

Beyond the Timescape

Chapter 1091: An Unknown World

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Heaven and earth spun chaotically. The cosmos was infinite. Space seemed to go on forever, only to contract to a minute size an instant later. Time stretched out endlessly, only to shrink down a moment after that. They were connected, fused, forming a massive, mysterious vortex that gobbled up Xu Qing's Sageheaven Pagoda.

Terrifying power erupted, forming a majestic force of attraction that surpassed the level of all tempests and could crush anything and everything. When it hit the pagoda, it exerted an influence on the forward path of the pagoda.

In comparison, the pagoda was like a tiny rowboat being swept along by a massive, furious wave. In the blink of an eye, the extra levels Zhang San had added to the pagoda all exploded into rubble. The rubble was then wiped out of existence, turning into ashes that dissipated in the vortex of time and space.

After losing all of the modifications that had been added on, it was back to its original form. It was a dilapidated pagoda, speeding along within the power of the vortex. The pagoda rotated on its own, but was also being spun by the power of the vortex, creating a chaotic sensation.

In fact, if you looked closely, you would realize that the pagoda was actually spinning faster than the vortex. That was the result of the interaction between the two things. The two different speeds led to a terrifying pulling sensation that made Xu Qing feel like he was rocketing forward at incredible speed.

Though he was seated cross-legged inside the pagoda, he was actually floating and spinning. He wasn't in control of anything. What was more, he was actually spinning even faster than the pagoda.

It was because of the differences in the physical nature of everything involved. Put plainly, the vortex, the pagoda, and Xu Qing were all rotating at different speeds. The resulting pulling force was naturally intense. Xu Qing was trembling as if he was being torn apart. But what hurt even more was his soul.

It was hard for him to assess what exactly he was feeling. When he scanned himself, he experienced both clarity and blurriness. It was even the same with his perception of the color of his surroundings when he looked at them with divine will. Sometimes there were two colors. Sometimes there were nine colors. Sometimes there was no color. Sometimes it was pure chaos.

Numerous images appeared in his mind. His eyes weren't open. The palace lord of the Summer Immortal Palace had warned Xu Qing that this would happen when he asked her for information about the Primeval Sea. Because Xu Qing's cultivation base wasn't actually strong enough to go through the passage, she had told him not to open his eyes. That was why he was keeping them tightly shut.

Going through the passage would take a long time. It was almost like journeying into a bottomless abyss.

Xu Qing wasn't even sure how much time had passed. All he knew was that the pain kept increasing. In fact, he was reaching the point where he almost couldn't feel his own body, as if he wasn't himself. It was the same with his soul. His perceptions were descending into chaos. All of the torment was pushing him into an intense sensation of deadly crisis.

This isn't going to work. The vortex, the pagoda, and I are all rotating at different speeds. And if it keeps up... either the pagoda will explode or I'll explode. And the latter is the more likely of the two. I've experienced something like this before!

His body felt like it was being ripped apart, and his soul felt like it was going out of control. At that point, he bit his tongue, using the pain to stimulate himself and stabilize his mind. It didn't do much, and it only lasted for a moment. However, that was all the time he needed to recall the time he had felt something similar to this.

It was... back when his human nature, godly nature, and animal nature had erupted back in the Moonrite Region.[1]

Back then, he had descended into chaos and had been unable to stabilize. And he had reached a point where his soul had been about to explode. He had resolved the situation by finding an anchor! That was how he had regained balance and stabilized his mind.

Anchor... balance....

Back when he had been in chaos because of his human, godly, and animal nature, the anchor he had found was determination and regret revolving around the lifespan flower.[2]

What about now...?

A few breaths of time passed, and then determination filled him. He had to ignore the warnings of the palace lord. If things kept on as they were, he could very well die. He had to take control. His eyes suddenly opened.

He looked around the Sageheaven Pagoda and felt incredibly dizzy. From his perspective, the pagoda was spinning around him. But he was also spinning, causing his sensation of chaos to grow even more intense.

Eyes growing increasingly bloodshot, he unleashed his cultivation base and performed a double-handed incantation gesture. Then he threw his hands out wide and used his cultivation base power to adjust the speed of his rotation. After several dozen attempts, and after having coughed up numerous mouthfuls of blood, he managed to slowly adjust his rotation speed to match that of the

pagoda. The moment they synced up, the tearing sensation in his body and soul reduced significantly.

He was now at a state of balance with the pagoda. This was the anchor Xu Qing had thought of. He breathed a sigh of relief.

Me, the pagoda, and the vortex are all spinning differently. Balance is the anchor! Now I need to get myself and the pagoda moving in sync with the vortex.

Not daring to relax for an instant, he made some inner analyses, then used the god vine to start making adjustments to the pagoda.

Time passed. It was hard to say how much. But eventually, his careful work resulted in the pagoda reducing the speed of its rotation. It soon reached a state of sync with the vortex. The moment it happened, Xu Qing... suddenly felt very peaceful, even though he knew that he was still rotating at high speed.

As the feeling of peacefulness filled him, he looked out of the pagoda. He saw the majestic vortex, and he saw what appeared to be time flowing past. And he saw the interchange of countless nodes of space. He also saw images from history within the vortex, mixing with images of the future. In fact, he was fairly certain he could see himself....

Before he could confirm it, the power of the vortex caused space and time to fuse. Rumbling sounds filled the vortex, filled the pagoda, and filled his mind.

Next, he and the pagoda slipped into the vortex. They vanished.

Intense rumbling filled Xu Qing, and he lost control. He lost consciousness.

It was an unknown star ring. An unknown world.

The lands were yellow and dry, covered with a spider web of crevices in all directions. The sky was pitch black. However, there were three eyeballs up above, staring down malevolently at the lands below.

There wasn't much light in the world. There were just the three eyeballs like moons, sending out faint light. The place was hazy and deathly silent.

A day passed and another eyeball appeared overhead. Not long after there were four eyeballs in the sky, a vortex appeared on the shattered ground. The vortex only existed for a moment of time before vanishing. It left behind a dilapidated pagoda.

Inside the pagoda, Xu Qing opened his eyes. His eyes looked blank at first, but they quickly became clear. He looked around with vigilance.

He frowned. He had no idea if this was the Fifth Star Ring or not. Although the chances were high it was, the sight of his surroundings left him wondering. Based on his understanding, considering

he had been traveling by means of the Primeval Sea, the most logical thing to conclude was that he would emerge in the Primeval Sea in the destination star ring.

He instinctively looked at his shoulder. Starfire was there, and for some reason had turned into an actual clay fox statue that sat motionless on his shoulder.

Xu Qing checked his injuries. They were significant. Instead of choosing to leave the pagoda, he sat down to meditate. Two days later, his injuries were on the way to being fully healed. He opened his eyes again. Shortly after, he stood and walked out. Once outside, he looked up into the dome of heaven to see six eyeballs there.

“One new one per day?” he murmured.

There was no wind. Nor did he sense any auras. It was as if this entire world was completely withered up. It wasn’t an unfamiliar sensation. Back before he joined Seven Blood Eyes, he had roamed the wilderness of South Phoenix for years. The big difference was that he had been a mortal back then.

First I need to see what this world is like. I need to look for living beings. And then I need to figure out if this is the Fifth Star Ring. If it is the Fifth Star Ring, I need to get to the Immortal Capital. If it’s not....

Wrapped up in his thoughts, he put away the dilapidated pagoda. After going through the vortex, the pagoda was on the verge of crumbling into rubble. Considering he would need it to get back to the Ninth Star Ring, he chose not to use it for the time being.

After I confirm which star ring I’m in, I can try to find a place to get it repaired.

Without any hesitation, he began moving, keeping his guard up. The search had begun.

A day later, a seventh eyeball appeared overhead. The light it emanated was very much like the color of blood.[3]

However, Xu Qing was not within that blood-colored light. He was in a subterranean cavern. And that was where he encountered a huge coffin. It was covered with sealing marks, magical symbols, and chains. What was more, it was in the middle of a huge spell formation. The rotation of the spell formation was extracting lingering life force from the coffin to nourish the surrounding world.

The sight of it caused Xu Qing’s pupils to constrict.

There’s a god in that coffin....

He slowly backed up. Another day passed and an eighth eyeball could be seen in the sky. The blood-colored light grew stronger.

Xu Qing stood atop a mountain, at the foot of which was a city. Thanks to the blood-colored light, the city seemed grisly and inauspicious.

He looked thoughtfully at it. He had been to many places during the last two days besides the cave with the coffin. And he had seen living beings. They weren't human. However, they vaguely resembled humans, with blue skin and triangular pupils.

Most of them were cultivators. And yet, whether they were cultivators or not, they were all emaciated, with very weak life force. Their listless eyes made them seem like the walking dead.

The cultivators here... were not very strong. None were beyond the Nascent Soul level. In fact, Xu Qing could tell that within this city, the strongest three people were Nascent Soul cultivators.

Don't tell me this is a minor world? Given how that coffin is drawing from that god to nourish the surrounding world, this place shouldn't be in this state.

He thoughtfully walked down into the city. The local cultivators couldn't tell that a stranger was walking among them. The cultivation base disparity was too great. Unless Xu Qing wanted them to sense him, they wouldn't be able to. And thus, Xu Qing walked about, studying the pedestrians, the shops, and the cultivators. Without exception, everyone was withered and emaciated. And they all seemed to emanate an aura of despair.

Even as Xu Qing looked up at the eight eyeballs in the sky, he reached a shrine hall on the far side of the city. There were more cultivators here than elsewhere, and the exquisite nature of the architecture caught Xu Qing's attention.

He entered the shrine hall and saw the shrine at the far end. There were nine blood-soaked eyeballs on it.

The frescoes on the wall depicted various myths and legends. This was what Xu Qing had been looking for. Information. Looking at the frescoes told him the story of this world.

It had once been a peaceful place. But some years ago, an evil sun had appeared in the dome of heaven. When it appeared, the world became withered and full of death. All living beings suffered. When they were in the depths of despair, nine heroes appeared. They killed the evil sun, though they were grievously injured in the process.

Those nine heroes became heavenly daos. They turned into nine eyeballs that safeguarded the living people of the world. However, because they had been injured so badly, their protection couldn't last for very long. Every nine days, they needed to replenish their life force.

As for the living people, in order to show their gratitude, they would willingly sacrifice some of their life force to the nine eyeballs whenever they appeared together at the same time.

Nine eyeballs. Nine heroes. And that god under the ground is probably the evil sun from the legend. But who exactly were the nine heroes?[4]

Xu Qing looked away from the frescoes and the legends. It seemed to him that the legend of the world could very well just be an excuse to make it easier to harvest life force.

That said, at least I have some clues to work with now.

He vanished from the shrine hall and appeared atop the mountain. Expression placid, he sat down cross-legged to continue working on his injuries. At the same time, he waited for the ninth eyeball to appear. He was quite certain that once the ninth eyeball was there, he would be able to see this world much more clearly.

1. The situation with the human nature, godly nature, and animal nature started in [chapter 619](#). ❸

2. The lifespan flower as the anchor was in [chapter 622](#). ❸

3. The Chinese characters I'm rendering as 'eyeballs' are actually the common ones normally translated as simply 'eye.' However, I want to differentiate them from Seven Blood Eyes. In reality, Seven Blood 'Eyes' would most accurately be rendered Seven Blood 'Pupils.' In the end, I went with 'eyes' as my translation choice because A) it sounds better, B) the sect was described as having seven literal eyes on the mountains (not just pupils), and C) I had no idea that something like 1,000 chapters later in a chapter the author hadn't written at that point, there would be another situation with a specific number of blood-colored eyes. There is not supposed to be an obvious linguistic connection between them. Incidentally, the text does not make it clear what exactly they look like. Do they look like literal spherical eyeballs, or do they look like an eye drawn on a piece of paper? We don't know. It could go either way, and the text never makes it clear. And in the end, there is not supposed to be a connection between Seven Blood Eyes and the eyeballs in this chapter. ❸

4. Another linguistic note here. There are different words that can be translated as hero. For example, the "xia" character from wuxia/xianxia is sometimes rendered as hero, and that "xia" character is sometimes used as a form of address in wuxia/xianxia. The term in this chapter, however, is not 'xia.' It's the most literal and common word for hero, the very same one that is used in the term "superhero" in Chinese. This isn't particularly relevant, but since many of you are familiar with how 'xia' and 'hero' are used in these novels, I figured I would elaborate a bit. If I was reading a translation, I would be wondering which version was being used.... ❸

Chapter 1092: The Heaven of a Minor World

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Looking up at the eight eyeballs and the blood-red light they emitted, Xu Qing thought, *Based on what I've seen over the past few days, I can tell that days on this world are thirty-four hours long. That's a bit longer than Revered Ancient. And that means that it'll be another eight hours before the ninth eyeball appears. While I'm waiting....*

Xu Qing closed his eyes to assess his current cultivation base and battle prowess. He had been very familiar with his god clone, including its godly authority and other assets.

When going into battle like that, I could turn into a real killing machine. As for this immortal body....

Truth be told, he had not yet had a chance to have a real fight with this body.

When he fought Grand Emperor Netherflame, he had been working with his Eldest Brother to simply contain the enemy, and he had not used any divine abilities or magical techniques.

Therefore, Xu Qing felt that his priority as he waited was to make sure all his magical techniques were in order and ready to use.

This immortal body cultivates the Ten Extreme Daos. However, because I've only reached the level of nine in both Spirit Trove and Void Returning, my current limit is nine extreme daos.

They start with the five elements of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. Those serve as the foundation, and are also natural laws that govern the operation of heaven and earth. By using my five yin organs as the basis, I can use my own body to perform the cycles, as opposed to using heaven and earth as the origin. Because of that... my battle prowess is not limited by any specific location or world. In other words, I can use the power of the five elements anywhere I go.

Xu Qing lifted his hand and then stretched his fingers out and looked at them. A metal-type power gathered in his palm. When it reached an extreme level, Xu Qing's eyes gleamed.

The dao of extreme metal will allow me to control any type of metal in heaven and earth. It's not a specific magical technique, but rather, will rely on quick thinking to be beneficial. The same thing applies to wood, water, fire, and earth.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed. With the dao of the five elements, all bits of wood around him could be pieced together based on his thoughts.

Theoretically speaking, the only limit to this five elements power is my own imagination. In other words, if I want divine abilities for the dao of five elements, I need to seek enlightenment about how to create them. Most importantly... any individual element can make a divine ability. Or, they can all be combined into a divine ability.

After experimenting briefly with each of the five elements, a thoughtful look appeared on his face.

Now, let's deal with Little Shadow. Little Shadow does not suffer from any limitations because of the switch between god clone and immortal body.

Xu Qing waved his hand, and his shadow stretched out in all directions, ultimately covering the entire mountain. At that point, Xu Qing was able to see Little Shadow's true form. It was a huge tree with a coffin hanging down from it, covered with numerous eyes. It pulsed with ingratiating emotional fluctuations.

And then there's The Emperor's Sword.

The Emperor's Sword was part of immortal cultivation, so naturally speaking, it couldn't stay inside a god clone long-term. Therefore, Xu Qing had extracted it and put it into his immortal body. Upon sensing the sword within him, he recalled the various sword stances Grand Emperor Swordsage had demonstrated.

Earth Treasury. Rending the Void. Heavenly Palaces. Star Splendor... The Human World.

Xu Qing spent some time mentally reviewing the five sword techniques before moving on.

Beyond all that, my magical techniques include Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits as well as my immortal skills.

A black spark appeared on Xu Qing's forehead, which turned into a golden crow. Black fire spread all around him, which he could control and bolster with the dao of extreme fire. As the golden crow's many tails spread, Xu Qing sensed something like a cheer coming from it.

After some contemplation, Xu Qing went on to the immortal skills. Immortal skills were a type of forbidden magic, and Xu Qing's control was limited. He had Six Thieves Deceive Life and Five Dogs Cleave Immortals. The former had two dao lineaments, while the latter would require some personal enlightenment.

I can still use them.

His eyes shone with mysterious light as his authority of erasure formed.

Then I have my magical treasures....

He waved his hand, and three beams of light shot out. Three magical treasures. The first was a needle that could stitch karma. The second was a pair of shears that could sever perception. The third was a shield that could be used for defense. The first two came from the Vivifiends, while the last was something he had acquired in the Devilbird holy land. [1]

As for trump cards....

His eyes glittered

Fishing the Moon in the Well represents the dao of extreme space. That's the first. My life essence sundials can influence the timescape, and they represent the dao of extreme time. That's the second. And I have one more, assuming I can assemble it with the five elements. And that's the God Decapitation Altar! Or I guess the most accurate way to say it would be a five elements God Decapitation Altar! [2]

And finally...

He took a deep breath, and his expression became more serious.

The dao of extreme space and the dao of extreme time both have individual transformations.

He thought back to what he had seen when he opened his eyes in the vortex passageway.

Space was infinitely big and infinitely small. Time was infinitely long and infinitely short.

Xu Qing's brow tightened into a frown, but soon relaxed. He knew that he needed enlightenment of additional factors before he could do anything like that with his immortal body. In fact, study and training was why he had chosen to travel to the Immortal Capital in the Fifth Star Ring to begin with.

There's no reason to get anxious.

Calming his heart and mind, he closed his eyes to seek enlightenment. And thus, eight hours ticked by. At that point, ripples flowed through the dome of heaven, accompanied by thunderous rumblings.

All living beings were shaken to the core and instinctively looked up. High in the sky... a ninth eyeball had appeared. The moment it was there, the entire sky turned crimson! The gloomy world was stained with red, until everything... was the color of blood. A terrifying aura descended from above, becoming a dreadful tempest that covered anything and everything.

Along with it came the sound of murmuring, which were the voices of the heavenly daos speaking into the ears of all living beings. It became like thunder.

Then, all people in the world, be they mortals or cultivators, regardless of whether they were in villages or cities, or even out in the wilderness... all prostrated toward the dome of heaven. Regardless of what their facial expressions had been before, the murmuring caused them to look fanatical. And regardless of how emaciated they were or how withered their life force was, they didn't hesitate to sacrifice some of themselves.

It was the same with children and the elderly. Everyone participated. Because of the willing sacrifice, the life force became streams of white smoke that rose up into the air toward the nine blood-colored eyeballs.

The eyeballs absorbed it!

As Xu Qing coldly observed things play out, he circulated his cultivation base, tapped into his five yin organs, and activated his seven major worlds. Spirit power flowed into his eyes.

That was when he could see that he wasn't looking at nine eyeballs! Astonishingly, there were nine spell formations. And within each spell formation was a skeletal corpse seated cross-legged.

They still have life force. They're not dead.

Xu Qing studied the nine corpses; he could tell from their facial features that they weren't species from this world. They were human!

They're all wearing the same clothes, too. Are they from the same organization? How were they injured?

As Xu Qing watched, the life force from the world converged on the nine corpses. However, after that, it came out of the tops of their heads and drifted off to a distant location that Xu Qing couldn't see....

They're not injured. They're actually filtering out impurities!

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed. Around then, a faint aura of awakening appeared on Xu Qing's shoulder. Next, Starfire slowly transformed from a clay fox statue back into a flesh-and-blood form.

When shē opened hēr eyes, shē grumbled, "Where the hell are we, boy? Which star ring did we end up in? Why does this place suppress gods so strongly? It's terrifying.... In fact, it rejects all forms of godly power! I could barely wake myself up."

When Xu Qing didn't answer, shē opened hēr eyes and looked at the lands below. Hēr pupils constricted.

"There's a Flawless God sealed underground!" Shē studied the surrounding world, then noticed the nine eyeballs in the dome of heaven. Shē gasped. "It's a god-assimilating spell formation!"

"Senior," Xu Qing said, "I did make it clear that I was going to a place that doesn't welcome gods."

Starfire shrank in on hērsel and weakly said, "The force of suppression on me is too strong. This isn't a matter of 'not welcoming' gods.... This is a minor world set up specifically to assimilate a god. It's extracting power from the god below to nourish the living beings here. But that's only the first level of filtration. Next, the living beings send their life force to those nine cultivators. That's the second level of filtration.

"After those two levels, an incomparably pure power is sent out for someone else to absorb. Very ruthless. In fact, this is even more ruthless than your Revered Ancient. I wonder who set this up. And how many formations like this are there...."

Starfire was clearly afraid of this place. After some thought, shē transformed into an earring on Xu Qing's ear.

"This should be safer," shē whispered. Then a tongue emerged from the earring and licked Xu Qing's ear. Shē could sense the energy of his primal yang. That seemed to placate hēr a bit.

It felt a bit unsettling to Xu Qing, but considering the state Starfire was in, he didn't stop hēr. He looked back up at the nine eyeballs in the dome of heaven.

"I don't think they've sensed you," Starfire said dully. "Are you just going to leave this place?"

Xu Qing shook his head. "It would be simple to break free. But there are likely more levels of defense outside. I'm still not fully recovered. What's more, considering I don't know the full story, I don't want to do anything until I'm back at my peak."

He had always been the type of person who remained unflustered. And he was extremely patient. He had been like that as a child, and that hadn't changed after he joined Seven Blood Eyes. He was in an unfamiliar place, and therefore his best options were either to do nothing, or to wait until he was confident about what would happen if he did do something.

"Fine," Starfire said. "I won't do anything to help you for now. The pressure is too immense. I need to sleep a bit to get used to it."

Starfire seemed very listless, and at the same time, helpless. All shē could do was grumble to hērsel about the risk shē had taken to come to a hellish place like this for some primal yang.

Xu Qing just nodded and continued to observe what was happening.

And thus, the night passed.

The living beings in this world made this same sacrifice whenever the nine eyeballs came out. When the day dawned, the sacrifice was over, and all of them were in an extremely weak state.

That said, the nine eyeballs didn't absorb too much life force. They left some behind. That ensured that there was always some hope in the world, and people didn't descend into true despair.

Up above, eight of the eyeballs were no longer visible. There was only one there.

In the following days, Xu Qing remained seated cross-legged atop the mountain. By the time a fourth eyeball was visible above, the injuries he had sustained in the Primeval Sea vortex were fully recovered. He was back at his peak.

He didn't waste any time. For the next few days, he sought enlightenment about how to combine the dao of the five elements with the God Decapitation Altar. He also spent some time thinking about his experiences with space and time in the vortex passageway. He was becoming increasingly convinced that what he had experienced with space and time in the vortex were going to be crucial in confirming the dao he was personally searching for.

Time passed.

The world grew increasingly crimson as the ninth day came. The ninth terrifying eyeball slowly appeared in the canopy of heaven. Blood-colored light spread as the living beings began to offer their sacrifice.

Xu Qing stood.

"It's time to leave," he said calmly, and he stepped up into the sky!

The sky trembled. Lightning snaked out beneath his feet in all directions. Each step he took seemed to shake the entire world, and the brilliance of the spreading lightning vied with heaven itself!

The nine eyeballs suddenly stopped absorbing the life force energy. And then, as they sensed Xu Qing, they swiveled to face him!

1. The needle first appeared in [chapter 974.2](#). The shears first appeared in [chapter 980](#). The shield first appeared in [chapter 1070](#). ㊦

2. The God Decapitation Altar section started in about [chapter 633](#) and went on for something like ten chapters. After that, Xu Qing used it a handful of times in various chapters. ㊦

Chapter 1093: God-Refining Spirit Mine

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The pupils of the nine enormous blood-colored eyeballs constricted. Inside the eyeballs were the nine corpses seated cross-legged, who were absorbing the spirit energy from the living beings below. All of them trembled.

Clearly, Xu Qing's arrival was a complete shock. He had not been noticed before the moment he revealed himself. That was a very significant fact, and it was clearly shocking to the nine corpse-like cultivators.

“Excuse me,” Xu Qing said calmly. “I’d like to leave this place. Do you mind letting me through?”

Obviously, the ideal outcome would be to leave without having to make a scene.

Unfortunately, his words had a very different result than intended. The nine blood-red eyeballs emanated intense hostility. The nine cultivators within them didn’t know where this person came from or how he had entered this minor world controlled by their clan. But it didn’t matter. They simply couldn’t permit mishaps in this place. Killing intent surged within them, and they immediately sent messages to the outside.

Sadly for them... Xu Qing had prepared well before revealing himself, and it was a given he was ready in all respects. He knew that these nine eyeballs were strange, but getting past them wouldn’t be difficult. What was more, defeating the nine cultivators wouldn’t pose a challenge.

The main concern would be to make sure no one from the outside interfered when he was killing them. Xu Qing was confident that, given how this minor world was set up, there was likely some sort of guardian on the outside. If someone like that interfered when he was trying to leave, it could lead to a tricky situation. Therefore, the best option was to try to get out quickly and smoothly to ensure that the outside guardian didn’t notice what was happening.

As he strode up into the sky, he waved his right hand, causing a huge pair of shears to appear high in heaven above the nine eyeballs. The shears were so massive they filled the sky, and their arrival caused the aura of a Grand Emperor’s treasure to rage like a tempest. These were the shears that could sever all dao lineaments and karma.

They snapped shut.

They made no sound. And yet, all living beings, including the nine cultivators in the eyeballs, heard a cracking sound deep in their souls. At that moment, all information the cultivators were transmitting to the outside world was severed!

But things weren’t over yet. Next, the Grand Emperor’s needle glittered as it stitched the karma that had just been severed so that everything looked just as it had looked to Xu Qing nine days before.

Because of that... no information could leave this place. No fluctuations would emerge from it. In most respects, it was now completely invisible and independent. The Grand Emperor’s needle improved the concealment effect. Unless an outside force sent divine will into this world, then they would have no way of knowing that anything unusual was happening.

Xu Qing’s eyes glittered with cold light. “Since you refuse to talk, then I guess....”

He took a final step, which caused the dome of heaven to tremble. Lightning converged beneath his feet, becoming like countless red snakes that shot toward the nine eyeballs.

The eyeballs shivered and glowed with red light. Within them, the nine cultivators quickly lifted their hands, their expressions very serious. They could sense that they were dealing with two extraordinary Grand Emperor treasures, and they also knew they were now cut off from the outside. Starting to feel despondent, they performed incantation gestures.

The nine eyeballs glowed with even more intense red light, and they pulsed with an astonishing defensive spell formation power. At the same time, the bodies of the nine cultivators began to transform from their withered state. Using the life force power they had absorbed, they began to recover from their previous state. They knew that they had to fight in the face of this sudden threat, or else they would end up dead.

Xu Qing's face was completely expressionless. He didn't care what cultivation base these people had. As long as they weren't Imperial Sovereigns, it didn't matter if they woke up completely.

I suppose this is the perfect opportunity to test out this immortal body.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed. Lifting his right hand, he pointed at the first eyeball.

The power of metal built within his lungs. He inhaled, then exhaled sharply, causing his breath to fill the entire minor world. It affected all metal in the world, including all weapons. In the blink of an eye, the world started trembling.... An instant later, all five elements metals in the world were replaced!

Xu Qing's extreme metal power became a dao of this world! He could sense that, with a mere thought, he could control every metallic thing in the world. His eyes glittered....

All of the five elements metals in the world erupted, gathering together in the sky in a flowing stream. It turned into a gigantic finger made of metal.

The finger hit the first eyeball. The moment it did, the spell formation went wild, sending out incredible power to defend the eyeball. But the formation ended up being completely useless. It shattered, and the awakening cultivator inside the eyeball... had no chance of escaping. Rumbling sounds echoed out as the eyeball collapsed and fell out of the sky. The cultivator within it screamed as the power of metal killed him in body and soul!

The cultivators in the other eight eyeballs were visibly astonished, but quickly went all out to try to get back to their peak level.

So, this is the power of an extreme immortal?

At the moment in which Xu Qing had taken over the dao of metal in this world, he felt like he had become the embodiment of a heavenly dao.

Next, he said one thing.

“Wood.”

The power of wood from his liver swept out and filled the world. All vegetation in the world shivered, as did all wood-type cultivators and anything else related to wood. The world lost one of its daos!

A majestic finger made from the power of the dao of extreme wood formed in the air. It pulsed with intense life force and a boundless terror as it shot toward the second eyeball. All living beings shook at the sight of it. Another of the nine eyeballs fell.

Wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. Winds screamed. And then Xu Qing's voice spoke like the flowing of the tide.

"Water."

Water from Xu Qing's kidneys replaced all five elements water in the world. It rose up into the sky and became rain, rivers, and seas. The foundation of all living beings. The world really was too small, and so, after taking the role of heavenly dao, Xu Qing could control all living beings.

"Fire."

The sound of a heartbeat became like heavenly thunder. Fire raged, flickering in the eyes of all living beings. And finally...

"Earth."

The lands of the minor world trembled, seemingly possessed of a will of their own as they shot toward the eyeballs in heaven backed by countless years of pent-up rage.

Three fingers rose into the sky. Three eyeballs collapsed! Three cultivators perished!

All the five elements power was under Xu Qing's control, allowing him to take over and become a heavenly dao.

Meanwhile, the cultivators in the surviving four eyeballs had recovered, and were rising to their feet one after another. Under their control, the eyeballs shrank down and entered their foreheads, bolstering them. Instantly, their auras surged.

These were seven-world Smoldering Gods! Grim looks appeared in their eyes, all while fear simmered in their hearts. One of them then stepped forward.

"Sire, it matters not where you come from. There is only one way to leave this place. And that is to wait for us to leave. Once outside, we can open the way for you to leave this world. If you don't trust us, then we can just send a single person. Considering the level of our cultivation, what's the need for all this fighting and killing? What do you think, sire?"

The other three cultivators didn't react with surprise to his words. Though none of them knew what this person was doing here, they could all tell that he had an astonishing background. Otherwise... he would have died just trying to get into their clan's secret location. What was more, they weren't confident at all in being able to overcome him, and didn't want to throw their lives away. That was why they needed to get out as quickly as possible and contact the elder who controlled the secret location.

If the elder stepped in, this interloper would be killed beyond the shadow of a doubt. Thus, the three other cultivators nodded.

"Everything from before was a misunderstanding."

"We reacted impulsively."

Maintaining vigilance, the three of them slowly backed up.

Xu Qing looked at them and shook his head. He lifted his right hand. Heaven and earth trembled. The world shook. The five phases formed five heavenly dao fingers up above. And then that hand shot toward the four cultivators.

As their faces fell, their cultivation bases raged as they prepared to fight back. Unfortunately, those five fingers were heavenly daos made from the five elements of this world. They contained the will of the world itself, and since Xu Qing was pulsing with a killing will, it meant this was killing intent from heaven itself.

The storm raged with heaven-rending, earth-crushing power. It didn't matter how the four cultivators struggled or fought back. It didn't do any good. An instant later... agonized shrieks rang out.

The four cultivators had been smashed into a bloody pulp that fell down to the ground like red flowers.

"I prefer to trust myself only," Xu Qing said calmly. Then he looked up at the dome of heaven and clenched his right hand into a fist.

An astonishing sword energy emerged from him, which turned into The Emperor's Sword. He grasped it, then adjusted the five elements power, sending the might of this world's heavenly daos into the sword. He slashed it at heaven.

Sword energy raged into the sky. Sword light filled the void. Sword will demolished space. In the blink of an eye, a huge furrow opened up as the dome of heaven was slashed open, revealing the heaven beyond. The beings living on this minor world felt like their minds were being hit by a hundred thousand lightning bolts. All of them just stared up at the sky and the rift there.

Most of them were shaken to the core. There was a heaven beyond heaven.

"Then where are we...?"

As countless people stood there in a daze, Xu Qing headed toward the rift.

The world shook as he reached it. He looked down at the minor world, then stepped out through the rift. He was in a strange place.

A massive dome stretched overhead, almost like a lid. There wasn't even a scrap of the mutagen of gods. There was only plentiful spirit energy. The sky outside of the minor world was red, and it flowed like a river.

The surrounding lands consisted of a huge swamp. It looked like it had once been a huge body of water that was now almost completely dried up. Bubbles would occasionally surface, and when Xu Qing looked at them, he realized to his astonishment... that they were all minor worlds. And each of those minor worlds contained a suppressed god. This place was some sort of prison for gods!

Xu Qing struggled to control his breathing as he looked around at the countless minor worlds bobbing up and down. And from many of them, something like smoke rose up toward the middle of the sky. There was a vortex there sucking all the smoke away.

This place is a prison for gods... That means that the real world must be outside of this place.

His eyes glittered as he finally came to an understanding of where he was. He looked off into the distance. The moment he did, the aura of an Imperial Sovereign flared off in the distance. He heard a deafening screaming sound. An Imperial Sovereign was on the way.

Then a cold and desolate voice echoed out. "How amusing. I've been guarding my clan's spirit mine for a long time, and at long last there's been a jailbreak."

Chapter 1094: Fighting an Imperial Sovereign

Chapter 1094: Fighting an Imperial Sovereign

"Spirit mine?" Xu Qing's eyes narrowed. He had considered it likely there would be a guardian. And he had even predicted that it could be an Imperial Sovereign. After all, this was most likely the Fifth Star Ring, and he was dealing with someone who could suppress a Flawless God.

But what did come as a surprise was the term used by the guardian to describe this place. Mines were usually places to gather resources. Based on Xu Qing's understanding, spirit mines usually contained veins of spirit stone. But in this place... the resources were gods. The life force of gods was being absorbed by the living beings of a minor world, filtered of impurities, and then filtered by powerful cultivators....

The resulting spirit energy would be immeasurably pure. Given that perspective, it did seem proper to call this place a spirit mine.

Those other cultivators mentioned some sort of clan. So did this Imperial Sovereign. This place... must be part of a clan. If this clan has an Imperial Sovereign working as the guardian of a mine, then what kind of cultivation base does the clan patriarch have? And what standing does the clan have in the larger world here?

Xu Qing's eyes were shining. He was now convinced he had made the right decision, and it seemed more likely than ever that he had reached the Fifth Star Ring.

However, given the fact I got here through the Primeval Sea, why did I end up in that minor world? Was there some circumstance or meddling that sent me there? Maybe I can get some answers from this Imperial Sovereign.

Xu Qing looked up at the figure screaming toward him from the horizon.

Imperial Sovereigns were strong, but Xu Qing had come prepared. He had trump cards that could kill an Imperial Sovereign. But as for this Imperial Sovereign....

I could probably kill him. But he won't just stand there and let me do it. Therefore... if I need to kill him, I'll have to get the timing just right. Ideally, though, I'd rather resolve this situation without fighting.

His eyes narrowed as the sound grew deafening, and ripples appeared in the dome covering this place. An instant later, the newcomer arrived with such incredible speed that it looked almost like an eye had opened in midair.

A figure stepped out of it and hovered there. It was a middle-aged cultivator with a wan face, menacing eyes, and a skinny frame that was anything but muscular. He wore a long black robe and was surrounded by swirling red energy that flowed like water and was horrendous in appearance.

Most astonishing was his aura. It caused wild colors to flash, and sent crushing pressure down everywhere. Thunderous rumbling filled the area which made him seem even more majestic. At the same time, sludge rose up from the swamp in all directions and floated in the air toward him. The cultivator almost seemed like a black hole that could drag everything in his direction.

Xu Qing even felt like his gaze was being tugged toward the man.

Even as Xu Qing caught sight of him, the man saw Xu Qing. Looking him up and down, he said, "You're not one of the slaves that inhabits the spirit mine. Nor do you have the life force of a god. And there are no signs that anyone broke in here."

He looked down at Xu Qing from above for a moment, and something strange occurred to him. Then he looked at the minor world Xu Qing had emerged from, and his eyes narrowed. Suppressing the killing intent in his heart, he growled, "Looks like you accidentally got into our spirit mine and then killed some of the slaves in charge of assimilating the gods. I can accept that. But I need to know who you are and what you're doing here. And I need to know how you got in here!"

His voice contained a threatening pressure that filled the area.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed. Given the way this person had shown up, he was obviously very perceptive.

It's clear he's trying to decide what to do with me. Well... I might as well try to get some information as well. After a moment of thought, Xu Qing clasped hands and bowed.

"I am your humble servant Sir Firedark. And you're right, it's only because of a random accident that I ended up in your noble lands—"

"What kind of accident?" the man interrupted, his eyes gleaming.

Xu Qing frowned slightly but stayed calm. "I was exploring a spatial rift."

The middle-aged cultivator laughed, and his eyes gleamed with strange light. "Exploring? I doubt that. The minor worlds of this spirit mine are separated from the major world outside, in a different spatial dimension. The chances of you accidentally getting inside by means of a spatial rift might as well be zero.

“Now, you have a seventh-level Smoldering God cultivation base, so it makes sense you could kill those slaves before they could power up. But what is less logical... is that you could slash open the sky of that world.... That’s something you don’t see very often. In fact, only a truly spectacular chosen could possibly accomplish it.”

The gleam in the cultivator’s eyes grew more intense. “But a chosen cultivator... couldn’t possibly be ignorant of the rules governing spirit mines. And a chosen would know that spirit mines are very sensitive locations. That’s why my original question involved your background.

“It seems to me that you don’t know what you’re talking about. Add in the fact that the aura of a foreign star ring still lingers on you, and my guess is... that you’re not a local cultivator, are you?”

Xu Qing’s face remained expressionless in the face of the cultivator’s words. Instead of saying anything, he waited to see if this Imperial Sovereign would keep talking.

“According to what I’ve heard...” the Imperial Sovereign went on, “before this place dried up into a swamp, it was called the Primeval Sea. And very occasionally, cultivators from other star rings will try to get here to the Fifth Star Ring by going through the Primeval Sea. That said, in order to do that, you need to have a Lower Immortal cultivation base.... Of course, occasionally you’ll run into chosen cultivators who use other ways to get here. But most chosen like that will come with a dao protector.”

The middle-aged cultivator chuckled and looked at Xu Qing with a flash of greed in his eyes. “And yet there you stand avoiding my questions. That just proves that you’re nervous. You don’t want to reveal who you really are. And that goes to show that you don’t have a dao protector....

“You’re a foreign cultivator from another star ring, aren’t you? You must have a lot of information about that other star ring in your head. Such information would be very valuable to me.”

The cultivator laughed loudly. Eyes shining with even greater intensity, he extended his right hand and pointed at Xu Qing. A huge finger made of natural and magical laws formed in midair. It couldn’t have been clearer to see, and even had fingerprints on it. As the finger grew larger and larger, so did the prints, becoming like huge valleys.

It overtook the dome of heaven, then began to rumble toward Xu Qing like Mount Tai itself. The aura of an Imperial Sovereign erupted everywhere, creating astonishing pressure.

Looking at the finger through narrowed eyes, Xu Qing backed up quickly. The fact that this cultivator had deduced so much from the handful of words Xu Qing had spoken indicated that he was very shrewd. At the same time, Xu Qing had learned a lot based on how the man had reacted.

For one thing, he had indeed reached the Fifth Star Ring. There had been no mistake in his journey. That had been his biggest concern. Everything made sense now that he had learned that the Primeval Sea here had dried up. Now it made sense how he had ended up in this spot.

What was more, the middle-aged cultivator had confirmed something else for him. And that was... there weren’t other powerful experts from this man’s clan in the area. In fact, it seemed possible that this location was a good distance away from the clan itself. That would explain why the man was so interested in whether or not Xu Qing had a dao protector.

If there were other powerful experts around, or if the spirit mine was located inside the clan, then that wouldn't really matter. After all, given that this Imperial Sovereign was a spirit mine guardian, it indicated that the clan patriarch was much stronger.

Those thoughts flashed through Xu Qing's mind, and he suddenly felt very confident. As the finger closed in, his eyes shone brightly, and the five elements erupted within him. It formed a resonance with the five elements in this god prison, and then he waved his hand.

The minor world he had slashed open rumbled, and the dao of the five elements from within it emerged through the rift he had slashed open. It combined with the five elements power from outside, and the heavenly dao hand formed again.

Just when the Imperial Sovereign's finger was about to hit Xu Qing, the heavenly dao hand swept up from below and grabbed it. It jerked it upward. A huge boom rang out.

The Imperial Sovereign's finger trembled violently when the five elements hand grabbed it. The magical laws within it fought back, and the natural laws resisted. A string of popping sounds rang out in all directions.

The Imperial Sovereign didn't seem surprised. He had known from the beginning that Xu Qing was extraordinary. So he lifted his right hand, not to unleash another finger attack, but instead to perform an incantation gesture with five fingers. Then he pushed his hand toward Xu Qing. His five fingers transformed into nine worlds, and the nine worlds became nine devils.

The vicious devils all had different appearances. One carried a mountain on its back and had an enormous belly. One had two heads and carried a sea on its back. One shouldered a world and had a body covered with spikes. One was surrounded by a host of living beings, all screaming in anguish. The others were similarly bizarre. The nine devils all howled and rushed toward Xu Qing.

Xu Qing was surprised, and immediately halted his forward momentum and fell back. At the same time, he performed a double-handed incantation gesture, causing Six Thieves Deceive Life to appear, and stirring Five Dogs Cleave Immortals within himself.

He attacked, using something that came from the cultivation system back when Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity was in charge of the Revered Ancient mainland. He used... immortal skills!

Xu Qing had an immortal body and immortal skills. During his nine days of study in the minor world previously, he came to realize that they were now even more gruish and powerful. After all, Grand Emperor Immortal Skill had invented those terrifying abilities specifically for cultivators.

This time, instead of the six desires turning into projected emotions, they turned into a massive sea of six desires! That giant sea spread out, becoming a whirlpool that spun faster and faster. The six desires interacted, building on each other to erupt in full fashion.

If humans have desires, then devils have even more intense desires. In the blink of an eye, the nine huge devils trembled head to toe. As the sea of six desires flowed over them, Xu Qing unleashed Five Dogs Cleave Immortals.

A formless will entered the Imperial Sovereign's sea of consciousness. It tampered with his memories, hiding inside, eluding his senses. And then a white hair appeared in his sea of consciousness, which turned into a vortex. The gate opened.

The greedy dog cleaves to a place.

All of this caused the Imperial Sovereign's heart to start beating faster. He frowned. He had never seen any magical technique like this.

"Very interesting. Is this some special daoist magic from your star ring?"

Chapter 1095: Treasure Light. Blade Light. Sword Light.

Chapter 1095: Treasure Light. Blade Light. Sword Light.

Grand Emperor Immortal Skill had performed a very special service back when Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity conquered Revered Ancient. He created the immortal skills, which boosted the battle prowess of human cultivators and made them far more gruish and deadly.

There were no shortage of such immortal skills that could be considered outright brutal. There had been no other choice but to treat Dark Serenity's enemies with complete ruthlessness.

However, after the war was over, the fact that immortal skills were harmful to natural harmony resulted in them being sealed away forever and not passed down by legacy. And for unknown reasons, Grand Emperor Immortal Skill disappeared into the sands of history. He became one of the only human Grand Emperors that later generations hardly knew about.

Later on, after the broken face and the gods arrived, many species left Revered Ancient to form the holy lands. Some of them took immortal skills with them and passed them down. The Immortal Skills Halls appeared which were centered on various immortal skills from Revered Ancient.

However, this was the first time the immortal skills had appeared in the Fifth Star Ring. As a result, it was no surprise that this Imperial Sovereign was shocked to the core by what was happening.

The sea of six desires that had swept over his nine devils, plus the vortex in his sea of consciousness, were all of utmost concern to him. Especially noteworthy was the latter, that sensation that there was something hidden in his memories. And then there was the vortex of white hair that turned into a gate, and pulsed with a sinister will. This indecipherable immortal skill was something he had no idea how to defend against.

An intense sensation of danger erupted in him like an unstoppable tide about to overwhelm him. In fact, he also felt like his memories would soon not belong to him. It was almost like his memories had become his own enemy.

As the critical moment approached, the Imperial Sovereign made a quick decision. Without any hesitation, he placed one hand on his forehead and the other at the pit of his stomach. He pushed down at the same time. Rumbling sounds echoed out as he tapped into his incredible cultivation base. The hand over his forehead affected his soul and his memories, causing the grisly transformations there to slow down. The hand over the pit of his stomach sealed his sea of consciousness, suppressing the eruption there.

Having accomplished those things, his eyes glittered with crimson light as he opened his mouth and inhaled. The nine devils that had been surrounded by the sea of six desires all howled as they collapsed, turning into streams of devil energy that flew back into the Imperial Sovereign's mouth. He swallowed all of them.

Then thunderous booms erupted from inside of him as his previously skinny frame filled in with muscle, his wan face became ruddy, and he grew from ordinary height into a 300-meter-tall giant. His baleful aura raged, and devil flames spread out under his feet. An astonishing and berserk will pulsed out from within him.

By means of the baleful aura and the explosive energy in this body, he managed to viciously rip the invading immortal skills to shreds. This was one of the Imperial Sovereign's trump cards, Baleful Devil Comes.

As cracking and ripping sounds echoed out, Xu Qing's face turned grim. He could sense that his immortal skills had been destroyed, as had the memory he had implanted in the Imperial Sovereign.

Meanwhile, the Imperial Sovereign, who was in the form of a baleful devil, looked at Xu Qing with crimson eyes that burned with madness. He lunged forward.

Xu Qing had barely had a chance to feel the raging tempest and towering energy before his entire body was filled with stinging pain.

The Imperial Sovereign was so fast he became a series of afterimages as he launched a palm strike.

Xu Qing reacted with lightning speed. His cultivation base surged as he fell back as fast as he could move. Yet he was still affected by the palm, which caused tremors to pass through him and filled his flesh and bones with the feeling they were being ripped apart. Blood sprayed out of his mouth.

The power of an Imperial Sovereign was truly spectacular. In fact, any other Smoldering God wouldn't just have felt like their bones were being ripped apart. They would have been killed in body and soul. However, he had the body of an extreme immortal, which was extraordinary in unique ways. Though he was injured, he was actually able to borrow some of the power of the palm strike to pick up speed and put some distance between himself and his opponent.

He didn't flee, though. After gaining the distance, the Imperial Sovereign closed in with another attack. Xu Qing's eyes glittered coldly. He lifted his right hand in the direction of the Imperial Sovereign, then lowered it.

Metal became a blade. Earth became an altar. Wood became a blade trough. Water became an axle. Fire became the killing force.

Xu Qing was using his own five elements to form a new God Decapitation Altar! And when his right hand dropped, the magnificent five elements God Decapitation Altar appeared in front of him, right in front of the Imperial Sovereign.

It surrounded him!

“Execute!” Xu Qing growled.

The energy fluctuations of the God Decapitation Altar sealed the opponent in all respects. The power of fire erupted and blade light glittered. The sharp blade fell.

A crack rang out!

The blade landed on the devil neck of the Imperial Sovereign. And yet, the God Decapitation Altar, which had never failed to date, simply couldn’t decapitate the Imperial Sovereign. It sliced about halfway through his neck before the power of the blow ran out, and it got stuck. Blood flowed out of the wound as the Imperial Sovereign howled in rage.

Then his body started splitting apart from itself as the nine huge devils came back out. The devils were partially transparent, almost like soul shadows. And they rushed toward the God Decapitation Altar, slammed into it, and exploded. Nine booms rang out. The God Decapitation Altar shook violently and, unable to stand up to the attack, crumbled into pieces.

Xu Qing reeled mentally. Blood sprayed out of his mouth as he backed up again.

Meanwhile, the devilish Imperial Sovereign, having lost his nine devils, now shrank back down into his previously skinny self. There was a gaping wound on his neck that gushed blood, although the wound was already closing up.

“Just what I would expect of a chosen. You have a seven-world Smoldering God cultivation base, but each of your magical techniques is more gruish than the one before it. You’re definitely strong.”

Though the words the man spoke seemed ordinary in nature, they caused Xu Qing’s heart to fill with a sensation of danger. All of a sudden, Xu Qing’s surroundings rippled as a host of spell formations appeared.

It started with 3,300 formations. Then 33,000. And then 330,000!

There were too many to simply count, and as they built up with astonishing speed, obfuscating the sky and enshrouding the land, they exerted crushing pressure onto Xu Qing. This was another of the Imperial Sovereign’s trump cards!

It was called 33 Taboo Formations.

The 33 in the name came from the way the technique worked. As long as 33 words were spoken beforehand, then all it took was a thought to unleash the technique.[1]

It was a devious divine ability that was hard to identify ahead of time unless you were familiar with it. Considering it was Xu Qing’s first time facing it, it would have been difficult to evade it. As

the formations surrounded him, and a sense of danger filled him, his right eye glittered as a dao lineament appeared there.

The authority of erasure erupted! And it erased all formations he could see!

Though the formations were being erased in large numbers, they were still working, and Xu Qing was still trapped in place, surrounded by intense rumbling sounds and flashing light.

Seeing what was happening, the Imperial Sovereign coldly said, “So you finally used authority. I was beginning to think you didn’t have any.”

He had not underestimated Xu Qing at all, from the beginning of the fight until now. He knew full well that anyone who could travel alone from a foreign star ring would have trump cards to call on. And from this opponent’s cold manner, it had seemed highly likely that he had a trump card that could harm Imperial Sovereigns.

As the fight had played out, and he saw his opponent’s methods, he had kept his guard up even more. Now, after his opponent used the trump card of that decapitation altar, and he used his 33 Taboo Formations, he still wasn’t going to be careless. In fact, his eyes were glittering.

He wanted to force Xu Qing to use another trump card. As Xu Qing used his authority to get out of the formations, the Imperial Sovereign suddenly lifted his hand. He had produced a treasure.

It was a seed. The moment it appeared, the seed sprouted, and in the blink of an eye, it turned into a sapling, then a full-grown tree, and then a gigantic, hulking tree! It was 147 meters tall![2]

It was sparkling and translucent, like crystal. That was true even of its leaves, and as it glowed with ‘treasure light,’ it looked incomparably beautiful.[3]

Apparently, it had a gravitational force of its own. As that force covered the battlefield, all of Xu Qing’s energy, as well as all traces of his magical techniques, were sucked toward it by some unimaginable power.

Astonishingly, three sealing marks then appeared on the tree. The first was Xu Qing’s heavenly dao hand of the five elements. The second was for immortal skills. The third was the God Decapitation Altar.

After the three marks appeared, they fused together to form the projection of a humanoid figure. The outline of that figure... was exactly the same as Xu Qing. Killing intent surged from within the projection, and that killing intent locked onto the real Xu Qing.

Even as Xu Qing used the authority of erasure on the spell formations, his mind and heart reeled.

“This treasure....”

The treasure not only had a gravitational force, it also created a projection that corresponded to him. The figure that looked like Xu Qing was struggling to get out of the tree, which was already starting to split apart to free it. Given the great level of danger, Xu Qing unhesitatingly spoke inwardly.

“Little Shadow.”

Instantly, the shadow beneath his feet surged outward, sending deep darkness out in all directions. Cackling laughter could be heard as a towering black tree rose up. The tree had black leaves and a black trunk, and there was something like a black coffin hanging from it. It also had countless eyes that were now fixed on the crystalline treasure tree.

“Still not using more authority, huh...?” the Imperial Sovereign said. He laughed coldly, and instead of closing in for an attack, he lifted his right hand and then shoved it down.

“Ghost gate: open! Heavenly fury: come!”

The movement of his hand caused heaven and earth to grow dark. A pitch-black door made of bones appeared out of nowhere. It was an ancient door that was obviously produced by means of a magical technique. Along with it came the sound of countless screams and howls from inside. A huge black claw then stretched out from inside. It grabbed the door frame, and an aura of death erupted, along with countless evil ghosts which swept out and swirled around the gate. Whatever terrifying entity that lurked inside was about to crawl out.

He had trapped Xu Qing with his 33 Taboo Formations. And then he was summoning a heavenly fury out of the ghost gate. But things weren’t over yet.

The Imperial Sovereign’s eyes glittered with the same cold light as before as he also took out a violet stick of incense.

“Let the life-locking incense burn, linking to your life. When the incense goes out, your life goes out!”

As the words left his mouth, the incense ignited.

Xu Qing instantly felt like he had been cursed, and that his life force was draining away.

“I forgot to tell you the reason I was selected to guard my clan’s spirit mine,” the Imperial Sovereign said coolly. “It’s not because I have a strong cultivation base. It’s because I live by the motto: never leave loose ends. Therefore, if you don’t have any more trump cards to pull out... then you’ve reached the end of the line!”

Xu Qing’s eyes glittered. Even within all the spell formations, a piercing cry could be heard as a flower of black flames appeared. A golden crow flew out of it, rising into the sky, surrounded by an aura of death and the evil ghosts.

Next came three beams of light!

The first beam contained a shield that shot toward the ghost gate, growing larger and larger as it prepared to block the path of whatever was coming out. The second beam of light contained a huge pair of shears that pulsed with the aura of a Grand Emperor. And the shears chopped right toward the burning incense. Karma was severed! The third beam was a beam of sword light.[4]

It wasn't Grandpa Ninth's sword, but rather, Xu Qing's Emperor's Sword. The Emperor's Sword could sever heaven and earth. It could smash innumerable formations. And as it gathered the power of the lands, he used the Earth Treasury stance as he shot toward the Imperial Sovereign.

“That sword. You have *that* sword...?” The Imperial Sovereign's pupils constricted as he suddenly backed up, his heart racing. “A precious treasure of humankind!”

1. The last thing the Imperial Sovereign said before using the technique was a sentence with 33 words. It was 33 characters in Chinese, and I made sure to make the sentence 33 words long in English as well (remember that two words connected by a hyphen make a single word). ㊦

2. I know some will wonder how many ‘zhang’ that is. It's 49. However, that specific number isn't relevant in any numerological sense as far as this technique goes, so I've just converted it into the real-world measurement. The number 49 actually does come up again shortly, but it's in a different context, so I think that number was probably just in the author's mind at the time. ㊦

3. The ‘treasure light’ here is made up of two Chinese characters that would normally be rendered as something like ‘unusual brightness.’ But in this context, it's a magical xianxia word similar to ‘sword light.’ By combining just about anything with the character for ‘light’ you will get a specific light associated with that thing, usually (but not always) something that can move about or has some inherent power of its own. Or at the very least, it's unique type of light that comes from that specific thing. ㊦

4. Chapter title explained: It's not 100% clear even in Chinese, but the wording in the opening paragraphs of the next chapter make the title of this chapter much clearer. Basically, the first beam of light is the ‘treasure’ light, as the shield is a treasure. It doesn't actually explain that in this chapter, although it's sort of clear by context (the author plainly states it in the next chapter). In Chinese, shears (which could also be rendered as scissors), combines two characters. The first is “to cut (as with scissors, shears, or clippers)” and the second is “blade.” So though it doesn't directly call it “blade light,” it's obvious in Chinese that the “blade light” is coming from the shears. The third beam is outright called “sword light.” ㊦

Chapter 1096: Slaughter an Imperial Sovereign with One Fatal Blow!

Chapter 1096: Slaughter an Imperial Sovereign with One Fatal Blow!

In a prison of gods in the Fifth Star Ring, divine abilities and magical techniques rumbled loudly.

In the distance, Little Shadow was in the form of a great tree that was currently twisted up around a crystalline treasure tree. The two of them were fighting back and forth, each hoping to suppress the other. Little Shadow had taken shape and was locked in combat with the figure that had come out of the treasure tree. Thunderous booms rang out constantly.

Further away, the authority of erasure eroded the 33 Taboo Formations. And within that area, Xu Qing's shield, formed from treasure light, flew forth to seal the ghost gate in the dome of heaven. The shield came from Grand Emperor Netherflame. It contained the power of a black lotus, and

erupted with netherworld flames that covered an area many times larger than the shield itself. When it hit the ghost gate, both objects shook violently.

Down below, the shears, formed of blade light, pulsed with a Grand Emperor's aura as well as dazzling light as it viciously cut through the karma of the incense.

Finally... The Emperor's Sword in Xu Qing's hand radiated prismatic and dazzling light. Xu Qing himself shot forth with momentum to sever heaven and cleave the earth. It became a towering killing intent that was focused directly on the Imperial Sovereign. At that moment, Grand Emperor Swordsage's words echoed in Xu Qing's mind.

"I used Earth Treasury years ago to cut down a vicious killer who was proficient in the dao of earth. The sword move focused on the releasing earth energy to replace the will of the earth with the will of the sword. It takes earth energy and turns it into sword energy. Then it converges to make an earth sword!"

Xu Qing's powers of understanding had long since struck astonishment into the heart of Master Seventh, as well as the hearts of the Heir Apparent and his siblings. Something similar was happening now. Only a moment before, he had gained enlightenment of Grand Emperor Swordsage's first sword stance.

Xu Qing knew nothing about the Fifth Star Ring, and he was facing a very competent Imperial Sovereign. Therefore, he didn't hesitate.

The Emperor's Sword glittered as the power of Earth Treasury spread out, shaking everything. The surrounding swamp trembled, as did the minor worlds in the bubbles. Streams of energy began to rise up from the ground, and from the minor worlds. It wasn't the nutrients being generated by the minor worlds. Instead, it was the earth energy being pulled out by Earth Treasury and turned into sword energy. More and more of it.

The swamp vibrated and the minor world bubbles began to tremble with increasing intensity. Countless streams of smoke headed in Xu Qing's direction.

All of this takes a bit of time to describe but actually happened in the time it takes a spark to fly off of a piece of flint. At that moment, it looked like Xu Qing's Emperor's Sword gathered an infinitude of energy streams.

Together, they formed around him in the shape of an astonishingly large sword! He was in the middle of it! It was almost as if Xu Qing himself had become the sword! Sword might raged, shaking the sky, causing the lands to quake, and causing the swamp that was the god prison to seethe like the sea.

Shaken to the core, the Imperial Sovereign fell back at top speed. But then the sword of earth energy shot forward with heaven-shaking, earth-shattering power and indescribable quickness! It shot right toward the Imperial Sovereign! Nothing could stop it!

I want that sword technique! The Imperial Sovereign didn't give voice to his thoughts. But as they filled his heart, and as his pupils constricted, he unhesitatingly summoned a vortex into his left eye.

A dao lineament appeared, and authority erupted! The first thing to happen was that a flowing river of red mist appeared outside of him. The river of mist was the manifestation of his authority. As the dao lineament stirred, the river swept out into the open.

An instant later...

Xu Qing could sense transformations to his surroundings. The air in front of him seemed to be resisting his movement, forcing him to slow down. Earth Treasury responded with increasing momentum, but... the force of resistance also increased in kind. In fact, it got so powerful that it became like a protective shield for the Imperial Sovereign. Not only did it slow Xu Qing down, but also, it opposed his sword energy.

If that were all there were to it, it might not matter much. But though the energy in the area formed a force of resistance against Xu Qing, it actually did the opposite for the Imperial Sovereign. It reduced the force of resistance against him, and reduced the energy flowing against him. In other words, Xu Qing was moving slower and slower due to this outside force, while the Imperial Sovereign was actually speeding up to an astonishing level.

In fact, he moved so fast that he was easily able to avoid the Earth Treasury sword move. In an instant, he was right next to Xu Qing, his eyes glittering with greed as he reached out to grab The Emperor's Sword. He moved with outstanding accuracy, and craftily timed his action perfectly. He didn't give Xu Qing any chance to make a counter move. He grabbed the sword!

Yet before a feeling of exultation could arise in his heart, the sword he had grabbed became illusory. In fact, the Xu Qing in front of him also turned illusory. The Imperial Sovereign's face fell.

My perceptions have been altered?

Before the Imperial Sovereign had a chance to react, Xu Qing materialized in the distance, and Earth Treasury erupted.

A moment ago, he had used the perception altering abilities of the Heir Apparent. He had three chances to use that ability, and had just used one of them. The Imperial Sovereign's perceptions might not have been as easily altered had it not been for his greed toward The Emperor's Sword, and Xu Qing had taken advantage of that. That gave him the opportunity he needed.

Unfortunately, the time in which the perceptions were altered didn't last long. What was more, this Imperial Sovereign's authority was very unique. As a result, Xu Qing's mind didn't have enough time to rely on Earth Treasury to kill him. Even though he managed to use his trump card, Grandpa Ninth's sword energy was telling Xu Qing that yet another unexpected twist might be just around the corner.

Unfortunately, he had no idea if his opponent had another trick up his sleeve, or another trump card to unleash. He needed to confirm whether or not he could create an opportunity to get some distance between himself and his opponent.

The reason was that he wanted to get in a fatal blow! He didn't just want to seriously injure this opponent. Most importantly was that he couldn't allow this person to escape.

Considering all of those things, he made a snap decision. The Emperor's Sword erupted, but instead of targeting the Imperial Sovereign, he took advantage of the moment of opportunity he had created to use Earth Treasury to target the land itself! Put more precisely, he was targeting... the minor world bubbles!

He was dealing with a competent opponent, so the first thing he needed to do was distract him. Only if this opponent was distracted would it be possible to identify a way to launch a fatal blow on him. And the best way to distract a guard was to start destroying the thing he was supposed to be guarding.

That was why, though it seemed like this sword move had been targeting the Imperial Sovereign, his actual goal had been to target as many minor world bubbles as he could. Sword energy descended. Lands crumbled. And large numbers of minor world bubbles in the swamp were slashed.

One by one they split apart! The heavens in the minor worlds shattered. The cultivators filtering the energy had no time to wake up, and one after another, they were destroyed in body and soul. Without skies in their worlds, the living beings there awoke as if from dreams. Meanwhile, the gods imprisoned in the worlds were thrown into great chaos.

And of course, the absorption of spirit energy decreased dramatically. The vortex in the sky that was sucking in the spirit energy was instantly affected.

"How dare you!!" shouted the Imperial Sovereign. Face falling, he instinctively looked up at the vortex, his heart filling with trepidation. No matter how much he wanted to, he just wasn't fast enough to stop Xu Qing. Something that normally wouldn't have been possible with him here was happening, and all of it was because of that sudden change to his perceptions moments ago.

The spirit mine was collapsing. The vortex was taking in far less spirit energy. And his heart was starting to pound. Seeing what was happening to the mine he was in charge of guarding caused killing intent to explode within him. He howled, and the dao lineament in his eye stirred again.

His dao lineament was unique and terrifyingly powerful. However, it hindered the cultivation, and every time it was used, there was a cost. What was more, if you used it on a large scale... that cost was terrifying. Therefore, it wasn't something he would even consider outside of extreme circumstances. Right now, he was out of options.

He lifted his right hand and then pushed it down toward the ground. Authority power surged, forming a force of resistance, which became defenses for him as well as a crushing force. It covered the entire crumbling spirit mine, causing the crumbling to slow down significantly. As a result, his skinny frame became even more emaciated, and his eyes shone with cold light.

Unfortunately, he didn't dare to do much further. His authority couldn't be used on the spirit mine for much longer. He needed to end the fight quickly and fix the minor worlds. If the vortex above was affected for much longer, he would face severe consequences.

Gritting his teeth, he ignored the cost he would have to pay to use his authority and pointed at Xu Qing. Authority erupted once again.

A tremor passed through Xu Qing, and he suddenly felt like he was being suffocated. The surrounding spirit energy, the air... and all gasses and energies were being extracted and turned into a powerful pressure that crushed down onto him. Shocking and ugly red bumps appeared all over him. He suddenly felt like he was going to be ripped to pieces. Yet he didn't look flustered.

The opportunity I've been waiting for is almost here.

Xu Qing looked at the Imperial Sovereign, then suddenly extended his right hand. Within him, the dao of extreme space stirred.

During his days in that minor world, Xu Qing had contemplated his memories of what happened in the Primeval Sea passageway, including the operations of space. Others who experienced the same thing might not have gained much enlightenment. But to someone who already had the power of space within them, the scenes in that vortex were akin to a wise Master imparting a daoist magic. They told him how space could be manipulated.

An instant later, as Xu Qing's dao of extreme space was unleashed, the area around him distorted wildly, as if they were being stretched out infinitely.

Next came cutting and isolation!

He cut out space and isolated authority. And as a result, the area for about 30 meters around him became a border. And then an irregular shape appeared in front of Xu Qing, like a section of a grid. That grid piece was unique and independent, and it was under the control of Xu Qing's dao of extreme space.

More grid pieces appeared, all connected to each other, until there were a hundred of them, all reflecting Xu Qing, who was in the middle. All energy was being absorbed... but each of the hundred grid pieces was essentially an additional world.

Things had turned around. Xu Qing looked up at the Imperial Sovereign.

"Your authority of energy can rip things apart," he said calmly. "But no amount of ripping can compare to the detonation of space itself."

A sound like shattering glass rang out in all directions. The one hundred grid pieces shattered, and a spatial tempest picked them up and sent them swirling around Xu Qing. Some of them swept out in all directions, negating the Imperial Sovereign's attempts to save the spirit mine.

Even as he raged in fury, the rest of the fragments shot toward him. The dao lineament in his eye shone with greater brightness.

"I can't believe it! That's the dao of space!"

Shaken, he lifted his right hand and pointed toward the dome of heaven. Suddenly, warmth and coolness appeared at the same time everywhere. The interaction between warmth and coolness then created a huge wind. Thunderous rumbling sounds built on each other, until it was like heavenly might. It slammed into the spatial tempest. A deafening boom swept out in all directions.

Heaven and earth were thrown into chaos. The spatial explosion and the heavenly might created absolute chaos. Everything blurred. Within that blurriness, the wind screamed.

Blood oozed out of the corners of the Imperial Sovereign's mouth. After unleashing the dao lineament of his authority, the time was approaching in which he would have to pay the cost. However, the killing intent in his eyes had not diminished.

The huge wind was causing trouble for Xu Qing as well. His flesh was being peeled off him, and blood was spraying everywhere. But his gaze was as sharp as ever.

At the critical moment, his dao of extreme time erupted. As the power of time surged, a majestic sundial locked onto the Imperial Sovereign. Time turned, and the moment in which blood began oozing out of his mouth was frozen in place!

Killing intent surged in Xu Qing's eyes. He had found the moment to launch his fatal blow. He lifted his hand, and the power of Fishing the Moon in the Well rose.

The dome of heaven became the surface of a well. The world became rippling water. The Imperial Sovereign stood on the water, with all of his magical techniques reflected below him.

The sundial locked onto his body. The well locked down his soul. He was thrown into the exact mental chaos that Xu Qing had wanted to create within him....

This was the moment Xu Qing had been waiting for!

A heaven-shaking, earth-shattering sword energy erupted. It was Grandpa Ninth's sword energy, and it could kill Imperial Sovereigns. A sword appeared that caused the sky to dim and the lands to quake. All of the swords in the various minor worlds of this god prison began to tremble in resonance.

Then they shot out of their respective worlds, swarming forth to merge into Grandpa Ninth's sword energy, causing its majesty to increase.

Power was building. And the killing force was building too. After only a few breaths of time passed, a killing intent filled the world, something in which the sword was paramount.

It slashed toward the Imperial Sovereign. Heaven fell. The sword fell. Killing intent fell. Something intense and domineering replaced all of the Imperial Sovereign's senses.

It was inescapable. It was unavoidable. It was unstoppable! Sword energy fell. Body and soul were shattered. He was killed in every respect!

One fatal blow!!

Chapter 1097: Immense Gains

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In some unknown location in the Fifth Star Ring, there was a spirit mine where a huge lid covered the sky, cutting the place off from the outside. It also prevented any fluctuations inside from being detected.

The swamp inside was full of craters, which had been created during the battle between Xu Qing and the Imperial Sovereign. In addition, there were innumerable minor world bubbles that had been blasted open.

Xu Qing hovered in midair, his face pale, his body covered in bloody wounds. He wasn't paying attention to any of that, though. He was looking at the decapitated body of the Imperial Sovereign. He quickly performed a one-handed incantation gesture, all while keeping his guard up in case something else happened. If anything even slightly unusual occurred, he would unleash another sword attack.

He kept watching until the Imperial Sovereign's energy was gone and his corpse started fading away. Only when it was clear that he had been completely wiped out of existence did Xu Qing start to feel more at ease.

It had not been an easy fight. Perhaps it was because he was in a different star ring where things were different than where he had grown up. Regardless, Xu Qing was fairly certain after what he had experienced in this fight that the Imperial Sovereign he had just killed was stronger than the Imperial Sovereigns from the holy lands.

I can think of three reasons. First, the guy I just fought is special in some way. Two, the Fifth Star Ring is a much more dangerous place than I expected, and thus, all Imperial Sovereigns are more complicated than I'm used to. Three, the Imperial Sovereigns from the holy lands lived comfortable lives and didn't have a lot of fighting experience.

Xu Qing really had no idea of precisely how different the Fifth Star Ring was, or what unknowns he would be facing. However, his eyes remained calm. And thanks to the fight, the baleful aura on him had grown stronger.

Hovering in midair, he looked around before fixing his gaze on the spot where the Imperial Sovereign's corpse had disappeared. There was a bag of holding there.

Xu Qing grabbed it, then blurred into motion. When he came to a stop, he was at the spot where the shield had slammed into the ghost gate. It was a divine ability that had summoned the ghost gate, so after the Imperial Sovereign died, it crumbled into nothing. Looking around, he collected back his shield and then stepped over to where the incense stick was. The incense had only burned for a moment before his Grand Emperor's shears severed its karma and extinguished it.

This thing seems pretty nice.

He waved his hand, and the incense stick flew over to him. He quickly erased any branding marks on it, then marked it for his own. Finally, he looked over at Little Shadow.

Little Shadow's true form was still fighting it out with the crystalline treasure tree. Little Shadow had started out at a disadvantage. Without its gruish nature and regeneration abilities, it would long since have been killed. But after the Imperial Sovereign died, the crystalline treasure tree trembled and lost its supporting foundation. And that was when Little Shadow had started really

fighting back. As rumbling booms echoed out, Xu Qing looked at the copy of himself within the treasure tree.

“You possess a bit of intelligence, don’t you?” he said coolly. “In that case... either you surrender or I wipe you out.”

In response to his words, Little Shadow trembled in excitement and transmitted some emotional fluctuations to lend some weight to Xu Qing’s threat.

The crystalline treasure tree shivered. The figure within it could sense how terrifying Xu Qing was, so after a moment of contemplation, it clasped hands and bowed to him. Then the figure disappeared. The crystalline treasure tree’s true form glittered with bright light a few times, then went dark. It made no further attacks.

Xu Qing reached out and made a grasping gesture. The treasure tree didn’t fight back. It flew toward Xu Qing and let him wipe out the old branding marks and claim it for his own.

Little Shadow returned to him looking extremely tired.

“You did very well,” Xu Qing said.

Little Shadow perked up. Praise from Xu Qing was incomparably meaningful to it, and it looked very happy. “Milord... I’m... useful....”

Xu Qing nodded. Then he looked at the crystalline treasure tree.

The tree was strong, especially when it came to how it could absorb the energy and divine abilities of enemies and use them to create a projection. Combined with the life-burning incense, which would force an opponent to use a similar technique, it could obviously count as a trump card.

I gained quite a bit from this battle. In addition to these two treasures....

He looked at the Imperial Sovereign’s bag of holding. Anticipation suddenly flickered within him.

Before checking the bag of holding, there’s a little matter I need to take care of.

He looked off into the distance and coolly said, “If you haven’t revealed yourself within three breaths of time, I’ll make sure you never do.”

His voice echoed through the spirit mine. After two breaths of time passed, the air above the swamp off in the distance rippled, and a figure emerged, changing from transparent to visible.

It was a young man with a very pale face. He looked terrified. Without any hesitation, he dropped to his knees and kowtowed to Xu Qing. Great beads of perspiration ran down his forehead, until it looked like he was raining sweat. He was the servant of the Imperial Sovereign that Xu Qing had just killed.

He was only in the Spirit Trove level. He had been very content to be the servant of an Imperial Sovereign. And at the beginning of the fight when Xu Qing had been seemingly hemmed in from all

sides, he had been feeling quite derisive of him. But then things changed very quickly. The sight of the Imperial Sovereign dying left him stunned and unsure of what to do.

He didn't dare to make a move, and had been hoping that the invisibility talisman the Imperial Sovereign had given him would keep him safe. He knew it was unlikely to keep him hidden, but had hoped that in the chaos of the moment, Xu Qing wouldn't notice him. But the words spoken by Xu Qing caused him to tremble uncontrollably as he flopped down and kowtowed.

Xu Qing looked him up and down. He had no intention of killing him. In fact, after the fight that had just played out, Xu Qing got the feeling this person could come in handy. Looking away, he sent his divine will into the bag of holding. After scanning the insides, his eyebrows shot up. There was a lot of good stuff inside.

The glimmering spirit stones alone were enough to leave him feeling very pleased. There were enough to form a small mountain. It only took a moment for Xu Qing to realize that these spirit stones were different from the ones in Revered Ancient. Each and every one contained the power of natural laws. He took out one and examined it more closely.

Are these made by assimilating gods? Is that how they get the power of natural laws?

In addition, the bag of holding had something even more valuable than spirit stones. It had pieces of immortal jade. They formed something like a river of immortal energy that flowed within the bag of holding.

The sight of it left Xu Qing feeling stunned.

After examining it for a while, he realized that the immortal jade had even stronger natural laws than the spirit stones. In fact, the sensation he was getting reminded him a lot of the time he had first absorbed essence power. It was just weaker. But even that was shocking.

Given all this, it seems the Fifth Star Ring is definitely more complicated than I thought. And it seems this guy was really rich.

Over the years, Xu Qing had killed a lot of people and taken a lot of loot. This was the first time the contents of a bag of holding had been so shocking. His anticipation grew as his divine will went past the spirit stones and immortal jade and began to scan the other things inside the bag of holding.

Soon he found a huge collection of bottles that were full of medicinal pills. There were different levels of quality. Given the level of his dao of medicine, Xu Qing could assess many of them and tell how to use them. But some were outside of the realm of what he had studied.

Just this short inspection of the bag of holding left Xu Qing's heart pounding. Next, he sent his divine will in further in the hopes of finding jade slips, ancient records, and magical treasures and items.

Sadly, although there were a few magical treasures, none were very powerful. That was understandable. Given the battle that had just played out, there was no doubt that the Imperial Sovereign would have pulled out any magical treasures that would have been useful. The incense and the crystalline treasure tree were examples.

However, there were still a handful of items that piqued his interest. For instance, he found a beast hide that glowed with black light, as well as a medallion. He pulled both of them out.

The beast hide was about the size of his palm, and with the black light it emitted were many symbols that flitted and flowed about as if they were alive. After examining the hide, he sent divine sense inside to examine the symbols. A moment later, his expression flickered.

“49 Taboo Formations!” he murmured.

There was no information about where the beast hide came from, but it did contain information about a collection of daoist magics called the 49 Taboo Formations!

Xu Qing immediately thought of the 33 Taboo Formations the Imperial Sovereign had used.

The 49 Taboo Formations could gather the power of the magical laws of heaven and earth to unleash a host of taboo formations. Some could unleash killing power, some could seal the enemy. All of them were extraordinary.

The downside was that every time you used it, you had to accumulate all of the formations in advance. The upside... was that to use it, all you had to do was say 49 words, and it would pop out in a way the enemy couldn't defend against. As you gained enlightenment of the divine ability, and as you furthered your cultivation, the requirement of the number of spoken words reduced.

The dead Imperial Sovereign had cultivated the technique down to the level of 33. Based on the description in the beast hide, if you cultivated it to the highest level, you could unleash the taboo formations with only 2 spoken words. What was more, the speaking requirement wasn't limited to the person using the technique. It would work even if the enemy spoke the words. The reason the final limit was two words was that the formations were split into yin and yang varieties, and the taboos were split into life and death varieties. They couldn't be combined.

As Xu Qing held the beast hide, he thought back to how the Imperial Sovereign had used the taboo formations in their fight. All of a sudden, something occurred to him.

This is an interesting divine ability. It's linked to certain words you speak. So what would happen if I cultivated the ability down to the point of two words? And what if it was my name? Then if someone said my name, and I exercised a thought, the taboo formations would burst out. That would make it... almost impossible to deal with.

After considering the matter, he decided that was within the realm of possibility. If he put the divine ability into his name, then it would really be difficult for anyone to defend against it. For example, if an enemy cursed him by name, then he could use the formations to defend himself. Or if someone who wished him harm asked who he was, he could say his name and instantly unleash the formations.

This would definitely be useful as a trump card!

His eyes shone brightly as he thought about the matter a bit more before putting the beast hide away. He definitely planned to put this technique into his cultivation routine in the future.

Next he looked at the medallion. It was a gruish medallion that pulsed with an intense, baleful aura. As it hovered in the air in front of him, it caused the surrounding temperature to drop. It was as bright red as fresh blood. The background of the medallion depicted an empty field, while in the foreground was an eye.

Looking at it, Xu Qing came to the conclusion that this was the most special item in the Imperial Sovereign's bag of holding. He didn't touch it. He just looked at it for a while. Then he suddenly turned to look at the young man prostrating off in the distance.

"Your life depends on how valuable you prove to be. Tell me what this thing is."

The young man suppressed his dread to look up at the medallion. Voice trembling, he answered, "It's an Immortal Capital permission medallion."

Xu Qing's expression remained unchanged. However, the words 'Immortal Capital' definitely attracted his attention. "Tell me more."

The young man took a deep breath. Considering that this person had just killed his own lord and master, he didn't dare to hide anything. This person obviously wanted more information about this star ring, and the young man didn't dare to be too cautious in the moment. Therefore, he gave a very detailed and systematic explanation. In fact, in order to make sure his explanation of the Immortal Capital permission medallion made sense, he went into a history of the Fifth Star Ring itself.

Xu Qing listened carefully. He was glad to have more confirmation he was in the Fifth Star Ring, and that there was a place there called the Immortal Capital.

In the past, the Fifth Star Ring had been full of gods. But when the Immortal Capital rose up, they crushed the gods and wiped out everything related to them. In fact, under the leadership of the Immortal Paragon of the Immortal Capital, the entire starry sky was compacted, and the Immortal Capital came to exist in the very center of the Fifth Star Ring. From then on, the Immortal Capital was considered holy and divine.[1]

What was more, the entire universe surrounding the Immortal Capital was compacted, and it ceased to be something like a starry sky. Instead, it turned into land where cultivators could reside. As time passed, cultivators proliferated until the population reached an astonishing level. It was almost impossible to count how many clans and sects there were.

Because of that, all cultivators had the same dream. They all wanted to ascend to the Immortal Capital! Anyone who did would be like *the carp who jumped over the dragon gate*. Their identity and status would change forever after that.

The people from the Immortal Capital were the lords of the Fifth Star Ring. And only the Immortal Capital existed high above all else, isolated from the outside world.

"Everyone wants to ascend to the Immortal Capital," the young man said. "And the only way to get there is by fighting for it!" When he spoke the words 'Immortal Capital,' his eyes shone with the light of longing. "There's a reason I said you have to fight for it. Every so often, the Immortal Capital holds the Trial of the Hunt![2]

“In preparation, the Immortal Capital sends out 10,000 Immortal Capital permission medallions and lets the innumerable cultivators of the Fifth Star Ring fight over them. It’s quite a brutal affair, and the casualties involved are shocking. That’s because the people who hold the permission medallions only qualify to enter the competition. The final number who get to ascend differs each time. Sometimes it ends up being the top 1,000 in the competition, but other times only the first few hundred!

“Senior, what you’re holding right there is an Immortal Capital permission medallion!”

1. The characters I’m rendering as ‘Immortal Paragon’ come up in other Er Gen translations. Different translators have translated the term differently, which in the context seems fine, as they seem to me to mean different things in the different novels. In other words, this term does not seem to be a connection point of terminologies between the novels. If there turns out to be some connection later, I’ll explain with footnotes, but from what I can tell it’s a standalone term. More will come later about what it means. ㊦

2. The characters I’m rendering Trial of the Hunt are basically exactly the same as those I rendered “the Great Hunt” back in the Firemoon Darkheaven part of the story. This does not seem to be intentional on the author’s part, and by that I mean, he does not intend for these two different events to be connected. I suppose it’s possible he’s trying to build a theme, but based on how things play out, I’m hesitant to believe that he intends them to be “the same thing.” To keep things clear, I’m giving this version a slightly different name. ㊦

Chapter 1098: Outside of Karma

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“Based on what I’ve heard,” the young man continued cautiously, “Imperial Sovereign Ling Feng got that medallion by offering a bunch of shockingly valuable treasures in compensation. Plus he called in a huge favor. That’s how he got his hands on it.

“My guess is that he planned to give it to someone else as a gift.... That’s why he kept it around but didn’t activate it. Otherwise, the medallion would have displayed his ghost mark on it after he died.”

He had explained everything he knew, and hadn’t left a single thing out. And he had made sure to keep all of his anger and hatred for Xu Qing buried deep where it couldn’t be seen. The young man knew that he was dealing with a person who would be able to detect the slightest bit of animosity or falsehood, and if that happened, the results would be horrible and permanent. As a result, he was exercising utmost caution.

Xu Qing hovered in midair listening to the young man’s explanation, all the while thinking about the ramifications. Finally, he looked at the permission medallion. There was clearly no sort of ‘ghost mark’ on it. He looked expressionlessly back at the young man.

“Continue,” he said calmly.

The young man was trembling in his heart. He wasn't able to get the tiniest read on Xu Qing, which made him feel more than ever that his life was in danger. After racking his brains, he said, "Senior, to the cultivators of the Fifth Star Ring, that Immortal Capital permission medallion is something incredibly rare. However, while some people think that getting one is a blessing, other people think of them as being inauspicious.

"If you have the appropriate battle prowess, then you could use it to reach the highest heights. But if your battle prowess is lacking, then having that medallion... puts you half a step onto the path of death. For one thing, everyone who wants a medallion will be after you. But worse than that, other people with medallions will *also* want to take it from you.

"The Immortal Capital only announces the success criteria at the very end. And unless you can get into the top 100... then you are in a very uncertain place. And thus... there's a lot of killing and robbing. After all, your rank is determined by how many medallions you collect. If you kill someone else with a medallion, then you get their medallion and any others they've collected."

The young man stopped talking at that point, as he had explained everything he knew about the Immortal Capital permission medallions.

"That's the only way to get into the Immortal Capital?" Xu Qing suddenly asked.

The young man respectfully replied, "There's another way. That's to further your cultivation to at least the Grand Emperor level. People outside of the Immortal Capital who are in the Grand Emperor level aren't allowed to participate in the Trial of the Hunt."

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed. "Are you saying that outside of the Immortal Capital, the strongest cultivators in the Fifth Star Ring are Grand Emperors?"

The young man shook his head. "Not exactly. There are too many sects to count in the Fifth Star Ring. Same with clans. There is no shortage of Lower Immortals. The reason is that not all Lower Immortals who ascend to the Immortal Capital end up settling down there permanently.

"There are a lot of people in the Immortal Capital who end up getting appointed as heavenly inspectors on the outside. Some Lower Immortals like that are lone wolves, but most are the patriarchs of various sects and clans."^[1]

Xu Qing felt like he was finally starting to understand a bit more about how the Fifth Star Ring worked.

He had known from the beginning that the cultivators in the Fifth Star Ring were strong. But hearing the details was more than a bit shocking. After taking a moment to digest the new information, he looked at the young man.

"In other words, when it comes to the fighting and killing over the permission medallions... people like Grand Emperors and Lower Immortals can't interfere?"

The young man immediately nodded. "The Immortal Capital has set rules prohibiting direct assistance. But as for indirect interference... well I heard that they tend to look the other way. Unfortunately, my level is too low for me to know the details."

Xu Qing once again looked at the young man.

The young man shivered as a very foreboding sensation filled him, and he was about to start begging for his life.

Before he could, Xu Qing waved his hand, causing the young man to fly over to him. His hand clamped down onto the top of his head as he prepared to do a soulsearch to confirm all the information he had just been told.

The young man was now at the peak of anxiety, and could hardly breathe. He knew full well that he was just on the verge of dying. In the hopes of preventing his soul from being damaged during the soulsearch, though, he suppressed his fear, ceased any struggling, and allowed Xu Qing to search through his memories.

Afterward, Xu Qing looked thoughtful. Because of the great disparity in cultivation bases, the fact that the young man had not struggled ensured that the soulsearch went very smoothly. And the injuries the young man had sustained were not outside of the realm of what he could endure.

Xu Qing thought for a moment. Then, instead of killing him, he sealed his soul, his consciousness, and his perceptions, and put him in his bag of holding. He could think of further uses for the young man, and considering how truthfully he had answered all the questions, he was clearly an intelligent person.

Using divine will, Xu Qing said to the young man, *“When I leave the Fifth Star Ring, I’ll free you. In the meantime... you’ll serve as a source of information.”*

With that, he focused on the medallion. After some contemplation, he decided not to activate it. Instead, he put it away. He would first do some exploring before deciding whether or not to participate in the fighting leading to the Immortal Capital.

I suppose the time has come to leave.

With that, he scanned the spirit mine, including all of the tattered minor world bubbles. Most of them were about seventy percent destroyed, leaving them hemorrhaging a dense mist of spirit energy that was ultimately sucked up by the vortex overhead. Presumably, the severe damage to the minor worlds meant that something like this would never happen again. It wouldn’t be possible for the minor worlds to put out such an incredible amount of spirit energy permanently.

What was more, because the skies of all the minor worlds had been broken open, and the living beings inside weren’t having their life force absorbed, they were now essentially free. Unfortunately, the people inside were all very confused and in distress. What was more, because of the difference in pressure between their worlds and the outside, they couldn’t just fly out. And they had no idea what was going on outside.

That state of affairs wouldn’t last for long. Eventually, chosen individuals from those minor worlds would start trying to leave and see the real heaven that existed outside of their world.

Xu Qing chose not to interfere. *There’s no karmic connection between me and them. It’s their destiny.*

At the same time, his divine will scan confirmed what he had theorized about this place being a prison for gods. It was true. Each minor world bubble contained a sealed god. Some were already dead. Some were barely clinging to life. None were conscious. Clearly this god prison, or 'spirit mine' as it was called, wasn't very high-quality. All of the sealed gods here were in the Godfire level. Xu Qing didn't sense even a single Altar God.

That said, before I leave, it would make more sense for me to take all this spirit energy rather than just let that vortex take it.

Narrowing his eyes, Xu Qing opened his mouth and inhaled deeply. The dense spirit energy roiled in Xu Qing's direction, entering his mouth and sweeping through him. Not only did it nourish his fleshly body, but it also nourished his seven extreme daos.

However, the huge lid sealing the place still had a vortex in it that was also absorbing the spirit energy. Xu Qing looked up at it, and after some consideration, decided not to destroy it. He clearly remembered how the Imperial Sovereign he had just killed had looked up at that vortex with fear in his eyes.

I'm afraid that the destruction of the spirit mine will affect the vortex. And as for where that vortex leads to....

Eyes narrowing, he sat down cross-legged and circulated the five elements within him. Time and space erupted, creating an even stronger stimulating force. The spirit energy in the place split into two parts. One part went to the vortex, while the rest went to Xu Qing.

In that manner, time passed.

As the spirit energy in the spirit mine grew thinner and thinner, Xu Qing's cultivation base climbed higher. Meanwhile, the vortex in the lid above was taking in reduced amounts of spirit energy.

The events that had just played out were very obvious in another heaven and earth in another part of the Fifth Star Ring. In that heaven and earth, the sky rumbled with thunder, while the lands were bright crimson. Two figures were currently fighting fiercely in midair.

Both were young men. One had red hair, the other white hair, and their killing intent was obvious with each and every blow they launched. Both contained great daos, and both contained authority. Shocking rumbling echoed out.

The red-haired young man was covered with dozens of swirling totem designs. Each one emanated strong spirit power that continuously bolstered his cultivation base.

But then one of the vortex totems went dim, and the spirit energy from there dried up. Normally speaking, he wouldn't care if one of his clan's spirit mines suddenly dried up. But this was a life-or-death battle, and his opponent was a top chosen. If he killed this person, then he would be able to add another Immortal Capital permission medallion to his collection.

Failure was not an option. But now something unexpected had happened.

Dammit, what happened at that spirit mine? And why did it have to happen at this critical moment...?

The red-haired young man's face turned dour.

But he was in the middle of a fight and couldn't check into the matter right now. Putting it aside for the moment, he went so far as to use some taboo techniques to fight as hard as he possibly could.

A very short distance from the spirit mine, a black flying boat zoomed along beneath a gloomy sky. It moved with astonishing speed. There were nine figures aboard, all of them chatting pleasantly. The boat was flying a white flag with a very unique design. The symbol was circular, and imparted a very specific meaning. As the flag flapped, the sound of their chatting and laughter drifted on the wind.

"Just up ahead is the clan spirit mine guarded by Senior Ling Feng. Once we arrive, we can settle down for some very nice cultivation."

"Our clan mission went very well, and we got some great loot. We got the information we were looking for and delivered it to the clan just as ordered. Now we can just have some fun in the minor worlds in the spirit mine. We've been working hard, everyone. We really deserve this break!"

When someone mentioned 'having some fun,' it provoked a wave of laughter. Everyone had looks of anticipation on their faces. To elite clan members like this, the minor worlds in spirit mines were places where they could relax and amuse themselves however they wanted.

Just up ahead was an enormous sealing lid that was their destination.

"Finally here."

The boat accelerated sharply toward the spirit mine.

1. The character for "inspector" makes you think of something akin to a police inspector, i.e. someone who goes on patrol to "inspect" for crimes or something like that. And it's not like they "inspect heaven." More like that they are "inspectors from heaven." Of course, what the heavenly inspectors do has not yet been stated outright. I'm just talking about the initial impression given by the Chinese characters. 警

Chapter 1099: The Wide World Beyond

Chapter 1099: The Wide World Beyond

The wind carried the sound of chatting and laughter. A black boat was flying at top speed through the air, and it was getting closer and closer to the spirit mine.

From a distance, the spirit mine looked like a huge crater some 500 kilometers from end to end. Covering the crater was an enormous black lid that sealed the entire place. The surrounding area was wilderness without many signs of life.

As the flying boat got closer, the nine figures aboard became clearer. Among them was a handsome young man who had just cleared his throat to get the attention of the others. He was clearly the highest-ranking member of the group, so everyone immediately looked over at him.

“In short order we’ll finally be able to relax,” he said coolly. “The mission we just finished was hard on all of you. Who could have guessed that those fugitives would be hiding amongst mortals? But we still tracked them down and accomplished the mission our clan gave us. Sadly, we had to destroy a few mortal cities to track down our quarry. Well, it is what it is....”

The young man sighed.

Hearing his words, the others on the boat added their opinions.

“You’re so kind, Clan Brother Hai Shan.”[1]

“Clan Brother, in the final analysis, the deaths of those innocent mortals are all the fault of the godly fugitives. It’s not like we set out to kill a bunch of people. The clan will definitely understand.”

“That’s right. The mission to track down those godly fugitives has been an open dharmic decree from the Immortal Capital for a long time now. We can all testify that everything that happened was for the sake of the mission. It wasn’t our fault!”

The young man they had called Hai Shan nodded regretfully for a moment. Then his eyes flitted to the pretty young woman sitting next to him. He smiled.

“Enough talk about that,” he continued. “Of the thirty-five spirit mines controlled by our clan, this is the quietest. That said, I’ve never been here before. Now that I think about it, this place is situated on your clan’s property, isn’t it Junior Sister Ling?”

The others on the boat smiled and nodded as they offered further input.

“That’s right. The guardian of this spirit mine is Senior Ling Feng, who’s a court attendant of our clan, and is also a patriarch in Junior Sister Ling’s family. In a moment, we’ll offer formal greetings to Senior Ling Feng, and hopefully Junior Sister Ling will vouch for us. That way, maybe her patriarch will give us some cultivation tips.”

“Granted, he’s only a court attendant with a foreign surname, but given Senior Ling Feng’s cultivation base, even just a bit of advice from him could be very beneficial to people like us.”

As everyone laughed merrily, the young woman they had called Junior Sister Ling smiled faintly.

“You’re flattering me, Big Bro Hai Shan. I stand in the shadow of my family’s patriarch, that’s all. I couldn’t possibly compare to the rest of you. As a court attendant, the fact that Patriarch Ling Feng was assigned to guard duty here is a magnanimous blessing on the part of your clan.

“But since you mentioned it, Big Bro Hai Shan, when it comes time to meet him, I’ll definitely ask him to give us permission to enter some of the minor worlds to absorb some spirit energy. I just hope it can help all of you Elder Brothers to relax a bit.”

Although the young woman spoke very modestly, the reality was that she was very pleased with the way these clan cultivators were talking about her. It was with such chatting and laughter that the flying boat arrived at the spirit mine.

Everyone flew out, and then Junior Sister Ling bowed to Hai Shan. Taking out a jade slip, she sent a voice message to Patriarch Ling.

Everyone seemed very relaxed. They were all looking forward very much to the rest and relaxation to come, and were simply waiting for the spirit mine’s spell formation to open up. But as time ticked by, the spell formation didn’t open. It didn’t even show signs of opening.

Junior Sister Ling frowned slightly. There had never been a case in the past in which she sent a voice message to Patriarch Ling and he didn’t respond.

Weird... she thought. After a moment of thought, she looked over her shoulder at the others. “The patriarch is probably in the middle of a cultivation session. Big Bro Hai Shan, as a member of the direct bloodline, you should be able to just open the spell formation. Do you want to take the lead here?”

Hai Shan looked at the spell formation. The spell formation blocked sight, making it impossible to see what was going on inside. He considered the situation briefly, then shook his head.

“I do have the authority to do that. But Senior Ling is the guardian here. It would be very rude to just barge in. If Senior Ling is in the middle of cultivation, why don’t we just wait out here for a bit?”

Everyone agreed. Junior Sister Ling nodded. She sent another voice message via jade slip, and even sent a message to Patriarch Ling’s servant. She got no responses.

It was the first time anything like this had happened, and she was feeling a bit flustered. Could it be possible that there had been some sort of accident? However, given the cultivation base and personality of Patriarch Ling, she decided that the chances of some accident happening were very low.

None of the group noticed that a cold gaze from inside the spell formation was sweeping over them. Even as Xu Qing absorbed spirit energy inside the spirit mine, he had opened his eyes and was looking outside. *Three in the fourth stage of Void Returning. Four that are two-world Smoldering Gods. One that’s a three-world Smoldering God. And the strongest is a four-world Smoldering God.*

Killing these people would be as simple as turning over his hand. However, Xu Qing didn’t want to kill anyone if it wasn’t necessary. Going around slaughtering people would only cause more trouble later.

Of course, if he didn't kill them, it was possible they might report that something unusual was going on at the spirit mine. Granted, the strange circumstance was nothing more than the spirit mine being locked down. Because the circumstances weren't clear, the clan would probably send someone to check on the mine. If they did, it would at least take some time for that person to arrive. On the other hand, if he did kill these people, it was likely that there were bloodline magics that would notify their clan, and then they would definitely know something was going on at the spirit mine.

Given all that, Xu Qing decided that since they weren't doing anything to court death, he wouldn't take any action. He just continued absorbing the spirit energy. The spirit energy was already starting to get thin. Based on Xu Qing's estimations, it would only take about two more hours to absorb all of it.

Although absorbing it could help improve his cultivation base a bit, the main reason Xu Qing wanted it was to bolster his seven extreme daos. That's especially true of the daos of space and time. As far as he was concerned, he had not developed those extremes far enough.

Therefore, as he absorbed the spirit energy, he focused on seeking enlightenment based on his experience in that vortex he had passed through in the Primeval Sea. He had begun doing so in the minor world bubble, and was continuing to do so while absorbing the spirit energy.

As the process went on, he also took some of the holy fardark nectar. That made the enlightenment come even easier.

In that manner, time passed. Occasionally, he would run into side issues, but overall, progress was good.

About an hour later, Hai Shan was starting to have some misgivings. "Junior Sister Ling," he said, looking over at her, "even if Senior Ling is in the middle of cultivation, doesn't he have a servant? Can't you get in touch with the servant?"

Junior Sister Ling was feeling more uneasy than ever. She nodded. "I did. But... he didn't answer."

Everyone else reacted visibly to this news. One by one, they looked over at Hai Shan.

Hai Shan's eyes narrowed. "If Senior Ling is so busy with cultivation, we shouldn't bother him. Let's just leave."

With that, he flew back onto the black boat. The others hesitated briefly before following. Junior Sister Ling was feeling extremely worried, and wanted to offer a different suggestion. But considering how serious Hai Shan looked, she didn't dare.

And thus, the group flew off. After the boat was a certain distance away, it stopped in midair. Hai Shan looked back at the mine, his eyes narrowed.

If Patriarch Ling and his servant aren't responding to messages, it could mean a number of things. Maybe they really are in the middle of cultivation or some other important thing. It's even possible

they went out to do something. Whatever they're busy with, maybe they can't tolerate any distractions, and that's why they aren't responding to messages.

Of course, there's another possibility. What if something bad happened? The spell formation is completely intact, with no damage. That indicates that if something bad happened, it didn't involve an outside attack.

What's more, we waited outside for about an hour. Nothing happened to us, and we were able to leave freely. All of this seems to indicate....

After some more thought, Hai Shan turned to Junior Sister Ling. "Does Patriarch Ling have any enemies? When was the last time you were in touch with him?"

"The patriarch never leaves loose ends," she replied immediately. "He always gets rid of his enemies right away. What's more, he's been the guardian here for years, and hasn't done any traveling in that time. I contacted him only a few days ago. It was after we had finished the mission and were on the way back."

Hai Shan considered the information. It seemed to him that given only a few days had passed, it wasn't likely that there had been some dramatic event. Even if there had, it was likely still in the beginning phases. That said, if Senior Ling Feng was so focused that he couldn't respond to messages, that seemed to indicate that if a dramatic event was underway, it probably involved an Imperial Sovereign. And that meant... that there was a chance to earn some credit here!

If I just report that something suspicious is going on, but it turns out everything is normal, then the clan won't be happy with me. Therefore....

After more thought, he decided that the best thing would be to try to get more information, but keep his distance. There wouldn't be any harm in that. Having reached the conclusion that this was definitely the best idea, he took out a jade slip and crushed it. In doing so, he called on his direct bloodline authority to connect to the spirit mine's formation. His eyes flashed with a blood-colored light. Focusing the clan authority in his eyes, he peered inside the spell formation.[2]

When he saw the situation inside, his face fell. The entire area was in ruins! And he saw two eyes as cold as death! A tremor passed through him and blood sprayed out of his mouth. His cultivation base reeled.

"Get out of here!" he shouted. Without any hesitation, he sent the boat speeding off into the distance. At the same time, he took out a clan jade slip to send a call for help. The others had no idea what was going on, but they all looked visibly taken aback.

Unfortunately... before Hai Shan could even finish taking out the jade slip, a cold voice echoed about.

"You shouldn't have looked."

A huge hand filled the gazes of Hai Shan and the others. They were suddenly surrounded by a huge spatial grid. Time seemed to slow down. Everything went black.

The hand closed. They were destroyed in body and soul. Even the flying boat was crushed into ashes.

Everything went quiet.

A moment later, the spirit mine's spell formation rippled, and Xu Qing emerged, having completely absorbed all the spirit energy. He looked around.

"So this is the Fifth Star Ring..." he murmured.

He burst into motion.

1. Hai Shan: Hai is a surname which means "sea, ocean." It's not very common as a surname. Shan means "mountain." So these characters together mean "sea and mountain" and are the same characters from the "Sea and Mountain Incantation" earlier in the novel. If you reverse them, they're Mountain and Sea, as in "Mountain and Sea Region" from earlier in the novel, or all the Mountain and Sea stuff from ISSTH. This name could well be a Daoist name, but there isn't any definitive proof either way, and it's not important, so I'm going to interpret it as an ordinary surname and given name. ❹

2. Just to be clear, his "direct bloodline authority" is not the magical/cultivation/godly authority, but rather, ordinary authority, i.e. permission or the right to do something. ❹

Chapter 1100: Fifth Star Ring

Chapter 1100: Fifth Star Ring

A majestic red aurora swelled like a river through the canopy of heaven. Because it ebbed and flowed, it didn't cast its light evenly, causing the silty ground to shift back and forth between brightness and gloom.

It wasn't just the ground in the spirit mine that was covered in sludge. The lands surrounding the mine looked the same. Xu Qing knew the explanation for that thanks to the Imperial Sovereign's servant. This place was in the south of the Fifth Star Ring, and was considered a very remote area. A long time ago, it had been a huge sea. In fact, it had been the Fifth Star Ring's Primeval Sea.

Later on, the Immortal Paragon had compacted the starry sky in the Fifth Star Ring, as well as the Primeval Sea, which was a place that countless gods had called home. This place had eventually been occupied by cultivators.

Unfortunately, the lands were poor and infertile. The upside was that there was no mutagen. The gods in the Fifth Star Ring had been conquered, and to some extent, it was correct to say that they had been outlawed.

Considering that the aura of the gods, in other words mutagen, was harmful to cultivators, it was only natural that it would be stamped out. In the end, the cultivators started assimilating the gods, turning them into nutrients, extracting their life force to make spirit energy for cultivators to use.

As Xu Qing traveled, he could feel the effects of that. Every single one of his pores felt extremely comfortable as the spirit energy in heaven and earth automatically poured into him. He felt like parched lands that were benefiting from a spring rainfall. There seemed no end to the spirit energy, and though it wasn't as strong as it had been in the mine, it was still there.

There's nowhere in the Revered Ancient mainland that comes close to this.

As he instinctively absorbed the spirit energy, he sent his divine will out to assess his surroundings. He could sense the natural and magical laws in this area; that was an ability unique to Smoldering God cultivators. By means of the local natural and magical laws, it was possible to directly sense the world.

His divine will made it possible to see semitransparent threads all around him, connecting to everything. They were natural and magical laws. Once one's cultivation base reached a certain level, it would be possible to affect and even control them.

As Xu Qing assessed his surroundings with divine will, he was able to find the sources of those threads.... A thoughtful look appeared on his face, and the vigilance in his heart grew stronger. As he sensed the world around him, he had felt its majesty. What was more, in the sources of the natural and magical laws, he had detected boundless wills.

Many of these natural and magical laws have been laid claim to already.

He retracted his divine will and looked up into the sky. He didn't make direct contact with any of the wills he had sensed. However, he did check to see what would happen if he tried to use some of those natural and magical laws. It was not a violation to do so.

Although the natural and magical laws here seem to be operating in order, the reality is that they are full of a certain type of chaos....

He looked around. Within the feedback from the natural and magical laws, he could sense blood and slaughter.

So this is also a place where the weak are the prey of the strong. In fact, it's even more intense than back home.

A day later, he was able to confirm his supposition when he witnessed a bloodbath.

A majestic merchant convoy was flying through the sky. There were several thousand people in it, and as beasts of burden they had a host of gigantic creatures that resembled rhinos. They were transporting some items that Xu Qing didn't recognize. But obviously, they were things that couldn't be fit into bags of holding. Based on the auras he could sense, the convoy had powerful experts as guards. It looked like an extraordinary convoy. Considering what Xu Qing could see and sense, he doubted anyone would dare to cause trouble for them.

But then the bloodbath occurred. Rumbling sounds echoed out as a troupe of bandits came out of nowhere. There were thousands of them, maybe even more than ten thousand, and they immediately set upon the merchants.

The fighting was fierce, and there were many deaths. Cultivators screamed. Beasts bellowed. The stench of blood spread everywhere. As the fighting played out, it was even possible to see some enslaved godly entities.

Most shocking of all was that the merchants actually unleashed a god. It was a huge eye that was bound like a slave. At one time, the eye had been covered with tentacles. But most of the tentacles had been severed, and the eye was covered in sealing marks. This god was obviously in the Godfire level. It served as some sort of trump card, and as the slaughter played out, it was basically nothing more than a weapon.

Xu Qing wasn't sure how the battle ended. He watched from a distance for a while, but when he noticed streams of divine will from both sides getting close to him, he left. The incident had nothing to do with him, and there was no need to get involved.

His departure didn't go completely smoothly. The two incoming streams of divine will were both hostile, and seemed unwilling to let him go free. However, as they got close, his eyes flashed coldly, and he sent his own divine will shooting out aggressively.

Sometimes, avoiding trouble requires more than keeping your head down. It can be better to make it clear you're not to be trifled with. The principle applied in the Fifth Star Ring just as much as it did in Revered Ancient.

The various streams of divine will clashed. Multicolored lightning flashed in the sky. Natural and magical laws were made manifest, and loud rumblings made it clear that the weather was changing for the worse. A blizzard and heavy rain struck at the same time.

And then... the other two streams of divine will backed away. Clearly they were afraid, and didn't want to pose an obstacle.

Xu Qing went on his way, his face completely expressionless.

Similar incidents occurred on three additional occasions over the next few days.

And seeing bloodbath after bloodbath gave Xu Qing a clear picture of how brutal and blood-stained this world was.

Like venomous bugs in a jar. It's almost like the entire Fifth Star Ring is full of powerful experts who climbed mountains of corpses and swam through seas of blood to get to where they are.

Xu Qing looked down beneath his feet. There was a valley below, and inside, another bloodbath had just played out. Corpses lay everywhere, an incredibly strong aura of death had overtaken the spirit energy.

Next to a large pile of blood-soaked corpses was a young man in a black robe, seated cross-legged. His expression was cold as he performed breathing exercises using the death energy. An instant later, he opened his eyes and looked up at Xu Qing.

"This is my spirit lode," he said.

After stating his claim to the location, the young man's eyes flitted to another spot outside the valley. There, ripples were spreading out as a person was forced out of the concealment of invisibility.

It was a pretty young woman. She opened her mouth to speak, but didn't have time.

A flying sword shot out of the young man's head, glittering with cold aggression. Moving with blinding speed, it stabbed right into the young woman's forehead. As her corpse toppled to the ground, the flying sword returned to the young man. Then it shifted to point at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing looked down with narrowed eyes. He had noticed the invisible young woman, of course. Now, sensing the hostility from the young man in black, he chose to continue on his way without saying a word.

After Xu Qing was gone, the young man continued to look up at the sky vigilantly. After confirming that the powerful expert had indeed left, the young man breathed a sigh of relief.

That guy... really felt dangerous.

Some distance away, Xu Qing thought back to the young man with the sword.

He's not an Imperial Sovereign. He's only a Smoldering God. But he has some sort of authority related to death. What's more, he doesn't actually seem alive.

That said, they had no beef with each other. After some thought, Xu Qing realized it just went to show how he should view the cultivators from the Fifth Star Ring.

This place doesn't have a lot of weaklings. Although the Imperial Sovereign's servant made it seem like this place is very orderly, after everything I've seen, I can tell that the only rules that really count are those put in place by the Immortal Capital.

As long as you don't break their rules, then you can do whatever you want. And that means this place is dangerous and chaotic.

Considering the level of the servant's cultivation base, he only knows some of the basics. When it comes to all the finer details, for instance the geographic layout or the specific organizations here, I can't rely fully on the information I got from his memories.

Being as cautious as he was, Xu Qing wasn't even going to fully trust the information from the soulsearch. If he did that, but then it turned out the person he had soulsearched was misinformed, then he could pay a price for that incorrect information.

I need to stick to my original plan. I need to find a city where I get some accurate information.

After some thought, he picked a place he had learned about from the servant's memories, and headed in that direction.

In the central part of the southern region was a place the Fifth Star Ring cultivators called the Grand Immortal Mountain.

It was called a mountain, but the reality was that it was an endless mountain range filled with many rising and falling mountains that numbered in the hundreds of thousands at the very least.

The place was filled year-round with white mist, within which moved drifting forms that seemed to be immortal beings. Sometimes the wind would blow, thinning the mist and revealing spectacularly beautiful palaces and temples crafted from the finest jade. It really did seem like an immortal paradise.

The immortal spirit energy here surpassed any other area in the south, as this place was the capital.

In a location in the very middle of Grand Immortal Mountain, in a place surrounded by a ring of mountain peaks... there was an astonishing silver-colored temple. The temple had staircases of more than ten thousand steps leading up to it from all sides. The towering temple itself looked almost like an altar.

The temple was glorious to behold. It was constructed primarily from 16,000 planks of immortal green cedar, had golden-colored roof tiles made from glazed spirit ceramics, featured two golden osmanthus trees shaped like coiling dragons, and was decorated with delicate sculptures carved from immortal jade. It went without saying that every surface was richly ornamented. Below the temple was a plaza crafted from immortal jade slabs, within which were 160 glowing statues organized into two rows.

Within the main hall of this extravagantly amazing temple was a holy throne, atop which sat an old man clad in a silver robe. He almost looked like a mortal, except that his eyes would occasionally flash with something brilliant that made it seem like he was gazing down on the entire world.

There was currently a performance going on including singing and dancing. Sleeves rippled in the wind, bells chimed, and voices undulated melodiously. Some sandalwood incense was burning, the smoke curling through the hall and making everything seem hazy and mysterious.

A middle-aged man entered the hall, clad in a long robe decorated with clouds. When he walked, the clouds looked like they were moving, lending him a very extraordinary aura. Walking through the dancers and the haze of the incense, he reached the seat of honor. Clapping hands, he gave a deep bow of respect.

“Greetings, Immortal. The opening ceremony of the Trial of the Hunt will begin soon in the Immortal Capital. How many disciples of our Grand Immortal Mountain will be joining the hunt this time?”

A moment passed after his voice echoed out. Then the old man on the throne, who was hardly visible through the haze, nodded slightly.

“Thirty percent. I hope one of them turns out to have potential. By the way, Lan Yun, I hope all of you remember to follow the rules, unlike last time. Grand Emperors are *not* to interfere. That’s the

rule. The Immortal Capital wants to find chosen who have risen fairly through the carnage. They don't want greenhouse flowers." His voice was calm, but it contained a bit of a threat.

"Yes, sir," Lan Yun replied respectfully.[1]

The old man on the throne regarded Lan Yun for a moment, then coolly continued, "There's no need for such formality between us, Lan Yun."

Lan Yun considered his words and then nodded. "You occupy the highest of positions, Immortal. Etiquette must be maintained."

With that, Lan Yun turned and left.

The old man said nothing further.

The singing and dancing resumed. The smoke from the sandalwood incense continued to burn, swirling about in the hall, slowly obscuring the delicate, beautiful, and lifelike images in the artwork. The octagonal palace lanterns hung about cast their light into the haze... causing the entire hall to become increasingly mysterious.

1. Lan Yun. Lan is not very commonly used as a surname, but it is listed as a surname. It means "mist, mountain forest vapor." Yun means "cloud." When I asked Madam Deathblade for her reaction, she actually thought it was a woman's name, which led to some confusion. It's conceivable this could be intended to be a daoist name, but there's not enough evidence to prove it, so I'm treating it like an ordinary surname and given name. 雲