

Timescape 821

Chapter 821: Darkheaven General

As the cultivator's clone died, a big fight was nearing its conclusion in the sixth region belonging to the Firemoon Darkheavens, which was some distance away from Xu Qing and the Captain, in a forbidden region in the third region.[1]

The combatants were Firemoon Darkheaven cultivators. Both were dozens of meters tall, with golden hair and golden eyes that made them seem very holy. Both of them had three forbidden mountains each hovering above them, pulsing with strong mutagen. As they fought amidst wind and snow, the sound of their combat drifted far and wide, and the surrounding natural and magical laws seethed.

There were members of Firemoon Darkheaven subsidiary species in the area, watching the fight play out.

A muffled thump could be heard as one of the combatants exploded. Blood sprayed everywhere as the other combatant grabbed the head of his defeated foe and glared at it.

“You knew full well that I staked a claim to that forbidden region. Yet you still dared to take the forbidden mountain from it?”

The surviving head looked back and growled, “Sir Cloudmortal, you can have this clone of mine. But my true form will track you down as you make your way to God Mountain. Make sure to keep all my forbidden mountains safe until then.”

The cultivator who had been referred to as Sir Cloudmortal didn't react visibly other than to throw the head onto one of the forbidden mountains overhead. The mountain rumbled, and the pressure coming off it caused the head to start crumbling into ash. However, the ash didn't drift away. Instead, it and the chunks of flesh below all teleported away.

Sir Cloudmortal didn't pay any attention to that. He clenched his hand into a fist, and the three forbidden mountains that had previously belonged to his opponent now flew over to him. From a distance, it was possible to see six mountains, all of them producing mutagen so strong it manifested as pulsing black clouds.

All of the onlookers bowed their heads. None of the subsidiary species qualified to engage in combat with actual Firemoon Darkheavens.

That was especially true during the Great Hunt.

When it came to the Firemoon Darkheavens, it was no exaggeration to say that every member of their species was outstanding, talented, and had shocking techniques at their disposal. That was one of the reasons why, over the years, the subsidiary species who acknowledged allegiance to them did so from the depths of their hearts.

Sir Cloudmortal looked around at his surroundings. He didn't even bother studying the members of the subsidiary species. After scanning the area, he turned to leave. But then he suddenly lurched to a halt and looked off into the distance. His expression flickered as he sensed that his clone in another forbidden region had suddenly ceased to exist.

Normally speaking, when a Firemoon Darkheaven's clone died, it would automatically return via teleportation, just as had happened with the flesh and blood of the opponent he had just defeated. It was a tacit understanding between members of their species. Unless there was some deadly animosity between opponents, they would hold back from using full force. In most cases, they would save strength like that for going all out in the god domain round of the Great Hunt. For a clone to be wiped out of existence during the first round was relatively rare.

“Who's responsible for this?” growled Sir Cloudmortal as he started moving in the direction of his lost clone.

Xu Qing and the Captain were flying through the air in a location a few regions away.

The Captain seemed to be in a bad mood, and though he would occasionally cast a glance in Xu Qing's direction, he wasn't talking at all.

At first, Xu Qing didn't think much of it. But after he realized the Captain kept looking at him, he took a tangerine out of his bag of holding and tossed it over.

“Feel like a tangerine, Eldest Brother?”

The Captain instinctively caught the fruit. However, he couldn't suppress the feeling of grievance in his heart. Finally, he gravely said, “Little Ah Qing, as a man, you need to rely on your own skills and abilities. Do you really think a true man needs to depend on a woman to succeed? Do good looks put food on the table?”

Upon hearing that, Xu Qing couldn't help but correct the Captain. “Shē's not a woman. Shē's a High God.”

The Captain took a deep breath and then disdainfully replied, “High Gods aren't that amazing. I banged one once! Nothing special at all!”[2]

Xu Qing had no response to such biting words.

The Captain was still in a bad mood, so as they continued on their way, he would frequently say some very shocking things....

And thus, half a month went by.

Xu Qing and the Captain had now laid eyes on the interior of Firemoon Darkheaven lands. Their quick rate of travel was thanks to the teleportation portals in the regions. Ordinary cultivators couldn't use such portals. They were only available to people with special qualifications, for instance, those participating in the Great Hunt.

According to the Captain's original plan, it was supposed to take much longer to reach the interior. But all Xu Qing had to do was take out a certain identity medallion....

That was another reason for the Captain's sour mood. When they reached the interior, he was still bloated and swollen. Forcing out a sigh, he produced a peach and took a vicious bite. Then, before he could take another bite, his expression flickered and he looked up into the sky.

Xu Qing also looked up. Even with the naked eye, it was possible to see that the dome of heaven over the interior was turning bright red. Terrifying pulses rolled out as the red color spread. Off in

the distance, which was the source of the redness, there was some colossal object flying along at top speed. Before long, that enormous object became visible to Xu Qing and the Captain.

It was a nonhuman head. It had brown skin, two horns, an oval face, and a prominent nose ring. There were seven eyes on the face, gray and withered, and within each it was possible to see a cultivator seated cross-legged in meditation. Each cultivator was a shocking Firemoon Darkheaven.

The head was as large as an entire city, making it easy to see even from a great distance. As for the red glow, it came from the top of the head.

Xu Qing wasn't sure what species this head represented, but based on the pressure it radiated he could sense the lingering will of a Smoldering God. From the look of it, this was the head of an actual Smoldering God!

Of even greater significance was that there was also something about it that reminded him of actual gods, which caused fear to linger within him.

At the same time, the head seemed to have been turned into a magical treasure. There was some withered hair drifting about the head, but there was one section on the very top of the head with no hair at all. In that spot, there were numerous buildings, plus crowds of bustling people. It was like some sort of market. In fact, people would occasionally fly off the head and disappear in bright beams of light that shot off over the horizon.

As the head neared, it caused a strong wind to blow across the lands surrounding it. Xu Qing and the Captain had no choice but to drop to the ground and stop flying.

"I can't believe we ran into a darkmoon ward," the Captain said, his eyes gleaming, first with reminiscence, and then with delight.

"Darkmoon ward?" Xu Qing asked, looking at the Captain.

Upon hearing the question, the Captain stuck his chin up. "That High God of yours didn't tell you?"

Xu Qing blinked a few times. He was aware that his Eldest Brother had been in a sour mood during their travels. He shook his head apologetically.

The Captain felt a bit better when he saw that facial expression. Sounding pleased, he said, "The darkmoon wards are a special kind of marketplace unique to the Firemoon Darkheaven people. Their species don't settle down and live in one specific place. Instead, they live nomadic lives as they follow the three 'steward tents' that form the basis of their culture.

"As for the darkmoon wards, they're special commercial operations devoted to trade with other species. The head you're looking at has the aura of a god on it. I'd say it's highly likely it originally came from a god domain.

"The Firemoon Darkheavens have a beloved custom of raiding god domains during their Great Hunt. You might call that suicidal, but it always works out for them. And if you think it's not suicidal, well, we're still talking about god domains.

"You never know when one of their three gods of sun, moon, and star might accidentally provoke some unprovokable entity and end up getting slapped to death."

The Captain sighed. "If that day comes, I hope one of them slaps that shrew Moonfire to death, and another puts that slutty Starfire to death."

Xu Qing didn't say anything.

The Captain was feeling better now that he could vent. "You have a Great Hunt identity medallion, so we can go in. Let's go. Maybe we can find something useful."

With that, the Captain shot toward the darkmoon ward. Xu Qing followed.

It was a loud, bustling place. Even from a distance, Xu Qing could spot the numerous shops and vendor stalls. It reminded him of the ghost wards. There was a head. There was a marketplace. There were definitely similarities between the two. Xu Qing wasn't sure if it was just a coincidence or if there was a deeper meaning to it all.[3]

He took a moment to check Little Shadow. Back in that ghost ward years ago, that severed head had seemed interested in the shadow. After absorbing that forbidden region recently, Little Shadow was focused on digestion and was in a state of hibernation.

And thus, Xu Qing and the Captain got closer and closer to the darkmoon ward. When they were only about 3,000 meters away, a shocking roar erupted from the place, loud enough to split metal and rock.

At the same time, a bizarre beast shot out from the darkmoon ward. It wasn't very large, only about 300 meters long. But the pressure it emitted was on the same level as the head itself. An ordinary cultivator who encountered it would be shaken to the core and feel like their soul was being ripped out of them.

The beast had the body of a wolf, was greenish-black, and had a turtle shell on its back. It had the face of an evil ghost with a head of long white hair. It looked very much like a grue of some sort. What was more, it didn't just have one evil ghost face on it. It had six. There were faces on each of its four kneecaps, and one at the tip of its tail. All of them were fear-inspiring in appearance, and all of them were howling loudly. What was beneath its feet was even more shocking; it was a sea of ghostly souls. Shockingly, the beast flew along on top of that sea, as if everywhere it went, it brought death and catastrophe.

There was a person standing amidst the white hair on the beast's head. He was tall and burly, wore a suit of violet-gold battle armor, and had flowing golden hair. His eyes were like torches, as if a look from them could immolate all living creatures.

He pulsed with Smoldering God fluctuations, and was surrounded by the rumbling of thunder. Steering the beast by its head, he led it away from the darkmoon ward and off into the distance.

The Firemoon Darkheavens in the darkmoon ward who saw all of that play out bowed their heads, their eyes burning with reverence.

As Xu Qing reeled in surprise, the Captain lowered his voice and said, "Do you know what that beast is called? It's a 'ghost chariot.' I've never seen the guy riding it, but considering he's wearing violet-gold battle armor, he can only be one type of cultivator. A darkheaven general!"

Chapter 822: Please Permit Us to Have a Reunion

“Among the Firemoon Darkheaven people, violet-gold means something different than it does to us humans. They use destiny aura to forge gold, with materials taken from slain entities in god domains. Combine that with sacrifices from their subsidiary species, they turned ‘dark’ into ‘violet.’ And the final result is a set of violet-gold darkheaven armor!” [1]

As the Captain described the terrifying figure off in the distance, his expression was one of envy. “Years ago, I got very, very close to getting my own set of violet-gold darkheaven armor.

“Believe me, little Ah Qing, among the Firemoon Darkheaven people, that type of armor isn’t just a status symbol. It’s actually a magical treasure that borders on the level of being taboo. As for how high the quality is, it depends on what type of beings were slain in the god domain and used to make it.”

The Captain was staring at the darkheaven general, his eyes full of longing so intense it was nearly corporeal.

Xu Qing was looking in the same direction; he could sense how extraordinary that violet-gold armor was. In fact, the moment that armor appeared, his soul threads inside of him had reacted as if they were facing immense pressure. That also went to show how amazing the violet-gold darkheaven armor was.

“And then there’s that ghost chariot. It’s basically a treasure! The Firemoon Darkheaven people have a very special region that they call the Mountain and Sea Region. Despite the name being Mountain and Sea, the reality is that it’s a place where mutant beasts gather. If you ask me, it should really be called Beast Region.

“For countless years, the place has been home to either native beasts, or beasts that the Firemoon Darkheavens collected from other places and relocated there. There, they breed, mutate, and proliferate. The amount of beasts there is shocking, but what’s even more shocking are the outrageous mutations.

“All sorts of wild beasts there have developed gruish abilities. The ghost chariot beasts are just one of them. Supposedly, they can actually devour souls. And once they reach a certain level of development, they can send their soul sea into one’s dreams and kill you without touching you. That’s why the commoners often refer to them as nightmare beasts.”

The Captain licked his lips. “The most important thing, though, is that they’re delicious! Maybe my information is somewhat outdated, but I remember from a previous life that there have been only two instances in recorded history of people taming ghost chariots.”

Xu Qing’s eyes glittered as he thought back to what the clay fox had told him about the second round of the Great Hunt. Coupling that with the Captain’s information, it seemed highly likely that the second round would take place in the Mountain and Sea Region.

Considering that, Xu Qing asked, “Eldest Brother, are there any other well-known types of mutant beasts in the Mountain and Sea Region? Is there some kind of ranking system?”

Thinking back to the wonderful flavor of ghost chariots, the Captain swallowed hard. “Ranking system? Sure. But too much time has passed for me to remember the details. Back in that life, ghost chariots ranked ninth. As for what ranked first, it was something called a ninedawns. Sadly, I never saw one, although from what I’ve heard, hardly anybody has.

“That’s why there aren’t many physical descriptions of them. Even the information from the God Mountain just says something about them having nine lanterns. There’s no more detail than that.” [2][3]

The Captain sighed. “I used to daydream about what it would be like to wear violet-gold darkheaven armor and ride a ninedawns beast as a mount, all while munching on ghost chariot flesh and returning to humankind in full glory. Anyone who saw that would be shocked to the core. What a pity it never happened, all thanks to that old shrew!”

The Captain gritted his teeth and muttered to himself a bit.

Xu Qing didn’t weigh in. He knew what ‘old shrew’ the Captain was talking about...

When the Captain talked about ‘returning to humankind,’ Xu Qing had a different understanding about how that would play out. As far as he could tell, returning to human lands looking like that would frighten a lot of people and probably result in a certain degree of inter-species animosity.

That said, as long as the Captain was happy, Xu Qing was happy. Instead of bursting the Captain’s bubble, he prepared to ask some questions about some other things. But then, Xu Qing’s expression flickered, and he turned to look in the direction of the darkheaven general.

A deafening wind had sprung up from that direction, causing rifts to fill the air, making it look like a mirror on the verge of shattering. The clouds were ripped to shreds as an anguished cry rang out, so deafening it could rip apart metal and rock. The ground quaked, and even the darkmoon ward trembled. Next, a figure appeared out of the windstorm. It was made of mist, making it seem illusory, and as soon as it appeared, it fled to the southwest.

The darkheaven general was right behind it, pursuing on his ghost chariot. He wielded a spear of underworld fire, and had extremely cold eyes. His body was surrounded by golden light, making him seem like a sun. Glaring at the fleeing misty figure, he said, “Go back and tell your lord that Little Ghosty is living a fine life with me. In fact, it’s for Little Ghosty’s sake that I refrained from wiping out your species three times in a row. Next time, I won’t hold back.”

Each word he spoke thrummed with the power of natural laws, becoming sealing marks that landed on the fleeing figure. It struggled not to collapse, and in the end, managed to escape. After it was gone, the darkheaven general’s ghost chariot howled. Then it turned and bore its master off into the distance in the blink of an eye. Heaven and earth returned to normal. The sky above the darkmoon ward went back to the way it was before.

The Firemoon Darkheavens inside all had their heads bowed and respectful looks on their faces.

Xu Qing, meanwhile, had a look of anticipation on his face. He was thinking about what it would be like to have Smoldering God battle prowess one day.

The Captain looked at him thoughtfully, then clasped his shoulder. "Ah, what's so impressive about that? If I threw caution to the wind and undid some seals, I could be like that too. As for you, little Ah Qing, you've got plenty of time to work with. Don't be in a rush."

The Captain blinked a few times and then looked in the direction of the darkmoon ward. "Come on, let's go take a look around."

Xu Qing nodded. Looking away from the darkheaven general, he followed the Captain into the darkmoon ward.

Xu Qing wasn't able to hide the forbidden mountain he had taken. However, upon entering the darkmoon ward, the mountain marvelously shrank down and started orbiting over his head.

Entering the darkmoon ward was simple. You could just walk right in. Of course, there were requirements. Only Firemoon Darkheavens could enter whenever they wanted. All other outsiders required an identity medallion. Xu Qing's medallion ranked very high, and that was enough to get him inside. The Captain also had an identity medallion. Though it didn't qualify him to participate in the Great Hunt, it was enough to get into the darkmoon ward. After the warding spells scanned them, they were able to enter without any trouble.

Looking around at the crowded streets, it was possible to see a few people with forbidden mountains orbiting around them. That was enough to prove that what the clay fox had told Xu Qing was correct. The Captain sighed again.

"I guess the first round really is about moving mountains. Our tests along the way proved that you can't hide the mountain. But at least it shrinks down while we're in the darkmoon ward. I guess that just goes to show how difficult the first round is. Everyone who gets a mountain has to show it publicly, which makes it a lot easier for people to target and rob each other.

"Little Ah Qing, this first round is definitely going to be a bloody affair. Look! People are already giving us dirty looks for being human."

Xu Qing looked around the bustling market. He could see what the Captain was talking about. There were definitely some people looking at him. Well, to be specific, they were looking at the forbidden mountain.

"Keep your facial expression under control. We need to look scared and subservient. That's one reason I brought you here to the darkmoon ward. To do a little fishing...."

The Captain looked very nervous. After some thought, Xu Qing made sure his complexion was ashen. And thus, the two of them walked along, studying their surroundings.

Xu Qing quickly came to see firsthand what a bizarre marketplace this was. Though the buildings here were businesses, few people came in and out of them. Most people clustered around the vendor stalls. Just about everything imaginable could be found for sale.

Xu Qing saw flesh from godly entities with impressive fluctuations. Among humankind, things like that would be considered very rare. And though they weren't available literally everywhere, there were still enough types to provide for a variety to pick from. The Firemoon Darkheavens just

controlled too vast of a territory. Because of that, their economy was all-encompassing. There were even specialty items from other species that popped up regularly.

It was the same with the species represented in the darkmoon ward. Just looking around, Xu Qing saw hundreds of species. If he somehow ended up in a place like this before he started his path of cultivation, he would be convinced that he was surrounded by demons and devils.

The Captain had a lot more experience than Xu Qing, and he knew quite a bit about the Firemoons. Therefore, after they had walked around a bit, the Captain shouted a quick goodbye to Xu Qing, then ran off to a vendor stall run by a green stone golem, with whom he started negotiating.

Xu Qing kept walking along, scanning the various vendor stalls to look for interesting things.

I see a lot of poisonous plants for sale.

At one particular vendor stall, Xu Qing saw a collection of bottles as well as a host of dried medicinal plants. After looking through what was available for about an hour, he sighed.

I just don't have enough spirit stones....

There were plenty of interesting wares available, but unfortunately, the prices were shockingly high. Given the amount of spirit stones Xu Qing had on him, he really couldn't afford anything.

That is, unless he sold some things. It had been a long time since he experienced the feeling of lacking spirit stones. It made him think back to his days in the continent of South Phoenix.

Prices in this darkmoon ward are a bit ridiculous.

Shaking his head, he was about to send a voice message to the Captain saying they should leave. However, that was when he suddenly received an excited message via divine will from the head in his D-132 god trove.

"Oh exalted, handsome, invincible, and merciful great jailer, I can sense the aura of some old friends. Please, permit us to have a reunion!"

Xu Qing stopped in place. Despite all the years that had passed, there were still some empty spots in D-132. Two specifically: a scarecrow and a millstone. After the Corrections Division in Sea-Sealing County collapsed, they had escaped, never to be seen again.

In response to the head's words, Xu Qing's eyebrows shot up, and he looked around, eventually coming to focus on one specific vendor stall. There were random objects laid out for sale there, representing a wide variety of cultivation levels.

One of them was a scarecrow, missing an arm and a leg, laying on a pile of random things, staring up blankly into the sky. Next to it was half of a millstone. [4]

As Xu Qing approached, the scarecrow evidently sensed his aura and the aura of D-132. Its glassy, seemingly dead eyes suddenly turned to look at Xu Qing. At first it was stunned, but then, it was excited.

Chapter 823: He's Mine

The scarecrow's experiences over the past few years had left her feeling like D-132 was nothing short of a paradise. Life there was carefree and without worries. If you died, it wasn't a big deal, as you would come back to life. There were people to talk to there, plus, all the inmates got to work

together to pull off a mystifying scam. Granted, it involved sleeping next to a god's finger, but that thing spent most of its own time sleeping anyway. What was more, there were always jailers coming and going that they could mess around with. Although she had occasionally thirsted for freedom, after that freedom arrived, it didn't bring the happiness she had hoped for.

Living in the outside world was pure bitterness, and once people figured out her undying characteristics, they always came up with plenty of ways to toy with her. It was almost too horrible to endure. By now, those special characteristics were fading away. She couldn't recover her lost limbs, and at best, could just hold on a bit longer until she, as well as the millstone, who wasn't in much better shape, would just naturally die.

Given the rate of things, it seemed like it would only be a few dozen years until her undying characteristics were gone. When that happened, she would ultimately collapse into ashes. She was simply waiting. Waiting to die.

Thus, her eyes had long turned listless. Never in her wildest dreams could she have guessed that here in the interior of Firemoon Darkheaven territory, she would actually sense Xu Qing's aura! It seemed unbelievable. After all... they were ridiculously far away from Sea-Sealing County.

Thus, she gaped, and then started to get excited. Using her one remaining arm, she reached over and patted the millstone. Sadly, the millstone didn't budge.

However, her movement attracted the attention of the vendor who managed the stall. His head resembled a human cultivator, except his body was covered with white scales. What was more, he had three eyes. The center most eye was pure white, as if it were staring into a void. Astonishingly, he had a small mountain orbiting above his head. Clearly, he was participating in the Great Hunt. When he saw Xu Qing, and noticed the mountain orbiting his head, he sized him up, his eyes glittering mysteriously.

"Human? You don't see many of your kind in Firemoon territory."

Xu Qing's expression was the same as ever. He recognized what species this cultivator was.

Whitemarsh.

Xu Qing didn't have a very good impression of this species. They had recently teamed up with the Nightshades in the Nightspirit Region to fight against humankind.

Forgoing any conversation, Xu Qing walked up to the scarecrow. "How much for this?"

The Whitemarsh cultivator grinned. He made a grasping motion, and the scarecrow flew over into his scaled hand. He squeezed hard, and the scarecrow let loose an agonized shriek.

"This thing has a very low level, but at the same time, is very interesting. It contains some of the characteristics of a god. It also has an undying will, which is worthy of study. What's more, it has a soul sealed inside. A human soul. Specifically, it's the soul of a very good-looking female cultivator. I played around to my heart's content already, but that doesn't change the fact that she's very valuable."

The Whitemarsh cultivator looked at Xu Qing. Noting his facial expression, he laughed. "What, is she your friend or something? How about this? Give me that forbidden mountain of yours, and you

can have her. That half of a millstone has the same origin as the scarecrow. Sadly, it's about to fade away into nothing. If you want, I can throw it in for free."

The Whitemarsh's words were noticed by some of the surrounding cultivators. Many of them looked over and started whispering sarcastically among themselves.

Xu Qing had noticed some malicious gazes since he arrived in the darkmoon ward, but more than that, people seemed derisive. Because of the decline of humankind, there were powerful species who, though they didn't dare to view humans as scum, still didn't think very much of them. Whether it was bullying them or killing them, either were on the table.

That said, the forbidden mountain orbiting above Xu Qing's head identified him as a participant in the Great Hunt. Because of that, most people would take him a bit more seriously. Although the rules of the Great Hunt allowed for fighting and killing among participants, that was only for people who qualified to participate. Others weren't allowed to make any moves on participants.

Xu Qing's facial expression remained calm despite the sarcastic whispers and derisive gazes. In the end, he shook his head and turned to leave. The price being asked for was something he couldn't accept.

Seeing that Xu Qing was about to walk off, the Whitemarsh squeezed down harder on the scarecrow. This time, the scarecrow gritted her teeth and forced herself not to scream.

"Well, isn't this interesting," the Whitemarsh murmured. Chuckling, he looked at the departing Xu Qing, his eyes narrowed. At the same time, his third eye flickered with an imperceptible white glow. Within it appeared an image of four secret troves.

Spirit Trove, with four secret troves....

The Whitemarsh cultivator's third eye returned to normal.

"Human Fellow Daoist! I could also accept a hundred catties of high-grade flesh from a godly entity. What do you say?"

Xu Qing stopped walking and thought for a moment. He could sense that once D-132 was complete, it would transform in some way. Besides, completing D-132 in general was something he had long thought about. He was the jailer assigned to D-132, and the assignment had come directly from Palace Lord Kong.

After some thought, Xu Qing took out a bag of holding. He had flesh from godly entities left over from the Moonrite Region. Although he didn't have a lot, his reserve contained a few hundred catties. After measuring out the appropriate amount, he tossed the bag of holding to the Whitemarsh.

The Whitemarsh cultivator caught it, hefted it, and then nodded in satisfaction. With that, he tossed the scarecrow to Xu Qing. He also waved his hand to send the millstone flying over.

Xu Qing flicked his sleeve to collect the scarecrow and the millstone. Then he turned and left.

The Whitemarsh watched Xu Qing walking off, then licked his lips and started packing up his wares.

Meanwhile, as Xu Qing walked along, he put the scarecrow and millstone into D-132. The moment they appeared inside, the head, the stone lion, and Sir Inkwell all got excited to varying degrees. The god's finger let loose some energy that immediately healed the scarecrow and restored the missing half of the millstone.

"Reunion time!" the head said, laughing.

Next, D-132 shivered. With all the inmates back, the cell block that had been cursed by misfortune was now whole. And instantly, a sensation of transformation rose up. Seeing that, Xu Qing retracted his divine will. After briefly looking over his shoulder at the Whitemarsh's vendor stall, he continued on his way.

Four hours later, Xu Qing and the Captain met back up.

The Captain looked nervous, pleased, and also a bit guilty. Grabbing Xu Qing by the arm, he hurried down the street.

"I hooked seven or eight fish," he said. "And some of them I wasn't even trying to hook. What about you, little Ah Qing? Get anything good?"

"I got something," Xu Qing replied.

"Something? Like what, something big?" The Captain blinked a few times.

Xu Qing nodded.

The Captain looked thrilled. However, neither said anything further as they left the darkmoon ward, making it seem like they were in a big hurry as they did so. After they were some distance away, time passed. They were keeping their speed within the realm of what Spirit Trove cultivators were capable of. Half a day later, no one had caught up to them.

The Captain was surprised. "No way! Since when did the Firemoon Darkheaven cultivators become so well-behaved? Don't tell me I didn't make things obvious enough? Or maybe I was too obvious!"

Sighing regretfully, he looked over his shoulder.

Xu Qing looked off into the distance himself. He also couldn't sense any signs of pursuers.

"There's another possibility. Maybe someone did something to scare off other pursuers. You know, sort of like how that forbidden region was marked."

Xu Qing lifted his right sleeve and placed some taboo poison onto it. What had looked like an ordinary sleeve moments ago now had a finger-nail sized mark on it, just barely visible.

"This was 'secretly' put here by a Whitemarsh cultivator who's participating in the Great Hunt. He checked my cultivation base, and detected my four secret troves. As for him, he's in the great circle of Spirit Trove. If we just wait a bit longer, another forbidden mountain will be delivered right to us."

Xu Qing flew over to a nearby mountain peak, where he sat down to wait.

The Captain's eyes glittered. Licking his lips, he joined Xu Qing and stared up into the canopy of heaven.

About two hours later, the Captain's eyes lit up when he noticed three beams of light shooting over the horizon. They moved with rapid speed, and it seemed they were homing in on something specific. After coming over the horizon, they moved directly toward Xu Qing. When they were about 3,000 meters away, they stopped moving, revealing three figures.

They were all Whitemarsh cultivators. On the right side was the very same vendor who had sold Xu Qing the scarecrow. In the middle was a cultivator with much nicer clothing than the others, and an aura that surpassed the vendor. He was in the first stage of Void Returning. The final person was in the great circle of Spirit Trove.

The vendor pointed at Xu Qing, then turned and said a few things to the Void Returning Whitemarsh. Smiling just as he had back at the darkmoon ward, he said, "It doesn't matter that you were fishing in the darkmoon ward, humans. As soon as I laid eyes on you, I planned to get some friends to help me deal with you.

"The forbidden mountain above your head sealed your fate. Furthermore, though I have no idea how you rank among humans, I don't mind giving you some news about humankind, free of charge."

The Whitemarsh's eyes never left the forbidden mountain above Xu Qing. He licked his lips. "You humans suffered a huge defeat on the northwestern front. Your imperial preceptor managed to keep things under control, but the Saia high priest already showed up to provide backup. I also heard that the Shadowfiend species was persuaded to join the fighting.

"Your northwestern territory is in great danger. As for the Nightshade front lines, though you humans have kept my species pinned down, and though your Sea-Sealing County forces will soon take all of the Nightspirit Region, the reality is... we wanted you to pin us down.

"Human casualties on the two lines of battle are severe. Now, think of what would happen if someone tied both of your hands behind your back, then tried to stab you in the heart. Could you avoid the blow?" The Whitemarsh grinned broadly. "In fact, even as I speak these words, it's possible that hundreds of humans have died on the battlefield."

The Whitemarsh looked closely to see Xu Qing's reaction. Clearly, he had a reason for providing this news; he wanted to draw Xu Qing and the Captain off the mountain peak.

Given that he could sense their movements through the mark he'd left on Xu Qing, and considering his cautious nature, he had already come to the conclusion that they might have set up a trap for him. Xu Qing and the Captain, who had plenty of experience in such things, knew that as well.

"He's mine," Xu Qing said calmly.

The Captain smiled. "I'll take care of the other two. I haven't sampled Whitemarsh flesh for a long time!"

The two of them vanished. And then, brilliant light suddenly appeared all around the three Whitemarsh cultivators.

Chapter 824: A Lamb Like a Devil

The Whitemarshes were a subsidiary species to the Firemoon Darkheavens. They didn't really have a good reputation, and could hardly compare to the Saia people. There were many, many such species attached to the Firemoon Darkheavens.

"Normally speaking," the Captain said very loudly, "species like the Whitemarshes have one thing in common. They're ruthless toward other species, but are more than willing to grovel and scrape to the Firemoons. In fact, when it comes to currying favor, they don't have a bottom line. Considering they wouldn't dare try to rob other important participants in the Great Hunt, when they saw you, it's no wonder they took you to be a fat lamb."

As the Captain jested, blue light flared, and coldness spread out for 500 kilometers that could freeze even the air. Within that space, winter descended. Mountains and lands alike became covered in ice. Plants and vegetation became ice sculptures, and the clouds became so heavy they fell out of the sky.

There was little need to mention the Whitemarsh cultivators.

"However," the Captain continued, "there's a kind of beast from certain forbidden grounds that looks like a lamb, but is called a devil by the locals."

The Captain lifted his hand and pushed it toward the Whitemarsh cultivators.

These cultivators in first stage Void Returning and the great circle of Spirit Trove were visibly surprised. The former reacted most quickly; given his Void Returning cultivation base, he had his ways of dealing with natural and magical laws. All the threads within him swept together to form a furnace, which raged to life.

The Spirit Trove cultivator next to him had it worse off. No matter how he tapped into his five secret troves, he couldn't really stop the freezing effect. As the dramatic transformations occurred around him, he lost the ability to move, and fell out of the sky along with the clouds.

The two of them were stunned, and already, their hearts were pounding in their chests. As for the person orchestrating all of this, the Whitemarsh vendor, his face fell and he started backing up at top speed. He sensed a deadly crisis looming. The developments already underway were far, far from what he had previously predicted would happen. There was no time to sit around contemplating the situation. He instantly released the power of the great circle of Spirit Trove. All five of his secret troves erupted with burning flames, and in his anxiety, he even burned some of his own life force.

With that burst of speed, he quickly made it off into the distance. However, he wasn't fast enough.

At the same time that the Whitemarsh vendor burst into motion, Xu Qing appeared right behind him. It didn't matter how much of a burst of speed was involved. It didn't do any good.

There was no way he could shake Xu Qing for even a fraction of a second.

Xu Qing's daoist robe flapped in the wind, and his hair whipped back and forth. He raised his hand, but there was no explosive burst. Instead, his hand held a black dagger with a shroud wrapped around the hilt, which emanated an intense aura of death. [1]

The aura spread out in all directions, causing the Whitemarsh cultivator's heart to pound. The sensation of death became like the tide, washing completely over him and making it impossible to move, let alone flee. He wanted to run. But the threat weighing down on him because of this human cultivator was such an intense pressure it felt like his five secret troves might collapse at any moment. He tried to unleash the heavenly daos in the secret troves, but they were in embryonic form and could do nothing but remain in place, trembling. Cultivation base, heavenly daos, and energy alike were all subject to immobilizing pressure.

The Whitemarsh's heart filled with alarm as Xu Qing viciously slashed the dagger through his throat.

It was just like back when Xu Qing was young. Blood sprayed everywhere. There was no agonized shriek, only a gurgling sound as the head... tumbled away from the torso. As it landed on the ground, soul threads shot out from Xu Qing, stabbed into the head and extracted the Whitemarsh's soul. In moments the head withered into a husk, while the soul was madly extracted, turning into more soul threads in Xu Qing's collection. The torso collapsed into ash.

Meanwhile, elsewhere on the battlefield, the Captain laughed ferociously as he suddenly exploded, turning into countless beams of blue light, within each of which was a blue worm. The worms swept out and then closed in on the Void Returning Whitemarsh from all directions.

Struggling and fighting back didn't do any good. In the blink of an eye, so many blue worms had smacked into the Whitemarsh that he looked like a huge blue ball of flesh. Only when looking closely was it obvious that the ball of flesh was made from worms. To accompany the ghastly sight were horrifying chewing sounds and miserable screams.

Xu Qing looked over and could tell that the Captain's current battle prowess was stronger than when they had clashed with the Firemoon cultivator recently. Obviously the Captain had made some progress in their recent travels. Smiling, Xu Qing waved his right hand to retract all of his soul threads.

Meanwhile, the screaming faded away to nothing inside the ball of flesh. The flesh then wriggled and changed back into the Captain, who licked his lips as he looked at Xu Qing.

"Whitemarshes still taste delicious, little Ah Qing. By the way, I learned two interesting things from his memories.

"First of all, the one you picked just now was actually considered a chosen among Whitemarshes, and is an expert at concealment. The one I killed seemed stronger, but the reality is that he just stepped into Void Returning and hardly had any success with his heavenly daos. In fact, he was recently beaten in an ambush when fighting with the one you killed. But the most worthless of all of them is this guy."

The Captain made a grasping gesture, and the final immobilized Whitemarsh flew over to him.

Xu Qing nodded. He could already sense that there was something wrong with the returning soul threads. There seemed to be some missing.

Given what the Captain had said, it seemed the Whitemarsh vendor had some lifesaving techniques, and had faked his own death. There were no fluctuations in the area, such that just about any other person would have been incapable of tracking down the concealed party. But things weren't that difficult for Xu Qing. His eyes turned pitch black, and taboo poison spread out everywhere, filling the surroundings.

The Captain's eyes went wide.

"Throwing around more poison? Don't spoil my meal! It's delicious!"

The Captain performed an incantation gesture and pointed out, causing blue light to flicker as the last Whitemarsh cultivator collapsed into roughly a hundred green apples.

As they tumbled down, the Captain swished his sleeve to collect them up. Then he turned completely blue and disappeared into thin air.

As Xu Qing's poison spread, the air rippled, and a fist-sized eyeball appeared, white in color. The eye looked astonished, but at the same time, determined. He had been so close that he didn't dare to try to teleport away, for fear of the teleportation being noticed. He had previously planned to just wait until Xu Qing left, then stealthily sneak away. How could he have guessed that he would be discovered so quickly? Feeling no reason not to, he quickly resorted to a teleportation. As the teleportation fluctuations built up, the eye began to turn blurry.

Xu Qing's gaze remained calm as he waved his right hand, sending out a host of soul threads. In the blink of an eye, they formed into the shape of a huge sundial. The gnomon was in motion as natural laws of time descended.

Xu Qing looked at the spot where the eye was about to teleport away, and time reversed there. The blurry eye became very clear. Its expression was again one of astonishment.

When the sundial's power faded, the eye trembled as it tried to initiate another teleportation. It failed. It tried to go invisible. That also failed. And then Xu Qing was in front of it.

He pulled his hand back and then swatted the eye. The eye turned bloodshot and shrieked, but it didn't do any good. Resistance meant nothing. A pop could be heard as the eye exploded.

The sundial collapsed into soul threads, which then bored into the eye, causing more soul threads to appear in Xu Qing. From a distance, it was possible to see countless crimson soul threads swirling around Xu Qing, making him look like a devil.

The Captain materialized next to him. Chuckling, he retrieved a green apple and took a bite.

"You don't look like one of the good guys at all, little Ah Qing."

Xu Qing looked at the apple in the Captain's hand. He said nothing.

The Captain took out another apple and tossed it to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing caught it and took a bite. It was very sweet. From a very young age, Xu Qing had always refused to eat human flesh. But he would eat just about anything else.

Xu Qing's actions caused the Captain to clasp his shoulder happily.

“I got more news. There’s a member of the Firemoon Darkheaven nobility who wanted to commemorate the Great Hunt by opening up his personal forbidden regions. Now they’re available to all cultivators participating in the Great Hunt. This particular noble has five forbidden regions in his territory, one of which has more than twenty forbidden mountains in it. Based on the information I just got, they’ll be opening up very soon. We should hurry over there.

“Since you have Great Hunt qualifications, we can definitely fuck them up! That way, it’ll be much more reasonable for us to enter the god domain later to handle my big job. Besides... who knows, maybe you could end up as a darkheaven general! Little Ah Qing, your Eldest Brother is going all out to help you!”

The Captain emphasized his words by smacking his chest. His eyes glittered. “Just remember, if we ultimately succeed, and you become a darkheaven general, you’ll need to lend me your new outfit for a few years.”

Xu Qing nodded, then waved his hand, causing the forbidden mountain which had previously belonged to the Whitemarsh vendor to fly over to him. Now he had two forbidden mountains orbiting over his head. Occasionally, red lightning bolts would crash between them. Occasionally, the lightning bolts would hit each other, causing showers of sparks to illuminate the surroundings.

Looking up at the two mountains, Xu Qing suddenly said, “Eldest Brother, how many forbidden mountains do you think it would take to earn first place?”

“Oh, I don’t know, a hundred maybe?” the Captain replied casually.

“Alright. A hundred.” Xu Qing’s eyes flared with cold light as he burst into motion.

The Captain blinked a few times, grinned, and then followed. The two of them disappeared over the horizon as they headed toward the Firemoon Darkheaven noble’s forbidden regions.

Chapter 825: This Time it’s... Godherald of Starfire

The Great Hunt was a very important event for their species. Participants included, not just their own subsidiary species, but outside cultivators as well. Everyone had a chance to earn the qualifications. Xu Qing was a good example. Because of that there was no set number of participants.

However, there were a limited number of forbidden mountains. With so many cultivators participating, securing one of those forbidden mountains was no easy task. That wasn’t to mention that the requirement to pass the round was three mountains. At a certain point, the only way to collect enough forbidden mountains was to fight with other participants. That was the only way to meet the basic standard.

Of course, the Firemoon Darkheavens didn’t want people who merely met the basic standard. They valued strength, and as a result, there would always be very fierce fighting. As the Firemoon Darkheavens tried to raise venomous bugs in a jar, things would happen such as what Xu Qing and the Captain had just heard about.

Special forbidden regions were being opened.

In the first round of the Great Hunt, there would always be participants who were members of the nobility subservient to one of the Firemoon Darkheavens' three grand stewards. Depending on the requirements from the temples of the gods, they would open their personal forbidden regions for use in the competition. And instead of discouraging fighting and robbing, they actually promoted it.

Vortexes of flesh and blood could be found throughout Firemoon Darkheaven regions, which would lead directly to those forbidden regions. As a result, the first round of the Great Hunt was widely promoted, and would attract chosen among chosen.

That said, due to terrain and travel limitations, it was almost impossible for all the participants to show up at one specific forbidden region at the same time. Normally speaking, local cultivators would get the news first, and would flock to be the first to enter.

Right now, a vortex of flesh and blood had appeared in the northwestern part of the eighth region, in the territory of a Firemoon noble. The area was normally kept sealed, with an outer layer that shone with golden light, and indicated that the area was private property.

The forbidden region inside was so large it took up about half of an entire prefecture. The mutagen was so dense it formed a mist. There were a large number of mutant beasts as well. Taking in the forbidden region as a whole, it was actually not very far from becoming a forbidden ground. It was filled with jungles, rivers of poison, villages of grues, as well as some astonishing forbidden mountains.

Hovering in the air above the tallest of the mountains was a magnificent palace. There were two rows of statues leading into it. And in the depths of the palace hall, seated on a throne, was a hulking figure with his forehead resting on his palm. He seemed to be dozing. He appeared to be middle-aged, and glowed with golden light. He was mighty, with Smoldering God fluctuations that could crush worlds.

He was the Firemoon noble who owned this forbidden region. He had opened the place to honor the orders given by the temples of the gods. He also happened to be somewhat interested in the chosen cultivators participating in the event. That was why he had come in person to see what promising individuals might rise to prominence in his forbidden region.

Of course, there were also some unwritten rules that everyone had to comply by, which included him.

As the appointed time neared, the Firemoon noble opened his eyes and sighed. That exhalation caused heaven and earth to dim, and kicked up intense winds. The golden barrier that covered the forbidden region then collapsed.

It turned into a golden mist that swept inward toward the palace hall. A moment later, it entered the hall, and the Firemoon noble inhaled it.

Then the Firemoon noble spoke in a cool voice that echoed out in all directions like heavenly thunder. "The forbidden region is now open. Put on a good show, ya little punks."

Chosen Firemoon cultivators who had been waiting in the area immediately started moving into the forbidden region at top speed.

Almost instantly, fierce fighting broke out.

No one would interfere with them, no matter whether they were fighting, stealing, or killing. Even the Firemoon noble in the palace just watched.

Before long, there were deaths. Not everyone had chosen to instantly go after a forbidden mountain. After all, you could get the forbidden mountains by killing others. And hunting down others was a lot simpler than defending against mass onslaughts.

That said, all of the shockwaves of combat were kept within the forbidden region. No one on the outside could even see what was happening. The forbidden region was like a black hole that devoured everything and didn't release even the tiniest fluctuation.

Everything was quiet.

Before long, seven days passed. More Great Hunt participants showed up on a daily basis and disappeared inside. There were also some people who chose to leave. Strangely enough, not much happened to any of the forbidden mountains.

The Firemoon noble in the palace yawned and shook his head. *This is actually kind of boring.*

That was around the time that Xu Qing and the Captain appeared in the canopy of heaven about 50 kilometers away from the forbidden region. They had been traveling nonstop for about seven days. Instead of having two forbidden mountains orbiting above his head, Xu Qing had three. He had acquired another one along the way.

That took a bit too long.

The journey took too long, and it also took too long acquiring that extra forbidden mountain. Xu Qing was getting the feeling that unless he managed to get a lot of forbidden mountains all at once, there was no way he would manage to collect a hundred in time. With such thoughts on his mind, he looked at the distant forbidden region, his eyes gleaming coldly. Then he started moving again, with the Captain in tow, his expression one of anticipation.

After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, the two of them reached the border of the forbidden region. Within moments the dense mist of mutagen swallowed them up.

Once inside, Xu Qing concealed his aura. He would no longer move about so openly, and would instead favor stealth as he slipped through the jungle environment. He had spent so much time in forbidden regions in the past, and had interacted with so many of their denizens, that such behavior had long since become an instinct for him.

Once inside the forbidden region, his forbidden mountains shrank down again, just as they had in the darkmoon ward.

A strange light gleamed in the Captain's eyes as he watched Xu Qing. It wasn't his first time witnessing how Xu Qing moved in forbidden regions, but it was the first time he had paid close attention. Gradually, he changed his own movements in imitation of Xu Qing. And before long, he was speeding through the trees of the forbidden region like a predatory cat. Because of the way they kept to the shadows and moved stealthily, they didn't run into anyone.

Xu Qing quickly came to realize that this place had a restrictive effect on divine will; its current maximum range was only about 300 meters. Most cultivators were used to using divine will to scan their surroundings, and thus felt out of sorts in such circumstances.

Little Shadow was still asleep and couldn't help.

That said, Xu Qing wasn't too worried. He was familiar with how forbidden regions worked. What was more, he could pick up a lot of information from the surrounding plants and vegetation. As they hurried on their way, Xu Qing paid close attention to everything around him, including the mutant beasts. And it wasn't long before he noticed the mountains, and especially the golden palace floating in the air.

"That palace looks very out of place," the Captain said in a low voice. "I'd say it probably belongs to a Firemoon noble. Someone important must be here to watch the show. There have already been a lot of deaths here in the past seven days, little Ah Qing. I can smell the blood."

Xu Qing nodded. He had just spotted some bloodspirit weeds nearby that looked unusually healthy. It was a plant that thrived by absorbing death auras. When things died near them, their leaves would automatically turn in that direction.

In fact, as Xu Qing was looking around at the bloodspirit weeds, their leaves stirred and all pointed in one specific direction, whereupon they started wriggling as if absorbing something. Xu Qing didn't do anything in response. However, the identity medallion the clay fox had given him pulsed, and then caused him to turn invisible. Meanwhile, the Captain squatted next to a tree and transformed into a worm.

After enough time passed for half an incense stick to burn, they detected sounds from not too far away.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed as he waited.

A figure appeared, racing in their direction. It was a young Firemoon Darkheaven with a cultivation base in Spirit Trove. That said, his cultivation base was unstable, and he was clearly injured, with a listless expression and a mouth stained with blood.

He looked anxious. As he got close to Xu Qing, he suddenly stopped and looked around. Seeing nothing seemed to make him even more nervous, and he opened his mouth to speak.

That was when a sound rang out that sounded like metal grating against stone. A figure neared in a bright red sea of flames.

"Since we happened to run into each other, Master Gravesparrow," he said in a sinister voice, "why don't we settle our old grudge once and for all. Where do you think you're going to run to?"

The speaker stopped in midair, revealing himself to be another young Firemoon Darkheaven. Flames covered him, which was something Xu Qing hadn't seen among other Firemoon Darkheaven cultivators. Astonishingly, he had two forbidden mountains orbiting above his head.

"Old grudge??" snapped Master Gravesparrow, his eyes burning with fury. "You know full well which of us started that grudge!"

Master Gravesparrow suddenly turned to the side and bowed, his expression one of piety as he loudly said, "I, Master Gravesparrow, chief legate of Steward Deepspirit of the Starfire Temple, offer respectful greetings to the godherald of Starfire!"

The pursuing cultivator looked around in surprise. However, there was nothing more than silence after that.

Master Gravesparrow's complexion turned a bit more ashen. At the same time, the pursuing cultivator chuckled softly.

The Firemoon noble in the golden temple opened his eyes. "Well, isn't this interesting?"

As the words left his mouth, he slowly pointed at the spot where Xu Qing stood invisibly in the forbidden region.

Chapter 826: Crown Prince Brightsouth

Xu Qing didn't want to reveal himself. Although the identity medallion given to him by the clay fox was vibrating so violently it was heating up, he chose to ignore it. In fact, he even intensified the concealing effects. There was no purpose or need to interfere in the affairs of the irrelevant. In terms of one of these people being a so-called godherald, Xu Qing was used to such rankings.

Ever since he had impersonated a godchild in the Holytide Region, and both a godherald and a godchild in Moonrite, he had seemed to develop a special affinity for things like that. Now that he was in the territory of the Firemoon Darkheaven people, if similar circumstances arose, he wouldn't hesitate to do the same thing again. After all, he even had an identity medallion from the clay fox.

That said, Xu Qing was still somewhat interested in this Firemoon Darkheaven cultivator with the two forbidden mountains orbiting overhead. Therefore, he had immediately come up with the plan to just wait until the two of them dealt with each other, then step in to take the mountains.

But when the Firemoon noble in the palace pointed at him, he had to do something different. That gesture caused the concealment effects hiding Xu Qing and the Captain to slowly fade away.

The Captain reverted from worm form to human form, and as he squatted at the base of the tree, he muttered to himself inaudibly.

Xu Qing went from being invisible to visible. He stood beneath the tree, his expression calm, but his heart racing. The sensation of being forcibly revealed by someone else put him fully on guard.

The two Firemoon Darkheaven cultivators who had been just on the brink of fighting were understandably taken aback.

Being the one with a disadvantage, Master Gravesparrow naturally sped up until he was behind Xu Qing and the Captain. Chest heaving, he clasped hands and bowed deeply at the waist.

"Well met, Godherald!"

In a moment like this, it wasn't important that he was dealing with a human and not a member of his own species. The most important thing was this person's identity, which he had confirmed with his own senses. As far as he was concerned, someone with an identity like this might be able to save his life.

As he bowed, his pursuer's face darkened. However, he was a member of a different temple, and thus, his senses weren't as acute as Master Gravesparrow's, especially considering that Xu Qing had been attempting to stay hidden. Furthermore, he couldn't help but be a little suspicious of the identities of Xu Qing and the Captain. He had never seen or heard of any humans that were godheralds in Starfire Temple. And the Firemoon Darkheavens viewed almost all other species in Revered Ancient as inferior.

That included these humans here. If a member of an inferior species became a godherald, it would cause a big stir.

What was more, Xu Qing had three forbidden mountains orbiting overhead, which obliquely proved some things. But if this person was really a godherald, why was he participating in the Great Hunt?

That said, this Firemoon Darkheaven didn't want to take any unnecessary risks. Regardless of anything, the term 'godherald' was something that caused fear to well up in his heart. Therefore, he just backed up and looked at Xu Qing with glittering eyes.

He still wanted to kill Master Gravesparrow. But he also wasn't sure if he should press the attack.

The Captain looked at what was happening with no small amount of amusement. Here they had two Firemoon Darkheavens, one that was bowing to them, and one that was backing away hesitantly.

Plus there's someone up there watching the excitement...

The Captain looked up at the floating palace.

Xu Qing was annoyed. Ignoring the bowing Master Gravesparrow, he looked at the other cultivator and coldly said, "Put your forbidden mountains down and leave."

The cultivator's glittering eyes turned even colder. From what he could sense, this person was a Spirit Trove cultivator, as was the person standing next to him. Although he himself had the same cultivation base, the fact was that he was a Firemoon cultivator, and there were few cultivators from other species who could match up to him while in the same cultivation level. That was especially true of humans. He had done training in human lands, and had killed quite a few of their so-called 'chosen' cultivators. Because of that experience, he knew exactly how frail human cultivators were. That led to deep disdain on his part.

The only reason he was hesitating was because of this person's identity. For that reason alone, he suppressed his killing intent, looked up at the golden palace in the dome of heaven, and bowed.

"Exalted One, for a godherald to show up in this round of the Great Hunt and demand a forbidden mountain is a violation of the rules. Please, Exalted One, you need to step in."

Those words caused Master Gravesparrow's heart to thump. He had also picked up on the same cues as the other cultivator. And his opponent's action of calling out to the Firemoon noble was a case of *raking the firewood from beneath the kettle*

. It was the perfect move. According to the rules of the Great Hunt, non-participants were forbidden from meddling. There were some ways around that rule, but they were very limiting.

In the golden palace above, the Firemoon noble smiled faintly. Then he spoke in a dignified voice.

“This person is not a godherald—”

Before the noble could finish his sentence, the Firemoon cultivator who was surrounded by intense heat suddenly glared at Xu Qing with open killing intent. Erupting like an actual volcano, he shot toward Xu Qing. Since the identity he had feared was now a moot point, all he cared about were the forbidden mountains.

Oftentimes, the way things play out deviates significantly from assumptions.

As the Firemoon cultivator closed in with aggressive decisiveness, Xu Qing disappeared from in front of him. All he saw was a cold flash of light pass by his eyes. Then his head flew off his shoulders. Because it happened so quickly, his body just kept moving in the same direction as before. Before he could feel anything other than shock, a host of red threads appeared out of nowhere, sweeping over both his body and his severed head. To him, the entire world became the color of blood. Then, he experienced the indescribable pain of having his soul devoured. Then his world became black. All of it happened in an instant.

“—except that you can’t defeat him,” the noble finished. By the time the words left his mouth, everything was over.

Xu Qing was visible again, his face expressionless. The cultivator whose soul he had just devoured no longer controlled his forbidden mountain, and thus, they floated over to orbit over Xu Qing’s head. Before, he had three. Now he had five. It was like a crown of mountains.

As for Master Gravesparrow, his heart was now racing. What he had just witnessed flipped his world upside down. The person that had been pursuing him was an old archenemy, and also an outstanding figure in their shared cultivation level. He was vicious and merciless, with plenty of tactics ready to unleash. But he had just died in an instant at the hands of this human.

It was a blow that left him feeling stunned. And when Xu Qing turned to look at him, Master Gravesparrow shivered and bowed his head respectfully. Inside he was trembling with increasing intensity with every moment that passed. And that was because he could tell that Xu Qing’s gaze brought with it an invasion.

Xu Qing studied Master Gravesparrow to confirm that he really didn’t have a forbidden mountain. Then he turned and walked off.

The Captain jumped to his feet and hurried after him. Upon passing Master Gravesparrow, he smiled and said, “You got pretty lucky.”

As Master Gravesparrow watched the two of them leaving, he struggled with sensations of utter disbelief. Just when they were about to disappear in the distance, Master Gravesparrow gasped as he seemingly remembered something. Raising his voice, he called, “Many thanks for your assistance, Fellow Daoists! I have two pieces of news about humankind that I can give you!”

Xu Qing stopped in place and looked over his shoulder at Master Gravesparrow.

Seeing that, Master Gravesparrow hurried after him. Stopping about 30 meters away, he respectfully continued, “Fellow Daoists, there are a total of 27 forbidden mountains in this forbidden region. That said, not all of them can be won by fighting. There are only ten that are in that category. As for the other seventeen... they’ve already been set aside.”

Master Gravesparrow looked up at the golden palace floating in the air.

“Those seventeen forbidden mountains are to be distributed among chosen disciples, both from my species and from other species. All they have to do is go to those mountains and take them. And no one would dare to fight with them.”

Xu Qing didn't say anything. He was waiting for the Firemoon cultivator to get to the point. After all, nothing he had said so far had anything to do with humankind. And he hadn't mentioned anything about pontificating on the rules of forbidden mountains.

“Why does that matter?” the Captain asked.

Lowering his voice, Master Gravesparrow said, “It matters because I happen to know that one of those seventeen mountains was set aside for you humans' Grand Prince!”

Xu Qing's pupils constricted. The Captain's eyes lit up with interest.

“When your Grand Prince arrived here in Firemoon Darkheaven territory, he went around... begging for help to resolve the situation with humankind. He didn't make any progress at all, so ultimately, he decided to join the Great Hunt. People from many species expressed admiration for your Grand Prince, and that includes me. In my opinion, he must want to become a darkheaven general, after which he can request that the stewards resolve the crisis with humankind.

“His Firemoon mother probably gave him some help, which is how he already has a forbidden mountain reserved for him.”

Considering that Master Gravesparrow was a Firemoon Darkheaven, it was no wonder that he had access to far better information than Xu Qing. And he wasn't holding back any details.

“Is there something else?” the Captain asked.

Master Gravesparrow hesitated briefly, then quietly said, “The thing is, your Grand Prince hasn't come here yet. A few days ago, I was informed that while Grand Prince was on the way here to get his forbidden mountain, he ran into Crown Prince Brightsouth.

“King Brightsouth is king legate to Steward Heavencloud of High God Sunfire. His crown prince has shocking talent, battle prowess that can crush all members of his generation, and is considered one of the top chosen among us Firemoons. He's very famous. There were witnesses who saw him take Grand Prince captive along with a bunch of other humans. All of them... were forced into servitude as cart-pullers.”

Master Gravesparrow gauged Xu Qing's facial expression before continuing, “As a result, the forbidden mountain set aside for Grand Prince here is now unassigned.”

Xu Qing quietly looked off into the distance. The Captain's expression turned grim.

A moment passed.

“What's the situation with the forbidden mountains now?” Xu Qing asked.

Master Gravesparrow took a deep breath and respectfully answered, "According to the rules here, ten days have to pass before anyone can take forbidden mountains from here. The forbidden region has been open for seven days so far, so all the mountains are still there. That said, the news has spread, so there's surely some participants already camping there."

"Lead the way," Xu Qing said, his eyes turning cold.

Chapter 827: Now THAT'S Xu Qing

When Master Gravesparrow saw the coldness in Xu Qing's eyes, he thought back to his enemy who had just died. Taking a deep breath, he nodded and immediately led the way.

Xu Qing followed, his face grim. The Captain was right next to him, and he seemed to have shed the frivolity from earlier. Although the Captain wasn't a bleeding heart when it came to humans, the news from just now was moving even to him.

"Humans..." He sighed inwardly.

And thus, the three of them delved deeper and deeper into the forbidden region.

Within the golden palace above, the Firemoon noble smiled again. He seemed pleased.

Things are finally getting interesting. How could the Great Hunt be the Great Hunt unless there was some blood spilled and lives lost?

Time passed.

Two days later in the depths of the forbidden region, Xu Qing, the Captain, and Master Gravesparrow all stood atop a massive tree, looking off into the distance. The spot where they looked was covered by a faint, black mist that made the place seem locked in eternal gloom. The trees in that area were as withered and misshapen as demonic monsters.

Beyond that withered jungle were numerous towering mountains. They looked like 27 crouching dragons, linked together to form a mountain range that covered nearly half of the forbidden region. Some of the mountains had black fire that occasionally flared, sending out black smoke everywhere. There was even black lava flowing down them.

"Those are the forbidden mountains in this forbidden region," Master Gravesparrow said quietly.

Xu Qing sensed the heat on the wind, and his eyes narrowed. He had seen a lot of forbidden regions, and generally speaking, they were cold. This was actually his first time seeing volcanoes in a forbidden region.

"The last 10 are the ones the general participants of the Great Hunt can fight over. The 17 up in front are the ones that have been set aside. As for the mountain set aside for Grand Prince... it's the ninth."

Master Gravesparrow pointed at one mountain in particular.

Xu Qing looked in that direction. He could sense a lot of auras in the mountains, coming from the various Great Hunt participants that had gathered in the area. He sensed them on all the mountains, with the majority on the final 10 mountains, where the auras were very mixed. It was the same with

the mountain Master Gravesparrow was pointing at. From what Xu Qing could sense, the cultivators who had gathered here had *swords drawn and arrows nocked*. Most of them seemed to be waiting instead of fighting.

“In one more day, the forbidden mountains will be free for the taking. When that happens, chaotic fighting will definitely break out.” Master Gravesparrow’s eyes gleamed with the desire to do battle. His mountains had been taken much earlier, and were now with Xu Qing. He didn’t dare to try to rob Xu Qing, so he was hoping to pick up a new forbidden mountain here.

On the way here, he had courteously requested of Xu Qing to be able to take a mountain. Xu Qing had agreed. Although he also needed forbidden mountains, it was true that Master Gravesparrow had given them some very valuable information.

“Fellow Daoist Xu, all we need to do is be patient for one more day.” Master Gravesparrow rotated his cultivation base, and his eyes gleamed. He didn’t plan to make a move immediately. As far as he was concerned, that was pointless. Seizing a mountain now would require waiting around for a day, giving other cultivators plenty of time to notice and lay in wait. That would obviously make things a lot more difficult and dangerous.

“Just wait until the final day goes by. Once the forbidden mountains have been seized, we can swoop in, steal the ones we want, and get out of here. That’s the most likely path to success. After all, with all the mountains up for grabs, people will be distracted.”

Xu Qing looked at the ninth mountain, then the other mountains. Eyes cold, he said, “There’s no need to make things so complicated.”

With that, he flew into the air and headed toward the mountains.

Behind him, Master Gravesparrow’s expression flickered. He knew Xu Qing was strong, as he had witnessed it personally. But it didn’t seem that he had battle prowess sufficient to fight everyone here at once. Given Xu Qing’s battle prowess, his plan would guarantee with nearly one hundred percent accuracy that they could get one forbidden mountain. Two wasn’t out of the question. But rushing in blindly would attract too much attention and throw too many other variables into the mix.

“This....” Feeling very nervous, he was about to say something when the Captain laughed and flew past him.

“You want one or two mountains,” the Captain said. “But my little Junior Brother wants all of them.”

“All of them?” Master Gravesparrow’s heart raced as he watched Xu Qing flying up into the air.

Xu Qing reached up toward his left shoulder, then jerked his hand out. His totem tattoos flared with black fire that rapidly spread out into a sea of flames around him. At the same time, the golden crow

flew out gracefully into the fire, then threw its head back and let loose a piercing cry. It was pitch black, with the general appearance of a phoenix. Its numerous tails spread out, attracting the attention of all the cultivators waiting in the 27 mountains.

As that happened, Xu Qing reached out and made a grasping motion toward the golden crow. The crow cried out proudly as it turned and shot toward him. As it neared, it crumbled down until it was a black spear in his hands. The presence of that spear caused wild colors to flash, and lightning to strike repeatedly in the area. It was as if the canopy of heaven would be ripped apart. A howl rippled out of nowhere, like a warning to ward off the presence of the spear.

It didn't do any good. Xu Qing's eyes just got colder as he hefted the taboo spear. Then, as the noble in the golden palace looked on, as did the astonished Master Gravesparrow and all the cultivators on the 27 mountains, Xu Qing hurled the spear toward the ninth mountain.

The black spear was like an unstoppable dragon piercing through the sky, leaving behind a black streak. Lightning gathered around it, encircling it and bolstering it. And piercing winds swept out in all directions. It headed straight toward the ninth mountain. It was consummately domineering as it slammed into the peak of the mountain, causing intense rumbling sounds to fill heaven and earth. The mountain shook violently as a shockwave rolled out from the spot where the spear hit, and sparks flew everywhere, filling the mountain.

The cultivators who had been camping on the mountain were visibly shocked as they tumbled backward. Though they were furious, none of them dared to do anything. The cultivators on the other mountains looked over with serious expressions. Quite a few of them already harbored malicious intentions.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing's voice drifted down from above.

“Yield. In three breaths of time, everyone remaining on this mountain will be exterminated.”

The domineering spear and the cold words were enough to shake the heart of any weaker person. However, these were Firemoon Darkheavens participating in the Great Hunt, and thus, it just stoked their killing intent. That was especially true considering they were looking at a human.

A moment passed, and then roughly half of the hundred cultivators on the ninth mountain flew up into the air. Some of them spoke.

“It's been a long time since I saw a human as arrogant as this.”

“You overestimate yourself.”

“I really want to see how you plan to kill us all if we refuse to leave.”

Some of the cultivators charged directly toward Xu Qing as he hovered in midair. Eyes filling with more killing intent, Xu Qing lifted his right hand and pushed it toward the incoming cultivators.

An explosive boom ripped through the air as three inverted mountains appeared above and then dropped down. One was blood-red. One was frosty with ice. One was entirely aflame. Even just one of those mountains vastly surpassed any of the forbidden mountains in the area. And their inverted shapes made them seem like aggressive swords, pulsing with incredible pressure. This was none other than the Withering Flame Demon Magic True Self Dao that Xu Qing had mastered.

The three inverted mountains descended toward the cultivators flying up from the ninth mountain. The pressure building up created a sealing function that caused blood to spray from the mouths of the weaker cultivators.

However, there were quite a few stronger ones among them. In fact, there were over twenty who fought through the pressure to unleash divine abilities and magical techniques.

Unfortunately... the Withering Flame Demon Magic True Self Dao was not Xu Qing's only trump card. It had some limited sealing functions, that was all. Next, Xu Qing's eyes turned pitch black. Mutagen levels in the forbidden region skyrocketed. Taboo poison rapidly built up on the ninth mountain. Some of the unlucky cultivators were hit right away, and started screaming. Given the level of Xu Qing's taboo poison, it only took the blink of an eye for them to melt into bloody sludge.

On the outside, Xu Qing's taboo poison might be considered ordinary in nature. But in a forbidden region, the local mutagen only bolstered it! The poison mist grew incredibly dense, spreading out rapidly. Combined with the sealing effect of the three mountains, it gushed everywhere.

All cultivators who hadn't left the mountain earlier were now trapped.

From a distance, it was possible to see three mountains above and the lands below. The mist was like a huge column, a giant tempest filled with howls of anguish.

Xu Qing's seal wasn't limited to that, though. He waved his right hand, and a host of crimson soul threads shot out, filling the tempest of mist and blocking the path of any who were trying to flee. He was intent on killing all living cultivators on the mountain.

The poison grew stronger. More mutagen rushed in from the surrounding forbidden region, bolstering it to a shocking level. The screams grew more piercing. One could imagine the despair of the cultivators trapped inside the mist as their bodies rapidly decomposed.

Xu Qing's poison was the power of a god. In fact, in the right circumstances, it could even invade an actual god. Even though Xu Qing couldn't unleash all of its power, with the blessing of this forbidden region's mutagen, only someone with a Smoldering God cultivation base could possibly survive its onslaught.

The process didn't last for very long. Eventually, the Withering Flame Demon Magic True Self Dao mountains collapsed and disappeared, revealing that there were still four or five cultivators still alive. As the poison mist dissipated, it was revealed that all the other cultivators were pools of gore. From a distance, the ninth mountain seemed filled with a rain of blood. Combined with the black color of the mountain, it looked violet. It looked extremely ghastly.

Those handful of cultivators who had escaped were now screaming in agony as their flesh rotted away. Eventually, they also melted into bloody sludges.

Xu Qing ignored them. As the cultivators on the other mountains looked on in shock, he strode over to the ninth mountain with its rain of blood. Placing the spear down in front of him, he sat cross-legged.

The wind blew, filled with the stench of gore. Xu Qing inhaled deeply. It was a familiar aroma that made him think of past slaughters.

He looked around. Everything was very quiet.

Chapter 828: What Do You Mean All of Them

There were 27 mountains in this forbidden region, and 26 of them were filled with Great Hunt participants who were looking in Xu Qing's direction with very serious expressions. All were people who had carried out many instances of slaughter during their years of cultivation. But even they were shocked by what they had just seen. It was killing by isolation and killing by poison.

Killing by isolation was ruthless, while killing by poison was ferocious. The latter was especially noteworthy.

Xu Qing's poison was ghastly to behold and truly imparted a sense of terror into those who witnessed it.

When one's cultivation base reached a certain level, it came with natural resistance to most poisons. In many cases, it made one completely immune. Theoretically speaking, the people who had just died shouldn't have needed to worry about poison. But today, they had witnessed a shocking poison that... surpassed what any of them thought possible.

"It stirred the local mutagen...."

"That's no ordinary poison. That's a godly poison!"

"I heard about a magic associated with gods. It's called a god curse...."

"Only the magic of gods can negate god curses."

The cultivators looked at the ninth mountain with fear in their eyes. But in addition to the fear, they also felt greed. It was somewhat contradictory. The reason was that, as Xu Qing sat down cross-legged, numerous forbidden mountains orbited overhead.

The people who had come here to lay claim to forbidden mountains included some who had already taken some forbidden mountains. Therefore, when Xu Qing killed the cultivators on the ninth mountain via isolation and poison, all of their forbidden mountains became masterless. All he had to do was wave his hand to collect them. There were a total of 22!

Given Xu Qing's original group of five, that meant that he now had 27 miniaturized forbidden mountains orbiting overhead. Lightning crackled between them, and they emanated mighty pressure. And of course, they were extremely eye-catching.

As of this moment, Xu Qing himself was just as valuable as this entire forbidden region. The forbidden region had 27 forbidden mountains that people were ready to fight over. And yet Xu Qing alone already had 27 mountains.... As for what was easier to take, and what would be more worth it, opinions differed amongst those in the area.

In the temporary silence that followed the event, the gazes locked onto Xu Qing became increasingly aggressive and greedy. That said, nobody made a move. Nobody knew how to deal with his poison, and that was enough to keep them at bay.

Meanwhile, the Captain and Master Gravesparrow arrived at the ninth mountain next to Xu Qing. The Captain was familiar with the way Xu Qing carried out deadly slaughters, so he wasn't really surprised at all. That being said, it had been a while since anything like this played out. It actually got him a bit excited.

As for Master Gravesparrow, he was stunned to the core, and could only stand there wordlessly. The smell of gore shook him to the core, and when he looked at Xu Qing, his expression was one of reverence. The Firemoon Darkheavens were a people who instinctively admired strength.

In the golden palace, the Firemoon noble leaned forward to look more closely at Xu Qing.

I thought the little human was a hardened killer, but I never guessed... that he was actually a fiendish killer! This Great Hunt is getting more and more interesting. I bet the little Firemoon punks down there are really getting worked up now.

The noble smiled as he pondered the poison he had just seen. *I've never seen anything like it. Given the aura, it must have come from a god domain. And it's quite vicious in the hands of that kid.*

As the cultivators on the other mountains were looking at the 27 mountains orbiting over Xu Qing, he looked around to see how many forbidden mountains they had. There weren't many on the back ten mountains, and the number on the others were split up randomly.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed. Given how well the Captain knew Xu Qing, he noticed the look in his eyes and smiled. When he mentioned 'all of them' to Master Gravesparrow earlier, he hadn't been talking about just these 27 mountains in this forbidden region. He had been talking about all of the mountains that the cultivators had as well.

A total of 213 mountains.

Most of the cultivators in the area were in the Spirit Trove level. Although there were a few in Void Returning, the highest among them was second stage.

Licking his lips, he quietly said, "How many hours until the mountains are up for grabs?"

Master Gravesparrow lowered his voice and replied, "Another twenty-six hours!"

Xu Qing nodded and closed his eyes to wait. He wasn't an unreasonable person. In fact, being reasonable was a good habit. That was what Master Seventh had taught him. When you act reasonably, you can be calmer. Therefore, Xu Qing planned to wait for a bit, then ask everyone else present if they would be willing to just leave.

In that manner, time passed. An entire day went by in which more and more people glanced at the ninth mountain. That was especially true of the cultivators on the mountains that had been set aside. Some were also communicating via voice message. Master Gravesparrow was getting more nervous at that realization, and kept instinctively looking at the Captain. When he saw how relaxed he looked, he wasn't sure how to react. None of this was playing out as he'd imagined it would. Though these two humans were obviously very strong, it was also obvious that, after seeing the forbidden mountains orbiting above Xu Qing's head, the other cultivators in the area were probably calling for help.

The more time that passed, the less likely that their opponents would be limited to the cultivators present at the moment. It was entirely possible that a truly amazing chosen cultivator could show up. At a certain point, he couldn't hold back any longer, and gave voice to his concerns.

The Captain smiled but didn't respond.

Xu Qing just sat there with his eyes closed. That said, he kept his divine will locked onto his ancient sun as he meditated.

Eventually, when there were only about two hours left, someone chose to make a move!

It wasn't one of the cultivators waiting on any of the mountains. Instead, a figure appeared off in the distance, flying at top speed. He was covered with white scales and had a third eye on his forehead. That made it obvious what species he was. Whitemarsh. His arrival instantly attracted the attention of the other cultivators present.

“Sir Heavenhark of the Whitemarshes!”

“I can't believe it's him!”

“He's one of the most famous chosen among the Whitemarshes, and from what I've heard, has progressed rapidly in his cultivation. In less than a sixty-year-cycle, he reached Void Returning. People say that he's guaranteed to reach Smoldering God. He even had the outstanding luck to be able to pay a formal visit to Steward Heavencloud!”

As the other cultivators reacted in different ways, Sir Heavenhark's aura spread out, filled with vicious ferocity that caused everything to turn gloomy and dark. He had natural laws flowing in his eyes, which also created a projected face behind him. He was in the second stage of Void Returning, and in the great circle of that stage. Shockingly, orbiting above his head were roughly a hundred forbidden mountains that emanated terrifying pressure.

After arriving, the Whitemarsh Sir Heavenhark scanned the area, then looked coldly at the ninth mountain.

Meanwhile, a few dozen Whitemarsh cultivators flew up from the surrounding mountains and joined him. After bowing in greeting, they said some things to him in hushed tones, then pointed at Xu Qing.

Voice cool, Sir Heavenhark said, “The poisoned curse of a god can be easily negated with an item connected to a god.”

He waved his hand, and a bronze incense burner appeared above his head. It abounded with a sense of ancientness, and emitted fluctuations which spread out in all directions to suppress the local mutagen. It was clearly something connected to a god. The smoke from the burner spread out for about 300 meters in all directions, creating a smoky area with Sir Heavenhark in the middle.

The other Whitemarsh cultivators' expressions burned with zeal, and they bowed reverently.

Sir Heavenhark's expression was the same as ever. He looked like a godchild as he strode toward Xu Qing on the ninth mountain. All gazes came to be fixed on him. He landed on the mountain, and the billowing poison mist couldn't penetrate the smoke from his incense burner. As a result, he was able to walk through the poison uninhibited.

All of the onlookers were shaken. That included Master Gravesparrow, who had heard of this newcomer. Although Master Gravesparrow was a Firemoon Darkheaven cultivator with a high status, he had to admit that Sir Heavenhark had an even more amazing reputation. In the past hundred years, no chosen had achieved faster cultivation progress than him. Master Gravesparrow couldn't help but look over at Xu Qing and the Captain.

The Captain seemed as relaxed as ever. And though Xu Qing's eyes were open, he actually wasn't looking specifically at Sir Heavenhark. Instead, he was looking at the incense burner. Only after studying it closely did his gaze fall to look at Sir Heavenhark.

Sir Heavenhark didn't show any reaction to that. He just kept walking forward, pressure mounting around him such that his every footfall caused the mountain to shake. The poison mist just parted for him, and posed no trouble whatsoever. Killing intent and a domineering air were both very prominent on him.

However, the reality was that Sir Heavenhark was secretly shocked. He could sense that this poison was actually a lot more dangerous than he'd assumed. Although it didn't appear to be causing any trouble for him, the reality was that it had already started to invade him. In fact, based on what he could sense through the incense burner, he knew that he would only have about one hour of protection, after which the incense burner would stop working.

This god curse is extraordinary. That said, an hour should be more than enough.

Sir Heavenhark's eyes grew colder, and when he was about 900 meters away from Xu Qing, he suddenly accelerated, turning into a destructive meteor that shot forward. He was like a boulder crushing a drinking glass as he smashed everything in his path. The mountain shook. Plants and vegetation were reduced to ashes. And all light seemed to fade away, making that meteor the most eye-catching thing in the area.

Master Gravesparrow's face fell, and his cultivation base surged. The Captain yawned. Xu Qing's expression hadn't changed at all; he simply raised his right hand and placed his finger about three inches in front of his forehead.

A mass of black markings appeared there, some thick, some thin. They seemed to represent his blood vessels, and they soon interlocked to form a vicious ghost face. All of a sudden, the ghost face resembled a lamp, which lit up with underworld fire. From a distance, it looked like there was a ghost lamp on Xu Qing's forehead!

Sir Heavenhark was still 810 meters away.

Next, Xu Qing's finger moved to his left shoulder. Black blood vessels converged there to form a second ghost lamp.

The underworld fire flickered as Sir Heavenhark reached a point 690 meters away. Next, Xu Qing moved his finger to his right shoulder, then his dantian region, then his legs, and finally to the spot above his heart. All of the incantation gestures were performed in the blink of an eye.

Seven lamps with the fire of the underworld were now burning within him. His aura skyrocketed as curse power emerged from the seven ghost lamps. They became seven ghost faces, each of which had a different facial expression, including joy, anger, anxiety, thoughtfulness, terror, and more. This was a taboo magic that Xu Qing had learned via imitation from Imperial Sovereign Li Zihua's fourth son. [1]

The Seven Lamps Underworld Fire Curse! And it was the type of curse that resulted in death!

Xu Qing looked with cold eyes at Sir Heavenhark, who was now about 30 meters away.

"Extinguish the lamp, extinguish the enemy."

Chapter 829: A Gate to Death

Xu Qing's cold voice echoed out into the forbidden region, bringing with it a wind of death and the glow of an underworld lamp that could attract the souls of the living. A mountain-toppling, sea-draining force built up on him as he sat on the ninth mountain, countless crimson soul threads spreading out behind him. The seven ghost faces emerged from within him and began to orbit around him in a very gruish fashion. That, combined with his unusually handsome features and long hair, made him look absolutely incomparable. He seemed imbued with a spirit that could conquer mountains and rivers, and it caused the sky to flicker with bright colors, and galeforce winds to whip around him.

Sir Heavenhark saw him and reeled inwardly. His mind filled with thunderous rumblings, and his expression flickered. All of a sudden, a sensation of deadly crisis rose up within him like the waters of the tide. It swept through his mind like a landslide, filling every inch of his flesh and every particle of his bones. Even his soul started screaming.

Danger. Danger! Danger!!

All of his senses were telling him that this was a deadly crisis. The smoke from the incense burner was starting to ripple and distort. The sensation caused Sir Heavenhark to start breathing heavily. He suddenly stopped in place and then prepared to fall back in the face of this gruish human. He was too slow.

Looking at Sir Heavenhark coldly, Xu Qing dropped his hand, causing all of the taboo poison mist on the ninth mountain to rush together and form a huge vortex. The black tempest of taboo poison was destructive and terrifying as it blotted out the sun, eventually turning into the face of a vicious devil. Mouth gaping, it lunged toward the incense burner above Sir Heavenhark's head. The incense burner trembled as smoke tumbled out of it like a rippling waterfall.

Things weren't over yet, though. The invasion of poison mist intensified, sweeping around to cut off Sir Heavenhark's path of retreat.

Meanwhile, as Xu Qing's seven glittering lamps shone onto Sir Heavenhark, Xu Qing... extinguished the first of them.

When that happened, Sir Heavenhark's pupils constricted and his heart filled with waves of astonishment. Pain erupted in his five yin organs and six yang organs, as if they were being stabbed with a sharp dagger.

A scream escaped his lips. Even after coughing up seven or eight mouthfuls of blood, he couldn't negate the effects. He staggered backward, his aura in shambles. He no longer looked grand and majestic. Instead, his clothing was filthy as he collapsed onto the ground like an insect. Then he started to show signs of aging, as the flame of his life force began to grow dim.

"Y-You..." he stammered, his heart pounding. Xu Qing then extinguished the second lamp.

That caused another scream of anguish to erupt from Sir Heavenhark's mouth. Cracks started spreading out all over him, and the sensation was like that of being sliced apart by thousands of blades. Blood flowed out of the cracks, covering his scales and soaking his garments. His hair withered, and then the same thing happened to his scales, which began to fall off and collapse into

dust. It was as if his cultivation base was being stripped away, causing his aura to diminish constantly.

The sensation of death began to grow more intense within him. Thankfully, he still had his incense burner to provide some defenses, otherwise he would already have descended into ultimate despair.

That said, he was still flustered if not terrified. He felt like a little rowboat being tossed about by raging waves, and was trying as hard as he could to just get away. He even burned his own life force in his attempt to flee the ninth mountain.

Xu Qing didn't try to stop him, because... it wasn't necessary. He looked coldly at the Whitemarsh chosen, especially the teetering incense burner above his head. Without any hesitation, he took the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth lamps... and extinguished them.

With every lamp that was extinguished, the retreating Sir Heavenhark screamed again. His fleshly body and his soul were both extremely withered at this point. In the shortest of moments, six of the seven lamps had been extinguished.

What was more, 1,000,000 soul threads swept out from behind Xu Qing toward the incense burner. A loud cracking sound rang out as the incense burner split down the side. Taboo poison, the Seven Lamps Underworld Fire Curse, and the soul threads were making it difficult for the treasure to hold strong.

The rings of smoke surrounding it stopped moving, and then one of them disappeared. Taboo poison spread into it.

Sir Heavenhark shivered from head to toe, and then fell out of the sky to slam into the ground. He was now at the foot of the ninth mountain. He lay there sweating profusely, his sweat itself filled with rot that melted away at his body. Not only was his body and soul injured by the extinguishing of the lamp; the power of the taboo poison was eating away at his flesh and blood, delivering a devastating blow to his mind.

Indescribable pain filled him, such that he was unable to even scream. The feeling of death filled him, along with an incredibly noxious odor. His mind was already overwhelmed with indecision, anxiety, and fear. It was as if there was nothing left in heaven and earth to keep him alive. The flame of his life force was now just a tiny spark.

In the past, he had thought about dying. But in his imagination, it would be after he reached the Smoldering God level. And he was certain he would die in battle, representing the Whitemarshes in war against other species. His death would leave a huge impression on fellow members of his species, and later generations would all talk about how once in the past, there had been an extremely powerful expert called Sir Heavenhark.

As a result of that, what was happening now seemed completely inconceivable. In his defiance and madness, the spark of his life force suddenly flickered as if to reverse the situation.

Xu Qing extinguished any such hope as he extinguished the seventh lamp and then closed his eyes.

The moment the lamp went out, a wind blew and extinguished the spark of Sir Heavenhark's life force. All of his defiance became background noise. Every bit of his madness faded into calm.

Extinguish the lamp, and thus extinguish the enemy.

There was now only a corpse at the foot of the mountain. As the soul threads pierced into it, it collapsed into ashes that drifted on the wind to the other mountains. Everything was completely silent. However, this silence was different than before. It was... a stifling and deathly silence.

Looks of dazed astonishment could be seen everywhere. The onlookers couldn't even move. They had been watching the ninth mountain the entire time, and Xu Qing had remained seated the entire time.

Then, everyone started talking.

"Sir Heavenhawk... is dead?"

"A Whitemarsh chosen...."

"Just who exactly is that guy? When did a chosen like this show up among humans?"

"That divine ability he used seems like something I remember reading about in one of the ancient records...."

"That was the magic of an Imperial Sovereign! You have to have Imperial Sovereign blood to use it!"

"It's called the Seven Lamps... Underworld Fire Curse!"

"Back during the heyday of humankind, there was an Imperial Sovereign named Li Zihua. It comes from him!"

As one of the superpower species of Revered Ancient, the Firemoon Darkheaven people were generally better informed than other species. As a result, the ancient magic Xu Qing had used in the end was quickly identified.

Master Gravesparrow was unable to stop from gasping in shock. As he looked at Xu Qing, he was now fully convinced it was the right decision to acknowledge allegiance to him. He had no idea what other things this human was capable of, or exactly how strong he really was. The things that had played out left him with the sensation... that this person was a mysterious black hole that could devour anything and everything.

Even the Captain was a bit surprised, and looked a bit more closely at Xu Qing. This was the first time he had seen Xu Qing use the Seven Lamps Underworld Fire Curse.

The little punk has really mastered the art of being deceptive. No. No way! I have to work harder!

The Firemoon noble in the golden palace was looking down thoughtfully at Xu Qing. Even he was moved.

Something big happened with Li Zihua's statue in the Moonrite Region recently. There were a handful of humans who slaughtered a god there....

As everyone watched in astonishment, a host of miniaturized forbidden mountains floated over to Xu Qing. Combined with the 27 forbidden mountains from before, he now had a total of 139. As they linked together via lightning, they became a unified body that emanated boundless pressure in all directions.

The sight of so many forbidden mountains shocked everyone present. All of them knew that Xu Qing was strong, but the sight of more than a hundred such mountains was almost too much of a temptation. The cultivators who had mountains set aside for them were feeling particularly greedy. However, all of them chose to remain in concealment and wait until later to make a move.

It was at that exact same moment that the ten-day time period for the forbidden region expired. It was as if a huge cage had been lifted. The aura of the outside world flooded in, and the lands quaked as all twenty-seven mountains were severed from the ground below.

A voice rang out from the golden palace.

“You may now begin moving the mountains.”

Those words were like a bugle call to slaughter and robbery. No one paid any attention to Xu Qing; though they were still filled with greed, they all felt it would be better to deal with the other mountains first.

And yet, even as their cultivation bases flared, and killing intent filled their eyes... Xu Qing's eyes opened. The time had come. He lifted his right hand and waved it through the air. The sky went dark, and clouds converged, sending out an aura and pressure that caused the entire forbidden region to tremble.

Everyone in the forbidden region looked around in surprise. A massive black cell block appeared overhead, filling the sky over the forbidden region. Countless lightning bolts danced here and there, accompanied by faint howls of grief.

Everyone felt a sensation of majesty, gloom, blood, and pressure. As soon as it appeared, it dropped down toward the ground with immense force. The ground quaked as the cell block passed through the mountains and landed. All 27 of the forbidden mountains were now within its bounds, and they were all locked up inside.

Vicious laughter rang out from the cell block. It was possible to see the actual cells inside, where the stone lion danced. The head rolled back and forth, crying and laughing at the same time. The millstone turned, squeezing out endless quantities of blood. The scarecrow howled in grief, all while weaving pieces of straw together into tiny figures. The crazed Sir Inkwel swept his brush back and forth as he composed a painting of all the cultivators in the forbidden mountains dying. There was also... a huge finger that took up multiple cells. It pulsed with the explosive aura of a god. This was the complete D-132.

Next, Xu Qing's voice echoed out. “In three breaths of time, every living person here will be dead.”

The main gate of D-132 opened.

It was... a gate to death.

Chapter 830: Misfortune and Amnesia

The term ‘gate of life and death’ had multiple layers of meaning.

Those who left the door within three breaths of time made a choice for life. Those who stayed behind were choosing death. That was the first layer of meaning.

The second layer of meaning related to the fact that the completed D-132 had very unique powers. They were the godly authority of misfortune and a will domain of amnesia. The former, the godly

authority, would ensure that those who remained behind after the doors closed would be thrust into infinite misfortune, which would ultimately end in death. The latter, the domain of amnesia, would make it so that they forgot their own death. Thus, even though their bodies died, the overwhelming misfortune would transform them into bizarre entities similar to the head, the stone lion, and the others.

To some extent, they would be something like an accidental combination of gods and immortals. After all, godly authority was something from the gods, while will domains were the result of cultivators studying ways to defy the power of the gods. That was what happened when D-132 was completed. In addition, D-132 had supreme sealing powers. Unless someone had some ability that specifically targeted misfortune and amnesia, or had battle prowess dramatic enough to blast free, they would never be able to leave.

At the same time, it all conformed to Xu Qing's very reasonable plan. First, he would leave the door open and give the cultivators a chance to leave.

As D-132 dropped down, the Firemoon noble in the golden palace looked on with glittering, narrowed eyes. It was only natural that he could see how extraordinary the cell block was. He could also sense a human will of slaughter inside. Therefore, he had a choice to make. Should he stop what was happening?

Why should I stop it? The point of the Great Hunt is to find people with potential from any species. We live in a world where the weak are the prey of the strong, where fate comes and goes. A human as strong as this is going to light a fire under all the other species, and bring out the best in the younger generation.

Besides, I wonder if this human kid is under the tutelage of someone powerful. He does things in a very orderly way. He even opened the door and gave everyone a chance to flee.

After some more thought, the Firemoon noble grinned and looked at Xu Qing with even more approval than before. He had the feeling that this little forbidden region of his was soon going to be soaked with blood.

Very interesting. I like it!

Outside D-132, the Firemoon noble chose not to interfere. Inside D-132, Firemoon cultivators as well as cultivators from other species were also faced with a choice.

Leave, or stay?

Before Xu Qing killed the cultivators on the ninth mountain via isolation and poison, most people would have chosen to stay. They wouldn't have given any stock to Xu Qing's words. But they *had* witnessed him slaughter all the cultivators on the ninth mountain. And then he used his gruish magic in which 'extinguishing the lamp extinguished the enemy.' After putting an end to Sir Heavenhawk, everyone knew that he would follow through on whatever he said.

What was more, the strange behavior of the head and the others in D-132, as well as the god's finger, created a gruish sense of unease within them. In the end, about thirty percent of the cultivators gritted their teeth and chose to abandon the fight. They fled as fast as they could through the exit of D-132.

After all, not everyone was willing to take insane risks at a time like this. Nothing blocked their path, and in short order, they flew out of the cell block.

However, the remaining seventy percent just stood there with cold looks in their eyes. Fundamentally speaking, all of them were confident, both in themselves and in the numbers they had on their side. They were willing to fight.

As a species, Firemoon Darkheavens were raised to fight and kill. As long as there was a potential benefit, they would put their lives on the line.

Xu Qing had enough forbidden mountains orbiting overhead to be more valuable than the entire surrounding forbidden region, and that was definitely enough potential benefit. There were some of the seventy percent who were actually hesitant, especially when they saw the others able to leave freely. Sadly, they ran out of time.

Three breaths of time went by quickly. The entrance of D-132 closed with a loud boom, whereupon the head, the stone lion, and all the others started cheering at the new arrivals.

Then a very gruish aura erupted in D-132.

The god's finger suddenly shook back and forth, causing the entire cell block to shake. At the same time, the color of blood spread out from it in every direction. Wherever it went, D-132 changed, transforming into a blood-colored hell. A will of amnesia filled every inch of the cell block, seeping out into the surrounding lands. It invaded all twenty-seven of the forbidden mountains. In an instant, the god's finger absorbed the local mutagen and made it part of D-132.

In terms of battle prowess, it was far from being on the level of other gods. And it had lived a very depressing life. But it was still a god, and was actually much more accustomed to acting like a god than Xu Qing was.

In the shortest of moments, D-132 and everything in it became one unified whole. Misfortune exploded.

There were several hundred people who had remained. Of them, some instantly started exhibiting very freakish behavior.

For instance, there were some people who had long struggled with old injuries that they kept under control with their cultivation base. But now their cultivation bases were operating strangely, causing the injuries to flare up. Although the probability of that happening was small, it cropped up here instantly. The injury flare-ups caused blood to spray out of the mouths of such cultivators, leaving them both surprised and confused.

There were also people who had just taken out magical devices to use. Unfortunately, though such magical devices only had a 1/10,000 chance of malfunctioning, there were plenty that exploded instantly.

Some people had produced antidote pills to consume. But in a very gruish development, those antidote pills didn't do anything to help against the poison, and in fact, they did the opposite and poisoned those who consumed them. Some people flew up into the air only to be caught up in the explosion of magical devices. Though they evaded some of the blasts, there were dozens if not hundreds of detonations, the terrifying power of which hit many.

Yet other people howled as they unleashed divine abilities. Gruish misfires occurred, which were normally a rarity, but not here. Beyond all of that, there were some people who managed to unleash extreme techniques or items that they could normally control easily. But here, they unexpectedly backfired.

Within D-132, all of the Firemoon and nonhuman cultivators descended into chaos. So many unexpected things happened to all of them that, when combined, it became one thing: misfortune. There were some who quickly realized that something was amiss. And there were others who were particularly experienced and knowledgeable that recognized what was going on.

“Misfortune.... This is godly authority!”

Those words caused the faces of many cultivators to fall. In contrast, Xu Qing sat on the ninth mountain looking calmer than ever, while the Captain sat by smiling broadly. Master Gravesparrow looked downright lifeless.

Meanwhile, the cultivators being affected quickly came up with a strategy.

“Kill the gruish human! That’ll fix things!”

Gazes full of killing intent locked onto Xu Qing as numerous cultivators flew in his direction. Unexpected things kept happening along the way. Some even got caught up in magical techniques, resulting in deaths here and there.

But as a group, they were closing in on Xu Qing. Unfortunately... little did they know that misfortune was only one aspect of D-132’s powers. The will domain of amnesia... had already started working.

And the closer they got to Xu Qing, the stronger it became.

The first to get within about 600 meters of Xu Qing was a Firemoon cultivator. Though he had dealt with numerous instances of misfortune, he was about ready to make his final charge. But then his expression became one of confusion, and he stopped in place to hover in the air. He had forgotten what he was doing.

More cultivators showed up, but thanks to the will domain of amnesia, they forgot about their goal. They forgot to look for Xu Qing, and some of them couldn’t remember what they were doing in this place to begin with. They even forgot about the Great Hunt....

Confusion became the main theme. Some of them exchanged glances and would seem to be on the verge of recalling something important. But then the amnesia would grow stronger, and they would forget even more. Vicious misfortune once again swept over them. More deaths occurred, and corpses dropped out of the sky like dead flies.

However, some of these cultivators were able to rely on innate abilities, special treasures, or unique bloodlines to strengthen them against the misfortune and amnesia. Those ones managed to stay lucid.

“We’re dealing with both misfortune and amnesia! Everybody split up! Don’t get too close, and don’t use any techniques you don’t have to. Just keep one thing in mind and repeat it over and over. Kill the human! Shout it at the tops of your lungs. Use the sound to keep yourself awake and drive away the amnesia!”

“Kill the human!”

“Kill the human!!”

“Kill the human!!!”

Thus shouted the Firemoon and nonhuman cultivators in the midst of the crisis, the death, and the gruishness. Some people who had already succumbed to forgetfulness heard the deafening shouting and started to act on instinct. Once again, they charged toward Xu Qing.

Suddenly, the god’s finger thrashed, causing thunderous rumbling to echo out. The stone lion danced excitedly. The head cackled more piercingly. The millstone spun so rapidly it was like a vortex. The scarecrow frantically weaved straw people.

And Sir Inkwell looked insane as he put the finishing touches on a painting depicting everyone present. Then he spun to Xu Qing, bowed, and said, “Oh great and exalted jailer, the prisoners are going crazy! Please get them under control!”

The stone lion, the head, the scarecrow and the millstone all used their varying methods to execute a bow, and then cried the same thing.

“Oh great and exalted jailer, the prisoners are going crazy! Please get them under control!”

“Please get them under control!”

Colors flashed and winds screamed. Xu Qing got to his feet and raised his right hand. The black spear in front of him spun up into his hand, pulsing with black flames. Eyes cold, Xu Qing lifted his right foot... and took a step forward! He flew off the mountain!

Behind him, the Captain stretched lazily and looked at Master Gravesparrow. “If you don’t make a move now, Little Gravesparrow, there won’t be any more forbidden mountains for you to take.”

Licking his lips, the Captain burst into motion.

The slaughter was just beginning.