

Timescape 151

Chapter 151: Declaration of War

The news was like a tempest that rapidly spread throughout all of Seven Blood Eyes. Both Onpeak and Offpeak cultivators were deeply interested in the subject.

In a war, high-level cultivators would make up the backbone of the fighting force. However, there were still many things that higher-level Qi Condensation cultivators could do, whether it was as foot soldiers, handling logistics and transportation, or many other things. Besides, there were Qi Condensation level Seazombies as well. In other words, the Offpeak disciples could also participate in the fighting.

As the news spread, a buzz filled the city.

However, Xu Qing wasn't paying attention to all that. For one thing, he had personally witnessed the peaklords and elders fighting the Seazombie experts. Also, Huang Yan had already mentioned war twice to him, and then there was Zhang San and his whole business plan. Because of all that, Xu Qing had long known that war was coming.

Xu Qing had never thought much about war. Earlier, Zhang Yunshi had told him that Foundation Establishment cultivators weren't obligated to join the fighting, and that the main reason they would go was for profit.

But after Xu Qing started cultivating the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture, he'd changed his mind. And the truth was that all Foundation Establishment cultivators who practiced that technique thought of a war as very important. After all, it was an easy thing to get souls when fighting in a war. All you had to do was stay alive, and you could open multiple dharma apertures.

That was even more the case considering that Seazombie souls were especially effective for use with the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture. That was what got Xu Qing excited, especially the thought of how useful Seazombie souls were....

He currently had 20 dharma apertures open. That meant he had only 10 to go before he could form his first life flame.

If he had ghostlonging horseshoe crabs and chrysanthemum mollusk to attract sea beasts, then considering the diminishing returns as he opened more apertures, he had the feeling it would take about two years, even if he did occasionally run into a Foundation Establishment beast.

Of course, that method was also dangerous, and that wasn't even taking into consideration travel time, plus the question of whether or not he could get enough ghostlonging horseshoe crabs.

Taking those factors into consideration, three years was a more reasonable estimate.

Going for that long on the open sea without being able to enter the profound radiance state seemed extremely dangerous. When a powerful expert ran into a Qi Condensation cultivator out at sea, it wouldn't be worth it to kill them. But it was a different story when running into Foundation Establishment cultivators.

War would be dangerous, but in terms of the potential benefits, it was vastly superior.

As the news spread about war, Zhang San was working hard on the combined harbor project. He had spent a lot of spirit stones already. Having identified the harbors to develop, he had hired

thousands of Sixth Peak disciples, as well as tens of thousands of ordinary construction workers. The work had already begun.

With so many people working day and night to develop a new harbor, the place changed on a daily basis.

And there were already new businesses planning to open there. Because Zhang San was a deputy bureau chief in the Transportation Division, it was within the scope of his authority to establish a new bureau to service his harbor.

The Captain had similar authority. Though he was away from the sect, he arranged for the Celestial Bureau to move to the new harbor to serve as a new branch of the Violent Crimes Division.

Somehow, Huang Yan learned that Xu Qing was one of the investors in the new harbor, and made the arrangements for the Pilot Assistance Division to set up a branch operation there.

As news spread, Gu Muqing quietly made arrangements to open a very large medicine shop there as well.

The Sixth Peak shopkeeper who had once tried to blackmail Xu Qing, perhaps at the behest of his backer, was one of the first to arrive and buy a storefront. Apparently, it was a show of goodwill.

As more and more people showed up at the new harbor, things got more and more lively. Other than the upcoming war, it was the biggest topic of conversation in the sect.

When Ding Xue heard about what was going on, she wanted to show her support, and thus purchased three storefronts that formed a triangle surrounding Gu Muqing's shop. Ding Xue didn't really know what she was going to do with them, but seemed very enthusiastic about the prospects. She even contacted all of her best friends and asked them to also come support the new harbor project.

The day after Ding Xue bought her storefronts, Zhao Zhongheng hurriedly made arrangements for the Dispatch Division to open a branch there as well....

Zhang San was very pleased with all of this. Of course, he had been the one to spread word about Xu Qing's involvement, at the Captain's behest. As the Captain had said, good-looking people often came in very handy.

Zhang San also tapped into his own network, and before long, people from the Third, Fourth and Fifth Peaks were coming to purchase storefronts. Just about anything you could possibly need for cultivation was available there.

Considering that this new harbor was basically being run by the Violent Crimes Division, it was no surprise that gambling halls and brothels started popping up there immediately. In fact, they made up the majority of the new arrivals.

Storefronts were selling out fast.

Another half-month went by, and the ghostlonging horseshoe crabs Xu Qing had ordered from the Hundred Plants Workshop came in.

That was when, with great fanfare, the new harbor officially opened for business. They went to the Seventh Peak to officially apply for a harbor number, and were assigned 176.

The day it opened, Xu Qing moved off of the mountain peak and found an out-of-the-way berth in Harbor 176, which was where he would call home going forward. As he walked along the new harbor, which was already bustling, Xu Qing mused that Zhang San really had gone all-out to get the place done in time to start earning money from the sect. When Xu Qing sat on his dharmaskiff, listening to the sound of the waves and feeling his boat sway in the water, it made him think back to his Qi Condensation days. Right now, he was simply meditating. For the time being, he was delaying his plan to go out to sea.

As Harbor 176 was being constructed, more and more rumors about war spread. And just about every day, it was possible to see beams of light shooting through the air as cultivators returned to the seven peaks. That was what gave Xu Qing the indication that the war was getting close.

Another half month passed.

One morning, when Xu Qing had just used the Life Nurturing Incantation to open his 21st dharma aperture, the sound of bells rang out from the seven mountain peaks. It was very rare to hear bells like this. Their loud tolling filled all of Seven Blood Eyes, attracting the notice of both Onpeak and Offpeak cultivators.

Many disciples stepped out onto their dharmaboats to look at the seven mountain peaks. Many such disciples were actually Foundation Establishment cultivators. Similar things happened throughout the capital city. There were also Foundation Establishment cultivators who lived on the peaks, and they emerged from their mansion grottos, their gazes sharp.

Shortly after the bells rang, the voice of an old man echoed out, suppressing the sound of the bells as it filled Seven Blood Eyes.

“Disciples of Seven Blood Eyes, I am Sir Bloodsmelter, whom you may address as Patriarch. Today, I have an important matter to share with you. War has come.

“Our sect is formally declaring war on the Seazombies. They have accumulated wealth worth over a hundred billion spirit stones, and I intend for at least half of that to go to you as a reward!”

As his ancient voice echoed out, countless streams of blood emerged from the seven peaks, like writhing eels that shot up into the dome of heaven and became a massive cloud hanging overhead. As the countless threads of blood that made up the cloud merged together, they eventually formed the huge face of an old man. The ghastly looking face sent rumbling sounds throughout the sect, and caused everything to look like it was the color of blood.

Looking at it, Xu Qing was reminded of the time he had spotted Flame Phoenix. From a distance, it seemed like the entire area had been turned into a land of devils.

Meanwhile, a torrent of sword energy erupted from the huge eye on the First Peak. As it shot out, it turned into a blood-colored sword, formed from countless bolts of crimson lightning. It was a shocking sight, as even one of those lightning bolts was strong enough to crush a Foundation Establishment cultivator. Standing on that sword was a crimson-faced old man who was none other than the peaklord of the First Peak. He pulsed with a shocking and deadly aura that made it seem like he could slaughter gods.

“Your orders shall be followed, Patriarch!”

Almost as soon as the peaklord from the First Peak appeared, rumbling echoed out from the Second Peak as a massive pill furnace rose up from it. Sitting cross-legged atop it was a graceful middle-aged woman who was surrounded by a medicinal pill aura so powerful it glowed. Even more astonishing was that, within the pill furnace she sat atop was a medicinal pill that shone like the sun, and emanated terrifying fluctuations.

“Your orders shall be followed, Patriarch!”

From the Third Peak came a scholarly middle-aged man who stood on a yellow cloud. That cloud was filled with a shocking, grue-like aura, and surrounding the man were countless ghost projections. Stunned, Xu Qing realized the ghosts reminded him of the faceless woman in white that he'd seen back in the slums of the city he once lived in. They were all grues! [1]

“Your orders shall be followed, Patriarch!” the middle-aged scholar said.

After him came someone from the Fourth Peak. He was a burly man with a chain wrapped around him. The front end of the chain was a huge eyeball which he held in his hand. As soon as the eyeball appeared, a god-like, holy aura erupted out, which Xu Qing realized came from a godly entity, although one not quite on the level as Joine.

No one came out of the Fifth or Sixth Peak!

Finally came the Seventh Peak. Rumbling sounds echoed out as Master Seventh appeared, striding out into midair. He seemed ordinary in nature, and compared to the other peaklords, didn't look very impressive. He almost seemed mortal, as he didn't emit any fluctuations. And yet, with the exception of First Peaklord, all the other peaklords bowed their heads in deference.

“Your orders shall be followed, Patriarch!” Master Seventh said, clapping hands and bowing.

When the patriarch Sir Bloodsmelter looked down at Master Seventh, he seemed surprised, and even laughed. “Little Seventh, you've improved your dao resonance and didn't say anything. You're getting close to a breakthrough. Congratulations!”

Chapter 152: Going to War

In response to Sir Bloodsmelter's praise, Master Seventh smiled faintly. He didn't say anything, but he did clasp hands and bow again.

The patriarch, his face made up of countless streams of blood in midair, shifted his smiling gaze from Master Seventh to the capital city below. Given how high he was in the air, and the level of his cultivation base, it seemed like all the disciples in the sect were fixed in his mind. As he looked at them, he spoke in words that boomed like thunder.

“Based on the existing agreement, peaklords and elders are required to fight in this war. However, it is not so with Foundation Establishment and Qi Condensation. I know that you have reached your state of cultivation due to your own hard work; though the sect may have provided some bit of help, it wasn't much.

“Therefore, you will not be required to participate in this. But those of you who do wish to participate, you may choose missions that are appropriate to your own abilities and style. Therefore, disciples of Seven Blood Eyes, who is willing to fight?”

Throughout Seven Blood Eyes, all disciples in the fifth level of Qi Condensation and higher felt their identity medallions vibrate as information poured into them regarding the profits that were up for grabs.

Seeing all that, Xu Qing took out his identity medallion to check the information.

“Those who go to war will be compensated according to the level of their cultivation base. There is an initial payment of compensation for anyone who participates. Those in the fifth level of Qi Condensation will receive 500 spirit stones. That number will increase with each level to the great circle of Qi Condensation, which will be rewarded with 3,000 spirit stones. Foundation Establishment compensation starts at 100,000 spirit stones, and goes up to 500,000 for the great circle. Once you agree to go to war, you may not leave the fighting until the war is over. However, you’re free to accept whatever missions you want.”

When Xu Qing saw the initial payment just for joining the war effort, he felt excited. It meant he could instantly get his hands on 100,000 spirit stones, which was no small amount of wealth.

“During the war, missions will be handed down from the peaklords to the elders. The elders will then distribute the missions for any disciple from any peak to take. The rewards for the missions are incredible.

“Any valuables you acquire, whether during a mission, or not during a mission, are yours to keep, and you don’t need to report them!

“After the war is over, the sect will carry out a comprehensive analysis of the efforts of everyone who participated, and will distribute the final loot accordingly.

“Seazombie souls are particularly effective for our sect’s Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture. You’ll understand when you use them!

“So, who is willing to go to war?”

Considering the base pay for participating in the war, it was easy to imagine the astonishing possibilities with the missions.

Seeing the message, Xu Qing was shaken. After all, he was suffering from a severe lack of spirit stones. After buying all the magical devices and poisonous plants he needed, he only had enough spirit stones for daily expenses. He knew full well how important spirit stones were for cultivation. If he had 10,000,000 spirit stones, then he could post his own missions, and have hordes of sect cultivators go hunting for Foundation Establishment sea beasts to bring him. In fact, with enough spirit stones, he could hire elders to help him. In that case, opening 30 dharma apertures would be a lot easier.

And if he had an even larger amount of spirit stones, he could forget the elders and just upgrade his dharmaskiff to a dharmaship, and then as long as he avoided anything too dangerous, he could dominate entire swathes of the Forbidden Sea.

The rewards being offered during this war were extremely enticing. That was especially true considering how effective seazombie souls were. Xu Qing had already experienced that himself, and it only added to the temptation. After all, he was already the type of person who could slaughter enemies decisively. After thinking about it for a while, he made his decision.

As the cultivators saw the details, their eyes lit up with excitement and hope. Before long, voices began to ring out from within the capital city and the mountain peaks.

“I’ll go to war!”

“I’ll go to war!!”

As the cries echoed in the sect, figures flew out from both the city and the peaks and stopped to hover in midair. They included Foundation Establishment cultivators, and also Offpeak Qi Condensation disciples in the fifth level and higher who had flight talismans.

Of the roughly 1,000 Foundation Establishment cultivators from the Seven Peaks, about seventy percent chose to participate. Together, they formed a massive force whose energy fluctuations caused winds to scream in the area, and the sea to surge violently.

Of course, numerous elders appeared to stand next to the peaklords from their respective peaks. In the capital city, there were too many Qi Condensation cultivators to count. Some chose to go to war, others chose to simply see how things played out.

After all, disciples in the fifth level of Qi Condensation or higher were not people who just sat around idly.

“Activate the grand spell formation,” Sir Bloodsmelter said, “and connect the teleportation line to the Merfolk Isles!”

All of Seven Blood Eyes trembled as the seven huge eyes on the mountain peaks emitted bizarre light that covered the entire sect. The grand spell formation was activating.

Within the identity medallions of all the disciples, there was more than just mission information. There was also a general outline of the sect’s battle strategy. Apparently, the sect wasn’t worried about the details being leaked.

The Merfolk Isles were to be the frontline base of operations. Any Seven Blood Eyes cultivators who wished to join the war effort would simply affirm through their identity medallion that they were participating. The spell formation would then teleport them to the Merfolk Isles.

For one thing, this would ensure that the battlefield would be far from Seven Blood Eyes. Also, the Merfolk Isles occupied a strategic location, being halfway between the sect and the Seazombies.

During the Grand Competition, the sect concealed the fact that they were going to the Merfolk Isles. Then, by taking advantage of the patriarch’s breakthrough, they sowed chaos among the enemy and caught the Seazombies completely unaware. As a result, they easily took the islands. That was really the first part of the overall battle strategy. The second part was to quell any resistance from

the Seazombies who remained in the Merfolk Isles. The first part of the strategy had been a clever scheme. The second part was not.

“Warriors, advance!” Sir Bloodsmelter collapsed into innumerable terrifying red streams of light that shot into the spell formation and disappeared.

The five peaklords followed.

Next came the elders, and finally, the seven hundred Foundation Establishment cultivators. Bristling with baleful aura, they disappeared into the teleportation.

Xu Qing was a Foundation Establishment cultivator, but he wasn’t the first one to teleport away. He was watching the city. Although there were people staying behind to guard the capital, the place already looked a lot emptier than normal. Though the place was protected by the spell formation, it was still in a precarious state.

That said, his time in Seven Blood Eyes had left him the impression that every member of the sect was a profound schemer, so he doubted the patriarch and peaklords would be negligent when it came to the sect headquarters.

I bet Seven Blood Eyes has secret reserve powers that nobody knows about. In fact, I wonder if the city and the sect headquarters are actually being left vulnerable as a trap to lure in an unsuspecting enemy.

After some thought, he looked at the grand spell formation, eyes glittering. Raising his identity medallion, he thought, I’ll go to war!

Light from the spell formation shot down and surrounded him. Then he vanished. As similar beams of light shot down into the city, numerous disciples disappeared as they were teleported away. It seemed unlikely that such a large number of teleportation lights would appear again in the city anytime soon.

Out on the Forbidden Sea, a blanket of spell formation light also covered the Merfolk Isles.

The formation obviously had defensive properties, and it was linked to the formation in the sect headquarters. This was how the disciples were teleporting in. Fierce fighting was already underway in the air above all four islands. The sea was covered with surging waves and thick water vapor, which also emanated the sounds of fighting. It was possible to see some of the fighters. There were Merfolk cultivators fighting Seazombies!

After being crushed in the Grand Competition, the Merfolk had been forced to fully acknowledge allegiance to Seven Blood Eyes. And now they were serving as the first wave of fighters in the war. However, the fighting didn’t seem as intense as it could be.

The four islands that made up the Merfolk Isles all had unusual non-Merfolk structures on them. They were towers, all of them glittering as blue lightning crackled on them. That lightning connected to the other towers on the other islands, so that all four islands were linked. There were also huge magical devices that had been installed on the islands, which were capable of launching shocking magical techniques onto the battlefield.

There were also spell formations active on the islands. At regular intervals, magical symbols would appear in the air above them, then sink into the ground, stabilizing the spell formations.

There were simple residence structures that had been erected in various locations. On Nethervault Island, massive amounts of mutagen had been collected into the shape of a nine-headed snake, apparently to be used as a mount.

The volcanoes on Meegah Island had also been altered by Seven Blood Eyes, and their eruptions caused massive amounts of terrifying force to roll out in all directions.

On Emiche Island, a huge lake of swords had been carved out of the surface of the island, filled with swords that were currently gathering power. That was clearly the work of the First Peak, and when it was unleashed, the result would be astonishing.

The biggest changes were to Joine Island. The island now had a huge eye on it that took up about seventy percent of the island. Looking at it closely, it actually resembled the huge eyes on top of the mountain peaks back in the sect. As the eye blinked, it sent out information into the identity medallions of all the cultivators in the area.

When Xu Qing arrived, he was in the air over Meegah Island. Looking around, he saw the Merfolk Isles and all the dramatic changes to them. Shaken, he looked off into the distance, where Sir Bloodsmelter and the five peaklords could be seen above Joine Island.

Bowing in front of Sir Bloodsmelter were the other two peaklords who hadn't been present in the sect. One of them was an old woman, standing atop a spell formation chart that seemed to contain tens of thousands of spell formations. The other was an old man with a grim facial expression. He didn't seem imposing at all, as if there was a bitterness within him that could never be dispelled. He held a gourd of alcohol in one hand from which he occasionally sipped. These were the peaklords of the Fifth and Sixth Peak.

Now Xu Qing realized why these two hadn't been present when the other peaklords gathered. They were the ones who had orchestrated all the dramatic changes to the four Merfolk islands!

Chapter 153: Someone's Teleporting In

The volcanoes on Meegah Island rumbled, sending out billowing clouds of black ash in all directions. The ash was then captured by the power of the Seven Blood Eyes formations and sent out onto the Seazombie battlefield. Some of the ash fell on the island like black snow. Occasionally, the rumbling of the volcanoes ramped up into a deafening sound that overwhelmed all other sounds.

Xu Qing didn't dare to stay up in the air for long. Dropping to the ground, he looked around at the disciples from the various peaks, rushing about this way and that.

Everyone had their own goals and destinations. Some were setting up spell formations, others were performing maintenance on weapons. Some were heading toward teleportation portals to go to the field of battle, which was just beyond the boundaries of the island. Up above, certain Foundation Establishment cultivators flew in midair, just within the bounds of the spell formation. And new people continued to arrive.

Xu Qing's identity medallion vibrated as new mission information arrived. In fact, upon arriving, a waterfall of new missions poured in. Keeping his guard up, Xu Qing started to inspect the mission listings.

Some missions disappeared almost as soon as they came in, having been accepted by individual disciples. Other group missions would list how many people had accepted them, and when the slots were filled, would disappear.

“Stand guard over weapons on Joine Island. Needed: three disciples from the Sixth Peak in the fifth level of Qi Condensation or higher and three Foundation Establishment cultivators. Reward: 50,000 spirit stones, split up based on performance and cultivation base.”

“Sixty Qi Condensation disciples needed on Emiche Island, plus two Foundation Establishment disciples, to root out enemy ambushes targeting First Peak disciples as they work on frontline magical device setup. Total reward: 70,000 spirit stones.”

“Needed: three hundred people skilled in spell formation maintenance. Total reward: 60,000 spirit stones.”

“Needed: ten Qi Condensation disciples to accept grue forms. 1,000 spirit stones for one day of service.”

After glancing through the missions, Xu Qing realized there was one particular mission that was pinned to the top. It was a battle mission.

“Long-term mission on the battlefield outside the islands. Kill more than 10,000 Seazombie cultivators, regardless of cultivation base level. Reward: a destined opportunity to reach Gold Core.”

After looking at the mission, Xu Qing felt shaken. The reward was incredible. For most Foundation Establishment cultivators, any destined opportunity to reach the Gold Core level was something that would turn their eyes red with anticipation.

As he continued to look through various missions, he noticed a new mission that was bright red, like blood, making it stand out from the others.

“Needed: ten Foundation Establishment disciples who can enter profound radiance state, to cross the battlefield to the Seazombies’ third fortified island. Mission details will be provided by an elder. This mission is very dangerous, and could involve clashes with Gold Core cultivators. The reward for each individual participant is 8,000,000 spirit stones.”

It was a shocking mission as far as Xu Qing was concerned, and it seemed incredibly dangerous. In fact, it was the kind of mission in which death seemed more likely than success.

However, after only a few moments, the mission capacity filled up, and the mission vanished. It made Xu Qing think back to what Zhang Yunshi had said about war, and how disciples would rush to accept missions that came with a lot of profit.

I need to pick a mission.

Based on what he was seeing, the Qi Condensation missions didn't come with very good rewards, and most of them were split between the participants.

And the really good Foundation Establishment missions required profound radiance state. Because of his cultivation base, he couldn't accept such missions. For that same reason, he didn't think it was a good idea to accept any battlefield missions.

What he needed was a mission that would provide some spirit stones, but at the same time, give him a chance to kill a lot of Seazombies.

It didn't take long for him to find a mission just like that in the list.

"Scouts report the underwater world on all four Merfolk islands have small-scale Seazombie teleportation portals. We need eight Foundation Establishment cultivators, two for each island, to search for these spell formations and destroy them. Kill any Seazombies you encounter, or if they're too difficult to kill, report them immediately. For every teleportation portal you destroy, the reward is 10,000 spirit stones. You will also be rewarded based on your kill count."

The mission seemed to meet every one of Xu Qing's requirements, so without any hesitation, he selected it. By the time he did so, seven of the other mission slots had already been filled. He was the final one to sign up. Had he been even a bit slower, he would have missed out on the mission.

After accepting the mission, more mission details were sent to his identity medallion. He was assigned to Meegah Island. There were eight people signed up for the mission, but the names were kept private, so he had no idea who the other seven were.

The mission details also contained a physical description of the teleportation portals, and an explanation of how to identify them by their fluctuations. It explained how to destroy them, and also included a reminder that, until a teleportation portal was destroyed, it was possible Seazombies could teleport through it.

Because of the restrictions in place by the sect's grand spell formation, it was impossible for the small-scale teleportation portals to accommodate Seazombie cultivators with two life flames. The majority who came through wouldn't even have life flames, and they would be on suicide missions to destroy spell formations and magical devices belonging to Seven Blood Eyes. That said, Seazombie teleportation portals didn't operate on spirit power or dharma force, but rather, mutagen. Coupled with the high concentrations of mutagen deep underwater, the teleportation portals would be difficult to find.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed as he considered that there would be another sect disciple on the same island as him, working on the same mission.

With that, he moved toward the nearest city. The passages to the underwater world were all in the cities, as he knew from experience. Most Merfolk cities were now nothing but ruins, but the jade slip Huang Yan had given him had a detailed description of Meegah Island, and he remembered that there was a tunnel not very far away.

As he sped along through midair toward his destination, the deafening sound of the volcanoes surrounded him, and black ash drifted down everywhere. He saw other Seven Blood Eyes disciples

as he went, but no one called out greetings to each other. Everyone just hurried on their way. After an incense stick's worth of time, he saw the crumbled ruins of a city up ahead.

It didn't take long to find the tunnel entrance. The area around it had been cleared. Coming from deep in the tunnel was a frigid energy and also the smell of blood. Previously, the sea water had been deep in the tunnel, but the water level had risen, and was visible from the tunnel mouth.

Looking down suspiciously, he took out some poison powder and scattered it. Before it could even dissipate into the water, he jumped down.

Once in the water, he took out a sack of poison like he had before, then started moving down. For about thirty breaths of time, he just went down and down. Everything was still and quiet, with all of the clamor of the world above cut off by the water. The rumbling of the volcanoes was little more than a faint vibration. However, Xu Qing kept his guard up as usual. When he neared the bottom, he tossed the sack down, where it exploded and sent poison everywhere. Finally, he emerged from the tunnel.

Looking around, he saw that all the buildings were in complete ruin. The coral and sea anemones were all rotting. Apparently, the black smoke that had spread out during the Grand Competition had lain waste to everything.

I need to hurry and find the teleportation portals.

Looking around, he didn't get any sense of where the portals were. Therefore, he sent his dharma force into the violet crystal within him to create a force of suppression. The shadow instantly pointed out a direction to go in.

One of the reasons he'd accepted this mission was that he knew his shadow was sensitive to mutagen. Others might have a hard time finding the teleportation portals due to the strong mutagen under the water, and would have to rely on special magical devices. But Xu Qing didn't have to do that. Besides, he had the feeling his shadow would be much better than any magical devices at sniffing out the mutagen signature of the teleportation portal. The only thing he was worried about was that his shadow wouldn't cooperate.

"I'm going to assess you ten days earlier..." he said.

His shadow trembled, then clearly focused on trying to find the right mutagen signature.

Meanwhile, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior spoke from within the iron skewer. "Don't be angry, milord. The shadow doesn't understand you the way your humble servant does. Milord, I know how tired you get from all your hard work. Obviously, the two of us need to take the initiative to share in your weariness. What worries you, milord, worries us. What concerns you, milord, concerns us."

Hearing this, the shadow suddenly bristled with killing energy.

After thinking about it, Xu Qing decided that what the patriarch had said made sense, and thus he looked coldly at the shadow and suppressed it three times in a row.

"I don't like that killing energy of yours."

The shadow trembled as if in humiliation. However, it cooperated, dutifully pointing the way to the teleportation portal while Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior looked on complacently.

With the shadow as his guide, Xu Qing quickly found the teleportation portal. It was located in a crater that had likely been hewn out by a blast from a magical technique. Within the mud and silt was the teleportation portal. It didn't emanate any fluctuations, which meant that the only way to find it would be to notice how strong the mutagen was in the area.

Looking at it, he could see that the portal wasn't active. Based on the description from the mission, he knew where the eye of the portal was. With one vicious kick, he destroyed it. It didn't take any prompting for his shadow to find the next portal and lead the way to it.

Xu Qing moved at high speed, quickly destroying a second and third portal. As for the fourth portal, just when he was about to destroy it, it flared to life.

Muttering in surprise, he focused on the glittering portal, and sensed a Foundation Establishment aura. It seemed that someone was teleporting in. The aura wasn't particularly strong. Whoever was coming, they didn't have a life flame. Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing chose not to destroy the portal, and instead quickly scattered poison powder all over the portal. In only ten breaths of time, he put over a hundred types of poison in place.

Then his iron skewer flew out and hid itself next to him. There was now a small bell tied to the skewer. That bell would affect the soul of anyone with a fleshly body. But it didn't affect spiritual souls. Inside the skewer, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was very excited, as he knew his time had come to shine.

The anxious shadow, not wanting to show any weakness, remained at the ready.

Finally, Xu Qing took out his dharmaskiff, then backed up a few paces and squatted on his haunches, his eyes glittering with cold light as black balefire rushed out to form a dagger in his hand.

"They're almost here," he murmured. The teleportation portal flared with light, and the mutagen levels soared. Then, Seazombies started emerging.

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“Sixty Qi Condensation disciples needed on Emiche Island, plus two Foundation Establishment disciples, to root out enemy ambushes targeting First Peak disciples as they work on frontline magical device setup. Total reward: 70,000 spirit stones.”

“Needed: three hundred people skilled in spell formation maintenance. Total reward: 60,000 spirit stones.”

“Needed: ten Qi Condensation disciples to accept grue forms. 1,000 spirit stones for one day of service.”

After glancing through the missions, Xu Qing realized there was one particular mission that was pinned to the top. It was a battle mission.

“Long-term mission on the battlefield outside the islands. Kill more than 10,000 Seazombie cultivators, regardless of cultivation base level. Reward: a destined opportunity to reach Gold Core.”

After looking at the mission, Xu Qing felt shaken. The reward was incredible. For most Foundation Establishment cultivators, any destined opportunity to reach the Gold Core level was something that would turn their eyes red with anticipation.

As he continued to look through various missions, he noticed a new mission that was bright red, like blood, making it stand out from the others.

“Needed: ten Foundation Establishment disciples who can enter profound radiance state, to cross the battlefield to the Seazombies’ third fortified island. Mission details will be provided by an elder. This mission is very dangerous, and could involve clashes with Gold Core cultivators. The reward for each individual participant is 8,000,000 spirit stones.”

It was a shocking mission as far as Xu Qing was concerned, and it seemed incredibly dangerous. In fact, it was the kind of mission in which death seemed more likely than success.

However, after only a few moments, the mission capacity filled up, and the mission vanished. It made Xu Qing think back to what Zhang Yunshi had said about war, and how disciples would rush to accept missions that came with a lot of profit.

I need to pick a mission.

Based on what he was seeing, the Qi Condensation missions didn't come with very good rewards, and most of them were split between the participants.

And the really good Foundation Establishment missions required profound radiance state. Because of his cultivation base, he couldn't accept such missions. For that same reason, he didn't think it was a good idea to accept any battlefield missions.

What he needed was a mission that would provide some spirit stones, but at the same time, give him a chance to kill a lot of Seazombies.

It didn't take long for him to find a mission just like that in the list.

"Scouts report the underwater world on all four Merfolk islands have small-scale Seazombie teleportation portals. We need eight Foundation Establishment cultivators, two for each island, to search for these spell formations and destroy them. Kill any Seazombies you encounter, or if they're too difficult to kill, report them immediately. For every teleportation portal you destroy, the reward is 10,000 spirit stones. You will also be rewarded based on your kill count."

The mission seemed to meet every one of Xu Qing's requirements, so without any hesitation, he selected it. By the time he did so, seven of the other mission slots had already been filled. He was the final one to sign up. Had he been even a bit slower, he would have missed out on the mission.

After accepting the mission, more mission details were sent to his identity medallion. He was assigned to Meegah Island. There were eight people signed up for the mission, but the names were kept private, so he had no idea who the other seven were.

The mission details also contained a physical description of the teleportation portals, and an explanation of how to identify them by their fluctuations. It explained how to destroy them, and also included a reminder that, until a teleportation portal was destroyed, it was possible Seazombies could teleport through it.

Because of the restrictions in place by the sect's grand spell formation, it was impossible for the small-scale teleportation portals to accommodate Seazombie cultivators with two life flames. The majority who came through wouldn't even have life flames, and they would be on suicide missions to destroy spell formations and magical devices belonging to Seven Blood Eyes. That said, Seazombie teleportation portals didn't operate on spirit power or dharma force, but rather, mutagen. Coupled with the high concentrations of mutagen deep underwater, the teleportation portals would be difficult to find.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed as he considered that there would be another sect disciple on the same island as him, working on the same mission.

With that, he moved toward the nearest city. The passages to the underwater world were all in the cities, as he knew from experience. Most Merfolk cities were now nothing but ruins, but the jade slip Huang Yan had given him had a detailed description of Meegah Island, and he remembered that there was a tunnel not very far away.

As he sped along through midair toward his destination, the deafening sound of the volcanoes surrounded him, and black ash drifted down everywhere. He saw other Seven Blood Eyes disciples

as he went, but no one called out greetings to each other. Everyone just hurried on their way. After an incense stick's worth of time, he saw the crumbled ruins of a city up ahead.

It didn't take long to find the tunnel entrance. The area around it had been cleared. Coming from deep in the tunnel was a frigid energy and also the smell of blood. Previously, the sea water had been deep in the tunnel, but the water level had risen, and was visible from the tunnel mouth.

Looking down suspiciously, he took out some poison powder and scattered it. Before it could even dissipate into the water, he jumped down.

Once in the water, he took out a sack of poison like he had before, then started moving down. For about thirty breaths of time, he just went down and down. Everything was still and quiet, with all of the clamor of the world above cut off by the water. The rumbling of the volcanoes was little more than a faint vibration. However, Xu Qing kept his guard up as usual. When he neared the bottom, he tossed the sack down, where it exploded and sent poison everywhere. Finally, he emerged from the tunnel.

Looking around, he saw that all the buildings were in complete ruin. The coral and sea anemones were all rotting. Apparently, the black smoke that had spread out during the Grand Competition had lain waste to everything.

I need to hurry and find the teleportation portals.

Looking around, he didn't get any sense of where the portals were. Therefore, he sent his dharma force into the violet crystal within him to create a force of suppression. The shadow instantly pointed out a direction to go in.

One of the reasons he'd accepted this mission was that he knew his shadow was sensitive to mutagen. Others might have a hard time finding the teleportation portals due to the strong mutagen under the water, and would have to rely on special magical devices. But Xu Qing didn't have to do that. Besides, he had the feeling his shadow would be much better than any magical devices at sniffing out the mutagen signature of the teleportation portal. The only thing he was worried about was that his shadow wouldn't cooperate.

"I'm going to assess you ten days earlier..." he said.

His shadow trembled, then clearly focused on trying to find the right mutagen signature.

Meanwhile, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior spoke from within the iron skewer. "Don't be angry, milord. The shadow doesn't understand you the way your humble servant does. Milord, I know how tired you get from all your hard work. Obviously, the two of us need to take the initiative to share in your weariness. What worries you, milord, worries us. What concerns you, milord, concerns us."

Hearing this, the shadow suddenly bristled with killing energy.

After thinking about it, Xu Qing decided that what the patriarch had said made sense, and thus he looked coldly at the shadow and suppressed it three times in a row.

"I don't like that killing energy of yours."

The shadow trembled as if in humiliation. However, it cooperated, dutifully pointing the way to the teleportation portal while Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior looked on complacently.

With the shadow as his guide, Xu Qing quickly found the teleportation portal. It was located in a crater that had likely been hewn out by a blast from a magical technique. Within the mud and silt was the teleportation portal. It didn't emanate any fluctuations, which meant that the only way to find it would be to notice how strong the mutagen was in the area.

Looking at it, he could see that the portal wasn't active. Based on the description from the mission, he knew where the eye of the portal was. With one vicious kick, he destroyed it. It didn't take any prompting for his shadow to find the next portal and lead the way to it.

Xu Qing moved at high speed, quickly destroying a second and third portal. As for the fourth portal, just when he was about to destroy it, it flared to life.

Muttering in surprise, he focused on the glittering portal, and sensed a Foundation Establishment aura. It seemed that someone was teleporting in. The aura wasn't particularly strong. Whoever was coming, they didn't have a life flame. Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing chose not to destroy the portal, and instead quickly scattered poison powder all over the portal. In only ten breaths of time, he put over a hundred types of poison in place.

Then his iron skewer flew out and hid itself next to him. There was now a small bell tied to the skewer. That bell would affect the soul of anyone with a fleshly body. But it didn't affect spiritual souls. Inside the skewer, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was very excited, as he knew his time had come to shine.

The anxious shadow, not wanting to show any weakness, remained at the ready.

Finally, Xu Qing took out his dharmaskiff, then backed up a few paces and squatted on his haunches, his eyes glittering with cold light as black balefire rushed out to form a dagger in his hand.

"They're almost here," he murmured. The teleportation portal flared with light, and the mutagen levels soared. Then, Seazombies started emerging.

Chapter 154: A Meal for Three

Xu Qing had fought a Seazombie in the great circle of Qi Condensation. It had been a tough fight. Whether in terms of fleshly body power or their tenacious life force, it had taken an immense effort for Xu Qing to kill the Seazombie. [1]

Unfortunately, he had no experience fighting Foundation Establishment Seazombies, and therefore, he kept his guard up. Also, he didn't get too close to the teleportation portal. As he watched the portal, a shadowy shape took form within the glittering light.

It was not a human that had been zombified. Instead, it was a nonhuman the likes of which Xu Qing had never seen before. Shockingly, this Seazombie had bat-like wings, although they were tattered and broken. Despite the damage it had obviously suffered before dying, it pulsed with a clear Foundation Establishment aura. This Seazombie was obviously a cautious individual, for as soon as he materialized fully, he prepared to back up.

However, he could never have anticipated what Xu Qing had set up. Before he could even start moving, the water in the area stirred, transforming into solid walls in front of him, behind him, on either side, and even overhead, making it impossible for him to move anywhere. And each wall pulsed with a terrifying aura that crushed down on him.

He slammed into the wall behind him, and a muffled rumbling sound could be heard. Foundation Establishment was mighty, and the wall collapsed. But then, a second, third, and fourth wall appeared to replace it. Xu Qing's dharma force vastly surpassed anything from someone in the same level as him. His hands flashed in an incantation gesture, causing all of the walls of water to rush toward the Seazombie cultivator.

The Seazombie glanced around with cold eyes, and quickly spotted Xu Qing. Grinning viciously, he said, "You're alone?"

He was completely ignoring the poison around him. After all, seazombies were known for their zombie poison, which gave them general immunity to other poisons. But as he put his hands together for an incantation gesture, his face suddenly fell as he realized that the surrounding poison was causing his wings to melt.

"What poison is this?"

Then his face flickered even more dramatically as he noticed that the surrounding walls of water were causing the poison levels to increase. As more than a hundred types of poison combined, the Seazombie cultivator's entire body started to show signs of melting.

Shocked, he shifted to a different incantation gesture, sending clouds of zombie poison out. At the same time, he flapped his wings, releasing terrifying shockwaves to slam into the walls of water. The walls collapsed, but as they did, new walls appeared. In fact, though the Seazombie managed to destroy some of the walls, so many new ones formed that the total number increased, not decreased.

At the same time, the poison cloud being kept in place by the walls was causing big problems. The Seazombie had a powerful fleshly body power and amazing regenerative powers. But he was still starting to melt from head to toe. In fact, he had the feeling that if things kept going as they were, that after enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, he would be melted into nothing.

Without any hesitation, he pulled out a pitch-black beast bone. Eyes flashing with killing intent, he spat out a mouthful of blue blood onto the bone. The bone trembled, and then erupted with mutagen, which created a black, shadowy form that seemed intelligent. Erupting with cackling laughter, it sent out waves of energy in all directions, destroying whatever walls it touched.

That beast bone was clearly a magical device. The Seazombie focused its effect on Xu Qing, using it to smash through the intervening walls. Bursting out from the cloud of poison, he closed in on Xu Qing with cold killing intent.

Xu Qing remained in place, his expression placid and his heart calm.

He's in Foundation Establishment, but can't enter the profound radiance state.

If the Seazombie could enter the profound radiance state, it wouldn't have been so difficult for him to break through the walls. He would have instantly smashed through. And it seemed very unlikely that this Seazombie could enter the profound radiance state, but was holding back as a trick. After all, he was in enemy territory. Anyone in this situation would want to kill any enemies they found, then go into hiding to make sure the coast was clear.

Having come to these conclusions, killing intent flared in Xu Qing's eyes.

The Seazombie cultivator blasted through the final wall, and though the shadowy figure he had summoned faded away, he thrummed with a killing aura as he lunged toward Xu Qing.

However, Xu Qing was a lot faster; he burst into motion, and in the blink of an eye, body-slammed the Seazombie.

The Seazombie looked shocked as blood sprayed out of his mouth and he was thrown backward. Before he could do anything, Xu Qing unhesitatingly charged forward again. Black balefire surged on his dagger despite the fact that it was in water. As Xu Qing closed in, he and the Seazombie clashed again.

Booms rang out as they fought back and forth.

The Seazombie grew more and more shocked. It was similar to Xu Qing's original fight with the Seazombie in the great circle of Qi Condensation. His mutagen had no effect on Xu Qing, nor did his zombie poison. And Xu Qing obviously had amazing recovery powers.

As Xu Qing slashed his dagger out, the Seazombie raised his right hand and used his beast bone to send the cackling shadowy figure toward Xu Qing. The shadowy figure had red eyes that burst with greed as it closed in. However, then those eyes went wide, and the figure tried to back up. But it was too late!

All of a sudden, Xu Qing's shadow burst out. It had been eying the shadowy figure, and now, suddenly seemed hungry as it rushed toward it.

The shadowy figure reacted as if it had suddenly encountered a deadly predator. It trembled and slowed down, as if it didn't dare to flee.

Xu Qing's shadow pounced on it, opening its mouth wide and swallowing the shadowy figure.

A moment later, a burping sound could be heard, and then the shadow's incorporeal eyes locked onto the shocked Seazombie cultivator.

The Seazombie looked terrified, and backed away rapidly. However, that was when the sound of a bell rang out from behind it. It was a sound that seemed to pierce through the fleshly body and lock onto the soul. As it entered the Seazombie's ears, he suddenly stopped moving. It only lasted for a moment, but during that moment, the sound of the bell got closer.

Black light flashed as the iron skewer stabbed through the Seazombie's forehead, swirled around, then stabbed him through the throat. Afterwards, the bell rang again.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing was covered in black balefire, becoming like a human torch. At the same time, he tapped into the feather-shaped magical device.

As soon as that magical device was activated, Xu Qing's top speed skyrocketed. He took a step forward, and water surged around him as he moved with incredible speed toward the shocked and injured Seazombie.

His dagger slashed viciously through the Seazombie's throat, causing blue blood to explode out along with an agonized shriek. Then, Xu Qing's dagger became a stream of black fire that entered the wound and spread into the Seazombie's body.

The Seazombie struggled to break free, but Xu Qing slammed his knee into his abdomen. A thump rang out as the Seazombie's body almost collapsed. And as the black fire burned his soul, he let loose a hoarse scream.

Then Xu Qing's shadow arrived and wrapped around the Seazombie's legs, provoking more howls of anguish. On the spots where the shadow touched the Seazombie, its flesh melted. It seemed that, within moments, he was going to be an actual corpse. That was because the mutagen within him was being devoured by Xu Qing's shadow. And as a result, the shadow began to let off some of the aura of a Seazombie.

The black iron skewer wasn't sitting around doing nothing. It stabbed directly into the beast bone magical device. After it did, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior began devouring the spirit resonance in the device.

The entire process took an incense stick's worth of time.

As the Seazombie cultivator fell into despair, he grew weaker and weaker. Then a final rumbling could be heard as the last of his mutagen was sucked out. At the same time, he lost his soul, and his entire body crumbled into ash that dissolved in the water. The beast bone magical device also crumbled into nothing.

Xu Qing used the Seazombie soul as kindling, sending raging fire toward his 21st dharma aperture.

A boom echoed through him as the dharma aperture opened. As spirit power poured into it and turned into dharma force, Xu Qing turned to look at the teleportation portal.

Instead of destroying it, he set up more poison, then fell back to wait. At the same time, he looked at his shadow. He had been paying attention when his shadow devoured the Seazombie's mutagen and thus gained a Seazombie aura.

After some time passed, it was to Xu Qing's disappointment that a second Seazombie did not teleport in.

Seazombies weren't stupid. It seemed likely that after the first one teleported in, those preparing to follow had realized something unusual was going on. Finally, Xu Qing just destroyed the portal and moved on.

His shadow's mutagen levels were clearly higher, and at the same time, it seemed it had developed a new taste for Seazombies. It seemed more interested than Xu Qing in encountering a second one.

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior seemed stronger as well after devouring the enemy's magical device. Xu Qing wasn't sure what he thought about that, considering magical devices could be sold for a tidy profit. The patriarch could tell from Xu Qing's expression what he was thinking, and quickly went into a very carefully worded explanation.

"I lost control, milord. Next time, I'll only absorb seventy percent, and leave thirty percent behind. That way, you can still sell the thing. As a spirit automaton, I can do it in a way that whoever you sell it to won't be able to tell. That said, milord, I suggest you not sell such items in the sect. I know plenty of black markets that would be a much better choice."

Xu Qing looked at the skewer but didn't say anything.

The next day, thanks to the help of the shadow, Xu Qing found another teleportation portal hidden in a crevice. After making various preparations, he waited. Days passed and he finally destroyed it

and moved on to another portal. This time, after he made his preparations, the portal started to activate.

Chapter 155: Opening Apertures Like Mad

The fluctuations coming from the portal were so strong that Xu Qing's pupils constricted, and he suddenly felt physically jumpy. His shadow also transmitted alarmed emotions to him.

At the same time, a figure rapidly became visible in the portal. He saw a tall, burly fellow that was clearly in the Foundation Establishment level, but also pulsed with the fluctuations of a life flame. Obviously, this Seazombie cultivator, knowing he was teleporting into enemy territory, had activated his profound radiance state before teleporting, just in case he ended up in a dangerous situation.

Without hesitating for a moment, Xu Qing thrust out his right hand, and before the figure could fully coalesce, he activated a detonator among the items he had set up around the portal. A thump rang out as the portal collapsed. As for the figure that had been teleporting in, he let out a defiant howl that slowly faded into nothing.

Face expressionless, Xu Qing gathered up the items he had placed in the area and moved on to look for another portal. Four days later, he found one. This time, he didn't have to wait long before two Seazombie cultivators teleported in.

They were also Foundation Establishment cultivators, but after Xu Qing confirmed they weren't in the profound radiance state, he had his shadow check their mutagen levels. The shadow, knowing that this was as much of a benefit to it as Xu Qing, earnestly did so. These two Seazombies were exceptional; however, they definitely couldn't enter the profound radiance state. Therefore, as soon as they materialized, fierce fighting began.

After previous encounters, Xu Qing had made adjustments to his poisons. This time, he employed it in a much more efficient manner. And the plan of attack was for the shadow to move first, followed by Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior, with Xu Qing following up as the third wave.

His dharmaskiff would be his trump card, used only as a last resort. Enough time passed for two incense sticks to burn, during which time booms and shrieks rang out. They faded away when Xu Qing successfully slaughtered the second of the two Seazombies.

After absorbing their souls and immolating them, they provided enough force to open his 22nd dharma aperture! Xu Qing was quite excited, and now understood that the talk of Seazombie souls being effective were no exaggerations.

I only need 8 more dharma apertures before I can form my first life flame! Once I do, and I put it on the life lamp, then my battle prowess will increase dramatically!

He was about to destroy the teleportation portal, when suddenly he sensed another aura teleporting in.

It was ordinary, without any trace of the profound radiance state. However, his shadow urgently informed him that this aura was actually exactly the same as the Seazombie they'd encountered who did have the profound radiance state. Apparently, this Seazombie had learned from his previous mistake by not entering the profound radiance state before the teleportation. Sadly for him, he had the bad luck to run right back into Xu Qing.

Even as his form began to take shape, Xu Qing viciously struck the spell formation, destroying it. The figure struggled as if he thought he could make it through just in time, but failed, and could only let loose another defiant howl.

I have the feeling this method of mine isn't going to work for much longer. The Seazombies are going to figure out what's going on.

This mission really couldn't be more perfect for him, but it wouldn't last forever. He had the feeling that if he wanted to reach the profound radiance state, he was eventually going to have to go out to the battlefield.

I'll try a few more times.

As he continued his search, days passed. There weren't very many teleportation portals underneath Meegah Island. Probably no more than a dozen.

Xu Qing had already personally destroyed eight of them. He encountered two more Foundation Establishment Seazombies. One of them he killed quickly. But the other had many lifesaving magical devices, and was very close to forming a life flame. It took Xu Qing a lot of effort, and about two hours, before finally being able to kill him.

That gave him a very good sense of how powerful Foundation Establishment Seazombies were. Thanks to those two, he was able to open three dharma apertures, leaving him with a total of 25. However, he wasn't done yet. He found three more teleportation portals, but didn't encounter anyone coming through them, so he just destroyed them.

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior sighed in disappointment at that, and the shadow seemed bored stiff.

Having destroyed all of the teleportation portals, Xu Qing had no choice but to head back to the surface of the island. Just when he was about to turn the mission back in and consider going to the battlefield, his identity medallion vibrated as a text message came in.

"This is Elder Ouyang Ling from the Third Peak. Based on your identity information, your name is Xu Qing, right?"

Xu Qing looked suspiciously at the message and didn't respond.

Then a second message came in. This time, it wasn't a text message, but rather, a voice message, and the voice was so powerful it caused Xu Qing's mind to spin and his 25 dharma apertures to tremble.

"Don't overthink why I'm messaging you. I'm the one in charge of the teleportation portal mission. Unfortunately, things aren't going as quickly on the other three islands. I don't care how you finished your mission so quickly. That's personal and it doesn't matter. I'm wondering if you would consider going to Joine Island and the other two islands to do the same thing you did here. What do you think?"

Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing responded with a voice message. "I accept the mission, Elder."

The Third Peak elder seemed satisfied with Xu Qing's answer. He quickly adjusted Xu Qing's mission, so that it wasn't just to scour Meegah Island, but all the islands. His spirit stone reward for

the original mission also came through. When Xu Qing saw the number, he felt even more anticipation than before.

110,000 spirit stones!

He had destroyed eleven portals, and was rewarded 10,000 for each one. As for the four Foundation Establishment Seazombies he'd killed, he didn't get a spirit stone reward for them, but they were added to his kill count.

Xu Qing looked at the reward and the kill count, and sighed regretfully. Of those four Foundation Establishment cultivators, only two of them, the first and the last, had magical devices.

That said, my goal is to open dharma apertures!

Looking in the direction of the other three islands, he decided to head to Emiche first.

Given that Joine Island had that huge eye on it which resembled the giant eyes back in the sect, he had the feeling the teleportation portals there would be easier to find for the disciples on the quest. And if he was wrong, it didn't really matter.

Flying out over the water, he headed to Emiche Island, which was where the sect had hewn out a lake of swords. And that lake had been imbued with some power that made the swords in it incredibly sharp. From a distance, the lake was covered with water vapor, but inside, it was possible to see countless flying swords floating about. There were also many smaller sword lakes set up around the larger one.

As Xu Qing got closer, he sensed a very dangerous aura from within the sword lake, and it was focused on him.

Apparently, it was scanning him. A moment later, it vanished, and he stepped onto what had once been the home of the royal Merfolk clan, Emiche Island. Xu Qing didn't pause for a moment. Using the information from Huang Yan's jade slip, he immediately went toward the nearest tunnel going to the underwater world.

When he reached the underwater world of Emiche, he was met with a sight that was far more entrancing than the islands of Joine or Meegah. There were countless palaces here, and even though most were in ruins, it was still possible to see how glorious they had been. This place had once been the Merfolk's royal palace complex.

After gaining his bearings, Xu Qing started looking for teleportation portals. It seemed a given that other disciples had already searched the surrounding buildings, and sure enough, his shadow quickly led him away from the palace complex.

About half a day later, in a place full of coral, he found the first portal. Eyes glittering, he set things up around the portal and waited. This time, luck was with him. After only a few days, the portal glittered, and an aura seeped out. Xu Qing confirmed that the cultivation base level was appropriate, then attacked. It didn't take long. After killing the new arrival, Xu Qing destroyed the portal and continued his search.

In that manner, time passed. Over the course of a month, Xu Qing went all over the underwater world on Emiche Island, searching for teleportation portals and destroying them. Along the way, he reached 28 dharma apertures.

Only two more until I can start my life flame!

Full of anticipation, he headed toward Nethervault Island.

As Xu Qing went about his mission, the war between Seven Blood Eyes and the Seazombies became more intense. The fighting had been going on for nearly two months, and the Seazombies had already launched five full-scale assaults in the hopes of forcing Seven Blood Eyes out of the Merfolk Isles.

Each of those five assaults was bigger than the last. However, thanks to Seven Blood Eyes' tight defenses, the sect's forces held strong. What was more, they took the initiative to launch their own counter-offensives into the Forbidden Sea.

At the same time, more and more Seven Blood Eyes disciples were arriving to join the fighting force. There were also nonhuman allies of Seven Blood Eyes who bolstered their forces. Because of that, other nonhumans were a common sight in the Merfolk Isles.

Of course, the Seazombies had other nonhumans working with them as well. The scale of the war just kept getting bigger and bigger.

None of that had anything to do with Xu Qing. Right now, he was speeding along in the underwater world of Nethervault Island, following the direction of his shadow to the next teleportation portal.

If I'm lucky, I should be able to open the last two dharma apertures in less than half a month!

Scanning his identity medallion, he saw that he had a bit over 300,000 spirit stones. But the idea of starting his life flame was far more exciting than that.

I wonder how I'll measure up to the Captain after I ignite my first life flame and add the life lamp to it.

Inside the black iron skewer, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was equally excited, as he could sense that he was also getting close to a breakthrough. Once I break through, I'll be even more useful. Then I won't need to worry about the Fiendish Xu getting rid of me!

The shadow was in a similar state. Its mutagen continued to grow stronger. Of course, that made Xu Qing consider deeply whether or not to start suppressing it even more often. Sensing what Xu Qing was thinking, the shadow trembled and tried to act as ingratiating as possible.

But Xu Qing's eyes were firm with determination. There was something very strange going on with his shadow. After consuming a Seazombie, it gained a Seazombie aura, and that alone put Xu Qing on guard. Even if he prevented it from breaking through, he felt like he still needed to be very careful.

Just when he was tapping into the violet crystal to suppress his shadow, his expression flickered, and he turned to look off into the distance. About five kilometers away, he saw very clear teleportation fluctuations. Considering how powerful they were, it wasn't a single person teleporting in. It was a large group!

Chapter 156: It's You!

The powerful fluctuations were joined by faint rumbling sounds, as well as a flow of dharma force.

Xu Qing stopped moving and looked at the distant portal, numerous thoughts running through his head. The portal was active, and there were Seazombie Foundation Establishment cultivators coming through.

He could hear the sounds of fighting; obviously there were already Seven Blood Eyes disciples there fighting the invaders. Most disciples were on the surface carrying out missions. In the two months he had been down here, he hadn't encountered very many other disciples. If he was correct, these were other disciples on the same mission as he was.

Xu Qing wasn't quick to take action. Staying hidden, he slowly approached. When he felt he was close enough, he squatted down and looked at his shadow.

The shadow had been with Xu Qing long enough to know his personality. What was more, after Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior had trifled with the shadow earlier, it had been working very hard to be impressive. It didn't need any urging to stretch out toward the battlefield. The light in the underwater world came from the colorful coral, and though it provided illumination, it wasn't very bright. Therefore, it was easy for the shadow to move around undetected. That was especially true considering how strong the mutagen was in the area. Therefore, it didn't take much effort for the shadow to reach the battlefield.

After looking around, it came back to Xu Qing. There, it projected some vague information to him while simultaneously creating some images on the ground that only he could see. Xu Qing looked down at the images. Though he could control his shadow, he did not have the ability to look through its eyes. Based on the images the shadow had created, Xu Qing realized what he was dealing with.

"Three Seazombie Foundation Establishment cultivators," Xu Qing murmured. "They've surrounded a Seven Blood Eyes Foundation Establishment disciple. And you can tell none of them have the profound radiance state."

His shadow nodded its head, then danced back and forth in anticipation.

"Are you sure you didn't miss anything, Little Shadow?" Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior said. "Like me, you should be taking our lord and master's safety seriously. That should be your number one priority! Under absolutely no circumstances should you ever be careless!"

The patriarch felt very proud of his words. If the shadow performed well, then he could claim some of the credit with the Fiendish Xu. And if the shadow made a mistake, then the patriarch would still get credit with the Fiendish Xu. It was a win-win situation.

The shadow's killing intent locked onto the black iron skewer, but Xu Qing ignored both of them as he crept forward. He currently had 28 dharma apertures open, and if his calculations were correct, then killing two or three more Seazombies might get him to the point of opening 30.

I can't let this opportunity pass me by!

He kept his cultivation base hidden as he got closer and closer to the powerful fluctuations ahead. Eventually, he caught sight of the teleportation portal. The place was covered with long seagrass that made it difficult to see the portal. However, it couldn't block out the light the portal emitted.

There was one Seazombie Foundation Establishment cultivator on the portal, making adjustments to it. Apparently, he was preparing it to receive even more Seazombies via teleportation. This Seazombie had once been human. Other than his rotting skin and the zombie poison which surrounded him, he still looked almost completely like an ordinary human. In fact, he resembled a scholar, with a black daoist robe and powerful cultivation base fluctuations.

In addition, there was a young disciple from the Third Peak, clad in a dark yellow daoist robe, who was fighting with two Seazombies who were slightly weaker than him.

There were obviously other things to worry about in the area; when Xu Qing got close enough, his identity medallion lost its connection to the sect. Xu Qing ignored that and kept observing the battlefield.

The Third Peak disciple had a set of black gauntlets that emanated black mist as he fought. That mist spread out and took the indistinct shape of various grues. At the same time, on the disciple's forehead was the image of what appeared to be a gruesome face, facing away and struggling to turn around. However, it was restricted in place so that turning around would be completely impossible.

This Third Peak disciple couldn't enter the profound radiance state. However, he was fighting two Seazombies at the same time, so it seemed likely he had about 20 dharma apertures open.

However, the Seazombies were attacking with materialized mutagen, and combined with their powerful fleshly bodies and zombie poison, plus the fact that they were teaming up two-against-one, the Third Peak disciple was obviously in great danger.

The image on the disciple's forehead made Xu Qing think back to the Third Peak's reputation in the sect.

The Third Peak magical techniques revolve around grues!

As Xu Qing was examining the combatants, they seemed to take notice of him.

The Third Peak disciple launched an attack, forcing the two Seazombies away. At the same time, he shouted to Xu Qing, "The Seazombies locked down all voice messages. Help me out, and I'll pay you 10,000 spirit stones."

This was how Seven Blood Eyes disciples usually did things. Despite being fellow disciples from the same sect, they had no obligation to help each other.

Even as the Third Peak disciple called out, the Seazombie in the black scholar robe stopped working with the spell formation, rose, and rushed toward Xu Qing. As he closed in, his hands flashed in a double-handed incantation gesture, causing the field of interference to sweep wider and completely contain Xu Qing. Apparently, he felt that he had trapped this new disciple, preventing him from retreating. And he also felt confident in being able to kill him. Despite not being able to enter the profound radiance state, he had 29 dharma apertures open.

Couple that with the Seazombie's naturally superior fleshly body and regenerative powers, plus the strong mutagen near the sea floor, and he was completely confident that he could defeat virtually anyone in the same cultivation level as himself. And that wasn't even to mention that this new opponent was only a human. He had killed his fair share of Foundation Establishment humans.

However, as his dharma apertures rumbled with power, a look of surprise appeared in his eyes, as this Seven Blood Eyes disciple didn't retreat as expected. Instead, he charged forward.

“You have so much confidence in your cultivation base and battle prowess that, instead of retreating, you’re fighting? That’s not how you Seven Blood Eyes cultivators usually operate. In that case, let’s see if my fleshly body is stronger than yours!”

Laughing coldly, the Seazombie accelerated, obviously intent on crushing Xu Qing into a bloody pulp.

Some distance away, the Third Peak disciple looked over. A violet robe? He’s from the Seventh Peak. How could someone from the Seventh Peak be that stupid?

However, he wasn’t in any position to do anything other than speculate. He couldn’t extricate himself from the fighting, and was struggling just to defend himself. A moment later, the Third Peak disciple’s eyes narrowed.

Xu Qing and the Seazombie raced toward each other, and when they were only about thirty meters apart, both of them suddenly accelerated dramatically.

Xu Qing had pulled out the feather-shaped magical device, while the Seazombie scholar was using a black fan. However, almost as soon as the Seazombie accelerated, he shifted in a different direction. Xu Qing also veered to the side.

As it turned out, Xu Qing’s real target wasn’t the scholar. Instead, it was one of the two Seazombies the Third Peak disciple was fighting.

Xu Qing preferred taking out the weak targets first. Things usually went smoothly when he fought in that way. And thanks to the feather-shaped magical device, he was so quick that, after changing directions, he almost immediately arrived next to the two Seazombies that were fighting the Third Peak disciple.

As for the Seazombie scholar, he hadn’t been targeting Xu Qing at all. And his previous talk about battle prowess and fleshly body had been a ruse. His true target was the Third Peak disciple.

And thus, in the time it takes a spark to fly off of a piece of flint, both of them streaked toward the spot where the Third Peak disciple was fighting the two Seazombie cultivators. A huge boom rang out.

The Third Peak disciple coughed up a huge mouthful of blood and staggered back in shock. However, in that moment of crisis, a black tattoo appeared on his neck. It depicted a lotus, and it quickly spread out to cover his head, blocking what would have been a mortal blow from the scholarly Seazombie.

Off to the side, Xu Qing was wreathed in black balefire, and his iron skewer flew next to him at incredible speed. In the blink of an eye, one of the weaker Seazombies was pierced through the forehead, while the other’s throat was slashed with a dagger. The one pierced through the forehead grunted and staggered back, his hands flying into an incantation gesture that summoned a huge six-armed statue of a god. Roaring, the god statue blocked the iron skewer, preventing it from making any further attacks.

As for the Seazombie whose throat Xu Qing had slashed, he wasn’t as lucky. The black dagger turned into flames that engulfed him. And then Xu Qing’s left hand closed into a fist, which smashed into the Seazombie’s chest and crushed his heart. At the same time, black balefire erupted from all of Xu Qing’s 28 dharma apertures!

The Seazombie let loose a bloodcurdling scream as he burst into flames. However, that was when Xu Qing's shadow wrapped around him and started absorbing his mutagen. Almost immediately, the Seazombie withered up by half. Then, as he screamed and burned, his soul was sucked away.

As for the shadow, its Seazombie aura grew stronger, though it immediately tried to suppress it.

All of this takes a bit of time to describe, but as a matter of fact, it happened in an instant. After the slaughter, Xu Qing looked up at the Seazombie with the black scholar's robe. He seemed surprised that the Seazombie had used the exact same tactic as he had.

The Seazombie scholar looked equally surprised. Ignoring the Third Peak disciple who had just barely escaped death, he glared at Xu Qing.

That was when the teleportation portal suddenly emitted powerful fluctuations, as a new teleportation began. However, the aura that accompanied it wasn't very strong, as if it were only interested in probing the area.

Then it seemed to catch sight of Xu Qing, and the portal surged as a howl came out from the other side.

"It's you! You just wait, I'm going to kill you!"

The fluctuations of the profound radiance state erupted from the portal. This was the very same Seazombie cultivator that Xu Qing had already twice prevented from teleporting in. After detecting Xu Qing, it was with a heart full of rage that he fully activated the teleportation portal!

Chapter 157: Xu Qing's Profound Radiance State!

Upon hearing the words spoken by the profound radiance state Seazombie cultivator, the Seazombie scholar looked thoughtful. As for the Third Peak disciple, he backed away in shock.

Xu Qing frowned but didn't say anything in response. Using the soul of the Seazombie he'd just killed, he started battering at his 29th dharma aperture. At the same time, he ignored the scholar and dashed toward the other Seazombie that had been injured by the iron skewer, and was now scrambling in the opposite direction. Along the way, he looked at the Third Peak disciple and spoke for the first time, saying, "If you don't want to die, keep that black-robed one busy."

Xu Qing knew that it would be a waste of time to either try to destroy the teleportation portal or deal with the Seazombie scholar. If he tried to destroy the portal, the other Seazombies would interfere. And killing the scholar would just take extra time. He was strong, and he was also very smart, and Xu Qing didn't feel like dealing with such an opponent right now. Instead, he wanted to reach the profound radiance state and deal with him after.

Therefore, the optimal choice was to have the Third Peak disciple buy time with the scholar, while Xu Qing tried to kill the second of the weaker Seazombies. If he could devour his soul and use it to open his 30th dharma aperture, then he could form his life flame.

Xu Qing had plenty of experience fighting. From when he was small in the slums to right now, it was impossible to say how many fights he had been in, and how many people he had killed. But he had long since honed his senses and his judgment.

Thus, he bore down on his target at top speed. This particular Seazombie had been a nonhuman in life. He had a long nose like a trunk, similar to the cultivator Xu Qing had dealt with on Sealizard Island. [1]

Xu Qing closed in, not hesitating at all to attack. Rumbling booms echoed out everywhere.

Meanwhile, the Seazombie scholar was trying to decide what was going on. He couldn't figure out what Xu Qing was planning, although he guessed that it had something to do with the profound radiance state. That would explain why, instead of fleeing, he tried to kill the other Seazombie on the battlefield.

Despite not knowing the details, he did know that if this person reached the profound radiance state, he still wouldn't be a match for the person coming through the teleportation portal, the exalted Yun Chen.

After all, profound radiance states differed from each other based on the number of dharma apertures they drew on.

However, there wasn't time to analyze the situation deeply. Whatever was happening, he had to stop the enemy from succeeding. Therefore, he prepared to charge toward Xu Qing. People who could cultivate their way to Foundation Establishment were generally not idiots. And this Seazombie scholar was no fool.

Neither was the Third Peak disciple. He had just been a bit slow to react earlier. He didn't quite understand what Xu Qing was planning, but he did know that despite his own Third Peak advantages, he wasn't quite strong enough to block the path of an opponent as strong as this Seazombie scholar. And if he couldn't block him, then it made sense to flee.

But if a Seazombie capable of entering the profound radiance state entered through the teleportation portal, then even if he managed to get out of the area of interference and send a voice message asking for help, it wouldn't do any good. He knew how terrifying the profound radiance state was. It didn't matter where he fled to, he would almost certainly die. The best course of action seemed to be going all out in a different way.

As soon as he made this decision, his eyes shone with determination. If he wanted the best shot at staying alive, there was only one option.

Gritting his teeth, he went into a double-handed incantation gesture, then viciously hit his forehead to unleash a Third Peak secret magic.

When he did that, the figure on his forehead turned around to reveal the face of a woman. She had a pale face with blood oozing out of her eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. She was a grue, and she looked ghastly, almost like she was ready to climb out of his forehead. She grew larger and larger until, finally, she did separate from him, floating out into the open. Then, the spectral grue shot forward, not in the direction of the Seazombie scholar, but instead, toward the glittering teleportation portal!

That was the Third Peak disciple's plan. If the portal was destroyed, it would resolve the crisis. And the only thing preventing him from destroying it was the Seazombie scholar. Therefore, doing this would also align with the request from the Seventh Peak cultivator.

It would ensure that, if the Seventh Peak disciple was plotting against him, it wouldn't work. It would also ensure that the Seazombie scholar didn't have time to attack him, since he would be

defending the portal. And that meant the disciple would have a better chance of escaping this situation with his life.

If the portal opened, then the Seventh Peak disciple would be the initial target, giving further opportunities for escape.

I gotta risk it!

The Third Peak disciple gritted his teeth, and without looking back at all, ignited his dharma apertures and fled at top speed.

Situations could change in an instant on the battlefield, and when dealing with opponents at roughly the same cultivation level, victory was often decided by who could think most quickly. When the Seazombie scholar saw the Third Peak disciple send a grue toward the teleportation portal, then flee, he had a bad feeling about what was happening.

From his perspective, the most important thing was making sure the exalted Yun Chen arrived. Therefore, he couldn't bother fighting Xu Qing, nor could he waste time chasing the Third Peak disciple. He headed straight toward the teleportation portal. As he neared, he went all out to prevent the grue from reaching it. Booms echoed out.

Xu Qing wasn't surprised at all by the Third Peak cultivator's decision.

Xu Qing was currently doing everything possible to kill his Seazombie opponent. The Seazombie struggled mightily, and used his summoned statue skillfully, but it did no good.

The black iron skewer whistled through the air, stabbing into the statue and absorbing it madly. With other people present, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior didn't show himself. But he didn't hesitate at all to absorb the statue. That said, he also knew he needed to show some restraint, as he didn't want to harm the Fiendish Xu's chances of making some spirit stones. Therefore, after absorbing seventy percent of the statue, he stifled his greed.

The shadow acted similarly. Taking advantage of the fact that no one could see him, the shadow lunged toward the Seazombie cultivator and wrapped around his leg.

The Seazombie screamed shrilly as his leg collapsed into ashes, and terror filled his eyes. He wanted to flee, but couldn't. And then Xu Qing's dagger plunged toward his throat. In that moment of deadly crisis, the Seazombie cultivator proved how vicious he was. A look of madness filled his eyes as he detonated half of the dharma apertures within him. Booms echoed out as the shocking power of half of his dharma apertures erupted, breaking him free from the grip of Xu Qing's shadow. Dodging the iron skewer and avoiding Xu Qing's dagger, he turned to flee.

The Third Peak disciple was nowhere to be seen. Furthermore, the grue he had left behind was starting to fade away thanks to the distance between them. And then, under the powerful attack of the Seazombie scholar, it vanished.

Having handled the grue, the Seazombie scholar turned to look at Xu Qing. However, just as he was about to charge forth, he saw that his fleeing companion suddenly shivered violently and coughed up a huge mouthful of black blood. Seazombie blood was blue. But he coughed up black blood. It wasn't poison that Xu Qing had thrown out. Instead, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior had requested that Xu Qing coat the iron skewer with poison. And when he stabbed the Seazombie through the forehead, he released that poison.

It just took a bit of time to kick in. Therefore, when the Seazombie detonated half of his dharma apertures, he became so weak that the poison took effect. As the poison flared up, numerous daggers of black flames shot toward the Seazombie at high speed and stabbed into him. There were six in total. One hit his neck, one hit his heart, one hit his forehead, and the other three hit limbs. Cracking sounds rang out as the Seazombie was thrown to the ground from the impact. Then the iron skewer shot toward him. The skewer stabbed him numerous times, and then the shadow wrapped around his other leg.

Agonized shrieks rang out as black fire spread all over him. Meanwhile, Xu Qing ignored the incoming Seazombie scholar. Stepping toward the wounded Seazombie, he reached down and clamped his hand over the thing's mouth. The screaming stopped. Meanwhile, balefire shot into the Seazombie. After taking its soul, Xu Qing turned it into kindling to batter his 30th dharma aperture.

A massive rumbling filled him!

He shook as his 30th dharma aperture opened. Then, all 30 of his dharma apertures linked together as one. Dharma force streamed out of them, turning into threads of fire that converged in his dantian region. Wrapping around themselves, they became a small ball of fire. It grew denser and brighter, and then a whooshing sound could be heard, which signified that this Foundation Establishment cultivator had formed his first life flame!

Shocking fluctuations rolled out in all directions as the life flame ignited. Bright flames shone on his thirty dharma apertures, making them almost transparent, and faintly illuminating his heavenly palaces.

At the same time, a mighty aura shot out from within him. As Xu Qing looked around, the world seemed different. Everything moved more slowly, even the water, the crumbling ruins around him, and the Seazombie scholar. The scholar was still charging forward, but seemed like he was moving in slow motion.

In fact, everything was moving so slowly it felt uncomfortable to Xu Qing at first. He even noticed individual dust particles within the water. And when he focused on the dust particles, he felt like he could zoom his view closer to them at will. As he noticed all of these things, the life flame inside him burned, and he felt a terrifying power within him.

His magical techniques were all improved now, and his fleshly body seemed on a higher level. It was as if his soul was now clad in armor. Everything seemed different from before. Xu Qing had known all along that having a life flame was completely different from not having one. But now that he was personally experiencing that difference, he realized that he had underestimated it. They were two completely different realms. Now, his 30 dharma apertures were like thirty ovens, all of them burning rapidly through their fuel. As they burned to create his life flame, brilliant light shone in all directions, making it seem like there was a huge furnace within him!

Within the iron skewer, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior trembled in envy and hope. The shadow also trembled, as though Xu Qing's brilliance made it uncomfortable

But Xu Qing's upgrade wasn't over yet. As everything around him slowed, and as the teleportation portal in the distance became fully activated, Xu Qing moved his life flame to align with the wick of the black life lamp.

The surrounding seawater exploded wildly as a terrifying aura swept out. As the life lamp ignited, it released power vastly more terrifying than the life flame, sweeping through his meridians, flesh, and blood. Everywhere it passed, Xu Qing felt like his life force was advancing. He trembled as massive rumbling sounds echoed out within him.

Now, what was inside him wasn't a furnace, it was an erupting volcano!! This was a power that could crush anything in its path!

As that power was raging through Xu Qing, the teleportation portal finished opening fully.

Within it appeared a Seazombie Foundation Establishment cultivator in the profound radiance state. He was not fully materialized, but by now, there was no way to stop the teleportation.

Grinning cruelly, he said, "You failed to stop me this time, human brat. Are you ready to die?"

Chapter 158: Mount Tai Crushing an Egg

"Uhhh...." The Foundation Establishment Seazombie on the teleportation portal suddenly stopped talking.

In life, he had been a species that looked mostly human except for having six eyes. In addition to the eyes where humans normally had them, he also had an eye on each cheek, one on his forehead, and one on the back of his head. He was now about half-materialized on the teleportation portal, and the materialized parts included his head and eyes. His breath was already coming in ragged pants, and all of his five visible eyes that Xu Qing could see were filled with shock and disbelief. It was simply impossible for him to hide the heaven-shaking, earth-toppling incredulity he felt in his heart.

"Y-you... you have a life flame? And not just one!! Th-this... this...."

The Foundation Establishment Seazombie was so shocked he was physically shaking. The intense sensation of deadly crisis was so strong that even his soul was trembling. In fact, now he wanted the teleportation portal to be destroyed. Given how far along the teleportation was, there was no way for him to back out of it now.

Looking at the black-robed Seazombie scholar, he shouted, "Destroy the portal. Now!"

Of course, the incoming Seazombie wasn't the only one to be shocked. The Seazombie scholar who had just now been closing in on Xu Qing was also being ravaged by waves of astonishment. The fire within Xu Qing was just absolutely terrifying! There was an explosive, volcanic level of strength in him that caused the Seazombie scholar's eyes to sting so badly he felt the urge to look away. And his heart was so rocked by shock that he thought he might pass out.

Given the circumstances, the Seazombie scholar didn't dare to get any closer. The sensation of deadly crisis within him was telling him that he had only one option. And that was to ignore his instinctual drive to follow the orders of his superior, and take advantage of the distraction that superior was providing to make an escape.

He made the decision in the blink of an eye. Turning, he fled.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing slowly looked up.

The volcanic power within him caused burning fire to circle around him, boiling the surrounding seawater. And his eyes also seemed to contain piercing fire that made him look like the child of a god. His gaze seemed capable of piercing through all barriers and obstacles. Not even the fluctuations of the teleportation portal could influence it. And thus, Xu Qing looked directly at the six-eyed Seazombie cultivator.

From Xu Qing's perspective everything was still moving very slowly. The Seazombie scholar was running away in slow motion, and the dust in the area seemed frozen in place. Everything looked like a painting.

The teleportation portal's fluctuations were like ink slowly spreading out in the water. Only the six-eyed Seazombie cultivator seemed to be moving slightly faster than everything else. But he was still slow!

When Xu Qing looked at him, the six-eyed cultivator's mind reeled, and his facial expression flickered dramatically. Inwardly, he howled in anguish. Two life flames. He has two! This is a Seven Blood Eyes Seventh Peak disciple with two life flames!! But why did he prevent me from teleporting in before?

Taking advantage of the part of him that had already materialized, he began attacking the teleportation portal, hoping to destroy it. However, that method wasn't fast enough.

Xu Qing raised his right hand in the direction of the portal, then exerted a slight pressure.

Rumbling sounds echoed out as black balefire erupted from within him with volcanic might. Sweeping forth, it became a huge black hand that descended toward the Seazombie. The heat being released by his hand could devastate anything and everything. Cracks and crevices spread out on the ground, until it seemed like it might crumble into nothing.

The seagrass in the area crumbled into ash, and the water in the area boiled away, leaving an empty space that revealed the teleportation portal all by itself. The six-eyed cultivator on the portal was shrieking hysterically. As the sensation of deadly crisis grew more intense, he held nothing back in his efforts to fight back. Four additional arms sprouted out from his torso.

Clenching all six hands into fists, he activated his profound radiance state, going so far as to destroy some of his own dharma apertures to release all of his latent power. Instantly, he transformed into a mass of fire as he braced himself against Xu Qing's hand of black flame. At the same time, he produced three magical devices and also spat out a blue piece of jade. His expression was one of madness and despair.

Sadly for him, none of that was enough! Someone with a single life flame simply couldn't compare to a cultivator with a life lamp.

As the hand of black flame descended, everything was reduced to ashes. The six-eyed Seazombie's first magical device collapsed. His second broke into pieces. And his third didn't even last for half a breath of time before exploding.

Then the blue piece of jade shattered. As the cracking sounds echoed out, the Seazombie's fleshly body failed to stand up to the force, and began to rip apart. Three of his six arms exploded into clouds of blood. Then his legs couldn't take it, and they also exploded. His remaining three arms bent under the force, then also exploded into a haze of blue blood.

Xu Qing's hand of black flame crushed through everything with ease, landing on the surface of the ground, and continuing onward! The teleportation portal was smashed into bits of ash.

A huge handprint appeared embedded in the ground. The six-eyed Seazombie had already been crushed out of existence, leaving behind nothing other than a dim ball of green fire that shot off in flight.

It moved so fast that someone without a life flame wouldn't be able to track it. But to Xu Qing, it looked slow. He took one step forward.

As he did, the water in the area exploded, turning into rivulets that spun away in every direction. Xu Qing moved with such speed that, in the blink of an eye, he appeared right in front of the fleeing six-eyed Seazombie's soul. Ignoring the heat of the cultivator's life flame, he reached inside and grabbed the soul like he was grabbing a baby chicken.

The Seazombie cultivator screamed in agony as black flames enveloped him. Xu Qing was directly refining his soul! The dead Seazombie had no way of understanding how this Seven Blood Eyes disciple could be so strong, yet earlier had prevented him from teleporting in. All in all, he had never encountered someone with a single life flame who was this strong. To him, Xu Qing didn't seem like someone who had just created their life flame.

Three breaths of time passed, and then Xu Qing relaxed his hand. The Seazombie's soul had been fully refined, and was now kindling within him.

Having accomplished these things, Xu Qing turned and looked at the Seazombie scholar who was still slowly fleeing. All of a sudden, Xu Qing was struck by the difference between someone with a life flame and someone without it.

The difference is beyond astounding.

Sighing, he took a step toward the fleeing Seazombie scholar.

Because Xu Qing was in the profound radiance state, the fleeing Seazombie couldn't even track his movement. Then, the water around him boiled away explosively, and Xu Qing was standing in front of him.

As a look of terror spread across his face, Xu Qing reached out, summoned a dagger of black flame, and slashed it through the scholar's throat. His head flew off his torso, though the two remained linked by black fire. But as the fire burned them, the two parts separated. And then they both collapsed into ash. Xu Qing turned to look in the direction of the fleeing Third Peak disciple.

Because of how far away he was, there was no way he had any idea what had happened. After thinking about it for a moment, Xu Qing decided not to chase him.

The disciple could still unleash grues. And though his actions had been mostly out of self-preservation, he had still helped Xu Qing to a degree.

Xu Qing collected his battle trophies from the area, looked around to make sure there were no clues left behind as to what had played out, then vanished.

As Xu Qing sped through the underwater world while in the profound radiance state, he felt a sensation that was difficult to describe. It was a feeling of all-encompassing safety that stemmed from his immense strength. He moved with such speed that ordinary Foundation Establishment

cultivators wouldn't be able to see him. The resistance of the water did slow him down, but only by a bit. When he looked inward, the volcanic explosiveness within him was shocking to say the least.

I wonder how I would compare to the Captain. Within him, he could sense the life flame burning in his life lamp, and the power of the profound radiance state. All strength is the result of transformation!

As he sped along, he waved his hand, sending out a sea of black flame that descended onto a Seazombie teleportation portal and wiped it out of existence. Then he clenched his hand into a fist and punched, hewing out a massive crater.

Next he performed an incantation gesture. Seawater roiled around him, changing into a tornado-like vortex that smashed into the crater with deadly force. Any ordinary Foundation Establishment cultivator who faced that attack would be destroyed in body and soul.

My magical techniques and fleshly body have all improved!

Finally, he came to a stop in a remote part of the underwater world. As the seawater boiled around him, he looked down at his shadow, and also waved his hand to summon the black iron skewer.

His shadow trembled, and Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior in the skewer was also shaking. After Xu Qing entered his profound radiance state, both of them had remained silent. Even they were terrified by Xu Qing in that state, and how easily he could destroy anything.

"Assessment time is coming," Xu Qing said calmly.

Chapter 159: A Shadow Scam

Xu Qing didn't need to issue any more threats. His shadow immediately shivered in response to his words. In fact, in its terror, it seemed to react instinctively by ripping itself apart in several places. Then it seemed to exert its consciousness anxiously to send a message to Xu Qing.

"Seazombie... eat... quick breakthrough... breakthrough quick...."

Xu Qing didn't bother to wonder what the difference was between 'quick breakthrough' and 'breakthrough quick.' Nor did he care whether or not the shadow was being sincere. Instead, he shifted his attention to the iron skewer.

The skewer trembled as Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior appeared on its surface. He had obviously prepared himself mentally over the past few moments.

As soon as he appeared, he slapped his chest and confidently said, "Don't worry, milord! All I need to do is consume a few more magical devices and I can achieve a breakthrough with my spirit automaton techniques. Based on your humble servant's calculations, once that happens, then under my control, our dear little skewer will be able to achieve a speed and sharpness comparable to the profound radiance state.

"Although it won't be able to stay in that state long, milord, I'll work very hard not to hold you back. Incidentally, your humble servant has been looking into self-detonation methods.

"I've already thought it through. What worries you, milord, worries me. What concerns you, milord, concerns me. My life isn't worth anything, so if a true moment

of deadly crisis arrives, then your humble servant won't hesitate to self-detonate to make sure you have a chance to escape. Milord, all of this is to make sure you can follow the path of the Ancient Emperors and Imperial Sovereigns!"

The patriarch spoke with great passion, and repeatedly thumped his chest to emphasize his words. Off to the side, the shadow trembled in amazement. Afterward, Xu Qing looked deeply at the patriarch, then nodded.

"I understand." Looking away, he exercised a thought, and the life flame within him winked out. As it did, Xu Qing returned to his previous state, and no longer shone brightly. The terrifying pressure that he had exuded vanished.

The moment he left the profound radiance state, he felt a temporary uncomfortable sensation. In fact, he briefly felt the urge to go back into the profound radiance state. He suppressed the urge.

It was a normal sensation for any Foundation Establishment cultivator who left the profound radiance state. That state involved explosively releasing everything from one's dharma apertures. It caused dharma apertures and spirit seas alike to surge, and also boosted the dharma body. As could be imagined, it was extremely draining.

As a result, Foundation Establishment cultivators had to exercise restraint, and know how long they could stay in that state. For most single-flame cultivators, they could last for an hour or perhaps a bit longer.

Because of that limited time, most people wouldn't use the profound radiance state unless they absolutely had to. And that was because the state tapped into the life flame. If the life flame ran out, then the dharma apertures in one's body would rapidly wither up. And withered apertures would leave one irreversibly crippled.

After getting used to being out of the profound radiance state, Xu Qing checked his battle trophies.

He had just killed four Seazombie Foundation Establishment cultivators, and the most disappointing thing about it was that the one who had teleported in wasted four magical devices defending himself.

Because it happened when Xu Qing had just entered the profound radiance state, and also had his life lamp active, he had been unable to exert refined control, and had only been able to attack with full force. And sadly, crushing his opponent had also involved crushing those magical devices.

They were probably worth more than a million spirit stones!!

Thinking about that, he sighed, then took out the bags of holding he'd taken.

These bags were better than any of the ones he'd taken up to this point. In total, they contained about 300,000 spirit stones. Sadly, he only found a single magical device. It was the fan belonging to the Seazombie scholar, which was a speed-boosting item. Xu Qing looked at Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior, who was obviously antsy to devour it. He tossed it over.

The iron skewer thrummed as it stabbed into the fan in a very crafty way, into the frame of the fan from underneath, in a way that the damage wouldn't be easy to spot.

As the fan's spirit resonance was sucked away, it grew a bit dimmer. When the patriarch was satisfied, he pulled the skewer out of the fan, then turned back and exhaled onto the fan. That exhalation had a marvelous effect; when it landed on the fan, it went from being dim to glowing brightly. It looked exactly the same as before!

"It's just a bit more fragile, that's all!" the patriarch said, blinking a few times. He looked a bit apologetic, as if he was intentionally trying to seem like he wasn't a shady character. Xu Qing's facial expression was the same as ever as he took the fan back. Ignoring the patriarch's facial expression and words, he unleashed the power of the two Seazombie souls within him to open his 31st dharma aperture.

I need more souls!

Now that he had passed 30 dharma apertures, he could tell that the soul power wasn't as effective. An ordinary Foundation Establishment soul wasn't enough to open a dharma aperture. He needed souls from cultivators with life flames. Though he had opened the 31st aperture, he could now see that he would need more souls to open the 32nd.

As his dharma force built back up, Xu Qing burst into motion, heading toward the exit of the underwater world. He soon found it and went right in without slowing down. Before long, he was back on the surface. As soon as he was there, he saw numerous Seven Blood Eyes cultivators flying overhead. The atmosphere of war was even stronger than before. As rumbling echoed in the distance, shocking fluctuations rolled through the sky. Xu Qing's expression turned somber as he looked up. High in the sky, he saw more than ten high-ranking members of Seven Blood Eyes fighting with a group of Seazombies. Further away over the water there was even fiercer fighting going on between the two sides.

Meanwhile, row after row of magical devices on the four islands sent out powerful magical techniques, creating a multi-colored glow which rose high into the sky. Flying swords shot out of the sword lake and screamed through the air. The spell formations were also working like mad.

Apparently, the war had reached a critical point, and the Seazombies were counter-attacking in a ferocious manner.

Xu Qing sent some dharma force into his identity medallion to check the missions, and saw that most of them were for the front-line battle. The rewards were spectacular. And there were already seven or eight people creeping close to completing the mission to kill 10,000 enemies and get a destined opportunity for core formation. While he was paying attention to his identity medallion, he turned in the completed teleportation formation mission. However, he didn't immediately pick a new mission.

Right now, the most important thing as far as he was concerned was to explain how he had the power of two life flames within him, despite only having a single life flame.

The obvious way to avoid revealing that fact would be to figure out a way to stay away from Seven Blood Eyes disciples. Otherwise, if he got into a fight in the presence of others, he would have to reveal the truth, and might end up in a deadly crisis as a result. But that would be difficult long-term. So the alternative was to come up with a plan to explain his unusual strength.

The best explanation he could think of would be to say that he had devoured a lot of souls in battle. That seemed like the least risky cover story.

Looking at his kill count on his identity medallion, he saw that he had killed fifteen Foundation Establishment Seazombies, but none in the Qi Condensation level.

That's not enough. If someone investigated him, and saw such a low kill count, they would immediately become suspicious. Therefore, Xu Qing found a remote area, checked to make sure he was alone, then looked down at his shadow.

"You emitted a Seazombie aura earlier, right? Do it again."

The shadow seemed confused, and even formed itself into a question mark on the ground in front of him.

"Just do what you're told!" barked Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior.

Looking somewhat hurt, the shadow released a small Seazombie aura. However, the moment it happened, the violet crystal in Xu Qing immediately suppressed it out of existence. As the shadow looked terrified and bewildered, Xu Qing checked his identity medallion and found that his count for Qi Condensation kills had risen from 0 to 1. Xu Qing's eyes lit up.

So, I was right.

When he had seen that Seazombie aura coming from the shadow earlier, he had wondered how the identity medallion would keep track of the kills. Seeing the result of his experiment, he was very pleased.

The identity medallion wasn't alive, and thus had no sense of judgment. All it did was take note when various auras and fluctuations collapsed, and used that as the basis to determine the kill count. Normally speaking, it wouldn't be easy to cheat the medallion. As for what would happen when multiple people attacked a single target, there was a function in place to calculate the results. It wasn't perfect, but was good enough in most cases. But Xu Qing's bizarre shadow was different.

This was the method he planned to use to deal with the situation. He would accept a mission, and use it to actually refine souls to open apertures, but at the same time, use his shadow to bolster his kill count for both Qi Condensation and Foundation Establishment enemies. Then it would be more believable that he would have the battle prowess of two life flames. That was especially true during wartime, when so many enemies were present. As long as he didn't do anything too outrageous, it wouldn't seem suspicious. The main thing to consider was how many times the shadow could be suppressed.

After a bit of consideration, Xu Qing decided it wasn't worth worrying about. After all, he had suppressed the shadow numerous times without it dying, so he doubted a few more times would hurt much.

And thus, for the next two months, Xu Qing accepted missions like mad. For most missions, he only used the power of a single life flame, and would only use his life lamp when he was alone.

And of course, just to make sure there weren't problems because of his identity medallion noticing the power of two life flames, he had his shadow conceal the presence of the lamp at all times.

All of the missions required high kill counts. And of course, Xu Qing would occasionally require his shadow to release Seazombie auras in the Foundation Establishment level. However, it could not attain that same level of battle prowess.

Apparently, the shadow had limits. Regardless, Xu Qing's kill count of Foundation Establishment Seazombies increased.

His shadow was in a miserable state, and that caused Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior to shiver in terror. Although the current situation had nothing to do with him, he still couldn't stop worrying about his own survival. That was more true than ever on a few occasions when it seemed like the shadow was really about to collapse. Through the two months, Xu Qing also got many legitimate kills. Because of that, the shadow got a chance to bolster itself some, and its battle prowess was slowly returning to normal. That was quite a shock to Xu Qing. Meanwhile, Xu Qing reached the point of opening 40 dharma apertures.

Chapter 160: Hooking a Fiendish Killer

Xu Qing's kill count soon reached a much better-looking state. He was at over 3,000, and most of them were thanks to the shadow. At that point, Xu Qing figured he was in a good place, and didn't dare to push his luck any further.

If he recorded too many fake kills, it would be too suspicious. Upon checking the sect's kill list, he saw that even among the most vicious disciples, virtually none had more than 10,000. There were only seven or eight who had more than 7,000, with a larger group that had around 5,000.

Xu Qing suspected that those high kill counts must be from people using special methods, or perhaps killing a lot of Qi Condensation enemies. Without some such explanation, such high numbers seemed ridiculously exaggerated and unrealistic.

After all, Seazombies weren't weak by any stretch of the imagination.

The person occupying the top spot on the list was Wu Jianwu. His kill count was so high that Xu Qing couldn't help but suspect that it was a fake number. Considering that, though, it seemed unlikely that his own numbers would be investigated. There were others with far more suspicious numbers. That said, there were people on the list whom he knew were ferocious fighters. The number two spot was occupied by Second Highness, who had killed over 8,000 enemies. [1]

After some more thought, Xu Qing wondered if the sect was fine with such ridiculous numbers to either improve morale, urge the disciples to fight harder, or make Seven Blood Eyes seem impressive.

Regardless, now that he was done padding his numbers, he started looking for an actual mission for himself. After all the hard work he'd put in lately, he was feeling a bit tired, and was hoping to find something simple.

It didn't take long for an escort mission to catch Xu Qing's eye.

Second Peak cultivators were known for their pill concocting. However, they didn't just concoct pills for healing and boosting the cultivation base. They also concocted poison pills, or medicines with random and unusual properties. There was also a category of pill they would make that were known as taboo pills.

Generally speaking, taboo pills were made for war purposes; once they were unleashed, their terrifying and lethal effects were difficult to deal with. Some could cause instant mutation, some could attract mutagen, and some could provoke meteorological phenomena. Every taboo pill had different effects, and every pill was used in a different way.

What was more, taboo pills had to be buried immediately after being concocted. Therefore, in most cases, the Second Peak disciples would concoct a partial taboo pill in the sect, then find a good place on the battlefield to finish the concocting process.

This escort mission was being assigned because there were a lot of small islands surrounding the Merfolk Isles, many of which had volcanoes that served perfectly as locations for Second Peak disciples to concoct pills.

Of course, the Seazombies also valued such locations, and would do everything possible to break through the battle lines, reach those islands, and interrupt the Second Peak disciples' efforts. And thus, this urgent mission was calling for Foundation Establishment cultivators to buy time for the Second Peak disciples to move from one location to another as they concocted and buried their pills.

The listed mission reward was 300,000 spirit stones.

When Xu Qing saw that, he was intrigued. An escort mission seemed a lot more reasonable than a mission to join the chaotic fighting on the battlefield. As he pondered whether to accept it, the twenty open positions in the mission began to fill up. When he saw that there were less than half of the open slots available, he accepted the mission. He immediately received a small portion of the spirit stone reward upfront. Then he was given the location of the teleportation portal to go to the mission area, as well as some other instructions.

After looking over the information, Xu Qing headed to the teleportation portal, and soon disappeared within the glittering light.

To the southwest of the Merfolk Isles were a series of large islands stretched out in a row like a pearl necklace. The islands had been there for a long time, and though they were very large, the volcanoes that covered them made them unsuitable for habitation. On the Seven Blood Eyes sea charts, these islands were called the Pearl Archipelago. The volcanoes in the Pearl Archipelago were active, belching out black smoke that caused ash to fall down like snow, and burning lava to fall like rain. The ash and lava that covered the Pearl Archipelago made the place seem like the Yellow Springs.

Meanwhile, waves surged around the islands as figures rushed toward the shore at high speed.

Those figures were, of course, Seazombies. When they climbed on shore, fierce fighting broke out, and booms rippled across the islands. Dharma force fluctuations rolled out, and mutagen surged.

On one of the islands in the middle of the archipelago, a large force of Seazombies had already slaughtered their way to the central region. In that central region was a valley where the ground was covered with black ash. Occasionally, lava would spray down into the valley, forcing the people there to keep their defensive shields active.

The people there were all Seven Blood Eyes disciples, most of them from the Second Peak. They looked very anxious as they watched a group of Fifth Peak disciples trying to repair a spell formation nearby.

The Second Peak disciples had come here to bury taboo pills near the subterranean earthflame. The fierce Seazombie assault had come seemingly out of nowhere. In fact, they had just buried their taboo pills, and hadn't even had a chance to make any adjustments. Because of the assault, they had no choice but to leave the area.

Unfortunately, once the Seazombie army appeared, the teleportation portals stopped working correctly. They now only allowed for incoming teleportations, not outgoing. As far as these disciples could tell, the Pearl Archipelago was a trap laid by the Seazombies.

And they were right. The large Seazombie army assaulting the Merfolk Isles was actually a feint to allow for the real operation to take place in the Pearl Archipelago. If they succeeded, then they could establish a command base here, and then use it to deploy troops against Seven Blood Eyes much more easily.

If Seven Blood Eyes sent forces to deal with the Pearl Archipelago, then the Seazombies could easily turn their feint on the Merfolk Isles into the main assault. All of the spell formations on the island were being affected. Furthermore, the Seazombies were going so far as to destroy some of the teleportation portals, while keeping others intact. Apparently, they wanted to guard a tree stump waiting for rabbits; if any Seven Blood Eyes cultivators teleported in through those portals, they would attack and kill them to earn battle credit.

In the northwest part of that one particular island, there was a deep valley in the middle of the island where a teleportation portal currently glittered with bright light. Surrounding the portal were several dozen Seazombie cultivators.

The leader of the Seazombies here was an ordinary Foundation Establishment cultivator, a nonhuman with three eyes. Keeping those eyes fixed on the teleportation portal, he shouted,

“Everybody get ready. Keep a close eye on the dharma force fluctuations. If a cultivator with a life flame starts to come through, destroy the portal instantly. Hopefully no one like that appears, because I really want to rack up some merit points.”

The Foundation Establishment cultivator looked at the glittering teleportation portal with keen anticipation.

The truth was that when the Seven Blood Eyes patriarch unexpectedly invaded the Seazombies after his cultivation base breakthrough, he ended up seriously injuring their patriarch. And that threw the entire Seazombie people into chaos. If it wasn't for the fact that some of their sleeping old-timers awakened to take control, the Seazombies might have been wiped out. After that, Seven Blood Eyes set up their main command base in the Merfolk Isles. Subsequent attempts by the Seazombies to retake the Merfolk Isles had all failed.

In the hopes of eking out a victory, the Seazombie leadership were offering amazing rewards, including the chance to upgrade their life force. All that was required to get those rewards was enough merit points, and that had whipped the Seazombie cultivators into a frenzy.

The Seazombie cultivator waiting in ambush by this teleportation portal was no exception. However, he was also cautious, and was worried that a Foundation Establishment cultivator with the profound radiance state would come through. Thus, he had brought along a magical device that could read fluctuations.

In fact, right next to him was an enormous eyeball that had eight tentacles, each of which had dug into the forehead of a Qi Condensation Seazombie in the great circle. The eyeball was slowly absorbing them to assess what was happening with the portal.

Suddenly, the eyeball shone with white light.

Seeing that, the Foundation Establishment Seazombie grinned viciously and prepared to jump toward the portal. However, that was when, just as a figure became visible in the portal, a stream of black light shot out from within. It moved with such incredible speed that, in the blink of an eye, it was right in front of the Foundation Establishment Seazombie.

Shocked, the Seazombie lurched backward. But at the same time, the black blur doubled its speed, carrying with it the tinkling of a bell that seemed to affect the soul. The Seazombie cultivator shivered.

Then the black blur stabbed into the Seazombie's chest and came out the other side.

Meanwhile, as the figure in the teleportation portal grew more distinct, the giant eyeball glittered, not with white light, but with red light.

"Red dharma force!" shrieked the wounded Seazombie. "Destroy the formation!"

The moment the order left his lips, the surrounding Seazombies attacked the teleportation portal. Unfortunately for them, it was right then that the roar of a dragon echoed out from the formation. A snake-neck dragon shot out, growing larger by the moment until it was 300 meters in length. Rumbling sounds echoed out as it bore the brunt of all the incoming magical techniques, ensuring that none of them hit the teleportation portal.

At that point, the figure coming through the portal became clear. It was none other than Xu Qing. Instead of stepping off the portal immediately, he looked around.

He saw the shocked Foundation Establishment Seazombie, and the dozen or so Qi Condensation Seazombies. It was obvious that he was being ambushed, and yet, that wasn't much of a surprise to him. He had come in as prepared and vigilant as always. Given that he had recently done the exact same thing these Seazombies were doing, it was no wonder that he'd made preparations before teleporting in.

Having sized up the area, the volcanic force within him exploded, and he entered the profound radiance state. As intense flames spread out from him, bringing incredibly high heat, the surroundings rippled and distorted.

As a result, the huge eye exploded, and the eight Qi Condensation Seazombies connected to it screamed and coughed up mouthfuls of blood. The other Qi Condensation Seazombies in the area also let loose agonized shrieks. Given how far their cultivation bases were below Xu Qing, to them, he was on a completely different level of existence. It was similar to how he had felt when he first met Third Elder.

Of course, he currently wasn't on the level of Third Elder, but then again, these Seazombies weren't comparable to his level back then.

As the screams echoed out, Xu Qing burst into motion, arriving right in front of the wounded Foundation Establishment Seazombie.

The Seazombie was so shocked that, before he could even turn around, Xu Qing's hand had latched onto the top of his head. Then, black fire raged out to consume him. The Seazombie struggled. Unfortunately, Xu Qing's life lamp exerted terrifying pressure, and this Seazombie didn't even have a life flame. His eyes went wide as his dharma apertures rumbled and his cultivation base was thrown into chaos. Then, black balefire surged into him.

He let loose another agonized shriek. He was strong. So strong, in fact, that back when Xu Qing didn't have a life flame, a fight between the two of them would have gone a different way. But right now, the Seazombie had no hope.

To Xu Qing, Foundation Establishment cultivators with no life flame were as weak as wild chickens.