

Timescape 881

Chapter 881: A Pearl in an Old Oyster

The vast red sea seemed to go on without end. Because it was frozen, there were no waves to be seen. It seemed to be floating in the middle of the starry sky in between the spider webs. If you could take the scene and shrink it down, the red sea would actually look like a drop of blood within the spider webs.

Within that blood drop of a sea, there were hundreds of huge bivalve shells, and they would open and close randomly. When they opened, it was possible to see huge eagles that would stretch out from inside and explore the surroundings. Apparently, the shells were part of the eagles' bodies. The eagles had scarlet feathers, and their eyes were closed as if they were sleeping. They emanated gruish auras, and even looking at them from a distance would make one feel uneasy down to the soul. They were like enormous deities in the middle of growing.

The view gave Xu Qing an even deeper understanding of god domains. As he and the Captain had traveled, he had seen and sensed things that surpassed anything he had understood before. Most of them defied logic. Whether it was the tentacled fish floating through the void, or the enormous eyes of annihilation, or the spiders that could ignore magical techniques, they were all incomparably gruish.

“See that, little Ah Qing? Those shells are amazing things!” The Captain stood next to Xu Qing, looking excitedly at the shells as he explained. “Look closely, and you can see the fleshy parts inside the shells. Check this out: that flesh contains god pearls!

“Such pearls might not be useful to most people. But to us it's the opposite. Those thingies are going to be the foundation of the next step of the big job! Now, you know how kindhearted I am, and how I just can't stand to see others suffer. Do you see how, when those shells open up, they look like they're in pain? It's obviously because of the pearls!”

The Captain licked his lips as he eyed some of the pearls. “Ai. It's time for us to do a good deed and help them! We need to get those pearls out of there so the shells can have a bit of comfort!”

Xu Qing looked at the shells and then the red-colored sea. There was something terrifying about that sea, and it imparted a sensation of dangerous crisis. He could tell that this was a potentially deadly place. Ignoring the Captain's introduction, he stayed firm to his original decision to refrain from participating. Turning, he prepared to leave.

Seeing that, the Captain suddenly got very anxious.

“Don't go, little Junior Brother!” he said. “I have a way to safely get the pearls! You've already seen how well-prepared I am.”

The Captain quickly took out a rope.

“I'm going to tie one end of this rope around myself. You'll hold the other end. Then, you just find one of the open shells and throw me into it. After I dig out the pearl, I'll

give you a signal, and you yank me back out. Simple! Given how fast I work, as long as you help out, we're guaranteed to succeed!"

Xu Qing hesitated as he looked at the rope. Something about it seemed familiar. At first it just looked like an ordinary rope, but if you looked closely, you would see complicated designs on its surface. Xu Qing sighed inwardly as he realized what it was.

The Captain grinned. "Recognize it? Hahaha! See how hard I've worked getting ready for this? Now, give me a hand, okay?"

The rope was made from his skin. Similar to what he had done in the Moonrite Region, the Captain had sliced his own skin off and used it to make a rope. Given that level of commitment, Xu Qing felt bad about refusing. Giving the Captain a deep look, he finally nodded.

The Captain was thrilled at Xu Qing's agreement. With that, he discussed more of the details. He had really thought things out thoroughly. After making a few adjustments to the plan, Xu Qing gritted his teeth, tied the rope around the Captain, and then hurled him out over the red sea.

Before long, the Captain spotted an opened shell with an eagle inside. As the eagle leaned out of the shell, the Captain donned a special pair of gloves and shouted, "That one right there!"

Without the slightest hesitation, Xu Qing snapped the rope out in the direction of that specific shell.

The Captain was sent flying down in a blue streak of light, moving at astonishing speed to shoot right into the opened shell.

Maybe it was the Captain's ample preparations, or maybe it was the invisibility provided by the Wordless Book of Stone, but either way, the Captain flew right past the eagle without attracting any attention.

As the Captain landed on the fleshy part inside the shell, his eyes glittered with blue light. Without any hesitation, he reached out with his gloved hands and started digging through the flesh. The special characteristics of the gloves ensured that the flesh actually moved away from them, and thus, the pearl was quickly revealed. The Captain excitedly wrapped his arms around the pearl, which was roughly as big as he was. Then he pulled forcefully.

At the same time, Xu Qing yanked on the rope as hard as he could. As a result, the Captain burst out of the shell.

Once back at Xu Qing's side, the Captain laughed heartily. "What do you think, little Ah Qing? Didn't I say that success was guaranteed?"

Xu Qing was slightly suspicious. It did seem to be going as smoothly as the Captain had said, with no dangerous developments. But considering how things usually went, Xu Qing still kept his guard up.

The Captain shook his head and sighed. "You need to trust me, little Junior Brother. Alright, let's keep going."

With that, the Captain pointed at another opened shell.

For the time it takes an incense stick to burn, Xu Qing helped the Captain collect pearls from over a dozen shells. Each and every attempt led to success. There were no failures. There was even one instance in which the Captain got two pearls from one shell, and still made it back safely.

“I’m starting to get a bit tired. Come, little Ah Qing. It’s your turn. You give it a try.”

“Nope,” Xu Qing said.

The Captain’s eyebrows shot up. “Little Ah Qing, you’re really not helping much here. Since when did you become such a scaredy-cat? Ah, whatever. I’ll do it. We need to have a total of about a hundred of these pearls.”

The Captain stuck his chin up disdainfully and indicated for Xu Qing to throw him out again.

Xu Qing wasn’t moved by the Captain’s words. He had already made his decision to not get too involved. Therefore, just as before, he tossed the Captain out.

On this particular occasion... it took a while for something unexpected to happen. But it happened. As the Captain entered the shell, and before he could dig out the pearl, the eagle suddenly opened its eyes, and snapped its sharp beak down onto the rope. The rope snapped. The Captain’s expression flickered dramatically, and he tried to back up. He was too late.

The shell snapped shut. A boom rang out as it sealed tightly. The sea was quiet. There were no fluctuations.

Xu Qing just hovered in midair looking out. He sighed. He’d known all along something like this would happen. He looked at the shell where the Captain was trapped. Then he looked at all the other shells the Captain had visited up to this point. All were closed. Obviously, some time needed to pass before the shells opened again.

I can’t just sit around waiting.

Xu Qing sighed and entered his fourth-level god state. The soul threads swept out around him and the Ninedawns skulls started rotating around him. Just to be safe, he tapped into his mage trove and summoned half of the projection of an antemage. At that point, he headed out over the red sea.

The red sea vibrated, and the shells started rocking back and forth. Godly might seemed to build up, covering the area and causing a sensation of crisis to build.

Xu Qing wasn’t in the mood to think things through very thoroughly, so he just tapped into all his strength to grab the shell that had swallowed the Captain.

Rumbling sounds echoed out from the shell as Xu Qing struggled. In the end, he managed to open a small crack. It was small, but it was enough to see inside.

“Eldest Brother!” he shouted. Something blurred out of the shell.

At that point, Xu Qing couldn’t hold it open any longer. He lunged backward, and the shell slammed shut loudly. Xu Qing reined in his aura, and the godly might that had been converging in the area faded away.

The Captain was in bad shape. He was dripping wet and had patches of rotting flesh all over him, some of which reached down to the bone. That included his face. Apparently, if Xu Qing hadn’t opened the shell as quickly as he had, the Captain would have been completely digested. There was even a pearly layer of shell that had started to build up on him....

Xu Qing looked the Captain up and down but didn’t say anything.

“Ahem. What just happened *wasn't* unexpected, little Junior Brother. That kind of thing happens all the time!” Although the Captain was actually very embarrassed, he would never admit it openly. “I did it on purpose, actually. See this stuff covering me? It’s the same stuff that makes the pearls. It’ll be very useful later.”

“Oh.” Xu Qing nodded, glanced one more time at the Captain’s sorry state, and held back from berating him.

Sadly, the look in Xu Qing’s eyes made the Captain feel like he had lost a lot of the dignity of an Eldest Brother. He looked furiously at the shell that had swallowed him, his eyes slowly filling with a crazy look.

“Little Junior Brother, let me borrow that Dawning Sun of yours!”

Xu Qing was about to refuse when the Captain blinked a few times.

“Rest at ease. I’m not going to detonate it. That ancient sun of yours has one of my own treasures in it, and I need to extract it. All you have to do is hand it over.”

Xu Qing sighed. Although he wasn’t convinced the Captain was being completely forthcoming, he took out his ancient sun and handed it to the Captain. Then he backed up by about 3,000 meters. Even then, he didn’t feel completely safe, so he backed up to 9,000 meters.

The Captain wasn’t very pleased to see Xu Qing backing up so far.

“What happened to the trust between us?” he murmured with a cold snort as he gripped the Dawning Sun. By this point, all of his emotions had combined into pure craziness.

Just as Xu Qing had suspected, the Captain didn’t extract anything from the Dawning Sun, as there was nothing inside that he had left behind.

Glaring at that one specific shell, the Captain squeezed the Dawning Sun with his hand, bringing it to life!

Intense heat erupted from the Dawning Sun, as well as a terrifying aura and fluctuations that spread out to fill the entire red sea. The surrounding void started to distort and ripple; the heat of the Dawning Sun seemed like it could scorch anything and everything.

Speaking in a crazed voice that echoed out in all directions, the Captain said, “Alright, bitch. Usually I’m the one who goes around biting things. This is the first time I’ve run into something that bit me! And that’s why I’m going to boil you up, fool!”

Off in the distance, Xu Qing’s expression darkened, and he backed up even further....

Chapter 882: Gobsmacked Old Grandpa

The only thing Xu Qing could do in response to the Captain’s crazy behavior was sigh. None of it was a surprise. When his Eldest Brother asked for that Dawning Sun, it explained everything. Xu Qing knew that he couldn’t stop the Captain from acting suicidal, and that the best reaction was to just back away.

On the frozen red sea, the Captain's eyes and facial expression were both masks of craziness. He was the one who went around biting things. But then this shell bit him! It left him feeling like he had lost a lot of face in front of his little Junior Brother.

Glaring down at the shell, the Captain laughed loudly. "It's time for you to learn, fool, that you can't just go around biting anything you please!"

The Dawning Sun continued to power up, emitting astonishing heat waves that rolled out in all directions. The shells were starting to glow red, and ripples were now visible on the surface of the water. That terrifying heat was rapidly spreading out across the entire sea.

Despite being several thousand meters away, even Xu Qing could feel the intensity of the heat.

That said, though the Captain was acting crazy, he didn't actually want to end things in mutual destruction with the shell. Or perhaps it was that the shell just wasn't very ferocious. Either way, the Captain was still thinking straight enough to just let out some of the heat from the Dawning Sun. He didn't truly detonate it.

It really highlighted how familiar the Captain was with Dawning Suns. Originally, this sun started out as an ancient sun that the Captain fished out of a river. Of course, the Dawning Suns were also the domain treasures of humankind. And considering that Xu Qing had put some of Crimson Mother's flesh into this one, it obviously surpassed ordinary Dawning Suns. Because of that, even just the mere heat it could radiate was astonishing, even inside of a god domain.

Ripples were now visible everywhere as the frozen sea turned into an actual sea. As for the shells... they were all bright red, and the eagles inside of them were trembling. The heat of the dawn light, and the mutagen, were so strong that the entire world in the area was changing.

Laughing madly, the Captain shot down to the shell that had bitten him, jumped inside, and quickly dug out the pearl inside.

Then, he took advantage of the fact that the other shells were all open due to the heat. Moving at top speed, he raced from one to the next, digging out pearls.

"You trashy shells!" he said loudly. "You couldn't just let me have the pearls, could you? Oh no. You just had to force my hand. Well, if you refuse to do things the easy way, we'll do them the hard way!"

"Back in the day, I froze you and took the pearls as I wished. I had you locked down so tightly you couldn't fart! Well, my cultivation base isn't the same as it was back then, but I still have ways of dealing with you. This time, I can't freeze you, so I'll boil you!"

The Captain felt wonderful. Looking over at Xu Qing, who was still carefully backing away, he called, "Little Junior Brother! Don't be such a scaredy-cat! Come, come! Help me grab a pearl or two!"

Xu Qing was 15,000 meters away, and he wasn't stopping. He didn't even look over his shoulder.

The Captain shook his head. *Clearly, little Ah Qing needs some toughening up*

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Humming a little tune, the Captain continued taking out pearls until he had more than a hundred....

Meanwhile, the water was bubbling with more and more intensity as the heat increased. From a distance, the previously frozen sea now looked like a pot of boiling water. The shells were bright red, and the huge eagles inside of them had been stimulated to the point of opening their eyes. Their eyes glowed black, and they let loose piercing cries. For thousands of such shells to all be issuing such howls created a deafening sound wave that could end the heavens and crush the earth.

Soon, the struggles of the eagles reached a peak level. The shells were rocking back and forth violently. Some of them even moved their bivalve shells like wings, and flew up into the air. Sprays of water shot up like geysers. The sea was mutating!

Stunned, the Captain looked at the shaking shells.

“They can actually fly?”

Based on what he remembered, this frozen red sea had never done anything like this, and the shell eagles definitely hadn’t ever flown.

As the Captain looked on in shock, the sea churned. Countless shells flew up into the air. In fact, all of them were flying. At the same time, the water erupted. Sea water shot up into the air!

The cries of the huge eagles were both excited, angry, and murderous. And they were all glaring at the Captain. And then they started racing toward him.

Up to this point, none of this was too much to deal with. The Captain’s eyes glowed with cold light.

“Who are you trying to scare?”

Snorting coldly, he was about to launch an attack when, all of a sudden, something happened that made even him gasp....

The entire sea was floating up, revealing that at the bottom of it was a mass of tentacles....

The Captain looked on, stunned. Instinctively putting the Dawning Sun away, he turned and raced madly in Xu Qing’s direction.

Off in the distance, Xu Qing could sense the terrifying fluctuations behind him, and eventually couldn’t help but stop and turn around.

What he saw floating up into the air wasn’t sea water. Rather, it was an absolutely gargantuan red jellyfish! The massive jellyfish had just been resting there, with the huge sea being nothing but its head. Now it had been woken up, and had floated up into the air. Compared to it, the Captain was like nothing more than a mote of dust.

The mere sight of the terrifying jellyfish caused Xu Qing’s scalp to go numb. Turning back around, he fled at top speed. The Captain was behind him, moaning and groaning as he tried to catch up.

“Little Junior Brother...” he cried. Xu Qing didn’t respond, but he reached back with his right hand and lent some power to the Captain. As a result, the Captain achieved a burst of speed that put more distance between himself and the huge jellyfish and its tentacles.

Gasping for breath, the Captain then threw out the rope of flesh. Xu Qing grabbed it and yanked it, pulling the Captain a bit closer.

“This was just a slight mishap, little Junior Brother...” The Captain said as he caught up. Xu Qing just kept going.

They were now being chased by several thousand eagles as well as a floating jellyfish. Angry howls echoed out; from the sound of it, they wouldn't rest until the object of their animosity was dead.

Thankfully, the spider webs were still around, and the jellyfish was gargantuan. It couldn't pass through the spider webs without having to worry about being stuck, and that slowed it down a lot. This also served to highlight how terrifying the jellyfish was, as some of the strands of spider web snapped due to its passage. Some of them ended up tossed aside by the jellyfish's tentacles.

Xu Qing was reeling from the sight of it

Even the Captain was scared witless. “This sea was never like this in any of my past lives! It's-it's-it's... it's actually a gigantic jellyfish??”

Xu Qing wasn't in the mood to reply. Gritting his teeth, he kept fleeing.

In that manner, time passed.

A few days later, another person could be seen fleeing through the sky of the god domain just like the Captain and Xu Qing. He was none other than Tuo Shishan. His hair was disheveled, and he looked to be in pretty bad shape. He was being chased by two tentacled fish who were hot on his tail.

Why am I so unlucky?

Tuo Shishan felt like he was running out of options, and was starting to get anxious. After entering the god domain, things had gone smoothly at first. But the more time that passed, the less smoothly they went. He had even had to deal with eyes of annihilation. If he hadn't paid the price of putting the old grandpa inside of him to sleep, the eyes of annihilation would have killed him.[1]

He had assumed his misfortune had passed after that incident, but had somehow ended up running into these two tentacled fish. And now the old grandpa was asleep.... Tuo Shishan sighed. Unless he had no other options, he didn't want to force the old grandpa to wake up. It would be too hard on the old man.

It's fine. I have other options. These tentacled fish will go away once they catch prey....

He started looking around for someone to transfer his calamity to. After searching hard for about two hours, the bedraggled Tuo Shishan saw two figures racing along in the distance.

Xu Qing? But who's that other guy? Another human?

Tuo Shishan's eyes lit up. For a short time, he wrestled with whether or not to cause trouble for Xu Qing. In the end, he gritted his teeth and reminded himself of the two common sayings: *better you than me*, *fellow daoist* and *all great men are ruthless*. [2]

Oh, Xu Qing. We're not really friends, and thus, our meeting here... is just bad luck for you!

Without any hesitation, he tapped into all the strength he could muster to shoot rapidly toward Xu Qing, with the two tentacled fish right behind him.

Xu Qing and the Captain were in rough shape. For several days straight, they had been pursued relentlessly by the giant jellyfish. Even when they tried to lead the chase through areas heavily congested with spider webs, the jellyfish never seemed to slow down. Apparently, the effects of the Wordless words didn't apply to the jellyfish.

"It's not that the invisibility stopped working," the Captain explained. "It's just that karma is bound too tightly. If we can just get far enough away from it for a few hours, then we should be able to sever the karma threads."

Xu Qing nodded. Around then, they happened to spot Tuo Shishan flying toward them with two tentacled fish behind him.

Xu Qing's eyebrows shot up.

At the same time, a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering roar echoed out from behind Xu Qing and the Captain as the jellyfish snapped through spider webs to chase after them.

Whether because of its size or its momentum, the jellyfish shook everything in the area.

Tuo Shishan had been focusing on Xu Qing as he attempted to get the tentacled fish to switch targets. But then he looked up. He immediately caught sight of the terrifying jellyfish and the host of shell eagles.

One look was all it took to cause sweat to break out on his forehead. The two tentacled fish stopped in place, shivered, then spun and fled in the opposite directions. In the blink of an eye, they were gone....

As Tuo Shishan hovered there with his heart pounding, Xu Qing and the Captain got closer. They had clearly seen the two fish chasing him, which then fled.

A sense of deadly crisis exploded within Tuo Shishan. Without any hesitation, he proudly called out, "Fellow Daoist Xu Qing, I'm here to lend a helping hand!"

As the words left his mouth, he prodded the old grandpa inside of him, then waved his hand. Glittering light shone out as a projection of the old grandpa appeared. Looking confused, he flew straight toward the jellyfish.

Chapter 883: Ancestral Emperor's Tomb

Tuo Shishan reacted with lightning decisiveness. He knew full well that, given the level of his cultivation base, he wasn't anywhere near a match for Xu Qing in close quarters fighting. After all, though he hadn't personally witnessed the death of Master Stillwinter, he had heard firsthand accounts and knew all the details. So he knew that if he didn't make it immediately obvious that he wanted to help, he might never have a chance to do so.

And then there was the shifty-eyed fellow next to Xu Qing, who was obviously a scoundrel through and through. Now that Tuo Shishan thought about it, he realized that the sleazy-looking fellow had

been with Xu Qing during their initial clash outside of the city. Any person who hung around with Xu Qing was obviously not going to be a weakling. All of that led him to the conclusion that he would be lucky to live through a conflict with these two.

Then there was the fact that these two had somehow provoked something as terrifying as this jellyfish. That... wasn't something easy to do. It wasn't as if just anybody could get a reaction from an entity like that, and then end up being chased relentlessly.

Because of all these factors, Tuo Shishan didn't hesitate to wake up the old grandpa and throw him toward the jellyfish. That was enough to show his attitude.

The old grandpa shivered in the midst of his confusion. When he laid eyes on the huge red jellyfish, he shivered from head to toe.

That little brat... However, there wasn't time for anything else, so he unleashed his Smoldering God power in a blow toward the giant jellyfish.

Rumbling sounds filled heaven and earth. The majestic jellyfish shivered slightly, but then just powered through the attack and kept coming.

This thing is like a miniature god! The old grandpa steeled himself and launched another attack.

Behind him, the Captain and Xu Qing had somewhat odd expressions on their faces as a result of Tuo Shishan suddenly showing up and helping. And they could see how strong that old grandpa was.... Given how things had developed, it wasn't proper for them to take action against Tuo Shishan.

"Many thanks!" Xu Qing said with a nod, and then shot right past Tuo Shishan.

Tuo Shishan was also fleeing in the same direction, although he clearly wasn't as fast as Xu Qing. All he could do was force a smile onto his face and say, "We're bros, right? No problem!"

The Captain looked surprised to hear such words. He also shot a nod in Tuo Shishan's direction, then sped after Xu Qing. And thus, the two of them vanished over the horizon.

Tuo Shishan was also fleeing for his life, but he wasn't quite as fast. Meanwhile, the old grandpa was letting loose pained exclamations as he used a variety of methods to try to buy time.

Slowly but surely, Tuo Shishan managed to put some distance between himself and the jellyfish. When he was far enough away, he finally breathed a sigh of relief. Knowing that he was safe for the moment, he thought about the plight of the old grandpa and felt bitterness in his heart.

How did things end up like this?

In a different direction, Xu Qing and the Captain, despite having finally shaken the giant jellyfish, weren't slowing down at all. They kept going for several more hours. Then the Captain waved his hand to sever the karma threads connecting them to the jellyfish.

Afterwards, they felt much more relieved. However, they kept flying for a few more days until all lingering traces of fear left them. The danger from the jellyfish was finally over.

At the moment, they were resting atop a magical mushroom some several dozen meters tall.[1]

Squatting there, the Captain exhaled softly. When thinking back to everything that had played out, he couldn't help but sigh. "See? Didn't I say earlier that that crappy Tuo Shishan is a good guy?"

The Captain reached down, dug out some of the flesh of the magical mushroom, and swallowed it down. “Have some. This type of mushroom is one of the only safe things to eat in this god domain.”

Xu Qing took a deep breath and looked at the horizon. Only after confirming that there really wasn't any karma connecting him to the jellyfish did he start to calm down. He looked at the Captain.

The Captain smiled wryly. “A mishap. It was really just a little mishap.”

The Captain dug out some more mushroom flesh and tossed it to Xu Qing.

Though Xu Qing had long grown used to the Captain's crazy behavior, he still needed more time to regain his composure. Taking the mushroom flesh, he unhesitatingly swallowed it down. Though the mushroom flesh looked dark and unappetizing, it was actually very sweet, and even provided some nourishment to the soul.

“What do you think, little Junior Brother? See, I was being serious! This mushroom is pretty good. Believe me, there used to be a lot of magical mushrooms like this around here. After I figured out how to make use of them—”

“There were a lot fewer,” Xu Qing interjected bluntly.

The Captain chuckled. He was quite an expert in calming Xu Qing down, so he ignored his surly tone. Throwing his arm over Xu Qing's shoulders, he proudly said, “Little Ah Qing, nobody understands me like you do. You're right. I ate about seventy to eighty percent of the magical mushrooms around here. They're really that amazing. And I guess they just don't grow back, which is why you don't see many of them now. Let's keep eating. When we're done, I'm going to take you to see another amazing treasure.”

The Captain took another bite.

And thus, the two of them ate mushroom flesh for about two hours.... By that point, the gigantic mushroom was gone. They had eaten the entire thing. The Captain ate less than Xu Qing, and as a result, Xu Qing's mood was improving.

Eating that much of the mushroom flesh provided a direct boost to the strength of Xu Qing's soul. In fact, it was about a forty percent boost, resulting in an even more clear understanding of the limitations of his cultivation base. Because he lacked heavenly daos, his progress had slowed. However, the boost to his soul did help him to improve his connection to his five secret troves. What was more than clear was that his troves were empty, with the exception of the god state trove and the mage trove.

My first god trove has the bluegreen dragon, and the mage trove doesn't need a heavenly dao because... the antemage inside basically is a heavenly dao! In other words, I'm currently lacking three heavenly daos. [2]

Having spent time in this god domain, he knew that the tentacled fish could serve as heavenly daos... and so could that huge jellyfish.

Unfortunately, those two specific types would be too powerful for him to control.

The spiders would work, and maybe even those shell eagles. Except they're too weak. Furthermore, one of the most important things to consider is my Emperor's Sword secret trove....

As Xu Qing pondered such things, the Captain blinked a few times and then smiled.

“Thinking about heavenly daos?” he asked as he lay on the ground, rubbing his belly and burping occasionally. “The amazing treasure I’m going to show you next can help you get heavenly daos. So don’t put too much thought into it, little Junior Brother. The heavenly daos are just waiting for you!”

The Captain stood and pointed off into the distance.

The fact that the Captain had twice mentioned an ‘amazing treasure’ caused Xu Qing’s vigilance to skyrocket. He looked off in the direction the Captain was pointing.

The spider webs there were denser than in other places, and it was just barely possible to see a planet in their depths. It was wrapped up in countless spiderwebs, making it seem defeated. In addition, Xu Qing could see some plants that were new to him.

They were actually withered trees that were growing on the spiderwebs, and on their dried up trunks were faces with their eyes closed as if sleeping. As they got closer, more and more such trees became visible.

“That’s where your big job is going to take place?” Xu Qing asked coolly. He had already firmly decided that he wouldn’t be going in that direction. He would find somewhere else to get some heavenly daos.

“Little Junior Brother, I’m afraid I need to correct you. *I’m* not going on a big job. *We* are.” Seeing the determined look in Xu Qing’s eyes, the Captain cleared his throat and blinked a few times. “Little Junior Brother, I’ve looked at your god troves before, and... for secret troves like that, you need a heavenly dao that’ll cooperate!

“That said, in the final analysis, getting a heavenly dao for a god trove won’t be hard. What’s going to be hard is your Emperor’s Sword secret trove! There’s no heavenly dao that can qualify to enter a secret trove like that!”

The Captain’s expression was very serious as he looked at Xu Qing. “That’s why I need to take you to check out this treasure I mentioned. You can see it already. It’s that planet!” He once again pointed off into the distance. “You know what’s inside that planet? An emperor’s tomb!”

Xu Qing’s eyes narrowed. He had been thinking about the Emperor’s Sword secret trove, and had essentially come to the same conclusion as the Captain. Heavenly daos suitable for the Emperor’s Sword secret trove were anything but common.

Noticing Xu Qing’s thoughtful look caused the Captain to brighten up. “Based on the research I did, this god domain didn’t always look like this. This place actually used to be an entire world similar to the Revered Ancient mainland. Granted, it’s not a land mass like Revered Ancient, but if you take a bunch of planets and put them together, it’s almost the same thing.

“In the past, this place used to have cultivators, civilizations, and countless species. But one day the spider god came along, devoured everything, and changed it into a

god domain. All the living things here became grues, losing their intelligence and transforming into godly entities.”

The Captain’s face was a mask of reminiscence. “As for our Revered Ancient mainland, its personhood exists on a much higher level. But in the future... it’s most likely doomed to become like this place.

“And that’s because the broken face of the god is far more terrifying than the spider god! Also, the tomb inside that planet is that of the ancestral emperor of this planetary system. In terms of his identity and status, well, just imagine him as being like Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity! They’re essentially the same.

“And that tomb definitely has something with the requisite personhood to serve as the heavenly dao for your Emperor’s Sword secret trove! I’m telling the truth, little Junior Brother. If you can’t find a suitable heavenly dao in there, then *you* can be the Eldest Brother from now on!”

The Captain didn’t avert his eyes. His tone was decisive. In order to get Xu Qing to join him, he was willing to throw caution to the wind.

Xu Qing was visibly moved. He knew his Eldest Brother, and was thus aware of the vicious nature of the promise he had just made. He looked at the planet wrapped up in countless spider webs, and a crazy look appeared in his eyes. A few breaths worth of time passed, and he burst into motion.

The Captain licked his lips and raced after him excitedly.

A moment later, the two of them were whizzing through the spiderwebs.

Chapter 884: A Statue Worshiping a Moon

From their perspective, the spider webs just kept getting bigger and bigger. At the same time, the trees became easier to see.

As the Captain zipped among the spider webs, he said, “Slow down, little Junior Brother. The faced trees are actually the ancestral emperor’s bodyguards, who were transformed by mutagen invasion. They’re asleep, but they still have extraordinary battle prowess. What’s really surprising is that if you wake them up, they’ll release a chant that can shatter the soul. And their chanting can also bring terrifying entities with it.”

Xu Qing nodded. He had been able to sense the gruish nature of the faced trees even from a distance.

The faces were all middle-aged, and there were no women, only men. They seemed human, but the color of their skin was unusual. What was more, they had slits behind their ears that resembled fish gills. Their eyes were closed, but their expressions were distorted, and they seemed to pulse with both mutagen and rancorous energy. All in all, their expressions were those of defiance.

“People are like bugs compared to the gods. They fought back, but sadly....” The Captain sighed as they passed among the trees, being careful not to touch any of them.

After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, their invisibility as provided by the Wordless words enabled them to slip past the terrifying trees unnoticed. They passed through layer after layer of spider webs, almost like mosquitoes as they got closer to what was in the middle.

Soon, the huge planet loomed just ahead. It was gray, and was covered with all sorts of rifts and crevices. It also pulsed with an aura of death, and had swirling vortexes on its surface, which were storms. What was more, there were roughly sixteen irregularly shaped craters visible on it. Each one was terrifying to behold.

When Xu Qing spotted the craters, the sensation they imparted caused him to think back to the spider god he'd seen in the shrine in the Ninedawns Forbidden Lands. That god had sixteen legs, which was a perfect match for the number of craters: sixteen.

All of a sudden, Xu Qing could see something in his mind; the terrifying and gargantuan spider god made a home on this gray-colored planet, with sixteen legs plunged into the lands of the planet. That was how the sixteen craters formed.

Looking at the planet, the Captain said, "Based on what I found out back in the day, this was the main habitat of the master of this god domain. But then that master left and never came back, which was when this place started devolving into ruin.

"Things in this spot are not as dangerous as elsewhere. But in the end, we're still in a god domain, and this is the core of the place, so we can't let our guard down. Of course, the more that's the case, the better the rewards are going to be!"

Despite the crazy look in his eyes, the Captain didn't forget to offer a quick reminder to Xu Qing. "This is where we'll find a heavenly dao suitable for your Emperor's Sword secret trove! Let's keep moving, little Junior Brother!"

The Captain flew onward.

Eyes gleaming with determination, Xu Qing followed. Since he had already made his decision, there was no need for hesitation.

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Eventually, they stepped onto the planet. The ground was gray and the sky was black, although the storm clouds made everything dim and blurry. The deafening storms blew here constantly. This really seemed like a danger zone.

The biggest storm Xu Qing had seen in his life up to this point had been in the Greenhair Badlands in the Moonrite Region. But having stepped onto this planet and entered the storms that covered it, he could see that the two couldn't compare. These storms were vastly bigger than the one in the Greenhair Badlands! It was as if the storms were the only thing here, scouring the lands and making it difficult for Xu Qing and the Captain to make progress as they traveled.

They were no ordinary storms. They contained the aura of a god, as well as astoundingly high personhood. They also contained the lingering remnants of imperial energy and god magic. It was easy to imagine what kind of heaven-shaking, earth-shattering battle had been fought here.

Thankfully, Xu Qing had his god states. By tapping into godsource, he could make his way through the storm winds. The Captain had obviously been here before, and considering all the secrets he

kept, it was no wonder that he was also able to force his way through the storms. It actually seemed like he was following a specific path.

Time passed. Seven days later they had forced their way through the storms, getting closer and closer to their destination. The two of them were really starting to feel the strain of fighting against the wind.

What really struck fear into the heart of Xu Qing was that the storms seemed to carry with them the sound of a beating heart. It was as if... there was something alive in the middle of them.

Xu Qing looked at the Captain. The Captain shook his head and said nothing.

It was around the time the sixth storm spread out around them that the Captain led Xu Qing to a big crevice in the ground.

After climbing down inside, it was no surprise to Xu Qing that they found a cave. It was impossible to say how long ago it had been carved out there, but the craftsmanship was superb, and it provided a great hiding spot to stay safe from the storm winds.

Once inside, the Captain let loose a long sigh of relief. He looked around. "This place hasn't changed much at all, little Junior Brother. Let's rest here for three days. According to my calculations, the storms outside will complete a cycle at that point. When that happens, the storms will get very weak for a time.

"As for what you were wondering about before, I'm not sure. In one of my past lives I did get sucked into the middle of one of the storms. I didn't die, but after I came out, I had no memories of what happened inside. Even now, I have no idea."

Xu Qing was shaken. The more he knew the Captain, the more he knew how to interpret his stories. And that left him shuddering at the thought of what terrifying things might lurk in the middle of the storms. After a bit more thought on the subject, he looked around the cave.

"How many times have you been here, Eldest Brother?"

Stretching, the Captain chuckled and sat down next to the wall in what seemed to be a familiar spot. Leaning back against the wall, he held up three fingers and said, "This is the third time!"

Xu Qing looked deeply at the Captain for a long moment. It was obvious that only something really incredible would keep the Captain coming back after having failed twice. Xu Qing also found himself thinking about the 'amazing treasure' the Captain had mentioned.

"What's the goal this time around?" he asked.

The Captain blinked a few times, looked around furtively, then shook his head. "I really can't say it, little Junior Brother. Just wait a bit.... All I can say for now is that compared to this, the Crimson Mother situation will count for almost nothing! I've been thinking about this place for a long time. In fact, about half of all the preparations I've made in this life are for here.

"I was previously thinking it might take four or five lives for everything to take shape. But then you came along, little Junior Brother, and things changed."

The Captain slapped his thigh excitedly.

Xu Qing sat there thinking. He knew that the Captain wasn't just being deliberately mystifying. There had to be a good reason for him holding back an explanation. After all, the Captain liked to show off, and would surely have loved to reveal his master plan and revel in the look of shock it would elicit.

Whatever's making the Captain hesitate, I bet it has something to do with the three gods....

After all, there had to be a reason the three gods had set the Great Hunt here repeatedly. And then there was the fact that the spider god was sealed in the Ninedawns Forbidden Lands. All of a sudden, a very dramatic possibility occurred to Xu Qing.

Fourth god?

Pupils constricting, he refrained from saying anything else. Closing his eyes, he began to make adjustments to his cultivation base to keep himself in peak condition.

The only sound in the cave was the wind outside, like a howling god. Sometimes it changed, turning into a whimper. Other times it seemed to contain struggle, or bitterness, or something else very gruish. The changes to the wind only served to remind Xu Qing of how terrifying this place was.

Three days passed very quickly.

The Captain really did understand this place well, because the sound of the wind started to die down. Then, after the third day was over, there wasn't any sound at all!

"It's time!" the Captain said, his eyes glittering. Xu Qing followed him out of the cave to find that the black sky was now visible again. The gray lands around them were perfectly visible as well.

There wasn't any trace of a storm.

"We only have two hours!" the Captain said, and he burst into motion, becoming a bright beam of light that shot off into the distance.

Xu Qing raced after him.

Unfortunately, two hours wasn't a lot of time. Despite how fast they were moving, the wind gradually started to pick up again. Around the time that it really started to get loud, a strange mountain and a group of statues appeared ahead of them.

The mountain was majestic and towered high into the sky. There was a circular cave in the middle of the mountain. Wind screamed in the area, and even in the cave, creating a piercing sound that shook the soul. There was also a very ancient feeling to the area that built up in Xu Qing as he looked around.

At the foot of the mountain were a host of very old statues. The three-headed six-armed statues were looking up into the sky. They held enormous blades in their hands, and emanated a terrifying pressure. What was especially noteworthy to Xu Qing was the fact that every one of the huge statues had a half-moon mark on their forehead. The statues on the edges seemed to be kneeling in worship to the sky.

As Xu Qing took everything in, the Captain's voice drifted out with the wind.

“Those are the thirty-six princes of the ancestral emperor. Just before dying, they offered worship to the moon. Not Moonfire, and not the red moon. I'm talking about the most ancient moon there is. That moon is formless. It's the yin from yin and yang.

“Some species even call it the ancestral moon. That mountain is what we're here for. That's the tomb of this planetary system's ancestral emperor!”

The Captain started heading toward the mountain, but when he realized Xu Qing wasn't following him, he looked back.

Xu Qing was standing in front of one of the statues, studying it, his eyes shining. The bluegreen dragon had started sending out fluctuations as if to remind Xu Qing of something. And that reminder seemed to have to do with his third secret trove. That third trove was related to moons. And it seemed to be pulsing with longing. Xu Qing could tell that this statue would be the perfect heavenly dao for his third secret trove.

Chapter 885: A Lamp in the God Trove

Xu Qing's life essence bluegreen dragon formed the heavenly dao of his first god trove. Being so familiar with it, it made the god trove very responsive, and also ensured that its natural and magical laws were the most complete.

His taboo poison formed his second god trove, and violet moon power made the third. Then he had the Emperor's trove, plus one trove that had no spirit at all.

The 'spirit' was the heavenly dao. Without a dao in the trove, it would be very difficult to push it to the level of the great circle. In that case, the five troves couldn't erupt volcanically, in which case the natural and magical laws couldn't form spirit ash. Without the spirit ash, it wasn't possible to form void soil, which in turn would make it impossible to effectuate the return of dao lineaments.
[1]

That was why Xu Qing's most important goal during the god domain phase of the Great Hunt, other than winning the title of Grand Darkheaven, was to acquire heavenly daos.

Up to this point, he had encountered quite a few living beings in the god domain that could have become heavenly daos. But for various reasons, he had rejected all of them.

Until now!

The three-headed six-armed statue with the moon mark emanated an aura that provoked a reaction from his third god trove. That was unprecedented, and it caused Xu Qing's eyes to gleam!

A moment later, the Captain's voice reached him. “Hurry up, little Junior Brother. Time's ticking!”

The Captain's voice was quickly caught up by the wind and scattered in all directions.

Xu Qing nodded. Looking away from the statue, he glanced around at the storm, and felt the sting of the infinitude of dust particles that it contained.

A moment later, he shot after the Captain.

When the Captain saw Xu Qing following him, he accelerated toward the mountain that was the emperor's tomb.

The wind was getting stronger, filling the land and sky, obscuring vision and bringing about a sensation of wickedness and destruction. The statues were already fading from sight because of the darkness of the storm. Even the mountain was starting to get hard to see.

Thankfully, the Captain was thoroughly prepared, and knew exactly where he was going. As he got close to the mountain, he spat out a huge mouthful of blood. The word 'huge' was no exaggeration. In fact, it was so much blood that it contained more blood than existed in the body of an average human.

At the same time, he waved his right hand, gathering up the blood and using it like ink to paint on the rocky surface of the mountain. He drew something that resembled an arc. However, that wasn't the end of it. He kept spitting out more and more blood, until he'd done it a total of seventeen times. As Xu Qing looked on, he used that blood to paint a complete circle!

Next, he began to sing a song that sounded more like weeping than singing.

"Alas, I mourn mine father; who caught ill and passed away.

"I know mine father well, and know his toil; he loved us and protected us each day.

"But he abandoned me and parted ways; drifting in the nether, hearing troubled and vision astray; I recognize him not, weeping to the core, love changed into dismay."

His voice thrummed with grief and sorrow. The wind even seemed to have trouble carrying the words away.

Xu Qing felt moved by the lyrics. What was more, if it weren't for the fact that the Captain turned around and winked excitedly, Xu Qing might have assumed that the emperor buried here was actually the Captain's father.

As the Captain's song reached a fever pitch, he shoved his right hand into his torso, ripped out his liver, and put it into the middle of the circle of blood.

His voice suddenly sounded more sorrowful.

"This filial sacrificial offering is for my father in the underworld; please sample it, lest all be lost. Amen!"

The rocky surface of the mountain trembled as the Captain ripped out his kidney, spleen, and lungs. One after another, he placed them in the circle of blood. The last thing he added was his heart!

Apparently, those things were his sacrificial offering! He was just waiting for the father to come eat!

Heaven and earth rumbled. The mountain shook. The wind grew more terrifying. And as the Captain performed a double-handed incantation gesture, his eyes shone with crazy light. Taking a step forward, he slammed his head against the rocky cliff surface.

"Amen!" he said, holding nothing back. A cracking sound rang out as the Captain's head smacked into the rocky surface, causing a rift to open up.

Xu Qing was visibly surprised.

The Captain's actions caused the emperor's tomb to start shaking dramatically. After striking the circle of blood, a crevice opened up. The Captain's expression turned even more crazy as he threw his head back and then slammed it back onto the surface of the rock.

"Amen!"

The mountain shook even more violently, and the existing crevice opened up further, while more crevices opened up.

After executing nine strikes in a row, the blood circle collapsed, revealing a tunnel leading into a cave. However, there was a glowing shield of light that created a final barrier into the cave.

"Hahaha! Finally got it open!" The Captain's face was slick with blood, and his expression was as crazy as ever. Having successfully opened up the cave, he didn't forget to look back at Xu Qing and laugh heartily. "Little Ah Qing, this is a back door your Eldest Brother left behind in a past life. With the Wordless words, getting inside will be simple, plus the shield of light will keep out any dangers. Hahaha! The treasures are just waiting for us inside. Let's do this!"

The Captain raced forward. However he only went a few steps before he realized that Xu Qing wasn't following him. He looked back, stunned.

"What are you doing, little Junior Brother?"

Xu Qing had been planning to follow the Captain inside. But upon hearing what he said about 'keeping out any dangers,' his eyes gleamed with determination, and he activated his Violet Lord god state. Millions of soul threads spread out to take the shape of Violet Lord, backed by the blessing of Ninedawns. His battle prowess skyrocketed, and he shoved his hand in the direction of the last and nearest statue.

Godsource spread out, making a huge hand that could crush anything in its path. Astonishingly, he was planning to kill one of the statues and use its soul as his heavenly dao!

At the same time, he shed the invisibility from the Wordless Book of Stone.

The statue shuddered. Its eyes snapped open, and they glowed with an underworld light. At the same time, the statue instantly transformed into a flesh-and-blood form. Opening its mouth, it shouted, "Restrain!"

Heaven and earth reeled as chains of white bone popped out of nowhere and latched onto Xu Qing's illusory hand, immobilizing it.

"Devour!"

A reverse force of devouring then swept out of the statue's mouth and toward Xu Qing.

Xu Qing grunted as the power slammed into him, forcing him to back up several steps. Next, wild energy fluctuations rolled out as the statue rushed toward Xu Qing, its three heads all glaring angrily at him and its six arms all performing incantation gestures.

Xu Qing remained calm as he negated the power of devouring. With eyes that flashed like blades, he looked at the incoming statue, backed up, and then made a grasping gesture with his right hand.

The air in front of him split open, and fire erupted out as a black spear appeared. Xu Qing grabbed it. At the same time, a vicious beast with the body of a jackal and the head of a dragon emerged from within him and fused with the black spear, bolstering it.

It was none other than the jackal-dragon, who loved combat and fighting!

Xu Qing's eyes glittered with cold light as he hurled the spear at the incoming statue! Flames spread out in all directions. The Ninedawns jackal-dragon howled. The black spear thrummed with a heaven-rending, earth-crushing sound that was like a sun ripping apart the darkness of night.

A boom rang out as the charging statue lurched to a halt and threw four hands out to grab the spear and stop its momentum.

Xu Qing didn't hesitate to throw his left hand over his head. Four fingers pointed straight up, forming a pointed tip to the blade that was his arm. At the same time, a vortex appeared in the sky, causing an ancient temple to appear. The temple revealed an altar with a divine likeness bearing a saber. The statue stepped forward, emerged from the temple, and slashed the saber down. Heaven and earth lit up. That temple was called Supreme Vastness, and the statue had Xu Qing's face. The saber conformed to a heavenly dao, and was in fact a heavenly saber!

Considering how high Xu Qing's cultivation base had climbed, this saber was anything but ordinary. It was no longer a projection.

The awakened statue shivered and lifted its remaining two arms like a weapon. At the same time, the three heads all opened their mouths and howled. Wild colors flashed in the air as the heavenly saber descended, slicing the 'weapon' apart. The arms shattered, and one of the heads crumbled!

The heavenly saber faded away.

The statue, meanwhile, was flung backward by about 300 meters. Its four remaining eyes let off streams of black smoke as they charged back toward Xu Qing, its four arms stretched out to grab him.

Xu Qing frowned. Without any hesitation, he shot backward and managed to enter the screen of light in the cave just before the statue arrived.

The statue closed in, and its four hands slammed into the shield. The shield trembled, but it kept the statue at bay.

The Captain was right. The shield of light really did keep dangers away. The statue stood just outside of it, glaring coldly at Xu Qing. Then, after a long moment passed, it returned to its spot and reverted to stone. That said, the portions where it sustained damage wouldn't easily be restored.

Seeing that, Xu Qing didn't wait for the Captain to say anything before striding back outside of the shield of light. There, he performed an incantation gesture and unleashed a torrent of divine abilities. The statue awoke again, and the fighting resumed.

Booms rang out and terrifying shockwaves spread. Xu Qing occasionally fell back and occasionally pressed the attack.

On the other side of the shield, the Captain watched. Though he was surprised, he now realized that Xu Qing wanted to use the shield of light as an area to seek refuge while he tried to wear down the statue.

He was inclined to remind Xu Qing that the statues here couldn't be killed. He had done his own research into that, and knew that even if you managed to destroy one, it would cause other unexpected complications. But then he realized that if he explained that, it would likely diminish his prestige as the Eldest Brother. And prestige was extremely important.

Thus, he put a look of admiration onto his face and said, "I'll help you, little Junior Brother!" With that, he rushed out and joined Xu Qing in trying to deal with the statue.

Just like before, the statue continued to sustain damage, and eventually the heavenly saber appeared. But this time, something different happened.

The heavenly dao was shaped like a saber, with the taboo poison of a god's curse as the body of the blade, and daybreak light as the light of the blade! The Ghost Emperor mountain formed a decapitation altar, and D-132 became the trough! The golden crow connected them, and the violet moon was the seal! The timescape was the container, and it was driven by the sundial life lamps!

God Decapitation Altar!

As the executioner's blade fell, it severed the final remaining head on the statue and caused the rest of its body to collapse. As the pieces fell to the ground, bits of moonlight erupted from within.

Struggling to control his breathing, Xu Qing opened his third god trove, sending out a force of attraction that grabbed the moonlight and sucked it in. All of a sudden, a lamp appeared in the darkness of the god trove!

On another part of this strange planet, on the other side of the mountain that was the emperor's tomb, a person was beginning a very gruish and mysterious ceremony. The ceremony used a sun as its origin, a moon as its strength, and a star as the force of attraction. That was why there was a huge triangular totem on the ground.

Wild winds screamed around the totem, within the middle of which a person was seated cross-legged.

This person wore voluminous clothing that looked like it was tailored for a man. However, the wind caused the cloth to press tightly against what was obviously a very voluptuous form. Her features were exquisite, and featured skin as fair as snow. However, the facial expression that was visible contained coldness and murder.

This person was none other than Sir Firedark.

The ceremony being carried out caused glittering light to flash, not up into the sky, but down into the ground. It pierced through the planet and then connected to the emperor's tomb.

In the blink of an eye, Sir Firedark vanished without a trace.

Chapter 886: Five Trove Gates

Outside of the emperor's tomb on the imperial planet in the god domain, something dramatic was playing out.

The moment Xu Qing shattered the statue with the God Decapitation Altar, all of the other statues in the area shivered and opened their eyes. As black light flooded out from their eyes, they began to transform from stone to flesh, starting with their heads. All of them were waking up.

A terrifying aura rose up, stirring the winds and clouds. It turned into a huge vortex with the emperor's tomb in the middle as it swept out violently in all directions. Black lightning crashed within it, making it look like something painted by a god to represent all the killing and death in the world.

Meanwhile, outside of the planet, the withered trees growing on the spiderwebs started swaying back and forth. The faces on their surfaces opened their eyes, which were crimson, and screams erupted from their mouths. It was a sound like metal scraping against rock, filled with shocking power and a boundless rancorous energy. If the doors of the Yellow Springs were opened, and a sound drifted out from hell itself, it would be like this, something that could make both ghosts and gods wail.

Their voices merged, caused wild colors to flash as the surrounding tempest slowed down and stopped.

At the same time, the vortex that had just formed split open like a massive eye. It was almost as if the planet itself was waking up and was intent on destroying anything and everything around it.

Xu Qing and the Captain were both stunned by the development. Without a word, they fell back. However, they couldn't avoid the violent fluctuations caused by the awakening of the planet. Xu Qing's god state collapsed, his defenses shattered, and his organs vibrated painfully. The Captain was in similar trouble as the violent fluctuations nearly ripped him to shreds. A sensation of death hung over them, as though they might be wiped out of existence at any moment. Thankfully, they were close to the mouth of the passageway, and as the fluctuations built in intensity, they were able to pass to the other side of the shield of light.

Once inside, Xu Qing coughed up a massive mouthful of blood. Every part of him, from head to toe to soul, screamed with intense pain. Dropping to a cross-legged position, he focused on healing.

The Captain couldn't last any longer. His body collapsed into a mass of blue worms. Moments later, though, the worms formed his body again, and he stood there with his face ashen.

After some time passed and the two were recovering, they exchanged a glance.

The Captain cleared his throat. "Little Junior Brother, what you did just now was utterly crazy. Granted, that's how I also do things, except... next time could you give me a little heads up beforehand...?"

The Captain was feeling odd for a few reasons. For one thing, he had expected something to happen to the statues, but it hadn't occurred to him at all that their actions could wake up the entire planet and unleash the power to destroy everything. What was more, *he*

was the one that usually went and did something suicidal, all while dragging Xu Qing along with him. But this time it went the other way around.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing looked back at the Captain quizzically. "Eldest Brother, you never give me a heads up!"

The Captain smiled wryly. "That's because, as your Eldest Brother, I always worry you might chicken out."

Xu Qing nodded. "I was worried about the same thing happening with you."

The Captain's eyebrows shot up. *Little Ah Qing has picked up some bad habits. This won't do! I think I need to show him what it really means to be unafraid! What it really means to not fear death! What it really means to do something crazy!*

Looking very solemn, he said, "I have to offer you some constructive criticism, little Junior Brother. The things out there are scraps, nothing more. I'm taking you to a place where acting crazy will earn you *big* rewards. Now, let's get moving!"

The Captain shot to his feet and charged forward with unstoppable momentum and astonishing courage.

Seeing that, Xu Qing sighed. It looked to him more like the Captain wanted to compete with him in acting suicidal. He slowly followed. As he went along, he looked over his shoulder at the shattered statue out in the storm. He hated to give up like this, but also knew that he couldn't continue to hunt statues. Looking back, he continued after the Captain.

They were walking through an artificial tunnel that had been carved through the rock. The walls were covered with unusual designs that occasionally pulsed with light. There were a lot of twists and turns in the tunnel, as well as numerous side tunnels, which made their path seem meandering. It was almost like they were traversing a maze.

However, the Captain continued leading the way heroically, as if he knew exactly where he was going. He never slowed down an iota.

Considering that, Xu Qing didn't pay attention to the path they were taking. He just followed along, all while keeping his focus on his sea of consciousness.

Astonishingly, there were five huge 'trove gates' hovering above his sea of consciousness! Each door was 30,000 meters tall, outstandingly majestic, and pulsed with a matchlessly ancient aura. They were configured to face in five different directions.

The first gate was wide open. On the other side was a majestic world, inside of which swirled a bluegreen dragon that occasionally roared loudly. That was Xu Qing's first god trove!

The second gate was closed, but it pulsed with a sensation of taboo poison, unease, and fear.

The third gate was also closed. Within it was a violet moon power, like a burning furnace.

The fourth gate was different. Though it was closed, it pulsed with an imperial will, something majestic, like a monarch ready to slaughter everything in his path.

The fifth gate, which was for the mage trove, was halfway open. It was just barely possible to see that, on the other side, there was a hulking figure lurking in a dark abyss, propping up heaven and earth, all while surrounded by howls of anguish. Those howls came from Master Stillwinter.

The five trove gates were like gods hanging in a paramount position over his sea of consciousness. They were the trove gates of the Spirit Trove level, although in the case of Xu Qing, they were for his god troves, imperial trove, and mage trove.

The Spirit Trove level involved forming trove gates in the sea of consciousness for every secret trove. If a trove had a heavenly dao, the trove gate would open. But without a spirit inside, it would remain closed.

Of Xu Qing's five trove gates, one was open, one was half-open, and the other three were closed.

But right now, Xu Qing's third trove gate, which was connected to his third god trove, was experiencing something dramatic as moonlight seeped into it.

It was like light from the ancestor of all moons, and contained the yin dao of the moon. It made the violet moon power in the god trove even more ancient, and caused a heaven-rending, earth-crushing sound to fill the trove.

The rumbling from the third trove gate filled Xu Qing's sea of consciousness, surpassing anything and everything until... the third trove gate opened by a crack. It was a very small crack, but even that small progress on the track from nothing to something was tremendous!

On the other side of the opening, in the violet dusk of the god trove, a faint white sphere appeared. The sphere seemed profoundly ancient, as if it was the embodiment of that word.

It was surrounded by a frigid energy that seemed capable of freezing space and time. In fact, this moonlight seemed like it could freeze great daos. It was the embryonic form of the third god trove's heavenly dao!

It was a form of the supreme yin, which in ancient times was known as the netherglimmer. [1]

The moment it appeared, thanks to the third trove gate opening, a volcanic eruption of force occurred. A mountain-toppling, sea-draining aura spread out over Xu Qing's sea of consciousness, filling his entire body as it cleansed and blessed him. As Xu Qing made his way through the maze-like tunnels of the tomb, a tremor passed through him, and he suddenly erupted with cultivation base power that surpassed anything from before. He quickly concealed it, leaving behind only a fierce and extraordinary light gleaming in his eyes.

Up ahead, the Captain stopped in place and turned around to look at Xu Qing. Then he took a step forward and vanished into the wall ahead of him.

Expression serious, Xu Qing unhesitatingly walked through the wall as well, almost as if it wasn't even there. On the other side was a vast cave.

Unlike the maze, this cave seemed to have been formed naturally. It was dark, and also empty, save for nine spinning vortexes of starlight up above. They looked like nine openings leading to nine different worlds.

As Xu Qing studied them, the Captain said, "Outside of the emperor's tomb is a primal-chaos labyrinth. Without knowing the correct path to take, not even a Smoldering God could get through it easily. But to me, it's as easy as walking home. We're in the middle of the labyrinth now. Those nine vortexes up there are nine paths. Five of them lead to life, and four to death. They change randomly, which makes it very hard to survive an encounter with them."

The Captain clasped his hands behind his back as he hovered in midair. Looking proudly at the nine vortexes, he continued, "However, based on all the research and preparations in my past lives, I'm confident that no matter which vortex I pick, it won't lead to death. No, any path I pick will automatically become a path of life!"

With his chin stuck up, the Captain flicked his sleeve. *Wow, even I'm impressed by what I just said. It was nothing short of amazing. Considering how quick-witted little Ah Qing is, he'll soon give voice to his astonishment and admiration.*

He waited for a while. When he realized that no one was speaking, he looked down in surprise.

Xu Qing wasn't even looking at him. Instead, Xu Qing was looking at the seventh vortex, and his eyes were glittering thoughtfully.

The Captain cleared his throat and said, "That's a path to death! In fact, none of the paths are more deadly than that one. Don't even look at it."

Xu Qing ignored the Captain. His eyes were burning with increased curiosity as he realized that, even though he had no idea what was inside that seventh vortex, one thing was certain. And that was... as soon as he'd arrived in this location, his second god trove, that of taboo poison, started emitting the same kind of fluctuations that his third god trove had released in the presence of those statues.

Those fluctuations contained intense longing!

The Captain's eyebrows shot up and he was about to say something when, all of a sudden, a figure emerged from another one of the tunnels. This figure pulsed with a terrifying and domineering aura, and was clad in a voluminous daoist robe.

The strong wind pressed the robe tightly against the body of the newcomer, revealing some very pronounced and attractive curves. The dramatic rise and fall of the curvature, coupled with the daoist robe, would cause any onlooker to feel a very mysterious sensation.

This person was none other than Sir Firedark.

Upon stepping out, she looked at Xu Qing and then the Captain. First, she looked surprised, but then her eyes blazed like heavenly bodies as shocking killing intent rose up within her.

Xu Qing's pupils constricted.

The Captain's jaw nearly dropped, and then he inhaled sharply. "Holy fuck, what are you doing here?" [2]

The Captain turned to run. At the same time, Sir Firedark's killing intent blazed to the highest heights, and an aura as terrifying as a Smoldering God's spread out, filling the cave. Sir Firedark took a step forward, instantly arrived next to the nine vortexes, and launched a fist strike at the Captain.

"Die!"

Chapter 887: A Very Tough Adversary

The figure next to the vortex had beautiful hair and a daoist robe that couldn't cover her voluptuous curves. Her face was extremely beautiful, but was laced with a baleful aura that added a bit of manliness to it. When she attacked, the entire cave trembled as though it might collapse. Sir Firedark's hatred had really pushed her cultivation base power to something like that of a Smoldering God. The fist caused space to distort and interfered with time itself, piercing forward with the power of extermination.

Before Xu Qing could even interfere, the Captain screamed as Sir Firedark's fist hit his body and caused it to explode. Chunks of flesh and gore intermingled with a spray of blood that spread out for dozens of meters.

Sir Firedark's killing intent still burned, and thus, after delivering the blow, she didn't stop. Taking a step forward, she released another destructive blow onto the Captain's gory remains.

Xu Qing's gaze hardened, and even as Sir Firedark's second blow was being delivered, he burst into motion. He instantly went to his fourth-level god state. The Ninedawns skulls appeared, turning into mage armor that covered him from head to toe. His battle prowess instantly shot to a level comparable to the great circle of Void Returning.

He rapidly performed some incantation gestures, causing taboo poison to surge and the violet moon to appear. His Violet Lord god magic was unleashed, slicing apart the air. A heavenly saber also appeared. An ancient temple appeared in midair, its main entrance opened, and a divine likeness strode out and slashed down with the saber.

Prismatic saber light spread out as the canopy of heaven seemed to tilt on its side. The light bolstered the battle prowess of Xu Qing's god state, and with the blessing of Ninedawns, his fluctuations surpassed what they were when the trove gate of his third trove opened. With that, he shot toward Sir Firedark.

Sir Firedark stopped in place, then spun, shifting the target of her attack from the Captain's remains to the incoming heavenly saber. A deafening boom rang out as fist met saber. The fist wasn't harmed at all, but the saber shattered!

Sir Firedark's battle prowess was completely and utterly terrifying. To Xu Qing, it didn't feel like fighting a Void Returning enemy, but rather, a Smoldering God!

When it came to the Void Returning level, Sir Firedark ranked first in the echelon of the Firemoon Darkheaven people. Though she hadn't pushed her cultivation base to its limit, her spectacular talent and boundless reserve powers ensured that her battle prowess had reached the ultimate height!

The fist didn't just destroy the saber. It caused a domineering will to sweep over Xu Qing, which felt like countless mountains slamming into him. His mage armor cracked, and his god state began to collapse into millions of soul threads. Blood sprayed out of Xu Qing's mouth as he fell back by several dozen meters. That said, he had managed to buy some time for the Captain.

Up in midair, the Captain's gory remains clumped together, and in the shortest of moments, he was back. From some distance away, he looked at Xu Qing fighting Sir Firedark. His expression was grave, and his eyes were filling with killing intent.

"Let's crush this pansy, little Junior Brother!"

Within the Captain's crazy eyes could be seen two faces. And the pupils of the two faces had faces in them, and that pattern continued endlessly. At the same time, a very gruish aura spread out from the Captain. Boundless frigid energy erupted as he waved his right hand. Instantly, the flesh on his hand transformed into a blue ice blade.

The slightest movement of that blade could slice the air open. Striding toward Sir Firedark, he raised his blade and then chopped it down. As he delivered the blow, he also performed an incantation gesture with his left hand. Blinding blue light erupted into a huge sea filled with never-ending cold. It froze everything it passed, causing loud cracking sounds to ring out as it neared Sir Firedark.

Xu Qing's expression was similarly serious. This was his first time fighting Sir Firedark, and though he'd only managed to unleash one saber strike, the domineering aura he had sensed from the enemy's fist strike reminded him of someone.

Master Shengyun!

They didn't look alike at all. Nor could they really compare to each other. The reason Xu Qing found himself thinking about Master Shengyun was that this whole situation with Sir Firedark reminded him of his clash with Master Shengyun in *Forbidden by the Phoenix*. [1]

Both opponents were powerful, mighty, and seemingly invincible! And yet, back then, Xu Qing still defeated Master Shengyun, preventing him from eventually becoming invincible. Today, facing Sir Firedark caused battle spirit to rise within Xu Qing.

The desire to do battle surged in his sea of consciousness, causing his trove gates to tremble and his cultivation base to churn. His god state formed again, and the mage armor returned. The Nine skulls became nine lanterns of flesh, and the heads of the dragons roared. Three inverted mountains appeared. The black flames of the golden crow spread out, becoming a black spear that Xu Qing grabbed. Then, he joined the Captain to attack Sir Firedark.

An instant later, the three of them slammed into each other. A deafening boom filled the cave.

It was instantly clear how formidable Sir Firedark was. Instead of meeting the combined attack of Xu Qing and the Captain with a divine ability or magical treasure, she used only her fist!

One fist blasted the Captain's blade into pieces. One fist sent the black spear tumbling backward. One fist shattered the Captain's ice, rendering it useless. One fist caused the three mountains to crumble!

It was as if her fist could crush anything in its path. Then she took a step forward, and she pulsed with such terrifying and unyielding momentum that she really did seem invincible. Clenching her hand into a fist, she launched another blow at the Captain.

All of a sudden, D-132 appeared to lock her in place.

Surging with a domineering aura, Sir Firedark launched a blow that shattered D-132. Then she turned and attacked Xu Qing.

One step. One punch. That was all it took to shatter the Ninedawns skulls and ravage Xu Qing's god state. He staggered backward, coughing up blood. Sir Firedark was obviously crushing them with ease. Meanwhile, the countless faces in the Captain's eyes opened their mouths and issued a piercing cry that could shake the mind and soul.

Sir Firedark stopped in place.

The Captain's eyes filled with a crazy look as he suddenly let loose a loud shout. Astonishingly, an ancient and illusory staircase appeared as a result. There were a total of nine stairs that made it up, and they seemed like they came from the most ancient of times. The Captain lifted his foot, stretched it out, and stepped down. Every step he took caused him to tremble, especially his chest, which wriggled visibly. After the ninth step, a skeletal hand made of blue ice burst out of his chest. Pulsing with terrifying and ancient energy, it grabbed toward Sir Firedark, carrying a wind of death with it!

Xu Qing, meanwhile, hadn't slowed down a bit. He extended his right hand, and his heavenly dao became the body of the blade, the taboo poison became the razor-sharp edge, daybreak light became the blade glow, the Ghost Emperor mountain became the altar, and the destiny aura of D-132

became the trough! The golden crow, violet moon, and timescape bottle became the container, while the sundial life lamp urged everything into action.

The God Decapitation Altar descended. The blade slashed, glittering, right toward Sir Firedark.

As the two consummate attacks closed in with deadly force, something serious flashed through Sir Firedark's eyes. It was only a flash!

Lifting her hand, she tightened her fingers, causing the air to shatter.

Golden light flared all around her, covering her from head to toe, filling her bones, and forming an undying sensation that gathered in her hands to become... the Undying Emperor's Fist![2]

One blow hit the Captain. The skeletal hand shattered, and the Captain exploded into a cloud of gore. The other blow hit Xu Qing, and the God Decapitation Altar, which had always been unstoppable, emitted loud rumbling sounds. No head flew through the air. Instead, the altar collapsed, leaving Xu Qing tumbling backward, soaked in blood.

That said, it wasn't as though the attacks launched by Xu Qing and the Captain were completely ineffective. Though the Undying Emperor's Fist shook heaven and earth, Sir Firedark was also left pale in the face, with blood oozing down her chin.

Unfortunately, her killing intent and domineering aura were stronger than ever as she took a step toward the Captain.

Her main target had always been the Captain. She was not going to give up on that.

As her foot landed, she clenched her hand into a fist. But then a hoarse voice spoke behind her.

"This world of heaven and earth can be considered a well.... Everything is inside the well...."

As the voice echoed out, ripples filled the air in the cave, covering Sir Firedark as well.

Sir Firedark stopped in place. Beneath her feet was a surface of water with reflections on it.

Xu Qing had no time to wipe the blood from his mouth. Eyes shining with the desire to do battle, he extended his right hand and fished out one of the reflections beneath Sir Firedark's feet.

A tremor passed through Sir Firedark, and for the first time, she felt a deathly sensation. And yet, hardly a moment passed before she sent golden light into the reflections. The golden light transformed into a sun, which then rose out of the water! Terrifying heat emanated from the sun in all directions, causing air and water alike to evaporate into nothing.

Fishing the Moon in the Well had been defeated!

Xu Qing's mind spun. His eyes were crimson, and his soul ached painfully. But he could deal with pain like that. The moment Fishing the Moon in the Well was vanquished, his third trove gate trembled as a white sphere slammed into it.

The trove gate shuddered and opened a bit more, and the frigid energy of the netherglimmer erupted out. It was the power of the supreme yin. The power of the ancestor of all moons. And it could even freeze the power of time. It converged in front of Xu Qing in the shape of a finger, which he stabbed toward Sir Firedark.

Sir Firedark's pupils constricted, and for the first time during the fight, she backed up.

However, as she did, the Captain's gory remains transformed into a host of 100,000 blue worms, all with the Captain's face on them. Bursting into motion, they appeared around Sir Firedark. The Captain's faces opened their mouths and spat out blue frigid energy at Sir Firedark. The frigid energy grew more and more intense, combining with Xu Qing's supreme yin finger attack. The air froze. Space-time froze!

Cracking sounds rang out as a huge block of ice appeared in the air. It was so large that the top touched the roof of the cave, and the bottom touched the floor below.

Inside of the block of ice was Sir Firedark. Astonishingly, she had been sealed tight and couldn't even move.

All 100,000 of the worms then spoke at the same time as they began to form back into the Captain. "She won't stay trapped in there for long. A very tough opponent, wouldn't you say, little Junior Brother? Let's scam. Follow me onto one of the automatic paths of life, and this shrew definitely won't be able to follow us!"

The Captain was back, bedraggled but whole. Without any hesitation, he shot toward the third vortex.

Xu Qing didn't hesitate to follow. However, just before stepping into the third portal, he looked over at the seventh portal. His eyes shone with determination.

"I'm going there instead, Eldest Brother!" he said, heading toward the seventh portal.

"No, don't—" the Captain said, stunned. Yet before he could even finish speaking, Xu Qing was gone. The Captain looked over at the block of ice, which was already starting to twitch. Turning, he raced toward the third vortex. "You're on your own, fool! I got my own business to take care of. Good luck, everybody!" [3]

As the two of them disappeared into the vortexes, something dramatic happened with the block of ice. Astonishingly, the projection of a major world appeared behind Sir Firedark. It contained heavenly bodies, a heaven and earth, and life.

Figures could be seen within it, over a hundred of them, and they were all Sir Firedark!

Over a hundred versions of Sir Firedark all clenched their hands into fists and launched blows at the ice. The ice exploded. At the same time, Sir Firedark suffered a major backlash, causing most of her clothes to be shredded to bits, and revealing the fair, tender skin beneath....

Yet it was without hesitation that she raced toward the vortex, her eyes full of killing intent.

Chapter 888: Northyear Greenwood

As the trees with faces wailed, the statues awoke, and the vortex formed overhead, the planet that was the emperor's tomb was still covered with a terrifying storm. It was apocalyptic, like a heavenly punishment that caused the entire planet to tremble.

Dammit, what bastard messed with the godwardings here??

A person was currently seated cross-legged in a hide tent that offered protection from the wind. It was hard to say what beast the hide was from, but it allowed the tent to stand tall despite the storm. In fact, it kept the wind completely locked down in that specific area.

Of course, the tent couldn't lock down the heart of Fan Shishuang. As he sat in the tent, he gnashed his teeth and looked outside, his eyes glittering with apprehension. He had two main goals in this god domain. The first was to push his cultivation base to the great circle. The other was to hunt the beings that lived here. Both goals centered on the planet that was the emperor's tomb. His clan had prepared long and hard for this event. And thus, as soon as he entered this god domain, he had rushed without stopping to this specific place.

How could he have guessed that, as soon as he arrived, the entire planet would suddenly wake up? What was more, he still had not yet completed all the steps to carry out his plan to get inside.

I just have to go for broke!

Gritting his teeth, Fan Shishuang looked down and performed a double-handed incantation gesture as he unleashed a secret magic his clan had prepared.

He wasn't the only one doing something like that. There were two people elsewhere on the planet who were also cursing whoever had stirred up the godwardings.

They were Sir Heavenink and Tuo Shishan. The former had arrived earlier, while the latter expended a huge amount of effort to escape that huge jellyfish.

When you included Sir Firedark in the mix, it was clear that the top five chosen from the Firemoon Darkheavens' echelon all had chosen this place as their goal. Each had different ways of getting into the emperor's tomb, and had prepared years in advance for this moment. But because of the dramatic developments, all were having trouble dealing with the planet. Now, they had to pay a steeper price and also deal with far more danger.

The person they were all cursing was Xu Qing, who, in the interests of pleasing his second god trove, had entered the seventh vortex in the cave.

The moment he entered, it was like stepping through a membrane into a vast void. It was dark, cold, and unfamiliar, and it seemed to go on forever.

None of the senses that worked on the outside seemed to be present here. There were no directions. No paths. No heaven and earth.

Xu Qing even felt his consciousness slowly fading, as if everything around him were turning into darkness and gloom. The natural and magical laws were different from the outside.

It was as if sleep and dormancy were the great daos here, and every person who entered had to conform to this place's will.

Xu Qing was no exception. He felt his divine will fluctuations fading into nothing. It was as if his mind was falling asleep. The only thing that burned with any intensity was the desire from his second god trove. It was like a bright fire that served as a focal point for Xu Qing's senses.

Relying on those senses, Xu Qing made his way forward on instinct, like a fish swimming through the darkness.

He wasn't sure how much time passed. Maybe a century. Maybe a single breath of time. But the longing from his second god trove grew more and more intense, until eventually that little fish breached the surface of the water. He had passed through the void and had now arrived at a scintillating starry sky.

The moment he saw the starlight, his senses all went back to normal. His divine will stirred again, and his dormant thoughts returned.

As he looked into the starry sky, he saw two beings that were so majestic they were almost impossible to describe.

One was an enormous tree that seemed to represent life. The other was a majestic beast that personified terror and evil.

The tree was so huge it took up half of the starry sky. Its gnarled surface was covered with vein-like markings. Branches spread out in all directions, all of them covered with lineaments that seemed to contain natural laws and great daos. There were dao fruits on the tree, as large as planets. Or perhaps it was correct to say that they *were* planets.

From a distance, it was possible to see its branches spreading out as if to fill the starry sky, while its roots anchored it firmly to the universe around it. That said, it wasn't a lush tree. It was withered, including both its branches and the planet fruits. It was as if its life force was in decline. Despite being withered, each branch of the tree still radiated a terrifying might that shook the starry sky and influenced the universe.

As for the huge beast, it wasn't as large as the tree. In fact, it was about half the size. It had the body of an ox and was surrounded by a poison miasma. Appallingly, each of its hairs had a corpse tied to it, creating something like a suit of armor. Its head was the color white, which created a bizarre contrast with the starry sky. It had a single eye that covered most of its face, with a vertical pupil that radiated something nefarious. In addition, it had a tail that was a gigantic snake whose howls could destroy planets.

The huge beast was locked in combat with the tree. The fighting was nearing a peak, with each clash shattering portions of the starry sky, and making it seem like the end of days had come.

Xu Qing looked around, stunned.

Whether it was the huge tree in the starry sky or the terrifying beast, to him they were like gods that he couldn't possibly resist or affect. He wasn't sure why they were fighting, but the longing from his second god trove was clearly focused on... the enormous beast!

The moment that Xu Qing's gaze took in the battle taking place, the terrifying beast's snake tail whipped around and glared at Xu Qing briefly before striking at him. Its mouth was open as if it wanted to devour Xu Qing and everything around him.

Pupils constricting, Xu Qing shot backward. At the same time, the huge tree stirred, and an enormous leaf dropped down in front of Xu Qing. The leaf was like an entire landmass, but it was mostly withered, with only about twenty percent of it containing life force.

As it passed in front of Xu Qing, his vision swam, and he heard an echoing roar that faded into nothing. When he could see clearly again... the starry sky was gone. The tree was gone. The beast was also gone.

A world stretched out in front of Xu Qing. The sky and lands alike were the color gray. He saw mist in every direction, but nothing alive. Only ruins.

Xu Qing looked around as a thousand thoughts ran through his head. He remembered what he saw after stepping into the seventh vortex, whether that was the icy void or the starry sky with the tree and the beast. Even now, the world in front of him almost didn't seem real. The only real thing for him was the longing of the second god trove.

That beast elicited a response from the taboo poison god trove.... As for that leaf that dropped down in front of me....

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed.

He wasn't sure if this world was that leaf, or if it was just the next stop on the journey through the vortex. After a short time passed, he cleared his thoughts, looked around at the gray around him, then cast his senses into the mist. The mist was poisonous.

Xu Qing started moving quickly. A few days later, Xu Qing stopped on a listing tower in some ruins.

This is a withered world with no life. I'd say it's highly likely it's actually that leaf.... What's causing the world to wither is the poison. Long ago, this world was a flourishing place. But now... it's just collecting dust.

Xu Qing looked down at the mist. He looked around at the ruins. He saw the broken pathways, the skeletons of the buildings, the collapsed temples, and the crumbling statues. Taking it all in, he could almost visualize what this world had been like in its heyday. Now, it was empty and bleak.

Eventually, his gaze came to rest on rubble that had been piled in front of the tower. It was possible to see inscriptions on some of the stones. He waved his hand, and the rubble floated up into the air and pieced together into an enormous, 30,000-meter-tall stone stele. It wasn't easy to put all the pieces together correctly, but gradually, the stele took shape. From a distance, it was like a beacon of civilization within a world of pure poison.

As that glimmer of civilization appeared, the symbols on the stele became clear. It was hard to make sense of the symbols by just looking at them. But by examining them with divine sense, they became possible to understand.

They explained the history of this place.

This world had once been called Northyear Heaven. It was one of the nine heavens subordinate to the immortal emperor. The immortal emperor made the Greenwood the dao of Northyear, charged with protecting the world and all the countless living beings in it. But the immortal emperor perished. Gods invaded, the nine heavens collapsed, and catastrophe came to all worlds.

Later, an evil spirit tainted the world. It tormented the living beings, caused a plague to spread, filling Northyear, enfeebling its heavenly dao in an attempt to devour it. Most of the living beings in the world fell to the plague, including the cultivators.

There was resistance, including three full-scale revolts. But they all ended in failure.

In the end, the leaders of the world went all out to try to break open the sky. When the rift opened, a beast descended. It had a white head, the body of an ox, and a serpent for a tail. The moment it appeared, the entire world withered and fell into destruction.

As Xu Qing stood atop the listing tower and took in the information from the inscriptions, he came to understand this world, and why it was withered. As for the immortal emperor that the histories mentioned, it seemed likely that he was the one buried in the tomb.

“Northyear and the Greenwood...” he murmured, thinking about the enormous tree he’d seen.

The description of the evil beast was also the same as what he had seen out in that starry sky.

Xu Qing waited a bit longer to see if anything further was going to happen. When nothing did, he prepared to retract his divine will.

But then an ancient voice spoke, from the sky, the land, the air, the stele, and from everything else in this world.

“That evil spirit had a name. Hellfei. When the immortal worlds collapsed and the outside gods invaded, the seven negative emotions from all the living beings that died converged. Young friend from the outside, you’re the first cultivator to come here since the immortal emperor died.... Please. Can you help me?” [1]

Xu Qing’s expression remained neutral. He didn’t look surprised at all. Looking up into the canopy of heaven, he said, “Who are you?”

“The immortal emperor gave me the name Greenwood. I was to protect Northyear as this world’s heavenly dao.”[2]

Chapter 889: The Perfect Specimen

As the raspy voice entered Xu Qing’s mind, he looked down slightly. “Sire, I’m afraid your humble servant is too weak to be of any help in your fight with Hellfei.”

“That’s the precise reason I need your help, young friend,” the heavenly dao said. Its voice seemed very old, but at the same time, pleading.

“My fight with the evil spirit is taking place in the starry sky, but the struggle is also in the myriad worlds, as we vie for heavenfate and daosoil.

“This world is the origin of Northyear, and is also where the evil Hellfei first appeared. It contains Hellfei’s original dao shadow form, which has already usurped most of the heavenly dao authority here. Young friend, can you please lure out the Hellfei’s dao shadow form and kill it at least a hundred times?

“Every time it dies, it will drain some of Hellfei’s essence power. That will be a big help in the fight in the starry sky, as it will give me an opportunity to use heavenfate!

“I’m ashamed that I haven’t been able to live up to the immortal emperor’s mission to protect the living beings here. I’m struggling on death’s door, and only hope that I can use this opportunity to end things in mutual destruction. My life will end, and my dao will be complete. The responsibility of the heavenly dao will be met, meeting with the immortal emperor’s grace.

“In return, young friend... when Hellfei and I die, I will bestow upon you Hellfei’s lone eye. Your trove is lacking a heavenly dao, and also contains a unique will. Hellfei’s eye was born out of resentment of the catastrophe wrought by the gods. You could call that eye the source of resentment against the gods. And it will benefit you a lot.

“What’s more, it’s the only way for you to get out of here.”

Xu Qing said nothing. He just looked up at the misty sky.

That mist contained poison, and it poured down into heaven and earth like a waterfall. Though it didn’t initially seem very impressive, it was still majestic enough to be called sky-obscuring and sun-blocking.

The words of Greenwood, who claimed to be the heavenly dao of this world, seemed to make sense. Xu Qing knew that his second god trove was made of taboo poison, which meant that living things could have the personhood to serve as its heavenly dao.

As Xu Qing had come to understand clearly over the years, on a substructural level, the taboo poison was the curse of a god. That was why he had decided to take a risk and enter the seventh vortex. If the hidden rancorous energy here was really because of how the living beings hated the destruction wreaked by the gods, then to a certain degree, it did meet the qualifications to be the heavenly dao of the taboo poison god trove.

He could confirm that both from the fluctuations coming from the god trove and also from what he had seen of Hellfei out in the starry sky.

But...

Xu Qing’s eyes glittered for a moment before he calmly said, “Fine, I’ll do it.”

“Many thanks to you, young friend. I’m not able to say much to you right now, as I must concentrate on fighting Hellfei. Just provoke some fluctuations from this place and attack with deadly force. Hellfei’s form will definitely try to interfere. When you accomplish this task of mine, I promise that Greenwood will never forget you!”

Countless motes of light rose up everywhere, which seemed to be representations of Greenwood’s divine will. Gathering together, they shot up into the sky.

After they disappeared, Xu Qing, who still stood atop the listing tower, looked down. His expression contained neither joy nor sorrow. It was as profound as deep waters, and lacked any confusion. He looked very closely at the stone stele in front of him.

A moment passed, and he waved his right hand, dispelling the power of the stone stele. The historical stele collapsed, reverting into a pile of dusty rubble.

Xu Qing took a deep breath and sat down on the tower. According to Greenwood, he was supposed to catch the attention of Hellfei's dao shadow form, then attack it with destructive force.

"There's no need to make things so complicated," he murmured. His eyes turned black, his second trove gate rumbled, and the power of taboo poison gathered in his eyes.

Wherever he looked, taboo poison flourished. He looked at the ruins, and everything blurred from buildings to roads. Taboo poison became a mist that spread out everywhere, spreading ripples and distortions. He looked at the lands, and the gray soil turned as black as if ink were being splattered onto it. The black steam that rose up joined the existing poisonous mist.

He looked into the dome of heaven, and the sky seethed as the mist there was joined by the poison mist. They didn't mix, and in fact, the reaction was like cool water poured into a vat of boiling oil. Everywhere Xu Qing looked, the curse of a god arrived.

Heaven and earth rumbled. Winds screamed. The mists went wild.

Before long, everything he looked at was covered with a taboo poison mist. As it gathered around the listing tower, it began to reject the world's local mist, until there was a clear demarcation between the two. Rumbling sounds echoed out everywhere.

There were two vortexes in the sky. One was in the middle, and it was made of Xu Qing's taboo poison. The other vortex surrounded the first, and was made of the world's poison, which was also spinning dramatically. The two vortexes rotated opposite of each other, causing an intense grating sound to spread out, accompanied by the crash of lightning.

As time passed, things grew more intense and violent. Winds screamed left and right, filling the world. From a distance, it looked like the world was falling apart.

Yet Xu Qing remained on the tower, his expression placid, his gaze fixed on the sky. The storm winds caused his hair and garments to flap wildly. He looked almost like an immortal or a god.

All of a sudden, a bellow echoed out like that of an ox, deafening and terrifying.

It pulsed with thunderclaps rife with natural and magical laws. Wherever that sound reached, the sky ceased collapsing and the earth no longer crumbled. Even the vortexes stopped moving.

The wind went still!

But the mist seethed, falling from the sky like a waterfall or a flower blooming in reverse. Within it was a creature. It had the body of an ox, with a white face that featured a single eye with a vertical pupil. Its tail was a ferocious snake. Wherever it went, pestilence surrounded it, making it like an ancient source of poison that could spread plagues everywhere. When it went through the sky, the sky rotted. When it went across the lands, even the air was eaten away.

A poison plague spread everywhere and rushed toward Xu Qing with killing intent. It looked exactly like the version of Hellfei Xu Qing had seen out in the starry sky, except much, much smaller.

If a mortal could see this beast, they would be terrified to the core. But it was different for Xu Qing. He could see that though it had a very astonishing poison, this dao shadow form of Hellfei only had battle prowess equivalent to the first-stage of Void Returning.

Xu Qing wasn't actually surprised at that. As Hellfei's roiling poison closed in on him, he snapped his right hand out in front of him. Heaven and earth trembled as countless soul threads emerged, connecting in midair to make a huge hand. Then, like the hand of a god, it thrust forward with crushing momentum. Its fingers closed, and the Hellfei which would have struck terror into the hearts of a mortal was crushed out of existence.

However, as the hand of soul threads opened back up, about thirty percent of them shivered as they transformed from being red into being black! And they started pulsing with a rancorous energy.

That energy spread rapidly out into the rest of the hand.

It was fei poison!

For the first time, Xu Qing's eyes glittered in surprise. Ignoring the hand in midair, he reached out with his free hand and closed the fingers on each other. Instantly, one of the black soul threads flew over to him.

Xu Qing had deeply studied the dao of poison, and also had plentiful practical experience. Therefore, as soon as he looked closely at the black soul thread in his hand, it only took a moment of thought before he inhaled deeply. The black thread was sucked into him.

All of a sudden, Xu Qing's expression changed. He looked slightly dazed. At the same time, a violent reaction began to build up within him. He quickly suppressed it by sending taboo poison throughout his body. As a result, the black soul thread was purified, then faded away.

Xu Qing's expression turned even more quizzical.

This poison actually targets godliness!

He already had a deep understanding of Hellfei's poison. Because that poison was born out of resentment of the gods, it could infect godliness. It could make godliness lose its majesty, and cause its personhood to decline. It was a rare poison that was actually designed to target gods.

The soul thread Xu Qing had just studied closely was only a solitary thread, yet the poison had still destabilized the godly nature, human nature, and animal nature within it.

"How interesting." Xu Qing licked his lips. It was his first time encountering something that was on roughly the same level as his taboo poison. Although they weren't exactly the same on all levels, its method of targeting godliness was very unique.

He unleashed the taboo poison in his gaze. Looking at the hand of soul threads, he sent the taboo poison to clash with the fei poison. The hand became the battleground.

Heaven and earth rumbled again in response to Hellfei dying. Mist converged again, and Hellfei started forming again. When it was complete, its battle prowess was greater than before. Howling, it charged toward Xu Qing.

Xu Qing reached out with his right hand and made a grasping gesture. This time, it wasn't soul threads that converged. Rather, he tapped into his battle prowess to grab Hellfei and drag it over. Hellfei struggled, but couldn't do anything other than spit out poison mist. However, Xu Qing wasn't interested in studying Hellfei's poison. As soon as it was in front of him, he slashed down

with a saber, splitting open its body to study it. He wanted to see Hellfei's physical makeup, as well as the makeup of its soul, to see if he could understand its poison on a substructural level.

Even Hellfei was shocked by this development. It struggled even more mightily, but the difference between the two was so immense that it was powerless to do anything to Xu Qing other than use poison.

And its poison was indeed formidable. After it had spat out seven or eight mouthfuls that could infect godliness, Xu Qing frowned. He waved his hand, and his black spear appeared, which he stabbed through Hellfei's head, killing it again.

It has an illusory form, with a blurred soul. It really was born from resentment. And yet the way the resentment circulates within it is very interesting.... I need to do some more dissections to understand what it's really like inside.

His eyes glittered with anticipation as he looked at the spot where Hellfei had died. After a few breaths of time passed, another version of Hellfei appeared in front of Xu Qing. It was about to roar, but then Xu Qing's hand shot out. He quickly began slicing it apart, separating its torso, its snake tail, and its limbs. And then, with the true spirit of a student, he started studying it....

Chapter 890: Five Filths of the Gods

Time passed.

Xu Qing wasn't feeling anxious. He killed Hellfei quickly the first time, but the roughly dozen times after that... he took his time dissecting and studying it. The reason he needed a dozen times was partly because his careful study often led to Hellfei's death in the name of research. But more often than not, Hellfei would spit out some poison that infected the area, including Xu Qing's godliness. And that caused an obstacle for his research.

In the end, it didn't matter. Whenever Hellfei died, it only took a few dozen breaths of time before it was back. That provided Xu Qing plenty of opportunities to lure the poison out of it using his soul threads. That was the best way he could come up with at the moment to deal with Hellfei's poison. After all, the poison targeted godliness, and the source of Xu Qing's godliness was his soul threads.

At the same time, he also continued to use his own poison to vie with Hellfei's poison. The result was that the ruins he occupied were filled with more and more soul threads.

Even still, Xu Qing continued with his study. The biggest downside... was that even after Hellfei had died dozens of times, its battle prowess continued to climb with each death. At a certain point, it came back to life with second-stage Void Returning battle prowess.

Its roar was like a god, and his poison was even more capable of spreading pestilence....

That didn't change how things worked, though. Even with Hellfei's increased battle prowess, Xu Qing just reached out, grabbed it like before, and dragged it in front of him. As before, he dismembered, dissected, and studied.

Xu Qing had always been an earnest devotee of study and research. It was very similar to the way he experimented on prisoners in the Violent Crimes Division back in Seven Blood Eyes. Those experiments were one of the main reasons for his amazing achievements in the dao of poison. When all was said and done, Xu Qing really valued knowledge.

Xu Qing summoned his black spear and put an end to Hellfei before it could self-detonate.

Hellfei... has a very unusual body structure. That said, I now understand a bit about how it forms that poison....

Xu Qing's eyes were narrowed in thought as he used soul threads to draw out Hellfei's poison from within him. Then he looked back at the spot where Hellfei had just died, and prepared for another round of research. Next, he wanted to study Hellfei's soul.

As the mist in the world churned like a great, wild sea, Hellfei returned again. This time, the aura of third-stage Void Returning swept out, shoving the mist aside as it bore down furiously on Xu Qing.

Xu Qing's gaze hardened as he hurled his spear at Hellfei's head. But Hellfei, who had already been killed by that spear many times, blurred, dodging to the side to avoid the spear. Then it appeared right in front of Xu Qing, where it spat out some poison mist.

But then, a heavenly saber fell. It was only one slash. But Hellfei was chopped in half, whereupon the pieces collapsed into nothing.

As it died, Xu Qing's golden crow emerged from his back, faced the spot where Hellfei had just died, and inhaled deeply.

The gory remains of Hellfei did nothing. The golden crow looked confused.

Xu Qing frowned.

He could sense that the golden crow hadn't managed to absorb even a scrap of a soul. What was more, this action seemed to have touched on some sort of taboo, as the mist in the world went absolutely wild. Overhead, the massive vortex suddenly emitted deafening rumbling sounds. Lightning bolts snapped back and forth, the sky rippled, and the lands shook. At the same time, Hellfei's howl echoed out as it stepped from the illusory to the corporeal.

Next, the vortex above surged as a version of Hellfei emerged that was some 3,000 meters long. Whether in body or aura, this Hellfei surpassed the previous versions by every metric. And its roar was a heaven-rending, earth-crushing sound that spread out in all directions.

Before Xu Qing could even launch an attack, it opened its mouth and inhaled deeply.

The mist in the world swept into Hellfei's mouth. In fact, in the blink of an eye, it absorbed every scrap of mist there was. It was a dramatic and majestic sight. Hellfei didn't just absorb the mist. It also sucked in all of its body parts that were laying around.

Its 3,000-meter-long body began to shrivel down, while at the same time, its single eye grew brighter and brighter until it was the most eye-catching thing in the world. And it was staring at Xu Qing.

He looked at it curiously.

It doesn't want me to study its soul....

Around then, wild colors flashed in heaven and earth, and everything shook. The ancient voice of the Greenwood reached Xu Qing, and it sounded anxious.

“Young friend, your assistance has already been something of a miracle. But be careful. Pushing that evil spirit into a corner will force it to send more power into that form. Then it will unleash its life essence divine ability to crush it. It’s called... Five Filths of the Gods!

“Young friend, can you buy a bit more time? Drain Hellfei some more? This battle in the starry sky is reaching a critical point.”

Almost as if to emphasize that point, wild shockwaves swept down from the starry sky beyond the dome of heaven. The entire world shook so violently it seemed like it might collapse. The ground split open, causing irregularly sized chunks of earth to rise up into the air. At the same time, ripples rolled across the sky. The world really did seem like it was heading into a doomsday.

Yet again, Xu Qing rose to his feet on the listing tower. The moment he did, Hellfei’s vertical pupil went wide! An incomparably evil and ancient power began to build up. At the same time, five mysterious dao chants filled his mind.

“First filth: godfire’s smoke rises; godfire is inherently smokeless; gather smoke and converge impurities; create uncleanness.

“Second filth: god soul’s desire builds; the god soul is inherently desireless; gather desire and converge mortality; shed omniscience.

“Third filth: god body decaying; the god body is inherently undecayed; gather decay and build rot; never eternal.

“Fourth filth: god shrine covered in dust; the god shrine is inherently without dust; gather dust and lose brilliance; sever joss flame.

“Fifth filth: godly nature is filth; godly nature is inherently without filth; gather filth and lose wisdom; decline personhood.”

These were the Five Filths of the Gods.

Each of the five dao chants caused a tremor to pass through Xu Qing. He had no godfire, yet the signs of the first filth still presented. Hissing black smoke appeared, filled with impurities. It created a profoundly unclean sensation. Then, his soul trembled as his seven emotions and six sensory pleasures went out of control. They were like a rising tide that overwhelmed all of his senses.

However, there was more. His body began to decay, and his life force faded. Rot began to fill him. Next, the soul threads within him, which had godsource as their foundation, filled the role of the god shrine that was mentioned. Dust began to cover them, causing them to lose their brilliance. Finally was his godly nature. As it burned brightly, he lost control of his human nature and animal nature, which caused his personhood to decline.

Even Xu Qing was taken aback by these developments. He could sense that this... was a poison specifically designed to target gods!

Based on what he was experiencing, Xu Qing now understood why Hellfei would be a very suitable heavenly dao for his taboo poison. The Five Filths of the Gods was a perfect match for his god curse. In fact, his curse would make a great sixth filth.

God's life fully cursed; a god's life is inherently curseless; gather the curse to sever life; eradicate godsource.

As Xu Qing thought those things over the course of just a few breaths of time, the ferocious Five Filths of the Gods exploded in intensity.

A mysterious light flickered in Xu Qing's eyes, and then the projection of a huge sundial appeared behind him. The gnomon spun, and it was as if a river of ancient time had been unleashed. And the waves rolling across its surface were from five breaths of time in the past. Time... was moving backward in accordance with the spinning of the gnomon!

The smoke of impurity from the first filth rapidly vanished. The seven emotions and six sensory pleasures that had cropped up in his soul went completely calm. His senses became clear again. The decay to his body was reversed, and the rot went away.

His soul threads no longer had dust on them, and instead were brilliant. His godly nature, human nature, and animal nature all returned to a state of balance.

It looked like time had been reversed and Xu Qing was back at the point before the five filths had been unleashed. But after the sundial faded away, he frowned. He had just realized that though the sundial had indeed caused time to reverse, resulting in his body recovering, that time reversal didn't actually change the Five Filths of the Gods.

The poisonous origin of the five filths was still around.

However, that power didn't do anything. It seemed to be converging. Building up. It was easy to imagine what would happen shortly when it was fully powered up. It would be completely unleashed on Xu Qing.

Xu Qing had lots of experience working with poison. Sometimes he had Little Shadow devour it. Sometimes he sent it into the god's finger. Sometimes he opened a portal to Emperor Ancient Spirit and sent it there. Those were all possibilities right now. He could even use his own godly curse in combination with his sundial to try to build up an immunity to this new poison.

But he didn't do any of those things. Instead, he lifted his right hand and used a technique he hadn't used in a long time. His entire hand turned as semitransparent as a Gruegloom.

Then, with complete decisiveness, he reached his hand into his chest, and shoved it all the way into his sea of consciousness to the second trove gate there. Clenching his hand into a fist he punched the gate with full force. Though there was no heavenly dao behind that gate, the force Xu Qing had unleashed was enough to crack it open slightly.

The moment that happened, a gravitational force erupted, latching onto the origin of the poison and dragging it toward the trove gate.

Only a moment later, the trove gate slammed shut again. However, the poison's origin had already been sealed inside.

Having accomplished that, Xu Qing looked up. Hellfei, whose filth poison had suddenly just disappeared, looked surprised as Xu Qing then hefted his black spear and summoned his heavenly saber. Saber and spear were unleashed simultaneously, bringing attacks from both heaven and earth.

The mighty Hellfei shivered before exploding. The crumbling world also exploded like a mirror that had been shattered. The starry sky was revealed.

The enormous Hellfei's true body howled in grief. It became incredibly weak as it looked venomously at Xu Qing. It wanted to fight back, but had no strength left. The ancient Greenwood tree sent branches wrapping around it viciously, ensuring that all of its struggles were useless.

Eventually, the branches pierced into Hellfei's body, causing blood to rain down. Then branches popped out from its skin in various locations. It was a brutal sight as it went completely still.

The starry sky trembled as the source of the resentment disappeared, and everything turned bright and clear. However, the enormous tree had gone all out, and was now like a lamp without much oil left.

"Many thanks. I now have no regrets." As branches wrapped around the face of Hellfei's corpse, the head exploded. Only the solitary eye remained. A branch wrapped around it and threw it to Xu Qing. "As promised, young friend, here is your reward."

From beginning to end, Xu Qing had remained calm and silent. But as the eye flew toward him, he lifted his right hand. A heavenly saber appeared there, and without any hesitation, he slashed it down. The eye was slashed to pieces!

"Done with the act?" Xu Qing asked quietly.