

Beyond the Timescape

Chapter 1191: Things Are Different in the East

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The third round of the Immortal Capital's Trial of the Hunt was about killing and plunder. There was no set time limit. On some occasions in the past, the third round lasted for a long time, while in other cases it ended quickly.

The reason was that the end of the round was determined by a number. Of the 10,000 Immortal Capital permission medallions that were given out, when only 1,000 remained... a one-month countdown would begin. At the end of the month, the Trial of the Hunt was over.

In terms of the ranking list, it was publicly displayed at all the major orthodox organizations in the Fifth Star Ring. In other words, it was visible to participants and non-participants alike.

As of now... there were 1,000 people with permission medallions. The countdown had begun.

As it did, the rankings became public, and the Fifth Star Ring was shaken. That list contained the combined results of all of the four major planetary systems, and if there were no unexpected changes, it was likely to be the final ranking list.

The most important thing about the list was the top 100. Going back through many Trials of the Hunt, everyone in the top 100 ended up going to the Immortal Capital. Exceptions were exceedingly rare. The top 10 were considered the chosen ones, and they were always the elites of the current generation in the star ring.

After scanning the top 100, just about everyone would focus on the top 10!

To the surprise of everyone, there were only three of the Shining Stars in the top 10. The others... weren't even on the list! By now, it was no secret why this was the case.

Whether it was the big event in the north or the news from the south, just about everyone had heard about Xu Qing! Other people just tried to snatch whatever permission medallions they could. But he was hunting the Shining Stars.

Jiang Fan had lost to him. Yuanshan Su had chosen to bend the knee. Hordeslayer and Rampart had ultimately given him their medallions. With their light added to his, the star that represented Xu Qing was glittering more brightly than ever. When those Shining Stars were eliminated, they

dropped from their high spots on the list, and cultivators that few people had heard of replaced them. But eventually, a familiar name popped into the top 5.

Li Mengtu took 5th place! As the lone Shining Star from the west, he had always been on an upward trajectory.

Above him was Sir Vilespirit, who was in 4th. There was no consensus on whether it was a good or bad thing for him to have such a high rank. At the very least, people agreed that he had earned his place there.

In 3rd place was Xu Qing! Opinions about him were mixed. Although he had collected some medallions from other Shining Stars, there were others on the list who had many more medallions than he did. Everyone was still trying to take advantage of every moment to rise in the rankings. That was why Xu Qing wasn't in 1st place.

Above him was Zhou Zhengli, who was in 2nd! People weren't sure what to think about Zhou Zhengli. He had always maintained an image of being kind, charitable, righteous, and strict. But he didn't have a very impressive presence. For the most part, he always came up in the context of Sir Vilespirit, as if he was predestined to oppose him.

As for 1st place... it was occupied by a name that the vast majority of cultivators in the Fifth Star Ring had never heard of.

Chen Batian! It was a rather inelegant name, so it went without saying that people were taken aback to see it in 1st place.[1]

Because few people were familiar with this person, more people were talking about him than about Xu Qing and how he was hunting Shining Stars. Unfortunately, there was hardly any reliable information about him. Everything was rumor.

Some people claimed he hailed from the eastern planetary system. Others said he had an extreme personality, and that he was both ruthless and lascivious. There were people who said that he had ranked very low in the first and second rounds, and had suddenly risen to the top in the third, for unknown reasons. Yet others claimed that he was bloodthirsty, and had killed every opponent he ever fought. But in the end, those were all just rumors. As a result, the mystery surrounding him grew deeper.

Meanwhile, after the ranking list went public, there was something else that led to widespread astonishment.

Sir Star Ring wasn't on the list! He was the number one chosen in the Fifth Star Ring, yet he wasn't in the top 10. In fact, he wasn't even in the top 100. He wasn't there at all! A lot of people had speculations.

However, it wasn't until a Quasi-Immortal finally emerged from the fifth world of the Aurora Immortal Palace that an explanation was provided. The fight between Xu Qing and Sir Star Ring in the fifth world was like a breeze that had long since passed. But now, that breeze returned and became a tempest that raged near and far. At that point, everybody started talking about Xu Qing.

As rumors raged, Xu Qing left the north. By the use of several long-distance teleportation portals, he reached the eastern planetary system on the seventh day of the countdown. There were now only 735 permission medallions left.

He went directly to Mount Taia.[2]

Expression placid, he stepped onto the mountain. Mount Taia was the ninth of the most prominent mountains in the eastern planetary system. It towered majestically into the clouds, its surface pitch black, making it look like a dark blade stabbing up into the sky.

If you looked at it closely, you would see a network of red filaments running through the mountain, almost like blood vessels. According to legend, this mountain... was actually a horn! Supposedly, it was the horn of God Emperor Starhorn, who had served as one of the nine generals of the Fifth Star Ring's God Paragon! That particular god emperor's godhood was related to stars, and he was known as the number one God Lord serving under the God Paragon. Of course, very few people knew whether or not that legend was true.[3]

At the moment, someone was seated cross-legged at the very peak of Mount Taia. He was a young man clad in black. There was a grave and stern look to him, as well as some sort of wretched energy. He seemed to exude killing intent. Stabbed into the ground in front of him was a broken sword. His aura was so interconnected with the sword that it was impossible to distinguish between the two of them.

He was none other than Sir Vilespirit. All of a sudden, his eyes opened, and he looked at Xu Qing approaching him.

Xu Qing's expression was neutral as he took a step forward, placing him about a tenth of the way up the mountain. He stopped walking.

Sitting on a boulder just ahead of him was a small white bottle. The bottle was open, and it exuded an aura that seemed like that of an immortal, but wasn't. It also seemed like that of a god, yet wasn't. Swirling within it was some sort of liquid.

When Xu Qing looked at it, the illusory reality emanating from his soul rippled. Obviously, the contents of the bottle were something that could be very beneficial to an immortal embryo.

"Ringsource..." Xu Qing murmured.

Ringsource was the most fundamental power in the thirty-six higher star rings. It formed the origin of gods and the structure of the star rings. Whether it was the godly authority of the gods, or the cultivator authority of the cultivators, substructurally speaking, they all came from ringsource. It was the same with both godhood and canon. It was something higher star rings literally could not be without. When cultivators formed an immortal embryo and then upgraded it to become a mature immortal, they absolutely had to use ringsource!

When all was said and done, if a cultivator was working on converting an immortal embryo into a mature immortal, it was necessary to acquire ringsource, even if it was by stealing it! This bottle could help Xu Qing take his immortal embryo a step further. Although he couldn't reach the undying level yet, it would still be immensely helpful.

“Well, isn’t this interesting.” Xu Qing waved his hand and collected the bottle. Looking up at the peak of the mountain, he took a second step forward and vanished. When he reappeared... he was in the middle of the mountain.

There on a boulder in front of him was a green bottle. Inside it was a fist-sized clump of crimson clay. It was called god clay, and it was one of the tools Fifth Star Ring cultivators would use to control gods. By molding it into the shape of a god, you could control that god. It went without saying that it was astonishingly valuable.

Xu Qing took it and then stepped forward a third time. When his foot fell, he was near the top of the mountain. Lying in front of him was what appeared to be the stalk of a plant. However, it glittered with faint starlight. Xu Qing was familiar with this type of plant.

“Star ring hemp!” Xu Qing’s eyes narrowed. Star ring hemp grew in the far reaches of the outer sea in various star rings, and it was exceedingly rare. If you burned it, you could open a passageway between star rings. Star ring hemp was how Xu Qing had originally come to the Fifth Star Ring.[4]

It was smaller than the piece he had used in the past, but it was still extremely valuable. After a long moment, Xu Qing picked up the hemp and took a fourth step forward. When he appeared again, he was at the very top of the mountain, right in front of Sir Vilespirit!

Sir Vilespirit reached out, grabbed his broken sword, and yanked it out of the ground. The entire mountain trembled. Countless red filaments then flowed up the mountain and converged at the peak. It was as if they were being absorbed by the broken sword. Eventually, the sword was pure red. And then, that redness converged on the tip of the sword, where it emerged... as a drop of blood!

The moment that blood appeared, the sky trembled, the winds seethed, and rumbling as loud as heavenly thunder echoed out. Everything in the area rippled and distorted. The rest of the red filaments on the mountain quickly turned dark, and eventually disappeared, as if their last power had been drained away. That drop of blood on the sword became the only color in all heaven and earth!

When Xu Qing looked at the blood, he heard the sound of heavy breathing in his mind. It was Starfire, who seemed very excited.

“That’s the blood of a God Lord! And it’s a God Lord with godly authority similar to mine!! Xu Qing, I must have that drop of blood! If I absorb it, then I’ll not only be able to reach the Altar God level very quickly, but it would make it vastly more possible for me to eventually become a True God!”

Just as Starfire seemed to be on the verge of speaking out loud, Sir Vilespirit waved his hand. The drop of blood flew off the broken sword toward Xu Qing.

“Fellow Daoist Xu, you helped me a lot in the fourth world. The three gifts you took on your way up the mountain are repayment for that. As for this drop of God Lord blood... I broke my promise regarding the fox madam, and am offering this as compensation.”[5]

With that, Sir Vilespirit got to his feet and bowed to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing didn’t respond.

Sir Vilespirit turned and flew off the mountain. The broken sword followed. Once in the air, he bowed again, then became a bright streak of light that shot off into the distance.

Xu Qing watched him go and did nothing to stop him. The four gifts were given in thanks and compensation. But Xu Qing knew that they were also the price Sir Vilespirit was willing to pay to keep his Immortal Capital permission medallion.

“I can’t take all these gifts and then demand the medallion,” Xu Qing murmured, shaking his head. However, he didn’t leave. Instead, he looked at the horizon in the opposite direction. “Isn’t that right, Zhou Zhengli?”

As his words echoed out, ripples flowed over the horizon as Zhou Zhengli appeared. He happened to be carrying an unconscious, burly man. The man was criss-crossed with bloody wounds, and pulsed with an aura of death. He almost seemed like a puppet and not a person.

Zhou Zhengli neared, landed on the mountain in front of Xu Qing, and then tossed the burly man onto the ground. Clasp hands, he bowed respectfully.

“Well met, Young Lord.” He pointed at the burly man. “That guy’s name is Chen Batian. After I left the Fallen Immortal Moors, I tracked him down here in the east. He’s my personal gift to you. Take him. You can then be the number one Shining Star, and you can also take 1st place in the Trial of the Hunt!”

1. Chen Batian: Chen is listed #5 on the list of the 100 most common surnames. Ba means “tyrant, lord, rule by force, usurp” and Tian means “heaven/sky.” I guess you could interpret it to mean something like “lording it over heaven” or something similar. Madam Deathblade’s reaction upon seeing the name was, “this is the name of a bully.” Her reaction conforms to what it says in the paragraph that his name is “inelegant.” ❸

2. I’m transliterating this name as that seems to be the intent of the author. In other words, there is no meaning to the name. Taia in Chinese seems to be an alternate set of characters to describe a sword named Tai E, which was a real sword from ancient Chinese history. Here is a [link to an article](#) that mentions it. I also clipped that section of the article to save [as an image](#), because you never know how long websites like that will keep articles up. ❹

3. The term ‘god emperor’ came up previously in [chapters 808, 963, 966, 967, and 1007](#). Back then and now, it is not treated as a cultivation level. God Lord is a cultivation level, and as you can see in this passage, it seems to indicate that this ‘god emperor’ was in the God Lord cultivation level. And if you go back to [1007](#), you will see that same information stated outright. In other words ‘god emperor’ is a title used by God Lords. ❺

4. Xu Qing used star ring hemp to open the way to the Fifth Star Ring in chapter 1089. ❻

5. Sir Vilespirit uses a slightly different and more respectable form of address than the one used back in the immortal palace, which I’ve reflected by calling her fox madam instead of fox maiden. ❼

Chapter 1192: Step Into the Light; Soar Past Mountains

Chapter 1192: Step Into the Light; Soar Past Mountains

Xu Qing had never heard of Chen Batian before. After all, this Chen Batian had only jumped in the rankings when the one-month countdown began. Though he was the focus of a lot of attention, few cultivators in the Fifth Star Ring knew anything about him.

As time passed, more and more rumors spread about him. As it turned out, not one of the dramatic and fanciful rumors proved to be true. In the end... how could anyone guess that the top contender in the Trial of the Hunt had been prepared as a gift?

It was a gift that had been created out of nothing. At the moment, the person who had created this gift out of nothing was bowing deeply and smiling humbly.

That was the most terrifying thing about Zhou Zhengli. He had been very careful when dealing with the menacing Sir Star Ring. He didn't reveal how dangerous he could be. And Xu Qing got the feeling that the conflict and grudge between him and Sir Vilespirit was a facade.

In all likelihood, Zhou Zhengli and Sir Vilespirit were doing it all on purpose. And was all done... to please people far more important and powerful than them. Those important people were interested in watching the show, and the willingness of Zhou Zhengli and Sir Vilespirit to go along with it was a way of showing subservience.

Xu Qing knew that he wasn't one of those 'important people,' and he didn't think Sir Star Ring was one of them either. He didn't make demands of subservient people. To him, both the Fifth Star Ring and the Immortal Capital were just stops along a very long journey.

Since it was just a stop on the journey, he would be cautious... but do as he pleased. In other words, he didn't care about Zhou Zhengli's ulterior motives. Vipers were fine as long as they didn't bare their fangs. But if the fangs came out, well, Xu Qing had already explained to Zhou Zhengli what would happen then. He liked to eat snakes. And venomous snakes tasted the best.

Besides, after everything he had experienced in his youth, plus his journeys in the Revered Ancient mainland, as well as the teachings of his Master and the tutelage of Erniu, Xu Qing... was far more venomous. Therefore, he only glanced at Zhou Zhengli before turning to look at Chen Batian.

"I selected Chen Batian very carefully," Zhou Zhengli said in a soft voice. "I wanted to make sure he had no deep karmic ties. Incidentally, you could say that he's evil through and through. Also given to lust."

Zhou Zhengli knew that he had to make sure Xu Qing was comfortable accepting his gift. Therefore, he had picked someone without any karmic connections, and could thus be killed without worry about the consequences. That was the way to make sure his gift could be accepted without worry.

To further achieve that end, he bowed and backed away from Xu Qing and Chen Batian.

That was because Chen Batian was gasping for breath. The flame of his life force was just about to go out. Zhou Zhengli had taken measures along the way to ensure that Chen Batian would actually die of natural causes. And it would happen... very soon.

That way, there would be no misunderstandings. No one would believe that he had booby-trapped his gift. He had indirectly killed him in a way that had nothing to do with the person he was giving his gift to.

When a cultivator died in that way, their Immortal Capital permission medallion would automatically go to the person closest to them. That was why he had backed away.

Xu Qing said nothing. A few dozen breaths of time passed, and Chen Batian breathed his last.

The instant it happened, an Immortal Capital permission medallion flew out of him, dazzlingly bright. It shot toward Xu Qing, fused with him, and then the star chart appeared in the sky again. This time, the ranking list had changed.

1st place was now occupied by Xu Qing!

Zhou Zhengli again bowed to Xu Qing. Then he backed away before leaving Mount Taia and flying off into the distance.

Xu Qing didn't stop him. After Zhou Zhengli disappeared over the horizon, Xu Qing blurred and stepped into space-time. Using space-time that way left no traces of his passage, and made it impossible to track his karma.

Shortly after, ripples spread out in the dome of heaven, and Zhou Zhengli appeared again. He looked down thoughtfully at Mount Taia.

Definitely very different from Sir Star Ring. If it had been Sir Star Ring, and he had such an advantage and such strength, he would definitely be a lot less cautious. In fact, he would probably stay around here until the trial was over.

But this Xu Qing... has the advantage, and even crushed all the Shining Stars. Yet even after getting gifts from both me and Sir Vilespirit, he still acts very cautiously. And it's not something done with purpose. It's actually... an instinct for him!

Zhou Zhengli sighed softly. *Definitely not to be trifled with!*

With that, he turned and vanished again.

There were only seven days left in the countdown. Thanks to the change to the ranking list, everyone in all the sects and organizations in the Fifth Star Ring knew about Xu Qing. And of course, it caused quite a shakeup.

Chen Batian disappeared and Xu Qing was in 1st place! More and more rumors were spreading about Xu Qing now. Him taking 1st place had a big effect on the various cultivators he had interacted with.

In the western planetary system, Li Mengtu was working harder than ever. Of course, since he was in fifth place, it was inevitable that he would reach the Immortal Capital. But when he saw the rankings list, he decided that he would still try to get more permission medallions.

I might not be able to surpass him, but at least I won't fall behind.

There were similar sentiments in the southern planetary system. They existed in the Yuanshan Clan. They existed at Grand Immortal Mountain.

Yuanshan Su was in seclusion. She needed to achieve a cultivation base breakthrough before the end of the Trial of the Hunt. If she could become a Quasi-Immortal, then she would be able to get to the Immortal Capital. "I know I can do it!"

Jiang Fan chose a similar route to Yuanshan Su, and was working hard to that end.

In the northern planetary system, Hordeslayer and Rampart, thanks to how connected their Master was, had things a lot easier than Jiang Fan and Yuanshan Su. Both of them got new permission medallions and started over from the beginning. Given the level of their cultivation base and battle prowess, it wasn't a very difficult task. All they had to do was fight enough people. However, given the limited time frame, the two of them were very busy. Whenever they rose through the rankings, they would see Xu Qing's name and curse him. But at the same time, they would work harder.

Things were different in the eastern planetary system.

Sir Vilespirit and Zhou Zhengli both had stable spots on the ranking list, being in 2nd and 3rd place respectively. They had given up on trying to improve their ranking, and were simply waiting until the Trial of the Hunt ended.

What Sir Vilespirit and Zhou Zhengli were actually most focused on was... the Star Ring Pagoda! As far as they were concerned, that was the biggest variable in the entire trial!

Amidst the countless towering pagodas that made up the headquarters of the Star Ring Pagoda, there was one pagoda that was taller than all the others, and it shone with dazzling starlight. At the moment, that starlight was all pouring into a complicated spell formation.

A young man was seated cross-legged in the formation. The starlight flowed through the rotating formation into the young man and through his meridians. Thanks to the process, his body had become completely fused with the pagoda.

A strong immortal aura pulsed from him, and if you looked closely, it came from... his immortal embryo! After experiencing the illusory reality and the undying, it was possible to form the immortal embryo. It was the hallmark of Quasi-Immortals. That was why the starlight acted as meridians, the pagoda as his bones, and the immortal embryo as his fleshly body. It was turning into...

Sir Star Ring!

Within the pagoda, someone spoke in a raspy voice.

“If there are no twists and turns during the tribulation, then how could good fortune spring from extreme adversity? My apprentice, you have already accepted the tribulation, and perished in the process. That was simply your destiny. As your Master, I have remolded your body, and thus, you can achieve ultimate balance and continue on the path of the immortal!”

As the words echoed out, Sir Star Ring’s eyes suddenly opened, and boundless starlight spilled out of them, making the pagoda even more dazzling.

“He’s out there, waiting for you,” the raspy voice said.

After a moment of silence, Sir Star Ring shook his head. “No.”

“Why not?”

“I can’t defeat him. If I fight him now, I’ll lose the name Star Ring. There’s no rush. I can fight him... at the Immortal Capital!”

“Well said!”

Outside of the Star Ring Pagoda there was a mountain called Ninth Heaven. At the peak of Mount Ninth Heaven, Xu Qing sat cross-legged, staring at the boundless Star Ring Pagoda headquarters. The crimson aurora made the starlight of the towers especially prominent. And the spot where the starlight was gathering was the same spot Xu Qing was staring at.

He was waiting for Sir Star Ring. The moment he arrived in the eastern planetary system, he had sensed Sir Star Ring’s aura. It was obvious that Sir Star Ring... had returned. Thus, he had come here to wait for Sir Star Ring to come out and fight.

Sadly, even after waiting for quite a while, Sir Star Ring never came out. Xu Qing’s facial expression remained the same as usual. He wasn’t inclined to force the issue.

He closed his eyes. Days passed. Eventually, there was only one day left in the countdown. Then one hour. Then one second.... It passed!

Rumbling sounds could be heard in the sky over the Fifth Star Ring. They grew louder and louder, filling the east, and ultimately, the entire Fifth Star Ring. Countless cultivators, regardless of what they were doing, all went silent and looked up into the sky.

A voice rang out.

“The Immortal Capital’s Trial of the Hunt is over. Now, the top 100 will enter the Immortal Capital!”

Innumerable cultivators in the Fifth Star Ring were filled with excitement, and looked on in envy as numerous seven-colored beams of light descended from the aurora. There were a total of ninety-nine, and they were distributed among the qualified trial-takers in all four planetary systems. They were like shining roads of light leading upward.

All Fifth Star Ring cultivators dreamed of stepping on the road that led to the Immortal Capital. These prismatic beams of light were why the participants had gone through so much hardship. It was why they had shed so much blood and killed so many enemies. Now, their hearts were racing. This was the moment they had been fighting for!

One by one, they prepared to step into the light. But just before they did, more thunderous rumbling sounds issued forth above to fill the Fifth Star Ring.

Countless individuals looked on as a beam of light far brighter and more colorful than all of the others descended, almost like a river. Compared to this beam of light, the others were like little streams. It was a majestic and boundless river that shone with blinding light. It descended from above and landed in the east, at Mount Ninth Heaven.

Everyone was shaken.

Xu Qing opened his eyes and looked at the bright path of light. He rose and stepped into the light. The moment he did, he was whisked upward.

Meanwhile, other cultivators in other areas were also flying upward. All were heading toward what lay beyond the dome of heaven... the supreme Immortal Capital.

Chapter 1193: Fundamentally in the Immortal Capital

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It was a most holy occasion during the Immortal Capital's Trial of the Hunt! It was a moment that countless cultivators dreamed of. Countless living beings would witness the moment in which the qualified participants ascended to the Immortal Capital!

Xu Qing was in the brightest beam of light that advanced ever upward. Behind him, ninety-nine beams of light rose from the four planetary systems, all of them bearing cultivators who were going to the Immortal Capital.

As of this moment, they were the center of all attention in the four planetary systems. As of this moment, they were entirely worthy of being called stars. As of this moment, the four planetary systems were all peaceful and quiet as the scene played out in the canopy of heaven.

Of course, the vast majority of people could only see some of what was happening. But the truly powerful experts in the four planetary systems could see how unique the most brightly shining of the light was. As everyone watched, the people in the beams of light rose higher and higher, getting closer and closer to the aurora. And finally... they turned crimson as they entered the aurora, one after another.

There was no starry sky above the aurora. There was only a foggy haze.

Within the haze were a hundred four-sided pillars, all of them very ancient and weathered. They were terraced, so that the tallest pillar was in the very middle, with pillars stretching out almost in a triangular shape on either side, with each successive pillar shorter than the one before it. As a whole, they looked like the character for 'person': 人.

All of the pillars glittered with seven-colored light. They seemed to have existed for countless years, to have witnessed innumerable magnificent things, and now pulsed with infinite majesty.

The light they exuded turned into numerous prismatic beams. They dropped down below the aurora and into the four planetary systems. They became the subject of all attention there.

The light coming from the central pillar was the brightest as... Xu Qing rose through the aurora within it! He was the first of the hundred cultivators to emerge from the aurora. As the aurora flowed around him, he seemed almost like something going from the bottom of a river up to the surface of the water.

Upon breaking the surface, he saw the infinite haze, as well as the one hundred seven-colored pillars. He didn't hesitate. He approached the pillars and alighted on the tallest of them, the one in the center.

There he stood. Turning, he looked down. The vast aurora was like a crimson sea. Inside of it, ninety-nine beams of light contained more cultivators who were ascending to their corresponding pillars.

Among the crowd, Xu Qing spotted Zhou Zhengli, who smiled humbly.

He saw Sir Vilespirit, who bowed his head.

He saw Yuanshan Su, who avoided his gaze.

He saw Li Mengtu, who looked excited.

He saw Hordeslayer and Rampart. They usually acted proud and arrogant, but now they seemed to shrink in on themselves.

Xu Qing studied the group. The majority of the faces were unfamiliar to him, but there were some he recognized. Jiang Fan wasn't there. But what was shocking was... a young man in black! He exuded a sensation of order, and was orbited by chains of starlight. Almost as soon as Xu Qing looked at him, he looked back.

Sir Star Ring!

Xu Qing remained completely calm. He was not surprised to see all of these people here. And he had long since come to sense that Sir Star Ring had awoken. He had gone to the Star Ring Pagoda sometime earlier and waited for a while, but Sir Star Ring never came. As a result, Xu Qing wasn't taken by surprise at all to see him here. He quickly looked away from him.

Ignoring all the cultivators landing on the pillars, Xu Qing looked up at the haze. He had always felt that the Fifth Star Ring wasn't very big. He had come to that conclusion after comparing it to the Revered Ancient mainland. It wasn't that Revered Ancient was larger. It was a fact that the four

planetary systems of the Fifth Star Ring were vast in size. Even just a single one of them would surpass Revered Ancient. Most cultivators could fly for an entire lifetime and never leave one of the planetary systems. Despite that, Xu Qing still felt that the Fifth Star Ring was small.

Based on the star ring map he had seen years ago that depicted the thirty-six higher star rings, he knew that a star ring should be incredibly large. But that was not what he had experienced in the Fifth Star Ring.

Of course, he knew that some of it was because of how the Fifth Star Ring had been compacted. It made sense considering that the various layers of a starry sky were all the same instance of space. After being compacted, the Fifth Star Ring turned into a landmass, and therefore, the way one perceived it with the senses would be different.

But when all was said and done, that was only one factor, and there was definitely a much more relevant explanation. It was a theory Xu Qing had developed after traveling to all four planetary systems. Yet now....

As he stood atop the ancient pillar looking at the haze, Xu Qing's thoughts went wild. He was struck with a sudden premonition that the real Fifth Star Ring... was what he was looking at right now.

Anticipation filled him. The other cultivators in the area felt similarly. They didn't have to wait long. Soon, the final person stepped onto the pillar, and the haze began to seethe. An indescribably heavy force was clearing the fog, as if an invisible hand were waving it away. And then... the haze that had been blocking their view vanished without a trace.

A majestic starry sky was now visible to them! Within the infinitude was a huge whirlpool that occupied about ninety percent of the starry sky. It seemed still, but if you looked closely you would realize it was rotating.

Xu Qing and the other cultivators on the pillars were minuscule in comparison. Everyone could sense that the astonishing whirlpool was full of a massive amount of heavenly bodies, and all of them had life on them as well as the aura of immortals. And yet, as everyone soaked in the astonishing sight... it was as if some immense power shrank that starry sky down. The whirlpool also shrank down rapidly.

And as it shrank down, an even more majestic whirlpool of stars appeared within the starry sky. The whirlpool from before wasn't visible. But it hadn't disappeared, it had shrunk down, revealing that it was one of millions upon millions of whirlpools.

His mind spun. Yet things weren't over. The giant whirlpool of stars shrank down again. Xu Qing and the other cultivators saw countless astonishing whirlpools of stars forming together into a huge star chart. Or, put more precisely, it was a star domain!

If the first thing they had seen was the star domain, they wouldn't have been able to grasp how large it was. But after seeing everything shrink down, it was obvious that it was so immense it defied description.

And yet... things still weren't over.

The star domain shrank down, revealing a host of innumerable star domains, an infinitude that became a complete universe! Yet even as the universe became visible, the starry sky blurred, and... countless universes appeared to them. Then the universes shrank.

The starry sky trembled. Ultimately... an immense figure became visible in front of them. It was not a true body. Instead, it was made of countless planetary systems, galaxies, star domains, and universes! This person's features were indistinguishable, but he was surrounded by the most paramount of sensations.

This figure was not the Immortal Paragon of the Fifth Star Ring! And that was because as the figure made up of countless universes appeared, the starry sky shrank again, revealing that, astonishingly, there were ten other such figures!

There were a total of eleven! They were like heavens beyond heaven! They were the eleven Immortal Lords of the Fifth Star Ring!

Each one was magnificent.

Xu Qing and all of the other hundred cultivators felt like they were being battered by waves of astonishment. Rumbling sounds filled Xu Qing's mind and heart as he looked at the eleven figures.

One of the figures, despite having indistinguishable facial features, was immediately recognizable to Xu Qing thanks to his experience in the immortal palace.

That person was... Immortal Lord Nineshores! There was something unique about Immortal Lord Nineshores compared to the others. In front of him was a ring made of starlight.

As soon as Xu Qing saw the ring, he realized what it was. It was the ring of the epoch. It was currently... the Nineshores Epoch!

Xu Qing took a deep breath and suppressed the excitement in his heart as he looked at the other Immortal Lords. He was hoping to spot... Grandmaster Bai! Eventually, his gaze settled on the ninth of the Immortal Lords. It was a majestic figure who seemed to be an old man. It wasn't possible to see his face clearly, but he had a medicinal decocting pot in his hands that immediately struck Xu Qing with a sense of familiarity.

The old man looked down at Xu Qing, and a very faint smile appeared on his lips. Xu Qing smiled back and then bowed.

After that, the starry sky blurred again, and the sensation of shrinking occurred again. And then, the heavens beyond heaven that were the eleven Immortal Lords shrank down. Behind them was an even more majestic figure who seemed unsurpassably holy, and who was mighty enough to occupy the entire starry sky.

This was the origin of all immortals! This was the paragon of the Fifth Star Ring. This was he who had crushed the gods. He was... the Immortal Paragon!

The eleven heavens beyond heaven all orbited around him. This was the true Fifth Star Ring!

After being taken over by cultivators, it was compressed, and that process caused the different parts of it to occupy heavens beyond heaven.

As for the four great planetary systems of east, west, south and north, they were the original homeland! They were where everything had started.

Fundamentally speaking, there wasn't actually an Immortal Capital. The original homeland was the Immortal Capital. That was where the Fifth Star Ring's pureblooded humans existed.

All of the fighting, killing, and bitterness was designed to raise pureblooded humans. It was all for the future of the Fifth Star Ring. The cultivators who came from there all had *politically correct family backgrounds and educations*. In the future, they would be tasked with an important mission.

As for the lives of those in the heavens beyond heaven, in some ways, they were simply collateral relatives. In fact, most of them weren't even human, but instead, had just been blessed with human bloodlines. All of these things did not need to be conveyed with words. As soon as Xu Qing and the other cultivators saw the majestic scene in front of them, they understood.

"Now I get it...." Xu Qing murmured.

And then, among the eleven heavens beyond heaven, Immortal Lord Nineshores, whose turn it was to oversee the epoch, opened his eyes.

"Ascendees, you will now enter my own heaven beyond heaven."

Chapter 1194: A Reward from the Nineshores Heaven!

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From the land of origin, a hundred ships had sailed into the Immortal Capital. It was the grand, majestic tradition of the four great planetary systems of east, west, south and north.

What they found out after arriving wasn't necessarily top secret. After all, there were immortals in all four of the orthodox organizations, as well as some core Quasi-Immortals, who knew the truth.

The Immortal Capital was actually a project being carried out by cultivators after taking over the Fifth Star Ring. It was a project designed to nurture pureblooded humans. The project had gone on in the past, and it would continue to go on in the future.

To the upper echelons of leadership in the Fifth Star Ring, cultivators weren't nourished and nurtured. They were born out of struggle. They went against the stream and fought to survive. It reflected how the cultivators from a minor world had eventually fought their way to the point of overthrowing the gods that had ruled the Fifth Star Ring.

They did not want to lose that spirit! They did not want greenhouse flowers. They wanted like-minded people who never let go of their killing intent and their determination to strive forward.

Only cultivators like that counted as being pureblooded humans that could be responsible for the future, and could survive in the higher star rings, surrounded by gods.

Low-level cultivators might need special circumstances to develop such qualities. But it was built into these cultivators who had just ascended. The cultivators who had reached this point were resolute individuals who had developed their own ways of understanding and perceiving things. Those with similar ideals could walk together. Those with dissimilar ideals would not be forced to stay. It was a demonstration of the confidence of the Fifth Star Ring cultivators.

Unfortunately, the rest of the thirty-six higher star rings were lands occupied by gods, so those with dissimilar ideals... would have to become gods if they wanted to go somewhere else. The factions had long since been determined.

That was why the Immortal Capital's Trial of the Hunt was held over and over again. It was also why Immortal Lord Nineshores had called them ascendees! They had ascended from their homeland.

The rules of the Fifth Star Ring stated that whichever Immortal Lord was reigning over the current epoch would accept all of the ascendees into their immortal palace. It was currently the Nineshores epoch. Therefore, Xu Qing and the rest of the cultivators responded to the voice of Immortal Lord Nineshores by flying off the pillars.

They shot... right toward Immortal Lord Nineshores' heaven beyond heaven made of countless planetary systems, galaxies, star whirlpools, star domains, and universes.

The instant Xu Qing entered, a plethora of stars appeared before his eyes, like infinite star charts. There was no limit. There was no end. It was so vast, and the cultivators were so insignificant, that they felt like ants.

Then, someone spoke in a majestic voice.

"This, which occupies only a small percentage of the Fifth Star Ring, is... the Nineshores Heaven!"

It was not Immortal Lord Nineshores. The owner of the voice appeared in front of Xu Qing and the others, and he was an old man in a white daoist robe. He had the demeanor of a transcendent being, like someone who could tread through starry skies and universes.

"I am Xu Daoyun, a reception elder here in the Nineshores Immortal Palace. I am tasked with receiving you and offering a bit of an explanation along the way."

His gaze swept over them, and all of them trembled inwardly. Those who had canon treasures felt such treasures dimming as if they were being suppressed. Those with true canon had it slightly better off, but still felt as if the gaze were weighing down on their canon and making it difficult to operate. It was a gaze that pierced into the depths of even Xu Qing and Sir Star Ring, and left them feeling powerless to resist.

Xu Qing had experienced something like this before. Back in Revered Ancient, he had stood with Grand Emperor Swordsage and faced a Lower Immortal who wanted to enter the mainland. The feeling was similar. The difference was that the feeling now was far more intense.[1]

Immortal...!

Xu Qing took a deep breath. Sir Star Ring also bowed his head. To him, this old man was giving him a sensation similar to his Master. If the two strongest members of the group of one hundred felt that way, there was little need to mention the others. All of them quickly bowed.

The old man's expression remained the same as he continued, "There is no end to the heavenly bodies in the Nineshores Heaven. New heavenly bodies are born constantly, and old ones fall. The orbits are not eternal. The star domains are not fixed in place. The universes rise and fall.

"Assuming there are no setbacks, then this is where you will practice cultivation going forward. Furthermore, as cultivators who have ascended from the homeland, you will now be given a reward!

"Everyone here will be given a universe in the Nineshores Heaven to serve as your mansion grotto! All of the star domains, star whirlpools, galaxies, and planets within it belong to you!"

All hearts surged with excitement.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered at the generosity of the Fifth Star Ring, and the importance with which it treated ascendees! All the resources of a universe were being given to help one person grow stronger! It could well be imagined that even a relatively barren universe would still have vast amounts of immortal energy in it. That wasn't to mention all of the other items and resources it would contain.

It was definitely proper to say that whoever got this reward would be... paramount in the universe they were given!

Even Xu Qing was moved by this reward. Yet the anticipation he felt in his heart continued to grow more intense. And that was because he had taken 1st place. It went without saying that his reward wouldn't be limited to this.

The white-robed old man once again spoke. "The universe is only the first reward. But before moving onto the second, I need to address the 1st place ascendee...." His gaze shifted to Xu Qing. "There are certain special universes in the Nineshores Heaven, and each one is considered a strategic resource. Since you took 1st place... you are hereby rewarded with a first-class universe. The Inksun Universe! Later on, you can discover for yourself what's so special about it.

"Now, as for the second reward.... Everyone will receive a treasure or canon augmentation. For those of you who have magical treasures with no canon, you can have canon added to them. Those who already have canon in a magical treasure can have it improved. Or you can request to have the canon taken out of the treasure and put inside of you! It will be your choice how to use this reward.

"In addition, those who made it into the top 10 will be given the chance to have a Lower Immortal personally forge you a piece of equipment. To take advantage of this reward, you can go to the Daoforge Universe! Few people can ever get a destined opportunity like this, so treasure it, all of you."

At this point, the old man's gaze shifted from the top 10 in general to once again focus on Xu Qing. "Since you took 1st place, you will be given one opportunity to visit the Heroic Immortal Tombs.

Here in the Nineshores Heaven, the Heroic Immortal Tombs have served for countless years as a place to inter the bodies of Lower Immortals who fell in battle. There, you can find canon and immortal treasures, all of which can be acquired based on your own good fortune.”

As the old man spoke, Xu Qing could feel everyone else looking at him. Clearly, their gazes were full of envy. That was especially true of people like Hordeslayer and Rampart, who had once been in the Shining Stars, and had benefited from help and equipment provided by Lower Immortals.

Other than the universe, the other rewards weren’t very enticing to them. But when they heard about the Heroic Immortal Tombs, they couldn’t help but fill with longing. After all, though they might have benefited from the help of a Lower Immortal, there was no way that such a Master would pass on canon to them unless it was unneeded. And they wouldn’t give up their most powerful and useful canon treasures. After all, they were still alive.

But the Heroic Immortal Tombs were different. They contained the remains of dead Lower Immortals, and the canon there would be masterless. And any treasures they left behind... as long as they hadn’t been destroyed in the battle that led to their death, would definitely be spectacular.

Any other type of good fortune would be similar. The destined opportunities in the Heroic Immortal Tombs were like true legacies! Even Sir Star Ring was sighing inwardly.

It was only natural that Xu Qing understood how precious of an opportunity he was being given, so he ducked his head and bowed.

Looking away from him, the old man continued, “The Nineshores Heaven isn’t just the location of your mansion grotto going forward. You will also be given an official assignment here. However, you will be given some time to rest and enjoy your rewards. One year. A year from now, you will be summoned to the Reception Universe, where the relevant personnel will make arrangements for your assignment. And now, you’re all dismissed.”

The old man waved his hand, and a host of wooden immortal slips flew out toward the hundred cultivators.

In the vast majority of cases, each cultivator got two immortal slips. One was a teleportation talisman leading to the universe that they had been rewarded with, while the other would augment a treasure or canon. A handful of people got three immortal slips, with the extra one being the opportunity to have equipment forged by a Lower Immortal. Xu Qing was the only one who got four!

After distributing the immortal slips, the old man said nothing more. He simply faded away into nothing.

After he was gone, some people left excitedly. However, most of them didn’t leave. Instead, they hurried over to Xu Qing. They had all arrived together, and no one knew what post they would be assigned to. For all anyone knew, they might end up working together. And since Xu Qing had taken 1st place, he would surely start out with an important position. Obviously, the smartest thing to do was try to befriend him.

As people clustered around Xu Qing and made small talk, Sir Star Ring flew off looking proud and aloof. He soon disappeared. Yuanshan Su hesitated for a moment before making the choice to leave.

It almost wasn't necessary to mention Hordeslayer and Rampart. They rushed away at the earliest possible moment, worried that if they didn't get away quickly enough, Xu Qing might order them to come over to him. They definitely did not want everyone seeing them being under his control, or possibly rushing over to him excitedly.... The mere thought of such a scene left them feeling uncomfortable.

Xu Qing paid little attention to them as he exchanged words with the other ascendees. Then, after they had given each other transmission jade slip contact information, the ascendees began to depart.

Now that Zhou Zhengli and Sir Vilespirit had ascended to the Nineshores Heaven, it seemed that their previous violent animosity for each other had changed. Though they hadn't been standing next to each other, it spoke volumes that they stayed behind after everyone else had left.

"See you in a year, Brother Xu!" Sir Vilespirit said, clasping hands before leaving.

Zhou Zhengli and Li Mengtu were the last to leave. The former smiled in the same self-deprecating way as always.

"Young Lord, my guess... is that a year from now, the whole lot of us are going to get the same assignment." With that, he respectfully departed.

Sighing inwardly, Li Mengtu exchanged a glance with Xu Qing, then turned to leave. Just before departing, he said, "Any time. Just say the word. I owe you my life. And more."

Xu Qing watched them all leave. Then he smiled and, eyes gleaming with anticipation, made his way off into the distance. Then he sent his divine will into the teleportation slip and... vanished.

He was heading to his very own... Inksun Universe!

1. Grand Emperor Swordsage and Xu Qing faced the Lower Immortal in [chapter 1086](#). Remember that in Chinese, Lower Immortal and Summer Immortal are pronounced exactly the same. 下仙

Chapter 1195: Inksun Universe

Chapter 1195: Inksun Universe

How big was the Inksun Universe...? Xu Qing wasn't actually sure. True, he was the paramount entity in the Inksun Universe, and could destroy the entire system with a thought. Unfortunately, the range of his divine will wasn't sufficient to encompass the entire universe.

That said, when being teleported inside, he was able to see it in its entirety on the approach.

The Inksun Universe resembled the two curved horns of a goat, composed of innumerable galaxies and whirlpools of stars. They were connected at the bottom, so that the entire structure looked like an irregularly shaped ellipse. Taken as a whole, it also looked like a fish. To be most precise, the Inksun Universe looked like a big fish with the horns of a goat.

It was majestic. When it came to the planets, star systems, star whirlpools, and star domains, they were densely packed.... And there was shining light everywhere. They were... suns. Some places had life, some had death.

That was all Xu Qing could take in before he got too close to take in its entirety.

The teleportation abilities in the Nineshores Heaven surpassed anything Xu Qing could perceive or comprehend. Clearly, they were the result of extensive research carried out in the cultivation system in the Fifth Star Ring. These teleportations could cover multiple universes to send a person to a specific starry sky. It definitely surpassed the normal limitations of space. It was something beyond description.

This is what civilization feels like.... It's a civilization of immortals.

On the way inside the Inksun Universe, Xu Qing wondered what was special about it. Given what the reception elder had said, he needed to explore it to find out. Considering that the Inksun Universe was of special strategic significance, he got the feeling that the high-level living beings inside it would probably have a good idea of its unique nature.

It was still getting bigger and bigger from his point of view. Galaxies flowed past him like rain water, until he saw his destination!

It was an immortal hall! Crafted from a pitch-black asteroid, it looked big, but compared to the starry sky in general, it was minute. That said, the size of a structure in this universe was unrelated to the power and status it represented. It could be tiny, and all living beings would still prostrate in worship to it!

In the Inksun Universe, this was the most holy location in existence. It was ancient, archaic, and magnificent.

Surrounding it... were countless figures, all of them bowing. Most of them were humanoid in appearance, although there were small differences between them and ordinary humans. There were some that were very obviously nonhuman. There were even some that emanated terrifying beastly auras. There seemed no end to them, and when it came to their cultivation base, there were Smoldering Gods and even Imperial Sovereigns. These were the lords of the various star domains in the Inksun Universe.

The Fifth Star Ring was huge, and though humans had started out as a minority there, considering it was a civilization of cultivators, it was little surprise that they had proliferated so dramatically. But compared to a magnificent conglomeration of many universes, it was like *a drop of water in the ocean*.

And yet the humans that made up that drop of water had ultimately become the rulers of all the other species in the Fifth Star Ring!

These nonhumans were really the progeny of the gods. That was where they had come from. But they had been forced into servitude, and after many generations had passed in the Fifth Star Ring, the blood of the gods in them had long since been sealed. As a result, there was a limit to how much they could grow, and they had to treat humans as their lords.

In other words, they had no choice but to walk the same path as the cultivators. Because of their blood being sealed, they could rise no higher than the Imperial Sovereign level. People who were not human could not become immortals!

The only exception... were individuals of strategic importance. Only then could the seals be removed, allowing them to fight and die for the Fifth Star Ring.

The end result was that the ascendees who had just come from the original homeland were like royalty to these nonhumans! Xu Qing was the lord of this universe, so when he came, all its servants would come to worship.

As the powerful experts prostrated, the immortal hall atop the asteroid began to shine with dazzling immortal light. All nine colors shimmered, creating a flowing sea of light that swept throughout the surrounding starry sky.

The starry sky trembled. All heads were bowed. The door of the immortal hall opened.

Xu Qing stepped out. At the same time, he absorbed the immortal slip that had just teleported him here. Of course, that slip didn't just function as a teleportation device. More so... it was a symbol of the highest level of power in the Inksun Universe. It created a resonance with the immortal hall, with the starry sky, with all the countless star domains, and with the entire universe.

The countless nonhuman cultivators all bowed lower.

"Greetings, Your Majesty!"

"Greetings, Your Majesty!"

"Greetings, Your Majesty!"

A chorus of voices swept out into the starry sky with mountain-toppling, sea-draining force. The momentum of the combined voices grew more and more intense.

Xu Qing looked around with a calm expression. As he stood at the door of the hall, he closed his eyes. After arriving, opening the door of the immortal hall, and absorbing the immortal slip, he became recognized as the lord of the Inksun Universe. After that, the entire universe existed in his mind.

And thus, he sent his thoughts out like an unstoppable wave through all the star domains, galaxies, and planets. The entire place was full of strong immortal energy. Some of that immortal energy was emanating from the planets. Surprisingly, some of it... existed in the living beings, and came from their life force. This was what it meant to use a universe to nurture a chosen!

Xu Qing opened his eyes. He retracted his divine will, and then over a thousand of the nonhumans flew up to the immortal hall and lined up to speak respectfully to him.

“Your Majesty, the Inksun Universe contains 700,000,000,000,000 galaxies. Every galaxy contains....”

“Your Majesty, the total number of species in the Inksun Universe is....”

“Your Majesty, there are many resources in the Inksun Universe, but the most abundant are the black suns....”

“Your Majesty, there are a number of pocket realms and treasure lands in the Inksun Universe. Specifically....”

Xu Qing received a full report of everything in the Inksun Universe.

As he was listening, he suddenly turned his head to look off into the distance. Interrupting the report that was being given, he pointed and said, “There’s a cultivator right there. Who is it?”

He was pointing in the direction of the spot where the two fish horns connected at the fish’s head. By means of divine will, Xu Qing could see that there was an area of darkness there, a spot cut off from divine will that contained terrifying mightiness. Though it was cut off from senses, it seemed like there was an incomparably massive black sun there, emanating infinite black light and fire. Either that, or it was a black hole inside that could devour anything and everything. It was extremely unique.

But when he sent his divine will to examine it further, the stream of divine will vanished. What made it vanish wasn’t the strange heavenly body that resembled a black sun or a black hole. It was a figure hovering cross-legged next to the black hole. That person seemed to be emitting Quasi-Immortal cultivation base fluctuations, and was able easily crush Xu Qing’s divine will out of existence.

In response to Xu Qing’s question, the cultivators who had gathered outside the immortal hall exchanged awkward glances.

Then one of them spoke in a trembling voice. “Your Majesty, that area is the Inkland, which formed after this universe’s very first sun was extinguished. It’s also been named a restricted area by the immortal palace. We’re not allowed to even get close to it. As for the person guarding it....”

The cultivator hesitated. Xu Qing’s eyes narrowed.

Bowing his head, the cultivator continued, “It’s the exalted Kun Wu. Just like Your Majesty, he’s human. Before you came along, the exalted Kun Wu was the acting lord here. He’s the only one who has the right to practice cultivation in restricted areas.”^[1]

“Acting lord?” Xu Qing’s gaze turned cold.

1. Kun Wu. Kun is not a common surname. It’s most commonly known as the Chinese character from Kun Lun. Wu is an obscure word that means, among other things, “I, my.” Kun Wu is actually a real person. Or maybe it’s a mythological person. Or maybe a clan. Even in Chinese, the information I could find about it wasn’t very clear. In any case, it’s an obscure name that sounds sort of mythical and ancient. Madam Deathblade said it’s a very unusual name that she had never

heard of before (she's not exactly interested in or versed in ancient/mythological stuff off the top of her head). ٩٦

Chapter 1196: I'll Use This Place For 300 Years

Chapter 1196: I'll Use This Place For 300 Years

The meaning of the term 'acting lord' was self-evident. This person was temporarily in charge. He was a human with a Quasi-Immortal cultivation base, which was befitting of such a position.

"Your Majesty, the likes of us can only speculate about your identity. Presumably, the Nineshores Immortal Palace decreed that this universe was to be your personal property...." A nonhuman cultivator stepped forward who looked like an old human man, except that he had a third eye. Bowing respectfully, he continued, "From ancient times until now, the only people rewarded with this glory are pureblooded ascendees from the Immortal Capital. This seems to indicate that Your Majesty is an ascendee from the Immortal Capital.

"As for the exalted Kun Wu... well, he's similar to yourself, Your Majesty. Supposedly, he was an ascendee from the Immortal Capital who had his own universe. But this place was apparently more suitable for his style of cultivation. So he came over here about a thousand years ago and never left.... He's human, and the Nineshores Heaven is just so huge...."

At this point, the old man looked up hesitantly at Xu Qing in the immortal hall. "In the Nineshores Heaven, any universe with no lord in its immortal hall is considered unoccupied. And thus, human cultivators will often go into them to practice cultivation. Before the exalted Kun Wu came to the Inksun Universe, there were other humans who had settled down here. But they were all driven away when the exalted Kun Wu showed up."

The old man was being very careful with his words. He clearly didn't want to offend either Kun Wu or the new lord in the immortal hall.

Xu Qing thought about that for a moment. "In other words, you call him the acting lord, but that's just a form of address, and not an official position?"

The old man hesitated but ultimately nodded. "Yes. The Inksun Universe's immortal hall has been without a lord for many years until now. Because of that, a lot of humans have come and gone.... And so, for the past thousand years, we've just gone along with whatever the exalted Kun Wu told us to do." He smiled wryly. "Truth be told... there are so many universes in the Nineshores Heaven that the likelihood of an ascendee being given the Inksun Universe was always remote. In fact, we were surprised when we found out Your Majesty was coming here. Presumably, the exalted Kun Wu is also surprised."

Xu Qing's gaze turned even colder. Now he understood some of the unstated rules in the Nineshores Heaven. The Nineshores Heaven was a huge place and had many, many universes. It wasn't possible for all of them to have official lords ruling over them. As a result, many were

unoccupied. The unoccupied universes would naturally be attractive to cultivators. And any human who entered one of them could basically do anything they wanted with them.

Perhaps the Nineshores Immortal Palace tacitly approves. After all, the Fifth Star Ring seems to foster intense competition to identify who's strongest! It's natural selection.

Xu Qing looked at the strange area known as the Inkland. *If these nonhumans know about my arrival, there's no way this human doesn't know. Given that he hasn't left, and even went so far as to destroy my divine will, I guess I have to treat him as a squatter. And the only thing to do with squatters is drive them away.*

Paying no further attention to the nonhumans, he strode out of the immortal hall, left the asteroid, and made his way into the starry sky. Space-time flowed beneath his feet, and the void rippled. To the astonishment of the nonhuman leaders, he used his divine will as a guide to step onto the thread of the timescape in the Inksun Universe as if it were a string on an instrument.... There was a twang. He vanished.

The bowing nonhuman cultivators were all astonished to the core. That was especially true of the peak Imperial Sovereigns. These were extraordinary individuals. In fact, if they weren't being restrained by the Fifth Star Ring, they would already have reached immortal ascension. It was only natural that they were extremely knowledgeable. And the more knowledgeable one was, the more astonished they would be by what they had just seen.

"Space-time?"

"His Majesty's canon... is that of space-time??"

"He's only an Imperial Sovereign, and his immortal embryo is still only in illusory reality. But just now, he didn't give off the sensation of being a mere Imperial Sovereign!"

"I wonder... how did he rank among the other ascendees?"

In the depths of the Inksun Universe, where the fish head was, in the location that could not be penetrated by divine will, just on the border of the area that seemed to contain a black hole like a sun... a middle-aged cultivator sat cross-legged.

He wore an embroidered robe, had flowing, blue hair, and though his eyes were closed, his facial expression was cold. Astonishingly, he had a fishing pole in his hand! And the fishing line went right down into the black hole!

Frowning, he opened his eyes and looked at the starry sky in front of him. To him, it looked like the starry sky in front of him was being folded. It was like a piece of paper being folded over many times. It soon looked like a door, out of which Xu Qing emerged.

Xu Qing looked expressionlessly at the fishing cultivator, then looked at the fishing line going down into the Inkland black hole. Behind him, the starry sky went back to normal.

Ringsource? Xu Qing's eyes narrowed. Previously, he had only sent a bit of divine will here, and it had been shattered very quickly. And since he had been focused on the squatter, he hadn't had a chance to study the mysterious black hole. Now that he was here in person, he could sense that it contained the power of ringsource.

Perhaps because of the unique nature of the Inkland, or maybe the gravitational force from the black hole itself, the ringsource couldn't get out. The only way to get it out was to fish it out.

Even still, Xu Qing couldn't help but be a bit excited. Although the ringsource was trapped and not easy to get out, that didn't change the fact that ringsource was the foundation of the higher star rings, and was considered the most elemental type of power.

It was also absolutely critical to forming the immortal embryo! This type of power was extremely precious!

Is this why the Inksun Universe is said to be of strategic importance?

Xu Qing decided that he would look further into the situation. Looking away from the black hole, he turned to the middle-aged cultivator.

"Leave this place," he growled.

The middle-aged cultivator was, of course, Kun Wu. Looking up at Xu Qing with a grim expression, he coolly said, "So you're a new ascende?"

Xu Qing didn't answer the question. He just looked calmly at Kun Wu.

Kun Wu's eyes narrowed as he sized up Xu Qing. Although he couldn't see every detail, he was able to determine that Xu Qing wasn't a Quasi-Immortal, but did have Quasi-Immortal battle prowess. And he could sense the space-time fluctuations around him. His guard went up.

After a moment of thought, he said, "Did you know that I'm originally from Grand Immortal Mountain. This universe of yours used to be special, but it's degraded into something ordinary.... I'll be making use of it for a short time longer. No more than three hundred years. In terms of compensation—"

Before he could finish speaking, Xu Qing extended his right hand and unleashed his space-time canon. He seized control of the time of all living beings and things in the Inksun Universe! In any other universe, Xu Qing would not have been able to do such a thing with his current cultivation base. After all, even just a single universe was immeasurably large.

But the Inksun Universe was different. From the moment he arrived and became the lord of the immortal hall in this universe, the karma of the Inksun Universe became like a servant to him. This place... was his personal property. It was similar to the god cultivation system in which gods had god kingdoms of their own.[1]

Earlier, his divine will could make use of karma to spread throughout the universe. Now, he was doing the same thing with his space-time canon. All of the time in the entire Inksun Universe surged, and under the direction of Xu Qing's canon, it swept toward him.

A sound echoed out like the water of a river. Crashing waves could be heard. A majestic, flowing body of water appeared, growing larger and larger. Eventually... this universe's River of Time appeared in Xu Qing's right hand!

The astonishing river contained projected images of all the living beings here. It was like an ancient cradle of civilization that contained everything and everyone from throughout the starry sky.

It was all under the control of Xu Qing's canon. Xu Qing dropped his right hand. The starry sky shook, and everything distorted.

All of the nonhuman cultivators who could sense what was happening were astonished.

Kun Wu with his fishing pole was also visibly taken aback. An intense sensation of danger filled him. There was no time to offer explanations, so he unleashed his Quasi-Immortal cultivation base. Instantly, he was surrounded by flowers, plants, and trees. Infinite vegetation sprang up, surrounding him and growing out into the void. It was as if a primeval jungle had suddenly come to exist in the starry sky.

And the vegetation rushed toward the River of Time. When it reached the river, it grew in and around the water, until the River of Time seemed like it was just part of the jungle! The jungle wanted to completely cover it.

This was Kun Wu's canon, mastery of vegetation!

Xu Qing's face remained completely expressionless as he performed an incantation gesture with the right hand that he had just lowered. Instantly, innumerable planets in the Inksun Universe trembled, and the time that belonged to them was extracted and turned into... sand in the River of Time!

Every single grain of sand was a planet. With planets as sand, the river had a "foundation" as well as "weight."

It crushed downward. The vegetation in the river collapsed. The jungle outside of the river began to wither up.

However, Kun Wu was an extraordinary Quasi-Immortal. The collapsed vegetation began to grow again, and the withering reversed. Kun Wu himself was on his feet and backing up, his eyes glittering coldly. He could tell that Xu Qing was no simpleton.

"You have an Imperial Sovereign cultivation base but Quasi-Immortal battle prowess. No wonder you don't want to let me borrow this place. But... in the end you're just not a Quasi-Immortal!"

Kun Wu's eyes shone with an aggressive light as he threw both of his hands out in front of him.

"Cosmic Reversal!"

Instantly, all of the vegetation collapsed, and this time it didn't return. The withering did not reverse. Instead, everything destroyed itself. In the blink of an eye, the endless vegetation died. As a result of the vegetation dying, a powerful aura of death built up within Kun Wu's words.

“Borrow the canon of death to slay the living!”

The aura of death converged, becoming a gray image that contained an outline of Xu Qing. The image was like a death seal, and the person within it would have their life severed. This was Kun Wu’s trump card, and was an expansion on his vegetation canon that he himself had created.

Xu Qing’s eyes shone coldly as a sensation of danger exploded within him. The River of Time rumbled as it changed shape. It turned into a vortex, and as it spun, a wind kicked up. It had turned into... a space-time tempest! Infinite Timelessness had appeared.

Thanks to Infinite Timelessness, Kun Wu’s image trembled and collapsed into chaos. The image of Xu Qing flew out, and then there was no outline.

The tempest formed by Infinite Timelessness swept toward Kun Wu. Seeing that his killing move had been negated, his face fell and he shot backward with shock in his eyes.

“You can control your canon to that level? What was your ranking among the ascendees?”

Xu Qing didn’t respond. Although he hadn’t fought very many Quasi-Immortals, he knew that each Quasi-Immortal had areas of strength. What was more, the one he was facing had come from an earlier batch of ascendees, and could very well be a chosen. A Quasi-Immortal like this had to be very powerful.

The canon of parallelism stirred within him. Different layers of space-time descended. It was like a kaleidoscope!

Heaven’s Principle also appeared!

Kun Wu’s pupils constricted as the sensation of danger within him grew explosive. Without a moment of hesitation, he pulled out the immortal slip for his own universe and began a teleportation. He was done fighting!

He had managed to stick around the Inksun Universe as a squatter thanks to the level of his cultivation base. What was more, he knew that the majority of the ascendees would be mere Imperial Sovereigns. Back when he had been an ascendee, he had ranked in the 60s. But now he was a Quasi-Immortal, and for people like that to pick on newbies wasn’t anything out of the ordinary. In fact, it had happened to him back then. He had intended to just rely on force to get what he wanted.

All in all, the Inksun Universe had been special in the past, but was now considered ordinary. Yet little did he know that the person who had been given this universe actually had stupefying battle prowess. What was more, that kaleidoscope imparted a sensation of imminent and intense peril to him. If he moved even an instant too slowly, he would die.

In his astonishment, he began to blur as the teleportation began. Then he vanished! Unfortunately, Heaven’s Principle went with him.

Xu Qing looked on coldly. Eventually, he waved his hand, and Heaven’s Principle returned, stained with blood.

All of the nonhumans who had been watching were shaken to the core, and prostrated even lower to Xu Qing. What was more, all of them had been wondering the same thing that Kun Wu had wondered just before he left. But now... they were starting to get an idea of just what ranking Xu Qing had among the ascendees.

Not far away in the starry sky, about seven or eight universes away from the Inksun Universe, was the Aetherpouch Universe. In the immortal hall there, Kun Wu was just materializing from the teleportation.

The moment he appeared, he coughed up a massive mouthful of blood, and his eyes glittered with horror. His face was pale, and his blue hair had turned gray. He looked gaunt. His aura was so unstable that even after he dropped into a cross-legged position and deeply drained his immortal embryo, his cultivation base was still teetering. Ultimately, he was unable to stay in the Quasi-Immortal level. He seemed to be visibly deteriorating. Thankfully, it stopped when he was still at the peak of Imperial Sovereign.

Sometime later, he opened his eyes and laughed bitterly. A mote of dust had appeared in the middle of his teleportation, and even now, fear of it lingered in his heart.

That guy is no ordinary person. He must have ranked very high among the ascendees!

Kun Wu took a deep breath as he thought back regretfully to everything he had done in the Inksun Universe. Sighing, he sent a voice message to a friend asking for information about the top 10 ascendees. When he got a response, he shivered from head to toe, and his eyes went wide.

1st place....

Stunned, he could only moan inwardly at his bad luck....

No wonder he was so strong!

But then he frowned.

Wait, hold on. Normally speaking, someone like that should have been given a special universe. But Inksun was only special in the past. It's degraded now, and is considered normal. Don't tell me... there's something about the Inksun Universe that I'm unaware of!

In the end, Kun Wu shook his head and dispelled any notions of trying to dig for more information. If Xu Qing was an ordinary ascendee, it wouldn't matter. In fact, even if he were in the top 10, then Kun Wu could consider asking some friends to help him. After all, he was a member of the Grand Immortal Mountain, and he had a lot of connections in the Nineshores Heaven. But this was the 1st place ascendee. He knew full well that he wasn't in the position to provoke someone like that.

Immortal Lord Nineshores always pays close attention to the 1st place attendees.... People like that should never be messed with.

1. This is the first time ‘god kingdoms’ have been mentioned in the context of the god cultivation system. It caught me off guard because the way it’s mentioned here makes it seem like it’s something we’ve heard about before, except we haven’t. ❹

Chapter 1197: You’re So BAD, You Naughty Little Boy

Chapter 1197: You’re So BAD, You Naughty Little Boy

Time passed, slowly but surely.

A month of in-universe time passed in the Nineshores Heaven. That month was relevant to the universes in the Nineshores Heaven, not the star domains, star whirlpools, and galaxies. The reality was that in the massive Nineshores Heaven, the way time flowed in the endless universes changed depending on what civilizations and species were there, and how they recorded history.

In the end, that wasn’t important. Any given species in the Nineshores Heaven would usually have multiple ways of recording the passage of time. After all, they would have records of their own planet, but also records of the galaxy they were in. Some large species would have records of the star whirlpools, star domains, or even of the entire universe.

The month that passed for Xu Qing in the Inkland was different for the species that lived in the multitude of other locations. To them, it might have been dozens of years or even hundreds. More time would pass the smaller the galaxy was. It could also reflect incomplete or damaged natural and magical laws, or low levels of immortal energy.

The beings that lived amidst such slow passage of time would often be incomplete or damaged in some way. It could be their soul, or their bloodline, or their karma. Because of that, such species might not develop much even after the passage of hundreds of years. Things were always balanced out in some way.

Xu Qing got a clear sense of all that as he sat in the same spot as Kun Wu had occupied in the Inkland. He was also fishing. By means of his space-time canon, he had come to a much deeper understanding of his universe during the last month.

He had attempted to enter the black hole, but could only descend about 30 meters. After that, a terrifying power of rejection stopped him. He had eventually given up, sat down cross-legged and started using the fishing pole.

Although his divine will couldn’t go very far inside, and given how difficult it was to get the ringsource out, Xu Qing felt like he was sitting on top of a mountain of treasure, only for the treasure to be extremely difficult to take. That said, he could tell that practicing cultivation here would give faster results to his immortal embryo than anywhere else.

The ringsource doesn’t come out easily, but there are still bits and pieces to be had. At the same time... Kun Wu’s fishing method is worth studying.

He looked at the fishing pole. Over the last month, he had been imitating Kun Wu, only to fail to fish out any ringsource. However, he got the feeling that he was doing the right thing.

Perhaps not enough time has passed. Fishing does require patience....

He looked away from the fishing pole and at the black hole.

That old man from the immortal palace said the Inksun Universe is a strategic resource. There must be something special about it....

Xu Qing had originally assumed that the Inksun Universe was special because of the ringsource it contained. But during the fight the previous month, some of the things Kun Wu said had been very revealing.

First of all, he said that the universe had degraded, and was now considered ordinary. Second, Kun Wu had been unaware of Xu Qing's ranking. It was possible that was because he had been so immersed in cultivation that he hadn't been paying attention to news from the outside. But considering that he himself had been an ascende, there was no way that he didn't know that 1st place ascendees would be rewarded with universes that were strategic resources.

Based on the clues, Xu Qing had come up with a theory. Kun Wu didn't think that the Inksun Universe was a strategic resource, not even considering the fact that it had ringsource. In other words, it hadn't occurred to him that this universe would be given to the 1st place ascende!

So, he didn't truly understand this universe. But what exactly is it about the Inksun Universe that's special?

Xu Qing looked at the Inkland black hole and something suddenly occurred to him. *Maybe the answer is in the black hole! What if there's something inside it other than ringsource.... Unfortunately, I can only go down 30 meters into it. Unless some Quasi-Immortal came along to help, I'm not going to have any luck.*

Xu Qing kept on fishing as he planned out what he would do going forward. *My short-term goal is to go to the Reception Universe in a year and get an assignment here in the Nineshores Heaven.*

But my long-term goal is to gather lots of ringsource. With it, I can form my immortal embryo and become a Quasi-Immortal. After that, I need even more ringsource to complete my immortal embryo. Then, I can gain enlightenment of the tenth extreme and reach immortal ascension! And that's when I can go back to Revered Ancient! I only have twenty years to work with.... I wonder if that'll be enough time.

Xu Qing looked off into the distance. *It hardly seems like it, but I've already been in the Fifth Star Ring for about ten years.*

Revered Ancient was a very long way away. In fact, Xu Qing didn't even know how far away it was. But he felt like he could sense where it was. *Regardless of anything, when the time comes, I'll go back. If I can reach immortal ascension beforehand, great. If not... at least I can lend some strength to the fight! One thing I need to do is fix my Sageheaven Pagoda. Maybe I can use my reward for that.*

Having reached this point in his train of thought, Xu Qing cleared his mind and focused on the ringsource. Ringsource was the key to improving his cultivation base.

Actually, there's another way to get ringsource....

Xu Qing's narrowed eyes glittered with a mysterious light. And that's gods.... Gods are in the majority in the higher star rings, and ringsource forms the basis of their life force. Their entire growth is based on gathering ringsource.

Because they are born in the higher star rings, it's much easier for them to gather ringsource than it is for cultivators. They are essentially collections of ringsource!

Devouring gods is that other way! The downside is that they aren't pure, so devouring them is dangerous and can have side effects. But, it's the fastest method. That's especially true considering I have a god clone with me. In other words... I can probably get around some of the downsides.

All of a sudden, Xu Qing thought back to the god prison he had ended up in when he first arrived in the Fifth Star Ring.[1]

In that prison of gods, there were spell formations that would extract and purify their spirit energy. In that manner, it could be used for cultivation purposes by low-level cultivators. The more cultivators that were part of the process, the more spirit energy would be produced, in an endless cycle.

Once there was enough spirit energy, it would be converted into immortal energy. I bet that's the same function served by the nonhumans in this universe. The nonhumans are used as nutrients for the path of the cultivators. Meanwhile, the further a cultivator gets along that path, and the longer they live, the stronger they get.

Xu Qing felt like he was experiencing sudden enlightenment.

But the god prisons in the four great planetary systems all contain low-level gods. But the high-level gods... must have special prisons of their own. And I bet those prisons are used to extract ringsource. If I pursue this path further, I need to find an opportunity to do some tests of my own. But right now, my most important focus is right in front of me. The Inkland!

Xu Qing looked down at the black hole in front of him. *As for the ringsource in there....*

Xu Qing looked hesitant, but he had an idea, so he closed his eyes to think.

When he opened them again, they shone with determination. Waving his left hand, he produced a green bottle. Within it was a fist-sized clump of clay. It was crimson.

This was the gift that Sir Vilespirit had given him recently. It was god clay! Fifth Star Ring cultivators had different ways of controlling gods, and in this one, they formed the clay into the image of a god that they could control. The blood-red clay floated out in front of Xu Qing, and then he used his divine will to change its shape.

Slowly but surely, he molded it into the shape of a fox!

Having accomplished that, he said, “Get out here!”

A very sweet voice replied to him. “Hmph! You rogue! You used to call me High God! What happened to that, huh? Well, it doesn’t matter what you call me. You always refused to give me your primal yang, and now you want to control me? You really are a rogue! I’ve done so much for you! Hmph!”

“I said get out here.” Xu Qing’s expression remained the same as ever as he flicked his sleeve, causing a medicinal pill bottle to fly out. Within it was a drop of blood!

When it appeared, the starry sky trembled, and the void roared as if with thunder. The surroundings rippled and distorted, and everything blurred. This was the blood of the God Lord whose authority was so similar to Starfire’s.

Starfire gasped excitedly.

“Gods are outlawed in the Fifth Star Ring,” Xu Qing said. “Since you’re only in the Godfire level, you don’t attract much notice. But if you absorb this blood and become an Altar God... well, I don’t know what would happen. They could very well clamp down on you instantly. Even though you got an identity in the Aurora Immortal Palace to serve as your foundation, I don’t know if that’s enough to earn you approval.

“Therefore, I shaped this god clay to look like you, so I can control you. That way, if anything unexpected happens, I’ll have an explanation ready to go. That will ensure that your breakthrough is as safe as possible. Sorry for the trouble.”

Starfire was clearly moved, but still let loose a cold snort. “Call me big sis. Then I’ll obey.”

Xu Qing thought for a moment. Starfire had been keeping him company for a long time, and had helped a lot in the Aurora Immortal Palace.... After a long moment, he sighed. “Fine, Big Sis.”

Starfire was clearly pleased, as shē laughed coquettishly. Then shē became manifest. Starlight streamed out toward the clay fox floating in front of Xu Qing. The light merged into the fox.

The clay fox was an inanimate object, but an instant later, it came to life. It filled with color, then transformed into a bewitchingly charming young woman. The woman walked toward Xu Qing.

There were few other words that could describe hēr other than: perfect. Hēr skin was so fair it was almost translucent, and hēr curvaceous body was so attractive that anyone who looked at hēr would be overwhelmed with the desire to be with

Upon nearing, her lovely lips parted, and she flirtatiously said, “You’re so *bad*, you naughty little boy.... First you rub your hands all over me, and then you don’t even give me clothes to wear?”

1. Xu Qing first saw the “prison of gods” in [chapter 1093](#). ❸

Chapter 1198: Unambitious Fox Maiden

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Xu Qing sighed. Deep down, he felt somewhat helpless.

From the moment he had met Starfire until this day, hēr way of speaking had not changed. Shē spoke in a way that was direct, shocking, and audacious. It didn't matter if he was weaker than hēr or stronger than hēr. Nothing had changed. Regardless of the time or place, shē was always ready to flirt with him....

Shaking his head, he waved his hand. A gown appeared that covered Starfire's astonishingly attractive figure.

Running hēr hands down herself and looking a bit annoyed, shē said, "Hm. It's a bit tight. Ohh. So you *like* tight clothes, you naughty boy."

"You can absorb the god blood and break through now," he said.

Noting how disinterested Xu Qing seemed, Starfire covered hēr mouth as shē laughed softly. Seemingly more fascinated by him than ever, shē took a step closer to him.

"Alright, Young Lord. And how exactly would you like me to break through?" Shē spoke in a sultry tone, and when shē called him Young Lord, it was very reminiscent of when shē was the fox maiden back in the Aurora Immortal Palace.

Xu Qing closed his eyes and continued fishing. "Time is limited. You decide."

Shē smiled coquettishly. That said, shē knew that the most important thing at the moment was to absorb the god blood. So shē stretched, stuck hēr chin up, and looked at the bottle floating in the air. Hēr phoenix-like eyes shone with a golden light.

Reaching out, shē shattered the bottle, causing an astonishing aura to pulse out. Countless godly striations appeared, intersecting and combining. The drop of blood wriggled and pulsed between different sizes and shapes. It exuded terrifying mightiness, and was accompanied by a soundless roar that caused the air to vibrate.

If you looked closely at the drop of blood, it seemed like it was made of stars. Innumerable crimson stars! It was as if the redness of the blood was the light emanating from those countless stars.

Starfire looked at the blood and inhaled deeply. Then, hēr godly might erupted, causing mutagen to suddenly fill the area.

The surface of a sea appeared within the godly aura, and everything within it was inverted. The sea was the sky, and the stars were beneath it. The sky reflected infinite starlight, which descended to create a divine likeness that hovered between the sky and the sea.

The divine likeness's mouth opened, and the drop of God Lord blood was absorbed. The statue shivered as if in pain.

After being absorbed, the drop of blood ceased to be red, and instead, became golden, which was the color of the gods! Something like a ball of fire ignited within Starfire's divine likeness. The fire raged, completely engulfing the statue, and spreading out to incinerate the sea and the stars.

An astonishing aura erupted from the divine likeness. Before, the mightiness of the blood had been constrained inside of it, as if it had been sealed, or even dead. But after Starfire consumed the blood, it was as if it came to life.

A terrifying aura swept out of the statue, bringing incomparable fluctuations like a storm that could rock all existence. It filled all of the star domains in the Inksun Universe, as well as all of the galaxies and planets!

The planets shook. All living beings reacted with visible shock. All inanimate objects swayed back and forth. Innumerable nonhumans were shaken to the core. Top experts were clearly taken aback, down to the last one. Numerous gazes in the Inksun Universe were focused on Xu Qing's location.

The development was even surprising to Xu Qing. The aura was just too spectacular. Under its weight, the entire Inksun Universe was visibly shaking.

Cracks appeared on Starfire's divine likeness, and golden fire began to seep out of them. Hēr sea was really disappearing, and hēr sealing marks were blurring. It was as if shē couldn't handle the force.

It only took a glance for Xu Qing to understand what was happening. Starfire had only come as a clone to the Fifth Star Ring, and that clone wasn't strong enough to deal with God Lord blood. It seemed he was going to have to step in to help. In fact, he was preparing to help take away some of the strength of the god blood, to reduce it to a manageable level. That would make the blood less effective, but he wasn't just going to stand by and watch Starfire be burned out of existence.

However, just before he was about to take action, Starfire spoke in a hoarse voice.

"I can do it!"

The nearly collapsed divine likeness trembled, and then a starry sky appeared over the head of the statue. It was not the star ring of the Fifth Star Ring. It was... the starry sky of the Revered Ancient mainland. It was the starry sky of the Ninth Star Ring! Starlight began to fall from that starry sky, like a rain of stars, and as it landed on the divine likeness, it merged inside and suppressed the golden fire.

However, that didn't seem to be enough. The golden fire was suppressed momentarily, but then it surged back even stronger than before.

As things reached a critical point, determination shone in Starfire's eyes. Opening hēr mouth, shē took a deep breath and then spoke in a godly voice.

"Switch the primary and secondary!"

New strength seemed to flow into the crumbling statue, building up with every moment that passed. The divine likeness shone with glittering, dazzling, blinding light. The starlight falling from the starry sky became unfathomably boundless.

It was no longer a rain, but rather, a falling sea of starlight. All of it was falling. It provided continuing nourishment until the golden fire first stabilized, and then began to unify with Starfire's divine likeness.

The pressure weighing down on the surrounding universe began to subside. The starry sky above the divine likeness blurred and faded away.

A massive and astonishing altar appeared beneath the divine likeness, something that could support an entire starry sky. It was extremely ancient and covered with complicated, godly designs. It was something that could end the heavens and crush the earth, and it seemed to be part of a higher star ring. The godly aura it emitted surpassed the Godfire level.

This was... a god altar! The moment it formed, it indicated that Starfire had entered the Altar God level!

Xu Qing could see it all very clearly. He could also sense that, just now, Starfire had apparently used a god magic to sacrifice his true self back in Revered Ancient. That was the price he had paid to absorb the god blood! That was what had fueled the breakthrough.

Xu Qing could also sense the love felt by a higher star ring toward a god. Altar Gods were the equivalent of the Quasi-Immortals of the cultivator system. When a cultivator broke through from Imperial Sovereign to Quasi-Immortal, dramatic changes occurred to heaven and earth, but it wasn't anything like the breakthrough Starfire had just experienced. It was as if, to the natural laws of a higher star ring, this... was orthodox and correct.

Xu Qing could sense that this universe, and this starry sky, had actually been helping this Altar God to come forth.

Gods really are doted on by the higher star rings....I'm sure the law enforcement forces in the Nineshores Immortal Palace noticed the commotion just now.

Almost as soon as Xu Qing thought that, the starry sky trembled. An immense and indescribable force arrived, causing all living beings in the Inksun Universe to go still.

The light from the suns stopped moving, and all the planets stopped rotating. Time seemed to be sealed. It was as if the entire Inksun Universe had been encased in a huge bubble. It was cut off from everything outside.

Starfire's breakthrough seemed to stop as if it had been paused, and the forming god altar was frozen in place. There it remained in place, completely motionless.

Then a pair of eyes appeared in the starry sky, seemingly replacing the entire Inksun Universe. The eyes were staring at Xu Qing. It seemed as if a single thought from those eyes could wipe out Xu Qing, Starfire, and the entire universe.

Suppressing his fear, Xu Qing bowed. "Exalted one, this is my god slave."

The eyes focused on Starfire. The divine likeness blurred, and a lifetime of images appeared. They started out with a human emperor, who, in the face of an invasion of gods, chose to split his three souls and transmigrate into the bodies of gods. Eventually, one of those gods encountered Xu Qing,

got wrapped up in his affairs, and then came along to the Fifth Star Ring. Then everything that happened in the Hundred Flowers Palace became a foundation. Then came a body made of god clay, which Xu Qing controlled.

Everything was very clear.

A cold voice echoed through the starry sky and into Xu Qing's mind. "If this god does anything wrong, you will bear responsibility!"

Xu Qing bowed again. He knew exactly who this person was.

The eyes in the starry sky closed, and the bubble surrounding the Inksun Universe vanished. The planets and living beings went back to normal. And Starfire's breakthrough continued!

No one else but Xu Qing was aware of what had happened.

The god altar beneath Starfire rose up, lifting the divine likeness high. And then an Altar God aura began to pulse out of Starfire. Shē opened her eyes, and shē shone with golden light. Behind hēr, boundless and dazzling stars glittered. Waving hēr hand, shē absorbed all of the supernatural phenomena, then smiled and approached Xu Qing.

"Seems you were being overcautious, you naughty little boy," shē said casually. "You used that clay because you wanted to feel me up, didn't you? Nothing unexpected ended up happening after all, did it?"

Starfire was clearly very pleased with how things had turned out. Not only had shē become an Altar God, but having absorbed the godly authority in the blood, she now had a much greater likelihood of becoming a True God, as well as a path to follow in that direction.

Glancing at hēr, Xu Qing coolly said, "Immortal Lord Nineshores just paid a visit."

Starfire's eyes went wide, and hēr pupils constricted. Shē was very familiar with Xu Qing's personality, and shē knew that he was telling the truth. What was more, shē hadn't sensed the visit of the Immortal Lord.

She sighed softly. *This star ring.... Well, who cares? The affairs of gods and immortals aren't important to me. Whatever happens in the future doesn't matter as long as I end up happy.*

Having reached this conclusion, Starfire blinked a few times, put everything out of mind, and prepared to do some more flirting.

Xu Qing didn't give hēr a chance. Looking at the Inkland black hole, he said, "Since you're an Altar God, you can go with me in there to look around. I want to see exactly what makes the Inksun Universe so special."

He started walking.

Looking at him from behind, Starfire licked hēr lips. "You naughty boy. The more deadpan you act, the more I like you."

Chapter 1199: Primeval Higher Star Pin

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The Inkland was like a black hole. But at the same time, it wasn't. There was no swirling vortex, nor was there any gravitational force that pulled things in. It was more like a cave in the starry sky, shaped like an ordinary circle. Few individuals were aware of where it led or how deep it went. The only thing Xu Qing was certain of was that his divine will couldn't see inside.

It was comparable to a star domain. Compared to the Inksun Universe as a whole, it wasn't very large. But when you stood at the edge of it, you would be filled with an intense sensation of grandeur. The wisps of ringsource aura that came out of it, like fog or catkins, made the Inkland black hole seem even more mysterious.

At the moment, Xu Qing was like a fish swimming down into the Inkland, struggling to make progress. Starfire followed along, pulsing with the power of a god to bolster him. They were working together. He would race down about thirty meters, and then Starfire would take the lead for a short time. The reason was that although there was no force of gravitation in the Inkland, there was a force of expulsion that got stronger the further in you went.

When Xu Qing had tried this alone, 30 meters had been his limit. By cooperating with Starfire he had pushed past that previous limit. But after switching back and forth several times, the force of expulsion was getting so strong that both of them were struggling to proceed.

At around 600 meters down, they couldn't go any further. That seemed to be the limit for Quasi-Immortals.

That was also when Xu Qing suddenly detected a very unusual aroma coming from deeper inside. It smelled like rust, mixed with something like ammonia.

Upon reaching that 600-meter spot, Starfire looked around suspiciously, then down at the endlessness below them. "There's something strange going on here.... This aroma... seems to be stirring some ancient memories in me...."

Meanwhile, creaking sounds were drifting out from Xu Qing, which came from the pressure on his fleshly body. Though his canon was strong, his fleshly body was still in the level of illusory reality. His canon, which he had been using to sustain his fleshly body, was starting to be eaten away by the force of expulsion.

Unfortunately, 600 meters was hardly scratching the surface when it came to the depths of this black hole. That said, the ringsource here was a bit more abundant than further up.

Though I can't check any further, at least this is a better fishing spot. Despite being a Quasi-Immortal, Kun Wu didn't have canon strong enough to go down this far.

After instructing Starfire to watch over him, he settled down cross-legged and took out the fishing pole. He cast the line, and it dropped down.

Kun Wu really had an extraordinary fishing pole.... Settling his energy and clearing his mind, he waited.

As Starfire stood guard, shē started thinking of the past. Shē was certain shē had never come to this place before, not even back when shē was actually a human. It seemed to hēr that the sense of familiarity came because, back when she reached godly ascension, shē had mysteriously acquired a massive amount of information about gods.

Time passed. Half a month went by.

Starfire continued to ponder things.

Xu Qing went on with his fishing. And then, after all of the time he had spent, he finally got some results. There was a tug on the fishing line.

His eyes snapped open, and he spotted a five-colored ball of light! It had appeared deeper down in the black hole, and though it was only about the size of a human head, it shone with intense brightness that made it very obvious to see in the darkness.

Though it looked like pure light, it was really a liquid, and it was attached to the fishhook. There was another tug on the line, and then Xu Qing yanked the pole up and dragged the liquid light toward him. As it neared, an intense ringsource aura spread in all directions.

Even when he was just sensing it, his immortal embryo was stirring in response. His eyes glittered brightly.

Starfire suddenly felt an instinctual longing building up inside. Ringsource was the most fundamental power in the thirty-six higher star rings. It formed the origin of gods and the structure of the star rings. Whether it was the godly authority of the gods, or the cultivator authority of the cultivators, substructurally speaking, they all came from ringsource. It was the same with both godhood and canon. It was something higher star rings literally could not be without. When cultivators formed an immortal embryo and then upgraded it to become a mature immortal, they absolutely had to use ringsource! Starfire knew that it was superlatively important to Xu Qing, so shē suppressed hēr longing.

Xu Qing reached out and grabbed the five-colored liquid light, looked at it for a moment, then squeezed it. The ball of light instantly transformed. It flowed up his arm and out to cover his body. And then, the body of illusory reality formed outside of Xu Qing's soul began to soak it up like a sponge.

The light slowly began to weaken and dim. By the time it disappeared, Xu Qing's aura had improved dramatically, and his body of illusory reality was now just on the verge of reaching the undying level.

Xu Qing opened his eyes, scanned himself, and then took out the little white bottle he had acquired from Sir Vilespirit. With the wave of his hand, he dissolved the bottle into nothing.

The liquid inside then floated over to him. It was also about the size of a head, and emitted the exact same five-colored glow. It was also ringsource!

“Exactly the same...” he murmured, eyes narrowing. Then, without any hesitation, he reached out and grabbed it.

The same thing happened. His body of illusory reality absorbed it and his aura surged. His fleshly body improved, until finally... he was shining with boundless light. Thunderous rumbling sounds echoed out everywhere. His true fleshly body, which was within his body of illusory reality, became transparent, as if it was melting and transforming on a fundamental level!

The process of undying illusory reality involved sending the soul out, and then using the illusory body to slowly replace the real body! Major success in that level came when the real body, which had been absorbed by the illusion, also became an illusion, and turned into a soul!

That level was called the undying. Of course, it wasn't truly undying.

That was because after that point, the fleshly body and the soul would be remolded and would intersect. It was like the soul gaining a body and the body gaining a soul. Then all of the preconditions could be considered met. That was why it would be impossible for someone like that to be killed by someone in the same cultivation level. Only someone on a higher level could do so.

Xu Qing's cultivation base had now reached that level.

His real body, hidden in illusion, was becoming increasingly transparent. Finally... they switched, so that the real became illusion. The true body became a soul, and the illusory reality became reality! The inner became reality. The outer became reality!

Xu Qing's aura climbed higher, and his canon glittered as it flowed inside and outside of him.

His eyes opened and they were calm, but full of aggression. He seemed threatening without being angry, and at the same time, full of determination.

Starfire was shaken to the core. As of this moment, Xu Qing seemed significantly stronger to her than he had before.

Xu Qing pondered the situation. *Next comes the final transposition of the undying illusory reality. The interior reality and the exterior reality must fuse, and then become... the immortal embryo! And that's going to require... a lot more ringsource.*

Based on what he could tell, that next step was going to require the equivalent of a hundred balls of ringsource like those he had just used.

Having reached this point in his train of thought, Xu Qing looked down. Considering that his fleshly body was stronger now, he figured he should try to sink down further. Before he could, Starfire reached out to stop him. He turned to look at

Starfire's expression was grave, which was very unusual.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed.

“While you were working on your cultivation,” shē said, “I was thinking back to the time I reached godly ascension, and received a host of information about gods.... As I was sifting through all of those memories, I realized why this place seems familiar to me.

“What’s actually familiar is that aroma. It’s the smell of the rust from primeval higher star iron.

“One piece of that information I received is this: the thirty-six higher star rings don’t have fixed sizes. As history progresses, they occasionally grow and expand. It’s something the thirty-six higher star rings just automatically do.

“When they do that, rips will appear in them. And whenever those rips appear, the God Paragon of the star ring uses a special material to create a type of pin that they will then use to pin close the rips. It prevents the rips from getting bigger, and allows them to eventually heal. The material they use to create the pins is called primeval higher star iron!”

Having reached this point in the explanation, Starfire looked around. “That’s the aroma here. It’s primeval higher star iron.”

“So...?” Xu Qing said.

“If my speculations are correct, this Inkland black hole is probably a spot where one of those rips occurred in the ancient past. In order to prevent the rip from spreading, the God Paragon of the Fifth Star Ring used a pin here!

“But the terrifying pin that could prevent a star ring from being ripped open has been taken away! It’s no longer here! However, the iron pin itself needs to be constantly maintained. In order to preserve it permanently, it would need to be returned here occasionally.

“That’s most likely why the Inksun Universe is considered a strategic resource.... I’d say there’s an eighty to ninety percent chance this place is designed to maintain a primeval higher star pin! And down below us....”

Starfire looked down into the gloomy abyss.

“I bet only that God Paragon could know... what’s on the other side of the spot that the pin was used on. We definitely aren’t strong enough to know.

“That got me thinking. A universe designed to maintain a primeval higher star pin should be extremely important in any star ring. So why give it to you? And thus... I suggest you don’t explore any further.”

Although Starfire did not provide a complete explanation, hēr tone of voice and serious expression made it clear that shē was suspicious of the entire situation. Hēr instincts were telling hēr that there was something going on.

Lowering hēr voice, shē said, “To put it plainly, taking a primeval higher star pin away wouldn’t require any sort of sacrifice. But... upon returning it, all living beings in this universe would need to become... sacrificial offerings.”

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“Sacrificial offerings....” Starfire’s words caused a profound look to appear in Xu Qing’s eyes. For a moment, he was lost in thought. Then he looked up and calmly said, “Since further exploration is going to be hard, let’s shelve this matter for the time being.”

With that, he floated back up through the Inkland black hole.

Starfire breathed a sigh of relief. After dredging up the memories that revealed what this place was, shē had begun to feel very uneasy about exploring it further. And the aroma of rust had stricken hēr with outright fear. After all, they had no idea who took the primeval higher star pin, nor when they would return.... If, by chance, that person happened to return when shē and Xu Qing were exploring the place, then they would definitely be wiped out of existence.

Of course, Starfire knew that things would most likely not play out that way. What shē was really afraid about was the unknown at the bottom of the Inkland. Whatever was down there, it was something mysterious and dangerous that surpassed hēr omniscience.

Seeing that Xu Qing was abandoning the exploration, shē breathed a sigh of relief and followed him away.

And thus, the two of them flew out of the Inkland. Once out in the open, Xu Qing tossed the fishing pole to Starfire.

Shē caught it, and being able to guess what Xu Qing meant by the gesture, shē looked at him begrudgingly. “What’s this mean, naughty boy? You’re going to go out and have fun while I stay behind fishing for you?”

Xu Qing nodded. That was exactly what he was planning to do. “I have ten months left before I need to go to the Reception Universe. Time is limited, and I still need to go cash in one of my ascendee rewards. If things go quickly, it’ll take a few months. If they go slowly, it might be half a year. I’ll return as soon as I’m done.

“In the meantime, High God, I’d like your assistance in the fishing effort. The more ringsource you can get, the better.”

Without waiting for Starfire to agree to the plan, he turned to leave.

Starfire watched him go with a cold harrumph that ended in a pout. *Polite words, but he sounded like he was giving orders. The little punk... has really grown up. How dare he talk to me like that! Although, seeing him like that just makes me like him even more.*

Starfire couldn’t help but lick her lips. Then she waved her delicate hand out, and immediately, a sea of flowers appeared outside the Inkland. The flowers bloomed, and out of them stepped a host of bewitchingly charming young women. They were all manifestations of her god magic, and they were extremely lifelike. A buzz of conversation and music drifted out.

It was almost like the Hundred Flowers Palace had returned. Naturally, luxurious divans appeared, along with immortal fruits and spirit alcohol.

Starfire already seemed to be enjoying hērself. Lying down on one of the divans like the senior consort of the imperial harem, shē flicked the fishing rod and sent the line down into the Inkland. Then shē popped an immortal fruit into hēr mouth, helped hērself to some spirit alcohol, and settled down to enjoy the music.

No one intentionally treats themselves badly in life.

As Xu Qing departed, he sensed what was going on outside the Inkland.

Everyone had their own likes and dislikes. He understood that. Starfire preferred to enjoy hērself. Shē liked a clamor of activity, while Xu Qing liked peace and quiet. But it didn't matter the surroundings. As long as shē fished up some ringsource, he didn't care what else shē did.

And thus, he used his immortal slip to leave the Inksun Universe and head in the direction of... the Daoforge Universe! Whether it was the possibility of upgrading the canon in magical treasures or having a Lower Immortal forge some equipment, both could happen in the Daoforge Universe.

Naturally speaking, the place was very special. In fact, it was definitely a universe that could be called a strategic resource. It was the heart of the equipment forging tradition in the Nineshores Heaven.

In fact, the mere structure of the universe itself was absolutely astonishing. There were no star domains in the Daoforge Universe. There were no galaxies, and there were no planets. There was only one magnificent and astonishing forge complex, which took up seventy percent of the entire Daoforge Universe. It was really that incomprehensibly large.

As for the fire that heated the forge houses in the complex, it came from... innumerable stars fixed in place below! All of the stars in the Daoforge Universe had been moved underneath the forge to heat it. That said, it wasn't just Daoforge Universe stars that provided the heat. In order to ensure the forge flames were as hot as they could be, stars were plucked from other universes and added to the mix. Another source of heat was godfire. By combining all of those things, it was possible to power the countless subsidiary forge houses operated by millions upon millions of expert smiths that operated them.

From a distance, the forge didn't look much different from a sun. It was just more astonishing and magnificent. And it ensured that this universe was one unified structure.

Emerging from the forge complex were countless glowing bands of light, stretching off in all directions. Each of those bands was occupied by hosts of cultivators. Anyone in the Nineshores Heaven who needed forging services, as long as they qualified, would come to this place. As a result, the Daoforge Universe was always filled with a clamor of activity.

When Xu Qing appeared, he was on one of those bands of light. As he looked around, he heard the rise and fall of conversation. He felt the waves of heat coming from the forge complex. And it was all a bit dazzling.

What an amazing place....

Without pausing for a moment, he started moving through the crowd along the band of light. Eventually, he reached a black altar at the end of the band of light where people were waiting in line.

There was a huge demand for the services provided by the Daoforge Universe, so on each of the bands of light, there were large numbers of people waiting for their turn. Of course, there were astonishing numbers of smiths working at the forge, so wait times usually weren't very long. Most people sat cross-legged and worked on cultivation while they waited. When their turn came, they would get onto the altar, crush their jade slip, and turn into a beam of light as they were teleported into the forge entrance.

Days passed in flash.

Xu Qing spent some time observing the forge complex. It was divided into three overall sections: the Main Concourse with Landings 1-3; the Central Concourse with landings 4-6; the High Concourse with Landings 7-9. The Main Concourse had the most forge houses, and the higher you went, the fewer forge houses there were.

The vast majority of cultivators who teleported in from the bands of light would go to the Main Concourse or the Central Concourse. It was less common to go to the High Concourse. In fact, Xu Qing never saw anyone go there. He had some speculations about why that was.

A few more hours passed as various cultivators went to the altar and teleported away. Finally, it was Xu Qing's turn. Taking a deep breath, he walked onto the altar and took out the immortal slip he had been given as a reward.

Just as he had seen everyone else do, he crushed the slip. There was a pop as the immortal slip crumbled and was absorbed into the altar. Then, a power swept out, turning into a beam of light that swept him up into the air. Astonishingly, the beam of light... took him toward High Concourse Landing 7!

A lot of people on the band of light noticed, and many shocked glances focused on the teleportation light. A buzz of conversation also rose up.

"Can you believe it! Someone just went to Landing 7!"

"The forge houses in the High Concourse are operated by immortal smiths!"

"Normally speaking, only cultivators who have made major contributions of service qualify to go there...."

"I bet you that was one of the new ascendees. The ones in the top ten get some very special rewards!"

Everyone sounded envious. The truth was that it was rare to get a chance to have a Lower Immortal forge equipment.

Of course, Xu Qing had no idea how the crowd outside was reacting. He was swept through the beam of light and soon found himself at the entrance of a forge house on Landing 7. He felt his face battered by heat as, to his surprise, he realized he was standing in front of a massive fire pit.

Seated cross-legged next to the fire pit was an old man in a red robe who pulsed with a terrifying aura.

Xu Qing's expression became very somber. He could tell that this was, indeed, an immortal! He bowed deeply.

The old man didn't open his eyes. In fact, he didn't even speak with words. He just used divine will. *"What do you want forged?"*

Without any hesitation, Xu Qing took out the geomantic compass he had acquired that was a canon treasure. He also took out the mote of heaven's principle. After a moment of thought, he also took out the Sageheaven Pagoda. [1]

With utmost respect, he said, "Senior, I would like to refine this geomantic compass, and use the materials, along with heaven's principle, as well as your canon, to forge a treasure that corresponds to my personal canon!"

"What form do you want it to take?" the old man asked with divine will.

"A skewer!" Xu Qing waved his hand and summoned an illusory version of the iron skewer that had long been at his side.

Then he pointed to the geomantic compass. "Senior, I would also like your help extracting the canon from that geomantic compass and putting it into my pagoda."

This time, the old man opened his eyes. Terrifying pressure radiated off him and onto Xu Qing. "Your reward was for one forging job."

Xu Qing bowed his head. "Senior, I also was rewarded with one opportunity to augment a canon treasure."

"That's not my job," the old man said coolly. He looked Xu Qing up and down. "Wait, you're Xu Qing?"

Xu Qing nodded.

The old man smiled. "So, you're the 1st place ascende... Well, fine then. I'll help you, just this once."

The old man waved his finger, and terrifying mightiness emerged from its tip. It landed on the geomantic compass, which trembled and collapsed into dust. The impurities within it were removed, leaving behind only its quintessence. As for the canon, he extracted it without damaging it, then waved his finger again to send it into the pagoda.

Next, a burst of flame emerged from the fire pit. It swept around the pagoda, causing the canon within to harmonize. Then the structure of the pagoda shattered, only to be put back together by the fire. Afterward, it was not only back in one piece, it was far stronger than before.

Having accomplished that, the old man started working on the magical treasure Xu Qing had requested. He took the purified geomantic compass as well as the mote of heaven's principle, and he combined them. After some thought, he then took out a palm-sized piece of green stone to add into the mix. More flame emerged from the fire pit, which surrounded the new object, burning and refining it, until... an iron skewer appeared within it.

After it had taken shape, the old man suddenly said, "Your canon!"

Having watched the old man work, Xu Qing could tell that he was definitely a grandmaster. Without hesitation, he excitedly sent out his canon of parallelism. It entered the sea of flames and fused into the iron skewer. The iron skewer vibrated, and suddenly a kaleidoscope of images appeared around it.

Xu Qing's eyes lit up. *It worked!*

1. Xu Qing got the geomantic compass in [chapter 1145](#). 一五