not a magic from any recent era.

What a majestic divine ability. There's no way something like that could have appeared in history and yet not be mentioned in any historical records....

As the people in the hall pondered the situation, some people thought about the Summer Immortal Palace.

One of the heavenly kings attending court was a woman wearing a daoist robe, and she had a blurred face. Looking at Xu Qing, she said, "Does that daoist magic have a name?"

"Fishing the Moon in the Well," Xu Qing replied with a neutral facial expression.

"Good name," she replied, nodding. She asked no further questions.

This session of court was reaching its end.

The chief minister, who was officiating, looked at the sky outside, then at the gathered officials. "Ladies and gentlemen, if there's anything further, please submit your petitions to the emperor. Otherwise, court will be adjourned."

Everyone bowed their heads.

The chief minister scanned the crowd again, then turned to the emperor. After a short moment passed, he said, "In that case..."

The chief minister nodded and was about to proclaim court adjourned. But then, a blood-red beam of light appeared in the dome of heaven outside the imperial capital.

It was visible first. But a moment later, a deafening scream filled the air. Everyone heard the intense sound, which was so loud it shook the entire imperial capital. It shot toward the imperial palace with incredible speed that bordered on teleportation. It didn't seem as if any spell formation or defensive obstacle would block its progress. As a matter of fact, the imperial capital's grand spell formation didn't just open up, it actually blessed it with further speed. Within the blood-red beam was the aura of a Dawning Sun, which made it seem completely unstoppable. Anything that tried to block it would be reduced to ashes.

The first people to notice what was happening were those in the imperial palace. The emperor looked up, and in very rare fashion, his gaze flickered dramatically.

In humankind, there was a very high-level communication method that resembled a blood-colored dark swallow. As long as it was used within human territory, it could span any distance to carry a secret message to its target. The blood-red beam in the sky was exactly that.

The heavenly kings' auras surged. The heavenly marquises' expressions flickered. The other officials were visibly moved as they turned to look at the blood-red beam of light that shot screaming into the imperial palace, where it transformed into a blood-colored dark swallow that landed on the emperor's hand. Then it surged with light like blood as it turned into a blood-red jade slip.



The emperor looked closely at it for a long moment. Then his expression turned grim, and a stifling pressure weighed down on the imperial palace.

Simultaneously, more blood-red dark swallows appeared on the horizon, all flying toward the palace. There were a total of nine of them, all of which entered the palace and turned into jade slips. The emperor flicked his finger, sending one of them into the hands of the chief minister.

The chief minister scanned it, and then his eyes glittered. He crushed it.

Voice hoarse, he said, "One of the three major subsidiary species of the Firemoon Darkheavens, the Saia, have amassed an army 10,000,000 strong and have encroached on our northwestern border to wage war!

"Also, the Whitemarsh species, another of the Firemoons' subsidiaries, has mobilized for war. They teleported to the front lines of our conflict with the Nightshades to provide backup. As a result, King Eastcauldron was severely injured.

"The Nightshade war has reached a critical point, while the northwest border is in severe danger."

#### Chapter 815: The Wind Stirs the Firemoon God

The chief minister's words resulted in complete silence in the palace hall. Then, a moment later, auras erupted everywhere.

The thirteen heavenly kings all stood. Further down on the stairs, the heavenly marquises did the same.

The northwest border was a very important and significant area. That was where human lands connected to the territory of the Firemoon Darkheaven people. For an area to be directly facing such a powerful species was a big weight. That was especially true considering that the Saia were one of the top three subsidiary species of the Firemoon Darkheavens. In other words, there was no way they would take any important action without the endorsement of the Firemoon Darkheavens. If this situation wasn't handled properly, it could lead to widespread destruction.

Furthermore... the armies of humankind had commanded the upper hand against the Nightshades for some time now. But with the Whitemarshes added into the mix, things were clearly going to get much more difficult. Now the armies were entrenched and couldn't easily retreat. Clearly, this was going to have a big effect on the overall situation for humans.

The gathered officials exchange glances, from the heavenly kings on high to the ordinary officials below. Humankind was made up of all sorts of disparate forces, and contained many important clans. As a result, there was always secret infighting going on. But right now... even officials who were in conflict with each other could see the determination in each other's eyes. No words needed to be spoken. Every person who had somehow managed to earn a place in this hall knew where they stood in a situation like this.

At certain times, power struggles needed to be put to the side, and ideological differences with political rivals needed to be forgotten. Personal vendettas had to be temporarily sidelined. A crisis on the border and on the Nightshade battle lines superseded all. With enemies surrounding them,

everyone had to pay the price to achieve some unity. Neither personal nor clan affairs were important in comparison.

If humankind ceased to exist, then profits or losses of any kind would be meaningless. Members of the imperial court could never accept the option of seeking asylum with some other species.

Therefore, requests for war assignments immediately filled the palace hall.

“Your Majesty, I’m willing to accept a combat post! Please send me to the northwest border to lend a helping hand to King Firecrusher!”

“Your Majesty, my clan has 80,000 death commandos ready to sacrifice their lives on the battlefield. I can personally lead them to the Nightshade front lines to fight for humankind!”

“Your Majesty, sending armies onto the campaign trail is very costly. I’m willing to contribute all of our clan resources.... This war is the number-one priority!”

“The Five Lesser Celestial Divisions will devote all available resources to the war effort.”

“Ah, whatever. I might not like King Eastcauldron very much, and have clashed with him numerous times. But right now... I’m willing to personally lead troops to the Nightshade front lines and serve under his command!”

Numerous such declarations could be heard.

Xu Qing was increasingly moved as he realized that the words being spoken were all sincere. This was what they really thought, and this was what they were really willing to do. It went beyond anything he could have predicted. He had previously believed the imperial capital to be a place of chaos, with the emperor keeping a tight grip on the populace, but with everyone constantly at odds with each other. As a result, he was touched by what he was seeing.

Is this just another side to humankind that I never saw before?

When there’s no big crisis, everyone is out for their own good. It makes it seem like they all have evil intentions and are only seeking their own profit. But when crisis looms.... Every person and every group can put all of that aside and work together....

Xu Qing was visibly moved. Of course, words were words. What really mattered was actions. That said, Xu Qing’s intuition was telling him that, in all likelihood, these people were being sincere.

It wasn’t just the court officials who were speaking up. The imperial princes were also stepping forward.

Fifth Prince walked out and bowed to the emperor. “Father, please permit me to return to the northwest border forthwith!”

Fourth Prince took a deep breath and also bowed. “Father, I’m willing to go fight the Nightshades. I’ll die in battle with them if I must! As an imperial prince, I have the warrior spirit of humankind!”

He was speaking with full sincerity. Though the succession struggle between the princes was still on, the prospect of war changed everything. As of now, it wasn't important to highlight who was right or wrong in various aspects. What was more important... was meritorious service!

Third Prince, Tenth Prince, Princess Anhai, and all of the other imperial princes stepped forward and said similar things. That included Ningyan.

“Your Majesty, I'm willing to fight the Nightshades!”

The emperor didn't seem surprised at all by this. He was well aware of what humans were like, which was why he allowed internal struggles. That was his way of ruling. Looking off in the direction of the Firemoon Darkheaven people, his eyes flickered with deep meaning. Inside, he sighed.

This happened sooner than expected.

Only the emperor himself could hear his sigh. Others could not. They just saw the emperor sitting there with the same expression as usual. After all, being in the position he was, he had long since learned to prevent others from seeing what he was thinking. Any change in expression on his part would be analyzed by everyone who saw it. Most people who reached high positions were like that. Oftentimes, one's facial expression was one of the most important factors in one's method of ruling.

“I have heard your petitions,” the emperor said calmly. “And now, the Five Greater Celestial Divisions will hear my orders.”

Cultivators from the Five Greater Celestial Divisions immediately stepped out from the officials and bowed. At the same time, in the central headquarters buildings of the Five Greater Celestial Divisions, majestic figures rose up and bowed in the direction of the palace.

“The five divisions will work with the chief minister to form war plans based on everything known about Nightshade war practices. Arrange for three potential war plans, to be referred to as War Plan I, War Plan II, and War Plan III. Deliver them to the palace within a day!”

“Your orders shall be followed!” the five figures said in unison along with the chief minister.

“Now the Five Lesser Celestial Divisions will hear my orders,” the emperor continued.

The cultivators on duty at the Five Lesser Celestial Divisions appeared. They were also extraordinary in aura and appearance.

“You will assist in all matters related to preparation for war, as well as any follow-up issues. No negligence will be tolerated. All human territories... are now officially in a state of war.”

The emperor's voice resonated in heaven and earth. At the same time, the imperial capital's grand spell formation rumbled to life, causing all spell formations in the Imperial Region to do the same. As their powers combined, human territories were sealed off and protected from the outside.

Court was not adjourned. No one left. Everyone waited for the chief minister and the Five Greater Celestial Divisions to release the plans for the war. There was a lot of work involved, including the overarching strategy, various calculations and inferences, as well as assessments.

Time slipped by slowly but surely. Twelve hours later, War Plans I, II, and III were presented to the emperor. After two hours of discussion, the emperor selected one of the war plans.

Xu Qing observed the entire process but didn't say anything. This was his first time participating in anything like this.

After the war plan was approved, a series of imperial edicts were issued.

First, the emperor issued five edicts related to the Nightshade war.

Imperial Edict A: Four heavenly kings shall lead an army to provide backup to King Eastcauldron. The goal is to reverse the situation of the human forces pinned down by the Nightshades. Instead, they will pin down the Whitemarsh forces. When a stalemate exists, no one can take the initiative. Third Prince will join the action.

Imperial Edict B: The forces in Sea-Sealing County, the Nightspirit Region, and the Holytide Region will work together. Sea-Sealing County will lead. They will be the primary force operating against the Nightshades. Their mission is to take advantage of the moment when the Whitemarshes are pinned down to mount an invasion of the Nightshade Region.

Imperial Edict C: Five heavenly kings, along with Twelfth Prince Ningyan, will lead reinforcements to support Sea-Sealing County. They will bear with them three Dawning Suns.

*Imperial Edict D: King Wildmist will work with the Special Operations Division to form a Spec-Ops Corps. They will infiltrate the Whitemarsh ancestral land. Considering that the entire Whitemarsh species is mobilized for war, they will destroy the ancestral land. Sixth Prince will participate. [1]*

Imperial Edict E: Xu Qing will travel to the Moonrite Region and petition the Heir Apparent and his siblings to provide assistance if a crisis arises. This will be the primary backup plan in case something goes wrong.

Those five edicts covered all aspects of the Nightshade war. They seemed simplistic, but the reality was that they were quite comprehensive.

When it came to the Saia invasion of the northwestern border, six imperial edicts were issued.

Imperial Edict 1: Fifth Prince will lead an army of 10,000,000 to the border.

Imperial Edict 2: Four heavenly kings will form a unified army that they will lead to the northwestern border to support King Firecrusher. Their mission is to secure the border.

Imperial Edict 3: Fourth Prince is authorized to participate in operations in the northwest. Furthermore, he will request that the imperial preceptor erect a Star-Plucking Tower in the northwest. As long as the imperial preceptor lives, the northwest will not fall!

Imperial Edict 4: Seven lines of defense will be erected around the imperial capital. Every line of defense will be overseen by an imperial prince or princess. All requests for assistance shall be honored by all parties. Forces on the lines of defense will remain on permanent standby to ensure no one attempts to mount an invasion.

Imperial Edict 5: Grand Prince will leave immediately on a diplomatic mission to the Firemoon Darkheavens to investigate the reason behind the military activity. He will do everything in his power to end the war while there. If he can't, he will at least buy time.

Imperial Edict 6: All important Firemoon representatives in human territory, as well as all commercial operations, will be put on immediate lockdown. They will not be freed until the war is over.

As a result of the eleven imperial edicts, humankind became like a huge weapon of war. A buzz of activity immediately ensued. The Five Greater Celestial Divisions took action, and the Five Lesser Celestial Divisions cooperated. Everyone acted according to their assigned role, putting aside any personal conflicts to work together.

This was completely different from the previous war with the Nightshades. This time... virtually all of the imperial princes joined in the action. In fact, they were pillars of the war effort, drawing out the best of all the parties involved. Before long, the imperial capitals' teleportation portals were activated. In line with the various imperial edicts, the armed forces began teleporting away.

Ningyan bid farewell to Xu Qing, although he would be representing Xu Qing on the way back.

Xu Qing made preparations to leave. Before departing, he looked out at the wartime atmosphere of the imperial capital, and decided to visit the Red Dust Emotional Suppression Pavilion. The place was completely locked down at the moment, and seemed empty and desolate.

As he stood outside, a jovial voice reached his ears.

“You and your humans are suddenly very busy, you naughty little boy. Did you come here to plead for help from me?”

Xu Qing thought for a moment. He was familiar with gods, and because of that, he knew full well that gods weren't swayed by emotion. To gods, other living beings were like bugs. He himself was just a fleeting shadow in the very long lifespan of such figures.

He shook his head.

The clay fox smiled. “You just get me to like you more and more, naughty boy. Truth be told, despite the fact you said no to my question, I wouldn't mind helping you if it was a personal matter and you agree to give me your primal yang. But this is a war between two species, and there's some major karma involved. Unless you offered something even more incredible, then... I would have to refuse to help.”

Chapter 816: Not As Good as Yanyan

The dome of heaven over the imperial capital was like a mass of spilled ink, dark and monotonous. The afterglow of the setting sun was just as dim. What sunlight remained filtered onto the lands like a gray cloak. The entire world seemed to sink down under the pressure. Even the clouds melted into the darkness of the sky.

Pedestrians on the streets hurried on their way. Few people knew the details of the imperial edicts which had been issued, but they saw the blood-red dark swallows, and could thus guess that catastrophe loomed.

And when the armies started moving, those guesses turned into reality. Humans of this time period had to deal with a lot of grief and sorrow. Darkness and gloom became the primary color theme in human lands. Then lightning crashed through that darkness, and heavy rainfall began. Though the wind did not contain the icy cold of winter, it did indicate that seasons were changing. Spring was coming. And yet those who it touched... still felt like the freezing winter would continue.

Xu Qing felt it, but he had grown used to the cold. As he stood outside the Red Dust Emotional Suppression Pavilion, he wasn't surprised at all by what the clay fox said. He was more familiar with the behavior of gods than most people. He had other reasons for coming here.

"Crimson Mother already perished," Xu Qing said calmly.

"I'm obviously aware of that," the clay fox said, sounding as seductive as usual. "What is it you want to say, naughty boy?"

"But," Xu Qing continued, his expression placid, "the red moon is still around." His voice provoked a ripple from the building in front of him. "As you can sense, it's on its way back.

"I stole Crimson Mother's authority, so my senses can't be deceived in that regard. It won't be long before the red moon once again appears in the sky over the Revered Ancient mainland. When that happens, the person standing atop it will be Li Zihua. Or perhaps it will be someone else.

"Regardless of who it is... they will want to be complete. And it's likely that those of us who split up Crimson Mother's flesh will be their target. We will be like seeds that have sprouted and grown, and are ready to be harvested."

A moment later the clay fox laughed. "That's very fascinating, naughty boy. Except that I can't see the future."

Xu Qing didn't quibble about gods being able to see the future. Voice calm, he continued, "Crimson Mother was Li Zihua's little sister. They were both postheaven gods, which are different from preheaven gods.

"For example, Fifth Prince, despite knowing I was justified in executing Seventh Prince, was an older brother, and thus, he had no choice but to fight me. I also have an older brother, and if someone else tried to kill me, he wouldn't stop them. But if I did die, I'm fairly certain that he would take action to sever karma."

The clay fox thought for a moment, then spoke in a voice that was less seductive and more businesslike. "That's a very interesting deduction. Though it seems very unlikely, you do make some good points. In that case... why did you come here today?"

Xu Qing bowed at the waist. "High God Starfire, I hereby request that you grant me the right to participate in the Firemoon Darkheavens' Great Hunt."

The clay fox smiled. "It seems I was right to be interested in you. You're very fun sometimes, naughty boy. You actually thought of a way to break the stalemate. If you can win the title of

darkheaven general in the Great Hunt, then you'll have a reputation among the Firemoon Darkheaven people. Darkheaven generals always get an opportunity to request a boon from the three major powers. I suppose you want to use that boon to stop the war between the Firemoon Darkheavens and the humans? Sadly, that isn't going to work."

The clay fox spoke in a teasing voice; to hēr, life was little more than a flower.

Xu Qing shook his head. "If I succeed, that won't be what I ask for."

"Then what will you ask for?" the clay fox asked curiously.

Looking calmly at the building, Xu Qing softly said, "Just wait until I succeed, then you'll find out."

Laughter drifted out from inside. "You rogue! Well, fine. For the sake of that primal yang of yours, I think I can agree to your request."

A pink stream of light emerged from the building and shot toward Xu Qing. It stopped right in front of him, where it coalesced into the form of a pink identity medallion. On the front was etched the image of a fox, while the back was a scene of mountains and rivers.

Xu Qing took it and looked at it.

Meanwhile, a languid yawn could be heard from inside the Red Dust Emotional Suppression Pavilion. "I guess I might as well explain to you how the Great Hunt works. Just remember, I'm doing this because I happen to like you so much. I wouldn't provide such details to anyone else."

The clay fox suddenly seemed a lot more seductive than before.

Xu Qing took a deep breath and cupped hands respectfully. He knew that the information to come was going to be very important. As he had previously stated directly, this was the only reason he had come here. Xu Qing didn't plan to go directly to the Moonrite Region. Given his relationship with the Heir Apparent and his siblings, it seemed a foregone conclusion that if he pleaded for help, they would agree to step in. Considering what he knew of the aspirations of the Heir Apparent and his siblings, Xu Qing felt it would be better to try to handle the situation on his own. If it didn't work, he could always go to Moonrite afterward.

There was another reason why Xu Qing wanted to go to the Firemoon Darkheavens first. And that was Ningyan's meritorious service. Only if Ningyan became the crown prince would Xu Qing have an opportunity to enter the ancestral planet to get the Plumdark Evergreen Lamp. And from what Xu Qing could tell, Ningyan's assignment in the Nightshade war wasn't going to be enough for him to earn that spot. But if Xu Qing could somehow arrange for Ningyan to resolve the situation with the Firemoon Darkheavens, that might be enough meritorious service.

As Xu Qing thought about those things, the clay fox spoke in a languid voice.

"The Great Hunt of the Firemoon Darkheaven people consists of three rounds. If you want to become a darkheaven general, you need to take first place in at least one of those rounds. If you can take first place in all three, then you won't just be an ordinary darkheaven general. You'll be the Grand Darkheaven!"

Somehow, there was anticipation in the clay fox's voice. "That said, there hasn't been a Grand Darkheaven for many, many years. The first round of the Great Hunt is actually already half over. In the first round, you have to move mountains. And not just any mountains. Forbidden mountains."

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed. "Forbidden mountains?"

"That's right. Any mountain from a forbidden region qualifies." The clay fox chuckled. "One forbidden mountain is the requirement. But that's the minimum. If you want to take first place, then you'll need to have more forbidden mountains than anyone else."

"The process involves taking the forbidden mountains to God Mountain in the heart of Firemoon lands. Do that, and you've succeeded, regardless of how many forbidden mountains you fuse into God Mountain. During that time... all participants are allowed to fight, rob, and kill each other."

The clay fox stopped speaking for a moment, and her simple explanation seemed to cause the smell of gore to proliferate.

Xu Qing nodded.

The clay fox continued. "The second round is a lot more interesting. It's the hunt of taming. The Firemoon Darkheavens have a lot of godly entities. Some are weak, and some are strong. Regardless, if you tame one and turn it into your darkheaven mount, then you meet the requirement for the second round."

"The stronger the godly beast you try to tame, the more difficult it is. But if you want to take first place, then you can imagine how difficult of a task you face. The slightest mistake and you can become food. Therefore, naughty boy, make sure you think this through clearly. Make sure you don't die before giving me your primal yang. And remember, I can't really interfere to help you during the Great Hunt."

Xu Qing was finding these different rounds of the event to be very unique and interesting.

"The third round is actually very simple, but it's the most important." Inside the shrine hall, the clay fox licked her lips, and her eyes shone with a bewitching glow. "And that's the hunt of the god domain! When the time comes, my two older sisters and I will act together to open the entrance of a god domain. As for which specific god domain, I can't really tell you. But I'm fairly certain... you'll like it."

The clay fox laughed softly. "After the god domain is opened, all participants enter and kill the things inside to earn points. The more you kill, the better your chances of winning. At the same time, it's still a god domain.... Therefore, every Great Hunt involves about eighty percent of participants dying."

"Some of them end up mutating and turning into god flesh. Such god flesh makes great treats for the little cutie pies inside. In fact, if something really delicious comes along, I might even take a bite. It's a banquet, designed for the pleasure of gods. And if you're there, I'll definitely be paying much closer attention than usual. That said, I



hope that if you do die, no one else gets your flesh. Therefore... I might use my god authority to lay claim to your flesh. What do you think about that, naughty boy?"

The clay fox's words were spoken gently, but they were chilling enough to be spine-tingling.

Xu Qing wasn't surprised. He nodded. "Sure."

Inside the shrine hall, the clay fox laughed, and the shrine vibrated. In fact, the entire shrine hall shook. Then hēr eyes glittered, and shē licked hēr lips.

"This time, naughty boy, I've come to realize... that I really do just like you more and more."

Xu Qing looked at the Red Dust Emotional Suppression Pavilion, and thought about how he had heard words like this, and felt something similar, when dealing with Yanyan in the past. In fact, in some ways, the clay fox worded things more conservatively than Yanyan. Forgetting about levels of power, he actually thought that Yanyan was a bit superior.[1]

Of course, he said nothing. After clasping hands, he turned and walked off, slowly merging into the darkness of night and disappearing.

After he was gone, the clay fox looked up from within the shrine hall of the Red Dust Emotional Suppression Pavilion.

"Years ago, Second Sister fell in love with someone. I wonder if it was like this."

Chapter 817: Firemoon Travelogue

The Imperial Region was a vast location that went on seemingly without end.

It was the fifth day of war.

A great wall had long since been constructed on the northwestern border of human territory, like an enormous dragon that kept nonhumans out. Known as the Black Wall, it was majestic, stretching from the west to the north, angling across the lands, pitch black in color and profoundly somber and desolate. With the advent of war, the wall had been locked down tightly. Without orders from a heavenly king, no one was allowed to pass through it.

Beyond the Black Wall were lands governed by the Firemoon Darkheaven people. They weren't the actual ancestral lands of the Firemoons. Instead, there were various regions controlled by subsidiary species. Only by passing through seven such regions would one arrive at the ancestral lands of the Firemoon Darkheavens.

The Firemoon Darkheavens were truly an impressive species.

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A languid voice reached Xu Qing.

*"The Firemoons and their subsidiary species control a total of 87 regions. Although the total geographic area actually can't compare to the Imperial Region we humans control, it's still astounding."*

About 5,000 kilometers away from the Black Wall was a huge flying ship pulled along by seven dragons. As the dragons roared, the wind whistled by. There were hundreds of cultivators on the ship. All were dressed in crisp uniforms and had somber facial expressions. They were clearly extraordinary.

In front of them all was a man who appeared to be middle-aged, with a burly frame and a much higher stature than ordinary humans. He had inky black hair bound with golden bands of cloth. He wore a brocade robe covered with intricate golden dragons. A pendant of white jade hung at his waist, making it clear how important he was. He did not have a delicate and pretty face. Instead, he seemed crude and straightforward. He had large eyes and bushy eyebrows, with thin lips. He seemed awe-inspiring, and from a distance, resembled the emperor of humankind to an uncanny degree.

He was Grand Prince. There was no one else who resembled the emperor more closely than him, whether in facial features or disposition. He stood at the prow of the ship looking off into the distance. His energy and blood surged so mightily he was like a burning red sun that caused those behind him to shield their eyes from the stinging radiance.

Grand Prince was carrying his orders from the emperor to act as an envoy to the Firemoon Darkheavens. Other than the troops already under the command of Grand Prince, those present included officials from the Five Lesser Celestial Divisions plus their associated guards.

The person who had just spoken wasn't Grand Prince, but rather, someone else on the ship who was dressed like an ordinary bodyguard. This person had a serious expression and vigilant eyes, and looked like the type of soldier who wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice his life in the line of duty. The words he had spoken were not directed outward, but instead, were transmitted into his belly....

Inside of his belly was a field of bright red light, within which Xu Qing sat cross-legged, his expression a bit helpless.

*"Eldest Brother, are you dead set on sneaking in like this?"* Xu Qing asked, looking at their surroundings.

A few days earlier, after leaving the Red Dust Emotional Suppression Pavilion, he had sent a voice message to the Captain letting him know about his travel plans. After all, the Captain was planning something big in the lands of the Firemoon Darkheavens. Thanks to Xu Qing's efforts, the Captain had already resolved a big issue with his plan, so he was quick to agree to travel together.

That said, Xu Qing was working on his own, separate, plans.

*"Of course we need to sneak in. You listen to me, little Ah Qing, my belly is a very safe and secure location. I would only allow someone I'm very close with to hide in my belly."*

The 'guard' vigilantly looked around while simultaneously having a conversation in his own belly.

*"Little Ah Qing, given your status, it won't attract much attention if you go to Firemoon Darkheaven territory. But think a minute about me! I'm different. I'm actually quite famous among the Firemoons. In fact, there's no one there who hasn't heard about me. If we just went strolling in, I'm worried that there would be far too much fanfare. As you know, I like to keep a low profile."*

Xu Qing nodded. He knew exactly what the Captain was talking about. Long story short, if the Captain revealed himself to the Firemoons, he would be summarily killed. Presumably, the Captain had done something extremely offensive and infuriating in Firemoon Darkheaven territory in a past life, and people were still angry about it. That made Xu Qing think about what the Captain had said about his relationship with High God Moonfire.... [1]

*“Sooo, that’s why we have to sneak in. Look at this secret identity of mine. It’s perfectly safe. I have ways of passing any inspections, and fooling any spell formations. Add in the shields protecting the imperial prince’s guards, and it’s a guarantee that nothing will go wrong.”*

The Captain sounded very pleased with himself. Xu Qing became even more vigilant.

As the Captain talked to Xu Qing, the gigantic ship slowly got closer to the Black Wall. Xu Qing couldn’t see that far, but the Captain could, and he had a perfect view of the majestic wall.

*“It seems higher than the last time I saw it.”*

Before long, the Black Wall’s grand spell formation activated and scanned the ship. It didn’t matter that Grand Prince was in charge, during war time, inspections like this were mandatory. Grand Prince didn’t react visibly. He just let the spell formation scan his ship.

As that happened, the Captain secretly bit down on a blood capsule hidden in his tooth. The spell formation fluctuations persisted for the time it takes an incense stick to burn. After that, everything went back to normal.

A small gap opened in the Black Wall, turning into something like a tunnel that led to the other side of the wall.

It didn’t matter that the spell formation had cleared them. Grand Prince’s orders indicated that he wasn’t allowed to camp or even stop at the border. He had to go through the wall without pausing.

Numerous auras had locked onto the ship. Because of those auras, even the seven golden dragons pulling the ship were locked down so tightly they couldn’t move their scales. And in that manner, the ship entered the tunnel and headed toward the other side. After ten breaths of time passed, the ship emerged into what was no longer human territory. Behind them, the passage opened by the Black Wall’s spell formation closed tightly. No one spoke the entire time.

Without so much as glancing backward, Grand Prince said, “Hoist the flag of humankind.”

A huge flag rose up from the ship and started flapping in the wind while simultaneously exuding immense pressure. Depicted on the flag were all of the successive emperors of humankind since Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity. Each one seemed profoundly dignified. The mere hoisting of the flag seemed to cause heaven and earth to dim.

At the same time, the seven golden dragons issued draconic roars as they accelerated, turning the ship into a golden streak that shot off into the distance.

It was going to be a very long journey to the main parts of Firemoon territory. The golden dragons could fly without rest, and the cultivators didn’t need to rest either. But they were forced to make stops in various regions to handle paperwork and other formalities. If it had been any other diplomatic mission, they would have had to deal with all sorts of difficulties and delays. But with

Grand Prince present, such things didn't happen. Although Grand Prince wasn't regarded very highly among humans, that wasn't the case with the Firemoon Darkheaven people. Because he was half-Firemoon, his bloodline ensured that he was treated with veneration by the subsidiary species they encountered. In fact, after leaving human territory, Grand Prince seemed more willing to reveal the true nature of his aura.

The repeated stops for paperwork gave the Captain plenty of opportunities. It was after they had passed through the fourth region, and had once again dropped to the ground, that the Captain concealed his aura and snuck off. He wasn't worried about whatever investigation resulted. A few hours after he'd made his escape, he spat Xu Qing out of his belly.

Xu Qing reverted to his normal appearance, then turned to look at the Captain, who was preening proudly.

"What do you think?" the Captain asked. "Is your Eldest Brother reliable, or is he reliable? If it wasn't for the fact that I was worried I'd be discovered after Grand Prince reaches his destination, I would have gone with them the whole way."

Xu Qing knew exactly what the Captain was waiting for, so he quickly plastered a look of admiration onto his face.

The Captain smacked his chest happily. "Let's go, little Ah Qing. I'll take you to look for a forbidden region. You probably don't know the different rounds that make up the Great Hunt, but I can explain.

"There are three rounds. Later on, I'll tell you how I personally did in each round years ago. I came so, so close to becoming a darkheaven general! But let's not talk about such trivial things. The important thing here is that you need to understand that the first round is about forbidden regions.

"In terms of qualifications, that's simple. The words from the Wordless Book of Stone can help us to change our auras. All we have to do is find two people who look at us the wrong way, kill them, and take their place. That's why I picked this specific location. This area has a very unique forbidden region that meets all the requirements for the first round. Come on, follow me!"

Looking very knowledgeable, the Captain started moving.

Xu Qing followed. For some reason, he was getting the sense that the Captain's preparations for this job were different from his preparations for past jobs.

He does seem to be acting a lot more reliable than in the past.

That said, given how well he knew the Captain, he was still skeptical. He followed the Captain through these unfamiliar lands for a few days until they spotted a red forbidden region in the distance. In the middle of it towered a blood-red mountain. At this point, Xu Qing could sense the difference in this place that the Captain had mentioned.

"See that mountain?" the Captain said, licking his lips. "That's where we're headed."

Eyes gleaming with a crazy look, he shot directly into the blood-colored forbidden region.

Xu Qing kept pace, noting the excited fluctuations coming from his shadow.

Given Xu Qing's and the Captain's current battle prowess, ordinary forbidden regions weren't dangerous to them. Therefore, after entering, they charged forward without hesitation. The forbidden region shook, and the mutant beasts inside trembled. Then a tyrannical aura in the form of a red mist swept toward them from all directions, pulsing with the force of expulsions.

As it neared, the Captain's blue eyes glittered, and the mist lurched to a halt.

Then the mist sensed Xu Qing, and it seethed so violently it nearly collapsed.

Finally, it sensed Little Shadow, and the mist rumbled loudly as it was sent spinning off to the side. The shadow pounced like a hunter, chasing the mist with glee.

The Captain chuckled mischievously and continued on his way.

Xu Qing didn't pay attention to Little Shadow. After all, the shadow was like a natural-born enemy to all forbidden regions.

After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, they reached the blood-colored mountain in the middle of the place. From a distance, it was red. But as they got closer, they saw more black. As it turned out, the red color was because of the innumerable blood-colored mosquitoes that lurked on the mountain.

When Xu Qing and the Captain showed up, the mosquitoes all started trembling.

Xu Qing looked around and then prepared to seize the mountain for use in round one of the Great Hunt.

But then the Captain did something totally unexpected. He waved his hand, and a strange aura spread out, provoking a strange reaction from the mosquitoes. They all suppressed their awe to fly into the air and buzz right toward the Captain.

The Captain didn't avoid them. He allowed the mosquitos to cover him, and also let them stab into him and drink his blood. Even as he started to swell up, he said, "Little Ah Qing, years ago I flubbed the first round because my body wasn't sturdy enough. Later on, I came up with this idea. By using the strange powers of these mosquitoes, I can temporarily bolster my fleshly body defenses!

"The first round is officially named Heaven Collapses to Earth. It's a test of the fleshly body. Now come on, you do the same. Just grin and bear it. The more of them you let bite you, the less your fleshly body will fear heaven collapsing!"

Stunned, Xu Qing watched as the Captain's flesh continued to swell up. He was really at a loss for words....

Chapter 818: What Are You Doing, Little Ah Qing??

"What's with the blank look, little Ah Qing? As soon as we entered this forbidden region, I could sense a sealing mark of the Firemoon Darkheaven people. This forbidden region has been claimed as personal property by someone."

The Captain struggled to ignore the itchiness and the sensation of his flesh swelling. Looking at Xu Qing, he continued, "Hurry up! I'm telling you, little Ah Qing, this actually feels great. And the stronger the feeling, the more it proves my body is receiving a blessing.

"I didn't do well in the first round in the past. Do you want to know why it's named Heaven Collapses to Earth? It's because everyone under the canopy of heaven for 50,000 kilometers surrounding God Mountain will feel great pressure weighing down on them, regardless of the level of their cultivation base.

"That's first. But there's more. Everyone involved in the first round will feel indescribable pain, from outside in and from inside out. All sorts of things will inflict incredible pain to stop you from advancing.

"Back then, I was too skinny, and my fleshly body wasn't ready. The pain itself nearly knocked me out. On the other hand, I saw some giants who cultivated very impressive fleshly bodies, and they had no trouble with this round. Afterward, I put a lot of thought into what I should have done. Finally, I came to realize that the mutant mosquitoes in this forbidden region I found have a special type of toxin that temporarily boosts the fleshly body.

"What's more, they make you lose any sensations of pain, which is a critical asset in the first round. Sadly, I ended up dying in that life, so I lost any chance I had at succeeding. You've got to trust me on this, little Ah Qing."

Even as the Captain spoke, he circulated his cultivation base, causing successive waves of mosquitoes to drop dead around him. Clearly, they had been poisoned by him. But the Captain was very determined, and was clearly not yet satisfied with his current state. Therefore, he summoned another huge group of mosquitoes....

Seeing that, Xu Qing thought back to what the clay fox had told him about the rounds of the Great Hunt. It seemed to him that... the clay fox was a bit more reliable than the Captain in this regard. From what Xu Qing could tell, the Captain had become so obsessed with his earlier experience that he didn't realize the rules had changed. It made sense considering how far from the Firemoons that humans lived, and how difficult it must be to get news from such distant lands. Unless you used the resources of an entire species to gather information, it would be difficult to get timely news like that.

Xu Qing opened his mouth to tell the Captain about what he'd learned from the clay fox. But before he could, the Captain threw out a medicinal pill bottle, which landed in front of Xu Qing.

"Don't ever say that your Eldest Brother doesn't love you, little Ah Qing. *That* is my love. Just open that bottle, and you'll be able to attract the mosquitoes just like me. Inside of that bottle is a rare perfume that I prepared especially for you. My version attracts female mosquitoes, while yours attracts the males. Heh heh." [1]

The Captain looked at Xu Qing and winked mischievously. Unfortunately, his skin was swelling up so much that after he winked he couldn't open his eye again....

Xu Qing looked at the bottle, and then looked at the Captain. He picked up the bottle and swallowed the words he had been about to speak. He no longer planned to tell the Captain about what he'd learned.

Turning to the blood-colored forbidden mountain, he looked up at its summit, then reached out and pushed his hand onto a rock in front of him that was part of the mountain. Unleashing his cultivation base, he sent terrifying energy out covering the mountain, causing it to tremble loudly.

The mosquitoes on it were stunned, and flew off the mountain in waves that blotted out the sky and made the forbidden region even darker. The rumbling sounds grew even louder, and they sounded completely horrendous.

When the Captain saw what happened, and realized that Xu Qing wasn't trying to attract the mosquitoes, he wasn't sure what was going on.

"Huh? Hey, what are you doing?"

Xu Qing didn't reply. Keeping his cultivation base rotating at maximum levels, he sent out 2,000,000 soul threads. From a distance, it was possible to see soul threads connecting to the dome of heaven, which caused innumerable lightning bolts to form a huge vortex around the mountain.

Then a massive hand appeared out of nowhere, reached down, and grabbed the mountain. It seemed intent on pulling the mountain up from the ground. The entire forbidden region trembled as the mountain shook.

The Captain's eyes went wide, but he didn't do anything as his heart pounded with doubt.

He was about to speak when a sound rang out from the mountain like heavenly thunder. The mountain shook back and forth violently, and as the 2,000,000 soul threads pulled, cracks spread out in the ground.

The mountain rose up by about seven inches! A liquid like black blood started flowing out from the mountain. If you squatted down on the ground and looked at that spot, you would see that between the mountain and the ground were endless amounts of black flesh.

There were also bones. This was no mountain! This was actually a fleshly body! It was the fleshly body of the forbidden region!

Xu Qing was actually caught by surprise. Mountains in forbidden regions were far heavier than mountains outside. What was more, Xu Qing knew more about forbidden regions than most people. Given the pressure emanating from this mountain, it was obvious that lifting it up was going to be very difficult. What was more, messing with the mountain would cause it to unleash a lot of mutagen. Most importantly, the mountain was an important part of the forbidden region, such that taking it away would be like slicing the skin off a living person.

As soon as it was lifted up by only a few inches, the entire forbidden region reacted like a living being. All of the grass, all of the trees, all of the mutagen, and even the rocks suddenly erupted with an intense will of malice and expulsion that became like a mist of blood. The soil seethed as corpses of cultivators who had died in this forbidden region from ancient times until now crawled up and then charged toward Xu Qing.

It was not willing!

The entire forbidden region seemed to have its own consciousness, which locked onto Xu Qing. The wind kicked up, screaming in a way that almost sounded like voices.

“Leave!”

“Get out of here!”

“Die!!”

The voices caused Xu Qing’s eyes to grow cold. He could deal with the pressure. His soul threads could handle the weight. Mutagen didn’t bother him. As for the body of this forbidden region and the mountain....

If you don’t want to give it to me, then I guess I’ll just have to take it.

Eyes gleaming with icy cold, he issued orders to Little Shadow. “Devour this forbidden region!”

Little Shadow had been waiting for those orders. Long ago, it wouldn’t have done that. If it was hungry, it would eat. But after encountering Xu Qing, he became very afraid, and wouldn’t dare to act disobediently. Therefore, it had been following along and thinking, but hadn’t dared to actually devour anything. It feared making a mistake and being punished.

After receiving Xu Qing’s orders, Little Shadow exulted. Sending out exuberant emotional fluctuations, it turned into a massive shadow that rose straight up from the ground like a giant black canopy.

Within that canopy was a forbidden region! It was a jungle, in the depths of which was a massive tree covered with closed eyes. It was a gruish tree with a coffin hanging from it that swayed back and forth. It was the very first of the shadow’s previous forms, the shadow tree. The coffin swayed like a huge bell, and from inside of it echoed chanting that sounded like fingernails scraping on wood. In unison, all of the eyes opened.

It wasn’t just the eyes on the tree. There were innumerable eyes throughout the black canopy that also opened, bright red with avarice. And then an enormous mouth opened that emanated a strong sense of decay. Without hesitation, it shot toward the fleeing blood mist.

Shrill howls of agony filled the forbidden region, which shook even more violently. Then chewing sounds drifted about that would cause chills to run down the spine of anyone who heard them.

Next came the sounds of swallowing. Little Shadow in canopy form descended to the ground, then spread out in all directions. Whether plants or animals, living or dead, whatever it reached blurred. Thanks to the shadow, the soil was changing color. It was turning gray, as it lacked either life force or death energy. Gray became the background color for everything. It was like a swallowed piece of meat.

The rumbling and the wind grew more intense, like screams of agony. As the shadow spread, those screams grew louder.

All of these developments were astonishing to the Captain. “This.... Little Ah Qing, all we have to do is let the mosquitoes bite us a bit. Why... why are you trying to take the entire forbidden region?”



Xu Qing didn't respond. After confirming that Little Shadow was spreading out to devour the rest of the forbidden region, he pushed his hand harder onto the rock in front of him. Instantly, a loud rumbling sound could be heard as the mountain slowly rose up by another seven inches.

The soul threads surrounding it pulled up, sending out a shock wave so powerful that it shredded all the nearby zombies to pieces. The forbidden region was being assimilated. The forbidden mountain was being removed.

That was when Little Shadow finally released some emotional fluctuations. It was a warning to Xu Qing. Next, the Captain's eyes glittered with blue light as he shifted his now-very-large body to look behind them.

Some distance away was a bright beam of light shooting toward them from the far end of the forbidden region. A domineering aura in the first stage of Void Returning became like an unstoppable flaming meteor.

There was a hulking figure within it. He looked human, except he was taller and burlier. He was fully six meters in height, almost like a giant. He had long, golden hair, and abounded with a sensation of grandeur. His eyes were also golden, which made him seem superior to others. Unlike humans, his pupils were vertical, like those of a dragon. The aura of his energy and blood was prominent. As he neared, he seemed like a volcano about to erupt, pulsing with shocking might and battle prowess that surpassed cultivators in similar levels from other species.

What was more, it was apparently because of some bloodline ability that all the surrounding mutagen was pushed away. Clearly, this person was far superior to other species in the ability to defend against mutagen.

"A Firemoon Darkheaven!" the Captain said, licking his lips.

1. "Hey Deathblade, did you know that male mosquitoes don't bite? The males feed primarily on nectar. The females are the ones that need blood. Females bite, and males don't." Why yes, as a matter of fact, I did know that. "Hey Deathblade, does Er Gen know that?" I have no idea. "Hey Deathblade, based on your answer to the previous question, do you think the Captain knows that? Was this an intentional bit of subtle humor by the author, or rather, a simple mistake?" I have no idea. But in the end, this is a mythological fantasy universe, so it doesn't really matter, right? 🙄

#### Chapter 819: Nine Breaths Submission

Xu Qing looked on coldly. This was his first time seeing a Firemoon Darkheaven cultivator, and he knew what the Captain was getting at. This was not a member of a subsidiary species, but an actual representative of the Firemoon Darkheavens. Given what the Captain had said earlier about the sealing mark, it seemed logical to conclude that this was the person who had created it.

Although Xu Qing had never seen Firemoon Darkheaven cultivators in person, he had learned a lot about them from the ancient records in the Xeno-Immortal School. Therefore, he knew that because of how rare Firemoon Darkheavens were in comparison to the subsidiary species they ruled, every single member was considered highly esteemed in their lands. That much had been obvious during their travels with Grand Prince, who was only half-Firemoon.

Firemoon Darkheavens were similarly respected even outside of their own territory. No one would dare to offend a Firemoon Darkheaven, and because of that, their cultivators were always very

confident and domineering, regardless of where they went. The source of their confidence was the strength of their species. And right now, that was even more the case inside of Firemoon territory.

Rumbling sounds filled heaven and earth as a face appeared in the sky above Xu Qing and the Captain. Then the accompanying meteor slammed into the ground. The forbidden region shook violently, and incredible pressure weighed down.

“Humans?”

The words caused wild colors to flash in heaven and earth. It was as if they contained power that activated natural laws, which settled onto Xu Qing and the Captain to exert control over them. In fact, the two of them could sense something about to rip them to shreds.

The Captain’s eyes shone with blue light, while inside, he was very excited. Xu Qing’s expression was as calm as if he were looking at a corpse. Little Shadow, who was in the middle of devouring the forbidden region, only paused for a moment, then continued with the devouring.

When the Firemoon Darkheaven cultivator noticed that the two humans hardly reacted at all to his arrival, his eyes flickered with impatience. He had actually just arrived in this location, specifically because of the forbidden mountain. He was participating in the Great Hunt, and thus needed forbidden mountains. The more the better. Considering how fierce the competition was, he’d ordered some of his subsidiary species servants to travel to nearby forbidden regions and imprint them with his sealing mark. That sealing mark indicated that this area belonged to him, and anyone who tried to steal it from him would face death and destruction at his hands.

On his journey to those various forbidden regions, he had experienced both successes and failures. As a result, he was in a foul mood. And now, here he was in this specific forbidden region, only to encounter two trespassing humans. Still looking annoyed, he clenched his right hand into a fist and launched a punch at Xu Qing and the Captain.

That blow seemed casual, but the Firemoon Darkheaven unleashed it with immense rage. Everything trembled as a huge golden fist appeared in midair, some 30,000 meters in size.

The astonishing energy and aura kicked up a violent tempest that shook the entire forbidden region. As the fist fell, the Captain laughed heartily and lunged forward with his bloated body.

“Perfect timing! Now I can test out how this fleshly body blessing works!”

The Captain, like a huge mountain of flesh, screamed through the air until he slammed into the golden fist. A deafening boom rang out in all directions. The Captain dropped to the ground and bounced a few times. At the same time, the fist shattered into pieces.

“That’s all?” the Captain said, looking up proudly.

Xu Qing looked over at him and could sense that it wasn’t just the Captain’s fleshly body that had become stronger. It was hard to say when it happened, but he now pulsed with the might of Void Returning.

He undid more seals? Also, it seems like Eldest Brother is intentionally trying to piss off this Firemoon cultivator.

Meanwhile, the Captain hollered up into the sky, “Bring it on!”

The Firemoon Darkheaven cultivator seemed surprised as he looked at the Captain. Then, seemingly taking the situation more seriously than before, he lifted his right hand and took a deep breath. That breath caused a wild wind to spring up. All of the mutagen and spirit energy, as well as the nearby natural and magical laws, rushed into his mouth. Rumbling sounds echoed out as he became the center of a shocking vortex.

After inhaling deeply, the Firemoon Darkheaven grew to double his previous size, then he launched another fist strike. Rumbling sounds echoed out as the air shattered. Then a golden mountain that was vastly larger than the fist appeared and dropped toward the Captain.

The Captain looked up in disdain as he once again shot forward to meet the attack.

A boom rang out as the Captain tumbled down. However, the mountain also collapsed.

This time the Firemoon Darkheaven cultivator had a very serious look in his eyes as he glared down at the Captain. He was about to speak, but before he could, the Captain interrupted.

“Way, way too weak!” The Captain burst out laughing.

That laughter caused killing intent to surge in the eyes of the Firemoon Darkheaven cultivator. Opening his mouth, he inhaled again, this time affecting an even larger area. Everything for 500 kilometers in all directions, including mutagen and spirit energy, swirled toward him in a huge vortex. He inhaled.

Meanwhile, the Captain slammed into the ground and bounced back up. Being also blessed with speed, he accelerated dramatically, and in the blink of an eye, was right in front of the vortex of mutagen and spirit energy.

Looking almost grateful, the Captain opened his mouth and viciously inhaled in the direction of the Firemoon Darkheaven. Instantly, the 500-kilometer vortex became like a gigantic deflating balloon as the Captain devoured more than half of it. As that happened, his body expanded rapidly. His hair turned golden as did his eyes, making him look exactly like a Firemoon Darkheaven.

The Firemoon Darkheaven cultivator’s expression flickered, and he backed up rapidly.

“You’re not human!”

“You’re the one who’s not human!” the Captain said, glaring. “Your whole family isn’t human. All you can do is hit people and curse them, huh? This is just the Firemoon Darkheaven specialty move called Nine Breaths Submission, right? When you use it, every breath you take causes your body to expand. What, just because I can devour some things means I’m not human?”

“Well, I’m not the one who said it. By the way, why can you only take three breaths? That’s definitely not enough. Try again!”

Xu Qing’s expression was the same as ever. He had sensed all along that there was something unusual about the Captain’s behavior. Now he realized it must be because the Captain could use some Firemoon techniques. Now that Xu Qing knew that, everything made sense.

After all the time they had spent together over the years, Xu Qing was very used to how the Captain operated. In fact, if one day the Captain told him that he was actually a full-on god, Xu Qing wouldn't be too surprised.

Therefore, Xu Qing stopped paying attention to the fight and went back to moving the mountain.

Meanwhile, the Firemoon Darkheaven cultivator looked down grimly at the Captain and said, "You're probably the most interesting human I've ever encountered. Fine. Since you've obviously mastered the Nine Breaths Submission technique, then perhaps you're familiar with our innate ability. Can you do that too?"

With that, the cultivator lifted his hand to his forehead and pushed down. Instantly, his energy and blood surged, creating a blood mist that swept through the canopy of heaven. The sky vibrated as a vortex formed, complete with crashing bolts of blood-colored lightning. Within that vortex appeared something that would shock anyone who saw it. It was an unknown location in a great void. And within it was an enormous kunpeng bird! [1]

A heavenly dao aura pulsed off it, and not an ordinary one at that. It was... one of the ancient heavenly daos of Revered Ancient! It was bound with countless chains, every single one of which was stabbed into its body. There was also a chain that served as an enormous whip that floated behind it and lashed it constantly.

It had innumerable wounds covering its body, making it look incredibly ghastly. Every lash of the whip sounded like the crack of heavenly thunder, and it provoked moans of agony from the ancient heavenly dao. It contained unimaginable pain, as well as a longing for death so intense it was difficult to put into words. The sound surpassed all natural and magical laws as it swept over Xu Qing and the Captain. Whatever it touched caused a sympathetic resonance, which carried with it pain and the desire to die.

This was the innate ability of the Firemoon Darkheaven people. In the past, they didn't have an innate ability as a species, just extremely powerful fleshly bodies. But as the generations passed, that changed. As they grew more powerful, they generated a brand new innate ability.

They could capture and enslave ancient heavenly daos, and by whipping them could provoke howls of anguish. In turn, that anguish became destiny aura that bolstered their species. In terms of how many heavenly daos they had chained up like this, only their leaders and gods knew.

The anguished cry from the heavenly dao ignored cultivation base or any other obstacle. It directly hit Xu Qing and the Captain, filling them with a sensation of pain and the desire to die.

However... Xu Qing's expression remained neutral, and the Captain was actually laughing sarcastically.

"Son!"

The Firemoon Darkheaven clearly misunderstood, as the coldness in his eyes grew more intense. But then, a crisp squeal echoed out from the void beyond the vortex. That sound contained astonishing personhood, and it immediately negated the kunpeng's agony and caused the vortex in the canopy of heaven to collapse.

The Firemoon Darkheaven cultivator's body went out of control, and he coughed up a massive mouthful of blood. Eyes filing with astonishment, he blurted, "What was that? What is that thing?!"

Gasping for breath, he started backing up at top speed. He had no desire to continue this fight. The good-looking human didn't seem very impressive, but the extremely bloated and fat one was absolutely terrifying. Without any hesitation, he chose to flee.

The Captain, meanwhile, shouted, "Don't go! Let's fight a bit more!"

Frowning, Xu Qing said, "Stop fooling around, Eldest Brother."

Xu Qing reached out with his right hand and made a grasping gesture. A black flame appeared out of nowhere, which rapidly became a sea of flames. Then a cry rang out from the golden crow tattoo on Xu Qing as it shot out into the form of a black spear. Intense rumbling sounds echoed out as the spear shot forth like a black dragon that could destroy the world.

In the blink of an eye, it was flying through the air. It looked like a spear and looked like a golden crow. Trailing fire behind it, it shot toward the fleeing Firemoon Darkheaven.

#### Chapter 820: The First Mountain

The scene from a distance was that of the canopy of heaven over the forbidden region trembling as a spear shot from Xu Qing like a dragon, surrounded by a black glow of destruction. A sea of flames spread out around it, extending into the canopy of heaven. It moved with shocking speed, like a shooting star piercing through the air. The soul threads attached to the mountain flew after it, bolstering the sea of flames and the spear, and making the weapon unprecedentedly penetrating. It made it unavoidable and unstoppable!

The Firemoon Darkheaven's face fell. "That aura... that's a taboo weapon!"

Coming from a major species, he had a much more complete understanding of history and related subjects. Therefore, it only took a moment for him to realize what the spear was. And that realization caused his mind and heart to reel.

That said, there wasn't time to sit around contemplating the situation. An intense sensation of deadly crisis filled him, causing his flesh and blood to quiver. He felt impending death from outside in and from inside out. He wanted to dodge, but couldn't. His instincts were telling him that if he backed down an iota in front of this spear, it would overwhelm him.

And if it overwhelmed him, he would die beyond the shadow of a doubt.

That was because this spear was intolerable to heaven and earth, and not permitted by the heavenly daos. It was one of the most ancient taboo weapons of Revered Ancient, and had been sealed inside a technique from an imperial clan. When facing an ancient taboo weapon like that, all he could feel was increasing fear as he felt destruction looming over him.

The Firemoon Darkheaven's eyes turned crimson and he let loose a howl accompanied by a spray of blood that was a forbidden magic. The blood spray turned into a blood mist in front of him. It created a line of defense filled with no less than a thousand faces from numerous species, all of which were howling as they burned. But not even that was enough.

In that moment of crisis, the Firemoon Darkheaven unleashed the full power of his fleshly body. As his arms grew massive, he shoved them forward. Golden light spread out from him, creating a halo that was a second line of defense. There was also a white glow that erupted from his forehead, which was a destiny god magic that caused a divine likeness to appear behind him.

The divine likeness was humanoid, covered with feathers, and was pure white. It seemed holy as it stretched out both arms to place the Firemoon Darkheaven in its embrace. The Firemoon Darkheaven wasn't holding anything back.

All of this takes a bit of time to describe, but actually happened in the time it takes a spark to fly off a piece of flint. An instant later, the black spear shattered the air as it arrived! Imbued with a spirit that could conquer mountains and rivers, and crackling like thunder, it stabbed into the blood mist in front of the Firemoon Darkheaven.

The mist seethed violently as it tried to fight back against the might of the spear. But it couldn't do anything. Even though all the faces inside of it were burning brightly, it did no good. In the blink of an eye, anguished cries rang out as they were dispelled by the spear like dust in the wind. The blood mist itself scattered.

The Firemoon Darkheaven suffered an instant backlash. His face turned ashen, and blood oozed out of the corners of his mouth. And yet, things were just starting for him. The black spear stabbed into his second line of defense, the golden light.

A boom rattled out. The golden light filled with cracks, holding strong for only one breath of time before it collapsed.

The Firemoon Darkheaven's face was as pale as death, and he couldn't prevent himself from coughing up blood. Then, the black spear continued on with unyielding destructive power, stabbing into the destiny god magic in the form of a white statue.

Immense power and majesty pulsed off the spear. Black fire. Red soul threads. A taboo weapon that could conquer every obstacle. Together, they formed a destructive attack that, although it wasn't literally impossible to block, was clearly... too much for the Firemoon Darkheaven to handle!

A deafening boom filled the forbidden region as the Firemoon Darkheaven's statue collapsed like cheap pottery. It started with the arms, then continued to the torso and head. They shattered, with the bits spreading out to reveal the Firemoon Darkheaven within. His expression was just as astonished as before, having no time to change before the black spear stabbed into his chest.

It pierced deep. It sliced through skin, stabbed into his flesh, and poked out of his back! He had been... completely impaled!

However, it didn't come all the way out of his back.

The remaining momentum of the attack carried the Firemoon Darkheaven backward into the sky. Previously, this Firemoon Darkheaven had been the picture of majesty and grandeur. But now he looked like a rag doll that had been viciously ripped to shreds.

Then, a moment later, the black spear stopped, leaving the Firemoon Darkheaven impaled to the dome of heaven!

It normally wouldn't make sense. The air wasn't a physical thing, so you couldn't impale people to it. But... that's exactly what was playing out right now. In the presence of this spear, the canopy of heaven became like a material object.

Looking up, one would see the Firemoon Darkheaven cultivator impaled in midair, blood flowing out of his chest, down his body, and to the ground below. His complexion was dispirited, and his

expression was one of bitter pain. He was hardly strong enough to keep his eyes open, yet with some struggle, was able to look down at Xu Qing standing there calmly below.

He would never forget that sight. Previously, he had mistakenly assumed that the bloated cultivator was the stronger of the two, and also the most mysterious. After all, he had used the Firemoon's own Nine Breaths Submission technique, which was enough on its own to be mystifying.

But now he realized he had been mistaken. The strongest... was obviously the one with the spear.

"Taboo weapon..." he murmured. With one final look at Xu Qing, he closed his eyes.

He was covered with countless wounds, all of which stretched back to his chest. And then he started to crumble, starting from those wounds. A thump rang out, and his body collapsed into countless chunks that rained down onto the ground below. It appeared as if he had been destroyed in body and soul.

But only a moment later, Xu Qing let loose an exclamation of surprise as the black spear suddenly jerked down.

At the same time, the chunks of flesh and blood that had rained down from above experienced a transformation! They suddenly erupted with very unique fluctuations. They were being teleported away.

Eyes lighting up, the Captain said, "Still trying to run? Is that a new Firemoon art? I want to learn it!"

Then the Captain inhaled deeply. There was a dark shadow on the ground that had been waiting for quite some time to make a move. It was none other than Little Shadow. And the shadow was working with the Captain!

The black spear also flew forth. It had long been Xu Qing's custom to make sure his enemies were dead, and to leave behind no survivors.

The three of them erupted from three different directions, ultimately ensuring that there was no chance the flesh and blood could possibly escape. In the shortest of moments, about forty percent of the flesh and blood in the area was removed from the teleportation effect and was funneled into the Captain's mouth.

Little Shadow's actions were particularly strange, as a chanting voice drifted out.

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

The voice seemed simultaneously proud, restrained, rushed, and slow. The combination made the voice extremely gruish. Thanks to it, about twenty percent of the flesh and blood ignited, becoming flames that peeled away and into Little Shadow.

The rest rushed toward Xu Qing's black spear. Black fire spread out, accompanied by soul threads, completely destroying it. There wasn't one scrap of flesh that managed to escape. All of it was gone.

Everything went silent. Then the Captain chewed a few times before looking at Xu Qing.

“He was just a clone.”

Little Shadow was also sending emotional fluctuations to Xu Qing, indicating it would be able to sense their enemy within a certain range.

“It doesn’t matter,” Xu Qing said softly. “We’ll kill him next time.”

With that, he turned back, reached out with his right hand, and again pushed on the blood-red forbidden mountain. As rumbling sounds spread from the mountain, Little Shadow, who was already spread through the forbidden region, resumed madly devouring the place.

The forbidden region trembled, and the howls of grief slowly began to fade. The expulsion power also declined. It was now possible to see that the forbidden region was fading and becoming blurry. Its borders were gradually disappearing.

However, it wasn’t happening very quickly, and Xu Qing wasn’t feeling patient, so he sent some soul threads to bolster Little Shadow.

The Captain glanced at what was happening and was clearly a bit surprised. However, he didn’t ask any questions. Instead, he focused on digesting the Firemoon flesh and searching for a way to negate the teleportation effects.

About four hours later, Little Shadow was done feeding.

Xu Qing and the Captain were surrounded by empty space. The mountain now stood by itself, hovering about one third of a meter above the ground.

The forbidden region had disappeared entirely! The lands were now gray. Within that grayness was a black shadow that wriggled like a river as he flowed toward Xu Qing and collected beneath his feet. Next came a loud burping sound, after which it spat out a finger-nail sized wisp of brown flame.

The flame wisp floated in front of Xu Qing, flickering dully. Occasionally, it expanded, then shrank down dramatically, as if it wasn’t very stable. Because of its movement, the dome of heaven rapidly turned dark, and rumbling sounds echoed out. Light crashed everywhere.

Then a soul power as boundless as the sea spread out from Little Shadow.

“Milord... full....”

Xu Qing nodded. Knowing full well where the fire came from and how dangerous it was, he carefully put it away.

Then he waved his hand, and the blood-red mountain floated up into the air overhead.

“Are there any mosquitoes left, little Ah Qing? If so, let them out. I still felt some pain, which indicates I need more of that blessing.” The Captain looked at Xu Qing’s shadow.

Xu Qing turned to look at the bloated Captain. “Eldest Brother, according to what High God Starfire told me, the first round of the Great Hunt isn’t a test of the fleshly body, it’s about moving mountains....”