

Beyond the Timescape

Chapter 1003: Fifth Star Ring

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Almost in unison with the words spoken by the old man, the dusky interior of the world inside Timeruins suddenly flared with shimmering, dazzling light. It was magnificent, almost like light refracted off the surface of water, which then rippled up to illuminate the canopy of heaven with multi-colored brightness. Meanwhile, the swampy lands were also changing in a mysterious way. Dense water vapor billowed out of nowhere, rapidly covering the entire swamp, and significantly reducing visibility.

Xu Qing and Erniu looked around with shocked expressions on their faces. Before either could do a thing, a heaven-rending, earth-crushing sound erupted, like the howl of a beast or the roar of a god.

Next, a massive river appeared, with waves that carried time itself as it rushed in their direction. In the blink of an eye, it rushed right past Xu Qing and Erniu, and then disappeared into something like a black hole some 30,000 meters away.

It was as if the river Xu Qing and Erniu could see was only one small section of a much mightier river. The water came from heaven, flowed past them, then disappeared 30,000 meters away, where it went to a different section of time.

Even more grish was that, even though the water of the river rushed rapidly right in front of them, it didn't actually seem to be located in the same dimension as them. The flowing water seemed illusory, as if this was just a reflection that had appeared for some reason in their location.

Xu Qing immediately recognized what he was looking at. "The River of Time!"

Wherever time passed, this river existed. However, to make it appear required either very unique authority or astonishing levels of power. Xu Qing had experience with this river, whether it was Princess Brightblossom in the Moonrite Region or other gods who had time abilities. All of them took the initiative to use it, causing the great river to appear, and then borrowing its power to fish out time from within it. All of them were *using* it.

But what was happening with this old man, who apparently came from some world beyond theirs, was completely different. The old man stood in the middle of the River of Time, looking at the spot where it came from. He was clearly waiting. He was waiting for the 'little thing' that he had mentioned.... It seemed that, in his eyes, the great River of Time wasn't something mysterious or profound. It was as if he could calculate its flow with ease, and understand all of its karma.

Apparently... he was standing within time itself, waiting for some sort of prey to appear. This was a level that completely surpassed the concept of simply *using* the river.

Thanks to Xu Qing's god perception, his mind and heart were pulsing in sync with the river. It made him think about back when he gained enlightenment of the authority of sound. Godly authority was something primeval that came from primal-chaos itself. It was an extremely ancient power that existed within the dark recesses of the world. Merely being able to grasp it signified that one was qualified to use it. And that would create a sealing mark.

But that only related to *using* it. This was a much higher level that revolved around *control*. As Xu Qing looked at this old man and considered these matters, he came to the conclusion... that the old man was definitely at that level! Maybe he wasn't a god, but he was able to do things that ordinary gods couldn't do.

That was the limit of what Xu Qing could 'see.' However, he was also certain that this was not the limit of what this old man could do. As for where his limits were, the details would differ based on perception. Perhaps to most living beings, it would be enough to say that the old man was 'strong.'

Meanwhile, Erniu was also reeling in mind and heart.

As the two of them dealt with a myriad of conflicting emotions and thoughts, a stream of golden light appeared in the great River of Time. The light sped through the water, moving much faster than the flow of the river itself. And wherever it passed, the waves of time collapsed.

Upon seeing that, Xu Qing yet again felt his mind teetering.

There's something inside the River of Time moving faster than the river itself...? Doesn't that imply that this golden light can move faster than time?

Everything Xu Qing had seen and experienced in the outer sea had shattered his previous conceptions of the world. His eyes had truly been opened to new horizons.

As he watched something move faster than time itself, Xu Qing's heart started racing. He wanted to see clearly what that golden light was, but clearly, his current level of cultivation base wouldn't allow him to do so.

But then... the golden light speeding through the river reached the old man. There, it stopped, moving no further. And its true form was revealed. When Xu Qing saw it clearly, his eyes went wide. Erniu's gaze became one of great curiosity.

It was a golden rat! It looked very similar to the golden rat Xu Qing and Erniu had encountered in that cave when they acquired the holy fardark nectar. That said, its aura was different. Furthermore, this golden rat pulsed with an even more ancient aura. One thing was for certain, it was definitely a member of the same species![1]

As for this golden rat, it didn't run around on four legs. Instead, it walked upright like a human. A single hemp sandal hung from its mouth, which it held in both hands. Apparently, it had been running along and chewing the sandal at the same time, resulting in the sandal being somewhat dilapidated.

The moment the rat saw the old man, a look of surprise and fear appeared on its face. Its eyes shone with terror, and it immediately stopped chewing on the sandal. The golden rat then spun around and fled in the opposite direction, going against the flow of the river.

The old man looked at the golden rat and smiled. "Little thing, you stole something of mine. I let you run free for quite a while, but now here you are right in front of me!"

The old man reached out through the River of Time to grab the rat.

A series of anxious squeals erupted from the mouth of the golden rat. At the same time, golden light shone off it, turning the surrounding river a golden color as it accelerated dramatically. It really seemed like it would manage to speed against the flow of the river and disappear into the canopy of heaven.

But only an instant later, the old man's grasping hand caused the spot where the river came out of the sky to be sealed off. The same thing happened to the area where it disappeared into the earth 30,000 meters away. Both ends had been sealed. The river now couldn't flow in this area!

The golden rat's path was sealed both ahead and behind! The river water in between those spots was cut off and began to sink down.

The golden rat shivered as it tried to break into the void. But an instant later, the river water that remained behind surged, becoming a rope of water that shot toward the rat. The rope ignored the struggles of the rat, wrapping tightly around its neck and dragging it toward the old man.

In the blink of an eye, it landed in the old man's hand. He shook it back and forth.

Perhaps the rope of river water was too tight, or perhaps it was just terrifyingly powerful. Either way, the rat's legs trembled and it squeaked several times. Pale froth bubbled at its lips, and its eyes went blank before fluttering shut. Its life force was rapidly vanishing, and an aura of death spread through it. Soon, it wasn't moving at all, making it seem like it was dead.

Erniu, meanwhile, blinked a few times and then suddenly shouted, "Senior, that rogue is just pretending to be dead! Hmmmphh! I can't believe someone would try to fake their own death in front of *me*! I can tell the truth at a glance. This little thing is just too inexperienced!"

A faint smile appeared on the old man's face as he looked at the golden rat hanging limply in his hand. "Even Fur Monster can see that you're pretending to be dead. Very clumsy indeed. If you want to get out of this alive, you're going to have to help me."

The golden rat shivered from head to toe and then opened its eyes. After casting a murderous glare at Erniu, it shifted its gaze to the old man, making sure to look very flattering.

Then it lifted up the hemp sandal with both hands, as if formally returning it.

The old man took the sandal, noting its dilapidated state. After shaking it out a few times, he dropped it onto the ground and slipped his foot into it. He shook his head.

“You good-for-nothing lout. Last time you stole my clothing, I took away your ability to speak. Then you coveted my sandals, and after going to all the effort of stealing one, you only managed to eat this much of it? I guess you’re just not very lucky.”

With that, the old man gripped the rope of time that was tied around the rat’s neck, and started walking up toward the dome of heaven. The rat swayed back and forth, looking very pitiful. At a certain point, it looked down at Erniu with a scowl, as if it was determined to remember what he looked like.

Xu Qing wasn’t paying attention to the rat. He kept his eyes on the old man, all while wondering if he should ask the questions that burned inside of him right now.

When Erniu noticed the golden rat glaring at him, he laughed coldly in his heart. He had to agree with what the old grandpa said, that this rat was really unlucky. After chewing on that hemp sandal, it hardly managed to swallow more than a bite or two. Erniu knew that if he had that opportunity, he would have stuffed the entire thing into his stomach. He looked back at the rat with clear derision.

The golden rat got even angrier at that, and let loose some more squeaks.

The old man heard and laughed. “You sense the bloodline of one of your descendants? Well, of course! Otherwise, these two wouldn’t have been swallowed by Timeruins and arrived in the very spot where I was waiting for you. Okay, enough tattle-telling. We need to go home.”

The old man was almost at the horizon now, where he waved his right hand gently toward the dome of heaven. The sky rumbled loudly. Great cracking sounds rang out as the sky split open, revealing a massive rift.... The other side of the rift was pitch black, but it was clearly possible to detect the aura of another world. It was above the surface of a sea!

The old man took another step forward. He was about to go through the rift.

Xu Qing suddenly clasped hands and bowed, all while speaking in a loud voice. “Senior, there’s something I’m confused about. If you’re inclined to explain, I would greatly appreciate it. Earlier, you said that this place is the Primeval Sea. And you said that the world my Elder Brother and I are from doesn’t know much about the Primeval Sea. In that case... what is the Primeval Sea? And why would my aura be sensed by all of the star rings?”

Xu Qing remained bowed at the waist as he waited for an answer.

The old man turned around and looked at Xu Qing. “You have a body made from Eminent Desolation’s flesh, so you should at least have a vague sense of the fact that the universe we all occupy has thirty-six star rings. Every star ring is vast and boundless, and filled with countless lands and places.[2]

“The Primeval Sea is a fantastic thing. Any location where it exists is a strategic spot and a prosperous place. And that’s because the Primeval Sea connects all of the star rings in the universe. And that’s also why, when you come here, your aura can spread everywhere.

“That said, don’t worry. I made sure to cover your aura. What’s more, the Primeval Sea in this spot is special. It’s currently sealed. You can only get in through rifts, which means that outsiders can never stay inside for very long. After all, your star ring used to be extremely famous.

“I suppose our meeting indicates we have a predestined affinity. One day, if you ever become a Lower Immortal, then you’ll have the basic qualifications to pass through the Primeval Sea. If you use that opportunity to leave this place, and if you’re also willing, you can use the Primeval Sea to come find me in the Immortal Capital in the Fifth Star Ring. That’s a world ruled by humans, and it’s also a world of immortals.”

With that, the old man stepped through the rift and vanished.

1. The golden rat first appeared in [chapter 922](#), and was in every chapter until the most relevant aspect of that small story arc, which was in [chapter 927](#). 📖

2. We have previously heard about ‘star rings’ in chapters [642](#), [705](#) (the footnote here might be worth revisiting if you don’t remember what I said about it), and [899](#). This term is not a very common term. Of the roughly 20+ dictionaries I use, only one of them has a definition of it (only in Chinese, and it’s not a very detailed definition, being only an explanation from a random line of ancient poetry). There isn’t even a Baidu wiki entry for the term, and Baidu wiki has entries for just about everything. If you do an image search of it, you will find some images of the planet Saturn. This is because the character “star” can also mean planet depending on the context. You can also find pictures of galaxies. This is *not* the common word for galaxy. However, in my imagination, these ‘star rings’ look like galaxies, and based on how they are described here and later, that seems to me to be the most plausible interpretation of what they look like. This is a fantasy universe, so I don’t in any way think that they are supposed to correspond to what real-life galaxies are, in terms of the number of stars/planets in them, or anything like that. 📖

Chapter 1004: A Place That Might Not Exist

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In the world inside Timeruins, Xu Qing and Erniu looked up at the rift in the dome of heaven, a thousand thoughts running through their minds.

To Xu Qing, this experience in the outer sea had been both freakish and phenomenal. That included the gruish entities they had encountered, and this human old man. All of them were deeply thought-provoking. The words the old man spoke before leaving had truly opened Xu Qing’s eyes to the world, and left him feeling deeply shaken.

Thirty-six star rings... and the Primeval Sea.... There were some things that Xu Qing had come to vaguely sense upon acquiring this body created from Eminent Desolation’s flesh. For instance, he did have a vague impression that there were thirty-six star rings out there. However, this was his first time hearing about the Primeval Sea. *I can’t rule out that what he told me is false. But in all likelihood, it seems true....*

Off to the side, Erniu slapped his thigh. “Little Ah Qing,” he said in a serious tone, “I’ve finally figured it out!”

Xu Qing looked over. He was curious to hear his Eldest Brother's thoughts. After all, this elderly human who proclaimed himself to be from the Immortal Capital in the Fifth Star Ring was too shocking, both in terms of his cultivation base and his manner of speaking. 'Outrageous' was a perfectly acceptable word to use to describe him.

With a grave facial expression, Erniu looked at Xu Qing and said, "Up on the surface of the sea, all I had to do was say the word 'safe,' and we would instantly encounter some really freakish things.... Now that I think about it, it was obviously the doings of that old man! He did it all on purpose!"

Erniu looked a bit disappointed, as if he really had believed that everything which happened was a direct result of the words that left his mouth. Apparently, his thoughts had been focused elsewhere. Unlike Xu Qing, he hadn't been paying close attention to the old man's final words, and their astonishing implications. Xu Qing was of course used to the way that his Eldest Brother's way of thinking differed from that of normal people.

That venerable Senior said that humans rule the Fifth Star Ring. It's a world of immortals.... Of course, I can't just automatically trust everything he says.

Xu Qing looked at the distant rift in the dome of heaven. It was hard to say if Erniu had really missed that last bit of information, or if he just wasn't shocked by it.

As Xu Qing stared up into the sky, Erniu looked over at the spot where the old man had dropped his sandal onto the ground. Leaping over to that spot, he squatted down and started searching the area. Before long, he managed to locate four strips of woven hemp.

Erniu's eyes gleamed with mad joy as he picked them up, handling them as if they were precious treasures. He immediately put them into his mouth and bit down with his teeth. A moment later, he frowned, as he realized that biting the hemp wasn't doing anything. As he kept trying in different ways, he noticed that Xu Qing seemed to be lost in thought. He blinked a few times.

"Don't waste your brainpower, little Ah Qing. Those things aren't even relevant to us. Besides, we have no way of knowing if that old fellow had good intentions or malicious ones. If you ask me, he didn't just want to have a look at you. He was probably interested in forming some karmic bonds with us! Otherwise, why would he offer us that skewered meat?"

Xu Qing nodded. "Eldest Brother, just now you said we had no way of knowing if that human Senior had good intentions or malicious ones. You clearly don't suspect the accuracy of the things he said...." Xu Qing's eyes glittered. "I guess that means... you already knew about all that stuff he told us?"

Erniu cleared his throat. *Little Ah Qing just keeps getting more and more wily. It's really hard to fool him nowadays.*

Erniu laughed heartily, glanced left and right, and then looked at Xu Qing with shining eyes. "There's no need to get into all of that. Say, did it occur to you that we also have a golden rat like that one we just saw? Remember, Little Jianjian is incubating those eggs. In fact, I wonder if they've hatched already. Wait, hold on. This won't do. Considering how incredible that golden rat was, I'd say we have to get back to the imperial capital post haste. We need to get those little rats back from Wu Jianwu!"[1]

Xu Qing didn't reply, but he kept his eyes on Erniu.

Seeing that, Erniu again tried to change the topic. Waving the four hemp threads in Xu Qing's direction, he said, "Look at these hemp threads! Considering that golden rat was so interested in them, they must be treasures! I just tried to take a bite, but these thingies are just too tough! I couldn't even leave a dent!" Erniu looked down at the hemp threads. "Of course, that old rat was a complete idiot. Just because you can't bite them doesn't mean you can't eat them!"

Erniu suddenly looked very proud. "It's not like I've never encountered unbitable things before. In situations like this, I know exactly what to do!"

He gritted his teeth. Considering that he really wanted to distract Xu Qing, he decided to throw caution to the wind.

As Xu Qing watched, Erniu placed his hand on his belly, then shoved violently. Unexpectedly, blood sprayed everywhere as he ripped his abdomen open. Then, he placed two of the hemp threads directly into his stomach. Having done that, he pulled the flaps of ripped belly flesh closed like a garment. Then he used the black fur growing off his skin to tie the pieces together. He tossed the other two hemp threads to Xu Qing.

"I might not know what they taste like, but as you can see, I still managed to get them into my stomach." Looking very pleased with himself, the Captain patted his belly.

Xu Qing sighed. His Eldest Brother hadn't directly answered the questions, but his actions gave Xu Qing the information he sought. And he was confident that there was a good reason for his Eldest Brother not wanting to say such things out loud....

With such thoughts in mind, Xu Qing decided not to ask any more questions. Taking the two hemp threads, he studied them before putting them into his bag of holding. Then, looking very calm, he said, "Let's go."

Erniu sighed inwardly in relief when he saw that Xu Qing wasn't asking any further questions. Nodding vigorously, he flew with Xu Qing up into the air and toward the rift. When they passed through the rift, they left the world inside Timeruins, and found themselves on the surface of the outer sea.

Even upon leaving Timeruins, Xu Qing didn't get a good look at the thing's true features. It was as if the moment they flew out, Timeruins melted back into the sea like an ink painting, ultimately vanishing in very gruish fashion.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered profoundly. He finally took out his dreadnaught, boarded, and looked off into the depths of the outer sea, all the while thinking about the Fifth Star Ring that old man had mentioned.

The surface of the sea was as calm and silent as death.

Erniu stood next to him, and when he noticed what Xu Qing was looking at, he sighed inwardly again.

“Seriously, little Junior Brother. Stop thinking about it. When you asked me if I knew about that stuff, I didn’t answer your question. Not because I didn’t want to tell you, but because I just can’t say the name of the place you’re thinking about. That name is taboo. Inauspicious.

“I’ve never seen that old man before, neither in this life nor in any of my past lives. But as soon as he mentioned the name of that place, I got an idea of who he might be.

“This isn’t his first time appearing in Revered Ancient. Master probably knows something about the old man. In fact, Master is the one who told me about the taboo and inauspicious nature of that name. Countless years in the past, Master ran a very thorough investigation and told me that the old man actually showed up in Revered Ancient two times in the past.

“The first time was when he appeared to the Summer Immortals and told them about the Fifth Star Ring. Later, the Summer Immortals left, presumably to go to that place, except they’ve never returned.

“The second time, according to Master’s suspicions, was before Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity left. Incidentally, both Master and Empress Summer Departure believe that Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity is no longer with the holy lands. So where is he?

“Today was the third time, and he came either for you or me.

“As for the place he came from, that name... at least according to Master... doesn’t actually exist. However, when people hear it spoken of, it gains foundation in reality. In other words, the more people talk about it, the more real it becomes.”

Xu Qing turned to look at Erniu. Erniu looked at Xu Qing.

After a moment of thought, Xu Qing said, “And what do *you* think, Eldest Brother?”

Erniu looked off into the distance for a long moment. He shook his head. “Master’s theory makes sense, and I agree with part of it. But there’s part of it I’m not sure about. After all, Master has never been there.

“I have the feeling that the place is real. The question is whether it’s good or evil. In this universe of gods, there are many, many fantastic things. Anything can exist. Everything is possible. A good example is me.”

That last sentence struck Xu Qing like a bolt of heavenly thunder, filling his mind with rumbling sounds and causing him to breathe heavily. In fact, compared to that bit of information, everything else didn’t seem very important to Xu Qing. Xu Qing still didn’t know who his Eldest Brother really was. However, given everything they had been through, and all the gruish things he had seen his Eldest Brother do, Xu Qing had some speculations.

“Eldest Brother, you....” Xu Qing trailed off.

Erniu didn’t say anything for a long moment, and his eyes shone with uncharacteristic confusion. “Little Junior Brother, there are some people who call me a god bastard. Some people call me a monstrous freak.... As for what I really am, Master doesn’t know, and neither do I. The truth is that I’ve been searching for an answer all along.[2]

“I can remember time passing by and being resurrected over and over again. And there are some things about my past that, when I recall them, I forget things from the present. In truth... there are already some things about this life, even habits, that I’ve forgotten. I truly fear that the day could come, little Junior Brother... that I don’t recognize you. Or Master.... It wouldn’t be until the following life that, in a sudden flash, I remember all of you.”

Erniu’s voice grew softer and softer as he spoke.

Meanwhile, an indescribable feeling built up in Xu Qing. He wasn’t sure exactly what it was, but it felt bitter and painful.

Erniu noticed Xu Qing’s facial expression, and for a brief moment, a look of pride flashed across his face. *Little Ah Qing, oh, little Ah Qing. No matter how wily you are, I’m always going to be your Eldest Brother. I can pull a fast one on you without any effort at all. Now, to wrap things up all neat and tidy.*

With that thought in mind, Erniu cleared his throat and said, “Let’s not talk about such painful things. Don’t be too sad, little Junior Brother. Just remember that, whatever amazing things you come across in the future, you should always save a portion for me. For example, the flesh of gods, cultivator authority, godly authority, et cetera. And of course, spirit stones and other mundane items count as well. Naturally, the more you set aside for me the better. It’s not that I’m greedy! No! Rather, the more things you give me, the more deeply my memories will be rooted.”

Xu Qing nodded, rummaged around his bag of holding, and took out a spirit stone which he handed to Erniu.

Erniu quickly took it. However, he didn’t sound very pleased when he said, “Just one?”

Xu Qing’s expression became one of bitterness. “Eldest Brother, in the past when you ate spirit stones, you would always eat one stone at a time. You... forgot that habit already?”

Stunned, Erniu looked at Xu Qing. Xu Qing looked back at him very sincerely.

Erniu hesitated, glanced at the spirit stone, and gave another look at Xu Qing. Suddenly feeling very ferocious, he put the spirit stone in his mouth, crunched it to pieces, and swallowed it.

Then, just as he was about to say something, Xu Qing pulled out a sword and performed a quick bit of magic. Rust instantly covered the sword.

“Huh?” Erniu said suspiciously.

“Eldest brother, whenever you eat spirit stones, you always say that they lack flavor. So you follow them up with a rusty sword....”

After a moment of silence, Erniu laughed heartily. “Oh, you! I was just joking around, little Junior Brother! How could I lose my memories! I’m completely fine!”

Eyes glittering, Xu Qing looked at Erniu and softly said, “Eldest Brother, I’m not sure how much of what you said just now was true, and how much was false. But I can tell that you care very much about that certain name.... Therefore, I have something I need to tell you. I’m going to work hard

so that, in the future, nothing bad happens to you or anyone else I care about. If I can't do that... then I'll suffer with you."

Xu Qing's words entered Erniu's ears and resonated in his heart. Looking at Xu Qing, he suddenly felt the impulse to throw caution to the wind and tell him everything. He opened his mouth to speak.

Xu Qing shook his head. "You have your secrets, Eldest Brother. I have mine. Master has his.... When an appropriate time comes, then you can tell me. Okay?"

Erniu thought about it, then laughed and nodded vigorously. "Sure!"

Almost there....

Beyond the world of Revered Ancient, out in the starry sky, a host of holy lands had stirred up a starry tempest. A terrifying aura pulsed around them as they sped toward Revered Ancient. Behind all those holy lands was a statue with eight arms. The area around the statue's head was full of oscillating distortions. It was just barely possible to see a figure seated cross-legged there.

My home. My apprentice. And also... the Primeval Sea.

1. Xu Qing and Erniu gave the eggs to Wu Jianwu in [chapter 932](#). ㊦
2. The term god bastard came up previously in [chapters 621](#), [629.1](#), [630](#), and [686](#). ㊦

Chapter 1005: He Should Be a True God

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As Timeruins faded away from the Primeval Sea, the surface of the water went calm. But at the same time, an indescribable sensation of danger began to build up, seemingly out of nowhere. It pulsed through the darkness and gloom, causing ripples to distort the air, and creating a pressure that weighed down on the heart and mind. Chanting drifted faintly from within the water, a sound that could drive someone into madness. It was as if death itself was approaching. This was the Primeval Sea, a location in which danger constantly loomed everywhere.

Xu Qing and Erniu both had very serious expressions on their faces. After traversing this sea for more than a month, and experiencing one strange situation after another, they had personally experienced what that danger was like.

One of them controlled a dharmaship as it sped along, the other sent his senses into the surroundings, while simultaneously performing an incantation gesture that made the ship becoming almost invisible within the surrounding darkness.

The dreadnaught had not survived the process of being devoured by Timeruins. Now, they were forced to switch to a dharmaship to travel. Thankfully, Xu Qing's godsource provided a bolstering effect that pushed the dharmaship to astonishing levels of speed.

After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, something happened. Perhaps it was luck, or perhaps it was because Timeruins' aura was disappearing, or maybe it was Erniu's invisibility magic. Regardless, the end effect was that 'death' didn't come around after all.

As the two of them made their way forward at top speed, they gradually left the Primeval Sea. After about two more hours passed, the sense of danger grew so weak it disappeared.

Xu Qing and Erniu breathed long sighs of relief. However, upon exchanging a glance, they could each see that the other was frowning deeply.

"I have no idea where we are..." Xu Qing said grimly. Previously, they had been paying close attention to their position to make sure they didn't get lost in the outer sea. But after being devoured by Timeruins, their senses were cut off from the outside. And right now, they were unsure of their current location. All they could see around them was endless darkness.

Erniu sighed. "I wonder how Ol' Pappy Yu is doing. He didn't get eaten by Timeruins, but I get the feeling he's still in the outer sea. And I also get the sense he isn't doing that well. We really miscalculated. If we'd known things would go like this, we could have come up with a good excuse to not come along."

Xu Qing thought for a moment, then replied, "I have an idea about how to figure out where we are. The downside is that it'll probably attract unwanted attention."

Xu Qing looked at Erniu.

Erniu considered what he'd just said. "How much time will it take, little Ah Qing?"

Xu Qing did a quick calculation. "About the time it takes an incense stick to burn."

"In that case, no problem! Just give me a moment to make some preparations." But then Erniu looked at the dharmaship and hesitated. "Any chance you have a smaller boat?"

Xu Qing immediately took out a very small dharmaboat and then put away the dharmaship. Erniu gritted his teeth then punched himself hard in the pit of the stomach, which forced sprays of blood out of his lips as he paced back and forth on the dharmaboat.

Xu Qing wasn't taken aback at all by this behavior. Over their years together, he had come to realize that his Eldest Brother usually had unlimited supplies of blood to work with.

Before long, the dharmaboat was covered inside and out with Erniu's blood. Erniu looked a bit pale in the face as he sat down and beckoned at Xu Qing.

"I'm using my own blood to unleash the same invisibility effect as the Wordless words. For an incense stick's worth of time, we should be totally fine!"

Without a moment of hesitation, Xu Qing closed his eyes, sent his god perception out and activated his godly authority of sound. Ripples spread out as... Xu Qing's god perception detected sound on the quiet outer sea. It was the sound of the water, flowing through the darkness. It was the unknown chanting coming from the ruins that dotted the surface of the sea.

Countless sounds exploded, all at the same time. As time passed, and as the sounds spread, terrifying entities sent out streams of divine will. There was laughter. There was crying. There were polite inquiries. There were enraged shouts.

The many sounds caused Xu Qing to tremble. All he could do was work as hard as possible to screen them out, and send his godly authority further and further out, hoping to identify his position and find the way back. As the process continued, pressure built up, until the dharmaboat started shaking. Erniu felt incomparably nervous, and began spitting out more and more blood to bolster the invisibility effect. Before long, an incense stick's worth of time had passed.

Xu Qing's eyes shot open, and he coughed up a mouthful of blood. After, his eyes glittered as he pointed in a specific direction.

"That's the way to the inner sea!"

Without a moment's pause, Erniu helped Xu Qing bolster the dharmaboat and send it racing in that direction.

Time slipped by slowly but surely. Half a month.

More time passed. Soon it was a full month since they had been devoured by Timeruins.

They were now about 40,000,000 kilometers to the east of where they had encountered Timeruins. As Xu Qing's dharmaboat zipped along, the sea water suddenly erupted upward in a huge geyser. The water seemed to fly all the way up into heaven, as if it came from the seafloor itself. In fact, the dharmaboat was carried by the water high into the sky.

Xu Qing and Erniu hadn't even recovered from their shock when a voice like flowing waves reached their ears.

"Have the two of you been having fun?"

A red mist sprang up, surrounding Xu Qing and Erniu. Then it disappeared into the distance.

Inside the red mist, a figure appeared in front of the dharmaboat, facing away from Xu Qing and Erniu. The figure was tall and straight as a pine tree, with a crimson robe and an extraordinary disposition. This person was Yu Liuchen, who also... had ceased to show any signs of being anxious.

The moment Xu Qing saw Yu Liuchen, he relaxed a bit inwardly. Clapping hands, he bowed.

"Well met, Senior."

Erniu actually looked excited. "Senior! You finally came!"

Yu Liuchen slowly turned around, revealing a face as handsome as before the moment they had all gone out to sea. Yu Liuchen was also smiling mysteriously, as if everything that had played out had been orchestrated by him.

“Did you have fun playing around in my story?”

Xu Qing blinked a few times. He didn’t see how Yu Liuchen’s story could possibly have touched on the mysterious Fifth Star Ring, or the old man from there. As a result, he came to the conclusion that Yu Liuchen was exaggerating a bit. That said, considering that Yu Liuchen had found them, it did seem to imply that they were part of the story. Therefore, he made sure to plaster a dazed and incredulous look onto his face.

It didn’t take any communication for Erniu to pick up on Xu Qing’s train of thought, and thus, he also revealed a dazzled expression, which quickly turned into a display of astonishment and shock.

“Wait a second, sir!” he said loudly. “Senior, are you telling me that everything we went through was actually part of your story? Senior, your words are orders to hordes of gods! Countless grues can be sucked into one of your stories and not even realize what’s happening! Godly might like that... well, Senior, it’s no wonder you’re worshiped by so many other gods. You can make heaven and earth lose their luster. You can make the starry sky glitter brightly for the most consummately powerful god imaginable!” After finishing with his brown-nosing, Erniu immediately asked, “In that case... are we going to continue the fishing expedition?”

When Yu Liuchen heard the words ‘continue the fishing expedition,’ his heart flip-flopped. However, he didn’t reveal that in his facial expression, which remained the same as ever. It was almost as if he had forgotten the instances along the way in which he had served tea. Looking Xu Qing and Erniu up and down, he said, “That won’t be necessary. He showed up already. Your task is complete.”

With that, Yu Liuchen turned around, faced the vast sea, and stepped up toward the canopy of heaven. High in the sky, he flicked his sleeve, giving the dharmaboat a blessing of godly power that sent it racing away. At the same time, his voice echoed out, carrying with it some sort of karma.

“Brilliant Heaven had a god who perished at the hands of the Summer Immortals, whose true body collapsed, whose god perception went dark, and whose true name returned to the starry sky.

“After ten thousand years, that name reappeared. After another ten thousand years, that god perception returned. After another ten thousand years, the true body was restored... call it a cycle. After many cycles, the true name shone brightly in the desire to return from the void.

“The journey was difficult. Unknown beings appeared and were devoured, one after another. More dangers appeared. More were devoured. After many bitter experiences, and many collapses, godsource once again overflowed! The limit was surpassed. Due to incomparable weakness, the True God could not be, and struggled on the verge of Altar God!”

As Yu Liuchen spoke, his godly authority spread, fusing with the dome of heaven, imprinting on the sea below, and making true words that described a true name.

“And now, as the fire of rebirth burns above the Primeval Sea, the god longs for rest, to recuperate for hundreds of thousands of years.... But there is tribulation in that god’s life, and that tribulation is in the form of a god. Yu Liuchen!

“Yu Liuchen used the karma of the Summer Immortals to throw out two humans as bait. They experienced two months of time, pulling the True God out of the Primeval Sea... to appear in the open! The god appeared, with weak godly might, god power at the lower limit, a true name blurred, hardly able to remember anything.”

As his words echoed out, they caused rumbling sounds to fill heaven and earth. Angry waves surged across the sea, and howls spread everywhere. But Yu Liuchen stood tall in the canopy of heaven, voice crashing like heavenly thunder, growing larger and more influential by the moment.

“And then, as Yu Liuchen looked down, the god collapsed, never to exist again!”

The next instant, wild colors flashed and intense rumbling sounds echoed out as his true words showed signs of shattering. Yu Liuchen frowned, then continued speaking, having made a slight correction to his story. “But the god’s prestige still existed, and the god struggled to break free from Yu Liuchen’s gaze. Yet Yu Liuchen had prepared long for this moment, and had a gaze of utmost mightiness. Thus, the returned god was devoured!”

The true words rumbled loudly and the sealing cracked. Clearly, this wasn’t enough. “Although the devouring failed, the returned god’s true name became even more unclear. Hardly any was left. Flight was sought, but Yu Liuchen’s plan had considered all possibilities. He was simply waiting for the right moment to give chase!”

This time, though the sealing rumbled loudly, it didn’t crumble. Seeing that, Yu Liuchen continued speaking. “A pursuit... of 137 days would ensure that the returned god’s true name was absorbed, and replaced forever! And because Yu Liuchen recounted this story, and spoke it to completion, he should be a True God!”

The true words once again showed signs of crumbling. Yu Liuchen’s eyes glittered, and blood-red light shone off him to bolster the true words. “And because Yu Liuchen recounted this story, and spoke it to completion, he should be a peak Altar God, with a chance to rise to True God!”

The moment the words were spoken, heavenly thunder rumbled, and the sea surged. Sealing marks glittered brightly, forming truth and reality.

Off in the distance, Xu Qing and Erniu felt their hearts racing. Behind them, the sea was seething, and the sound of endless chanting rose high. It formed an immense pressure which weighed down on the world. The chanting was like an ancient sound echoing about. A pressure like a reconvergence of time began to gather.

High in the dome of heaven, Yu Liuchen’s eyes glittered as his plan of tens of thousands of years began to unfold. The protagonist he had selected for his carefully crafted story... was about to appear!

Chapter 1006: The Holy Lands War Begins

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Xu Qing and Erniu hadn't hesitated for a moment to send the dharmaboat speeding off into the distance. The blessing of Yu Liuchen's god power provided a measure of protection, and also boosted the ship's speed. As a result, they were already a great distance away from that area of the sea. However, the lingering fluctuations of the story spoken by Yu Liuchen still reached them, immediately filling them with an intense sensation of deadly crisis!

Focusing inwardly, Xu Qing sent his cultivation base into full rotation, unleashing all of his godsource to bolster the dharmaboat. Erniu was also fully aware that the more distance they covered, the safer they would be, so he held nothing back to keep the defenses going. After all, they were dealing with a former True God, an entity on the same level as a Summer Immortal!

Thanks to their efforts, it was despite the viscous nature of the outer sea water that the dharmaboat got farther and farther away with every instant that passed.

Far behind them, the sea water beneath Yu Liuchen, which was in reality extremely heavy, suddenly exploded up into the air. As it did, a devilish, illusory, and gruish figure shot out of the sea.

The moment it appeared, Xu Qing and Erniu, despite being off in the distance, shook violently from head to toe. Blood sprayed out of both of their mouths as, all while reeling in astonishment, they tried to flee even faster. At the same time, they used their own ways of looking back to see what was happening.

Far in the distance, they saw that superlatively large figure rising up, so huge it could connect heaven to earth. Its physical appearance was that of a half-rotten corpse, pulsing with a strong aura of death. It was grayish-white, and definitely did not look human! Instead, it looked like some sort of humanoid lizard!

The moment it was out in the open, lightning flashed and thunder boomed. Winds screamed as the gruish figure emanated terrifying fluctuations. The sky rippled, and huge waves rolled out over the surface of the water.

Even more gruish was that the figure's head wasn't growing off its body. Instead, the figure held its own head in its right hand! As for its other hand, it held an enormous black candle that burned with a black flame. Despite its extremely bizarre appearance, for some unknown reason, it gave off an extremely holy sensation.

Xu Qing and Erniu weren't able to continue looking for more than a brief moment before their eyes literally exploded. Both of them had amazing healing powers, yet right now, those powers were working sluggishly. What was more, after losing their eyes, they felt as if all senses of observation had been removed. Turning their heads to face forward, they used instinct alone to flee off into the distance.

However, Yu Liuchen hovered in the air, his blood-red robe spreading out in all directions over the great sea, causing both the water and the sky to turn bright red. His eyes shone with shining, golden light, all while his godly might pulsed around him.

This was something that surpassed the Flawless God level. This was... Altar God!

Altar Gods had solitary godly authority! As Yu Liuchen looked down, godly authority spread out.

The karma in the story caused the Brilliant Heaven True God who had returned to weaken visibly. That weakness stretched down into the substructure of this True God. Hē had faced countless dangers on his return trip. Although hē had resolved them one after another, in the end, much of his essence had dissipated. After returning, his godly might was weak. His god power was low. As a result, hē had planned to hole up and recover. But before that could happen, hē had been dragged out into this situation. Most importantly of all was that his will had not fully awoken. After all, hē had been dead!

Yu Liuchen had targeted him during his awakening process, and as a result, hē had forgotten some fifty to sixty percent of his true name.

Thus, Yu Liuchen went all out.

As the golden light shone, the returned god acted just as the story had stated. Rumbling sounds echoed out from his body as hē started collapsing. Yet an instant later, though that collapse was continuing, hē let loose a howl that could rip apart heaven, causing wild colors to flash as his rotting godly authority began to shine. Unfortunately, hē was still stuck in the story!

Yu Liuchen had prepared well for this moment, and sent all of the blood-red color in the area rushing toward the god to devour him.

Of course, the devouring was foreordained to fail, because the story didn't describe that happening. After some time passed, a shrill cry echoed out as the red color was shredded to pieces, and the returned god burst out of it and raced toward the depths of the Forbidden Sea.

His will had not yet fully awoken, and hē was only continuing to forget his true name. As for this attempt to escape, it was an instinct... that came from the description in the story.

"It's all in the story. And I decided long ago that you are going to be the main character of my choosing. Your story will be the most beautiful story told during this, the first half of my life."

Yu Liuchen licked his lips, looked at the fleeing god, and then took a step forward. Hē was prepared for this chase to last for 137 days. It couldn't be one more day than that, nor one less day. It was only on the 137th day that hē could devour the returned god, and then extract the forgotten true name from the corpse.

In doing that... Yu Liuchen could replace this god! And then his story would achieve the most beautiful of endings. After all, hē had told this story to completion. Therefore, upon bringing his cultivation base back to its peak, hē had advanced another step toward making True God a reality.

"True God...."

Yu Liuchen's redness swept through the sky over the sea, and off into the distance.

Elsewhere on the great sea, Erniu's eye cavities were slowly filling in with flesh.

“I might have lost my senses, but I still have a premonition that Ol’ Pappy Yu is going to succeed at becoming a True God. The ol’ punk’s godly authority is really far too gruish. That said, Ol’ Pappy Yu is just too stingy! He was using us as bait, and in the end, he hooked the fish! Yet he didn’t give us even a single thing to keep as a souvenir.”

Xu Qing didn’t reply. His eyes had also exploded, but he was recovering faster than Erniu. He could already see a bit of their surroundings, and his other senses were recovering quickly. He pushed the dharmaboat onward with a bit more speed.

“Am I right, little Ah Qing?” Erniu said. He clearly wasn’t very happy.

“Yeah,” Xu Qing replied perfunctorily. “Too stingy.”

Erniu had the habit of not paying much attention to the tone Xu Qing used, and thus he ignored his perfunctory tone. After a moment of thought, he apparently made a decision. “That said, now that I think about it, this experience actually taught us a lot about how to hook fish. In the future, if we ever have a chance, we could find some bait of our own, and go on our own fishing expedition!”

As Xu Qing piloted the dharmaboat onward, he casually asked, “What kind of bait are you talking about? And what kind of fish?”

Erniu flashed a pleased look. “There’s almost too much to choose from when it comes to bait. How about Ningyan? Little Jianjian would work well also. As for what fish to target... well I need to put some thought into that. Have any suggestions, Little Ah Qing?”

Xu Qing shook his head and was about to say something when, all of a sudden, his expression flickered, and he looked at the distant sky ahead of them. His pupils constricted.

Erniu’s eyes hadn’t recovered yet, so he couldn’t see anything. Upon noticing that Xu Qing wasn’t responding to him, he inquisitively asked, “What’s up? Are you really bullying poor old me who has no eyes?”

Voice grim, Xu Qing said, “Eldest Brother... the sky over the inner sea is on fire.”

Reflected within his pupils was the sea of flames visible in the distance.

In the Summer Departure calendar of humankind, at the end of the first year of the imperial reign, burning flames fell from the sky and spread to the east, west, south and north of Revered Ancient. The fire came from the starry sky, whipping a starry tempest into a storm of flames. It came as sixteen majestic celestial-level holy lands came to Revered Ancient.

The holy lands were built by the emperors who left years ago with Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity. Every species who left had one of their own.

In the tens of thousands of years that passed since the departure, some of them faded into decay, while some were absorbed by others. As a result, there were fewer now than in the early days. For various reasons, emperors who had established the original holy lands began to perish or go missing. As a result, a classification system for holy lands was established.

Heavenly. Earthly. Celestial. Terrestrial.

The difference between each of the four categories was as great as the difference between heaven and earth. The terrestrial-level holy lands didn't have any cultivators who were Grand Emperors. But every celestial-level one... *did* have a Grand Emperor! And those which were in the earthly-level had more than one!

After all, in the ancient past, although Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity had conquered Revered Ancient, that didn't mean that humans were the only species that occupied the mainland. Species dotted the lands like trees in a forest. Not all species had a Grand Emperor, but those who left with Dark Serenity to establish holy lands beyond the heavens all did.

As of now, species that had left countless years ago were returning. Among them were sixteen celestial-level holy lands that were following the terrestrial-level ones that had already come to Revered Ancient.

In each of the cardinal directions of Revered Ancient, the east, west, south and north, there were four!

Astonishingly, three of them appeared in the sky over the lands of the Firemoon Darkheavens in the east. As for the fourth, it arrived... in the Imperial Region of humankind, right outside the imperial capital!

The arrival of these new holy lands played out completely differently than when the terrestrial-level holy lands had come. These sixteen celestial-level holy lands did one thing upon their arrival: they waged war! And now, the terrestrial-level holy lands didn't need to put on a front, and they also went on the offensive.

It was in the first year of the reign of Summer Departure that war broke out. It wasn't an unexpected turn of events to the species of Revered Ancient. Many species were prepared for it, and that was especially true in the east. They had revealed their true intentions thanks to the search for Xu Qing.

In addition, considering that the terrestrial-level holy lands had been driven out of the east, the humans and Firemoons didn't have to scramble to react. They were ready. The united forces of the east demarcated heaven and earth, thus ensuring that the flames of war didn't affect the majority of the lands below.

It was around that time that Xu Qing and Erniu approached the inner sea after their ordeal in the Primeval Sea.

In Fardark County, outside of the Imperial Region of humankind, a figure shot at top speed toward human territory. He was in extremely bad shape, with his aura unstable. He had numerous internal injuries, and yet, he had seven or eight heads hanging from a rope tied to his waist.

Those two whores Lan Yao and Yue Dong just won't stop chasing me!

This person looked exhausted and also anxious. Yet despite that, he still looked as deadly as a viper.

And I can't believe that the Devilbird holy land is one of the ones that arrived here in human territory.

Lan Yao's clan is extremely powerful in the Devilbird holy land. And her husband is an apprentice of their Grand Emperor! The arrival of this holy land might as well be a death sentence for me.

In that case... I'm going to be worth more than ever to the locals. After all, the Devilbird holy land has a lot of secrets, and I know them all. Since they want to kill me, then my best bet is to seek asylum with the humans, and sell out the damned holy land!

Feng Lintao's eyes glittered with crafty light as he accelerated.

Chapter 1007: He Called Himself Sir Firedark

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The holy lands were profoundly meaningful to the species of Revered Ancient. Some people longed for them, while others hated them. In the end, they were the subject of many complicated feelings. Perhaps if time had just continued to pass, the species of Revered Ancient would eventually have stopped thinking so much about the holy lands, and would have ultimately forgotten them. There definitely wasn't anyone who could have guessed that in the short space of one year... the holy lands would suddenly come back and start waging war.

Thanks to the warfare, suffering spread through Revered Ancient. The confusion, anger, defiance, killing intent, and of course the hatred that had been brewing in Revered Ancient for tens of thousands of years... now began to boil over.

Years ago, the holy lands had left, taking the best and brightest with them. They had taken hope with them. Now they were back, acting high and mighty. And they brought war with them. Thus, the species of Revered Ancient fought back. In the east, west, south and north, the top species issued calls to action, and the response was immediate.

Different actions were taken in different areas. In some places, there was open fighting. Divine abilities were unleashed, and magical techniques raged. In other areas, defenses were erected that contained the scale of the war.

The actions of the east ensured that they controlled the initiative and the rhythm of the war. In fact, at almost the exact same moment as the four celestial-level holy lands descended from heaven wreathed in flames, ninety-nine beams of light shot up from the east. They formed an extremely unique grand spell formation that combined the power of many species, and also tapped into the local mutagen, to cover the east of the mainland, including the continent of South Phoenix and the surrounding inner sea. It prevented the ousted terrestrial-level holy lands from returning, and created a boundary between heaven and earth.

As a result, the four celestial-level holy lands were forced to stop outside the defenses.

At the same time, mutagen became one of the most important tactics used by the east, as it was sent out into the sky to invade the holy lands.

Empress Summer Departure showed up personally, along with the three gods of the Firemoons. By using the Everlasting Dagger-Axe as well as the Dawning Suns humankind had prepared for use in war, thēy were able to engage in battle at a peak level with the holy lands' Grand Emperors.[1]

The battle lasted for seven days. During that time, the dome of heaven descended into a state like primal-chaos. An abstract painting once again appeared there, filling the sky. Mortals didn't have any way of understanding what it meant, nor any clue about who had the upper hand or who was losing. But after seven days passed, the three gods returned and went into secluded meditation. Empress Summer Departure appeared to have come out of the fight completely unscathed. It wasn't possible to determine the state of the four holy lands' Grand Emperors. And yet, after that battle, the four of them behaved similarly to the three gods. They weren't seen publicly.

A month passed.

With the initiative they had, the Firemoons and the humans launched small-scale counter offensives. At the same time, the holy lands cultivators occasionally used special magics to break into the spell formation and try to destroy the formation nodes. But the species of the east had special forces units assigned to track such invaders down and kill them. One of the special forces cultivators who earned some merit in various missions was Feng Lintao.

Half a month earlier when he reached human territory, he had revealed his identity and asked for an audience with Empress Summer Departure. The empress hadn't immediately granted his request. Instead, shē assigned him to one of the special forces units, and gave him a mission to hunt down invaders.

It went without saying that Feng Lintao, in the interests of securing asylum, went above and beyond in fulfilling his duty. His efforts alone resulted in dozens of invaders being killed. He didn't hold anything back, going so far as to kill members of his own species with incomparable ruthlessness. Whenever he killed an enemy, he would take their head and hang it from his waist. In the end, there were so many heads they were like a long skirt that looked absolutely horrendous and ghastly.

After working hard for about half a month, the empress finally summoned him for a meeting.

At the moment, he stood outside a grand hall in the imperial capital, standing there respectfully, his eyes shining with excitement and fervor, but his heart as cold as ice.

I've heard a lot about this human empress. Shē converted from being a cultivator to being a god. And not just some low-level god. Shē used the power of the successive human emperors to become an Altar God....

This empress is no simpleton.... That said, the less simple a person is, the more confident they'll be. And from a certain perspective, someone like that... will be perfect for the plan I've prepared to get out of this mess.

Feng Lintao glanced down at the skirt of severed heads. They were a blood tribute that he had prepared specially for this moment. He had put a lot of thought into his decision to defect to the humans. All of his analyses had led him to the conclusion there was only one way for him to get out of his current mess.

I need to make myself valuable. I need to prove my loyalty.

Feng Lintao narrowed his eyes. He was well aware that a god could easily read his thoughts. That... was why he was thinking such things. In fact, even as he mentally pondered such things, a tranquil voice echoed out from within the grand hall.

“Feng Lintao is hereby summoned for an imperial audience.”

Feng Lintao’s expression turned very serious. After clasping hands and bowing in the direction of the hall, he walked into the grand hall. Once inside, he saw over a hundred human cultivators standing in four rows, looking at him. Directly in front of him was a large staircase, with chairs on each level. The chairs closest to the bottom were for heavenly marquises, while those higher up were for heavenly kings.

At the very top, the empress sat expressionlessly on a majestic imperial throne.

Standing to the side of the empress was a person clad in the robe of the crown prince. He was none other than Ningyan. After becoming the crown prince, he always stood in that position, not to learn management skills, but rather, to observe. That was what his mother had asked of him. Right now, he was observing this holy lands cultivator who had defected to humankind.

“Feng Lintao, offer greetings to the human empress, Summer Departure!”

Feng Lintao retracted his gaze and bowed at the waist to the empress. When he straightened, he waved his right hand to toss the severed heads down in front of him.

“Your Majesty,” he said, “this is a blood tribute for you. Among them are scions of some of the great clans from the holy lands. All of them are highly ranked. Of course, I’m well aware that this won’t be enough to prove my loyalty. Therefore, I’ve come prepared to reveal two bits of classified information to you!

“The first bit of information is this: A thousand years ago, the Devilbird holy land was not celestial-class. It was the weakest of the earthly-level holy lands. That was because it didn’t always have one Grand Emperor. Back then, it had two!

“A thousand years ago, Patriarch Devilbird, who was at the peak of Grand Emperor, tried to break out of the Quasi-Immortal level and become a Summer Immortal. The breakthrough failed. The patriarch’s body wasted away, and his soul scattered. After preparing a legacy to leave behind, he entered meditation to die.

“When he perished, the Devilbird holy land was reduced to the celestial level. That said, there are rumors that Patriarch Devilbird might actually be able to recover. Your Majesty, I hope you will take precautions in this regard.”

There were many in the crowd who reacted to Feng Lintao's words with visible surprise. After he finished with his first bit of classified information, he paused briefly. Then he continued, "The second bit of information relates to the holy lands' reason for returning...."

The moment the words left his mouth, all eyes became focused solely on him. Seeing that, Feng Lintao settled his energy and cleared his mind.

"They have three reasons.

"First. They're planning to abandon Revered Ancient forever, and never return. Before doing so, they want to take all the resources away!

"Second. They want to carry out a blood sacrifice, and for that, they need a huge stockpile of resources. That's why they've immediately started waging war.

"Third. They were ordered to come here! And the person who issued the orders was *not* Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity. The truth is that the Ancient Emperor went missing about two thousand years ago. After that, the holy lands had no leader, and devolved into chaos. What's more, two thousand years ago, one of the ancient Summer Immortals who left Revered Ancient... came back!"

The echoing words provoked an immediate stir among the cultivators in the grand hall.

This news was monumental. That was especially true considering it touched one of the ancient Summer Immortals. Because of that, the initial reaction was one of shock and disbelief.

"Because of my low status, I have no way of knowing this Summer Immortal's name. The name is taboo, after all. But thanks to the back-channel information I have access to... I heard that this returned individual has a cultivation base at the very peak of the Summer Immortal level. In fact, it might have already surpassed that level, meaning that it exists in a level that can only be described as freakish and unimaginable.

"Some have said that this level is equivalent to that of the Brilliant Heaven god emperor. That's the level above True God, which is God Lord. In the cultivator system, that level designation is called Immortal Lord.

"Apparently, though, his cultivation base is unstable, which is the reason for his return to the holy lands. He has demanded that the holy lands scour Revered Ancient for something that can stabilize his cultivation base. As for the blood sacrifice, it will be used to summon that item, whatever it is. The more blood used in the sacrifice, the more accurate the summons can be. Unfortunately, I'm not completely sure of what that item is.

"However, there's one thing I can be certain of. This half-step Immortal Lord found an item that can temporarily bypass the blockade created by the broken face. In other words, it's a way to leave Revered Ancient. That's one of the main reasons that the holy lands have dared to come here."

Feng Lintao's explanation provoked more than a few gasps from the humans in the grand hall. It wasn't that their willpower was lacking. Rather, this information was just too monumentally shocking. Even Ningyan was breathing heavily, and couldn't help but glance a few times at his mother.

Feng Lintao took that all in and felt very pleased. He wasn't lying in anything he'd said. Every word was true. And he was convinced that his information would prove that he was sincere in defecting to humankind.

However, he also knew that he needed to prove that the choices he had made were logical. In other words, he needed to explain why he had chosen to defect. With that thought in mind, he clasped hands and bowed again in the direction of the empress, who had still not reacted in any way.

"Your Majesty, the reason I'm being so candid, and the reason I'm explaining all of these things, is that the Devilbird holy land has treated me with great insensitivity. I have two archenemies there. One is named Yue Dong, and she's a vicious and treacherous woman who will stop at nothing to see me dead.

"The other is named Lan Yao, and she has the heart like that of a snake or scorpion. She comes from one of the five great clans of the Devilbird holy land, and her husband is an apprentice of the very same Patriarch Devilbird who went into secluded meditation to die. In the Devilbird holy land, I'm considered to have impure blood, which is why I was always looked down on. Later, I offended them, which is the same as offending half of the entire holy land. Ever since then, they've been chasing me nonstop in the hopes of killing me.

"That's why I defected to humankind! Your Majesty, I don't expect you to take all of this at face value. My conflict with Lan Yao and Yue Dong was witnessed by two human cultivators. Based on what I could tell, both of them are important people who are most likely famous among you humans!"

Feng Lintao finished speaking and kept his eyes on the empress. Everyone in the grand hall similarly looked at the empress with very serious expressions on their faces.

Looking back at Feng Lintao, the empress calmly said, "What are the names of the two human cultivators who saw all of this?"

Feng Lintao immediately responded, "One of them called himself Sir Firedark, and he was traveling with his Elder Brother. Upon reflection, I'm fairly certain he was using a fake name. As for their true identities... thankfully, I managed to get a bit of information recently."

With that, he waved his hand, causing two projected images to form. One of them wore a blue robe and stood tall, with eyes glittering like heavenly bodies, and extremely attractive facial features. The other wore a similar blue robe, but had plain facial features and a rather shifty expression.

Feng Lintao clearly didn't like the second person. He was the one who had pretended to be hovering on the brink of death, all for the purpose of stealing Feng Lintao's sageheaven god vine.

As soon as the two images appeared, strange expressions appeared on the faces of everyone in the grand hall. In particular, Ningyan's eyes went wide.

Taking a deep breath, Feng Lintao calmly said, "Therefore, Your Majesty, all you have to do is ask these two, and they'll confirm the truth of everything I told you."

Out on the Primeval Sea, Erniu sneezed.

“Some lowlife must be talking about me!” he said. Erniu’s eyes had grown back, and he now reclined comfortably on the dharmaboat.

Xu Qing ignored him as he sat cross-legged and meditated, all while assessing the ways he had transformed recently. His godsource was stronger than before he had come out to sea. His godly authority was also a bit more majestic than before. All of it was thanks to those meat skewers he had eaten. The flesh of Timeruins was understandably extraordinary.

The most astonishing improvement was to his soul. His soul was now much tougher than before, by many times over. And the benefit from the nourishment was continuing. His god perception had improved dramatically, and his godly senses were stronger. In addition, the connection between his soul and his fleshly body had improved.

My battle prowess has benefited similarly.

A short time later, he ended the day’s session of meditation, opened his eyes, and looked in the direction of the inner sea.

“We’ll arrive soon,” he murmured.

The two of them had traveled at top speed for a month, pushing the dharmaboat to get back home. Although they had encountered a few dangerous situations, none had posed any challenge. Whether that was because of luck or because of the blessing Yu Liuchen had given them when they parted, it was hard to tell. As of now, they were only about half a day away from the inner sea.

Upon realizing how close they were to the inner sea, Erniu started getting himself back in shape. After all, he was the type of person who liked to look good. Although he couldn’t get rid of his fur, he didn’t think like normal people. In fact, that was one of his talents. As such, he took all of that dark fur and braided it together to form something like a coat of fur armor....

Xu Qing couldn’t help but admire Erniu when he saw that.

Several hours later, they reached the boundary between the outer sea and the inner sea. As black mist roiled, the ship shot across the border. Once they were in the inner sea, a burst of spell formation power swept over them. Almost as quickly, it vanished, allowing them to enter the inner sea smoothly.

The sunlight was dazzling. The sea breeze was warm.

Clouds roiled above as a figure like an eagle or a phoenix appeared, whistling down toward them. Along the way, it turned into Huang Yan, who landed on the surface of the water and glared angrily at Xu Qing.

“So, you’ve finally returned, huh? I promised Elder Sister to take you back safely, only for you to go missing again. Do you know how much face I lost, Xu Qing?”

Hearing that caused Xu Qing to break into a smile.

Huang Yan hurried forward and boarded the dharmaboat. Upon seeing Erniu, a quizzical expression appeared on his face.

“You went out to sea and came back with a fur coat? What is it you call an ox with a bunch of fur? A yak, right?”[2]

Erniu smiled sarcastically. “What the hell do you know, you old bird? Have you ever been to the outer sea? I don’t think so. Let me tell you, this is the most popular fashion among the species there!”

Glaring, Huang Yan waved his hand, causing a tornado to pop into being right on top of Erniu, which then sent him flying several thousand kilometers off into the distance.

Huang Yan grinned. “Finally, we can have some peace and quiet. Alright, Xu Qing, let’s go home! By the way, Elder Sister wanted me to tell you... that quite a few people are awaiting your return.” Huang Yan then cleared his throat. “And they’re women....”

1. The Everlasting Dagger-Axe was previously mentioned in chapters 902 and . ❷

2. Although I think this yak joke is funny in English, it’s slightly funnier in Chinese. As most of you should remember, the niu in Erniu’s name means ox. And in Chinese, the word for yak combines the character for fur with the character for ox. So a yak is a furry ox or a furred ox. ❷

Deathblade’s Thoughts

This chapter is about 1,000 characters longer than average.

Chapter 1008: Friends From Over the Years

Chapter 1008: Friends From Over the Years

The canopy of heaven was auspicious and peaceful. The light of the setting sun shone over the inner sea, making it seem like there was a gorgeous painting filling the sky over South Phoenix and the Forbidden Sea. Profound colors and mysterious charm brought out the splendor and complexity of life. Gradually, it became part of the afterglow of sunset that spread out over the sea, filling its darkness with scintillating waves.

As twilight settled over the lands, it reached the Seven Blood Eyes port, where waves gently lapped against the reefs and rocks, creating a muffled thrum that indicated night had come. The sea breeze blew softly through the evening, caressing the various ships in the harbors, and brushing against the faces of cultivators from various sects and species.

Eventually, it reached Ding Xue, causing her long, beautiful hair to sway out in front of her. It caused the little bells on the box next to Yanyan to tinkle. And in a medicine shop overlooking the sea was a graceful figure whose long skirt stirred in the gentle wind.[1]

Ding Xue stood next to the water at the port, clad in a form-fitting gown that accentuated her beautiful curves, but at the same time, did nothing to diminish the heroic air she had manifested

years ago. It was as if the passage of time hadn't changed her at all. She had a bronze sword strapped to her back.

A short distance behind Ding Xue was Zhao Zhongheng, who was still as infatuated with her as he'd always been.[2]

Yanyan currently sat on the wooden box on a dharmaboat in the very same harbor that Xu Qing had used when he first arrived in Seven Blood Eyes. Harbor 79. Next to her were five large water barrels which emanated the scent of blood. Her eyes were narrowed and her lips pursed. Her gaze was one of keen anticipation.[3]

There were others waiting besides these women. They included numerous Seven Blood Eyes disciples, including Violent Crimes Division constables from various mountain peaks.

Time slipped by slowly but surely. Night fell. Lanterns lit the port like little stars, making the place look almost like a shining starry sky. The 'starlight' glittered on the surface of the water, creating a resplendent painting. Within that painting, a solitary dharmaboat shot across the water.

Xu Qing stood at the prow looking at the familiar Seven Blood Eyes, as well as all the familiar faces there. He spotted Ding Xue, and he spotted Yanyan.

The disciples gathered at the port started calling out "Fourth Highness!"

At the same time, Second Elder Sister emerged from the Seventh Peak and went down to the port. She arrived just as the dharmaboat was pulling in.

Huang Yan jumped out and rushed over to her, looking very pleased with himself, as if he were saying, *"See! I told you I'd bring your little Junior Brother back!"*

Elder Sister chuckled and looked at Xu Qing. "Welcome home, little Junior Brother."

Familiar auras. Familiar surroundings. Familiar mountain peaks.

After reconnecting with old friends and acquaintances, Xu Qing left Huang Yan and Second Elder Sister to have their own reunion, and strode through the night to his mansion grotto. Although he hadn't stayed long in this mansion grotto, as soon as he sat down, he felt tranquil and calm. His heart, which had been racing for so long now, finally became peaceful.

He thought back to everything that happened over the better part of the last year. First he ran into Floating Fiend, then destroyed the Vivifiend holy land. After, he chased down Floating Fiend... then went with Yu Liuchen to the outer sea, where he had faced one dangerous situation after another. The entire time he had felt taut with anxiety and fear.

Now that he was back in Seven Blood Eyes, he could let loose a long sigh. That said, he knew that this period of rest wouldn't last for very long. His stay in Seven Blood Eyes would be a short one.

War had already broken out, and as the region lord of both the Holytide Region and the Nightspirit Region, he was like the heart and soul of Sea-Sealing County. Now that he was back, he needed to

go present himself to the empress and join the war effort that affected the entire east of Revered Ancient. He also needed a tempering of blood and death to continue to fuse his fleshly body and soul. At the same time, he required deeper enlightenment of his godly authority.

My dreadnaught was so badly damaged I can't use it anymore. I guess I need to see if Zhang San can fix it.

After mulling everything over, he closed his eyes and focused on cultivation. The profound sun immortal light flowed within him, like a sun rising inside his body. It cast dazzling light and warmth into him, which then returned to the sun, creating a cycle. The process brought his godsource into play, and illuminated the one thousand godly authority lineaments.

Time passed slowly but surely.

Two hours later, he opened his eyes and looked at the door of the mansion grotto, his brow slightly furrowed.

A voice echoed from outside. "Is now a good time, Elder Brother Xu Qing? I cooked some sweet potato and peanut congee for you."

The voice was deliberately soft, and seemed a bit timid.

Xu Qing was familiar with this voice, and was also familiar with this behavior. This person was obviously Ding Xue. There weren't many options at hand for Xu Qing. He was not the ignorant kid he had been years ago. He knew full well what Ding Xue was thinking when she looked at him. But when all was said and done, they were fellow disciples of the same sect, so he waved his hand, causing the mansion grotto's door to swing open silently.

As moonlight spilled inside, a graceful figure strolled through the door.

"It's been a long time, Big Bro Xu Qing." Ding Xue's face was flushed, and every time she blinked, her long eyelashes seemed to recount a moving tale that would stir the heart.

Nearing, she bent down and put the sweet potato and peanut congee down in front of Xu Qing. When she bent, her tight clothing made her attractive figure even more prominent. Her eyes looked like stars shining in the deep night, flickering with mysterious charm.

The passage of time didn't seem visible on her at all. In fact, it was quite the opposite. She seemed even more beautiful than before. Her eyebrows were more elegant, like graceful willow leaves, imparting a sense of sweet-tempered firmness. Her long, straight nose and delicate, ruby lips would cause just about any man to be hard-pressed to not want to get close to her.

Xu Qing said nothing at first. He saw the anticipation in her eyes, and thought back to how she had treated him years ago.... Sighing softly, he picked up the congee and took a sip.

"Pretty good," he said. Then he asked her a few questions about her cultivation.

Ding Xue looked at him with her heart pounding. Her plan for this night was to take Xu Qing for her own. That was why she had dressed in this way. But now that she was in front of him, she

suddenly felt nervous, and wasn't sure what to do next. All she could do was answer his questions about cultivation.

Time passed. About an hour later, she left his mansion grotto feeling somewhat confused. Once outside, she realized that her plan to win Xu Qing had failed.

I just need to prepare more thoroughly. Next time... next time I'm definitely going to win Elder Brother Xu Qing for my own! However, I need to keep myself under control. I love him, but that's my personal matter. I definitely can't put any pressure on him.

Thumping her chest encouragingly, she took a deep breath and proceeded to encourage herself further as she walked off. She had long since become used to the fact that there was someone following her. In fact, she was as used to him as she was used to the air.

That person was none other than Zhao Zhongheng. He followed her through the night, looking emotional as he thought, *Xue'er, I've been in love with you for years now. But I know that loving you is my personal matter. Don't feel any pressure. I don't want my love for you to be a burden. I just hope that you can always be happy.*

Feeling moved by his own words, Zhao Zhongheng took a deep breath and followed her with increased determination.

As was expected, Xu Qing could see all of that playing out. When he thought about how Zhao Zhongheng hadn't given up even after all these years, he couldn't help but feel pity. Shaking his head, he closed his eyes and went back to meditating.

And yet, only a moment later, he opened his eyes again and looked to the entrance of the mansion grotto.

A moment later, a trembling voice reached his ears. "Big Bro Xu Qing, my grandma told me what you went through to save me.... I couldn't track down any holy lands cultivators, but I did catch a few Night Dove agents so you could vent some anger."

Outside of the mansion grotto was Yanyan, clad in a red robe. She was biting her lip, but no blood seeped out, as she swallowed it all.

An hour later, Yanyan left.

Xu Qing sat inside the mansion grotto looking thoughtful. He had become aware earlier that Yanyan had a unique constitution. That, coupled with the fact that she had attracted the gaze of Golden Crow's musician, sparked certain speculations within Xu Qing.

That night as Yanyan dealt with the Night Dove agents, Xu Qing used his god perception to confirm some of his suspicions.

It's not that she doesn't have any mutagen in her. It's just that the mutagen doesn't manifest in her fleshly body. Instead, it enters her soul.... As a result, her soul has transformed in a very unique way, allowing it to absorb mutagen. The downside is that she doesn't understand what to do with it.

That's why following the path of cultivators isn't working for her. It really disturbs her on an emotional level. In some respects, Yanyan is a natural-born god cultivator!

Before Yanyan left, he put some of his own godsource into her soul, creating a seed that would help her in her future cultivation. After more thought on the matter, he closed his eyes and went back to cultivation.

He got no further visitors that night. Eventually, the sun rose.

As the sun rose, a figure crawled up onto the shore in the Seven Blood Eyes port, covered with soaking fur. Once out of the water, the furry figure started cursing.

“Huang Yan, you damned old bird! I can't believe you slapped me that far! And you even sealed my bag of holding and cultivation base so I couldn't fly. I had to swim the whole way back! You just wait until I track you down!”

This person was, of course, Erniu. Even as he gnashed his teeth, the sky grew bright.

As the morning breeze blew across the port, a slight rain fell.

Xu Qing opened an oilskin umbrella as he walked down the Seventh Peak, disguised to look like the low-level disciple he had been years ago. After finding the breakfast stall he had frequented in the past, he bought a bowl of jellied tofu for breakfast. After, he went to Harbor 176 to find Zhang San.

Despite the rain, the city was as busy as ever, with people of all species hastening to and fro. At one point, he walked past a medicine shop he had frequented long ago. Upon passing, he caught sight of a person inside wearing a pale orange robe. She was currently looking down at the pill furnace in front of her as she concocted some medicinal pills.

She was Gu Muqing, who had once been a chosen from the Second Peak, the peak that specialized in alchemy. Back in the day, she got to know Xu Qing after buying some of his white boluses.[4]

Seeing how focused she was, Xu Qing decided not to bother her, and continued on his way.

Inside the shop, Gu Muqing suddenly sensed something and looked up. But the streets were crowded, and with the rain, it was hard to see anything.

They had no reunion. It was not something fated to happen, just like something far in the distance that could never be seized.

1. Ding Xue introduced herself by name in [chapter 82](#), although she actually appeared before that in the story. She was in too many chapters to list as references. The last time she was mentioned was in [chapter 725](#), and the last time she appeared on screen was in [chapter 542.2](#). We were already re-introduced to Yanyan a few chapters ago. As for the other person, I personally knew

who it was referring to as soon as it was mentioned. There will be more detail to come, so I'll save the past chapter references for then. ㊦

2. Zhao Zhongheng was actually introduced to the story in [chapter 65](#). Similar to Ding Xue, he was in too many chapters to reference them all here. Although he was in a few scenes by himself, he was usually around when Ding Xue was around, and in fact, the last times he was mentioned and seen on screen coincide with the chapters mentioned in the Ding Xue footnote above. ㊦

3. Xu Qing settled down in Harbor 79 in [chapter 52](#). The water barrels are a callback to the gift Yanyan gave Xu Qing in [chapter 321](#). ㊦

4. Gu Muqing was first introduced in [chapter 61](#). We learned her name in [chapter 94](#). She last appeared in a poignant scene in [chapter 541.2](#). In the footnote of that chapter, I asked the following question: “Will she appear again in the story, or is this goodbye forever...?” What was your guess back then...? ㊦

Chapter 1009: Crafting the Strongest Dreadnaught

Chapter 1009: Crafting the Strongest Dreadnaught

In the Summer Departure calendar, at the end of the first year of the imperial reign, snow fell in the imperial capital of humankind. But winter always came late to Seven Blood Eyes, and besides, the climate was temperate, so the most that happened was that it rained. That was true even at the end of the year.

The rain that fell covered the Port District. From a distance, everything looked hazy. The crowds on the street and the ships coming in and out of the harbors created a beautiful scene. The pitter-patter of the rain on oilskin umbrellas was as gentle as the sounds of nature, tugging on the heartstrings of the people. It was like an affectionate confession of the sky to the earth, or the clouds expressing deep attachment to all the living things below.

Xu Qing walked through the rhythmic rain until he found Harbor 176. There, squatting in the eaves of a big warehouse was Zhang San, wearing the same style of clothing he had always worn. And just like always, he was smoking a pipe.

There was a familiar face squatting next to him. It was Erniu, who was wringing out his soaking fur all while talking nonstop.

Upon spotting Xu Qing, Erniu waved and shouted a greeting. Meanwhile, Zhang San's eyes lit up. Shooting to his feet, he put his pipe away and rubbed his hands together in anticipation, all while flashing a silly smile. That smile came instinctively to Zhang San, either when he was around old friends or important people.

Nowadays, Xu Qing counted as a familiar face to Zhang San, but at the same time, was something of a stranger. He was a familiar face because of their times together in the past. But he was a stranger because, nowadays, his cultivation base and status had reached an astonishing level.

“Xu...” he began hesitantly, unsure of exactly how to address Xu Qing.

“Elder Brother Zhang San,” Xu Qing interrupted with a smile before Zhang San could decide which form of address to settle on. And with that, he squatted down beneath the eaves. It was just like the time years ago when Erniu introduced Xu Qing to Zhang San.[1]

Zhang San grinned.

Erniu, meanwhile, looked off into the distance for something before snorting coldly and grumbling, “So, that damned old bird Huang Yan isn’t with you? Let me tell you, little Ah Qing, that crappy bird is one foul fowl!”

Xu Qing thought for a moment. “Eldest Brother,” he said quietly, “given Huang Yan’s cultivation, even though he’s not right here, he can probably still hear everything you say.”

Erniu’s eyes widened into a glare, and he loudly said, “This is Seven Blood Eyes! My Junior Sister is here! My Master is here! I’m the Grand Highness of Seventh Peak! You think I’m scared of some dumb bird?”

It was hard to say if it was a coincidence or not, but the moment the words left Erniu’s mouth, thunder crashed deafeningly in the sky.

Erniu’s face became a mask of abject terror.

Zhang San could feel a headache coming on already. Erniu had returned earlier that morning, and from the moment he had squatted down until now, he had been complaining about Huang Yan nonstop.... Zhang San obviously didn’t want to offend either Erniu or Huang Yan, so the moment Xu Qing arrived, he quickly changed the conversation topic.

“Xu Qing,” he said, “I heard you and the Captain went to the outer sea!”

Xu Qing nodded. Waving his hand, he produced the crumbled remains of his dreadnaught, which dropped down with a thump into the courtyard outside the warehouse. It took up about ninety percent of the entire courtyard. Though the dreadnaught had been mostly destroyed, it still pulsed with the aura of a godly entity, and was also full of outer sea mutagen. Combined, it created a vicious and evil black mist that spread out rapidly. As the rain fell, the black mist devoured it and expanded. Wherever it went, everything became as dark as night.

Zhang San was shaken to the core.

Xu Qing waved his hand, which dispelled the black mist and cleared it from the area as thoroughly as if it had been erased.

“Elder Brother Zhang San, my dreadnaught broke down. Do you think you could come up with a plan for how to fix it?”

Xu Qing was a big admirer of Zhang San’s work. From his first dharmaboat until now, he had always relied on Zhang San. Although Zhang San’s cultivation base was now far too low to be of much help, his deep understanding of dharmaboats would be enough to come up with a good plan.

Zhang San looked at the dreadnaught and its broken-down state, and he nearly gasped. “It looks almost like something opened its mouth and took a big bite out of it....”

Xu Qing nodded.

Erniu cleared his throat. “You’re absolutely right about that, Sansan. It did get bitten by a huge creature. And then, little Ah Qing and I were swallowed up along with the dreadnaught. Yep. It was all because I summoned the thing.”

Erniu looked very proud of himself when he offered the explanation.

When Xu Qing saw how pleased Erniu looked, he was struck somewhat speechless. That said, he had to admit that what Erniu said was fairly close to the truth.

Zhang San’s eyes went wide, and a moment later, he shook his head. Now that he thought about it, he actually didn’t want to know too much about what Xu Qing and Erniu had been up to. There were some things that, the more you knew about them, the more danger you were in.

My weak little body is not made for things like that.

Zhang San was very pleased with his high standing in Seven Blood Eyes. He had his own harbor, he had more spirit stones than he could spend, and he had a lot of daoist partners. There were very few people who would dare to offend him. Things had been very good lately. The last thing he wanted to do was start courting death.

Not responding to what Erniu had just said, Zhang San walked over to the dreadnaught and started inspecting it. Shortly after, he was back under the eaves. Taking out his pipe, he looked at Xu Qing and sighed.

“It’s ruined. You might as well just get rid of it. The materials are too damaged. Sorry, Xu Qing. I can’t really help you.”

Xu Qing looked at the broken-down dreadnaught for a moment. “Elder Brother Zhang San, can’t you just make a new one?”

Zhang San shook his head. “Given your cultivation base, an ordinary dreadnaught wouldn’t be of much use. And a special dreadnaught requires extremely high-quality material. But if the materials are *too* high-level, then I wouldn’t be able to do anything with them... that is, unless you could arrange for help. And you would need to chip in some help as well. Although, that’s really secondary to the main issue.

“Ultimately, the materials are key. An ordinary godly entity isn’t going to cut it at this point. You would need the flesh of a high-level god. Now, maybe you have that already, but in addition, you would need some extremely powerful item to serve as the foundation. Unfortunately, I can’t think of anything that would be able to bear the weight of the flesh of a god.”

Zhang San seemed to be at a loss.

Off to the side, Erniu's eyes lit up. "Hey, what about that mountain that used to be a holy land? Little Ah Qing, what do you say we write a letter to the empress demanding it back? We can sign it in the name of our Master!"

Zhang San immediately nodded. Though he hadn't actually seen that mountain, based on his understanding, using a holy land for materials would definitely suffice.

After a bit of thought, Xu Qing put away the dreadnaught, then flicked his sleeve to produce a chunk of flesh. It was from Floating Fiend. Xu Qing reached out and squeezed the flesh with his hand, crushing it so that a stream of gray light flew out, which turned into a dilapidated pagoda right in the middle of the courtyard. It was the very same mysterious pagoda that Xu Qing had discovered on the seafloor and used as a hiding place. Floating Fiend discovered it and absorbed it into his own flesh. Later, when Xu Qing was freed by Yu Liuchen, he had assimilated Floating Fiend's flesh, and thus acquired the pagoda. Given Xu Qing's current level of strength, he couldn't absorb the pagoda, so it made sense to leave it with Floating Fiend's flesh.

After taking it out, Xu Qing looked at Zhang San. "What about this thing?"

Before Zhang San could answer, Erniu's eyes locked onto the pagoda as if in excitement. He could sense a terrifying aura in the pagoda, and he could also see the aura of the sageheaven god vine.

"That thing is incredible!" he blurted, and all of a sudden, his sageheaven god vine shot out and wrapped around the pagoda, all while emitting excited fluctuations.

Xu Qing's god vine did the same. It quickly formed a resonance with Erniu's vine, and an instant later, starlight glittered out from the two of them. That, in turn, affected the pagoda, which also started to shine with starlight.

Zhang San had a very serious expression on his face as he observed what was happening. The more he observed, the more shocked he was. And then, with the approval of Xu Qing and the help of the vines, he passed through the bubble and entered the pagoda.

When he came back out a short time later, he looked shaken, but his eyes were shining.

"I can't identify the material it's constructed from, but it doesn't look like a postheaven item. In all likelihood, it's a naturally-occurring material! The aura is chaotic and primeval, and also incredibly ancient. It seems to have the same origin as those two vines of yours.... This is definitely an incredible item. Something unique and one-of-a-kind. I'm going to need to study it more to determine further details."

Zhang San inhaled deeply and looked at Xu Qing. "Xu Qing, my intuition is telling me that if we had a way to refine that thing and turn it into a dreadnaught... it would be absolutely stupefying. But even if we can't refine it, using it as a reference point will be very beneficial. As for your vine... well I need to put some thought into the whole matter. Incidentally, we're going to need help from the exalted Flame Phoenix."

Xu Qing quickly took out a transmission jade slip and sent a message to Huang Yan.

Shortly after, as Erniu grumbled inwardly, Huang Yan arrived. When the two of them saw each other, they exchanged nothing but sharp glares.

Xu Qing quickly hurried in between them, all while Zhang San started explaining the situation with Xu Qing's dreadnaught.

After Huang Yan heard the explanation, he looked at the pagoda for a moment and then nodded. "You need some flame? No problem."

Zhang San was about to say 'yes' when Erniu cleared his throat.

"San," Erniu said, "if you're planning to build a new dreadnaught for little Ah Qing, wouldn't it help to have the power of frigid coldness?"

Seeing the look in Erniu's eyes caused Zhang San to hesitate. In the end, he could only agree.

Erniu and Huang Yan continued to glare at each other for a while until Zhang San and Xu Qing managed to smooth things out between them. Then they started refining the pagoda.

Making a new dreadnaught for Xu Qing was one of the most important things for Seven Blood Eyes at the moment. Since Zhang San couldn't do it alone, Second Elder Sister ordered all of the equipment forgers in the sect to hurry over and help.

Eventually, they decided to use an open area in a forbidden ground as the construction yard. In that spot, hundreds of thousands of cultivators started working on Xu Qing's dreadnaught.

As the work progressed, Xu Qing himself didn't need to do much personally. In most cases, he could just leave his god vine behind.

As a result, Xu Qing ended up having a lot of free time. He spent time helping the Mute with his cultivation base. He also gave some dao sermons in Seven Blood Eyes, in which he explained matters of personal cultivation enlightenment. Not only did he provide general instructions to the disciples but he also gave individualized help, enabling specific disciples to deal with questions and obstacles.

A month passed.

On one particular morning, Xu Qing was seated cross-legged in his mansion grotto when he received a voice message from Zhang San.

"Xu Qing, your dreadnaught is just about done. Everything went smoothly. You... should just come see it for yourself."

Xu Qing rose and walked out of his mansion grotto. As he was about to leave to meet Zhang San, he suddenly sensed something. Looking up into the canopy of heaven, he smiled.

Up above, he saw a prismatic beam of light shooting toward the Seventh Peak.

There were two people within the beam of light. One was middle-aged, the other was a young woman. The middle-aged man was Grandpa Ninth, while the young woman... was Ling'er.

“Big Bro Xu Qing,” Ling’er said in a cheerful and lighthearted voice that sounded like the chime of silver bells.

1. Erniu took Xu Qing to meet Zhang San in chapter 55. ❸

Chapter 1010: Sageheaven Pagoda

Chapter 1010: Sageheaven Pagoda

At Seven Blood Eyes, dawn was the purest and most tranquil part of the day. The first stream of light that came from the east brought golden color with it, and it shone around the approaching female figure.

She wore a long white gown that was the perfect complement to her beauty. The rising sun behind her made her skin seem extraordinarily fair, like exquisite porcelain. She seemed clean, pure, and free of all worldly defilements. She was slender and elegant, like a supple willow tree. Her long, straight nose, rosy lips, and beautiful smile were as warm and gorgeous as the sunrise. As she approached, her long hair swayed behind her in a mysterious, intoxicating rhythm. Especially noteworthy were her eyes, which glittered like gemstones, and brimmed with pure, joyous light. She was like a butterfly slowly stretching its wings, with charm and loveliness that was almost palpable.

Ling’er missed Xu Qing so much that she had finally come to see him at the Seventh Peak. When she threw herself into his arms and breathed in his scent, her eyes overflowed with tears.

“Big Bro Xu Qing....”

Endless longing and worry had filled her, as well as an ineffable indecision, and all of that came out in the words she spoke.

A host of memories filled Xu Qing’s heart and mind when he heard her speak. He gently lifted his hand and stroked her hair.

“Why are you crying?” he asked softly.

“I don’t know.... I just feel like I’ve lost you, Big Bro Xu Qing.” She looked up at him.

He was quiet for a moment, and then he laughed softly. “Impossible.”

“Really?”

“Really,” he said with a nod.

Ling’er laughed through her tears.

Xu Qing looked up at Grandpa Ninth, who had not descended from the dome of heaven. Grandpa Ninth closed his eyes, settled down cross-legged in midair, and started meditating.

After some thought, Xu Qing decided not to go to the forbidden ground to check on his dreadnaught. Instead, he sat down outside of his mansion grotto and told Ling'er the story of everything that happened after he left the Moonrite Region.

Ling'er listened intently to all the twists and turns, and her emotions rose and fell as he went through the different parts of the story. When she heard the parts where Xu Qing was in danger, she got nervous. When she heard the parts when he won great victories, she got happy. Gradually, her worries faded away, and she became immersed in Xu Qing's world.

As he recounted his tale, that feeling of indecision within her gradually faded away. It was replaced by a smile, and then, with a love of life and a hope for what was to come in the future. It was something unique to young women. It was the liveliness and excitement of youth, the pure manifestation of a girl's dreams. She suddenly seemed like a flower blooming in spring, or the sunlight in summer, or the leaves falling in autumn, or the snowflakes in winter.

When Xu Qing told the parts of his story that touched on Erniu, she laughed and laughed, sounding like a gentle stream flowing through a mountain.

Time passed.

As Xu Qing spoke, the sky turned blue, and white clouds drifted overhead. Just like Grandpa Ninth had, they looked down calmly at what was happening on the Seventh Peak. Combined with the shining sun, it looked like a simple but elegant painting.

Eventually, Ling'er yawned. Then her eyes fluttered closed, and she fell asleep.

Xu Qing gently stroked her head to make sure she was in a deep slumber. Then, he looked up at Grandpa Ninth with a very serious expression. Clasp hands, he bowed.

"Grandpa Ninth, what's going on with Ling'er?"

Grandpa Ninth opened his eyes and looked down. "Last month, when she reached the great circle of Nascent Soul, her bloodline curse started flaring up again. The imperial energy you left for her ran out."

Xu Qing looked down at the sleeping Ling'er. Earlier, he had sensed the fluctuations indicating her cultivation base was unstable.

Face expressionless, Grandpa Ninth continued, "I brought her here to see you because I want you to come with me to see Emperor Ancient Spirit. My plan is to force him to give up the rest of his imperial energy. All of it. That said, there's no need to rush. Ling'er isn't in any immediate danger."

Xu Qing nodded. Going to see Emperor Ancient Spirit would involve traveling to the Wood Spirits in Sea-Sealing County.

Although he once had a command medallion that would take him directly to Emperor Ancient Spirit, after he was resurrected in South Phoenix, that medallion stopped working. Xu Qing had tried using it when he was being chased by Floating Fiend, only for it to fail.

"Very well, Senior. Please wait just a moment."

Xu Qing waved his hand, sending out a gentle force that helped suppress the instability in Ling'er's cultivation base. Then he floated up into the air before vanishing. When he reappeared, he was in the forbidden ground where his dreadnaught was being made.

A huge open space had been prepared there. As soon as Xu Qing appeared, he saw the hundreds of thousands of cultivators under the command of Zhang San, making the final inspection of the dreadnaught.

Huang Yan and Erniu were meditating at opposite ends of the open area.

Astonishingly, the object that Zhang San and the hundreds of thousands of Seven Blood Eyes disciples were inspecting was a massive nine-floor pagoda that rose high into the sky. It rotated slowly, glowing with majestic light, and pulsing with an ancient aura. All it took was a single glance to realize that it was extraordinary. The sageheaven god vine coiled around it, casting its own starlight into the glow of the pagoda.

Close examination would reveal that the nine-floor pagoda wasn't actually a unified structure. It had been pieced together. The bottom level was made from the earliest version of the dilapidated pagoda. The eight floors above it had apparently been added on to provide a higher level of control.

When Zhang San spotted Xu Qing, he looked at him and grinned. "What do you think, Xu Qing? Happy? That dilapidated pagoda of yours was very, very difficult to refine. Thankfully, the exalted Huang Yan's flame was extraordinary, and made it possible to refine it. When you add in the Captain's marvelous abilities, we were able to add eight floors to the pagoda.

"Now, you should be able to directly control it! This dreadnaught won't just work in the Forbidden Sea. You should be able to use it... in the starry sky! This is a dreadnaught designed to traverse the stars!

"It doesn't just have materials from godly entities. The Captain and the exalted Huang Yan also added in the flesh of gods. It's completely astonishing, and at the same time, can be released and collected back at will.

"What's more, given how much I'm familiar with your practice of blowing up your ships, I didn't bother building in divine abilities and magical techniques. Instead, I focused everything on durability. This dreadnaught... can also be used as a weapon to bash enemies over the head! And of course, in terms of speed and strength, it surpasses your previous dreadnaught by a longshot!"

Zhang San kept talking louder and louder in his excitement. Over the last month, he had been the one orchestrating the plan to build the dreadnaught. He had poured blood, sweat, and tears into the project, and had pushed his skill and imagination to the limit. As far as he was concerned, this was the best work he had done in his entire life.

"Now you just need to awaken your god vine! The vine is the spirit automaton of the dreadnaught. During the process of refining the pagoda, it became inextricably linked to it. Right now, it's asleep. With it as the spirit automaton, you can control the pagoda perfectly! By the way, I kept the defensive bubble that surrounded the pagoda."

Zhang San hurried to Xu Qing's side looking very excited, and all the while trying to hide his exhaustion. However, his bloodshot eyes made it obvious how tired he was.

Xu Qing was moved. Taking a deep breath, he clasped hands and bowed to Zhang San. Then he bowed to the hundreds of thousands of cultivators in the area. Finally, he waved his hand in the direction of the pagoda.

As his divine will streamed out, the sageheaven god vine coiled around the pagoda twitched. Then it slowly woke up and started moving around the pagoda. Starlight glittered resplendently as the sageheaven god vine carried the pagoda right toward Xu Qing. Along the way, both the vine and the pagoda shrank down until they landed on Xu Qing's palm, hardly more than an inch tall.

Xu Qing checked it with divine will, then retracted his divine will. Around that time, Erniu and Huang Yan emerged from meditation. Both of them looked very pleased. But then they noticed each other. Glaring at each other, they seemed just on the verge of bickering when Xu Qing cleared his throat.

“Huang Yan, I have a matter to attend to. I need to leave South Phoenix.”

Huang Yan opened his mouth to say something, but before he could, Erniu jumped up, rushed over to Xu Qing, and laughed heartily.

“We’re finally leaving? Alright, let’s hurry up and get out of here! Having to deal with this birdman on a daily basis is really getting old. It’s high time I un-bird-en myself, I can tell you that!”

Xu Qing clasped hands to Huang Yan. There wasn’t a need for any parting words. With another bow to everyone else present, he threw the pagoda into the air. In accordance with his thoughts, it grew to a height of 300 meters tall, and also emanated a seven-colored glow. A magnificent will spread out in all directions as Xu Qing stepped onto the pagoda. Erniu followed, and as his sageheaven god vine glittered with starlight, he was admitted. Next, rumbling sounds filled heaven and earth as the pagoda pierced through the void and disappeared.

When it reappeared, it was above the Seventh Peak in Seven Blood Eyes. There, the pagoda’s main doors opened, and the sleeping Ling’er floated up and into the pagoda. Grandpa Ninth also stepped inside. He looked around, and his eyes flashed with amazement.

“This thing is incredible!”

Hearing that, Erniu laughed proudly. “I refined it!”

Grandpa Ninth ignored him.

Xu Qing bolstered Ling’er again, slowing down the changes to her cultivation base. Then he sent more divine will into the pagoda. As all the Seven Blood Eyes disciples watched, the pagoda flared with seven-colored light. Dazzling brightness spread for 5,000 kilometers, and then the pagoda vanished.

It moved with shocking speed out over the Forbidden Sea. Immense waves swept out over the water as the pagoda shot toward Emperor-Receiving Prefecture. Wherever it passed, countless sea beasts sensed the pressure of the pagoda’s aura, and they trembled.

In Emperor-Receiving Prefecture, the Swordsage Court grand elder in charge of the prefecture was flying over the Supreme Arbiter Salvation Mountains. After passing the Everlasting Immortal Profundity River, he appeared outside the Spiritsound forbidden ground.[1]

Looking into the forbidden ground, he said, “Three days ago, a swordsage from my Swordsage Court was out on a mission when she encountered the wanted cultivator Li Zimei from the Supreme Arbiter Immortal Society. After chasing her into the forbidden region, they both disappeared.[2]

“Lord Spiritsound, things are different in Emperor-Receiving Prefecture, Sea-Sealing County, and the Holytide Region in general, compared to the last time you awoke! Therefore, I’m here on orders from the Swordsage Palace in Sea-Sealing County, demanding that you release these people from your forbidden ground!”

Natural sounds erupted from the Spiritsound forbidden ground, turning into sounds of death that swept out in all directions. The shocking power of the sound caused the entire forbidden ground to tremble. Waves broke out on the surface of the Everlasting Immortal Profundity River, all while a sinister voice spoke from inside the forbidden ground.

“Screw off!”

The Swordsage Court grand elder was shaken deeply as he fell back 300 meters. Face pale and eyes sharp, he looked at the forbidden ground. “That swordsage was named Qing Qiu, and she was a close childhood friend of Region Lord Xu Qing. If you insist on being stubborn, you’ll bring catastrophe down on your own head. And now, you can’t claim that I didn’t warn you!”[3]

1. The Spiritsound forbidden ground was first mentioned in chapter 269. More details about it were explained in chapter 347. ❹

2. Li Zimei was introduced by name in chapter 49. She was last mentioned in chapter 660, and last appeared onscreen in chapter 287. ❹

3. Qing Qiu was first introduced by name in chapter 355, although she had appeared onscreen before that. She first showed up as an adult in chapter 335, but her first actual appearance onscreen was in chapter 6. She appeared in far too many chapters to include references. The last chapter in which she appeared onscreen was chapter 543, though she was mentioned in a few chapters after that. ❹

Deathblade’s Thoughts

By this point in the novel, the author has seemingly forgotten his original designations for the Swordsage Court, Palace, and Division. Because of that, this chapter is a bit confusing when you read it in Chinese. I’ve edited the text here (as well as in subsequent chapters) so that the continuity is maintained.