

# Beyond the Timescape

## Chapter 1101: The Ferry Pilots

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In the Fifth Star Ring, the passage of time was calculated by means of the little vortexes that would appear in the red aurora in the sky. When 1,000 vortexes appeared, it counted as one year. After that, the aurora vortexes would disappear, and a new year would begin.

At the moment, there were 753 vortexes in the red aurora.

Xu Qing was currently looking up at the vortexes. This was the thirtieth vortex-day in which he had been traveling. If he traveled at this speed in Revered Ancient, he would have been able to go from the imperial capital of humankind all the way to Sea-Sealing County. But here, he was still on the border of the south of the Fifth Star Ring.

The lands were still swampy. The Fifth Star Ring was massive.

*At least I've finally reached my destination.*

He looked up ahead in the swamp to a majestic city.

The city was the color black, and beneath the light of the aurora, it looked like a sleeping beast. In the gloom, it was hard to see the entirety of the city with the naked eye. In fact, it was so large that, from what Xu Qing could tell, it was like one of the prefectures back home.

In the memories of the Imperial Sovereign's servant, this city... was actually considered rather small in the south of the Fifth Star Ring. There were a lot of cities like this in the south, but there were also many that were larger.

Most cities controlled by the servant's clan were like this one. As for the larger cities, given his status and cultivation base, he had never seen any of them. For his entire life, he had lived in the remote parts of the south.

As for the clan his lord and master had belonged to, Xu Qing had learned something about it during the soulsearch. Although that clan had some sizable territory in the periphery of the south, its patriarch was only a Quasi-Immortal Grand Emperor. In other words, they didn't really count as a domineering organization. There were other such forces in the south.

*It seems to me my previous understanding was a bit flawed,* Xu Qing thought as he looked at the city. Given what had played out at the spirit mine, he had assumed that since the guardian was an

Imperial Sovereign, the strongest member of the clan would probably be one of the legendary Summer Immortals. As a result, he had really put his guard up.

But clearly, Summer Immortal was a level of personhood considered uncommon no matter where you went.

*I still need to be careful. There are as many powerful experts in the Fifth Star Ring as there are clouds in the sky.*

Taking a deep breath, Xu Qing headed straight toward the city.

Given the current level of Xu Qing's cultivation base, it was an easy thing to alter his physical appearance and aura, plus hide his cultivation base level, so that he looked like the Imperial Sovereign's servant. Considering he also had the servant's identity medallion, it was easy to get into the city. He didn't run into any obstacles.

Before long, he was through the city gate. There were people everywhere, most of them being cultivators. Mortals were in the minority.

There were lots of shops, and a buzz filled the air.

Given Xu Qing's past experiences, going into this city and seeing so many cultivators left him feeling a bit dazed. He had never seen anything like this, not even back in the imperial capital of humankind back in Revered Ancient. There were just so many people.

Without even realizing it, Xu Qing started feeling like a stranger in a strange land. That was just human nature. Sometimes wide-open spaces will feel unfamiliar to people, but the reverse can also be true. Crowds of people can leave one feeling like a stranger.

But Xu Qing had grown up traveling to all sorts of places, so despite that feeling, he managed to stay calm and just blend into the crowd.

He spent some time analyzing the people around him. He tried to identify ways that he was different, then make adjustments so that he would fit in. For about half of a vortex-day, he spent time studying the accents, mannerisms, and other nuanced differences between himself and the local cultivators.

From the conversations he overheard, he was also able to get a sense of what things were like in the Fifth Star Ring and in this specific city. Although the information came in bits and pieces, he managed to get more than enough as he searched for a specific type of shop.

At the moment, he was standing just outside the type of shop he had been looking for. It had three floors and a very luxurious facade on the outside. A lot of cultivators were coming in and out. Inside, he could see rows of shelves filled with all sorts of magical treasures. All of them were sealed so that they couldn't be taken away, but at the same time, had accompanying jade slips with descriptions of the items used. This place was obviously a shop that sold magical treasures.

Xu Qing walked into the store and looked around the first floor at the various items for sale. After a moment, he sighed inwardly. Back in Revered Ancient, magical treasures were rare, and most of them would be precious treasures that could form the backbone of an entire sect. For example,

Seven Blood Eyes had those blood-colored eye treasures. To find random treasures unaccounted for was even rarer, and most of them were just fragments. Most of the time, what you found unaccounted for were really just magical devices. But this shop had all sorts of magical treasures.

Xu Qing thought back to Revered Ancient.

*Most of the magical treasure fragments back in Revered Ancient actually come from the gods. Perhaps if Eminent Desolation never came to Revered Ancient, it would have ended up similar to this place. But as it stands, there's a huge difference between the two.*

*What's more, there's another reason Revered Ancient never became like this. And that's because the Summer Immortals reached a dead end in Revered Ancient. But here in the Fifth Star Ring, it's been a long time since they found the path leading beyond Summer Immortal. That's why this is such a flourishing place.*

Xu Qing didn't spend too much time browsing the magical treasures. Though they were nice, given his current level, he didn't need any of the things on the first floor.

Soon he proceeded to the second floor of the shop. That was where he found what he was looking for. It was a map of the Fifth Star Ring.

One of the salesgirls on the second floor noticed Xu Qing looking at a jade slip that was a Fifth Star Ring map. Walking over, she smiled and said, "Maps like that are very expensive. And that's truer the more detailed they are. Senior, that particular one is a very detailed map of the south. However, I have to warn you ahead of time that it's a copy. What's more, it has a warding spell on it that prevents it from being copied again."

Xu Qing looked away from the jade slip. "I need more than just the south," he said coolly.

The salesgirl's eyes lit up and she flashed another pretty smile. "We do indeed have higher-level maps like that here at the Immortal Treasure Palace. We have branch locations throughout the Fifth Star Ring, so it's only natural that we have maps of all sorts. Senior, exactly what type of map are you looking for?"

Xu Qing thought for a moment then looked at her. "I want the entire Fifth Star Ring, including information about all the organizations and all the chosen. I want something very comprehensive."

The woman smiled until her eyes were slits. Inside, she was speculating that Xu Qing was probably involved in the Trial of the Hunt. Those were the only type of people who would want a map like that. After all, he was essentially asking for a map that would have information about all of the enemies he would be up against from throughout the star ring.

And of course, the people who were part of the Trial of the Hunt were all killers to the core. With that thought in mind, the woman became a bit more respectful.

"We do have maps like that here in the Immortal Treasure Palace. But if you calculate the cost in immortal jade, it's quite high...."

Xu Qing flashed his hand to reveal a huge pile of immortal jade pieces. Then he put them away and looked calmly at the salesgirl.

“Please, follow me to the third floor, Senior,” she said quickly.

He nodded and followed her up. The third floor was less crowded. It was full of partitioned areas where business could be conducted safely and privately.

The salesgirl led him into one such partitioned area, then bowed and left. Some time passed, whereupon she returned with a silver tray. Atop the silver tray was a white jade slip.

Xu Qing waved his hand, causing the jade slip to fly over to him. He quickly scanned it with divine will. A huge map appeared in his mind’s eye. It showed the east, west, south and north, and included information about all the sects and clans. It also had details about local conditions and customs. It also listed information about local chosen.

It was very detailed. That said, most of the information was blurred out by a warding spell so that you couldn’t read it until you bought it.

Xu Qing was pleased. Retracting his divine will, he wasted no time in handing over a large amount of immortal jade to buy the map. The salesgirl respectfully escorted him out, and soon he disappeared into the crowd.

Once safely away in the crowd, Xu Qing changed his appearance and aura a few times. After he was sure that no trouble had arisen because of his purchase, he settled on the appearance of an ordinary cultivator and just let the crowd carry him along. At the same time, he started taking in the basic information from the map.

*The Immortal Capital is in the very middle. It’s a holy place that you can’t get information about.*

*There are four regions on either side of it, to the east, south, west, and north.*

*Although they’re often called regions, they’re actually entire planetary systems. And each of them is further divided into east, west, south, and north. However, because this entire place is the Fifth Star Ring, people tend to name things based on the perspective of the star ring as a whole.*

*Each of the four great planetary systems is home to many sects and clans.*

*The most orthodox of the organizations are as follows: the Grand Immortal Mountain in the southern planetary system; the Sword Immortal School in the northern planetary system; the Star Ring Pagoda in the eastern planetary system; and the Dao Immortal Sect in the western planetary system. The reason those four groups are considered the most orthodox is that they are led by Lower Immortal patriarchs who have been appointed by the Immortal Capital as heavenly inspectors.*

*Outside of the Immortal Capital in the Fifth Star Ring, there are a total of sixteen Lower Immortals serving as heavenly inspectors! Four of them are leaders of those major sects. But the other twelve are incarnated as heavenly bodies that serve as inspectors in the aurora in various assigned locations.*

Thanks to the information from the map, Xu Qing was finally starting to get a fair picture of what the Fifth Star Ring was like. He was also able to determine where exactly he was.

*I'm on the outer edge of the southern planetary system, close to the western planetary system. In fact, I'm very close to the border, which is formed by the God Blood River.... According to the description, it's supposedly a river made from the blood of gods. There are some dangerous and grisly entities in that river, such that only someone with a Grand Emperor cultivation base can cross it.*

*The God Blood River forms the border between the west and the south, and ordinarily speaking, you can't get across it. Cultivators who want to get to the other side have to take ferries....*

*Because of that, there's a unique profession on the river. They're called the ferry pilots.... Only a ferry pilot can get you safely across the God Blood River. And that's because the ferry pilots all come from the Immortal Capital. Apparently, they're convicts who committed crimes there, and as part of their sentence, they have to serve as ferry pilots.*

*The cost of passage across the river isn't spirit stones or immortal jade. It's longevity.*

*The first time you cross the river, you have to give the ferry pilot six days of longevity. That's because the journey takes six days.*

*The second time you cross the river, the cost increases. It becomes a sixty-year-cycle.*

*You can't go a third time. And that's because the cost of a third trip is all of your longevity.*

Upon seeing that information, Xu Qing's heart pounded.

## Chapter 1102: Stars in the Blood-Red Sky

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*I can't believe that's how you pay to cross the river.... Considering how ridiculous the price is, there seems little point in crossing the river. And I bet there must be more to the story.*

As Xu Qing continued to peruse the information in the map, he was able to confirm his previous supposition.

*The God Blood River doesn't just separate the west and south. It forms the borders between the other regions as well. And the process of crossing the river is guaranteed to be safe!*

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed.

*Once you step foot on the ferry pilot's boat, they take responsibility for your safety for the duration of the six-day journey. They won't allow anything to interfere with the voyage. No one seems to know exactly how strong the ferry pilots are. But they do come from the Immortal Capital, and they're not just ordinary people from there, they're convicted felons.*

It didn't take long for Xu Qing to come up with a theoretical possibility.

*Based on what I know of the Immortal Capital's Trial of the Hunt, the people with the permission medallions are like venomous bugs in a jar. Their main goal is to rob and kill each other. And that means that these so-called ferry pilots... can provide a safe haven to the participants in the Trial of the Hunt. Twice!*

*It doesn't matter what danger they're in. As long as they can get to a ferry pilot's boat, they'll have six days to rest and recuperate. When powerful experts fight, a six-day break to recover and prepare can completely change the outcome.*

Xu Qing's eyes glittered brightly. Looking at it from that perspective, crossing the river could be considered a very valuable asset.

*The key is the timing. And if I can understand this, so can other cultivators in the Fifth Star Ring. In fact, probably everyone realizes it. This Trial of the Hunt thing is getting more and more interesting the more I learn about it.*

Xu Qing carefully analyzed all the different bits of information to make sure he wasn't making an error in logic. As he continued on his way through the bustling city, he went on to look at the information about the various chosen. The records contained a lot of details about them.

The planetary systems to the east, south, west, and north each had more than a hundred. Some came from specific sects and clans. Some came from rogue organizations. Others were lone wolves.

All had their extraordinary assets. And considering all of them were listed in the map from the Immortal Treasure Palace, it was a given that they were incredibly famous. From what Xu Qing could tell, this map with details of all the Fifth Star Ring chosen was essentially a ranking list.

And there were eight people on the list whose information was highlighted in a different color. Of all the hundreds of chosen in the Fifth Star Ring, they were like shining stars that everyone else looked up to. Because of that, they were collectively referred to as the Shining Stars.

Xu Qing was interested mainly in the southern planetary system, and of the Shining Stars, two were in the south.

The first came from the orthodox sect in the south, which was the Grand Immortal Mountain. He was the apprentice of someone named Lan Yun, who was a Quasi-Immortal Grand Emperor. This Quasi-Immortal Lan Yun had a very venerable position. He was apparently the Junior Brother of the Grand Immortal Mountain's heavenly inspector. It was said that, years ago, he had been just on the verge of opening the door of immortality. However, some accident occurred that delayed him, and now he was still half a step away from opening the door. Naturally speaking, a sect disciple like that could only be described as extraordinary.[1]

He had an apprentice named Jiang Fan who had not yet been practicing cultivation for 500 years and was an early Imperial Sovereign. He had command of seven types of authority, and had engaged in a spectacular battle in which he ended up killing a peak Imperial Sovereign, although he ended up severely injured in the process.[2]

That battle took place a full sixty-year-cycle in the past, and it shook the entire southern planetary system. In fact, even chosen cultivators from other planetary systems heard about it through their

various information networks. Because of that incident, Jiang Fan was considered this generation's number one chosen in the south.

Another of the eight Shining Stars from the southern planetary system didn't come from a sect. Rather, this person was a cultivator from the Yuanshan Clan, which was one of the top three clans in the south. She was a female cultivator named Yuanshan Su, and because she was fond of wearing an upper garment of green silk, she was often called by the nickname Green Silk Immortal Fairy.[3]

Her cultivation base was a bit higher than Jiang Fan's, as she was in the mid Imperial Sovereign level. However, in terms of authority, she wasn't on Jiang Fan's level, as she only had four. In addition, she had also fought a peak Imperial Sovereign, only she had lost and barely escaped with her life.

As Xu Qing looked over this information about the southern chosen, his eyes glinted with an aggressive light.

*One in the early level, one in the middle.... The former has seven types of authority and killed a peak Imperial Sovereign. The latter has four types of authority but failed to kill an Imperial Sovereign. Either way, both of them are definitely exceptional.*

Mind and heart spinning, Xu Qing went on to look at the information from the other three planetary systems.

*In the northern planetary system, both of the Shining Stars are from the orthodox Sword Immortal School! They're twin brothers, and people say that due to supernatural phenomena which appeared at their birth, both of them were born with swords in their hands. They have preheaven sword bodies, and both of them were taken as apprentices of the Sword Immortal School's heavenly inspector. Their names are Hordeslayer and the Rampart.[4]*

*During the entire time they've practiced cultivation, they've crushed everyone else in their generation, gaining immense prestige and becoming celebrities in the north. Both of them are early Imperial Sovereigns, and they each have four types of authority. On their own, they're both capable of fighting late Imperial Sovereigns, and if they join forces, they can fight a Quasi-Immortal Grand Emperor! Because of their stellar fighting record, they're considered to be in second place among the eight Shining Stars of the Fifth Star Ring.*

Xu Qing was already looking forward to encountering these people. Next, he looked over the information about the eastern planetary system. When he saw the details about the chosen from there, his pupils constricted.

The east was considered the most prominent of the four planetary systems in the Fifth Star Ring. For one thing, three of the eight Shining Stars came from there. But also, there were more chosen there than any of the other regions. Of the three Shining Stars from there, one came from an organization of rogue cultivators, one came from a clan, and one came from the orthodox sect known as the Star Ring Pagoda.

The rogue chosen was known as Sir Vilespirit. He had risen to prominence by fighting many deadly battles and was known for his devouring magic. He was a born killer who cultivated a dao of vile devils.

Back when he was a mortal, he joined a sect but eventually betrayed it. They chased him for a full sixty-year-cycle without ever catching him. Eventually he disappeared. Some years later he resurfaced and joined another sect. Yet again, he betrayed them, and yet again, they chased him but never caught him. Over the years, the same thing happened seven times. He joined seven sects. He betrayed seven sects. Despite being constantly on the run, he managed to become an Imperial Sovereign, whereupon he went back and exterminated all of the sects he had betrayed.

He had climbed mountains of corpses and swam through seas of blood, and that was how he achieved his dao of slaughter. Eventually, he fought a battle with one of the other Shining Stars from the east, the one who came from one of the top clans, but neither could gain the upper hand in the fight. That was how he ended up being listed as one of the Shining Stars.

As for that sect chosen, he was also an extraordinary individual. He had a mid Imperial Sovereign cultivation base, five types of authority, and had defeated a late Imperial Sovereign in battle. His name was Zhou Zhengli, and he came from the number one clan in the east. His name matched his reputation. He was chivalrous, kind, charitable, and was respected by countless cultivators in the east. He and Sir Vilespirit were like polar opposites who both wanted to put an end to each other.  
[5]

The third Shining Star from that planetary system was actually the number one chosen in the east. He had been bestowed with a name based on the star ring itself, and as such, was this generation's Sir Star Ring. He had a late Imperial Sovereign cultivation base, nine types of authority, and because he rarely fought in public, few people knew how strong he actually was. In the one public battle he had fought, he had challenged a Quasi-Immortal Grand Emperor. He had won. His name was known far and wide.

Any one of those seven individuals could be called incredibly exceptional.

The final Shining Star came from the western planetary system. That planetary system was known as the weakest in the Fifth Star Ring. Not only did they only have one Shining Star among the eight, but also, their orthodox group, the Dao Immortal Sect, was known to be in dire straits.

For one thing, the western region's heavenly inspector didn't care much about the affairs of the world, much less the situation with his sect. Because of that, membership was down, and most of the people who were left didn't seem to care much about the sect either. Another reason for the situation was that there were actually more clans and organizations in the west than the other regions. Because the Dao Immortal Sect was on the decline, everyone else was fighting each other in the hopes of gaining supremacy.

The Shining Star from the west came from one of the clans. Unfortunately, after working hard and taking advantage of his clan's reserve powers, he ended up joining the Dao Immortal Sect, where he became the apprentice of the heavenly inspector.

His name was Li Mengtu. One of the unique features of his clan was that all direct bloodline clan members had the character "tu" at the end of their name.[6]

His cultivation base was in the early Imperial Sovereign level, and he had four types of authority. However, because of his clan's gruish magical technique, as well as the training he had received from his Master, he was able to kill a mid Imperial Sovereign. As a result, he ended up being listed among the Shining Stars.

Other than him, the west didn't have anyone worthy to be in that list. After all, the general standard to be among the Shining Stars was to have practiced cultivation for less than 1,000 years.

After looking at all the information, Xu Qing felt that he knew a lot more about the flourishing Fifth Star Ring, as well as the eight Shining Stars. More than ever, he felt the desire to do battle.

*I have to work hard to get a lot stronger!*

Taking a deep breath, he went to find more places to shop. There was more he wanted to accomplish than just buy a map. He wanted to get some medicinal pills and magical treasures. Just to be safe, he wasn't going to buy everything at one shop. Instead, he would shop around at different shops to get everything he needed. Around the time another vortex was about to appear in the aurora above, he prepared to leave the city.

*I'm going to go out in the mountains and go into seclusion for a while. I really need to seek enlightenment of some magics related to time and space. And I need to gain enlightenment of the eighth extreme... That way I can break through to the level of an eight-world Smoldering God.*

The information from the map had just reinforced to Xu Qing the danger he was in, and how important it was that he get stronger.

In that manner, time passed.

As he was getting ready to leave the city, a little vortex appeared in the aurora in the dome of heaven. That indicated that a new day was starting.

When the vortex appeared, something unexpected happened. The blood-red aurora surged, spreading out to cover the entire sky in the southern region. Stars appeared in the aurora! There were about two thousand of them, filling the sky. Some seemed near, some seemed far. Some glittered brightly, others seemed dim.

The moment they appeared, countless cultivators in the south instinctively looked up.

Xu Qing frowned. He had just noticed that the Immortal Capital permission medallion in his bag of holding was vibrating. And it was emitting a force that his bag of holding couldn't contain, a force that seemed to connect to one of the stars up above.

That star was very dim. Right next to his star was another star that was shining brightly.

An instant later, the image in the sky vanished. An uproar ensued.

"The Trial of the Hunt is advancing to the second round!"

"All of the permission medallions are becoming visible.... Now they'll all be able to sense each other."

"I don't know about the other planetary systems, but here in the south... it's about to start raining blood."

As Xu Qing heard the buzz of conversation, he thought back to the image of that other star next to his.

*The reason I didn't activate the medallion is that I'm not interested in that whole thing. I guess it doesn't matter that I didn't activate it. Now that the second round is beginning, the medallions that weren't activated have been revealed. The only question is whether or not the other participants will be able to sense the medallions that haven't been activated.*

He kept his facial expression neutral so as not to attract attention in the crowd. And instead of rushing toward the city gates, he just kept moving along at the same speed.

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At the spirit mine where Xu Qing had arrived some thirty vortex-days earlier, a young man with red hair and a body covered with dozens of vortex tattoos stood looking up into the sky.

Sometime later, he looked away from the sky to the broken minor world bubbles. He could sense how thin the spirit energy was. His expression was very grim.

*Ling Feng told me a while back that he was going to give me an Immortal Capital permission medallion as a gift. And now... he's dead, and the medallion is gone??*

*Not only that, but the destruction of this spirit mine affected that fight earlier.... Is someone looking to die?!*

1. I doubt I need to explain this, but for anyone who wasn't paying close attention, we saw Lan Yun and (presumably) the heavenly inspector just two chapters ago in [1100](#). ❹

2. Jiang Fan: Jiang is listed #54 on the top 100 surnames. It also means "ginger." Fan is a common character that can mean many things, among them "mortal, ordinary, common." When I asked Madam Deathblade for her reaction, she said he sounds like "a cool dude." I thanked her for her very deep insights and decided not to ask for further clarification. ❹

3. Yuanshan Su: Yuanshan is a compound surname invented by the author. The two characters are actually a common term that means "distant mountain." This combination of characters is often used in adjectives. Su can mean a number of things including "raw silk, white, plain, vegetarian." In this case, as is made obvious by the text, the meaning of the character as used in her name is silk. Madam Deathblade says she sounds like "a pretentious conservative lady." The kind of upper garment mentioned here is usually some sort of sleeveless garment or jacket. Like all my other footnotes about clothing, I have to say that fashion changed through the ages, plus this is a fantasy novel, so as for what the author actually envisions, it's hard to say. [Here are a couple images](#) I pulled up if you search for this specific type of garment. ❹

4. Hordeslayer and the Rampart: These guys both have names that Madam Deathblade said "are not real names for real people, but are good names for weird fantasy people." The first name takes two characters out of a common idiom that is used to either describe a magnificent army, or used metaphorically to describe someone extremely strong. The second is a word that's also part of a saying/idiom that refers to someone or something so scary they make others back away in fear. They're supposed to be names, not nicknames, but as you can see from Madam Deathblade's reaction, they're not "real" names. One look at them gives you an instant sense of the over-the-top

fantasy feeling, so I decided to go with a translation in the hopes of conveying that same sensation.

☞

5. Zhou Zhengli: Zhou is listed #10 in the top 100 surnames. Zheng means “straight, upright, proper” and Li means “to stand, to set up, to establish.” Even I was able to guess the feeling of this name when looking at it, and that feeling is confirmed in the explanation provided in the text.

Madam Deathblade had the same reaction. ☞

6. Li Mengtu: Li is the #2 most common name on the list of 100 surnames. Meng means “dream” and Tu means “earth, soil, home, homeland.” There is no explanation yet as to any significance to the “tu” character. It’s the same character as “earth” from the five elements, but there’s no reason yet to believe that has anything to do with the name. With the facts we have at hand, the explanation about that aspect of the name seems more like an interesting trivia point the author decided to throw in. Madam Deathblade says it sounds somewhat romantic, as in her mind it sounds like someone who is homesick and loves their home. ☞

## Chapter 1103: Who’s the Lord of Rain?

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In the same city as Xu Qing, and not too far away from him, was the two-story city magistrate’s office. The magistrate himself was a middle-aged man wearing a white robe, who was currently standing at the balcony, his hands clasped behind his back. Looking away from the sky, he glanced at the crowd below, then looked off into the distance.

Killing intent flickered in his eyes. He was looking in the direction of Xu Qing.

The man was of medium height and was slightly pudgy. But he clearly had a bit of muscle on him. His hair was a bit white with age, but was neatly combed. He had faint crow’s feet at his eyes and wrinkles on his face. That, coupled with his sunken eyes, bore testament to the hardships he had faced in life.

It wasn’t possible to assess his cultivation base, but given that he was surrounded by natural and magical laws, and had dao lineaments in his eyes, meant that he obviously had the strength of an Imperial Sovereign.

*I couldn’t possibly have predicted that a second Immortal Capital permission medallion would show up in my city. However, it’s dark, which means it hasn’t been activated.... The person who bears it is either a coward, or they’re planning to give it as a gift to someone else. If it’s the former, I might as well just kill them. But if it’s the latter....*

The city magistrate wasn’t sure what to do. In the second round of the Trial of the Hunt, it was possible to detect other medallions. But it worked both ways. Anyone who had fused with their medallion would be able to sense other medallions, even if the other medallion wasn’t activated.

In contrast, someone who hadn’t activated their medallion wouldn’t be able to sense other medallions. That was why carrying around an unactivated medallion during the second round could be dangerous. In fact, few people ever did that.

All of those factors gave this magistrate a lot to think about. After all, he was an Imperial Sovereign, but he was only an early Imperial Sovereign. In this remote little city, that was fine. But it didn't mean much when dealing with big sects and clans, which was why he had always kept his head down over the years. If he ended up offending the wrong people by going after a permission medallion, he could end up bringing disaster on himself.

*But when I got that medallion early on, I activated it. And that means I've thrown caution to the wind! Life has become tedious. Why live in a rut, boxed in from all sides, just waiting to die...? Why not put everything on the line?? Besides, my cultivation base has been shackled for long enough. If things keep going on like they have been, I'll never make any more progress.*

With such thoughts on his mind, the city magistrate's eyes flashed with cold light. "Come with me to crush an enemy."

"Yes, sir," voices chorused in response, and a host of figures became visible around him.

The city magistrate strode off of the balcony, flanked by several dozen attendants. Locking onto the position of the other medallion, he started moving.

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Xu Qing was moving quickly toward the city gate.

When he saw the stars appear in the sky earlier, he had been struck with a sense of deep foreboding. And considering how one of those stars had been so close to him, he knew that danger was just around the corner. It got worse as he neared the city gates, only to notice that there were a lot more guards present than normal. What was more, the gates were currently closing.

Thanks to the spell formations and warding spells in the city, flight was prohibited. If he wanted to avoid being trapped in the city, he would either need to negate the formations and spells, or get through the gate. He felt like he was being hemmed in from all sides. It took only an instant for him to realize what was going on.

*Someone ordered the gates closed. And the person who gave the order is probably connected to that other star that was close to me. It's someone with a permission medallion. Either that, or someone close to that person.*

*Regardless, it indicates that the person has a high standing and status in this city.*

*Furthermore, I can't sense this person, but they can sense me. Or rather, they can sense the medallion. It doesn't matter that I haven't activated the medallion, now that the second round has started. In that case, holding back from activating the medallion is putting me at a big disadvantage.*

These thoughts ran through Xu Qing's mind in a flash. It was without any further hesitation that he quickly pulled out the Immortal Capital permission medallion and pushed down on it. The moment he did, the medallion vibrated, then turned into a liquid that fused into the palm of his hand and entered his body.

An instant later, Xu Qing saw an image of a red aurora in his mind's eye. Within the aurora, he could see the very same image of stars that he had seen earlier in the sky!

That said, there were some differences. Earlier, there were very few instances in which the stars in the southern planetary region were overlapping. But now, quite a few of them were....

And many of them were moving. It was no stretch of the imagination to say that the ones that had overlapped represented different people trying to rob and kill each other.

What was more, Xu Qing could now see his own ranking. He was #1733. That wasn't his ranking in the Fifth Star Ring as a whole, but rather, his ranking in the southern region.

An instant later, the image vanished. Apparently, the only time you could see a full image of the entire region and all the stars was when you activated the permission medallion.

However, even after the image was gone, Xu Qing could tell that he had the ability to sense any other medallions within 50,000 kilometers of himself. It was a function of the medallions, not anything to do with cultivation base or divine will. The permission medallions were from the Immortal Capital, and they were extremely unique. Without absorbing one, you couldn't unlock any of its functions.

As of right now, Xu Qing could actually sense two different medallions! One of them was a good distance away, right at the edge of the 50,000-kilometer area. In fact, it seemed to be moving away from him, and disappeared only a moment later.

The other one was very close and getting closer. It was flying right toward him.

Instantly, his cultivation base erupted. The power of the five elements spread out in all directions, and he bolstered his speed, shooting toward the closing gate like an arrow released from a bow. His opponent was approaching aggressively and clearly wanted to fight. There would be no avoiding it.

Xu Qing didn't know what level of cultivation base he was dealing with, so he could only plan based on the worst-case scenario.

If he had to fight, then the choice of battlefield was going to be very important. If they fought inside the city, the formations and spells would be a detriment to Xu Qing. He would be trapped, and whether he focused on breaking free or fighting back, he would be in a passive position. But if he could break free of the city, then he would have a chance to seize the initiative.

He moved with astonishing speed thanks to how hard he had worked at coming to understand the dao of space, and the methods he had come up with to use it.

The space ahead of him shrank. The space behind him stretched out. Thanks to that effect, in the blink of an eye, he was outside the city gate. The guards couldn't react in time to block him. They felt a gust of wind, and he was past them.

Then he coldly stretched his hand behind him and pinched his fingers together.

The city magistrate and his attendants had just arrived on the scene. But thanks to the hindrance of Xu Qing's spatial manipulation magic, they were now much further behind. They had missed their best chance to intercept him.

When Xu Qing pinched his fingers together, the space around him rippled and then collapsed. A deafening boom shook everything. The space outside the city gate completely shattered in all directions, giving rise to a gale force wind. Everything was thrown into chaos.

Within that chaos, a cold snort echoed out. Next, a thunderous rumbling filled the sky, and black clouds appeared. Rain started to fall, turning into heavy sheets that soaked everything inside and outside the city gate.

Xu Qing was included. The moment he sensed the rain, his gaze hardened.

*This rain is the manifestation of the dao lineaments of authority! My opponent's authority... is rain....*

Even as Xu Qing sensed that, the surrounding rain transformed, becoming sharp blades that whistled toward him.

At the same time, the shattered space inside the city gate wasn't blocked by the rain. However, the city magistrate's attendants took advantage of the rain itself to disappear from sight. When they reappeared, they had passed through all the shattered space and had surrounded Xu Qing. Unleashing Smoldering God might, they coordinated with the rain attack to unleash fatal blows on Xu Qing.

*Puppets? Are they unliving dirt? Or are they made primarily from rainwater?*

Eyes flashing coldly, Xu Qing shot backward. At the same time, his gaze passed through the sheets of rain to lock onto the white-garbed figure inside the city. He wasn't launching any attacks, but rather, was just standing there looking coldly at Xu Qing.

*Xu Qing considered the situation. He's obviously a cautious person. He doesn't know how strong I really am, so even though he can tell I'm not an Imperial Sovereign, he still doesn't want to face me in person. He'd rather fight from a distance using his authority and his puppets. However, caution can be a strength and a weakness. If you're cautious at the wrong time, you can lose the initiative.*

Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing shot backward again, this time focusing, not on the puppets, but on the blades formed from rain. All of a sudden, an idea popped into his head.

*I have cultivator authority. And I have godly authority. Cultivator authority comes from natural and magical laws. Godly authority comes from something else. The two types of authority have similarities and differences. They're similar in that they both have an origin. They're different because they're used in different ways.*

*Natural and magical laws come when cultivators create heavenly daos. The heavenly daos produce the natural and magical laws. When cultivators gain enlightenment, they have authority. It's a cycle. The origin of godly authority is even more ancient, and not even I know the details.*

*Erasure. Immortal skills. Rain. Energy.... All of those things can become authorities. In that case, what about my extreme five elements? Are they... all types of authority? They do not originate with heavenly daos, though. Their origin is me.*

Xu Qing had been considering this question during the entire thirty vortex-days in which he traveled to this city.

Then he saw this rain turn into blades, and decided to forget about all of his other magical techniques. Instead, he unleashed his dao of extreme water.

Something unimaginable happened. The water blades shooting toward him suddenly stopped in midair. In fact, all of the falling rain around him suddenly came to a complete and utter halt. The puppets also ceased moving.

Then Xu Qing lifted his hand... and the blades turned around. The puppets spun in place. All of the rain water vibrated... and turned into blades that pointed back toward the city at the shocked city magistrate.

The city magistrate had been watching as the young man he was targeting was surrounded by the water of his authority. But now he was the one who was shocked.

Clearly, this person was a true lord of the rain.

## Chapter 1104: Source of Authority

### Chapter 1104: Source of Authority

Xu Qing and the city magistrate faced off, one of them inside the city, the other outside of it. The rainwater floated in midair, pulsing with aggressive killing intent.

The two figures standing in that rain formed a very strong contrast. One of them was extremely good-looking. Floating in the rain, his hair drifted around him, and his eyes shone with a strange light. One of them had gray hair and had dignified facial features, though they were marred by a grimace. The city gate was in between them.

The raindrops had become sharp blades, and with the flick of his wrist, Xu Qing had turned them all to point at the city magistrate on the other side of the city gate.

As of this moment, both of them were pulsing with killing intent. However, neither of them chose to launch an attack.

Xu Qing was merely observing the situation. This was his first time trying to control an opponent's dao lineaments of authority. He needed to see things play out more in order to confirm his theories.

The city magistrate was also observing the situation. He was observing Xu Qing, and he was observing the rain. The authority of rain was a manifestation of his dao lineaments. As a native of the Fifth Star Ring, it was a given that he had been a brave warrior long before becoming an Imperial Sovereign.

He had fought many duels and had killed many opponents. It had been very difficult to break through into the Imperial Sovereign level. And before he could stabilize himself, he ended up facing

a powerful enemy. During that fight, he was seriously injured and had to flee for his life. Because of that injury, he had been unable to make any further cultivation progress.

Feeling completely disheartened, he had ended up settling down in this remote location. It had taken a long time for him to make the decision to go all out.

Unfortunately, how could he ever have guessed that his first fight... would involve something like this?

After becoming an Imperial Sovereign, he hadn't been involved in many fights. Therefore, it was little surprise that he had never been in such a situation, in which he lost control of his own authority. That said, he had at least heard of things like this. Normally speaking, if someone lost control of their authority in a fight, it was because they were dealing with someone who had the same type of authority. If the opponent had a deeper understanding of the authority, they might be able to take control of it.

*Authority comes from the immortal dao that accompanies an immortal embryo.*

*Immortal daos are similar to heavenly daos. But they aren't corporeal. They're illusory and imperceptible. And they're the manifestation of the star ring power that normally belongs to the gods, but that cultivators can seize.*

*In any given star ring, there are special lineaments that belong to the gods. Those lineaments are what the gods can sense. They're godly authority. Cultivators have no way to control them. But in the process of forming an immortal embryo, they can naturally absorb them and make them part of one's essence. That's why it's not very likely that two people will have the same authority.*

As the city magistrate considered these things, he kept calm, and his eyes shone with a fierce light.

*Although I don't have experience dealing with this kind of thing... it doesn't mean I can't come out on top! After all, this guy is a mere Smoldering God, not an Imperial Sovereign! He might be a chosen, but even he has limits!*

After a long moment in which the two of them just looked at each other, the city magistrate was the first to make a move.

He lifted his right hand and hit himself hard on the chest. A thunderous thump rang out, and a tremor passed through him. Then blood exploded out of all the pores on his body. The blood immediately merged into the rain, causing the sheets of rain to turn into a rain of blood.

At the same time, his will became part of the blood rain, which bolstered his dao lineaments. That allowed him to seize control of the rain and try to drive out Xu Qing. Unfortunately, there was no way this would succeed.

Xu Qing's water of the five elements was far more special. It didn't matter that the city magistrate was bolstering the water with his own will. That was only enough to take back a bit of control over the authority.

An instant later, the city gate became the delineation between the rain controlled by Xu Qing and that controlled by the other cultivator. Inside the city gate, the blood rain spread, bringing with it

the odor of gore. Outside the city gate, the rain was sparkling and translucent; it was incomparably pure.

The two types of rain then exploded, each of them becoming sharp blades, rain puppets, and magical techniques. From a distance, it was like two magnificent armies full of thousands of men and horses, slamming into each other. Rumbling booms shook heaven and earth. Wild colors flashed in the dome of heaven. The lands shook. In the city, countless cultivators reeled. As for the city gate, the two astonishing forces slamming together there caused the gate to explode into ashes.

Xu Qing and his opponent were both struck by massive force. They both staggered backward.

However, the two of them had very different facial expressions. The city magistrate was scowling. Xu Qing, in contrast, seemed to be in good spirits.

The reason Xu Qing had not been the first to launch an attack was that he needed to get more information to confirm his theories. Just now, he had picked up on some important clues. He could now sense that his seven extreme daos did seem like they could lead to authority. That was what it seemed like from his perspective. Furthermore, during the clash of rain just now, he had sensed that his five elements water had emanated an instinctive longing.

*I can devour this guy's authority of rain to make my five elements water stronger!*

Xu Qing's eyes glittered brightly. He was also able to ascertain that this city magistrate was a lot weaker than the Imperial Sovereign he had fought in the spirit mine.

The spirit mine guardian he had fought had been very close to the mid Imperial Sovereign level. You could say he was a peak early Imperial Sovereign. As for this current opponent, he had an old injury that resulted in his battle prowess being sub-par.

*Either this guy just stepped into the Imperial Sovereign level not long ago, or this is the result of that old injury. In other words... I can kill him without using Grandpa Ninth's sword energy!*

Having reached this point in his train of thought, Xu Qing's killing intent surged, and he burst into motion toward the city magistrate.

Within him, his dao of the five elements erupted. Astonishingly, a host of supernatural phenomena appeared around him.

The ground churned as the power of earth went wild. It was almost as if some being were waking up under the surface of the ground, causing even mountains to shake as a result. Plants and trees everywhere swayed wildly, looking like demonic monsters. All vegetation was stimulated wildly as the power of wood surged. The city rumbled as the power of metal was influenced. Magical devices, magical treasures, and all other metal objects vibrated and shot up into the air.

From a distance, the scene that was playing out was unsurpassably shocking. The sky rippled as majestic heavenly fire appeared. Everything turned crimson as the aurora was obscured, and a seething sea of flames overtook everything.

Meanwhile, the air rippled and distorted as all cultivators, and all other living things for that matter... found the water emerging from their bodies, as if a huge ocean were being summoned into the world.

This was all very different from Xu Qing's fight with Ling Feng, in which he had used heavenly daos to do everything. This time, Xu Qing's thoughts and his dao lineaments of authority were being unleashed.

The city magistrate was struck with even more astonishment than when he had lost control of his authority earlier.

"Five types of authority?? That's impossible!" The city magistrate's mind was being battered by waves of shock, and he felt like he was being struck by millions upon millions of bolts of lightning. Based on what he knew, the only people who had five types of authority were those listed among the eight Shining Stars. Of even greater significance was the fact that he had never heard of any Smoldering God who had five types of authority. "Just who exactly are you?!"

Even as the words left the mouth of the city magistrate, Xu Qing closed in on him. Next, the sound of a massive explosion filled the area where the city gate had once stood.

Within the resulting chaos, it was hard to see anything clearly. Anyone without a sufficient cultivation base would lose their mind. And even those who could see what was happening, unless they surpassed a certain level, would only perceive an abstract picture. It was because they couldn't comprehend what was happening.

When one's perceptions couldn't comprehend something, the mind would be thrown into chaos, and it wouldn't be possible to form an actual image of what was happening. Because they couldn't see what was happening, the blurry distortions would form something abstract. After all, in addition to the five elements, there were also transformations to space, as well as time being manipulated.

It lasted for a very long moment. Then a beam of sword light flickered, and the shimmering abstract image returned to normal.

The city magistrate was there, blood oozing out of his mouth, his hair disheveled. A sword had been stabbed into the top of his head, and had pierced through his entire body. Blood dripped onto the ground.

Xu Qing hovered in midair looking at his opponent.

The city magistrate managed to look back up at him. From the look of it, he wanted to say something. But when he opened his mouth, it filled with blood, making it impossible for him to speak.

Xu Qing didn't really care what he wanted to say anyway. With the wave of his hand, he pulled out The Emperor's Sword.

A tremor passed through the city magistrate. The light in his eyes went out; his soul had been wiped out.

Then Xu Qing made a grasping gesture, causing his opponent's authority of rain to transform into crystalline water droplets that flew out and became part of Xu Qing's five elements. His five elements water swelled.

Xu Qing's aura now surpassed what it had been before the fight. Beyond all of that, he also acquired the city magistrate's ring of holding. In addition, Xu Qing realized that the range in which he could sense other permission medallions had increased by tenfold!

At the same time, a new ranking number appeared in his head. He was now #1145 in the southern region!

Silence reigned.

Xu Qing looked at the corpse below. He waved his hand, and the corpse crumbled into nothing. He also removed any signs that a battle had taken place.

*If I'd come up with this idea earlier, I might not have needed to use one of Grandpa Ninth's streams of sword energy to defeat that spirit mine guardian.*

After some thought, he decided that even with this enlightenment, he still might have been forced to use some of the sword energy. When fighting in unfamiliar territory and circumstances, if you had the chance to launch a fatal blow, you should always take it. Having decided that that was the best way to look at it, Xu Qing looked off into the distance.

*There's no point in sticking around here.*

He blurred into motion and disappeared.

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Up in the dome of heaven, the crimson aurora flowed.

Xu Qing was a streak of prismatic light that shot through the sky at top speed. He made sure to keep a close eye on his surroundings as he mentally reviewed how the fight had played out.

When all was said and done, the most important thing he had learned was that his five elements as authority could take control of the authority of his opponents. That was going to be a big help going forward. It not only confirmed his previous theorizing, but also gave him food for thought about the Imperial Sovereign level.

Previously, Xu Qing had been aware that in the cultivator system, the Void Returning level involved the process of gaining enlightenment of the natural and magical laws of heaven and earth.

The four sub-levels were all like that. It was in that manner that Void Returning cultivators could use the heavenly daos of the world they lived in to create and control the natural laws of their own major worlds. Xu Qing now understood that such control didn't provide an origin. It was only the ability to use authority.

Perhaps it was correct to say that by gaining enlightenment from the larger world, a cultivator could then create their own major world. Overall, it was like the process of working with a thread and needle.

The fact that Xu Qing had stepped from Void Returning right into Smoldering God put him in that category. One reason was that he had built up a sufficient stockpile beforehand. Another was that the essence of Netherflame's fleshly body was incomparably pure.

In combination with his success at gaining enlightenment of Deep Earth's Ten Extreme Daos, Xu Qing's stockpile and his original essence allowed him to break through into Smoldering God. That was how he had formed his seven worlds.

The term 'Smoldering God' was coined in Revered Ancient. In other locations, that level was actually called 'Smoldering Immortal.' The name was different, but the significance was the same. The 'god' referred to in 'Smoldering God' wasn't an actual god. Rather, it was a nascent divinity.[1]

Before leaving Revered Ancient, Xu Qing had already begun to explore the substructure of the Smoldering God level. He knew that the level was fundamentally about gaining sufficient enlightenment of natural and magical laws, then use that to form one's own major world.

Ultimately, one would form nine major worlds. Those nine worlds might be consistent with each other, or they might not. It depended on the cultivator's way of thinking, background, and decisions. Regardless, those worlds ultimately became nutrients that one could use to propel themselves into the Imperial Sovereign level.

Unfortunately, the path of the Imperial Sovereign had been severed on the Revered Ancient mainland. Only people with very special bloodlines could force their way through. Most of the time... it wasn't possible. One reason for the situation was that something had gone wrong with the heavenly daos created by the Summer Immortals years in the past. But in the final analysis, the biggest problem was the influence of the broken face of Eminent Desolation. The godly aura was too strong, making it very difficult for immortals to rise up.

After all... the Imperial Sovereign level was very special. It involved fusing one's nine major worlds to make an immortal embryo. Transforming from a cultivator into an immortal was a major watershed point. Once you formed an immortal embryo, you were a Quasi-Immortal, in other words, a Grand Emperor.

For example, Empress Summer Departure had the help of Swordsage, the bloodline of Dark War, and the blessing of humankind's destiny aura. Despite that, she could go no further than the Imperial Sovereign level. She had no way to become a Grand Emperor.

That was also why no Grand Emperors ever appeared in Revered Ancient after the broken face came.

As a result of that situation, the empress had been forced to switch her cultivation to the path of the gods. By means of a special ceremony, she ignited godfire, using the immortal embryo she had never fully formed as the fuel. Then, as the fire raged hotter and hotter, shē eventually reached the Altar God level. After that, shē could never become an immortal.

Before leaving Revered Ancient, Xu Qing went to the Summer Immortal Palace, where he had learned these things about Imperial Sovereigns, and the way of Quasi-Immortal Grand Emperors.

According to the records of the Summer Immortal Palace, authority had never appeared in Deep Earth before. It was only after cultivators went to Revered Ancient that it was seen.

The Summer Immortal Palace originally assumed it was the same as essence. But in reality, essence had appeared within Deep Earth cultivators long before that.

There were differences between the two, the most obvious being dao lineaments. What was more, the manner in which it first appeared was in the process of an Imperial Sovereign forming an immortal embryo by means of their immortal dao.

The so-called immortal dao existed in the void, above the level of the heavenly daos. It appeared as authority, and as dao lineaments.

The Summer Immortal Palace actually didn't understand why it appeared. That said, normally speaking, dao lineaments of authority only showed up in the Imperial Sovereign level. There were exceptions. For example, there were some chosen who could produce it in the Smoldering God level. That became the standard to define chosen cultivators before the arrival of the broken face.

As for Summer Immortals, in other words, the Lower Immortals... they were cultivators who formed an immortal embryo, nurtured it to the proper level, then broke through, causing the embryo to transform, and giving birth to a full-fledged immortal.

According to the records of the Summer Immortal Palace, the level of Summer Immortal was the limit for the Deep Earth star ring. In Deep Earth, that was known as the ninth step.

That said, there was a difference between Summer Immortal battle prowess in Deep Earth compared to Revered Ancient. In the Deep Earth star ring, Summer Immortals could encompass the entire star ring with a thought. Other than actually destroying the star ring, they could do anything they wished.

That wasn't the case in Revered Ancient. After a certain level of analysis, the Summer Immortal Palace came to understand why that was. They understood that Revered Ancient was located in the Ninth Star Ring. And they eventually realized that the Ninth Star Ring was part of a larger heavenly system that had a total of thirty-six star rings.

The Ninth Star Ring, which was also known as the Brilliant Heaven star ring, was only one of them. Based on what the Summer Immortal Palace understood, those thirty-six star rings existed on a high level. To some extent, they could be considered higher worlds.

As for Deep Earth, it was a lower-level star ring. In other words, it was a lower world. According to the Summer Immortal Palace, it wasn't possible that Deep Earth was the only lower world. Most likely there was a correspondence. In other words, there were also thirty-six lower star rings. In fact, maybe there were more. One thing was certain: above Deep Earth was Brilliant Heaven.

This was just a theory of the Summer Immortal Palace, and there was no way to confirm if it was true or not. That said, though it was just a theory, it did explain the situation with Summer Immortal battle prowess.

There would be a pressure difference between lower and higher worlds, which was why there would be a difference in battle prowess. It was like the difference between a major world and a minor world.

In minor worlds without much pressure, it would be easy for someone to *call the wind and summon the rain*. But they might not be able to do the same thing in a major world.

Fundamentally speaking, the Summer Immortal Palace's research indicated that the thirty-six higher star rings were the lands of the gods. The source of godly authority, the mysterious lineaments, created a massive pressure that weighed down on all of the thirty-six higher star rings.

It was the same for gods and cultivators alike.

That point didn't mean very much to Xu Qing. After all, he had never been to Deep Earth. Therefore, he had no idea what terrifying level his cultivation base would be like there. His entire life had been lived in a higher star ring.

*My five elements turned into authority, their uniqueness....*

His eyes narrowed as he rubbed his chest. At the moment, a violet crystal was there, glittering.

*What exactly is it...? Back when I gained enlightenment of the Ten Extreme Daos, I saw a design that included a crystal, broken into ten parts. But my crystal isn't broken at all. It's whole.*

1. As I've mentioned in previous contexts, the character I rendered as "god" both in Smoldering God and in the god cultivation system, can be rendered in other ways. For instance, it's the character from divine will, divine sense, nascent divinity, etc. I've been trying to render it 'god' when related to the god 'species' but in other ways depending on the context when it relates to non-god stuff. As is clear in this passage, even within the context of the world, its logical to assume that the 'Smoldering God' level is named after the 'god' species. It's only much, much later that we're finding out it's not actually related the gods at all. ❹

## Chapter 1105: The Darkness Was Like an Old Friend

### Chapter 1105: The Darkness Was Like an Old Friend

*In the south, my rank is #1145....*

Xu Qing was currently speeding through the sky underneath the aurora. His expression was one of pure vigilance. In no way had he relaxed after killing that city magistrate. In contrast, his guard was up more than ever.

Now that he had activated the permission medallion, which involved absorbing it into himself, he was officially part of the Immortal Capital's Trial of the Hunt.

He could already feel danger looming. And that was because the range at which he could sense other medallions had increased. One unique function of the Immortal Capital permission medallions was that they couldn't sense other medallions unless you activated them first. You could be literally standing right next to someone else with a medallion and your divine will wouldn't be able to detect their medallion.

The only way to sense other medallions was to activate and absorb your medallion. The medallions qualified you to join the competition, but at the same time, served a specific function.

Xu Qing had absorbed his medallion before killing the city magistrate, and at that time, the range of his own medallion was 50,000 kilometers. That meant that he would instantly sense any other medallions that were within that range.

He had previously assumed everyone else could do the exact same thing. However... after killing that city magistrate, who had also possessed a medallion, Xu Qing realized that, not only had his ranking climbed, but also, his medallion had changed. It was as if the medallion had upgraded from a basic state to a second, more advanced state.

The most obvious change was that the range in which he could sense other medallions had increased by tenfold. He could now sense anything within 500,000 kilometers.

That was the reason for his grave attitude.

*I only got one additional medallion, but my range increased by a huge amount. Logically speaking, I can expect the range to increase even more as I get more medallions. In that case, everyone else....*

Xu Qing's pupils constricted. This was not a good situation for him. The more people you killed, and the more medallions you accumulated, the greater the range of your own senses.

And of course, that meant that there were going to be people with clear advantages and clear disadvantages. The strong people would have the advantage. The weak people would have a disadvantage.

It was easy to imagine a scenario in which there were enemies who could sense him, but were too far away for he himself to sense. A situation like that could prove fatal in a hunting event like this.

The more medallions you got, the higher your rank would be, and the bigger advantage you would have. As time passed, and more people got an advantage, the range in which they could sense other medallions would become completely terrifying. It would eventually be impossible to flee from such people.

*No wonder my rank jumped up so much by just killing one other competitor. Now that the second round has begun, I bet similar things are happening throughout the south. So, this is the second round. No wonder this thing is called the Trial of the Hunt.*

By merely having the range of his permission medallion increased, Xu Qing was able to deduce how deadly and brutal this event was. And it just went to confirm further that the Immortal Capital was trying to raise venomous bugs in a jar. The Immortal Capital recruited people for the event because they weren't interested in greenhouse flowers. They wanted apex predators. They wanted true chosen who had climbed mountains of corpses and swam through seas of blood.

The details of how the medallion range worked might be somewhat unfair. But if you looked at it from a different angle, it was very fair. Everyone started out exactly the same. How far you proceeded would depend on your own skill and ability. Either you lived or you died.

Xu Qing licked his lips, and a cold light flickered in his eyes. Now that he thought about it, this system actually made things interesting. At the very least, it made him feel a lot of pressure.

This was not the Revered Ancient mainland. His Master was not here to save him. He couldn't get help from Empress Summer Departure. His Eldest Brother wasn't here to provide backup. Though he had the clay fox around, the Fifth Star Ring repelled gods, so the fox was dormant.

*I have to rely on myself and myself alone. I will have to face all the consequences of my decisions.*

His vigilance had reached the highest level possible. Narrowing his eyes, he cleared his thoughts and proceeded forward at top speed.

At the same time, he took some time to assess and organize everything he had acquired thanks to the fight from earlier.

For instance, there was the authority that came from the extreme five elements.

*In reality, my authority isn't limited to the five elements. I also have space and time. However, I need more insight and practice with the latter two. Then there's my authority of erasure, plus the dao lineament from Six Thieves Deceive Life.*

*If you tally everything precisely, I actually have nine types of authority. Going forward, I need to focus my cultivation on the five elements authority, while also contemplating space and time. Plus I need to work on producing my eighth extreme.*

In terms of other ways he had benefited from the fight, the augmentation to his medallion counted as the second.

As for the third... it was the ring of holding. Now that the primary owner was dead, the branding mark on the ring was gone. As Xu Qing scanned the ring with divine will, he was able to see the contents very clearly. It went without saying that anyone who could become an Imperial Sovereign in the Fifth Star Ring would have ample resources.

The spirit mine guardian he had killed had been stationed at that mine for a long time, and thus kept his possessions with him. As for this second individual Xu Qing had killed....

Anyone who had intentionally activated and absorbed a permission medallion would be fully aware of the bloodshed they were in for. Such people would either be extremely confident, or they were the type who had no choice other than to throw caution to the wind. As for the former, it would be difficult to predict what they would carry around with them. But the latter would definitely keep all their most valuable things with them at all times.

That was exactly the case with this ring of holding.

It contained masses of spirit stones and immortal jade. However, there was only one treasure inside. It was a geomantic compass that was in really bad shape. It had clearly been severely damaged and not yet repaired.

There were some medicinal pills, though. Obviously this city magistrate had focused a lot on stockpiling pills. There were many, many types.

When Xu Qing attacked he had used his authority to lock down space. Plus, the fight had been very fast-paced. Because of that, though the man had managed to take out a few pills and use them, none of them had played a significant role in the battle.

Xu Qing scanned the pills to identify them, then put the ring away and shot through the sky as fast as possible.

In that manner, time passed. Five vortex-days went by.

Perhaps because he was in such a remote place in the south, or perhaps because of the speed he maintained, he didn't run into any dangerous situations. In fact, he didn't encounter any people at all. The sense of impending danger he had felt earlier had eased a bit.

Eventually, as night was about to fall, and a new vortex was about to form in the aurora, he stopped on a remote mountain to quickly hew out a cave. Once inside, he settled down cross-legged.

Darkness fell outside, and it was pitch black inside the cave. There he sat in the darkness, surrounded by silence.

As he became part of the gloom, he hid his aura and worked on cultivation. He was seeking enlightenment of his dao, and probing his path forward.

Darkness came and went outside. Vortexes appeared one after another in the aurora. Seven vortex-days passed.

Xu Qing opened his eyes within the gloom of the cave. It was as quiet as ever. The darkness was like an old friend.

*It's like... back when I was a kid. [1]*

Xu Qing looked around and sighed softly. Truth be told, Xu Qing knew exactly what it was like to be completely alone and surrounded by danger. Back when he was young, he had lived every day with that feeling.

From the time he left Peerless City until he became an apprentice of Master Seventh, he had licked blood from his blade like an assassin, and had always preferred to stay out of sight. Back then, he would always walk in the shadows when possible. The shadows offered protection. When he was part of them, he became darkness and gloom, and he could stay hidden. It was the same now.[2]

Eventually, Sergeant Thunder became part of his life, giving him the familial love he had missed for so long. His Eldest Brother had brought brightness to his life. Master Seventh took him as an apprentice and protected him, helping him to understand what it meant to have an elder watching

out for you. Ling'er had helped him to feel relaxed inside. With Plumdark around, he had been stricken with feelings he couldn't identify, perhaps nervousness, perhaps something else.

In Sea-Sealing County, Palace Lord Kong taught him what it meant to be a swordsage. The empress showed him that even gods could have human nature. And Grand Emperor Swordsage showed him that it was possible for a person to live a life that would always be remembered.

That had all been part of the process of growing up for him. He had experienced many things and had truly lived life to the full. Those things were part of him. They couldn't be taken away. They had made him who he was now. After all those experiences, now here he was, in the unfamiliar Fifth Star Ring, all alone, surrounded by danger.

*This is just another of my experiences.*

He found himself subconsciously patting his clothing to try to find his iron skewer. It wasn't there.

Little Shadow seemed to sense his emotions, and sent out some fluctuations to remind him it was there. The god vine sent a little branch snaking out to caress his face. The trip through the Primeval Sea had severely damaged the pagoda, and the god vine as well. It hadn't fully recovered yet. The actions of the shadow and the vine brought a smile to Xu Qing's face. And with that, he closed his eyes and prepared to continue working on his cultivation.

But then his eyes snapped open, and he turned to look toward the south. His expression was one of complete vigilance. He had just sensed another medallion within the range of his senses, located roughly in the same direction he was looking.

At first, it had seemed that the person was just passing by. But then he sensed them change direction and start moving toward him.

*This person has the same range as me!*

Xu Qing's eyes glittered with cold light. Many thoughts were running through his head.

*I can't run. If I do, they'll realize I noticed them and have the same range. If I did that, I would be making a gamble. I'd be gambling on whether or not they chased me. And if they did chase me, it would mean that we would have to fight eventually.*

*Doing that... would be too passive! Instead, I'll pretend that I don't notice them. In the time it takes them to get here, I'll make preparations. That way, I can create the most ideal field of battle for myself. That's definitely the best option!*

Heart filling with determination, Xu Qing waved his hand to produce 49 Taboo Formations, which he had acquired from Ling Feng, the spirit mine guardian. He had already studied them a bit and knew how to use them.

In addition, he had Little Shadow spread out into the area and go into hiding.

Next, he made certain other preparations. He enhanced the power of the land, and made sure there was plenty of vegetation in the area. He also took out a stick of incense, put it in front of him, and lit it.

Finally, after making all of his preparations, he put the crystalline treasure tree in front of him and activated it so that its aura began to spread out. Before long, an exact copy of Xu Qing appeared in the crystalline treasure tree. Even its aura was exactly like his own.

“Sit down cross-legged,” Xu Qing said calmly. The figure nodded and sat down cross-legged.

Then Xu Qing sank down into the ground, making sure to stay fairly close to the figure in the tree. That way, anyone following the location of his medallion would come right to this spot, and his real aura would overlap with that of the figure in the tree. Having accomplished all those things, Xu Qing sat waiting, killing intent building in his eyes.

1. I'm not 100% sure what the author intended this line to mean, but it makes me think back to [chapter 1](#) and the subsequent couple chapters in which Xu Qing was living in a small cave, and he had to stay inside during the night to stay alive. 📖

2. Here are a couple early chapters that mentioned how Xu Qing liked to stick to the shadows: [chapter 10](#), [54](#), [56](#). There are more than that, of course, those are just the ones I pulled up first. 📖

## Chapter 1106: Shyster v. Shyster

### Chapter 1106: Shyster v. Shyster

About 450,000 kilometers away from Xu Qing in his cave, a young man in a bright yellow robe was flying through the sky underneath the crimson aurora. He was moving with such incredible speed that it wasn't possible to track him with the naked eye. He was clearly heading right toward Xu Qing.

His cultivation base was very close to the mid Imperial Sovereign level, but he contained all of his power so that it didn't go farther than 300 meters away from him. And as he sped along, his power built up to greater heights within that area. He had plain facial features, as well as a faint birthmark on the right side of his face, which gave him a bizarre and gruish appearance.

The crafty look in his eyes made it clear that he wasn't a simpleton.

*Not moving at all? How interesting... It's possible this guy didn't notice me. Maybe he just activated his permission medallion. Either that, or he's trying to be clever and has set up some kind of trap! Of course, the third possibility is that he's just really confident....*

As the young man considered the possibilities, he sped onward, not slowing down a bit.

*It doesn't matter. I'm not afraid of traps! And if it's the third possibility, well, I still have options to work with.*

The young man lifted his hand to produce a special dimensional ring of holding that he himself had crafted. It was one of a pair. He threw it down. Beneath him was a swamp. The ring fell down and immediately sank into the swamp.

His action seemed casual and even random. And he didn't waste any time doing it. An instant later, and he had sped past, leaving that location behind.

Normally speaking, a ring of holding would have a dimensional holding space inside, with the body of the ring serving as the gateway leading inside. And most of the time, there was only one gateway leading into a holding dimension.

But this young man had created two. That second gate was a secret that no one else knew about. In fact, anyone who had learned the secret had ended up being killed by him.

As the young man sped along, his killing intent grew stronger. Time itself seemed to sense the killing intent and the anxiety, and flew past. He got closer and closer to Xu Qing.

350,000 kilometers. 250,000. 150,000....

Soon he was 50,000 kilometers away!

At that point, the young man, who had already been going incredibly fast, suddenly accelerated. He had decided that, regardless of which possibility in his analysis was correct, he would proceed according to plan.

And that plan had been to get within 50,000 kilometers, which was the range of a newly-activated permission medallion. And at that point, he would move with such incredible speed that his opponent wouldn't have any chance to react.

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The sky above Xu Qing's cave trembled. Rumbling sounds echoed out, and blue light suddenly filled the area. It was so bright that it supplanted the light of the red aurora. And then a gigantic stone hammer appeared out of nowhere.

It was simple and unadorned, and pulsed with a great ancientness, as if it had been around for an extremely long time. The moment it appeared, there was no delay at all. It instantly smashed down onto the mountain. Heaven and earth shook violently as a blue shockwave rolled out in all directions, smashing everything it hit.

The hammer was not corporeal. When it smashed down, it actually passed through the mountain itself and into the cave, right toward the head of Xu Qing, who sat there looking up. It moved with shocking speed and came with devastating momentum.

In the time it takes a spark to fly off a piece of flint, and without giving Xu Qing the slightest chance to react, it smashed down.

And then, even as the hammer fell, the young man with the birthmark followed with terrifying speed. His killing intent roiled out with shocking ferocity.

At that moment of danger, Xu Qing's expression flickered, and he quickly performed a double-handed incantation gesture. Instantly, the surrounding spell formations activated.

Forty-nine taboo formations flared to life, as well as hundreds of thousands of other formations, creating innumerable threads of light that became a closed fist. It shot upward to meet the hammer. The impact shook everything in the area.

The mountain was incinerated into ash. The surrounding lands were instantly turned into rubble. Even the air rippled and distorted as spatial rifts were ripped open. The fist of hundreds of thousands of formations ultimately proved too weak, and it shattered.

However, thanks to the power of the taboo formations, and of the explosion itself, the hammer was blocked, and it even moved backward a bit.

Unfortunately, the force of the blow was still difficult for Xu Qing to deal with. His face was pale, and he was shaking from head to toe. Clearly, he was unable to deal with this level of attack, as he took advantage of the moment to flee.

Before he could, the young man behind the hammer looked over, and a dao lineament stirred in his eye as he waved a hand. In the blink of an eye, a massive wind kicked up! His authority was that of wind. A heavenly gale descended, becoming a huge tempest that whipped about everywhere, locking down the entire area.

Xu Qing's path of escape was blocked.

Within the tempest could be heard countless howling sounds, as if a magnificent army with thousands of men and horses were in it, charging right toward Xu Qing.

Up above, the young man with the birthmark seethed with killing intent as he shot in Xu Qing's direction.

Madness burned in Xu Qing's eyes now that he couldn't flee. Throwing caution to the wind, he waved his hand. The authority of erasure erupted, clashing with the authority of wind. Next, Xu Qing rose up into the air, performing incantation gestures one after another to release magical techniques and divine abilities. He and the young man instantly started fighting.

Booms rang out constantly.

Xu Qing seemed to be going completely mad. He appeared to be desperate, and was putting everything on the line, hardly even paying attention to his own safety as he tried to push his opponent backward. It took only a short moment for deafening booms to fill the air.

Unfortunately, there was a clear disparity. After only about ten breaths of time, Xu Qing shivered as the young man's palm clamped down onto the top of his head. Without giving Xu Qing any chance to do anything, and without even saying a word, the young man viciously clamped his hand down.

A pop rang out as Xu Qing's head exploded. The moment it happened, Xu Qing unhesitatingly self-detonated, blocking his opponent and sending his soul fleeing off into the distance.

Rumbling booms again echoed out. The power of the self-detonation created a terrifying vortex, and yet, the young man with the birthmark just laughed coldly. Astonishingly, the aura of another dao lineament surged within him, creating a sea of flames.

He had two types of authority. One was wind, the other was fire.

This young man fought in a completely different way than the spirit mine guardian or the man from the city earlier. He led with his authority and his trump cards. The sea of flames raged, completely devouring the vortex created by the self-detonation. It seemed it was only going to take a moment to resolve the entire situation. The fire merged with the wind, then swelled outward to block the path of Xu Qing's fleeing soul, then destroy it.

But then...!

Down underground, the real Xu Qing opened his eyes.

The figure from the crystalline treasure tree looked exactly like him, even down to the aura. It could even produce a soul. Although it was fake, it would be hard for anyone to notice the difference, especially in a short time. After getting his opponent to use his authority of fire, he created a big opening.

Xu Qing's eyes flashed with cold light. The authority of the five elements erupted. The lands that had been reduced to ashes churned, and the power of the lands converged. Land-shaking, mountain-rocking force surged. The soil became like a sea, whipped up by the wind to crush the young man's fire authority.

And then, Xu Qing's five elements flame appeared in the sky, spreading out like heavenly fire. Countless streams of water vapor formed, and within each one was an image of Xu Qing. The power of wood swirled as innumerable wooden sword sheaths filled the area. Inside of each sheath was the power of metal. Five elements authorities were on full display, deadly and terrifying.

But Xu Qing still wasn't content. Without any hesitation, he burned the life essence incense. Incense smoke swirled up, filling with the power to burn life.

As the five elements authority raged, Xu Qing decisively emerged from the ground. Moving with stone-shattering momentum, he hefted The Emperor's Sword and shot toward the young man with the birthmark. All of this takes some time to describe, but happened in the twinkling of an eye.

Xu Qing sent out a thought to Little Shadow, who sent pure darkness spreading out, all while taking control of all the shadows cast by the aurora. This was the deadly trap Xu Qing had laid.

The young man with the birthmark reacted with visible shock. Falling back, he sent his authorities of wind and fire out, all while calling on some of his magical treasures. He also used some divine abilities to try to escape.

Clearly, he was too slow. Though he had deduced that this whole thing could be a trap, he didn't realize that the projection from the crystalline treasure tree was fake. And that had determined how everything turned out.

The five elements were raging; the land bolstered the body, the sea of flames eradicated magic, the shine of metal hastened the soul; the power of wood ended life; water vapor was deadly! The shadow entrapped. One sword destroyed.

A boom rang out far and wide. The young man exploded, becoming a cloud of gore plus a ring of holding.

The fight was over.

Little Shadow seemed extremely excited and sent out a lot of emotional fluctuations. It then rushed over to grab up the chunks of flesh and the ring and bring them to Xu Qing.

Except... Xu Qing's face had turned grim. With the wave of his hand, he stopped Little Shadow from reaching the chunks of flesh and the ring.

Little Shadow was stunned.

Xu Qing's eyes were glittering coldly, the reason being that he had not sensed his opponent's authority rushing toward him, nor had he detected any change to his permission medallion. His opponent wasn't actually dead!

His senses were telling him that the other medallion was so close it was almost overlapping with him. Because of that, he wasn't able to assess his opponent very accurately. To do so, he would have to go some distance away.

As that thought ran through his head, he suddenly waved his hand. All of a sudden, ripples flowed as the surroundings became a surface of water.

Heaven and earth became a well. It was none other than Fishing the Moon in the Well.

Xu Qing had acted with incredible decisiveness to use Fishing the Moon in the Well on the surroundings. His decisive reaction brought results.

The instant he used the technique, reflections appeared! On the surface of the water it was now possible to see the magical techniques and authorities that Xu Qing had used moments ago.

They were the reflections Xu Qing had selected. In addition, in the location where the ring of holding and the chunks of flesh were, it was possible to see the reflections of the various magical techniques, as well as the authorities of wind and fire. It was even possible to see the items in the ring of holding's dimension.

That was when Xu Qing saw something very unusual! The ring of holding had two gateways!

What was more, he was astonished to find that there was a shadowy figure stuck up against the wall of the ring of holding's dimensional space. Or had it been stuck there by someone...?

As Xu Qing studied it, he realized there was only one word that could properly describe it. It was *glued* to the wall!

The shadowy figure looked like it was glued on the wall of the dimensional space, in a clever way that would make it almost impossible to ever see. Moments before, it had been moving.

Because Fishing the Moon in the Well caused all things to go still, it was being affected. However, because it had the power of an Imperial Sovereign, it wasn't rendered completely motionless, and was still moving very slowly.

The scene caused Xu Qing's gaze to harden. It only took a moment to deduce that he was looking at his opponent's true form! What he had killed was only a clone! His opponent had not noticed that the projection from the crystalline treasure tree was fake. But Xu Qing had also failed to realize that he wasn't fighting his opponent's true form. Both of them had used similar methods to try to deceive the other.

As for the enemy's true form, it was very close by, and was thus able to use the overlapping effects of the permission medallions to hide. Beyond that, he had glued himself to the wall of the ring of holding's dimensional space, making it even more difficult to detect him. Because of that method, he was almost part of the wall within the ring. To some extent, he was in between the illusory and the corporeal. An outside force would have a hard time affecting him.

Xu Qing had no idea how he was able to do this. But right now wasn't the time to sit around contemplating it. Without any hesitation, he once again unleashed the previous magical techniques within the confines of Fishing the Moon in the Well.

"I don't care if you *are* hiding. I can still hurt you in your hiding place!"

Fishing the Moon in the Well was fundamentally a spatial manipulation magic. Maybe he was glued to the wall. Maybe he was really part of it. But the power of Fishing the Moon in the Well could still affect him!

Xu Qing's magical techniques and authorities erupted within Fishing the Moon in the Well. This time, his target was that shadowy figure! In the blink of an eye, everything exploded.

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Over 450,000 kilometers away in the swamp, the other ring of holding the young man had thrown down suddenly flashed. A figure appeared within it. It was the same young man with the birthmark. This time, his face was very pale. After emerging, he coughed up a massive mouthful of blood, then looked back in Xu Qing's direction. His expression was very serious.

He had the authorities of wind and fire. Two authorities made him chosen, but he wasn't satisfied with that. Unfortunately, his aptitude made it impossible for him to form a third type of authority.

Therefore, he had found a new way. Using a unique item with a rare spatial function, plus the power of his flame authority to temper it, he added some immortal serum. The serum would remain inside until he needed it. Then he could use his wind authority to scatter the immortal serum.

As a result, the serum would harden a bit and turn into something like a glue.

After developing this technique, he would use it in dangerous fights. He could take his true form and glue it onto the wall of the dimensional space in his ring of holding. As a result, he actually became part of the dimension. It was a great concealment method. And oftentimes, an opponent

would think they had killed him, then pick up his ring of holding afterward, only for him to jump out and surprise them. It had always worked.

Unfortunately, in the Immortal Capital's Trial of the Hunt, anyone who died would have their permission medallion absorbed by the person who killed them. That created a bit of a flaw in his technique.

*The damned rules of the Trial of the Hunt messed everything up. However, it's surprising that this guy figured out everything so fast, and thus prevented me from launching my sneak attack. He's no one to take lightly. And he even figured out a way to injure my true form. And then there's his authority....*

The young man's eyes narrowed.

*The fact that he laid such a careful trap shows that he's clever. And his authority makes it clear he has aptitude. He acts decisively as well. All of that indicates... that this guy is an uncharacteristically extraordinary chosen! I bet he was hiding his true cultivation base level.*

Heart pounding with lingering fear, he decided to just leave. It wasn't worth it to get involved in a life-or-death struggle with a person like this in the second round. Besides, having been injured, he wasn't in top shape now. He needed to find a place to treat his injuries.

*I need to make sure he's not following me....*

The young man sighed and turned to leave. However, that was when his expression flickered and he took out a messaging device. After looking at it, his eyes flashed.

After some thought, he sent a response. "I just ran into a guy that matches that description. He could be the one you want."

## Chapter 1107: Sticky Rain Seals Heaven and Earth

### Chapter 1107: Sticky Rain Seals Heaven and Earth

Meanwhile, back where the battle had been fought, the lands were devastated. The mountain had been destroyed, and everything else in the area had been flattened. The fluctuations of lingering magical techniques rolled out everywhere.

Xu Qing hovered in midair, his expression fierce as he looked off into the distance.

*Wind and fire. This guy's authorities are....*

*This is my first time in the Fifth Star Ring encountering someone with two authorities. This guy is obviously a chosen cultivator. That's especially true considering his crafty techniques. He's obviously a clever, formidable opponent!*

When Xu Qing thought about how his opponent had hidden himself by pasting his true form to the wall of his dimensional space, Xu Qing had to admit that it was impressive.

*I wonder how exactly he pulled that off. Maybe he was using a treasure with spatial abilities.... If it weren't for the functionality of the permission medallion, I might not have realized what was going on, at least not at first.*

Xu Qing's guard went up further. He had believed himself to be acting very cautiously, only to realize that he had been careless.

*Next time I kill an enemy and take their holding item, I need to pay closer attention.*

Mind racing, he collected the incense and the tree. The incense had gone out when the clone died, but there was still more left that could be used. As for the tree, it had sustained some damage when self-detonating, and Xu Qing wasn't sure how to fix it.

*I can probably get it to self-detonate one more time.*

After collecting the 49 Taboo Formations beast hide and the other items, he prepared to leave.

It didn't seem likely that the person he had just fought would flee only to return shortly after. This fellow was obviously smart. Considering the second round of the Trial of the Hunt had just begun, it didn't seem like a good move to target an opponent who you knew wasn't weak. Now was the time to conserve strength and avoid getting badly hurt. The only exceptions would be a situation in which fleeing wasn't possible, or you had a grudge to settle.

Xu Qing was thinking that if he were in this person's shoes, he definitely wouldn't try to keep on fighting. However, just as he was about to burst into motion, he stopped in place. A look of surprise appeared on his face.

"He's coming back?"

He had just noticed the blip of a star appear within the range of his permission medallion, about 500,000 kilometers away. Contrary to what Xu Qing had assumed, this person wasn't leaving. Instead, he was moving at top speed toward Xu Qing.

Xu Qing frowned slightly. Something about the situation seemed unusual. Only a moment later, though, his eyes flashed with cold light, and killing intent rose in his heart.

*Since he's coming back, then this fight... should be fought to the end!*

Xu Qing burst into motion, not toward his incoming opponent, but rather, in the opposite direction. The formations he had set up in the area had all been used. This was not the ideal location for a fight.

Therefore, Xu Qing shot through the air toward a towering peak covered in vegetation. It was so high, its summit was surrounded by clouds.

Xu Qing landed on the top of the mountain and stood there waiting. It seemed strange for his opponent to do this, and therefore, Xu Qing wasn't going to do anything impulsive. He also didn't want to fall into any traps.

And the best way to avoid fighting on his opponent's terms was to pick a location that he knew his opponent hadn't been to. This mountain provided a clear view of the surroundings, and the misty surroundings would make a great place to fight.

Xu Qing didn't waste any time. He waved his hand to send out his five elements authorities. Fire went into the sky. Water went into the clouds. Earth went into the mountain itself. Metal went into his own body. Wood filled the surrounding vegetation.

This time, Xu Qing didn't have to wait for long.

The young man with the birthmark could tell what Xu Qing was doing, and he took advantage of even teleportations to approach as quickly as possible. With terrifying speed, he crossed over 500,000 kilometers, and since Xu Qing wasn't moving, it took only a moment... for him to appear on the horizon.

As the aurora sent crimson light shining down, the sound of a thunderstorm rumbled.

Next, Xu Qing saw that, in addition to the red from the aurora, there were five other colors!

Black. Green. Yellow. Blue. Violet! The five colors came from five enormous flags, each of them several hundred meters long. They spread through the sky, and as they passed along, they gathered all other colors and cut them off. Those five colors became everything.

A majestic might erupted from within them, which focused primarily on the power of the five elements!

After the fight earlier, Xu Qing had learned a lot about his opponent. But the opposite was true. His opponent had learned about him. Therefore, the first thing he was trying to do was lock down Xu Qing's five elements.

The moment Xu Qing spotted the five-colored flags, a five-colored light swept out, and the flags were right at the top of the mountain. Five colors erupted, scattering the five elements power and covering the summit of the mountain. From a distance, it looked like a five-colored tempest. Deafening booms rumbled out everywhere.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing's eyes flashed with killing intent as he waved his hand, unleashing the five elements preparations he had made. Water flowed from the clouds. Wood erupted from the vegetation. Fire fell from the sky. Earth exploded from the mountain. As Xu Qing's killing will spread, the five elements reacted accordingly.

These five-colored flags were extraordinary, and the five-colored tempest could disrupt the five elements power in the area. However... they couldn't touch the five elements that belonged to Xu Qing. That was because Xu Qing's five elements came from his five yin organs, and did not come from the natural and magical laws of the surrounding world.

An instant later, the rumbling sounds grew even louder. Xu Qing's five elements authorities fought against the five-colored tempest, and they clearly had the upper hand. The five colors began to fade; clearly, it wouldn't take very long for Xu Qing to crush them.

But this time, Xu Qing was up against an extraordinary opponent.

After summoning the five-colored tempest, the young man didn't close in and start fighting close-quarters. He stayed on the edge of the battlefield, a cold smile on his face. He waved his finger, all while reciting a dao chant under his breath.

"Heaven serves as the world. Air serves as the backdrop. Five colors add embellishment. All magics in one image!"

As he waved his finger, the five flags that were struggling against Xu Qing's five elements authorities suddenly shivered. And then, all of them... exploded.

A five-colored self-detonation ripped out in all directions. As a result, the five colors mixed with each other! From a distance, it looked like the five-colored light became a physical substance, as if it was paint that mixed together and then scattered in the air.

It turned into... a five-colored canvas! And Xu Qing was right in the middle of the canvas.

As for the painter, it was the wind! The wind was also performing a sealing!

That sealing had been concealed within the five colors, and as soon as it erupted, it locked down the five elements.

"I'll help you to understand that although the five elements are formidable, the wind is stronger! When the great wind strikes up, it scatters earth, dissipates water, withers wood, grinds metal, and puts out fire! Seal, seal, seal, seal, seal!"

The young man's hands flashed in five double-handed incantation gestures, after each of which he waved his finger. The five-colored paint became more chaotic, and as the colors mixed, with Xu Qing in the middle, they formed a sealing mark. It was a sealing mark, not just focused on withering and grinding away, but on isolation.

It isolated Xu Qing's five yin organs, and thus isolated Xu Qing's five elements. For the first time in the fight, Xu Qing looked surprised.

*This guy's authority... has been developed to a very high level. Except, I used the dao of space earlier. There's no way he doesn't realize that what he's doing is basically pointless, right?*

Xu Qing waved his hand thoughtfully.

Yet again, Fishing the Moon in the Well appeared. Everything was reflected within the water. But this time, what Xu Qing planned to fish out of the water wasn't his opponent, but himself.

As the magic of Fishing the Moon in the Well erupted, Xu Qing fished out the five-colored sealing mark. Now he was outside of the canvas, outside of the five colors, and outside of the mountain!

The moment he appeared, the canopy of heaven rumbled. Blue light spread out as a massive hammer appeared and viciously swung down toward Xu Qing.

The Emperor's Sword appeared in his hand. The lands quaked. The mountain shattered. Earth power surged.

The first sword move was Earth Treasury. It slashed the hammer. Heaven and earth distorted. The air blurred. A deafening sound rang out.

The earth-powered sword shot up, and the hammer vibrated. Cracks spread out all over it, and then it was sent spinning off to the side. At the same time, the backlash caused Earth Treasury to dissipate, turning once more into earth energy that dissipated.

Xu Qing burst into motion toward the young man with the birthmark.

When the young man saw that both of his tactics had been vanquished by Xu Qing, his pupils constricted. Now more than ever he was convinced that his previous supposition had been correct.

Shooting backward with eyes narrowed, he waved a hand to throw something out in front of him. It looked like a ball of clay, and it seemed to contain some sort of spatial power. As it flew through the air, it left behind ripples in its wake.

Then, the young man exercised a thought, and authority erupted in the space between himself and Xu Qing.

It started with the authority of fire, which landed on the item streaking through the air. That item was obviously sensitive to fire, as it immediately started to melt, all while emanating an explosive power.

A boom rang out, and then something like rainwater started falling from the sky. However, this rain was sticky.

As it fell, the young man's second type of authority was unleashed.

A great wind blew. As the wind blew on the sticky rain, it started to dry and solidify, turning into... glue! In all directions, everything that the rain touched began to harden. It was another type of sealing. Using the glue he had created, he was sealing heaven and earth.

All of a sudden, Xu Qing understood how his opponent had pasted himself onto the wall of his spatial dimension. Just as he had guessed, his opponent was using a special item.

However, there was something else that he hadn't thought of. And that was how his opponent was using the item.

*He's combining two types of authority with that object to create the effect of a third type of authority! This guy is really a genius!*

Xu Qing took a deep breath as this thought occurred to him. This fight... was proving to be deeply meaningful to him. It was giving him a lot of inspiration.

*If I added that to my five elements, there would be even more variations possible!*

That said, now wasn't the time to think deeply about the subject. What was more, everything that had happened in this fight up to this point had revealed a very important thing.

*He doesn't want to fight me directly! And he doesn't want to get hurt. He's hoping to hem me in and seal me! Everything he's been doing falls in line with that strategy. And to achieve that end, he's even gone so far as to reveal some of his secrets....*

*This points to one thing. He's trying to buy time!*

This realization caused a sensation of intense danger to rise up in Xu Qing.

*He has someone helping him, and they're on the way. And they're much stronger than him!*

Xu Qing's eyes glittered with cold light.

*If things keep going as they are, it's going to be hard to end this fight. In that case... I can't hold back my sword energy. I need to end this fight right away!*

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Meanwhile, a good distance away from the battlefield, someone was shooting through the sky at top speed, even using teleportation magics in the process. This person had a terrifying aura. He was the very same red-haired young man who had appeared not too long ago at the spirit mine. He had the cultivation base fluctuations of a late Imperial Sovereign.

*You destroyed my clan's spirit mine and killed the guardian. Your actions made me lose that fight. And you even stole the Immortal Capital permission medallion that Ling Feng had prepared as a gift for me! I'm very curious to see how you got the outrageous gall to do things like that!*

## Chapter 1108: Abandoning Skin

### Chapter 1108: Abandoning Skin

In the Fifth Star Ring, near the border separating the south and the west, the crimson aurora shone above as sticky rain fell in all directions. A great wind blew, removing even more moisture from the rain, turning it into a glue that had immense sealing power. In fact, in some areas on the fringe, it had turned into a solid gel.

Not even the air could escape the effects. It was as if the space in this entire area was being solidified by the glue. It was astonishingly mighty and terrifyingly deadly.

Xu Qing was right in the middle of it all. He was covered in the sticky rain, which formed fluidic strands connecting him to the land, the air, and everything else in the area. It was completely stuck even to his skin.

Everything was rapidly turning into a thick gel, and the effects were only speeding up. If he couldn't free himself soon, and the wind dried everything up, he would be like an object encased in amber. Escape would be completely impossible.

But Xu Qing didn't seem anxious. He had a way to deal with this glue magic. Because of that, he was focused on analyzing, not the fighting, but rather, factors beyond the field of battle, including the inner state of the young man that was his opponent. Although such things might seem like they weren't relevant to the actual fighting, the reality was that they were key to everything.

Normally speaking, this person shouldn't be going for broke this early in the Trial of the Hunt. After all, the second round had just started, and fighting like this right now wouldn't be worth it. If you ended up seriously injured, then you would be in great danger. Later on, there would surely be even more dangerous situations to deal with.

What was more, Xu Qing only had a total of two medallions, which wouldn't be worth the effort this young man was putting forth. Given this person's battle prowess, there had to be other targets that would be easier to deal with. Risking one's life in such a silly way wasn't something an intelligent person would do.

*There's definitely something fishy going on.*

With such thoughts going through his head, Xu Qing looked at the distant horizon. Everything seemed to be confirming his speculations. A feeling of determination grew within him. As the wind blew and the glue hardened, the sealing effects were locking down everything in the area.

*I can't worry too much about the details. Even if I get injured in the process, I need to end this fight quickly.*

Eyes flashing with a mysterious light, he exercised a thought, and the blood in his body suddenly started racing much more quickly through him. A tremor passed through him as he shockingly forced all of his blood out through his pores.

It poured out without cease, turning into a blood mist that surrounded him. The blood spread, providing moisture to heaven and earth.

This was a technique he had picked up from the city magistrate he killed earlier. He drew out his own blood, infused it with his will, and sent it out to slow down the hardening effect caused by the wind.

As a result, the moisture the rain had lost was returned. At the same time, the sticky rain turned crimson. What was more, the wind couldn't blow as freely.

This magic that turned rain into glue was definitely unusual, and shockingly mighty, but it had a weakness. Specifically, the stickiness could only be unleashed when the wind dried it out.

The young man was obviously aware of that weakness, which was why he rarely used this technique in direct attacks. Normally speaking, he would unleash it from a hiding spot to catch someone off guard, and then swoop in to kill them before they recovered. What was more, he wasn't using it right now in the hopes of killing his opponent. He was just trying to buy time.

When he realized that Xu Qing had already identified the weakness of the technique, the young man scowled. That said, he wasn't very surprised. He had realized much earlier that this enemy was very intelligent and reacted quickly. He was definitely a formidable opponent. He hadn't really intended for his glue magic to simply seal this person.

Though he regretted that his opponent reacted so quickly, he didn't hesitate to fall back and simultaneously performed a double-handed incantation gesture. Without a second thought, he drew deeply on his cultivation base to bolster his wind authority to try to counter what Xu Qing was doing.

One was using the wind to dry things out, the other was adding the moisture back. As long as one could identify the most salient aspect of the situation, it was possible to force a state of balance....

Though the young man hadn't completely succeeded at sealing the area, he had at least slowed down his opponent and bought some time.

Besides, the glue covering his opponent, though it had been prevented from hardening by the moisture in the blood mist, was still sticky. The limitations it enforced were continuing.

The young man's reactions went to show how skilled and talented he was. He was really top-notch. After all, it was completely proper to say that his strategy was working exactly as intended.

What was more, his technique also accounted for Xu Qing's Fishing the Moon in the Well, although he had bypassed that necessity by starting out with his five-colored painting, which drained Xu Qing's spatial magic. He was fully aware that spatial magics like those used by Xu Qing could most likely be used multiple times in a row. And either way, draining his opponent was the best thing to do. Using his glue on everything in the area, even the space, would also do a lot to prevent his opponent from using his spatial magics.

*If he finds another weakness, then I don't think I can keep fighting. Besides, I already sent the location information to the relevant party. If he takes too long to get here, that's not my fault.*

With such thoughts on his mind, the young man bolstered the wind again, all while sending out his authority of fire. Simultaneously, he backed up and started getting ready with his next move.

Unfortunately... something happened then that was not only incredibly shocking, but also, was something he hadn't predicted. The countless strands of glue connected to Xu Qing suddenly started whipping back and forth and emanating a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering sword energy.

That sword energy... came from The Emperor's Sword. The energy wasn't severing the strands of glue. Thanks to the young man continuously bolstering his own magic, The Emperor's Sword actually couldn't do that.

Instead, the might of the sword was building up inside of Xu Qing.

He was severing... his own skin!

In the blink of an eye, the incisive power of The Emperor's Sword savagely sliced back and forth within his own skin. It was separating his own muscles from his skin!

A blinding sword nimbus erupted around him. In the blink of an eye, Xu Qing's body was seemingly split into two parts. A gaping wound opened up, starting at the top of his head, slicing down through his face, chest, and the rest of his body....

His skin was being opened like a garment. Astonishingly, a skinless figure made only of bloody flesh shot out into the open. It moved at top speed. Before any of the strands of glue could latch onto it, it took advantage of its freedom to unleash a spatial manipulation magic.

An instant later, Xu Qing had teleported away.

The young man with the birthmark watched this happen, and his pupils constricted rapidly, and his heart started pounding with alarm. He had encountered vicious people before, but never before had he seen this level of ferocity. This person abandoned his own skin to escape!

The young man shot back at top speed, an intense sensation of deadly crisis filling him. He knew that his opponent definitely wasn't paying this extremely heavy price just to make an escape. Sadly for him, his realization, and his fast retreat, were both too slow.

The moment Xu Qing was free, he unleashed his dao of space. A grid appeared, spreading out in layers and turning into a sealing power that crushed down onto the young man. An ancient sundial also manifested behind Xu Qing, its gnomon spinning as his dao of time appeared. This was the power to freeze time!

He used space to cut off the path of retreat. He used time to subdue the timescape.

As a result, the young man lurched to a halt in midair. His body stopped moving. His soul stopped moving. Space was locked down. Time was frozen.

And then... the sword energy came out.

This was the second of the five streams of sword energy that Grandpa Ninth had given to Xu Qing. When it exploded out, wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. Winds screamed.

Sword energy slashed toward the young man. This young man was an extraordinary opponent. It was a moment of crisis, and despite the fact that both space and time had been locked down, he still was able to react. An aura of self-detonation suddenly built up around him. He was going to use the might of self-detonation to shake space and time, and hopefully free himself.

Xu Qing's spatial grid trembled. Cracks spread out across it. The sundial behind him shook violently and also started to crack.

It was about to explode.

After all... this opponent was very close to being a mid Imperial Sovereign, and had developed his authorities almost to their limit.

At that critical moment, Xu Qing's eyes flashed with cold light. Despite the spatial vibrations and the cracks spreading out on the sundial, Xu Qing just focused on unleashing the sword energy. Sword energy swept forth. Light filled heaven and earth, and a thunderous rumbling drifted out.

Then, there was a bang... as the sword energy landed on the young man's forehead, pierced into his body, and destroyed everything it touched! He was killed in body and soul! All of this takes a bit of time to describe, but actually happened in the time it takes a spark to fly off a piece of flint.

In the blink of an eye, the range of Xu Qing's permission medallion was increased, reaching a level of 5,000,000.

However, he had no time to study what was within range, as he suddenly coughed up a huge mouthful of blood. His flesh was completely mangled; the injuries he had suffered were not insignificant.

What had been difficult about this fight wasn't the actual fighting techniques, but rather, ending it quickly. Despite his use of both space and time, his opponent had very nearly slipped free. It was easy to imagine what would have happened if he didn't have the level of control he did over space and time. Even his sudden use of that sword energy might not have been successful.

And if he had failed, then after his opponent got free, it was entirely possible he would have started fighting again.

Xu Qing took a deep breath. Right now, he didn't have time to focus on healing up. He quickly took stock of the battlefield, all while suppressing the pain he felt from losing his skin, as well as the backlash from using his space and time abilities. He burst into motion.

*This fight shouldn't have been so desperate.*

As he sped along, Xu Qing thought regretfully about how things had played out. If his opponent hadn't been acting so suspiciously, Xu Qing wouldn't have been forced to pay this price to win. After all, he had needed to use his second stream of sword energy to gain a quick victory. Now he only had three such streams left.

*Grandpa Ninth's sword energy has limits. It can kill an early Imperial Sovereign. But it won't work so well against someone in the mid Imperial Sovereign level....*

In order to speed up his recovery, Xu Qing focused on stimulating the violet crystal, all while consuming large amounts of medicinal pills. He worked on recovery all while speeding along at top speed and keeping his senses spread out in all directions. At the same time, he thought about everything that had happened so far in the Fifth Star Ring.

The Fifth Star Ring was a unified place! In that respect, it was very different from the Ninth Star Ring, which was where the Revered Ancient mainland was located.

Based on the map Xu Qing had seen in the Devilbird holy land, Xu Qing knew that there were different factions in the Ninth Star Ring, all of them arrayed around the broken face.

In contrast, the Fifth Star Ring was united. The gods there had been conquered and outlawed. All species were able to practice cultivation. Everyone followed the lead of the cultivators. And there were many powerful experts.

Xu Qing was currently in a remote location near the spot where the south met the west. Yet he had already run into multiple Imperial Sovereigns. That alone went to show how impressive the Fifth Star Ring was.

As far as Xu Qing was concerned, this posed both a challenge and a destined opportunity. It offered both extreme danger and good fortune. Since arriving in the Fifth Star Ring, he had experienced multiple fights with very powerful experts. Each of them brought Xu Qing new enlightenment and understanding. It helped him learn more about the Imperial Sovereign level, and also brought him deeper insights into his own daos.

During his fight with Ling Feng, the guardian of the spirit mine, he came to understand the strengths and weaknesses of his own daos. He had learned about the scale of his cultivation base, and also reminded him that his limits were often set by his own imagination. The grandeur of the five elements was variable and boundless.

Next he fought that city magistrate, which further confirmed what he had learned in the previous battle, and also enabled him to realize that his personal daos could be turned into authority.

And then there was his fight today with this young man. Because of this fight, Xu Qing saw what it was possible to do by developing authority to a higher level. The results could be truly majestic. In the hands of this opponent, wind authority alone was enough to shake all of his five elements. What was more, two authorities could be combined and augmented with an outside object to create an effect like that of a third authority.

There was no way Xu Qing couldn't feel shaken by all that. Normally speaking, he would have been happy for that fight to go on for longer. It would definitely have provided further tempering and insights. Unfortunately... the way his opponent was acting indicated that danger was on the way.

About an hour later, Xu Qing's intuition was proved correct.

By means of the Immortal Capital permission medallion, he saw a flickering star appear within the range of his senses, some 5,000,000 kilometers away. This particular star was far brighter than any of the others he had seen up to this point. The moment he saw it, his heart filled with an unprecedented sensation of deep crisis.

What was more, this person had obviously locked onto his location, and was speeding toward him rapidly.

## Chapter 1109: Ferry Pilot

### Chapter 1109: Ferry Pilot

Xu Qing felt a sharp, prickling sensation on his back, and it was growing stronger by the moment. His pupils constricted, and he was breathing heavily as the sensation of crisis grew explosively within him.

Back when he activated the permission medallion, he had briefly glimpsed all of the other medallion-holders in the southern region. They looked like densely packed stars. Though they

differed in brightness, he had been able to glance over all of them. But the star he was seeing right now looked different than all the others. Though it was a mere symbol, it filled his heart with dread. And despite being so far away, it was so bright that it seemed blinding.

*This person... is extremely strong, with a cultivation base that isn't even in mid Imperial Sovereign. This person is probably a late Imperial Sovereign! The guy I just killed was waiting for this person to show up!*

Given all the conclusions he had reached up to this point, Xu Qing felt lingering trepidation. It was easy to imagine what would have happened if he hadn't ended that fight so decisively by injuring himself and killing the young man with the birthmark....

For one thing, the range of his medallion wouldn't have allowed him to detect this person 5,000,000 kilometers away. And if he had been wrapped up in the fighting, that person would eventually have shown up, and he would have been dead. He wouldn't even have had a chance to flee.

Right now, he was still badly wounded, but at the very least... he wasn't in a passive position. And he had options. Taking in a deep breath, he unhesitatingly started moving at top speed.

He did everything in his power, even using teleportations, to move in the opposite direction as that blinding star.

Given his current battle prowess, he could kill early Imperial Sovereigns. And with Grandpa Ninth's sword energy, he could even kill an early Imperial Sovereign in a short moment, though it would result in suffering injuries.

But he wasn't sure if this stream of sword energy would be enough for him to defeat a mid Imperial Sovereign. And there was little need to mention a terrifying late Imperial Sovereign. Besides, given his injuries, he wasn't in the position to be fighting.

Unfortunately, even though Xu Qing was moving fast, his pursuer was faster. What was more, it was entirely possible that this person's medallion range surpassed 5,000,000 kilometers. His opponent would be able to detect all of Xu Qing's movements. And Xu Qing could tell that this person was moving like a meteor. The distance between them was closing.

A feeling of crisis filled every square inch of Xu Qing's flesh and blood. Even his soul and his will were filled with a tempest of danger. His blood. His bones. All parts of him were like independent entities screaming at him that he was in danger.

*I acted decisively. But in retrospect, I can see that I waited too long.*

Xu Qing struggled to control his breathing and forced himself into a state of calm. He knew that moments of life or death weren't times to get flustered.

*Given my current speed, he'll catch up to me in half an incense stick of time.... With my authority boosted, I could drag the fight out for the time it takes an incense stick to burn, but no more. An incense stick's worth of time....*

Xu Qing summoned a mental image of the map he had bought, and quickly focused on one spot.

*The God Blood River! The ferry pilots! The first time you cross the river, it costs six days of longevity. And you're guaranteed safety!*

Without a fragment of hesitation, Xu Qing shifted directions and shot toward the river.

At the same time, his skinless hands flashed in a double-handed incantation gesture, and he coughed up a huge mouthful of blood. A cloud of blood appeared around him, it burst into flames. This blood-burning magic was something Xu Qing had learned from Erniu, and it could significantly increase one's speed. The downside was that you ended up badly wounded.

Given the danger of the situation, though, Xu Qing didn't hesitate to use it. In the blink of an eye, he accelerated, vanishing from the spot he had occupied almost as if he had teleported away.

When he reappeared, he was 500,000 kilometers away. Unfortunately... although he was technically in the border region between the west and south, when you considered the entire southern region as a whole, he was still quite a distance away from the God Blood River.

Without any hesitation, he coughed up more blood to make another blood mist. He shot away yet again.

He did the same thing about ten times in a row. In that manner, he traveled more than 5,000,000 kilometers, the result being that his injuries worsened and he was incredibly weak. The upside was that he had managed to keep about 4,000,000 kilometers between himself and his pursuer. To low-level cultivators, that was a distance that would take a long time to cover. But to powerful experts, it was almost nothing.

He used the blood-burning technique several times, then called on his five elements magics, primarily water and fire, using their opposite nature to unleash explosive speed. Then he waved his hand, and the earth churned like the sea, causing huge sections of soil to rise up like walls blocking the sky.

In the blink of an eye, there were hundreds of thousands of such walls of earth. It was profoundly astonishing!

Next came wind!

Xu Qing didn't have the authority of wind. But his fight with the young man plus the pressure created by the current crisis led him to a sudden understanding. The fundamental properties of wood were similar to that of wind. Both were flexible and had many transformations.[1]

And thus... the power of wood raged and swirled. This was... wood transformed into wind!

Thanks to that, Xu Qing's speed was bolstered again. As he reached the limits of his fleshly body, heaven and earth rumbled with an astonishing sonic boom.

Yet Xu Qing wasn't satisfied. Unfortunately, it was obvious that his pursuer had realized what he was doing, and was trying to speed up. As of now, the distance between the two of them was about 2,500,000 kilometers.

Xu Qing could sense the baleful aura behind him, stinging his back. It was like a sun behind him, burning anything and everything. He felt great pressure because of his weakness. Eyes bloodshot, he used some spatial magic. An overlapping grid appeared in the sky. By using that magic, he achieved even more terrifying levels of speed. As he surpassed the limits of his fleshly body, cracks started spreading out over him.

Xu Qing didn't care. Rumbling sounds echoed out as he once again moved 250,000 kilometers in something like a teleportation. Time magic surrounded him, locking down the passage of time around him. By doing that, he managed to keep his fleshly body whole and intact.

Behind him, the power of fire that Xu Qing had buried in the walls of soil suddenly exploded. They turned into an obstructing force. Though the results were only partially effective, the tiny bit of time it bought was precious to Xu Qing. When every second counts, nothing can be held back.

As Xu Qing pushed himself to his limits and beyond, he shot forward with astonishing speed until he finally caught a glimpse of a boundless river of blood on the horizon.

It was such a mighty river it could span heaven itself. It was actually bigger than a sea. The smell of blood spread out strong in all directions.

Around the time Xu Qing spotted the river, he became so weak that he couldn't even see clearly. But he still managed to spot a location on the shore where a black ferry boat rested! It looked like an ordinary little boat, and there was a person seated next to it. The person wore a woven rush raincoat and a wide, conical hat. He had a pipe in his hand, which was currently sending smoke curling up into the air.

Xu Qing had no idea what the ferry pilots and their boats looked like. The information in the map hadn't provided a detailed description. All he knew was that there was only one spot along the river where you could board a ferry boat. He had no time to sit around wondering if this was really a ferry pilot. As soon as he saw the boat, he used the last bit of blood-burning magic he had to shoot forward. An instant later, he was right above the boat.[2]

At the exact same time, the sensation of danger within him reached an explosive level. A terrifying force swept through the sky, and a figure radiating endless fire appeared off in the distance, racing toward him.

He was leveling a fist strike right at Xu Qing.

The Grand Emperor shield appeared. The Grand Emperor shears glittered. There was no need to hold back Grandpa Ninth's sword energy. Xu Qing also drew... The Emperor's Sword.

He went all out to fight back.

The might of a late Imperial Sovereign raged. A huge crack snaked out across the Grand Emperor shield, and it was sent spinning off to the side. The Grand Emperor shears suffered a similar fate. The fist strike slammed into them and they exploded. Grandpa Ninth's sword energy was fierce, but even combined with the shield and the shears, all it could do was slightly weaken the fist strike.

In the end, Xu Qing had to block the blow with The Emperor's Sword. Rumbling echoed out as Xu Qing shook from head to toe. Massive amounts of flesh and blood were shredded off his body. But in the end, he survived, and used the momentum created by the blow to land on the boat.

The boat vibrated as Xu Qing lay there, gasping for breath, looking like his life force was about to run out. Yet he still kept his hand firmly on the hilt of The Emperor's Sword.

The figure up above didn't stop for a moment. Approaching, he reached out with his hand... to try to grab Xu Qing.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed, and he prepared to swallow an object that he had in his mouth.

And yet, just as that hand was about to latch onto him, the ferry pilot in the rush raincoat and conical hat tapped his pipe onto the deck of the boat.

No sound could be heard. But the figure in the air shivered and retracted his hand as he was sent tumbling backward. Some distance away, he came to a stop in midair and resolved into the image of a red-haired young man. Looking fearfully at the ferry pilot, he clasped hands and bowed.

"Senior, I haven't broken any rules. Although that person landed on your ferry boat, he hasn't paid the fare. According to the rules... since he hasn't paid the fare, he isn't a passenger, and I can kill him!"

"Like hell you can!" the ferry pilot snapped.

His words slammed into the red-haired young man like apocalyptic thunder. The young man staggered backward, shaking, blood pouring out of his mouth.

"This is my boat," the ferry pilot continued in a growl, "so I decide what happens!" He slowly looked up at Xu Qing. His gaze seemed casual as he looked at The Emperor's Sword, then at Xu Qing. "Pay up!"

Xu Qing nodded and sent out some of his longevity.

The ferry pilot seemed satisfied. He took some of the longevity, then stood and stretched. An oar appeared out of nowhere, and he put it into the river of blood. Ripples spread out over the surface of the river as the boat slipped away from the shore.

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The red-haired young man remained in place, his expression grim. He stared at the boat for a long time, his eyes flashing coldly as he considered whether or not he should wait for another ferry pilot to continue the chase in the west. In the end, he didn't think it was worth it.

*For one thing, it would waste one of my chances to use the ferry. What's more, my clan is in the south. If I went to the west, I'd have to lose a whole sixty-year-cycle to get back.... That guy is pretty badly injured. In fact, he's almost dead. It'll be hard for him to recover.*

After weighing matters over, the young man turned and left.

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Out on the river of blood, the ferry pilot looked at Xu Qing lying there.

“That thing in your mouth could heal you if you swallowed it,” he said. “But you held back, you little punk. It was all to make him think you’re not worth chasing. You put a lot of thought into all of this.”

Xu Qing quickly got to his feet and bowed respectfully. “Many thanks for your assistance, Senior.”

“Shut up. I don’t like talking. Especially to people who stink of gods.” The ferry pilot’s gaze lingered on Xu Qing’s empty shoulder for a moment. Without another word, he continued smoking his pipe.

Xu Qing bowed again, went to the stern of the boat, and sat down cross-legged to focus on recovery.

1. The five elements have all sorts of connections to just about everything. When talking about the “environment/climate” associates, wood and wind are connected. You can see that in these [five elements charts](#), and you can find similar information on the Wikipedia page for the five elements.

☞

2. I made an executive decision to add the line about “only one spot” where you could board a ferry boat. This is explicitly spelled out by the author, but not for another 80 chapters or something. There is no special reason for this tidbit to have been left out. It seems like the author just forgot to mention it in this chapter and brought it up later, or possibly he noticed reader comments and provided the explanation later. For me personally, I just couldn’t stop wondering how the heck Xu Qing could randomly just find a ferry boat. Well, he didn’t. So now you know. ☞

## Chapter 1110: The Boundless Path of Immortality

### Chapter 1110: The Boundless Path of Immortality

The wind blew across the majestic river, causing waves to roll across the god blood. The black boat floated across it. The boat wasn’t moving very fast, yet neither the wind nor the waves did anything to impede its progress. When the boat came, the waves calmed.

The blood rain that fell on the river ceased. It seemed as if this ferry boat was a paramount treasure on this river, and the ferry pilot who operated it apparently had limitless control over the river itself.

And yet, compared to the massive world it was in, this river... was nothing more than a prison for the ferry pilot. After all, there were many ferry pilots, and they came and went depending on when they were convicted and when their sentences ended. It made sense considering that all of them had been convicted of major crimes in the Immortal Capital, and had been sent to this place as a punishment.

That said, taking into consideration the Fifth Star Ring as a whole, there were few people who actually thought of them as being prisoners. No clan would dare to do so, nor would any sect.... Gradually, the ferry boats with their unique fare and offer of safety had become a lifeline to cultivators, and precious protection in key moments.

Xu Qing was the perfect example.

He sat at the stern of the boat, and within his mouth was the flower petal that Grandma Fifth had given him in the Moonrite Region just before he left Revered Ancient. That flower petal could restore him to perfect health, regardless of any injuries he had suffered. He could only use it once, as it was made from the precious life force power of Grandma Fifth herself. It was truly a blessing from her.[1]

Xu Qing didn't want to use it unless it was completely and utterly necessary.

*The Fifth Star Ring is full of danger everywhere.... Given the state of my cultivation base and battle prowess, I need to be very, very careful.*

He sat quietly in meditation, relying on the violet crystal to heal himself and slowly grow the skin back over his currently blood-slick flesh. The skin was not really a big deal considering his injuries as a whole. In fact, it only took about a day before he went from looking completely terrifying back to how he had looked before. At the very least, he didn't look so bedraggled.

Unfortunately, burning so much of his blood had weakened him severely. The final blow he had sustained from that red-haired young man had inflicted a dao injury, and that wasn't something that would heal in a short time.

*It'll probably take about a month....*

Back in the Revered Ancient mainland, taking a month to recover would be a bit dangerous, but Xu Qing would have had plenty of ways to stay safe. But in the unfamiliar Fifth Star Ring, which was full of powerful experts, it was impossible to say how many dangers he might have to deal with in that time.

Therefore, he wanted to take advantage of every moment of his six days on this boat to recover as much as possible. After all, he had paid the fare of six days of life force. Soon enough, he wouldn't have any true moments of safety at all.

Time passed. Three days went by.

During that time, the ferry pilot would occasionally dip the oar into the water to adjust the course of the boat. Other than that, he just sat at the front of the boat smoking his pipe. He never spoke. Occasionally, he would look up into the sky. It was impossible to determine what he was looking at. The aurora? Something inside the aurora? Or perhaps... he was looking at the void beyond the aurora?

Eventually, another little vortex appeared in the aurora, which was the fourth since Xu Qing boarded. The fourth vortex-day had arrived.

The ferry pilot exhaled a mouthful of smoke, looked away from the sky, and peered into the blood of the river.

“What’s your name, boy?” he asked suddenly.

Xu Qing opened his mouth and was about to say that his name was Sir Firedark.

“Don’t give me a fake name,” the ferry pilot said coolly.

Xu Qing hesitated briefly. “Senior, my name is Xu Qing.”

The ferry pilot closed his eyes and said nothing further.

Xu Qing remembered what the ferry pilot said about how he didn’t like talking. So Xu Qing didn’t say anything further. After all, this ferry pilot was probably the most powerful expert he had ever seen. According to the information provided by the map, if this man was a convict from the Immortal Capital, he was most likely a Lower Immortal.

A Lower Immortal was sitting right here in front of him.... It wouldn’t be possible to guess that just from looking at him.... But the fact that he had noticed the clay fox, who was currently dormant, was very telling.

Even as Xu Qing pondered these things, the ferry pilot opened his eyes again and looked up into the sky.

“Where are you from?” he asked.

Xu Qing was surprised, though he tried not to let it show on his face. Keeping calm, he respectfully went into a story based on some places he had learned about from the map.

The ferry pilot listened, and at the end of the story, he grunted a laugh. However, he didn’t pry further into Xu Qing’s past. Instead, he looked Xu Qing up and down as if to assess him.

“You’re a seven-world Smoldering God. You have lots of authority, including that of space and time. Very unusual. You have plenty of unique techniques too. Because of all that, it’s going to be hard to form your eighth and ninth worlds.”

Xu Qing bowed his head. It was really no surprise that someone like this could easily assess all of his daoist magics. He said nothing.

“Considering you have lineaments for your space and time magics,” the ferry pilot continued, “it’s safe to assume you have a plan for your eighth world. So even though the eighth and ninth will be hard, I suppose you just need enough time to work with. Well, do you know what an Imperial Sovereign *really* is?”

Xu Qing’s heart was beating a bit faster now, as this turn of conversation was a bit of a surprise. It sounded like the ferry pilot was planning to give him some advice.... Xu Qing could guess why this was happening, but had no way to confirm his speculations. And though he wasn’t sure of the details, it was an opportunity he couldn’t just let slip by.

Taking a deep breath, he clasped hands and bowed. “I hope you can clear up my confusion, Senior.”

“The Imperial Sovereign level is after Smoldering God,” the ferry pilot said calmly. “That’s when you form an immortal embryo. That process involves an accompanying immortal dao. Immortal daos are superior to heavenly daos, and they manifest as authority, and by extension, dao lineaments. I suppose you know all of that already.”

Xu Qing listened intently, then nodded in the affirmative.

“But some things in the Fifth Star Ring,” the ferry pilot continued, “are only revealed to cultivators by their clan or sect, after they reach the required level.” He looked at Xu Qing. “What do you think the real point of the Imperial Sovereign level is?”

“The immortal embryo?” he said.

The ferry pilot nodded. “The immortal embryo is also called the *undying illusory reality*. The illusory represents your soul. The reality represents your fleshly body. And the Imperial Sovereign level is about the process of replacing and merging.”

It was Xu Qing’s first time hearing such things, and he was listening very intently.

“Based on how the process works,” the ferry pilot went on, “the Imperial Sovereign level is divided into the sub-levels of early, mid, and late. The early level involves releasing your soul externally, and using it to form a fleshly body. That is the illusory reality. During that time, the Imperial Sovereign cultivator can be considered strong, but is also weak.

“They’re strong because the external illusion is gradually made real. They come to understand authority, and can control all manner of things. Those abilities eventually reach an inconceivable level. The weakness comes from the fact that reality is concealed by illusion. Therefore, if something can harm reality, they can be killed easily. For example, that stream of sword energy you used serves the function of exterminating reality.

“It’s a formidable stream of sword energy. Though it couldn’t quite kill an undying mid Imperial Sovereign, I can tell that the person who gave it to you is very impressive.”

At this point, the ferry pilot paused for a moment to give Xu Qing time to digest everything up to this point.

Xu Qing was understandably shaken. He had been able to tell before that Grandpa Ninth’s sword energy wouldn’t work very well on a mid Imperial Sovereign, but only now was he getting concrete details from the ferry pilot about why that was. As he thought back to the Imperial Sovereigns he had killed so far, he realized that everything made sense. It was only his previous lack of understanding that prevented him from understanding exactly what was going on.

A short time later, the ferry pilot puffed his pipe again and then continued speaking. “After succeeding with the illusory reality, you can start proceeding through the mid level. That second level involves taking the fleshly body, which was concealed in illusion, and turning it into a soul. That is what is called undying. Imperial Sovereigns of that level can instantly shift between reality and illusion. To some extent, a person like that has no weaknesses, and can be called undying.

“As for the third level, the late level, that requires a dao lineament of authority. The dao lineament is like a thread weaved through the body, taking the illusory, reality, and undying aspects and combining them. Pluck down a star, make it one, and then form the immortal embryo! Success makes you a Quasi-Immortal, also known as a Grand Emperor.”

With this information combined with what he already knew, Xu Qing now felt like he had a clear understanding of the Imperial Sovereign level.

Having an opportunity to get instruction like this was a rare thing, so Xu Qing couldn't help but ask, “Senior, after the Quasi-Immortal Grand Emperor is the Summer Immortal, right? How do you get to that level?”

The ferry pilot glanced at Xu Qing's Emperor's Sword for a moment before saying, “The Quasi-Immortal level is the same as the gods' Altar God level. The unique thing about that level is *canon*!

“Canon is the sublimation of dao lineaments of authority. It is power, and will, and essence. It is a continuation of the power of command an immortal developed in life up to that point. As for Lower Immortals....”

The ferry pilot exhaled a stream of pipe smoke. The smoke plus the wide hat made his face almost impossible to see. Yet his voice continued to echo out softly over the river of blood.

“That is the peak for lower star rings. Any such individual can be considered without flaw. Omnipotent. But in the higher star rings where canon reigns supreme, there is further room for growth.”

Xu Qing took a deep breath. Heart pounding, he clasped his hands and bowed again. “Senior, what's after the Lower Immortal level...?”

The ferry pilot didn't answer for a long time. When he spoke, his voice was hoarse. “After the Lower Immortals are the Immortal Lords! They who are lords to all other immortals!”

This made Xu Qing think back to something his Eldest Brother had said once. He said he refused to believe that there was no path going beyond Lower Immortal. He said that maybe there were things like Immortal Lords and Immortal Paragons....[2]

*I bet Eldest Brother knew the truth even back then.*

The ferry pilot was still talking. “Such levels are very difficult to reach. Some people even call them impossible. In all of the Fifth Star Ring, after all the countless years that have passed, there have only been eleven Immortal Lords. They reside in the eleven immortal palaces in the Immortal Capital, and they are all sources of canon.”

The ferry pilot chuckled. “Since we're talking about this, I might as well tell you about the level after Immortal Lord. It's Immortal Paragon, and there is only one such individual!

“The Immortal Paragon rules the star ring, and is equivalent to a God Paragon. And the Immortal Paragon in the Fifth Star Ring is actually the only one in all of the thirty-six higher star rings. Before becoming a paragon, he was known as the Fifth Forefather of Humanity.”[3]

1. Xu Qing got the flower petal in chapter 1088. ❸

2. Erniu speculated about higher levels in chapter 901. ❸

3. There were also Forefathers mentioned in chapters 940 and 950. I'm not saying they're the same. Well, the Chinese characters are the same, but that doesn't necessarily mean they are literally referring to beings of the same cultivation level. After all, Plumdark has a title with 'immortal' in it, but she's not an immortal. Neither am I saying the Forefathers in the past chapter *aren't* the same type as mentioned here. Make up your own mind.... ❸