

Timescape 871

Chapter 871: Making a Comeback

The Ghost Chariot Wildwood had opened up, revealing hundreds of cultivators using different methods, techniques, and items in their attempts to capture juvenile ghost chariots. These cultivators were all outstanding figures in their generation. Had Xu Qing not shown up, some would have been killed, but others would have succeeded.

But now... Xu Qing had shown up and said one thing that got all of the ghost chariots to fly out into the open. And with the wave of his hand, he had figuratively opened the curtain in a dark room, revealing the positions of all the cultivators. Truth be told, that description was insufficient. He hadn't just opened the curtain. He had dismantled the room altogether, and the pieces had grown legs and walked away.

The Firemoon cultivators present were all astonished to the core. In an instant, they had gone from hiding in the shadows to being exposed in the light, and it caused all of them to start breathing heavily.

Master Stillwinter was the most stunned of all. After the dramatic situation with the Mountain and Sea Region, which was centered on the Ninedawns Forbidden Lands, he had started to speculate that Xu Qing might be involved. He had even considered the possibility that they might meet again one day in the future. But he could never have guessed that they would encounter each other in circumstances like this. He saw the ghost chariots prostrating as if to their monarch, as well as the three terrifying ghost chariots in the sky. In rare fashion, he started trembling, and a sensation of profound crisis was growing within him.

3,000 meters away from him was Fan Shishuang, who felt similarly. He had been locked in combat with Master Stillwinter, but considering what was happening now, he was shocked to the core.

All it took was a moment for all the cultivators present to be so shaken they just remained in place unmoving.

Outside of the Ghost Chariot Wildwood, Xu Qing didn't even look at Master Stillwinter. Instead, he turned his attention to the three Smoldering God ghost chariots.

Those three were different from any of the other beasts he had encountered during his travels. They were not howling in anguish, nor were they prostrating. They were just examining him suspiciously.

When the beasts in the Mountain and Sea Region reach Smoldering God, I wonder... if their latent ancestral memories start to return.

That was the only explanation he could come up with for the unusual gazes of the three Smoldering God ghost chariots. The looks in their eyes also revealed the limitations of his Ninedawns aura.

Without the mage state of an antemage, it won't be possible to control Smoldering God beasts.

Xu Qing shifted his gaze to take in the cultivators who had been revealed in the vegetation, before eventually focusing on Master Stillwinter. They were so far away from each other that with mortal eyes, it wouldn't have been possible to even see each other. But when the battle prowess and cultivation base of a cultivator reached a certain level, they could see things that were much farther away, thanks to divine sense and other instinctual abilities. And thus, their gazes locked.

When that happened, the sense of crisis within Master Stillwinter grew more intense.

Xu Qing took a step forward. A sound like muffled thunder echoed out as a host of red soul threads sprang out, creating a tempest as he entered a god state. He went directly to the fourth level! It was the Crimson Mother state, which could also be called the Violet Lord state! He was 300 meters tall, with violet feathers of flesh covering him and two huge wings on his back. The sound of chanting drifted out in all directions. A violet moon rose behind him, covered with countless figures prostrated in worship. In front of him was a huge sundial with its gnomon spinning. The power of time caused the surroundings to distort and blur. Underfoot was an enormous lotus throne, each petal of which represented one of Xu Qing's abilities. They spread out like violet tentacles, making the lotus look like a violet pāramitā lily.

A godly sensation weighed down, causing the souls of all the cultivators to tremble. The ghost chariots all seemed agitated, and the three powerful ones above emanated intense pressure.

Xu Qing didn't pay attention to that. Within his terrifying god state, he took a second step. As he did, nine lanterns of flesh flew out and began circling around him. They were the Ninedawns skulls, and they roared as they suddenly shot toward Xu Qing and merged with his god state, covering him with a profoundly ancient suit of mage armor.

The Ninedawns skulls appeared on the armor as Xu Qing's battle prowess was blessed to a heaven-shaking, earth-toppling degree. When the jackal-dragon mask settled onto his face, wild colors flashed in heaven and earth!

This was something that had never before appeared in history. Part god. Part mage. Together on one person. At the same time, an indescribable aura pulsed off Xu Qing.

The ghost chariots below trembled as they groveled, while those up above bowed their heads. The plants and vegetation in the rainforest bent in his direction, all while red lightning crashed in the sky.

The Firemoon cultivators were unable to stand up to the force. Blood sprayed out of their mouths as they staggered in the opposite direction, their faces masks of horror.

Even Fan Shishuang and Master Stillwinter were visibly astonished. There was no need for them to start fighting; they could clearly sense how amazingly strong Xu Qing was.

Sir Heavenink struggled to control his breathing. Just like everyone else, it was his first time seeing Xu Qing in this state, and in his blood he felt the urge to offer worship.

As everyone reeled, Xu Qing took a third step in his combined god and mage state. That put him only 3,000 meters away from Master Stillwinter. The ground trembled. The sky shook. And the wild, killing aura of the jackal-dragon filled the world, causing violet snowflakes to start falling.

Fan Shishuang backed up. Given the look in Xu Qing's eyes, and the stories Fan Shishuang had heard about how Master Stillwinter tried to kill him, it was obvious what was going on here. Xu Qing was here for Master Stillwinter. It had nothing to do with him.

As he backed up, Master Stillwinter burst into action. His hands blurred in a double-handed incantation gesture, and he shot backward, tapping into all of his great circle Void Returning battle prowess. He was ranked second in the Firemoon Darkheavens' echelon. Maybe Xu Qing was putting a lot of pressure on him, but he wasn't the kind of person who just backed down. What was

more, he knew full well that since Xu Qing had come here, there would be no avoiding a battle to the death!

A huge rift opened in the sky, and a gigantic finger emerged, dropping down toward Xu Qing. The finger pulsed with heaven-destroying, earth-extinguishing power. It was powered by all of Master Stillwinter's battle prowess, as well as countless natural and magical laws, not to mention his dao lineaments. The air rippled and distorted as the force bore down on Xu Qing.

Xu Qing's expression didn't change as he looked at the descending finger. He lifted his hand and pushed out, causing rumbling booms to echo out as the huge finger stopped in front of him. Then it convulsed, and thunderous cracking sounds rang out. Next, the terrifying finger distorted dramatically in the middle as Xu Qing ripped it in half! Next, a second, third, fourth, and fifth finger descended.

Master Stillwinter had used this same move on Xu Qing before. Back then, Xu Qing had been forced to pay a huge price to use divine abilities to escape it. Even then, he had ended up seriously hurt, and in the end, had been forced to use Fishing the Moon in the Well.

On this day, things were different. He was facing the same divine ability, but his methods of dealing with it were different. He took a fourth step. More cracking sounds could be heard as the four fingers completely failed to stop Xu Qing. He ripped all of them apart.

The sight caused Master Stillwinter's expression to turn very serious. Backing up again, he performed another incantation gesture, causing the palm connected to the five broken fingers to obscure the sky as it crushed down toward Xu Qing.

He looked up at the huge palm, and gray fog appeared in his eyes.

The fog proliferated, and in the blink of an eye, had surrounded them. Then it shot toward the palm.

When they clashed, the palm was stopped in place. In fact, it was pushed back. Then the gray fog rapidly converged into the shape of a gray nail which pierced the palm and shoved it toward the ground. Everything shook dramatically as the huge nail of gray fog impaled the palm to the ground.

Nothing Master Stillwinter did could free the palm.

Xu Qing looked away from the palm to Master Stillwinter. Without saying a single word, he took a fifth step. That put him only 300 meters in front of Master Stillwinter.

Master Stillwinter struggled to control his breathing. At the same time, he turned red from head to toe as a host of blood clones emerged from him. Circling around him, they became a blood lake. Within the blood lake, blood clones collapsed one after another, causing the lake to expand dramatically and get closer to Xu Qing.

As Master Stillwinter floated higher into the air, his eyes burning with killing intent, he waved both of his hands apart, causing even more blood and blood clones to erupt. In the blink of an eye, he was surrounded by a shocking sea of blood so large that it wasn't possible to see where it ended. It filled the sky, turning all heaven and earth the color of blood.

Master Stillwinter wasn't even visible in the middle of the sea of blood as he howled, "Crush!"

He threw his hands down, and the terrifying sea of blood dropped down. Previously, this move had surpassed the limits of Xu Qing's blood authority, and he had failed to counter it. In the end, he managed to escape, but did so with serious injuries.

Upon seeing it unleashed again, Xu Qing lifted his right hand toward the red sea and closed his hand in a grasping motion. Cultivation base power spread through him, and godsource spread out. The Ninedawns skulls emerged into the open and roared.

Being blessed to the limit, Xu Qing's blood authority surpassed anything from before. It had reached a much higher level. The sky-obscuring, sun-blocking sea of blood turned into a massive vortex. And the source of the vortex was Xu Qing's hand!

The roiling sea of blood rushed to his palm, shrinking down rapidly as it did. From a distance, the sight was completely and utterly shocking to all the observing cultivators. In the end, the previously majestic blood sea was sucked into Xu Qing's palm, where it turned into a spinning red sphere.

The red glow it cast filled the sky and caused observers to feel pain in their souls. Its shocking aura seemed unstable, like it might detonate catastrophically at any moment.

Master Stillwinter's mind felt like it was being struck by lightning, and he was shaking. He could no longer hide his astonishment. Then Xu Qing flicked his finger, sending the destructive blood sphere shooting through the air. It became a streak of red that shot straight toward Master Stillwinter!

Chapter 872: One More Lash Brings Death

Blood-colored light filled the sky, turning everything crimson. The streak of red became like a scarlet curtain that covered all. The lands below were the same. They were like a hell of blood, with Xu Qing in control of it all.

The blood sphere seemed unstable, pulsing with terrifying energy that could eradicate anything and everything. The Firemoon cultivators who could see what was happening backed up, their hearts pounding. It almost felt like their own blood was about to be taken over.

Fan Shishuang's pupils constricted. It was obvious that Xu Qing was in complete control. Whether it was breaking the fingers or taking control of the blood, Fan Shishuang could tell that... he wasn't a match!

He hasn't even used any of his main divine abilities....

Fan Shishuang sped up as he backed away.

Master Stillwinter, who was the focus of this situation, was visibly shaken as he hovered in midair. He knew his own divine abilities, and how threatening they were, and he could sense that the killing power of this blood sphere surpassed anything he had done up to this point. Heaven and earth was like a huge cage to him, and the all-encompassing red was something he simply couldn't evade or withstand.

At that moment of deadly crisis, his years of fighting experience took over. Without any hesitation, he opened his mouth and exhaled sharply in the direction of the blood sphere. A stream of golden light shot out of his mouth. At the same time, he detonated his body, turning it into a host of blood clones that scattered in all directions.

The golden light rapidly turned so dazzling it was blinding. And in the middle of that light was a ring. It was made of golden bone, and though most of the flesh had been scraped off, there was a face on it.

That face's eyes were full of terror as it moaned, "Milord, it's me! Lil' Fishy! We're on the same side here.... Milord, I've missed you so much! It's all the fault of that god-damned Master Stillwinter...."

The ring was the god's finger from D-132, which Master Stillwinter had ultimately captured. Afterward, Master Stillwinter had used a brutal refinement technique to turn the finger into a ring. And now he was using it to block the blood sphere.

Maybe Xu Qing was thinking about old times, or maybe the finger's words were actually effective. Either way, the blood sphere actually passed right through the ring without hurting it at all.

In fact, the moment it happened, Master Stillwinter's mark was completely removed from the ring. The god's finger shivered from that near-death experience. As it flew toward Xu Qing, it was about to explain everything when Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior suddenly appeared and blocked its path.

"Halt!" the patriarch said coolly. This definitely was one of the highlights of his life. After all, being able to say 'halt' to a god was something that most spirit automatons would never have a chance to do.

The god's finger, despite being very irritated, didn't dare to cause trouble in a moment like this, and thus smiled ingratiatingly.

Xu Qing wasn't paying attention to either of them or their emotional reactions. He was looking up into the sky.

Because of the distraction caused by the god's finger, Master Stillwinter's blood clones had scattered everywhere. Most were nearing the horizon, and though they hadn't fully escaped the canopy of blood that covered everything, they were close. Every single one of the over 1,000 clones looked exactly like Master Stillwinter. And every single one had a very serious expression on its face. Eyes shining with mad killing intent, they glared at Xu Qing and all shouted the same thing.

"Sacrifice!"

"Sacrifice!"

"Sacrifice!"

Their voices echoed in the air as five blood-red secret troves appeared above, like five volcanoes rumbling loudly. They were the secret troves that Master Stillwinter had formed when in the Spirit Trove level. Although he was now in Void Returning, the five secret troves were still his foundation. Now, having no other choice, he was holding nothing back.

The moment the word 'sacrifice' echoed out, the heavenly daos in the five secret troves howled, and five figures emerged. One was a blood fiend with eight arms. One was a gobblewack with red scales. One was a patch of blood-colored skin. One was a crimson eyeball. And one was a stream of scarlet light. These were the heavenly daos that Master Stillwinter had subjugated in Spirit Trove.

Upon appearing, they didn't shoot toward Xu Qing. Roaring decisively, they shot up into the air, blasting open the blood canopy that stretched from horizon to horizon.

The dome of heaven trembled. The vortex seethed, and blood-red lightning crashed everywhere in shocking fashion. Within the vortex, an image appeared. It depicted a vast void within which was a shocking kumpeng bird shackled with numerous chains. It pulsed with a powerful heavenly dao aura. This was the ancient heavenly dao that had been captured by the Firemoon Darkheaven people! [1]

Looking closely, it appeared as if every chain was stabbed into the kumpeng's body. What was more, there was an enormous chain like a whip behind it that lashed it constantly, ripping its flesh into shreds. The whip was covered with numerous sealing marks that glittered brightly. And every lash of the whip caused a sound like heavenly thunder to echo out and mingle with the anguished howls of the ancient heavenly dao.

The howls contained immeasurable pain, and seemed to be pleading for death. The sound surpassed natural and magical laws, and they caused Xu Qing's blood sphere to slow down and stop in midair.

This wasn't Xu Qing's first time witnessing this ancient heavenly dao. However, unlike the last time, Master Stillwinter wasn't just drawing on the power of its sound. He was... sacrificing his own heavenly daos!

In the blink of an eye, his five heavenly daos shot into the vortex, where they crumbled into fragments that merged into the whip, adding five sealing marks to it and increasing its power. It was a process that couldn't be reversed. Master Stillwinter had lost his five heavenly daos for all eternity, which would have a massive impact on his cultivation base. In fact, if he wanted to recover, it would require paying a stupefying price. That was the main reason he hadn't resorted to this tactic in his last fight with Xu Qing.

But making this sacrifice gave him a spectacular boost to his strength. In the blink of an eye, one of the chains binding the ancient heavenly dao came off. It shot through the rift in the sky, clinking down to appear above the Ghost Chariot Wildwood. Then it swept toward Xu Qing, backed by natural laws that couldn't be blocked or evaded.

RUMBLE!

Xu Qing shivered as the chain smacked into him and knocked him back by 3,000 meters.

The power of the chain then became a host of red lightning bolts that smashed into him. The Ninedawns mage armor blocked them, but the nine skulls roared as cracks spread out over them.

Xu Qing's soul trembled, and a glimmer of surprise could be seen in his eyes. Inside, however, he was completely taken aback. The power of that chain was so terrifying that it took all of the might of the mage armor to protect him. Although the Ninedawns mage armor seemed like it was about to collapse, Xu Qing could sense that it was already repairing itself.

Apparently, the chain itself had some of the essence of an antemage in it. What was more, Xu Qing had known all along that the Ninedawns skulls couldn't form a true mage state. He needed to break through to Void Returning before he could fuse the skulls to do that.

The chains binding that ancient heavenly dao are really effective....

Xu Qing looked at the ancient heavenly dao out in the void, and was suddenly struck with a realization.

The God-Rejecting Mage Formation....

His eyes narrowed, but he didn't pursue the train of thought.

Noticing that the chain seemed to be on the verge of disappearing, he bit the tip of his tongue and spat out some blood. A tremor passed through him, and his god state began to show signs of collapsing. From that he could tell that he wouldn't be able to stand up to a second blow like he had the first one.

As for Master Stillwinter, he obviously had no information that could have informed him about how the chain would react to the Ninedawns skulls. Xu Qing was still alive, but *if you ride a tiger, it's hard to get off*

, and therefore, the faces of all his blood clones grimaced viciously.

“Sacrifice!!”

This time, he was going to sacrifice his own life force.

Master Stillwinter's body withered, and he went from looking young to elderly. In fact, half of him collapsed into ash. As the powerful life force entered the void, a second chain dropped down.

In the shortest of moments it swept toward Xu Qing in another devastating attack.

RUMBLE!

Xu Qing coughed up three mouthfuls of blood as his god state collapsed and his flesh was shredded, revealing bone beneath. His Ninedawns mage armor was largely ravaged and began falling off him. The wounds covering him made it clear that a third blow like this would kill him.

Holding nothing back, he fled. He also seemed to be ready to take a risk, as though he had a trump card to unleash.

As a result, the cautious Master Stillwinter didn't dare to get too close to him. He gritted his teeth. He had paid a massive price to take the fight to this level, and therefore, he wasn't going to give up until Xu Qing was dead, regardless of how negatively it affected him. He only had one life, and he didn't want to risk losing it. However, life force and heavenly daos could always be replaced, as long as you survived.

Therefore, his eyes flashed with determination as he yet again said, “Sacrifice!”

This time he was sacrificing his cultivation base!

His Void Returning cultivation base burst out of him. All of the daos he had assimilated and all of the natural laws he had gained enlightenment of became like shooting stars that raced toward the ancient heavenly dao. After they were absorbed, a third chain appeared.

“Die!” screamed Master Stillwinter as the chain lashed toward Xu Qing.

Xu Qing had been injured and was in retreat. It truly looked like a third chain blow would kill him.

Master Stillwinter trembled in rage. He wasn't sure how Xu Qing had survived up to this point... but he had some suspicions. As he pulled his clones back and used them to restore the lost portions

of his body, he forced himself to get composed and then shot after the fleeing figure off in the distance.

The moment he did, the completely bedraggled Xu Qing looked up and frowned. Thanks to Master Stillwinter, he had now fused halfway with the Ninedawns state. If he could complete it, then he could truly enter the mage state. Yet his opponent had still not chosen to back down.

“Useless piece of trash.” Xu Qing’s eyes glittered coldly as his injuries healed up. Having fused halfway with the Ninedawns skulls, he was even more terrifying than before. He stepped toward Master Stillwinter. “Crushing you should be enough to finish the fusion process.”

Off in the distance, a host of emotions exploded within Master Stillwinter, and he suddenly coughed up a massive mouthful of blood.

Chapter 873: Suppressing in the Mage Trove

How is this happening?? Master Stillwinter could not prevent the stress, fury, confusion, and a host of other negative emotions from exploding within him. He simply couldn’t understand what was going on. He had made a massive sacrifice to use the chains binding an ancient heavenly dao, and that should have resulted in a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering attack.

After all, he wasn’t the first Firemoon Darkheaven to use that method. The sacrificial technique was something that all chosen of his people could do. Because of the immense price that had to be paid, it was usually used as a last resort, which meant that it wasn’t something used frequently. But it had been used.

The chains that were summoned weren’t real, but rather, were illusory projections. But even still, each use of that very special divine ability that was exclusive to the Firemoon Darkheaven people could be considered extremely effective.

Cultivators from other species who could survive it were *as rare as phoenix feathers or qilin horns*.

Yet despite summoning three of those chains, he had failed to kill Xu Qing. Not only that, but the chains apparently had helped him! Master Stillwinter couldn’t help but feel completely humiliated. That was especially true considering that Xu Qing’s aura was now clearly stronger than it had been before. It was so bizarre that he couldn’t wrap his mind around it. He just couldn’t understand.

He’d gone all out, sacrificed his heavenly daos, life force, and cultivation base, yet it seemed like he’d done nothing but provide a tailor-made blessing to his opponent. The pain in his chest became so intense that he coughed up another massive mouthful of blood.

The words just spoken by Xu Qing caused Master Stillwinter’s eyes to turn crimson, and caused his killing intent to surpass his desire to live. He was aware that this was a situation in which he was likely doomed. Unless an actual god interfered, he had very little chance of surviving.

As one of the top chosen among the Firemoon Darkheavens, he was familiar with gods, and knew that the chances of that happening were slim to none. The Great Hunt was set up to be like raising venomous bugs in a jar. There was no way pleas for help would be answered. The gods existed on high, and were not given to sympathy. In the Great Hunt, life or death was the responsibility of the participant.

“Considering everything...” Master Stillwinter murmured. He laughed bitterly. Giving up on thoughts of fleeing, he glared at Xu Qing, madness rising within him.

Rumbling sounds echoed out from within him, followed by a very dangerous aura. Then terrifying fluctuations rolled out from him. The source of it all was his sea of consciousness!

There were ninety-six god monuments there, all of them trembling. The faces of the dead gods there roared in rage. Their combined cries swirled out to form a massive vortex that spun around Master Stillwinter himself. The sound grew louder, and the force of attraction grew stronger.

All of a sudden, the red sky shifted, turning blurry and dark. The entire world seemed to descend into the netherworld, all while ancient chanting spread through the darkness.

Master Stillwinter’s aura began to grow stronger and stronger. However, only an instant later, cracking sounds rang out within him as he started to crumble. This level of explosive powerup was too much for his fleshly body to take. But he didn’t care.

He had sacrificed his heavenly daos, his life force, and his cultivation base, but he still had his soul. His true soul was actually hidden among the more than ninety god monuments, and now, it glittered brightly. Master Stillwinter howled as it exploded, turning into a burst of force that swept over all the monuments. The true soul was the core of his sea of consciousness, and destroying it would affect everything else.

With that stimulation, the host of god monuments began to tremble violently. Next, they all began to shine with holy golden light that filled Master Stillwinter’s shattered body.

One by one, streams of light shot up into the dome of heaven. From a distance, it was possible to see a total of ninety-five beams of golden light shooting up into the dark sky to form ninety-five enormous god monuments. As they hovered there emanating destructive force, they merged to create a huge face with closed eyes.

The face was extremely ugly, and didn’t have ordinary facial features, but rather, resembled something like a bug or reptile. It was very repulsive.

Meanwhile, Master Stillwinter’s fleshly body had reached the end of the line. As he crumbled into ash, he leered at Xu Qing and said, “I’ll be waiting for you in the netherworld.”

With that, he faded into nothing. The only thing left behind in his stead was the enormous face in the sky. The two eyes fluttered and then opened. An ancient wind blew, full of corrosion and death.

It landed on Xu Qing. Heaven and earth went dim as signs of mutation cropped up in Xu Qing.

But this was not the Xu Qing of the past. He had faced many gods, and had thus developed a measure of resistance to them. What was more, when in his fourth-level god state he was like a god himself.

Therefore, he had his ways of resisting the mutagen and energy of gods. A tremor passed through him as the spots that were starting to mutate burst into flames and then became soul threads.

He looked up at the face in the sky, his eyes shining with a bizarre light. That action seemed like blasphemy to the god above, who was enraged. The face’s mouth opened and then inhaled sharply in Xu Qing’s direction. Heaven and earth crumbled. The air shattered. And a massive gravitational

force latched onto Xu Qing. Xu Qing's body wasn't under his own control as he flew up toward the face, which clearly sought to devour him.

This was Master Stillwinter's final trump card. He sacrificed his soul to revive the god monuments to a certain degree, and thus... end things in mutual destruction! That was the only thing he could do. No god was going to come save him. And death was death.

What was more, if he could prove his value and show his determination when he died, then it was always possible that a god might resurrect him in the future.

There was no way to tell if a god was pleased or displeased. But one thing was certain: Xu Qing currently looked pleased. All of this was going exactly how he'd hoped it would.

During the fight with Master Stillwinter months ago, he'd become aware of the gruish nature of his sea of consciousness. When using Fishing the Moon in the Well, he saw the more than ninety god monuments of deceased gods. Back then, he wasn't sure what it meant.

But after gaining enlightenment from Ninedawns' memory fragments, he saw what happened years ago, and came to realize exactly what those god monuments were.

They were gods that had died during the war between mages and gods. Despite being perished, and not being as dangerous as they were in life, they were still able to form a powerful trump card in Master Stillwinter's sea of consciousness. That led Xu Qing to the conclusion that they could be very beneficial nutrients for his mage trove.

For that to happen, though, the god monuments needed to be active. Like they were now.

They're just monuments to dead gods, which means that the monuments... count as being dead!

If he was dealing with ninety-five actual gods, then he wouldn't have any chance of succeeding. He would be dead after a single glance. But these were monuments that were the remains of dead gods. Therefore, Xu Qing could at least attempt to subdue them.

As he neared the huge face, the violet moon behind him shone with bright light, and the sound of chanting drifted out from it. The soul threads that formed his fourth-level god state wriggled, and as he waved his hand, they spread out. They became a sea of soul threads that was actually larger than the face, and became like a barrier between it and him.

The gravitational force ceased to pull at him. Eyes glittering, he reached out with his right hand and squeezed the sea of soul threads. Millions of soul threads rumbled loudly, sending out boundless fluctuations as they spread out and surrounded the face.

The face's eyes were listless and dead. But the opened mouth, instead of inhaling, suddenly spat out a golden mist. The mist had a corrosive effect on the soul threads, and for the first time ever, Xu Qing could sense them starting to pop out of existence.

At the same time, the facial features of the face blurred from the effort of trying to free itself from confinement.

Ninety-five beams of golden light shot out, which turned into ninety-five golden spears. The spears exploded in all directions, smashing through the soul threads in their way, which were powerless to stop them.

That said, there was no way Xu Qing was going to let the face do whatever it wanted. And thus, he reached out to the blood sphere that had been thwarted by the arrival of the ancient heavenly dao. Instantly, it erupted into a huge sea of blood. When combined with the soul threads, it created a double perimeter that started shrinking down to crush the face.

Xu Qing then took a deep breath and settled down cross-legged in the air. He placed his hands on his knees, and lowered his head. The mage mark on his forehead then glittered brightly.

Antemage!

His Ninedawns mage armor vibrated as boundless gray fog spread out and filled the surroundings. As the roiling gray fog covered him, a towering figure like a mountain became vaguely visible within.

Long ago, that figure had stood watch outside the God-Rejecting Mage Formation, protecting his species for ten thousand years. Later, he disappeared in the sands of history, remembered by few. Now, he was appearing again. This was the true antemage state of the Darkheaven Archmage people.

Along with it came a truly astonishing and boundless aura. The Mountain and Sea Region trembled, and countless beasts howled. The blood of numerous cultivators was affected, and they felt the urge to drop down in worship. Sadly, the figure was still blurry, giving the sensation that it was only about half complete.

A peerless might appeared around the face that Xu Qing had trapped. Then it crashed down. A boom rattled out as the face collapsed, transforming back into ninety-five god monuments. They attempted to form back together, but there was no time.

Millions of soul threads. A 50,000-kilometer blood sea. Half of an antemage state. Combined, they created something beyond exceptional. More rumbling echoed out as the gray fog seemed to become one with the huge figure.

A moment later, the fog dissipated, and Xu Qing was revealed, hovering cross-legged in midair. The giant face was gone. It was now in Xu Qing's sea of consciousness, suppressed in the lands of his mage trove. He had succeeded in acquiring incredible nutrients for his antemage state!

Chapter 874: The Last One

Lingering fluctuations rolled through the dome of heaven, causing the clouds to ripple endlessly. From a distance, it looked like fish scales, as if some literal gargantuan fish was swimming through the sky like water. It was unsurpassably shocking.

In front of the massive fish was Xu Qing, seated cross-legged, his long hair drifting around him as he emanated an ancient aura. He closed his eyes as he hovered there motionless. Surrounding him was roughly half of the image of an antemage. It was slowly fading away into the sky, disappearing into the distance along with the massive fish.

Everything down below was silent. The observing cultivators were overwhelmed with astonishment. They had just borne witness to a battle in which the Master Stillwinter, listed second in the echelon of the Firemoon Darkheaven people, had perished! They couldn't stop themselves from trembling physically.

When Xu Qing showed up, the ghost chariots bowed to him and the vegetation parted. That alone proved to them how powerful he was. In their hearts, they had all been absolutely convinced that Master Stillwinter was just as powerful. Yet from the beginning of the fight until the end, Master Stillwinter's tactics had been effectively useless. He had been outmaneuvered so badly that many of them experienced a misconception, and started to think that Master Stillwinter had actually been weak!

But misconceptions were just that: misconceptions.

Master Stillwinter hadn't been weak at all. It was just that he had been facing off against someone that was far, far too strong!

That said, though Master Stillwinter's defeat shocked all of them, there was a limit to that shock. There was no way that an event like this could leave them truly destabilized on a deep level. But what was destabilizing was that as the gray fog around Xu Qing faded away, they were able to glimpse the disappearing figure behind him!

That was obviously a source of deep shock, as they recognized that gray fog as coming from the Ninedawns Forbidden Lands. Though none of them recognized the figure, their bloodline contained an indescribably familiar resonance, as if... they were looking at their ultimate origin.

Even as that sensation took hold within them, Xu Qing slowly opened his eyes. At the same time, the mage mark on his forehead flickered, and the antemage figure behind him pulsed with an even stronger wild and ancient aura.

All of the cultivators trembled as they felt the urge to offer worship, coming from their blood, souls, and instincts. That included Fan Shishuang and Sir Heavenink.

The prostrating ghost chariots were all wailing and howling. The sound drifted out, filling heaven and earth with a sensation of grief that affected the emotions of everyone who could hear it. And that sensation was amplified by the sight of the figure in the sky. It was like wailing that came from their souls and blood.

Some of the cultivators dropped to their knees to kowtow. When Sir Heavenink did so, others followed his lead. Even Fan Shishuang felt an indescribable tug of emotion that caused him to bow his head and then kowtow reverently. The three ancient ghost chariots with Smoldering God fluctuations were no longer studying Xu Qing suspiciously. They bowed their heads.

Seeing that, Xu Qing understood why the legends claimed that a person would come from Ninedawns and would be worshiped by the Firemoon Darkheaven people. It was built into their blood.

Sadly, I'm only half-fused.

Xu Qing cast his senses into his fifth secret trove, the mage trove. There, in a land created by his own flesh, were ninety-five god monuments, currently being melted by lanterns of flesh and a gray fog. In midair in the mage trove were nine mountains. Previously, nothing had existed in the middle of those mountains, but now there was a colossal figure.

It was an image of half of an antemage. He floated cross-legged, pulsing with a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering aura. What was more, he clearly possessed life force, and was even doing breathing exercises. Every time he inhaled, the mage trove would shrink down. At the same time, the ninety-

five god monuments in the lands of flesh would emit streams of golden smoke that would float over to be inhaled.

They were nutrients that constantly bolstered the mage trove. Then the antemage would exhale, and the mage trove would tremble and expand. It became a cycle. With the god monuments and antemage present, the mage trove seemed almost like it was alive!

Xu Qing took it all in before focusing on the half-antemage. He felt anticipation. Eventually, he returned his attention to all the bowing figures. He stood. As he did, fluctuations of teleportation began to build up in the Mountain and Sea Region. It was an indication that the second round of the Great Hunt was going to end soon.

After a moment of reflection, Xu Qing shot over the horizon. When he was gone, the rainforest went back to normal. The ghost chariots ceased their howling and returned to whence they'd come.

The cultivators' faces were ashen. Hearts filled with astonishment and other complicated emotions, they left the area. They needed to take advantage of what time was left to get a mount.

The last to leave were Sir Heavenink and Fan Shishuang. They exchanged a glance, and then Sir Heavenink stuck his chin up, clasped his hands behind his back, and left.

Ultimately, Fan Shishuang was hovering in midair alone. *Ninedawns... out in the world.... This hasn't happened from ancient times until now....*

Fan Shishuang took a deep breath, suppressed the shock in his eyes, and left.

Time passed. There were two days left until the second round ended, and Xu Qing was currently in an unfamiliar area.

It was the Hillworm Jungle.

This was the spot where Xu Qing and the Captain had agreed to meet up.

Hovering in midair, Xu Qing looked at the dense jungle in front of him. He could sense the Captain's aura, but didn't see him anywhere. Finally he took out a jade slip and sent a message. He got no response.

I see signs of a fight....

After some thought, he entered the jungle. As he did, the plants bent to the side to make a path for him. Expression placid, he proceeded for a while before finally stopping and turning to look at a fruit tree.

The tree emanated a cold aura.

That's Eldest Brother's frigid energy.

Xu Qing walked up to the tree, reached out, and touched it. At the same time, he released both his Ninedawns aura and his divine sense.

Open your memories.

The memories of the plants and vegetation in the Hillworm Jungle became like threads that weaved together into a composite net. Gradually, images formed in Xu Qing's mind.

He saw the Captain fleeing as someone chased him. He also saw them fighting here in the Hillworm Jungle, both of them using a variety of techniques. In the end, the Captain fled off into the distance, leaving the Hillworm Jungle with the other cultivator in pursuit, pulsing with determination and a baleful aura.

Xu Qing opened his eyes calmly. He wasn't worried about the Captain.

Granted, Xu Qing already realized who was chasing the Captain. It was the chosen ranked first in the Firemoon echelon. Sir Firedark.

Except....

Eldest Brother was tangling with him for quite a while, but survived. There's no way he'll die. It looks like Sir Firedark hates Eldest Brother down to the depths of his bones. Eldest Brother must have really done a number on him.

Xu Qing did some calculations and came to the conclusion that this round of the Great Hunt was about to end.

Over the past few days, teleportation portals had been powering up all over the Mountain and Sea Region.

"No more than two days," he murmured.

Based on what he'd learned about the second round, once the teleportations began, all the participants would be sent back to God Mountain.

The Captain figured out how to get in here, so he surely has a way to teleport away. And that means he'll be leaving soon too.

Xu Qing felt better when thinking about it that way. That said, considering his close relationship with the Captain, it seemed best to spend the next two days looking for him.

Floating up into the air, he picked a direction and started moving. Whenever he lost track of the Captain's aura, he would send out divine sense and the Ninedawns aura to check the memories of the rainforest. Then he would adjust his path and start moving again.

Unfortunately, time was very limited. Even after searching for two days, he didn't actually find the Captain. Over the past two days, the teleportation fluctuations in the Mountain and Sea Region had become increasingly prevalent. At one point, Xu Qing even saw a Firemoon cultivator racing along in the distance, only to vanish via teleportation.

It's starting. At that point, he found a mountain where he settled down cross-legged to wait for teleportation. As time ticked by, the sound of rumbling filled the Mountain and Sea Region. It became deafening, like the enraged roar of a god.

Teleportation fluctuations filled the region like invisible waves.

The first to be taken away were the cultivators who hadn't acquired mounts. Next came those with weak mounts.

If one could stand in a position to observe the Mountain and Sea Region as a whole, it would be possible to see cultivators everywhere being caught up by the teleportation fluctuations. But there was one person who remained in place despite all of the teleportations.

Several hours later, when all of the other Great Hunt participants were gone, he was still there.

Frowning, Xu Qing looked up into the sky.

Rumbling filled heaven and earth. Because Xu Qing was the only person left in the region, the teleportation fluctuations all focused on his location. Up above him, they converged, creating a huge vortex that resembled a black hole. However, no matter how loudly it rumbled, it didn't affect him. It couldn't teleport him away.

It was a bit of a surprise.

If it can't take me away, then I guess I should take the initiative to enter!

Eyes narrowing, he stood and approached the vortex!

Chapter 875: Ninedawns Enters the World!

Heavenfire City was a holy city at the foot of God Mountain in the lands of the Firemoon Darkheaven people. It was made of three sub-cities that surrounded God Mountain, and at the moment, those cities were filled with rumbling sounds and golden light. From a distance, it was possible to see the light gathering at the peak of God Mountain, where it created a pillar that rose into the canopy of heaven.

Rumbling sounds could be heard as ripples spread in all directions in the sky. The golden light became increasingly dazzling, while at the same time, teleportation fluctuations grew stronger everywhere.

After noticing what was going on, people began to step outdoors in the three holy sub-cities and look into the sky. More and more people appeared, until there were no less than a million.

Most were Firemoons and their subsidiary species, all of whom were not participants in the Great Hunt. There were also elders and experts from various species. Many of them were associates of the participants who had gone into the Mountain and Sea Region, and were waiting for their return.

As the fluctuations coming off of God Mountain grew stronger, everyone looked up hoping to see people they knew returning on precious mounts.

"The second round is about to end."

"If nothing unexpected happens this time, we'll likely see Sir Firedark with a mount that can crush all others."

"Well, Master Stillwinter ranks second in the echelon. He probably got an extraordinary mount as well."

"I wonder if some dark horse came along this time. For instance, there's that human Xu Qing. I wonder how he did."

"Xu Qing? He might be a chosen, and he did take first place in round one. But that's only because none of our Firemoon chosen care about the first round. The second round is different. I bet Xu Qing either died, or at the very least, came to a true understanding of how inferior he is."

The buzz of conversation filled Heavenfire City. Clearly, no one was privy to details of what happened in the Mountain and Sea Region. After all, that region was isolated and sealed off. But the fact that no one knew what happened inside only led to deeper curiosity about the results.

About an hour later, the light from God Mountain was incredibly intense, and the rumbling had reached a peak level. Then, a heaven-rending, earth-crushing bang could be heard as a huge vortex opened in the sky. As the vortex spun, cultivators began to emerge.

The roughly one million observers in the city below all looked up with keen anticipation. Countless gazes locked onto the several thousand people who were slowly becoming visible. What they soon saw were people with ashen faces and varying expressions: some people were disappointed, some looked dumbstruck, and some were clearly just happy to be alive.

The one unifying aspect to all of them was that none had tamed a mount. They constituted the first wave of returnees.

“Based on how the rules usually work, the return teleportation begins with people who didn’t do well. After they’re all here, subsequent waves will contain those who took the lead.”

“It seems like there are quite a few people this time who actually failed....”

Those who had failed weren’t very important to the onlookers, so most people just glanced at them briefly.

As a result, nobody noticed that one of the people who had returned was a cultivator whose eyes glittered with blue light. He quickly masked that and made sure to plaster a disappointed expression onto his face. Once the teleportation was complete, he scattered with the others.

How come I didn’t hear any news about little Junior Brother in the Mountain and Sea Region?

Of course, he was none other than the Captain.

For the past few months, he had been fleeing for his life, and thus wasn’t very aware of the events that had played out. Upon looking around and determining that Xu Qing wasn’t present among those who had failed, he felt very pleased.

Little Junior Brother didn’t meet up with me, and he isn’t in the first wave of returnees. That means he must have done well. Well, that’s for the best. Without a point of comparison, it would be hard to highlight the superiority of the Eldest Brother.

The Captain sighed as he thought about what it was going to be like to present Xu Qing with some hillworm eggs. The shocked look on Xu Qing’s face would be amazing.

Ai. I really envy little Ah Qing. How did he get so lucky as to have an Eldest Brother like me to back him up? Logically speaking, he should be moved enough to hand all of Crimson Mother’s flesh back over to me.

The Captain licked his lips in anticipation, then casually took out a peach and started eating it. He had been thinking about Xu Qing’s portion of Crimson Mother’s flesh for a long time now. Normally speaking, it wouldn’t have been easy to come up with a reason to ask for the flesh back. But now he had a good opportunity.

Time passed.

As fluctuations continued to roll off God Mountain, more figures emerged from the vortex in the sky. Some of them chose to hide the mounts they had tamed, while others were happy to show them off. That led to quite a bit of discussion among the onlookers.

“Master Heavyspirit from the Cloudgobbler species actually tamed a mountain sparrow. That’s pretty impressive!”

“Look at Zhouxian from the Willspirit species. Given the shadowy figure floating around him, I guess he must have tamed some sort of grue.”

“Wait, something is off here. Why do all of these returnees have such strange expressions on their faces?”

As the discussions continued, people started to pick up on various clues.

Many of the returnees didn’t depart after the teleportation. They remained in place, looking back at the vortex with complicated expressions. It seemed as if they were waiting to confirm something.

The onlookers were surprised, and some considered asking what was going on. However, the teleportations weren’t over yet, so there was no way to send voice messages. That would have to wait until after things went back to normal. As people watched, more and more returnees appeared, and the mounts that were revealed became increasingly impressive.

Eventually, two very familiar faces appeared. They were Tuo Shishan and Fan Shishuang!

Their return attracted a lot of attention. Astonishingly, Tuo Shishan was riding a huge, ferocious ape that pulsed with black energy. Fan Shishuang looked pale, and his expression was impossible to read. He was also leading an enormous ape.

“Those are fiend apes! They rank just under ghost chariots!”

“A fiend ape is a suitable mount for Tuo Shishan. But why does Fan Shishuang also have a fiend ape?”

“Given how the two of them rank, I expected Fan Shishuang to have a ghost chariot as a mount....”

As the discussions raged, Tuo Shishan and Fan Shishuang exchanged a silent glance. Then, just like all the other returnees, they looked at the vortex.

Everyone was starting to wonder what was going on.

“It seems like everyone is looking at the vortex and waiting. But for what?”

The Captain’s heart was racing, and he was starting to get a bad feeling. Meanwhile, the vortex rumbled as a figure slowly emerged, growing clearer by the moment.

“Sir Heavenink!”

“The mount behind him... it’s....”

“A ghost chariot!”

Sir Heavenink looked calm as he emerged from the vortex. Then he moved to the side and looked back with a solemn expression. The fluctuations which came out of the vortex next were completely superior to those that accompanied Sir Heavenink.

Sir Firedark emerged, followed by a beast that seemed to have been born amongst flames and emanated a shocking might. This was something that ranked above ghost chariots. It was the number two beast! A hillworm!

Sir Firedark’s expression was very grim, and his eyes burned with killing intent as he scanned the crowd as if looking for something in particular.

The Captain blinked a few times, but was confident in his disguise. He just let Sir Firedark’s gaze sweep over him. And yet... he still had a very uneasy feeling, and it had only intensified with the return of Sir Firedark.

Little Junior Brother hasn’t come out yet.... Either he’s not coming out, or he’ll come out after the hillworm. That means....

As the Captain started to speculate about what it all meant, the crowd reacted to Sir Firedark’s hillworm.

“A hillworm!”

“Apparently all the other round two participants were waiting for Sir Firedark.”

“He has a hillworm, which means he’s taken first place in round one!”

“Hold on, why hasn’t Master Stillwinter come out?”

“Also, the teleportation isn’t over yet. Look everyone, the vortex is still spinning!”

“Something’s off here. Look at all the participants. With the exception of Sir Firedark, they’re all still looking at the vortex. They’re still waiting!”

Everyone in Heavenfire City was shocked by what they were seeing.

Up in the air, Sir Firedark had picked up on what was going on. Considering that everyone was looking at the vortex, he frowned and did the same.

Heaven-shaking, earth-shattering rumblings were coming out of the vortex, as if the vortex was struggling. It was as if some incomparably massive entity were approaching by means of the teleportation power, except that the teleportation was having difficulty accommodating it. Wisps of gray fog emerged, filled with a wild and ancient sensation. As they spread, they caused immense pressure to weigh down. All of a sudden, the hearts of all the Firemoon onlookers were struck with waves of shock as they realized their blood was fluctuating.

The top Firemoon experts looked especially serious, and some of them even flew up into the air to get a clearer read on the fog. Their expressions quickly became those of incredulity.

“Is that...?”

As everyone looked on, and as their bloodline fluctuations grew more intense, a figure emerged from the vortex. His long hair swayed around him as he emerged into the world. All of the tamed mounts threw their heads back and howled, then dropped down in worship.

Looking very excited, Sir Heavenink loudly said, "I, Sir Heavenink, offer respectful greetings to the future Grand Darkheaven of the Firemoon people as he returns triumphant from battle!"

With that, he bowed deeply at the waist.

The Captain's eyes widened, and he nearly dropped his peach as he stared at the familiar figure coming out of the vortex. As his emotions raged out of control, he thought, *The pretentious little jerk really knows how to put on a freaking show!*

Chapter 876: A God's Tacit Approval

Boundless fluctuations rolled through the sky above Heavenfire City and God Mountain. Bolts of lightning shot left and right, forming unusual supernatural phenomena. The intense rumbling left all the cultivators present feeling shocked. At the same time, the bloodline reactions of the Firemoon cultivators were getting more intense. All of them were visibly taken aback.

Although the subsidiary species didn't experience any reaction in their blood, when they saw what was happening with the Firemoon cultivators, they started to get even more surprised.

Up in the sky, Sir Heavenink wasn't the only one who was bowing. Next to him, Fan Shishuang did the same. As the figure emerged from the vortex, more than half of the round two participants instinctively bowed their heads. That included Tuo Shishan and all the other chosen. Sir Firedark's expression flickered as he looked at the vortex.

As for the Captain... he looked around and sighed inwardly as his heart filled with a prickling sensation, along with deep incredulity.

The cultivators in Heavenfire City were stunned. All of them now knew that the other participants were waiting for the person who was currently emerging from the vortex. As everyone watched, the vortex spun, and the figure inside strode out, becoming clearer and clearer. Gray fog was like a sea spreading out through the air and filling heaven and earth. There was something wild and ancient about it, and it even kicked up a massive wind. Because of the bloodline reaction of many of the onlookers, the gray fog echoed with a sound that resembled the howl of a god.

Soon, the Ninedawns skulls became visible around the emerging figure, surrounded by fog as they looked down at everything below. All Firemoon cultivators felt their blood reacting dramatically. It didn't matter the level of cultivation base involved. All cultivators of that species were unable to control the tug they felt from their blood.

There were some older Firemoon experts who saw the nine skulls and were so stunned their jaws nearly dropped. They couldn't prevent the shock from being visible in their eyes.

"Are those...?"

"This...."

The subsidiary species saw the nine skulls in the fog, and their expression flickered. Many had speculations about what they were seeing, but the one explanation that made sense seemed completely unbelievable.

Before they could do anything to confirm their speculations, the vortex rumbled loudly again. Fog poured out of it, spreading in all directions. The nine skulls emerged, becoming visible to all. There was an ox-dragon, jackal-dragon, phoenix-dragon, roaring-dragon, lion-dragon, turtle-dragon, tiger-dragon, graceful-dragon, and fish-dragon. Nine of them swirled around, emitted powerful roars.

Ninedawns, who had been confined for countless years of time, was now appearing in the world again! The antemage aura and the blood of the Darkheaven Archmages became an origin power that existed at the highest level.

All of a sudden, the souls of the Firemoon cultivators began to tremble, and their blood filled with a very intense sensation that made them want to bow down to the nine heads. The subsidiary species did not have any bloodline reaction like that, but their speculations were seemingly proved true.

The level of incredulity at play was monumental. The legends surrounding the Ninedawns Forbidden Lands, plus the sight of the Firemoon cultivators bowing, were so shocking that all of them chose to bow their heads. As of this moment, it didn't matter the level of cultivation base or the personal status or identity involved, everyone was bowing their heads.

That was also when the figure finally emerged from the vortex. As he appeared in the dome of heaven, those bowing to him finally saw who he was.

He had long hair flowing behind him like the River of Time. His eyes were like spirits in the starry sky, twinkling with countless heavenly bodies. His facial features existed at a higher level than all other life forms, and provoked shock as deep as the blood.

He was none other than Xu Qing!

The moment he appeared, the Ninedawns skulls' roars grew more intense, and they began swirling around him to form nine lanterns made of flesh! Xu Qing sensed the connection of a shared origin between himself and the nine heads. Instead of looking at everything below, he turned to look back at the vortex.

It had already begun fading away as he emerged. He could sense the Mountain and Sea Region on the other side of the vortex, and the numerous beasts there. An idea had just struck him.

If I'm out here, but I unleash the Ninedawns aura, I wonder if I can summon things from the Mountain and Sea Region.

If he did that in the lands of the Firemoon Darkheaven people, though, it could have severe ramifications. For now, he buried the thought.

As of now, no one was paying attention to anything other than Xu Qing and the nine lanterns floating around him.

Sir Firedark's mind was spinning, and he was breathing heavily. He didn't want to bow his head, but his blood was driving him to. Veins bulged out on his forehead as he resisted the urge, but in the end, he had no choice but to bow his head.

Silence reigned in heaven and earth, but inaudible rumbling filled the hearts and minds of the bowing cultivators. It wasn't just the cultivators in the area who were affected. As the Ninedawns aura spread, all Firemoon Darkheavens, regardless of where they were, felt their blood seething.

Meanwhile, as Xu Qing appeared outside of God Mountain, and everyone bowed to him, three shadowy objects appeared, pulsing with majestic energy.

They were three incomparably majestic tents! [1]

Each one was like an entire city.

The first pulsed with astonishing flames and contained the power of a sun. It was surrounded by a sea of fire, through which it was possible to see an enormous golden tent that was virtually a palace.

The second was surrounded by moonlight, and emanated frigid coldness. The moonlight around it was like a mysterious veil creating a shimmering barrier, through which was visible a tent that resembled a moon palace.

The third glittered with starlight, and was surrounded by a void that was like a starry sky. And at the end of that starry sky was a palace formed from starlight.

These three palatial tents corresponded to the three stewards of the Firemoon Darkheaven people, who were like emperors or kings that ranked only beneath their three gods. Among the Firemoon Darkheavens, their authority was supreme. They consisted of: Steward Heavencloud, who served High God Sunfire; Steward Silvercreek, who served High God Moonfire; and Steward Deepspirit, who served High God Starfire!

When they appeared, all of the Firemoon Darkheavens and the subsidiary species bowed even lower. Although they were only projections, the fact that the tents of all three stewards appeared at the same time was unusual. Normally speaking, they only came out for important ceremonies.

As the three majestic tents appeared in projected form, they descended in unison. At the same time, three terrifying gazes emerged from them and locked onto Xu Qing. They were clearly examining him critically.

Xu Qing, meanwhile, looked at God Mountain. He was aware that no one on the outside was aware of him acquiring Ninedawns. But the three gods certainly knew. However, from beginning to end, the three gods hadn't intervened at all, which was what led to him coming out of the vortex in the manner that he did.

Couple that with the situation in the cave underneath the Ninedawns Forbidden Lands, and it gave Xu Qing a fairly good idea of what was going on. The three gods tacitly approved of Ninedawns coming out into the world. In fact, it even seemed likely that they *wanted* someone to bring Ninedawns out...

Though he couldn't be sure of the reason, the arrival of these three majestic tents seemed to confirm his theory.

First to act was Steward Deepspirit, servant of High God Starfire. Starlight glittered around the tent as the gaze from within went from being critical to profound. Then, a calm voice echoed out.

“Ninedawns, as a sage of the Firemoon Darkheavens, I hereby bestow upon you a starglory robe of this tent!”

Out from Steward Deepspirit's illusory tent flew a long robe of starlight. It was exquisite as it floated out to appear in front of Xu Qing. It almost looked like a map of the starry sky, as it contained the glittering radiance of unending heavenly bodies. All cultivators below, be they

Firemoons or from subsidiary species, found this very meaningful. Starglory robes were profoundly significant on a symbolic level. Whoever wore such a robe had the right to seek an audience with Steward Deepspirit at any time. Throughout the history of the Firemoon Darkheaven people, few people had ever been given a starglory robe. Those who had were all extremely exceptional.

Xu Qing clasped hands and bowed. He knew his own limitations, and also knew how terrifying the Firemoon Darkheaven people could be. Therefore, he had no intention of acting arrogant because of Ninedawns.

After Steward Deepspirit, the next to speak was Steward Silvercreek, who served High God Moonfire. His voice was as cold as ice as he said, "You are bestowed with a silvercreek moon god medallion."

A gray identity medallion flew out from the tent, pulsing with moonlight and a mysterious will. It was actually a bone medallion, and the moment it appeared, the Captain's eyes went wide as he stood there in the crowd, and he struggled to control his breathing.

Xu Qing again clasped hands and bowed.

Next, fire pulsed around the tent of Steward Heavencloud, who served High God Sunfire. Streams of fire came out, converged, and turned into a shortsword. It emitted dazzling sword light as it floated over to Xu Qing.

Next, a stentorian voice erupted from within the tent. "You are bestowed with a heavencloud solarflame sword."

A robe. A medallion. A sword.

The symbolic significance couldn't be underestimated. And the fact that they had all been given at once defied description. There was no need to announce who had taken first place in round two. The appearance of Ninedawns and the actions of the three stewards said it all.

The projections of the three tents faded away into nothing.

At that point, the voice of a god echoed out from God Mountain.

"In seven days, the final round of the Great Hunt will begin."

As the voice echoed out, the vortex in the sky disappeared. The second round of the Great Hunt was now over.

In another area in Firemoon Darkheaven territory, high above the sky, illusory ripples spread out as a massive floating city appeared. Within the city were no less than 10,000 buildings, all of which glittered like stars. There were innumerable living beings in the city, which emanated terrifying fluctuations. In the case of some, their mere energy would be enough to cause all light to dim in heaven and earth.

In the middle of the stars was a huge tent made of starlight. It was the tent of Steward Deepspirit, who served High God Starfire. Inside the tent was a figure seated cross-legged, who was currently looking in the direction of God Mountain.

Ninedawns is finally out in the world. The three gods tacitly approve. This kid is tied to some major karma....

Chapter 877: Masterless God Domain

In Heavenfire City at the base of God Mountain, the god's voice faded away, and the vortex disappeared.

The Firemoon cultivators who had returned via teleportation seemed deeply thoughtful as they looked at Xu Qing. It was the same with the onlookers in the three sub-cities below. They were looking at Xu Qing with surprise and other complex emotions. This was different from Xu Qing becoming the champion of round one. This time, it wasn't as much of a provocation.

He had recovered Ninedawns and been given boons by the three stewards, which clearly demonstrated Xu Qing's qualifications. The bloodline fluctuations that everyone felt ensured that the Firemoons were able to overlook the fact that he was human.

As everyone looked on with mixed emotions, Xu Qing descended toward the city.

Seven days to rest and recover. Next, the Great Hunt will resume in a god domain. That's the main point of this event.

Xu Qing could sense the Captain, but given the situation, he didn't acknowledge him. Then, just as he was about to disappear into the city, a cold voice rang out behind him.

"Hold on a moment!"

The words were spoken like a command that couldn't be ignored. In fact, they stirred ripples as the natural and magical laws in the area were affected, and made the air suddenly seem to solidify. It was as if trying to move would provoke calamity from all directions.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed as he looked coldly over his shoulder.

The person who had spoken was Sir Firedark. Although the bloodline reaction made Sir Firedark feel slightly out of sorts, he couldn't suppress his frustration and rage, and thus, they became a powerful force that pushed away everything else.

As Xu Qing turned, their gazes locked.

It was only one look, but it caused the air between them to vibrate as if it might shatter. Natural and magical laws crumbled, turning into threads that conformed to Sir Firedark's will to surround Xu Qing.

The gray mist around Xu Qing seethed, pulsing with pressure as the Ninedawns skulls' eyes glowed with underworld light. Xu Qing looked at Sir Firedark with eyes narrowed; the sensation he was getting here surpassed that of Master Stillwinter by a lot.

Sir Firedark's eyes also narrowed as he realized that this definitely wasn't the person he was looking for. The person he sought could be described as 'crafty' and 'frigid,' while this Xu Qing was clearly an expert in the dao of slaughter. He looked away from Xu Qing and sent his icy divine will out over the other returnees.

"Nobody move!"

The returnees reacted with visible surprise. Sir Firedark had a very noble identity, and was considered the most important person among Firemoon Darkheavens of the current generation. Therefore, though his divine will didn't provoke bloodline fluctuations like Xu Qing, it was still powerful and threatening.

The only person to ignore him was Xu Qing, he turned back around and headed toward the city.

Sir Firedark ignored Xu Qing. His focus was currently on all the other returnees, as he was now certain that the god-damned, good-for-nothing cultivator he was seeking was hiding among them. Therefore, he started inspecting everyone one by one.

In the end, he didn't find anything. Short of slaughtering everyone, there didn't seem to be any way to find his quarry.... He was so irritated that he was almost inclined to do that, except it wasn't realistic.

Suppressing his killing intent, Sir Firedark spun and left.

The other returnees went their separate ways wondering exactly what was going on. Some reunited with family. Some returned to the encampments of their various species. Regardless, all of the cultivators who had returned from the Mountain and Sea Region started spreading the news about what happened there as it related to Xu Qing.

“Master Stillwinter... was killed by Xu Qing!”

The news spread like a tempest among the Firemoon Darkheaven people. And it provided a lot of food for thought for many of the old-timers.

Xu Qing wasn't paying attention to any of that. As he made his way toward his residence, he started reviewing everything he knew about the next round of the Great Hunt.

The three gods will tear open a god domain and allow the participants to enter. There, we will hunt godly entities.... On the surface, it seems like it's meant to be training for the Firemoon cultivators. But after what happened in the Mountain and Sea Region, and learning the truth about their history.... I wonder what the real reason is that the three gods will tear open a god domain?

All of a sudden, he stopped walking and looked over his shoulder.

Someone was racing after him at top speed. It was none other than Sir Heavenink, who stopped a few meters away from him.

“Congratulations, Fellow Daoist Xu! You'll almost certainly become the Grand Darkheaven soon!” Sir Heavenink looked both pious and fervent, and after he was finished speaking, he bowed formally to Xu Qing.

“What do you want?” Xu Qing said, ignoring what Sir Heavenink had just said.

Sir Heavenink blinked a few times but wasn't put off by Xu Qing's coldness. That was especially true when he thought about everything he witnessed Xu Qing do back in the Mountain and Sea Region. Given all that, Sir Heavenink was determined to make friends with him.

Therefore, he quickly continued, “Brother Xu, the third round of our Firemoon Darkheavens' Great Hunt involves hunting in a god domain. I know you have a lot of connections as well as plenty of

resources, so you probably know some of the details. But I noticed how that blowhard Sir Firedark was being so rude, and I'm worried he might try to harm you in the god domain, Brother Xu....

"Therefore, I was thinking that you might benefit from some of the information I got about the god domain. Maybe it will help you deal with whatever despicable plans Sir Firedark is hatching."

An odd expression could be seen on Xu Qing's face. What stuck out to him most about Sir Heavenink was that he always had new ways to describe other people. Bastard. Sissy. Brutal beast. Joker. And now he used the words 'despicable' and 'blowhard.'

"Go on," Xu Qing said, continuing to walk.

Seeing that Xu Qing was willing to listen, Sir Heavenink lit up and hurried after him. Lowering his voice he continued, "Brother Xu, forget what you hear other people say. The truth is that from ancient times until now, us Firemoon Darkheavens have only opened up god domains three times.

"Every single time, it was the same god domain. The difference is that the opening was ripped in different spots. Because god domains are so huge, outsiders have no idea of the truth, and they think that each one was a different god domain."

Xu Qing's pupils constricted. "It's the same god domain each time?"

Xu Qing was definitely surprised. This was an important piece of information, and it wasn't anything he could have predicted.

"And that means that the god domain this time around will almost certainly be the same one," Sir Heavenink continued in a hushed tone. "There's no way of telling where the opening will be. But regardless, based on records of past events, the living beings inside can be categorized into different levels." Sir Heavenink took out a jade slip. "This contains details about what they look like and their levels. It's very comprehensive.

"By the way, the reason things went so smoothly in the past is that there's one very important feature about this place. And that is... there's no god in charge!"

Xu Qing stopped in place.

"Normally speaking, god domains have a god in charge. But not this one! My clan analyzed the situation thoroughly and came to the conclusion that this particular feature is why the Great Hunt is always held there. Furthermore... there are probably other reasons for everything. Secret reasons."

Sir Heavenink glanced at God Mountain, then looked back at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing nodded. He understood what Sir Heavenink was getting at.

“It’s not possible for us to dig up any details beyond that. But I can tell you that the next round is going to be very dangerous, but at the same time, will bring astonishing benefits. All of the living beings inside the god domain are treasures. Their souls can be refined into heavenly daos, or be used to nourish either flesh or cultivation base.

“There’s also a big downside. Killing living beings in a god domain will cause you to be marked by a curse. The more you kill, and the higher the level of what you kill, the deeper the curse mark will go. But... because there’s no god in charge, even a deep curse won’t matter much. What’s more, the way they determine who takes first place is how deep the curse marks go.”

Xu Qing nodded. Although he hadn’t specifically experienced what it was like to be cursed because of killing living beings in a god domain, he had dealt with things like that. For instance, years ago in the event at the Supreme Beginning Netherflight Pillar in Emperor-Receiving Prefecture, when he encountered the essence of Crimson Mother for the first time, he had acquired a mark like that. And that mark came because the Ghost Emperor killed a living being from a god domain.

“Anything else?” Xu Qing asked.

Sir Heavenink excitedly went on to explain everything else he knew.

And thus, by the time the two of them arrived at his residence, Xu Qing had quite a thorough understanding of what was to come.

Sir Heavenink took a few steps back, clasped hands, and bowed. “Brother Xu Qing, I hope that you achieve a decisive victory in the god domain. Once you become the champion, you’ll be named Grand Darkheaven!

“Also, Big Bro Xu, please stay on guard against the other degenerate participants. There are a lot of villains with malicious goals, for instance, that stupid cunt Sir Firedark. And if you have anything you need me to do, just say the word. Sir Heavenink will do what needs to be done!”

Sir Heavenink cupped hands again and then hurried off.

Xu Qing watched him go, all while thinking about the wealth of information he had just obtained. Then he stepped inside.

The first thing he noticed was a familiar figure silhouetted against the window.

Xu Qing blinked a few times as he realized that the Captain was about to launch into a performance. Sitting down, Xu Qing took out an apple, started eating, and waited for the show to begin. He didn’t have to wait long before an ancient, desolate, and emotional sigh drifted out into the room.

“Little Junior Brother, you know... your Eldest Brother had it really rough this time around.... I—”

Before the Captain could finish speaking, Xu Qing took out the bone medallion he had received from the Moonfire steward. He tossed it over.

“I get it. Take that, Eldest Brother.”

The Captain spun and caught it. He seemed a bit embarrassed as he looked at Xu Qing, and ultimately decided not to launch into the tragic tale he had been about to tell. But then he remembered his status as the Eldest Brother. Putting a mysterious look onto his face, he lowered his voice and said, “Little Ah Qing, your Eldest Brother won’t take things from you willy-nilly. Allow me to tell you a very, very interesting secret regarding Sir Firedark.”

Chapter 878: Little Swallow in Lace

Xu Qing looked at the Captain. Earlier when he had arrived, he’d sensed that the Captain was lurking around. Then Sir Firedark searched the returnees with killing intent bubbling. And then there were the clues he’d personally uncovered in Hillworm Jungle in the Mountain and Sea Region.

All of it seemed to be pointing in one direction. His Eldest Brother definitely got into some heated conflict with Sir Firedark. And the one who came out on the short end of the stick was the latter....

It didn’t matter that Sir Firedark’s cultivation base was equivalent to the Smoldering God level, or that he had a terrifying reputation. Xu Qing knew that the Captain could deal with any challenge. What was more, Xu Qing didn’t care about learning Sir Firedark’s secrets. However, he could see how excited the Captain was to share this news, so he decided to play along. He nodded.

“What secret?”

The Captain’s eyes lit up and he licked his lips. Squatting down in front of Xu Qing, he instinctively looked left and right to check the surroundings before lowering his voice and saying, “Little Junior Brother, get this. Sir Firedark is a real gem!”

Xu Qing wasn’t sure what that meant. It was his first time hearing his Eldest Brother use the word ‘gem’ to describe someone. Coupled with the way the Captain was licking his lips... it certainly created a thought-provoking image.

Seeing Xu Qing’s reaction made the Captain even more excited to share his secrets. He chuckled, making him look even more sleazy than normal.

“You listen to me, little Ah Qing. Based on experiences from my past lives, I realized that this fellow Sir Firedark could be considered as valuable as a jewel to cultivators with certain proclivities. This person can either attack or defend, can advance or retreat freely, is capable of myriad transformations, and is impossible to defend against.” [1]

The Captain smacked his lips as if he were about to start drooling with desire.

Xu Qing was both surprised and confused to see such a look on the Captain’s face. The reality was that although Xu Qing had experienced a lot in life, when all was said and done, there were some areas of life in which he was very naive. That was why, in response to the Captain’s words, he found himself thinking about Sir Firedark and trying to remember the details of his aura or other special characteristics.

When the Captain saw that Xu Qing was confused, he blinked a few times. As he realized that this conversation was a lot of fun, he suddenly felt a bit more arrogant than before. Moments like this were when his little Junior Brother revealed how pure and simplistic he was. As the Eldest Brother, it wasn't right to let his little Junior Brother go around with such a weakness. Claspings Xu Qing's shoulder, he began to speak in the sincere and earnest tone of an older person teaching a lesson.

"You haven't seen enough in life, little Junior Brother. Ah, whatever. I guess I should just spell it out directly. Sir Firedark...." The Captain paused dramatically. "Can be a man *or* a woman! It's fantastic!"

The Captain licked his lips again.

His words slammed into Xu Qing's ears like a lightning bolt and caused his eyes to widen. Although there were too many weird and unusual things in Revered Ancient to count, the ability to change one's gender at will was not something commonly seen. But what was really shocking was the wording that the Captain was using in his descriptions.

Everything in the conversation up to this point was causing Xu Qing to start connecting various dots. After a moment of hesitation, he asked, "Eldest Brother, how... how did you find out about this?"

The Captain stuck his chin up and assumed a derisive posture. "Little Swallow just *doesn't understand the height of the heavens or the depths of the earth*, and had the audacious gall to steal my hillworm from right in front of me! Then, after sensing my presence, he told me to screw off! His expression and wording were like the picture of arrogance."

The Captain snorted coldly.

"So, after hearing his demand, I went and screwed off. However, the more I thought about what happened, the angrier I got. So, as he was working on getting the hillworm under control, I used all the godly law medallions I'd created to summon that hillworm's entire family. I'm talking dad, mom, grandpa, grandma, et cetera. [2]

"And what happened...? Heh heh. Let's just say Little Swallow got into a real bad situation. His cultivation base and battle prowess might be extraordinary, comparable to a Smoldering God even, but not even that will help much upon being surrounded by hillworms. Now, do you want to guess what I saw then?" The Captain rubbed his hands excitedly, and before Xu Qing could respond, continued, "At a very critical moment, he used a very terrifying divine ability. In fact, maybe it's beyond a divine ability and is actually a god magic! So, yeah, it's a terrifying god magic! Maybe even the *reprimand* of a god!"

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed.

The more the Captain went on with his story, the more his eyebrows danced up and down. "This magic has a side effect that, from Little Swallow's perspective, isn't really a side effect at all. Long story short, after you use that magic, for a short time period, your gender changes!

“Believe you me, little Ah Qing, I personally saw it happen every time he used it. He would turn into a woman, then a man, then a woman, and then a man again! So fun, right?”

The Captain’s enthusiasm caused a strange expression to appear on Xu Qing’s face.

By this point, the Captain wasn’t paying attention to Xu Qing. He was completely wrapped up in his excitement as he continued, “What’s more, every time he uses it and his gender changes, a pearl will form alongside him. As it orbits around him, it absorbs the aura of transformation and allows him to switch back. With one glance, I could tell that it was his personal life essence pearl. Obviously, it’s very important to him.

“Now, as you know, your Eldest Brother is a very kind and generous person, willing to help others and completely selfless in thought and action. And I really dislike seeing other people unhappy.

“Therefore, how could I possibly tolerate seeing him go through the pain of that transformation? After all, switching from man to woman involves changing even your meridians and blood vessels, let alone the physical external changes. As you can imagine, it’s very painful.

“Therefore... I took advantage of a moment when he had turned into a woman to simply take that pearl away from him.... That way, he can’t change back! It solves the problem entirely!”

The Captain extended his hand to reveal a red pearl floating above his palm. Although it emanated dazzling light, there was a shimmering blue shield covering it and preventing any fluctuations from escaping.

“What do you think?” The Captain looked at Xu Qing, clearly very pleased with himself. “The point is that you can’t be fooled by Little Swallow’s physical appearance. That girl is still on the inside. And she... won’t be changing back. In fact, because of that, when we parted ways I made sure to leave her one of Nethersprite’s lace bodices.”

Stunned, Xu Qing stared at the Captain. Then he thought about the fury and killing intent with which Sir Firedark had been searching through the returnees. Now he understood what was going on.

“No wonder...” Xu Qing sighed.

The Captain laughed heartily. Closing his hand around the pearl, he stood and stretched. The trip to the Mountain and Sea Region had been amazing, and he had benefited wildly. That said, thinking about how Xu Qing fared with Ninedawns made him hesitate. In fact, he couldn’t suppress his curiosity and asked Xu Qing for some details.

Xu Qing obliged.

As the Captain listened to the story, his eyes widened. In the end, he stamped his foot angrily.

“Little Swallow held me back! I should have been part of that whole thing! I really lost out!!”

Xu Qing didn't respond.

The Captain sighed, squatted back down, and started thinking. After a short time, he apparently figured out a way to comfort himself internally, because his eyes lit up.

“I might have missed out on a destined opportunity,” he murmured, “but what happened still confirmed a theory of mine. And given what we have to do next, that's going to be a big help!”

The Captain looked at Xu Qing, his eyes bright and full of expression, primarily craziness.

“Little Junior Brother, when this god domain gets opened up, I was planning to do something big, except I was only about ten percent confident in succeeding. But now, after what you just told me, I'm a lot more confident!

“This time, your Eldest Brother is going to take you... on a *super* big job so amazing it'll surpass anything we've ever done before!!”

Xu Qing immediately went on guard. Whenever the words ‘a big job’ came up, he knew he had to start paying close attention to the Captain's wording. After all, when the Captain talked about such things, they often involved toeing the line with death.

And the level of craziness of such jobs always seemed to increase. Thinking back, it all started with Joine's flesh. Then came the Seazombie ancestral statues, the Nethersprite clothing heist, the heavenly dao son incident, the Greenhair Badlands and the Imperial Sovereign, and finally, slaughtering Crimson Mother. Each event just got more and more dramatic. What was especially notable was that the Captain used the word ‘super.’

Xu Qing's level of vigilance couldn't be any higher. Looking at the Captain, he sighed. “Eldest Brother, we're... not going to do anything suicidal, are we...?”

The Captain smiled mysteriously. “Don't worry at all. I've been planning this thing for a very, very long time. And now that you've confirmed my theory, we're going to be completely and utterly safe.”

The Captain thumped himself on the chest confidently.

Hearing the Captain speak in such a way caused Xu Qing's hair to stand on end. His mind was spinning as he came to realize that the Captain was obviously planning something unprecedentedly terrifying.

He was about to say something when the Captain zipped out of the room, leaving behind only a few words echoing in his absence.

“Calm down, little Junior Brother. I'm going out to make some plans for the big job.”

Xu Qing remained behind in the residence. After some thought, his eyes began to shine with determination. Based on what he knew of the Captain, he got the feeling that the best thing to focus

on after entering the god domain was to search for heavenly daos and sealing marks. He was absolutely, positively not going to join the Captain in his next job.

Xu Qing had come to the conclusion that his hobbies did not include the practice of risking his life for fun. Having reached the conclusion that this was definitely the best idea, he took a deep breath, and closed his eyes to meditate. His mage trove needed more work to get him in peak fighting condition, and thus, he needed to speed up the absorption of the ninety-five god monuments.

In that manner, time passed. Six days.

It was morning, and there was only an incense stick's worth of time before the god domain was opened for the next round of the Great Hunt. Just as Xu Qing was getting ready to leave, the Captain returned.

Before Xu Qing could even open his mouth, the Captain took out a bottle. Then, a swishing sound could be heard as the Captain crumbled into a host of blue worms that entered the bottle.

“Put me in your bag of holding, little Junior Brother! It's time to get going!”

At the same time, shocking fluctuations rolled out from God Mountain with mountain-toppling, sea-draining force. Three terrifying streams of divine will had already covered the entire region. The aura of gods was present everywhere. Any life force who was under the level of a god began to tremble as a cold voice filled heaven and earth.

“The god domain will be opened. Participants, present yourselves.”

Xu Qing put the bottle into his bag of holding, then left the residence. When he appeared in midair, he looked at the distant God Mountain and saw astonishing figures.

Sunfire. Moonfire. Starfire.

Three gods had emerged!

Chapter 879: An Original God Domain

The auras of Sunfire, Moonfire, and Starfire spread from God Mountain, unleashing such dramatic force that it seemed as if the canopy of heaven might not be able to sustain it. It seemed like it was going to cave in. All three were visible as illusory projections.

In the middle was High God Sunfire, apparently clad in a golden robe. It was hard to determine if High God Sunfire was male or female. At first glance, shē seemed female, but at the same time, had male features. Behind hēr was a rising sun that emanated intense heat and godly might.

On the right was High God Moonfire, clad in a silver gown with a flowing skirt that spread out to cover the dome of heaven. Hēr face was so attractive it seemed to contain all the beauty in the world. The mere sight would leave one feeling stunned. However, hēr expression was as cold as a mountain of ice. Shē had one hand in front of her chest posed in an incantation gesture, while a moon hung behind hēr, casting out cold, holy moonlight.

On the left was High God Starfire. Shē was not majestic like Sunfire or flawlessly beautiful like Moonfire. Shē looked like nothing more than an ordinary clay fox. But any who looked at hēr would feel their hearts starting to pound. Heat would spread through them, filling their bodies and

affecting their hearts and minds. Behind hēr was a glittering star, whose light spread out to form a sea of starlight.

Three gods had come out.

All cultivators who flew into the open in the holy city bowed their heads. It didn't matter their status or the level of their cultivation base. They all looked pious as they dropped to their knees and kowtowed.

Further off in the distance was the projection of the three stewards' tents. And even the stewards emerged and bowed their heads to the gods.

Xu Qing hovered in the air outside his residence, looking around, his heart pounding. As of this moment, he could see the difference between humans and Firemoon Darkheavens. The Firemoon Darkheavens were a species controlled by gods. In front of their gods, all living beings were like slaves! Xu Qing frowned slightly. He was not a Firemoon Darkheaven, but he was in their lands, and thus he bowed.

Eventually, everything went still and quiet. The three gods on God Mountain looked around. When they looked at Xu Qing, different expressions could be seen. Sunfire was apathetic. Moonfire's expression was complex. And Starfire smiled.

Next, the sun behind High God Sunfire shone with radiant light that caused the color of gold to fill the dome of heaven. It was godfire. As it burned, the sky started to melt away layer by layer. Eventually, a void was revealed. And after enough layers were gone, a black hole could be seen. The burning continued.

Thanks to the godfire, the black hole collapsed, and a new black hole formed. It happened again and again in a cycle. During the process, the lands quaked, and the angry howls of heavenly daos could be heard, as if they wanted to stop what was happening but were powerless to do so.

In the end, a golden vortex could be seen spinning in the void. Within that vortex was a blurry membrane, beyond which it was just barely possible to make out another world.

The moment the golden vortex appeared, High God Moonfire's hand lifted, and moonlight swept out to make a huge river that flowed right toward the vortex. Soon, different howls from other heavenly daos echoed out from within the vortex, as if they also wanted to stop what was happening. Moonfire snorted coldly, and all of a sudden, some of the aura of Crimson Mother appeared on hēr...

Xu Qing shivered. Next, the power of Moonfire entered the membrane, which transformed, becoming clearer and clearer to reveal the world beyond. What was visible appeared to be a pure white world...

Before anyone could study it closely, the clay fox laughed. Starlight erupted, transforming into two enormous clay hands that reached into the vortex, grabbed the transparent membrane, and ripped it open!

A heaven-rending, earth-crushing ripping sound echoed out, causing the minds of all cultivators to vibrate. The effects of the ripping spread, until, from the perspective of the people on the ground, the opening filled half the sky.

It was like a wound. An aroma of rot and decay spread out, along with an ancient aura. It seemed completely foreign. It, along with strong mutagen, emerged from the vortex along with howling and roaring. At the same time, the opening grew large enough that it was possible to see some of the details of the world beyond.

Xu Qing looked up, a thousand thoughts running through his mind thanks to what he was seeing.

The world beyond the opening actually seemed familiar to him. Inside of the opening was an unfamiliar starry sky. And within the countless glittering stars was an enormous mass of... spider webs!! The webs were shocking and ghastly, and were filled with innumerable planets. Every single web strand was about one tenth the width of any of the planets.

This was the god domain that the Firemoon Darkheaven people were opening for the Great Hunt.

A god domain with no god in charge. It's been explored three times in the past. An original god domain....

Sir Heavenink's words echoed in Xu Qing's mind. Combined with the information from the jade slip, an obvious explanation occurred to Xu Qing.

This is the god domain of the spider god from the cave in the Ninedawns Forbidden Lands!!

Xu Qing's eyes glittered as he came to this understanding.

Everything fit together. Something happened to the spider god, and it ended up being suppressed by the three other gods. As a result, its god domain came to be masterless. Now it made sense why the three gods wanted the place explored.

As Xu Qing reeled inwardly, another godly voice echoed through the dome of heaven.

“Let the children hunt!”

The word provoked a gravitational force, which spread from the opening in the rift. Guided by the three gods, it became tens of thousands of threads that shot toward the cultivators who had passed the second round.

All of those cultivators, Xu Qing included, were pulled up into the sky, moving faster and faster until they were beams of light that shot into the opening. They entered the void that contained the god domain, and they entered an unfamiliar starry sky!

Compared to the massive god domain, a few tens of thousands of cultivators were like nothing. What was more, the danger was going to be immense.

As they were pulled into that starry sky, one of the participants shivered, screamed, and then exploded. Blood and flesh sprayed everywhere. The bits then exploded, until that cultivator was thoroughly destroyed in body and soul. He had been killed by a black tentacle that had appeared in the nearby void.

Whoever that tentacle touched would end up either injured or dead. At the end of the tentacle, Xu Qing spotted a 3,000-meter decomposing fish. It was covered with a host of tentacles, some of which hung limp and some of which swept this way and that. It was a very grisly sight. The fish emanated an aroma of decay, plus terrifying fluctuations that struck fear into the hearts of the Firemoon cultivators. However, they quickly suppressed that fear. Clearly, they had come prepared. After all, they were going into a god domain!

When the gruish fish appeared, everyone reacted quickly. They scattered, all while speeding in the direction of the god domain full of spider webs.

Xu Qing personally witnessed some chosen from subsidiary species get hit by the tentacles and killed. That caused his pupils to constrict. This fish was something he had read about in the jade slip from Sir Heavenink.

“A god domain void spirit that looks like a rotting fish, with tentacles that can exterminate life. It will eat anything and everything. Strangely, its size varies depending on who is looking at it! Some people look at it and see something 300,000 meters in size. To other people, it’s only 3,000 meters. There are large numbers of these void spirits. They have undying bodies, so that if you kill them, they’ll be resurrected soon after.”

Without any hesitation, Xu Qing accelerated, leaving that area and speeding through the starry sky while remaining fully on guard. Along the way, he saw several of the tentacled fish, and was very careful to avoid them.

As he neared the spider webs, they got bigger and bigger. He passed a few areas full of planets that, based on his senses, were full of death. They were dead planets. They emitted no fluctuations of life force, and were simply ruins full of endless spider webs. Meanwhile, the spider webs got so enormous that the strands were like white roads going through the starry sky. Compared to the spider webs, Xu Qing was like a mote of dust.

What was more, Xu Qing spotted numerous enormous objects wrapped in spider silk, dotting the spider webs. Inside were skeletons that must have been dead for countless years.

A sense of danger was starting to build up in Xu Qing. After some testing, he found that the spider webs were terrifyingly sticky. If he threw something onto them, they would become permanently stuck. After that, silk would start to spread out and cover them.

Now Xu Qing realized where all those skeletons came from.

I definitely cannot touch the spider webs!

Xu Qing’s eyes narrowed as he carefully flew through this gruish god domain and reviewed all of the information he had in the hopes of coming up with something that would help him in the moment. He also took out the bottle with the Captain in it.

All of a sudden, his expression flickered, and he shot backward by about 30 meters. Soul threads whipped out, millions of them, which instantly turned into his fourth-level god state.

Meanwhile, a shadowy form swept right past the spot where he had been a moment ago. It moved so fast it shattered the void. After pouncing in vain, though, it shot back to one of the enormous spider webs.

That was where its appearance became clear. It was a spider! It was some 300 meters in size, with a speckled golden body and the head of an old man. The head’s eyes were open, and the pupils were crimson as they stared coldly at Xu Qing. As for its mouth, it was filled with sharp, pointed teeth.

The sight of this creature reminded Xu Qing of the spider god in the Ninedawns Forbidden Lands. They... looked very similar with the exception of the head. That said, this spider had none of the majestic pressure of the spider god.

While Xu Qing studied it, it also studied him. Gradually, its eyes turned even redder, and then it howled and lunged toward him.

Chapter 880: Eyes of Annihilation

The spider moved so quickly that it was a blur.

In his god state, Xu Qing's battle prowess was equivalent to fourth-stage Void Returning. He hadn't even tapped into the blessing of Ninedawns yet, and yet his current state was incredibly formidable. However, the spider's speed caused his pupils to constrict. He knew that this spider was only one of the many living things in this god domain that were listed in Sir Heavenink's jade slip. However, these spiders were fairly common. And in terms of ranking how terrifying they were, there were many that far surpassed this type of spider. The fact that this spider was so fast, and yet was so common, went to show how astonishing the god domain was.

Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing shot backward by 300 meters to avoid the attack of the spider. He waved his right hand, and the golden crow appeared. It surged with black flames as it turned into a black spear, which Xu Qing hurled out in front of him. The black spear streaked through the air, and the spider lurched to a halt as the spear pierced through it.

The spider didn't try to dodge out of the way. The spear passed through it, and in grisly fashion, it didn't create any wound. In fact, it didn't seem to have any effect at all. It was as if the spider could ignore all magical techniques and divine abilities.

The spider burst into motion again, closing in on Xu Qing with a piercing shriek that could shake the soul.

Xu Qing frowned and thought back to the description of this type of spider from Sir Heavenink's information.

"The spider spirits are a type of guard that roam the fringes of the god domain. They can occasionally be encountered alone, but usually stay in groups. They have strong levels of godliness and are very fast. They're impervious to all manner of physical attack. Their attacks can only be vanquished with divine abilities."

Xu Qing's eyes glittered as he realized that the information from the jade slip wasn't entirely correct. His black spear was the manifestation of a divine ability, and the damage it inflicted wasn't from fleshly body power. Yet it was still ineffective. Either the information was wrong, or things had changed in this god domain.

As those thoughts went through Xu Qing's head, the spider closed in again. Xu Qing clenched a hand into a fist and launched a blow, but the spider ignored it. Appearing right in front of him, it spat a mass of white spider silk out of its mouth. It quickly swept out to surround Xu Qing.

His eyes glittered coldly; since neither magical techniques nor fleshly body power seemed effective, he needed to try something else to resolve the situation. Instead of dodging, he became a bright beam of light that shot forward.

Moving with astonishing speed, he blasted through the mass of spider web, arriving right in front of the 300-meter spider. However, he didn't launch an attack. He just kept going.

Rumbling sounds echoed out as he shot into the spider's body. Although it didn't actually hurt the spider, now that he was inside, his killing intent burned as he sent a host of soul threads out. In the blink of an eye, millions of soul threads swept away from his god state, filling the spider and instantly erupting with a soul-devouring ability.

This was Xu Qing's idea for how to kill the spider. Given that his soul threads were made from godsource, it actually worked quite well.

The spider could ignore cultivator techniques, but it couldn't ignore godly might. The 300-meter spider shivered and then let loose a shriek of agony. Its body visibly withered, shrinking down faster and faster until it collapsed in drifting ash.

Xu Qing appeared, his expression quizzical. The moment he was out in the open, another shadowy form shot toward him. It was a second spider! There were more shadowy blurs in the distance, accompanied by shrieking sounds. There were more than a dozen spiders there, all racing toward Xu Qing. Seeing that, Xu Qing's quizzical expression grew more prominent.

He was thinking back to what Sir Heavenink said, that the living beings in god domains were said to be treasures. After absorbing the spider just now, he gained more than a hundred thousand additional soul threads.

That level of increase surpassed anything he could have predicted. Most importantly, Xu Qing had sensed something like heavenly dao fluctuations on the spider. Though these spiders weren't heavenly daos, if they were ensorcelled, they could turn into heavenly daos.

I currently have something like 5,000,000 soul threads. All the slaughter and devouring earlier on the outside increased my limit. And this place... seems perfectly suitable to keep that trend going.

He licked his lips as he looked at the spiders closing in on him. Then he blurred, sending out a mass of soul threads to form a tempestuous vortex around him. Storm winds raged as the spiders bore down on him, shrieking the entire time. They entered the tempest.

There were a total of seventeen of them. Once they were inside the vortex, their screams echoed out. In fact, one of the spiders managed to break free and tried to escape. It acted too late. The soul thread count increased, reaching the level of more than 6,000,000. As a result, the vortex expanded, becoming like a gaping maw that devoured the fleeing spider.

Sometime later, the more than 6,000,000 blood-red soul threads shrank back down and turned into Xu Qing again. He waited around for a time, but no more spiders appeared. Sighing regretfully, he took out the bottle with the Captain in it and opened it.

A blue worm flew out and started wriggling dramatically, turning first into what looked like a half-melted wax person, but eventually turning into the Captain. If anyone had been present to observe, they would find the scene grisly to the extreme. But Xu Qing was used to it.

When the Captain opened his eyes and looked around, his eyes lit up and he started laughing uproariously.

"I finally got in here!! Little Ah Qing, we are now very, very close to our goal! Hahaha! Also, what a risk! Back when Sunfire looked at you, that not-male, not-female old fart, she very nearly noticed me. Luckily, I prepared very well, and had myself completely sealed from the beginning." The Captain seemed to be getting more and more

excited as he continued looking around. "This place is an original god domain without any master! Let's go, little Ah Qing. Follow me!"

With that, the Captain started moving in a specific direction, as if he was familiar with this place already.

Xu Qing sighed. Based on how comfortable the Captain looked, it seemed likely he had been here in a past life. Presumably, the big job he wanted to pull off was something he had failed at in the past. Now he wanted to get the job done.

Xu Qing shook his head. Sometimes he really couldn't understand why the Captain was so fond of risking his life. It was almost like he worked hard in every life to toe the line with death. Apparently, he wouldn't rest until he was able to put his life on the line.

With such thoughts on his mind, Xu Qing made sure to keep his guard up, and reminded himself that he definitely was *not* going to participate in the Captain's big job. With that, he hurried after the Captain.

As they sped along, the Captain decided the route. As he led Xu Qing into the god domain, they passed through gaps in the spider webs.

Seven days passed. During that time, countless participants in the Great Hunt spread out into different parts of the god domain. Some hunted living beings, others turned out to be the hunted. If you could look down from a very high vantage point, and could take in all of the tens of thousands of cultivators, you would find that... people were dying constantly.

The majestic god domain had lots of living beings in it. Every single one was outrageous and extremely gruish. That said, the cultivators who were participating in the Great Hunt were all confident for varying reasons, and simply had to find a balance between self-preservation and hunting. Of course, there was also mutagen to deal with. It was incredibly strong, to the point where there wasn't any spirit energy present.

To species other than the Firemoons, that could be fatal. But the Firemoon Darkheavens were a species consecrated to specific gods, and they had a natural resistance to mutagen.

Unfortunately, the god domain also had all sorts of terrifying entities that, if you encountered them, would reduce your chances of survival significantly. For example, there was that tentacled fish at the very outset. Another example were the dead planets that the spider webs had grown over.

Some of those dead planets would tremble as if having been struck with earthquakes. And then, the lands would part... to reveal that the planets had huge eyes in them. The eyes were white, and wherever their gazes landed, spider webs would proliferate. And whenever they blinked, all living beings and grues in the spot where they had been looking would be wiped out of existence.

"They call those the eyes of annihilation," the Captain explained. "The living beings in god domains are affected by the gods, and thus experience all sorts of mutations. Even the planets are no exception. In one of my lives, I tried to graft one of them onto my forehead. Sadly, it didn't work."

The Captain sighed.

As Xu Qing and the Captain proceeded along, one of the dead planets trembled, and then the eye opened. As it looked around, it seemed to notice something, and then swiveled to look at Xu Qing and the Captain.

The moment that happened, the Captain took out some sort of invisible object and pressed it into Xu Qing's hands.

Xu Qing didn't resist. He soon sensed an invisible sealing mark on his hand, which caused the gigantic eye to lose focus and look in a different direction.

Xu Qing looked down at his hand.

"Remember the Wordless Book of Stone? Heh heh. Trust me, little Ah Qing, I really prepared well this time around!" [1]

The Captain lifted his hand and waved it in front of Xu Qing.

Xu Qing nodded as he thought back to the time the Captain had carried out an undercover mission to get that book.

"The Wordless words can be used to conceal yourself with invisibility. That way, terrifying entities like the one from just now won't notice you. Let's go. Things should go smoothly from here on out. Our first goal is just up ahead."

The Captain excitedly flew ahead. Xu Qing shook his head and followed.

A few days passed in which they passed through a lot of spider webs. That was when Xu Qing caught sight of a very unique area.

It was a vast red sea. The sea water appeared to be frozen, and it went on forever. There were enormous shells sticking out of the water, some 30,000 meters tall. Some of them were open, revealing the enormous heads of beasts that resembled eagles.

The Captain pointed out. "We're here, little Ah Qing. This is the site of our first goal."