

Timescape 191

Chapter 191: Forbidden Sea Bounty!

Up above was a moderate wind and a beautiful sun. Waves billowed on the sea as far as the eye could see. The sky was blue, the water was black, and the high noon sun created beautiful, touching scenery. As waves crested, a group of swordfish flew out of the water in a graceful dance. When they splashed back down, colorful rainbows appeared in the resulting spray. The warm beauty made the black, cold waters seem slightly more forgiving and peaceful.

This part of the sea was very far away from Seven Blood Eyes, and relatively close to Seazombie territory. Because of the war, there weren't as many trading ships as normal. Furthermore, the mutagen was strong, and thus, there were many large sea beasts under the surface.

At the moment, a bluegreen dragon sped along underwater. It had a vicious countenance and many sharp teeth. Because of the aura it emitted, most of the sea beasts it encountered fled in terror.

Nothing stood in the way of this dragon as it sped along rapidly. That said, if a Gold Core cultivator were present to look at it closely, they would be able to tell that this bluegreen dragon wasn't alive!

It was the manifestation of a magical technique. What was more, inside of it was a young man sitting cross-legged in meditation. However, a flaming black umbrella over his head masked his aura. His clothing was tattered, and he himself was in a bad state. He was covered with deep wounds, and his aura was unstable. He was injured internally as well, and within his body was a strange black thread.

The thread wasn't physical. It was illusory, yet it was embedded deeply within his flesh and blood, and was preventing him from recovering. All of the flesh around it was withered, and its presence made him feel like his body was breaking down.

This young man was, of course, Xu Qing, still in the process of fleeing from the Seazombies. After escaping from the restricted area around the seventh zombie ancestor's divine likeness, he was able to successfully teleport away. That said, he hadn't been teleported out to the open water, but rather, to the shoreline. Using his ability to disguise himself, he had forced his injuries into temporary stability, and then snuck out to the sea. Along the way, he had encountered various Seazombie experts, but by being very careful, had avoided any dangerous situations.

The most relevant factor in his ability to escape was that, because of information provided by Ying Ling, most of the Seazombies' efforts were focused on the ringleader of the disaster, the Captain. Though they were also looking for Xu Qing, he obviously wasn't as important to them.

As of this moment, ten days had passed since the seventh zombie ancestor's nose had exploded.

During that time, Xu Qing relied on the speed of his bluegreen dragon to get him deep into the Forbidden Sea. Unfortunately, his injuries weren't healing, which was very frustrating. The source of that trouble was the illusory black thread inside of him, which came from the three-headed six-armed Gold Core Seazombie. Though Xu Qing managed to escape with his life, he had taken that black thread with him.

The thread was strong. He had used his life flame to try to burn it away, but it didn't work. He had tried suppressing it with his life lamp, but that didn't work either. Some of that was because Xu

Qing's cultivation base wasn't at the level to fully unleash all of the lamp's capabilities. Regardless, he was currently far from being in top form, but at least he wasn't dead.

Eventually, he had summoned the black umbrella to prevent his aura from leaking out. And then he had attempted to use Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits to assimilate the black thread. The imperial-class technique existed on a very high level, so even though Xu Qing's cultivation base wasn't at the point to fully utilize it, when combining it with his life lamp, and further adding in the consuming ability of his shadow, he was finally able to make some progress.

Another seven or eight days passed. He had now been traveling with his bluegreen dragon for half a month. At that point, he finally managed to eradicate the black thread.

The moment it happened, he coughed up a huge mouthful of black blood that obviously contained poison. When Xu Qing saw that it was about to infect his dragon and the surrounding water, he quickly took out a small bottle and collected the blood. He could tell that it contained a type of poison that he had never seen before. Either that, or it wasn't actually poison. Looking closer, he realized that the blood contained countless black beetles that weren't visible to the naked eye. Actually, the black 'thread' that had existed inside him earlier was actually made up of these black beetles.

If I research these things, I might be able to turn them into one of my trump cards.

Taking a deep breath, he put the bottle away and focused on his injuries.

Without the black beetles inside him, he was already starting to heal. Seeing that, he finally was able to consider how much he had profited from his latest venture. The most obvious aspect was the fact that he had 65 dharma apertures burning inside of him. That alone made him feel very satisfied.

"It was worth it!" he murmured.

Beyond that, he had acquired an interesting item, which was currently in his bag of holding. Specifically, it was an item about 30 meters tall, so irregular in shape that it was hard to tell what it was at first glance. Only by taking in its shape as a whole was it possible to realize that this item was none other than... the seventh zombie ancestor statue's nose! Now that it was away from Seazombie territory, the material had transformed, and it was ordinary in nature. It was gray, and didn't seem miraculous at all.

However, Xu Qing didn't want to just throw it away. Perhaps he could find some use for it later. After all... the nose was a holy item to the Seazombies.

He had no idea what dramatic ramifications would result from his actions. He had some speculations, but in the end, didn't think that they would be too severe. He and the Captain had absorbed some of that blood elixir. Also... the Captain bit off a chunk of the statue's toe, apparently causing the statue to become unstable and resulting in the nose exploding.

It wasn't that big of a deal. Besides, the Captain had mentioned that the zombie ancestor statues could repair themselves, and therefore, it was entirely possible the statue was already back to normal.

As for the Captain....

He won't die that easily.

Xu Qing wasn't sure exactly why he felt that way, he just knew that the Captain was not the kind of person who could be easily dispatched. Not wanting to waste time thinking about it, he sat down cross-legged within the bluegreen dragon, focusing on healing and also directing the dragon toward the Merfolk Isles.

His plan was to get back to Seven Blood Eyes. He was so far from the sect that it would probably take a year and a half to get back on his own. It would be a lot more convenient to use the teleportation portals at the Merfolk Isles to shorten the journey. Because he was participating in the war, he could use that portal for free.

While Xu Qing was traveling and healing up, the Seazombies were in absolute chaos. Although they had tried to prevent news from spreading about the seventh zombie ancestor's nose, word eventually leaked.

The news of the matter struck the Seazombies like a bolt of lightning. Once the matter got out into the open, word spread like wildfire. Before long, virtually all the Seazombies knew about it, and they were all enraged.

That was especially true of all the Seazombies that had been zombified by that specific zombie ancestor statue. Their relationship with that divine likeness was like that between a child and a mother, and therefore, their reaction was even more intense.

The fact that their zombie ancestor's nose was missing couldn't be any more humiliating. After a thorough investigation, they found out that the perpetrators were two damnable Foundation Establishment disciples from Seven Blood Eyes.

To mortals, Foundation Establishment cultivators were incredibly powerful. But when considered from the perspective of an entire species, they didn't count for much. How could the Seazombies not devolve into a violent rage when they discovered that low-level people like that had committed such a heinous crime?

It wasn't just the ordinary Seazombies who were angry. The nobility, and especially the king, were absolutely incensed. It was the same with their powerful old-timers.

After the news spread through Seazombie territory, it eventually reached the front lines of the war.

On the one hand, it caused the Seazombies at the front line to fight with almost reckless abandon. On the other hand, their troop formations suffered. There were some military commanders who could turn their subordinates' rage into an asset. But it was a double-edged sword, and without extreme care, could be self-destructive.

There was no way the wily old foxes in Seven Blood Eyes would fail to take advantage of a situation like that. Once they realized what was happening, they started fighting even harder. Over the course of roughly half a month, they made serious progress in the war.

The Seven Blood Eyes leadership was surprised by this turn of events, but it didn't take long for them to realize what was happening. They soon learned that two Seven Blood Eyes disciples had done something absolutely astonishing behind enemy lines. After hearing the news, quite a few of the peaklords couldn't help but look in shock at Master Seventh. They knew full well that only Master Seventh's Seventh Peak apprentices could possibly pull off something like this. After all... it

was only sixty years ago that Master Seventh had done something very similar. That said, his escapade wasn't as shocking as this event.

Even Master Seventh was taken aback, and had a very odd expression on his face. When he heard the news, it looked like something clicked in his head, but he didn't say anything out loud.

Regardless, the matter raised the spirits of all Seven Blood Eyes disciples. The patriarch was extremely pleased, and issued a proclamation that the two disciples who perpetrated the affair would be handsomely rewarded.

Before Seven Blood Eyes could even determine who the two disciples were, the Seazombies did them the favor by announcing the names. It took a lot of investigation on the Seazombies' part, but they had managed to discover the identities of the criminals and put bounties on their heads! And the rewards weren't just for Seazombies, but for anyone who brought in the bounty! The list had existed for a long time, and the number one name on it had always been Sir Bloodsmelter. The reward for his head was very high. In the number two spot was Master Seventh. After him were various peaklords and vice-peaklords.

Virtually everyone in the top ten was a Gold Core expert. But now, the list was different.

Wanted: Dead not Alive.

#1 - Chen Erniu - This Seventh Peak disciple is currently the director of the Violent Crimes Division. He is the mastermind behind the plan to desecrate the divine likeness of our zombie ancestor. Any Seazombie who lays eyes on this person should do anything possible to kill him, dismember him, chop him into pieces, and consume his flesh and blood! Whoever kills him will be rewarded with a great dao legacy, will be placed in the king's echelon, will be given the right to take ten items from the Treasure Storehouse, and will be given 100,000,000 spirit stones! [1]

#2 - Xu Qing - This Seventh Peak disciple is currently a vice-director in the Violent Crimes Division. He is an accomplice in the plan to desecrate the divine likeness of our zombie ancestor. Any Seazombie who lays eyes on this person must kill him immediately. Whoever kills him will be placed in the king's echelon, will be given the right to take ten items from the Treasure Storehouse, and will be given 70,000,000 spirit stones!

#3 - Sir Bloodsmelter is the patriarch of Seven Blood Eyes....

Chapter 192: Becoming Famous

The war between Seven Blood Eyes and the Seazombies had been going on for about half a year. The scope of the war only continued to get larger, as more allies joined in the fighting. The war wasn't just being fought on the front lines. Other areas in the Forbidden Sea were affected. Nonhuman allies on both sides of the conflict played a part, and eventually, small-scale military operations were being carried out in various locations near and far. It was a given that a huge war like this would attract the attention of all sorts of peoples.

However, no event in the war to this point caused a greater stir than the change to the Seazombies' bounty list. Virtually overnight, countless species in the Forbidden Sea suddenly started paying very close attention to that list.

To countless nonhumans and human-like species, Chen Erniu and Xu Qing were now household names. Everyone was talking about them.

There were many people who were enticed by the large reward being offered by the Seazombies. There were even experts in Seven Blood Eyes whose hearts were moved by the thought of that much profit. After all, according to the description, anyone could claim the bounty, even a disciple from Seven Blood Eyes. As long as they accomplished the task, they could earn the reward. In fact, the Seazombies even added a clarification that whoever completed one of the missions could be zombified, and thus join the Seazombies.

As a Seazombie, they could then join the king's echelon as part of their reward. It almost seemed lopsided in terms of how amazing of a reward it was. It was enough to turn just about anyone's eyes bloodshot with desire. The only downside to consider was the success rate of the Seazombie's zombification process; it wasn't guaranteed to be successful every time.

However, given the rewards, it was a risk worth taking. After all, members of the king's echelon were like crown princes, and were generally called 'dao child' on a day-to-day basis. Vastworld, whose face had been disfigured, and who now hated Xu Qing down to his bones, was a member of the king's echelon. In fact, to date, he was the only member.

From that it could be seen how unprecedented this reward was. It also made it clear how furious and determined the Seazombies were. It was absolutely clear that they wanted Chen Erniu and Xu Qing dead. In fact, going forward, it would be difficult for the two of them to travel the Forbidden Sea, as they would find enemies no matter where they went. That was more the case considering that such enemies would hide their true motives, making them difficult to identify.

It would also make cultivation very difficult for Xu Qing and Chen Erniu, as they wouldn't be able to trust anyone, and would constantly have to remain on guard.

That said, Xu Qing was used to living like that....

Right now, Xu Qing was inside his bluegreen dragon on the way to the Merfolk Isles, and he had no idea what was going on outside. The only way to get information about the outside world was through his identity medallion, and he had strayed so far beyond the Merfolk Isles that the medallion wasn't working properly. Because of that, he was completely focused on recovering from his injuries. Over twenty days later, Xu Qing could tell that most of his wounds were healed. After some thought, he decided not to leave his bluegreen dragon. His dharmaskiff was destroyed, therefore, using the dragon was the most convenient option for travel. It would save him both effort and worry.

I wonder what things are like out there. Did the Captain make it out? What has the Seazombie response been like?

When he was about a week out from the Merfolk Isles, he looked in the direction of the isles and thought, In the future, I can't do anything crazy like that again. Every single time, I end up seriously injured... One of these days, the Captain will drag me into something that he survives, but I don't.

Looking down at himself, and then thinking about everything he went through, he sighed. He just wanted to stay alive in the brutal world in which he lived. Maybe improve his life just a little bit. To do that, he needed to put everything on the line occasionally to get stronger. They were two different philosophies that he had no way to reconcile.

I'm still too weak.

When he thought back to that Seazombie chosen Vastworld, and his four life flames, Xu Qing's heart filled with a sensation of danger. That was his first time facing someone with four life flames.

The Captain had revealed some of his aura when being chased by that Gold Core expert, yet Xu Qing was still convinced that there was more to the Captain's cultivation base than he was letting on.

But Vastworld was different. There was no question that he was a four-flame cultivator.

People like that weren't exactly very common. That said, when Xu Qing thought about how big the Revered Ancient mainland was, and how many countless peoples and species were there, he had the feeling that four-flame cultivators were probably less rare than he imagined.

Thinking back to the fight, Xu Qing realized that he had definitely worked hard to gain the initiative in the fight. Add in his shadow, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior, and the fleshly body power of Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits, and he had managed to crush his opponent.

But if he met Vastworld again, he would need to be completely on guard, and also be prepared from the beginning. Crushing him in the same way wasn't going to be easy. From what Xu Qing could tell, though, it also wouldn't be easy for Vastworld to come out on top.

Four life flames....

Anticipation flickered in Xu Qing's eyes. He was now in mid Foundation Establishment. With his life lamp, he could easily crush three-flame cultivators, and when he added in Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits, he could hold his own against four-flames. With battle prowess like that, he was already at the peak of what Foundation Establishment was capable of. What was more, his ability to escape from a Gold Core expert wounded but alive was something few people could accomplish. Yet Xu Qing still wasn't happy.

I still have 25 dharma apertures to open before I can get my third life flame.... When that happens, I should be able to crush anyone in Foundation Establishment, with the exception of someone else who has a life lamp. At that point, I should be able to live life a little bit more at ease. And that means that it will take too long if I just follow the same routine to open dharma apertures.

All of a sudden, he found himself hoping that the Captain came back sooner rather than later.

The Captain was absolutely crazy, and if Xu Qing could participate in more missions like this zombie ancestor statue event, then it might not be that hard to get to his third life flame.

Once the Captain's back, I'll go ask him what other places we can hit.

Xu Qing's decision was made. As far as his previous decision to not do anything crazy, he tossed it aside.

I have no choice. My cultivation is going too slow. If I want to open more dharma apertures, then I have to find opportunities. Once I have enough dharma apertures open, then I won't take any more risky chances.

With that, he nodded his head decisively.

Five days passed. Now he was only about three days from the Merfolk Isles, and that was when his identity medallion suddenly vibrated.

Xu Qing took it out and saw the same old mission list, with the missions constantly updating. At a glance, nothing looked out of the ordinary. However, something caught his attention; at the very top of all the missions was something called the Hero Rankings.

He was generally aware of the Hero Rankings; they basically correlated to the Seazombies' bounty list. It contained a list of all the bounties the Seazombies had put on Seven Blood Eyes disciples, including the rewards. However, it cost money to check the list, so Xu Qing had never bothered looking at it.

This time, he hesitated. Though he was convinced that he and the Captain hadn't done anything incredibly amazing, it still seemed possible that they might have been added to the bounty list. After closer inspection, he realized that it cost a hundred spirit stones to check the list, and that just didn't seem worth it.

Just as he made his decision to not check the list, his bluegreen dragon got close enough to the Merfolk Isles that his identity medallion started vibrating like crazy.

Messages were coming in, one after another, from just about everyone he knew.

"Elder Brother Xu Qing, are you back yet?"

"You are so amazing, Elder Brother Xu Qing!!!"

Stunned, Xu Qing started going through all the messages.

"I think you might miss this message, Elder Brother Xu Qing, considering you're probably getting tons of other messages. Anyway, I'm so excited! After I saw the news about what you did, Elder Brother, I couldn't sleep for days. But I'm also worried about you. There's so many things I wish I could say. If you want to know the gist, look at the first word, the fifth word, and then the third word of my first sentence."

That message came from Ding Xue.

Xu Qing checked the words she mentioned, but didn't notice anything particularly unusual about them, probably because he was distracted.

By this point, he was coming to realize that the Seazombie incident was apparently bigger than he realized. As he went through the rest of his messages, he found that everyone was asking about the same thing.

Finally, he unhesitatingly paid the one hundred spirit stones to check the Hero Rankings. As soon as he opened it and saw his own name in the #2 spot, his pupils constricted. Then he looked at the #1 spot.

"Chen Erniu?"

It was obvious that Chen Erniu was the Captain, and the name left Xu Qing feeling a bit stunned. It was only then that he realized the Captain had never told him his real name. Perhaps it was because his name sounded so unsophisticated.

After thoroughly examining the Hero Rankings, Xu Qing took a deep breath and frowned. Finally, he looked back at the nose in his bag of holding. During his travels, he had thought deeply about

everything that happened, and the reaction of the Seazombies seemed to confirm that... it was almost entirely certain that Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits had created the instability which led to the explosion. Furthermore, the Seazombies' divine likeness obviously had not repaired itself.

It seemed unbelievable.

Maybe after I left the Captain did another crazy thing?

Regardless, the fact that his name was being spread far and wide left him feeling unsettled. He didn't like making a scene. It didn't conform to the way he had learned to live from a small age, and it also was not appropriate considering the traditions in the Seventh Peak and Seven Blood Eyes in general.

It's all the Captain's fault! I should have just backed out when I realized he wanted to do something like that!

As he studied the Hero Rankings a bit more, he came to realize how furious the Seazombies were. Obviously, they really, really wanted him dead. Forget other people. Even Xu Qing himself found his heart beating at the reward being offered for Chen Erniu. If he had that reaction, others would have an even stronger reaction.

Why do things never go smoothly for me? Going forward, I'm going to have to be on guard against everyone. The sect won't be safe anymore. That said, it'll be better than the outside. Given how big of a deal this is, anyone with malicious intentions won't be quick to reveal them in the sect.

He continued to analyze the ups and downs of the situation over the course of the following days. In order to be as careful as possible, he had his shadow mask the fluctuations of his identity medallion.

As he got closer to the Merfolk Isles, he used his previous methods to disguise himself.

Obviously, there was no choice but to go to the Merfolk Isles; reaching Seven Blood Eyes any other way would simply take too long. That said, the matter of the bounty list ensured that he kept his head bowed as he flew onto Eliche Island.

Not pausing for a second, he headed straight to the teleportation portal. There weren't a lot of disciples present; just about everyone was on the battlefield. Therefore, Xu Qing didn't attract much attention. It didn't take long to reach the portal.

Once there, he glanced at the Fifth Peak disciples in charge of the portal, then quickly flashed his identity medallion. After the spell formation confirmed his identity, the teleportation started.

Around then, the Fifth Peak disciple in charge happened to look at the portal stone, and noticed the name of the traveler on it.

At first he stared, and then his eyes went wide. Turning, he looked at the teleportation portal and gasped, "Xu Qing!"

Right then, the teleportation light wrapped around Xu Qing and he disappeared.

In the Seazombie ancestral land, in a jungle of bare, rotting trees, was a giant in a suit of armor, his flesh rotting as he sat there cross-legged in meditation. Even in a sitting position, he still was about 1,500 meters tall, making him far bigger than the surrounding trees.

On his head sat a young man in an imperial robe.

He was none other than Vastworld. Half of his face was withered and disfigured. Apparently, it wasn't possible to restore it to its previous condition. His ear was still missing. Gone forever were his good looks and noble demeanor; now he looked vicious and fierce.

Kneeling in front of him was a young woman in a beautiful gown of purple and cyan. Keeping her face averted, she softly said, "Your Highness, none of our healing items can counteract the corroding effects that caused your wound. Only the king and the marquises have the power to heal you. Except, the king... well, he said you created this problem, so you need to fix it. Kill Xu Qing, and the king will treat you."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Vastworld snapped. "Back when you bullied the Spiritjade people and plotted against me, you didn't enforce any such rule. Don't tell me you've taken a liking to Chen Erniu and Xu Qing, and want to zombify them? You Seazombies are a bunch of shameless bastards. Screw off!!"

Vastworld's vicious expression caused the woman to tremble and back away.

After she was gone, Vastworld sat there, his eyes bloodshot and filled with killing intent. He felt humiliated from head to toe. He was the dao child of the Seazombies. He was in the great circle of Foundation Establishment. He was a four-flame chosen. Yet he had been bested by some random nobody, and had also been disfigured horribly.

"Xu Qing, we're not done with each other. I won't rest until I've killed you!!"

Chapter 193: The Captain Did It All!

Xu Qing remained on guard. In the moment before teleporting away, he had noticed the reaction of the disciple by the portal. Although the disciple's expression had been one of surprise, there had been a certain amount of thoughtfulness in there as well.

Of course, putting himself in that disciple's shoes, Xu Qing had to admit that the reward was indeed enticing, so if anything, it would be unreasonable to expect people to not be tempted by it.

And then there's my Seazombie enemy. The... what did he call himself? The dao child.

If the statue's nose couldn't be repaired, then it seemed to indicate that when things were damaged by Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits, they couldn't be restored. And in that case... it seemed likely the dao child's face probably couldn't be healed.

He definitely hates my guts. I need to figure out how to get rid of him.

Those thoughts were on his mind as the glittering teleportation light faded away, and things grew clear. He was back in Seven Blood Eyes.

He was immediately met by familiar sights and sounds, the usual hustle and bustle of the capital city. There was a line of people waiting to access the teleportation portals. And there were two disciples off in the distance handling registration matters. One was male, one was female, and both wore gray robes. Glancing at them, Xu Qing thought they seemed familiar, but didn't take time to think much about it.

As he neared, his violet robe caught the attention of the crowd. As for the two disciples handling registration, their expressions flickered and they immediately got to their feet and clasped hands respectfully.

“Well met, Sect Uncle!” they said.

Xu Qing swept past them, but then his gaze landed on the female disciple, and he stopped walking.

She was pretty, a bit skinny, with a ponytail. When his eyes locked onto her, she immediately got nervous and even started shaking a bit. Heart pounding, she bowed her head even deeper.

“Your cultivation base isn’t bad,” Xu Qing said. “You’re not far from the sixth level. But the Forbidden Sea aura from your Seaforming Scripture isn’t on par with disciples of the same level from the Seventh Peak. Improve that aura, and you’ll have a much easier time with your breakthrough.”

The trembling girl offered thanks for his advice, and then he was gone.

The reason Xu Qing gave her the advice was that these two disciples were the same ones who had been there to receive him when he arrived at Seven Blood Eyes. And this girl had warned him about the dangers of the sect. It was a small act of kindness, but Xu Qing figured that upon meeting her again, he might as well repay her with some good advice. [1]

After Xu Qing was gone, the two disciples stood there sweating.

Xu Qing’s cultivation base naturally emitted immense pressure, and he also had a baleful aura that could only be acquired on the battlefield. To these two Qi Condensation disciples, he seemed like a fiendish monster.

“That senior’s cultivation base... was so strong!!” the male disciple said, gripping his fan so tightly it snapped in half. Looking curiously at his female companion, he said, “Wait, do you know him?”

The girl stood there looking absent-minded for a moment, then she rushed over to the spell formation to look at the teleport records. After finding what she was looking for, her eyes went wide.

“Xu Qing!”

“Xu Qing!?” the male disciple said, shivering. “Wait, you mean the same one who got famous recently after destroying a holy item in Seazombie territory? The one the Seazombies set a huge bounty for? That Xu Qing?”

The female disciple nodded blankly.

“How do you know him?” the male disciple asked, his eyes gleaming with unprecedented envy.

“I can envision it clearly,” she said quietly. “It was about a year ago. Do you remember that scavenger kid who came in with a white identity medallion? I warned him about

the dangers in the sect. I remember looking at his information back then. His name was also Xu Qing.”

The male disciple gasped as he thought back to that same incident.

The girl turned and looked at her companion. “I remember you saying he wouldn’t last two months.”

The male disciple’s face was ashen; he was having a hard time breathing steadily and controlling his feelings of alarm. He remembered thinking back then that this junior sister of his had acted like a fool. But now it seemed she had created a possible opportunity for herself.

Xu Qing had no idea what the two disciples were talking about right now. He had given that advice on a whim.

Now that he was back in the city, he put on a gray robe again as he headed toward the Transportation Division in Harbor 176. His dharmaskiff had been destroyed, so if he wanted a safe place to rest he would either need to go to his mansion grotto on the Seventh Peak, or rent an inn somewhere in the city. The Violent Crimes Division was also an option, but instead of going there, he decided to see Zhang San first to ask him about getting a new dharmaskiff.

He hadn’t been back in the Seven Blood Eyes capital city for about half a year. Looking around at the crowds, and the familiar shops and vendor stalls, he suddenly felt unusually calm.

The battlefield was far, far away, and thus, the atmosphere of war wasn’t very prevalent. Everything looked the same as it always did.

One difference was that the sect was making full use of Harbor 176. It was now an important strategic location for the transportation of goods. Though spell formations could be used to teleport things instantly, they were extremely expensive. Merchant ships were slower, but considering the war had already been going on for half a year, such speeds were acceptable. After all, the war wasn’t going to end anytime soon.

Elder Brother Zhang San gambled correctly.

Xu Qing thought about the future profits that would be coming his way, and was very pleased. That said, he also kept his guard fully up. After all, the escapade with the Captain was going to result in a lot of greedy people looking his way.

It’s a good thing the Captain is in the #1 spot. And he has a bigger bounty. Anyone who’s thinking of making a move will probably target him first.... He’d probably prefer it that way, for his reputation’s sake. I wouldn’t want to make him lose face.

After thinking about it for a bit, he nodded his head, fully convinced that his assessment was correct. Now he just had to wait for the Captain to get back.

Before long, he arrived at Harbor 176.

The sect was using over half of the entire harbor. There were all sorts of boats and ships present, and when Xu Qing saw them all, he sighed. The construction work was much further along than half a year before. The streets were all in good order, and many shops were already doing business. The place was far more crowded than before. There seemed to be ten times as many people or even more.

Because the harbor was a combination of three ordinary harbors, it was rather large. That led to larger crowds, and also more shops with more varied wares for sale.

Xu Qing walked at a brisk pace, taking in the hustle and bustle until he arrived at the Transportation Division.

Instead of immediately going inside, he sent a voice message to Zhang San.

A moment later, Zhang San flew out.

“Xu—” Zhang San knew what was what, and after blurting out Xu Qing’s surname, he cut himself off. Looking Xu Qing up and down excitedly, he pulled him into one of the warehouses in the Transportation Division.

As soon as they were alone, Zhang San said, “You and the Captain are famous!!”

“The Captain did it,” Xu Qing corrected.

“You two are both crazy! I can’t believe you actually destroyed the nose of the seventh zombie ancestor’s statue! Did you know the damage is permanent? I heard it has no nose now!”

“The Captain did that too,” Xu Qing said immediately.

“It’s absolutely crazy! I heard that the frontline Seazombie forces went berserk. The Seazombie leadership even tried to open negotiations with our patriarch. They want that nose back! The patriarch refused, of course.”

“The Captain is crazy,” Xu Qing said with a sigh, “and I got dragged along against my will. Did you hear what I said earlier? The Captain did all of it.”

Zhang San was finally starting to calm down. Looking at Xu Qing with eyes glittering, he lowered his voice and said, “Any chance you still have the nose? Can I see it?”

“I still have it,” Xu Qing said. “But after leaving Seazombie territory it turned into ordinary stone. There’s nothing miraculous about it.”

Sighing regretfully, he took out the stone nose and put it down with a loud thump.

“Careful!” Zhang San blurted.

It was huge, being about thirty meters tall. Gray in color, it didn’t emit any aura at all, though it seemed a bit barbaric. There were countless tiny holes on its surface, seemingly put there by sand and wind, which emanated a sensation of ancient time. After walking around it in a circle, Zhang San reached out and touched its surface. Eyes shining even more brightly than before, he looked at Xu Qing.

“Xu Qing, who says this nose isn’t miraculous? It’s from the Seazombie’s divine likeness! Every Seazombie in existence wants to get it back. It basically represents their dignity.” Zhang San’s eyebrows danced up and down as he continued, “I have an idea. Why don’t we build a museum here in our harbor? We can put this part of the

nose in it. And when the Captain gets back, we'll put his half in it as well. Together. With a museum like that in our harbor... believe me, Xu Qing, we'll be unstoppable!

"We won't even need to hire guards. The sect will send people to guard it for us. And the sect will do all our advertisement as well. Our harbor is going to become famous! People will come from all over! We'll be the number one harbor in Seven Blood Eyes!

"Furthermore, the storefronts near the museum will be worth a lot more money! We're gonna get rich too!"

Hearing this, Xu Qing's eyes lit up. Seeing how excited Zhang San was, he had to admire how talented he was when it came to running businesses. After some thought, he agreed.

They discussed some of the details, and then Xu Qing lowered his voice and said, "Elder Brother Zhang San, my dharmaskiff..."

Zhang San rubbed the zombie ancestor's nose contentedly and laughed. It was almost as if he had anticipated Xu Qing asking about his dharmaskiff.

"Bring it out! I figured you'd come back with your dharmaskiff all messed up. Our harbor is profitable enough that however bad the damage was, I can have it good as new in no time."

"Thank you so much, Elder Brother Zhang San," Xu Qing said. "Hopefully you can get the job done quickly. Many thanks!"

With that, Xu Qing clasped hands, then turned to leave.

"Uh, hey, where's the dharmaskiff?" Zhang San said. "How am I supposed to fix it if you don't give it to me?"

"It's gone," Xu Qing said.

The warehouse went completely silent.

Zhang San looked at Xu Qing, his eyes slowly growing wider and wider. "Gone?"

Xu Qing nodded solemnly. "Gone."

Chapter 194: Half Back

Zhang San stood there for a moment without saying a word. Then he smiled wryly, shook his head, and sighed. "You lost it in Seazombie territory?"

"It was smashed by a Gold Core expert," Xu Qing replied truthfully.

Zhang San studied Xu Qing's level expression and decided that his previous assessment was incorrect. This guy was definitely just as crazy as the Captain. He, a mere Foundation Establishment cultivator, was so amazing that he lost his dharmaskiff to the attack of a Gold Core cultivator. Usually... a Foundation Establishment cultivator wouldn't even survive an encounter with a Gold Core cultivator.

“What about the Captain?” Zhang San asked. If Xu Qing had returned in this state, then surely the Captain must have suffered just as badly. Considering what the two of them had accomplished, it made sense that the Captain probably lost his dharmaskiff also.

“The Captain...?” Xu Qing thought back to the circumstances when he teleported to safety, and how he had sensed three Gold Core auras.

“Never mind,” Zhang San said with a sigh. “I’ll make the Captain a new coffin while I’m working on your dharmaskiff. Maybe I won’t need to use it this time, but I will eventually.”

Xu Qing nodded, said his farewells, and left.

Zhang San watched him go, then shook his head and walked over to his dharmaskiff workshop, trying to decide if he should make a second coffin while he was at it.

Since I have two crazy bros, I might as well make a coffin each. That’s only fair.

As night fell, Xu Qing walked along the harbor, listening to the crashing of the waves and enjoying the feeling of being relaxed.

Going forward, I’ll just lie low in the sect until the fuss dies down.

With that, he headed to Harbor 176’s Violent Crimes Division. As a deputy director, his arrival caused no small amount of anxiety among his subordinates. And that was especially true of the harbor’s newly founded Celestial Bureau.

Xu Qing’s responsibility as a deputy director was to oversee that specific bureau. All of the constables greeted him with respect when he entered, and there were even some Qi Condensation disciples who took it upon themselves to stand guard outside of his office.

The Mute was one of them.

Almost as soon as Xu Qing entered his office, the Mute rushed over, squatted outside the door, and glared around murderously at anyone who got close. It didn’t matter who it was, even if they worked in the Violent Crimes Division, he treated them as an enemy.

When Xu Qing noticed the commotion outside, he realized it was the Mute.

He’s made rapid progress.

The Mute’s spirit sea was already around 210 meters, which indicated that he was in the seventh level of the Seaforming Scripture. Xu Qing didn’t even consider trying to determine how the Mute was progressing so quickly. Everyone had their secrets, and he had no interest in prying.

Time slipped by slowly but surely. Half a month.

Xu Qing kept a low profile, but word eventually spread of his return. Though he stayed in the Violent Crimes Division, and had a very fierce reputation, people started making appointments to

visit him. That said, few of them were strangers. Most were people like Huang Yan, Ding Xue, and others he knew.

During the half month that passed, the situation on the battlefield changed significantly. The fighting between Seven Blood Eyes and the Seazombies reached a fever pitch.

About a week before, a massive battle was fought in which Seven Blood Eyes split their forces into seven groups to assault the Seazombies' seven fortified islands. The goal was seemingly to take them all and then advance to the main island, the Seazombie ancestral land. The Seazombies held nothing back to stop them. However, Seven Blood Eyes' assault wasn't as simple as it seemed. Four of their advances were actually feints intended to pin down the enemy, not take control of territory. The other three advances were the real focus, with the goal of taking those three fortified islands and then using them as springboards to reach the main island. It was a vicious and brutal battle that shook heaven and earth. Though Xu Qing wasn't there to witness it personally, the Violent Crimes Division had reports from the battlefield, and they described everything in detail. Eventually, the Seven Blood Eyes forces managed to successfully take two of the fortified islands. The end result was not ideal for the Seazombies, and some of their top experts took to the field. The scope of the fighting had already reached a very high level. Seven Blood Eyes offered even bigger rewards for missions, causing the disciples' eyes to light with even more ferocity.

Because of how the war was ramping up, interest in the bounty on Xu Qing and the Captain died down. That said, one of the bounty rewards was unexpectedly increased, and it caused Xu Qing to be more of a hot topic than the Captain.

That new bounty reward was added by the Seazombies' dao child, Vastworld!

Bounty reward increase: I, the dao child of the Seazombies, will perform ten tasks for anyone who kills Xu Qing. As long as those tasks are within my ability to accomplish, I will do them! And anyone who provides accurate clues leading to Xu Qing's death at my hands will be rewarded with one task!!

As the dao child of the Seazombies, Vastworld's battle prowess was exceptional, and he was also relatively famous. As a result, many nonhumans heard about the bounty, and were very interested in it.

Because of this, stories about Xu Qing fighting Vastworld started to spread. That wasn't exactly what Vastworld had wanted, but it was impossible to avoid. All he cared about was killing Xu Qing; everything else was of little consequence. Thanks to that increased bounty reward, many malicious eyes came to be fixed on Xu Qing. Shortly after the initial reward increase, Vastworld sent Xu Qing a personal message.

"Xu Qing, do you dare fight me, a dao child? No help from any bystanders. Just you and me!"

Xu Qing obviously was aware of both the bounty increase and the message, but he ignored them. In his opinion, this dao child Vastworld was a bit of an idiot. Whether back in the slums or in Seven Blood Eyes, Xu Qing had never been interested in dueling. He preferred to slip through the shadows and slit his opponent's throat. That was a much more clean and efficient method.

During the half month that passed, quite a few things happened in the sect. One of the biggest... was that a huge museum was being built in Harbor 176. Although the details about the museum construction were kept under wraps, it was such a momentous thing that word eventually leaked.

Once that happened, Zhang San ceased any efforts to keep it a secret, and instead started promoting it everywhere. Before long, everyone in the sect knew about it. There was going to be a new museum in Harbor 176, and there would only be one exhibit inside. And that exhibit... was the nose of the seventh zombie ancestor's divine likeness!

Any Seven Blood Eyes disciple would be able to look at it, and nonhuman cultivators would be invited to do so as well.

The news caused a huge stir in the sect. And when the Seazombies heard about it, they went insane with fury. There really couldn't have been anything more humiliating to them than that.

Sir Bloodsmelter heard about the matter, and was very pleased. In fact, he was so happy that he personally penned a scroll of calligraphy and had it sent down to be hung in the museum. The scroll had four characters on it.

“Nose With Living Flame.”

Zhang San immediately sent a message to Xu Qing about it. That prompted Xu Qing to finally leave the Violent Crimes Division and visit the nearly completed museum. When he saw the zombie ancestor's huge nose, and the calligraphy scroll hanging above it, he gaped in surprise.

Zhang San stood next to him, a very serious expression on his face.

“What does the patriarch mean by that?” Xu Qing asked. He looked at Zhang San.

“Does he... want us to set it on fire?” Zhang San muttered noncommittally. “Or make it look like it's surrounded by flames?”

Right then, Xu Qing suddenly sensed something behind him, and spun to look at a spot outside the museum.

Zhang San was stunned. “What's wrong?”

Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing extended his right hand, within which was a dagger. He slashed the dagger out, and it made a swishing sound. Also, an exclamation of surprise echoed out from the spot where the dagger had slashed through the air.

“Hey!”

Along with the voice came a sound like wind, brushing past Xu Qing. Face completely expressionless, he ignited his two life flames, and as intense heat rippled out in all directions, he spun and launched a fist strike.

As rumbling sounds echoed out, Xu Qing backed up several paces and looked at a nearby spot of empty air that was rippling slightly as it also backed away from him.

“Chen Erniu,” Xu Qing said.

“That's Director to you, buddy!” a flustered voice said. And yet the Captain still didn't reveal himself.

Off to the side, Zhang San recognized the Captain's voice, and looked excitedly at the spot of rippling air. "Captain, you're back!"

"Of course I am. It's not like I was in any danger. I got chased by a few dozen Gold Core experts, that's all. Escaping from them was as easy as blowing some dust off my shoulder. I even swung by the front lines on my way back."

An apple suddenly appeared in midair, and then a crunch rang out as the Captain took a bite.

"Why are you still invisible?" Zhang San asked curiously.

Xu Qing and Zhang San couldn't see it, but the Captain only had one arm left. His waist was injured so badly his lower half was about to fall off. And he was covered in countless other wounds, some of which pierced all the way through him. His face was in really bad condition as well. It was battered and swollen, and all his hair appeared to have been burned off.

Ignoring the pain he felt from head to toe, he forced one of his swollen eyes open as he grinned and said, "I'm just used to it at this point. Being invisible is great. Very convenient for a lot of things. And as your superior, being invisible really highlights my position of authority." To emphasize his words, he took a huge bite of his apple, then casually continued, "Anyway, after I ran circles around those dozens of Gold Core experts, I also figured I should go find the first zombie ancestor statue and pee on it. Sadly, the thing was too big to take with me, otherwise I would have brought it here so you could pee on it too.

"Another reason I'm invisible is for Deputy Director Xu's sake. You see, I can get in and out of Seazombie territory with my eyes closed. But Deputy Director Xu can't. So to make sure he made it out safely, I went so far as to visit the Seazombie's royal palace.

"If I hadn't been in a hurry to come back and find the two of you, I would have gone by the place where the Seazombie patriarch gets healing done, to see if there was anything there worth doing."

As the Captain proudly said all of these things, his face was so swollen he looked like a pig, and he was in so much pain he could hardly endure it. His injuries seemed about as bad as the ones he'd received in the Joine incident, although the truth was that they were worse. He had barely made it back alive, but given his status as a superior, he obviously couldn't come out on the bottom.

Glancing at Xu Qing, he said, "Deputy Director Xu, as your superior, it was my pleasure to help you. This time. Just remember that you owe me 50,000 spirit stones now. And don't forget to pay me back."

Xu Qing didn't respond. However, he did look down at the Captain's shadow, which wasn't visible to anyone other than Xu Qing.

The Captain obviously had only one arm and one leg, and was trembling from head to toe as he ate his apple.

Chapter 195: The Sorrow of the Weak

Looking away from the shadow to the apple, Xu Qing curiously asked, "Captain, the bounty on your head is for 100,000,000. But an arm and a leg together are probably worth 30,000,000 spirit stones, right?"

Some teeth marks appeared on the apple, as if the person eating it had been about to take a bite, then stopped.

"Leg? Arm? What are you talking about, Deputy Director Xu? I don't understand. All I know is that you owe me 20,000 spirit stones, and you better not come up short. This time, I risked my life to make sure you got away safe!"

"Oh," Xu Qing said, then he took out a jade slip and tossed it to the Captain.

That jade slip contained a recording made by Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior. It clearly showed the Captain prancing about disguised as Third Princess....

The Captain caught the jade slip, and then a few breaths worth of time passed. After that, the sound of hearty laughter filled the museum.

"Oh my dear, lovable little Junior Brother. As your elder brother, I was just joking around with you! Hey, Zhang San! What are you doing here? Did you build this place? What's that big nose you're standing next to?"

An odd expression could be seen on Zhang San's face. The nose was obviously the largest object in the entire museum. Ahhh, Captain. You really have a random way of changing conversation topics, don't you?

Looking at the spot where the apple was slowly being eaten away, he shook his head. "Captain, you have the other half of the nose, don't you? Take it out and I'll see if the pieces fit together. That'll make our exhibit perfect!"

As soon as the words left his mouth, a rumbling sound echoed out followed by a loud thump as a huge gray stone appeared. It was about twenty to twenty-five meters tall, and was none other than the chunk of the nose that the Captain had made off with. Strangely, there were teeth marks on one corner of the nose where someone had obviously tried to bite it.

"This thing is useless," the Captain said, sounding bored. "On the way back, I tried to bite it a few times, but nothing worked."

Ignoring the Captain, Zhang San stepped forward, grabbed the nose, and excitedly pushed it next to the piece from Xu Qing.

"Alright," the Captain said. "I just got back and I have some work to handle. I have a huge plan I'm working on. Now that I have my high-level zombie heart, I just need to get a few more intelligence reports. Once I have everything ready, the three of us can go on a really big job!"

"Another job?" Zhang San gasped, looking in the direction of the apple as if he was looking at a deity.

Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing said, "Will it involve opening dharma apertures?"

“Dharma apertures?” the Captain said. “Why? Deputy Director Xu, you lack ambition! If we do this job, we’ll reach heaven in a single bound! Both Joine’s flesh and my high-level zombie heart are just stepping stones for this new plan!” The Captain was starting to get very excited, but in his excitement, he opened some of his wounds, and had to grit his teeth against the pain.

“I’ll explain the details later,” he continued coolly. “I have to go now. Ai. I’m such a workaholic. I have a whole pile of work waiting for me to handle.” With that, he hopped away.

Zhang San couldn’t see anything, but Xu Qing was able to track his shadow.

“With two pieces of the nose, our museum is going to be incredible!” Zhang San said excitedly, slowly walking around the composite nose.

Xu Qing looked away from the Captain and back at Zhang San. “Elder Brother Zhang San, how’s the work on my dharmaskiff?”

“It’s done,” he said, tossing a bottle to Xu Qing. “There’s an instruction manual inside. Go check it out on your own, Xu Qing; I need to get these two nose pieces properly attached to each other. I want this exhibit to look perfect!”

Laying himself up against the nose, he started planning how to attach the two pieces to each other permanently.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing left with the bottle. He didn’t return to the Violent Crimes Division, but instead went to Harbor 176. When he produced his dharmaskiff, it landed on the water with a thud, sending out waves in all directions. It looked exactly the same as before, down to every detail.

However, the materials were better than before. Clearly, Harbor 176 was producing a good income, as Zhang San had made general improvements to all parts of the dharmaskiff.

Xu Qing could even sense fluctuations from inside that could suppress a life flame. He remembered Zhang San mentioning that class-eight dharmaskiffs could suppress the life flames of other cultivators.

Looking at the dharmaskiff, he took out the instruction manual Zhang San had referred to and started looking through it. Because this dharmaskiff didn’t have any of Joine’s flesh, it lacked godliness. That said, the materials used to create it were superb. All of the interior parts were high-level materials. It was a class-eight dharmaskiff, and it was obviously worth a lot of money.

“Xu Qing, dharmaskiffs are different from dharmaboats. Dharmaboats are simple things, and thus, every time you increase their class rating, they become more impressive. Dharmaskiffs aren’t like that.

“The first seven dharmaskiff classes are different from each other, but not by much. It’s only when you get to class-eight that you get something really superior. This time, I focused on creating class-eight defenses for your dharmaskiff. For its power source

I used the heart of a monolithoid. With that backing the defenses, you can reach the same level as the profound radiance state of early Foundation Establishment.

“You don’t have any godliness, but I left space to add it. If you can get the heart of a godly entity, then your dharmaskiff can be upgraded to class-nine. At that point, your defenses, and everything else, will be comparable to mid Foundation Establishment! Of course, the bigger the godly heart you acquire, the mightier your dharmaskiff will be. If you reach class-ten, your dharmaskiff will be comparable to late Foundation Establishment. Don’t forget that class-ten dharmaskiffs are quite rare.

“I put in the same camouflage technology as before. Also, I decided to explore a new direction with this dharmaskiff, by adding a special self-detonation ability. It should make things easier for you. I also added something to the self-detonation that I like to call the Participation Effect. Next time you blow up your dharmaskiff, you’ll see how I participated....”

Xu Qing shifted back and forth between looking at the jade slip and studying the dharmaskiff. Despite lacking an attack of godliness, Xu Qing was pleased with the dharmaskiff. Stepping aboard, he activated the defenses, entered the cabin, and sat down. It felt cozy.

I really do prefer being on a boat. But what’s this Participation Effect that Zhang San mentioned?

Xu Qing was curious about it, but didn’t spend much time thinking about it. After taking a few deep breaths, he settled down to meditate.

Three days passed in a flash.

Now that the Captain was back, there was another wave of excitement in the sect regarding Xu Qing and the Captain’s heroic undertaking. That, in turn, led Xu Qing to wonder about the reward the sect had mentioned.

At the same time, he felt a bit more at ease. With the Captain away, Xu Qing hadn’t felt safe at all. If some higher-ranking member of the sect had malicious intentions, he would have been in great danger. Although it hadn’t seemed very likely, he liked to be prepared for anything. But now... the Captain was back, and Xu Qing felt a lot safer.

After all, he was the mastermind. He blew up the nose, and the bounty reward for him is off the charts. He’s in the #1 spot! If someone is thinking of making a move, and they’re trying to pick between the two of us, they’ll definitely target him.

Xu Qing felt very calm. However, three days later around evening time, someone who was decidedly not calm arrived at Harbor 176 and headed toward Xu Qing’s dharmaskiff. In fact, this person’s heart was full of grief.

It was a young woman, not very tall, and obviously quite thin and weak. She wore a gray daoist robe, and was in the third level of Qi Condensation. People like this had to be very careful in whatever they did in Seven Blood Eyes, regardless of if they were male or female.

As it turned out, this young woman was Xu Xiaohui, who had joined Seven Blood Eyes on the same day as Xu Qing. [1]

She quietly came to stand in front of Xu Qing's dharmaskiff, her expression one of bitterness. In her heart, she felt not just sorrow, but deep anxiety. Truth be told, it was only because she had run out of all other options that she was seeking out Xu Qing.

Though she and Xu Qing joined the sect at the same time, she had never spent much time with him. Furthermore, he was now a Foundation Establishment cultivator, and was so famous in Seven Blood Eyes that everyone knew his name. Someone like her would be hard-pressed to even look someone that important in the eye.

She had suffered in torment for months before finally making the decision to come. Therefore, upon reaching Xu Qing's dharmaskiff, she dropped to her knees and kowtowed.

"Disciple Xu Xiaohui is here to request an audience with Sect Uncle Xu Qing."

Inside the dharmaskiff, Xu Qing opened his eyes and looked through the defenses to see Xu Xiaohui.

"How can I help you?" he said.

The words echoed in Xu Xiaohui's ears, causing her to tremble. Voice quavering, she said, "Sect Uncle, I came to tell you that Elder Brother Zhou Qingpeng... was killed three months ago."

Silence filled the dharmaskiff.

After a few breaths of time passed, Xu Qing walked out of the cabin and onto the deck. Looking at Xu Xiaohui kneeling there, he thought back to the day the four of them had climbed the peak. And he thought back to straightforward Zhou Qingpeng giving him those ghostlonging horseshoe crabs. Although he had never become very close with Zhou Qingpeng, he hadn't forgotten that he owed him a favor because of that. The ghostlonging horseshoe crabs had proven very helpful. Hearing the news that Zhou Qingpeng had been killed, he couldn't help but sigh. [2]

It wasn't very surprising. Offpeak disciples lived brutal lives, like venomous bugs in a jar. That reality hadn't changed because of the war. There were always people dying, and there were always people to replace them as new recruits in the sect. That said, Xu Qing wouldn't forget the favor he owed, and thus, he wanted to know more about what happened.

"Explain everything," he said.

Upon hearing that, Xu Xiaohui's eyes turned red, and tears began to flow down her cheeks. For months now, she had despaired. But now that Xu Qing wanted to know about what happened, she finally felt a bit of hope.

"Sect Uncle Xu, you might remember that Elder Brother Zhou started working for Sect Uncle Ding Xiaohai in the Coastguard Division. He told me that he helped Sect Uncle Ding with a lot of things that never became public knowledge. Because of that, Sect Uncle Ding promised that he would make Elder Brother Zhou one of his attendants. [3]

"However, after Sect Uncle Ding left the Coastguard Division, he didn't take Elder Brother Zhou with him. As a result, Elder Brother Zhou suddenly had no one to keep

him safe. He had done some things in the past that got people angry with him, and that's one of the reasons he died.

"In addition to that, back during the Grand Competition at the Merfolk Isles, Elder Brother Zhou made some considerable profits. At first, he had no problem keeping those things safe. But after Sect Uncle Ding Xiaohai took to ignoring him, people started targeting Elder Brother Zhou. Three months ago, he was killed on the street. I've been investigating his death ever since, but I still haven't found out who the killer is."

Though Xu Xiaohui was visibly distraught, and was even weeping, her thoughts were very well organized. Clearly, she had thought through everything she wanted to say.

After a moment passed, Xu Qing said, "Were you and Zhou Qingpeng...?"

"Elder Brother Zhou was very kind to me, that's all. A while back, I took out a big spirit stone loan to buy a dharmaboat. But I couldn't keep up with the payments, so I had to throw dignity aside to curry favor. I eventually sank to being a plaything to other disciples. I might have seemed well-off at a casual glance, but the truth was I lived like an animal, enduring whatever torment they desired. I sometimes ended up covered with cuts and bruises. Perhaps that's just what I deserved for being so vain."

[4]

Biting her lip, she lowered her voice and continued, "Elder Brother Zhou showed pity to me, and helped me pay back my debt. I thought that maybe he was in love with me, but from beginning to end, he never even tried to touch me. He just kept helping me. I think that... I'm not exactly a great person. But I know how to repay a kindness. It's just that I'm not that strong. For months I've done everything I can to find out the truth. I've even sold myself. Nothing has worked. And that's why I've come to beg your help, Sect Uncle."

Xu Xiaohui bent over to kowtow, but a soft and gentle force prevented her from hitting her head onto the ground.

"There's no need for that," Xu Qing said. "I owe Zhou Qingpeng a favor. Let me handle this."

Chapter 196: Erniu's Secret

Xu Qing's words moved Xu Xiaohui more deeply than anything in months. She had not lied at all; everything she told him was true. The only things she had left out were the bitterness and pain she had experienced during the months in which she had personally investigated Zhou Qingpeng's death. And she didn't mention how she felt absolutely no sense of belonging in Seven Blood Eyes. She didn't hate the sect. But she didn't understand how a good person like Elder Brother Zhou could be killed so suddenly. In the end, she wanted to do everything she could to repay the kindness he had shown her.

Sometimes she had asked herself if everything she was doing was worth it.... All she knew was that if she gave up, it would mean abandoning what little bit of warmth remained in her heart. Ever since

coming to Seven Blood Eyes, that little bit of warmth had been precious to her. She didn't want to give it up.

Even though Xu Qing gently prevented her from kowtowing, she still remained in a kneeling position. From the look of it, to someone as weak as her, kneeling provided a sense of safety.

Inside, Xu Qing sighed deeply. Taking out his identity medallion, he found someone in his contacts and sent a voice message.

"Come see me."

Shortly thereafter, an emaciated figure sped out of the night toward Xu Qing.

When Xu Xiaohui sensed this person's presence, her pupils constricted. Looking over her shoulder, she saw a kid in a gray daoist robe, beneath which was a dog skin jerkin. The jerkin made the robe seem full and bulging. However, the kid's eyes were cold, and he emanated a baleful aura that would make anyone who looked at him shiver. Xu Xiaohui inhaled sharply. She had heard about this person who liked to wear a dog skin jerkin under his daoist robe.

He was the Mute, and over the past half a year, had earned quite a reputation for himself. Similar to Xu Qing, he had risen to prominence in the Violent Crimes Division, and was known for his cruel and vicious methods. He had slaughtered a lot of criminals, and though he was only in the seventh level of Qi Condensation, he had felled quite a few cultivators from smaller organizations who were in the ninth level of Qi Condensation. And that was because the Mute was more willing to put his life on the line than any outlaw. It was as if, to him, risking his life wasn't a big deal. Once he set his eyes on an enemy, either they died, or he died. That was his attitude.

Upon seeing the Mute running toward them, Xu Xiaohui immediately felt frightened.

The Mute glanced at Xu Xiaohui, then knelt in front of Xu Qing, his expression one of fanaticism and joy.

"Go look into the death of Zhou Qingpeng," Xu Qing said. "If you need to know the details, ask her using a jade slip." He pointed at Xu Xiaohui.

The Mute nodded firmly, then turned and left. He didn't ask a single question of Xu Xiaohui. Apparently, he felt that asking others about the incident would make himself seem incompetent.

Xu Qing watched the Mute go, then stood there quietly, waiting.

Dusk had passed, and the lingering glow of sunset was replaced by inky blackness. The moon was hardly visible. Night had come.

Xu Qing had picked a special berth in the harbor. Regardless of whether it was daytime or nighttime, things were quiet.

The Mute didn't keep Xu Qing waiting for long. His entire investigation only took about two incense sticks' worth of time. Returning, he knelt and solemnly offered Xu Qing a jade slip.

Xu Xiaohui had spent months investigating this matter, and had paid an enormous price to do so. But the Mute took two incense sticks' worth of time. Of course, it was a result of his place in Violent Crimes Division.

As Xu Xiaohui waited, trembling, Xu Qing examined the contents of the jade slip. It contained all of the details of Zhou Qingpeng's death, including what led to it. Xu Qing didn't care about that. He just wanted to know who the guilty party was.

The killer wasn't from the Seventh Peak. His name was Li Zelin, and he was an Offpeak disciple from the First Peak. He was in the ninth level of Qi Condensation, and he was a grim killer. According to the jade slip, he was implicated in the deaths of at least eleven other Offpeak disciples. However, he was careful. He always went into other districts of the city to kill other disciples, and was always very specific about who he targeted. Because of that, he never became the subject of investigation.

These sorts of things happened all the time in Seven Blood Eyes. As long as a disciple didn't go too far, and as long as they didn't attract the attention of any powerful experts, then the sect didn't care and nothing would happen to them.

This situation with Zhou Qingpeng was a perfect example. If it wasn't for Xu Qing owing him a favor, then he would have died and the matter would have ended.

The Mute had done a good job. In addition to all the details about the incident and the killer, he also had all the information about Li Zelin's network of relationships.

"He was taken in as an attendant by Wu Jianwu from the First Peak. Just this evening, Wu Jianwu accepted an invitation from an unknown individual to meet at the Dreamsense Mansion. Li Zelin is currently standing guard outside there." [1]

Nodding, Xu Qing handed the jade slip to the nervous Xu Xiaohui.

She accepted it and looked at the contents, then started breathing heavily. That was especially the case when she got to the end of the report. She looked up at Xu Qing, her face full of bitterness and hesitation.

"Sect Uncle Xu, this...."

Although the jade slip revealed the identity of the killer, given who Li Zelin was, Xu Xiaohui wasn't sure if Xu Qing would continue to help.

"Let's go," Xu Qing said, his expression the same as ever.

The Mute led the way, and Xu Qing followed. Xu Xiaohui gaped as Xu Qing walked past her. Then she took a deep breath, calmed her heart, and followed.

Dreamsense Mansion was a restaurant.

In fact, it was one of the most famous restaurants in the Port District. It was very large, and usually drew big crowds. It was clearly on a higher level than the restaurants run by the Coastguard Division.

That became especially obvious when you looked at the menu. They specialized in spirit food. When you ate food like that, it would strengthen your fleshly body and help purge mutagen. Although such benefits were fractional, they were also incremental, and could lead to significant improvements over time.

On the second floor of Dreamsense Mansion, inside an extravagantly decorated private dining room, three people sat around a table.

If Xu Qing were present, he would recognize all of them.

The first was Wu Jianwu from the First Peak. Seated opposite him was the Captain, who looked a bit pale in the face. The Captain was no longer invisible, and was back in one piece. All of his injuries had been healed. The third person, who sat there heaving sighs, was none other than the innkeeper from Plankspring Way. [2]

Truth be told, those three weren't the only ones present. There was also a snake. It was an anaconda, currently draping from the rafters. She swayed back and forth, almost as if bored and trying to amuse herself. Occasionally she would stick her tongue out at the Captain, or make a few cooing sounds as if to ask a question.

Grinning, the Captain looked at the anaconda and said, "Ling'er, are you thinking about a certain someone?"

"Coo. Coooo!"

"How about this," the Captain said, looking very innocent. "Give me ten bottles of that mutagen mist you harvested. Do that, and I'll call the little punk over here and have him spend a whole evening with you. That's fair, right?"

The anaconda's eyes lit up, but not before the old innkeeper jumped into the conversation.

"You're pushing it, Chen Erniu! If you want to cheat me, fine. But don't even think about cheating the girl!!"

Meanwhile, Wu Jianwu looked coldly at the Captain, picked up a jug of alcohol, and took a drink. Then he coolly said, "If the heart of the just fills with greed, the day shall come in which he bleeds!"

The Captain blinked a few times, then took an apple out and started eating it. Smiling enigmatically at Wu Jianwu, he said, "I know you just came out of seclusion, Little Jianjian, so you don't know what's been going on, and you have no idea how strong I've become. But let me tell you: if I was Sect Granduncle, I'd beat the living daylights out of you until you talked like a normal person." [3]

Wu Jianwu's eyebrows danced up and down as he replied, "Make eyes and wink, look mysterious; heavenly lightning strikes heroes delirious!"

Smiling broadly, the Captain said, "You can stop talking now. I promised Sect Granduncle that I'd stop beating his apprentices. So don't worry, I won't lay a hand on you." [4]

The innkeeper face palmed. "Alright, enough. I invited the two of you here today for three reasons. Let me explain so I can leave. Just being around you two is annoying....

"First. Wu Jianwu, the time limit your Master promised me is almost up.

Unfortunately, I can't stick around in Seven Blood Eyes. So before I leave, I want the seals on the inn strengthened. Tell your Master to hurry up and send people to help. Otherwise, who knows what might happen.

“Second. Chen Erniu, I can strengthen your seals three more times. After that, you need to think of another suppression method. Ideally, something strong like godliness. Otherwise... if the thing comes to life, you might not be you any longer.” The innkeeper gave the Captain a very meaningful look.

The Captain looked back with his usual smile, as though he wasn't worried about anything at all. That said, if Xu Qing was here, his familiarity with the Captain would allow him to instantly notice that, after hearing the innkeeper's words, the Captain stopped eating his apple.

“Third. Like I said before, I need to leave for a time. Ling'er needs to reach Foundation Establishment. She's a special girl, and thus, I need to take her to her ancestral land. I probably won't be back for a few years.”

Shaking her head, the snake looked at the old innkeeper and said, “Coo, coooo!”

The innkeeper glared back at her. “You're still stuck up on that Xu brat? Aren't you worried at all that he might eat you?”

“Cooo!!” the snake said, glaring and not backing down an inch.

Seeing the snake like that, the old innkeeper sighed, and the wrinkles on his face seemed to deepen.

The Captain cleared his throat and cast an encouraging glance at the snake. “That brat Xu Qing isn't bad at all. He and Ling'er would make a good pair.”

Ling'er looked very happy, and began swaying back and forth. She even spat out a mist-filled bottle for the Captain.

Smiling, the Captain took the bottle and put it in the fold of his robe. “Definitely a good pair. In fact, I think that Xu Qing would make the perfect consort for Ling'er.”

“Cooo?” Ling'er said curiously, obviously not sure of what a 'consort' was.

The Captain was about to offer an explanation when Wu Jianwu's eyes went wide. It happened when the Captain said 'Xu Qing.' At that moment, Wu Jianwu went from lounging in his chair to sitting very rigidly. Looking serious, he said, “Who under heaven could match the description; could it be that person from the past?”

The Captain and the innkeeper looked at each other.

“I don't understand.”

“I have no idea what you're talking about.”

Wu Jianwu seemed to get even more anxious. Struggling to breathe steadily, he gritted his teeth and gushed, “You mentioned Xu Qing. Do you mean the same Xu Qing from the Seventh Peak who's in Foundation Establishment and recently made a big stir? The one who's extremely good-looking? Is that the person you mean?”

Yet again smiling enigmatically, the Captain said, “Yeah, that's the one. Xu Qing. He's one of my deputy directors. You know him?”

Wu Jianwu snorted and began, “Through the ancient ages, I know him not; heaven's—”

“If you don’t know him, then fine,” the Captain interrupted. “Regardless, he’s back. Why don’t I call him over? You can meet him! Or I can take you over to his place.”

Wu Jianwu’s eyes went wide. Taking a deep breath, he got to his feet. “I have a pill brewing at home, how could I go; if we’re connected by destiny, we’ll meet one day.”

With that, he turned to leave. However, before he could, a shocking pressure suddenly weighed down on the private room, coming from the street.

The fluctuations caused Wu Jianwu’s face to fall and Ling’ers eyes to go wide. As one, they looked out the window to the street.

Chapter 197: Like an Emperor in the Shadows

The night was deep. The moonlight was cold. The rain fell gently.

The moon was like a silver plate in the sky, casting down cold rays of light that merged with the rain and cast a cold glow over the Seven Blood Eyes Port District. And eventually, it reached the eaves outside the Dreamsense Mansion. Raindrops were pearls on a string, and the strings formed sheets. The moonlight couldn’t be avoided, and cast dim shadows. It was like a scroll painting of people in the night, especially the rare combination of the rain and the moon.

Walking through the murky streets was a person with a gray daoist robe and a white umbrella. It was impossible to see who was under the umbrella, but they were slender and stood straight. The aura this person emanated caused the rain around them to turn into a mist that they walked through. The soles of their shoes left ripples as they walked, creating small circles that widened outward.

The person with the umbrella was accompanied by two other individuals, who followed along in the shadows of the eaves. One of them also had an umbrella, the other ignored the rain. This newcomer was Xu Qing, and the people following in the shadows were the Mute and Xu Xiaohui.

It was nighttime, but in a bustling area like this, merriment had only just begun. The shops on either side of the street were busy. People ate and drank, laughter rang out, and playful, flirtatious banter could be heard everywhere. Quite a few disciples with powerful auras were gathered here, as though to keep watch over certain shops. Obviously, they were attendants to the important people enjoying themselves in the area.

Xu Qing’s target was here.

Li Zelin was a skinny young man lounging beneath the eaves of Dreamsense Mansion. He was chatting with a female disciple, but then his expression flickered and he looked up the street.

He wasn’t the only one. Virtually all of the shops on the street suddenly went silent.

Xu Qing didn’t release fluctuations from his cultivation base. But his baleful aura, backed by his 65 dharma apertures, ensured that everyone who noticed him was shocked. Countless eyes suddenly became fixed on him. As everyone watched him, Xu Qing expressionlessly approached Dreamsense Mansion.

As he did, a window on the second floor opened, and an anaconda stuck her head out. She made a few happy cooing sounds, which prompted Xu Qing to tilt the umbrella to the side and look up.

He smiled.

That smile caused the anaconda to cut short her cooing. Her body suddenly seemed to go a bit limp, and she was about to slide all the way out of the window when the old innkeeper grabbed her. At the same time, he cast an angry, wary glance at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing looked away from them to the trembling Li Zelin standing beneath the eaves of Dreamsense Mansion.

Li Zelin was bursting with anxiety; he was panting so hard he could barely breathe, and his eyes stung as he looked at Xu Qing. It seemed like he was looking at a god, around whom the very air distorted. It was like this person was a massive vortex, slowly spinning and spinning as it prepared to devour him. Li Zelin's terror and astonishment were so intense that he felt himself going mad. He shook violently, and his flesh and blood were screaming at him that he was in incredible danger.

That was because... he didn't just recognize Xu Qing. He also realized that Xu Xiaohui was with him, her eyes burning with hatred.

Xu Xiaohui had been there three months ago when he cut down that lackey Zhou Qingpeng. Later, he had come to realize someone was investigating Zhou Qingpeng's death. After asking around, he found out it was Xu Xiaohui, the same girl who had stood around as helpless as a wounded deer when her friend was killed.

To Li Zelin, people who were so weak he could kill them with a single slap weren't even worth paying attention to. However, seeing that Xu Xiaohui was so intent on her investigation, he'd pretended to help, then had some fun with her. Afterward, he found her disgusting and drove her away.

But right now, he was trembling to his core. Everyone in the sect knew who Xu Qing was. Back when Li Zelin killed Zhou Qingpeng, he knew that Zhou Qingpeng had joined the sect on the same day as Xu Qing. But in Seven Blood Eyes, that kind of thing wasn't important. Disciples were venomous bugs in a jar, and didn't bother developing friendships.

Even now, Li Zelin had trouble believing this was really happening. In fact, he was trying to convince himself that Xu Qing had come here for some other reason. Trembling, he clasped hands in greeting.

"W-well... well met... Sect Uncle Xu."

"Is that him?" Xu Qing asked, looking over at the Mute and Xu Xiaohui.

The Mute nodded. Xu Xiaohui ground her teeth as she looked hatefully at Li Zelin. The moment she'd seen his name in that jade slip, she realized how much of a fool she'd been. She nodded her head angrily.

Upon seeing that, Li Zelin's heart started pounding, and he instinctively started backing up.

"Milord! Help! I—"

Before he could say anything else, a black iron skewer shot from Xu Qing into his neck.

The power of lightning within it instantly destroyed Li Zelin's soul, and cracks spread out over his skin, like his body was about to collapse. The power of the iron skewer seemed to provoke lightning from the sky. In the blink of an eye, a massive lightning bolt shot down, like a silver snake, to smash into Li Zelin's corpse.

A boom rang out, and the body exploded, becoming countless chunks of charred, smoking flesh, which landed hissing onto the rain-soaked street. It was an absolutely shocking scene that caused waves of astonishment to fill the hearts of all onlookers.

It was a given that a Foundation Establishment cultivator would be able to kill a Qi Condensation disciple with ease. But Xu Qing's methods were simply spectacular. He actually caused lightning to fall from heaven, and that was enough to leave everyone stupefied.

The skewer flew back to Xu Qing and hovered behind him, blending into the shadows.

That also caused the onlookers to tremble.

As silence prevailed, Xu Qing prepared to leave. However, it was at that moment that a quizzical voice emerged from the second-floor window that Ling'er had opened.

"Aiya, Little Jianjian. Wasn't that guy one of your attendants? And wasn't he just calling for help?"

The voice belonged to the Captain.

When Xu Qing looked at the anaconda and the innkeeper earlier, he had noticed the two familiar individuals inside the private dining room. Inclining his head, he looked through the window.

Inside the private room, First Peak chosen Wu Jianwu was looking at the Captain, who was smiling enigmatically.

After a short moment of silence, Wu Jianwu snorted coldly, then flicked his sleeve. Life flame fluctuations rolled out from him, filling the area.

"Woo-hoo!" the Captain shouted.

In Wu Jianwu's opinion, the Captain was an idiot, and he didn't like wasting time talking to idiots. Therefore, without sparing a glance for the Captain, he walked toward the window, his expression deeply grim.

By the time he reached the window, his cultivation base fluctuations were rolling out wildly. As lightning crashed above, countless bronze swords appeared in the clouds overhead, and all of them were pointing down. It seemed almost like heaven itself was furious. And as Wu Jianwu stood there, explosive killing intent building within him, he looked down at Xu Qing.

"Why did you kill my attendant??" he asked arrogantly.

His dramatic display of energy plus his grim expression made him seem exactly like what everyone expected a chosen to be. His words boomed like thunder, filling the entire area. At the same time, the countless bronze swords flickered with brilliant light.

Everyone in the area was deeply shaken. In fact, many people started leaving. They had the feeling that... a monumental fight was about to take place.

After all, Xu Qing had killed Wu Jianwu's attendant right on the street, and that could be considered a slap in the face to Wu Jianwu. Besides, everyone knew that First Peak disciples cared a lot about face, and would never rest to avenge slights.

Meanwhile, inside the private dining room, the anaconda's eyes glittered as she looked at Wu Jianwu. It seemed as if she wanted to thrash him. However, the old innkeeper kept his arms wrapped tight around her.

At the same time, the old man was actually feeling very pleased, and was thinking, Ahhhh, Xu Qing. What are you going to do now? The First Peak watches out for their own. Wu Jianwu has eight Elder Brothers who love big brawls.

Down on the street, the Mute and Xu Xiaohui were both shaken. The Mute, despite the fact that the pressure rolling off of Wu Jianwu made him tremble, he was baring his sharp teeth and eyeing Wu Jianwu's throat. As for Xu Xiaohui, she was biting her lip, anxiety building within her as she berated herself for dragging Xu Qing into this matter.

However... though everyone else seemed shocked, Xu Qing's expression was the same as ever. He looked up at Wu Jianwu standing next to the window, and his eyes were cold. Not saying a single word, he extended his right hand, causing his iron skewer to float out of the shadows behind him.

Right then, laughter erupted from Wu Jianwu's mouth. In fact, he threw his head back and laughed uproariously. Then he spoke in a very loud voice that seemed designed to make sure everyone could hear him clearly.

"So, that's what happened. Well, that makes total sense. Now I understand that it was a matter of personal vengeance. I, Wu Jianwu, should definitely not interfere."

Xu Qing frowned but didn't say anything. A moment passed.

"No, no. You don't need to treat me to a meal. I completely understand." After a pause, Wu Jianwu again laughed loudly. "Hahaha! Brother Xu, you really don't need to go through that trouble, and besides, I don't have the time right now. Really, just forget about it. By the way, I heard about your heroic undertaking in Seazombie territory. Amazing.... What? No, you're being too polite! Alright, considering how well you're treating me, I, Wu Jianwu, will go ahead and pay the 10,000 spirit stone fine for killing this person!"

Ling'er's eyes went wide as she looked at Wu Jianwu, then she scanned the street, as if she was having trouble understanding what was going on.

"Mm-hmm," Wu Jianwu continued. "Yes. Okay, fine. We'll hang out later when we both have time. Well, I need to say farewell for now. It was wonderful to see you, Brother Xu. Truly a pleasure!"

Wu Jianwu had started out sounding very serious, but ended up seeming very happy. Smiling broadly, he clasped hands and bowed to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing, who had not said a single thing the entire time, just looked up at him with an odd expression on his face.

Taking note of Xu Qing's expression, Wu Jianwu shivered, then flicked his sleeve, laughed, and walked out of the private dining room. As he flew off into the lightning and rain, he looked exactly like an immortal from a beautiful painting.

“Surpass mortal life and be refined; I’ll become an immortal and surpass mankind.”

Surrounded by thrumming bronze swords, he disappeared off into the distance.

Chapter 198: No, I’ll Take the Blame!

When he was far enough away that no one could see him, Wu Jianwu shivered. His face went pale, and his eyes flickered with astonishment. Sweat pouring down his forehead, he took a very deep breath.

What happened? Two flames?? That fiendish killer was terrible enough before. Now that he has two life flames, he’d definitely be able to kill me if I ran into him outside the sect!!

Heart pounding, he came to the conclusion that he definitely couldn’t leave the sect for the next few months.

Thanks to my quick wits, I managed to give him a lot of face. I even paid the fine for him. He’s a reasonable person, right? Next time we run into each other he won’t try to kill me. Will he? Ah, what a headache.... No. I’m not going out of my mansion grotto until I have two life flames!

Meanwhile, back outside Dreamsense Mansion, Xu Qing stood in the rain, a strange look on his face.

The Mute was completely taken aback, and Xu Xiaohui looked dumbfounded.

Ling’er blinked suspiciously, and the old innkeeper seemed speechless.

These people were right at the epicenter of the event, and all of them knew that Xu Qing hadn’t said a single thing. He had only taken a ready stance, and then Wu Jianwu had suddenly started spouting all sorts of balderdash. Combined with his laughter and loud voice, it had almost seemed like he was exchanging voice messages with Xu Qing. And apparently it had involved an invitation to dinner.

It was all so convincing that anyone who simply overheard Wu Jianwu would think it was all a real conversation, would come to the conclusion that Wu Jianwu really admired Xu Qing, and would believe that the two of them were good friends who respected each other a lot. Furthermore, it seemed that because Wu Jianwu had refused Xu Qing’s invitation repeatedly, Wu Jianwu had felt obligated to pay the fine for killing an Offpeak disciple.

A loud crunch broke the silence as the Captain got to his feet, munching his apple as he walked over to the window, where he looked down at Xu Qing and blinked a few times. Very impressive acting, Little Jianjian. I admit I’m surprised.

Xu Qing looked up and noticed that the Captain had all four of his limbs intact. An odd look appeared in Xu Qing’s eyes. The Captain had recovered very quickly this time. But considering how quickly he’d regrown his lost limbs, Xu Qing had to guess that he didn’t use a cultivation technique or medicinal pill, but rather some gruish ability.

Meanwhile, Ling’er took advantage of the innkeeper’s shocked state to wriggle out of his grasp, slither out of the window, and approach Xu Qing.

Xu Qing’s eyes narrowed briefly, but then he saw the snake’s eyes, and they seemed familiar, as if they’d met before. Those eyes did not contain any killing intent, but rather, pure happiness.

“Coo. Cooooo.”

Looking very happy, the snake shrank down, becoming much more slender, and turning into a snow white color. Wrapping around Xu Qing’s arm, she looked at him with wide, adorable eyes. [1]

“Coo. Cooooooo. Coo.

“Coo coo.”

When the innkeeper saw what was happening, his heart sank, and he was about to start scolding the snake. But then Xu Qing looked up at him with cold eyes.

The innkeeper shivered and thought back to the time Xu Qing had almost killed him. Feeling both grief and indignation, he realized that whenever a girl had to pick between her sweetheart and her father, who had spent so much blood, sweat, and tears raising her, she would usually pick the former. His heart sank further.

No. I won’t compromise. That brat is no good. He’s definitely not the right match for Ling’er. Mind racing, he suddenly raised his voice and said, “Coo. Cooooooooo!”

He didn’t dare to speak the language of humans, and instead spoke Ling’er’s language. He had just told her that if she wanted to be with Xu Qing forever, she had to be able to shapechange permanently. And if she wanted to do that, she needed to reach Foundation Establishment. Thus, they needed to go.

Ling’er obviously didn’t want to leave Xu Qing. But after circling around his arm softly once more, she dropped to the ground and raced back to the old innkeeper.

The innkeeper breathed a sigh of relief. Feeling very pleased with himself, he hurried away.

As they left, Xu Qing could hear the sound of cooing echoing in their wake.

“Alright, Deputy Director Xu,” the Captain said from the window. “Enough of that. Come have a few drinks with your boss.” He beckoned at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing thought about it for a moment, then turned and nodded at Xu Xiaohui, indicating that she should leave.

Xu Xiaohui bit her lip. Heart full of gratitude, she dropped to her knees in the rain and kowtowed to Xu Qing, knocking her forehead against the ground. Then she left.

The Mute didn’t leave. He walked over and squatted outside of Dreamsense Mansion in the same spot where Li Zelin had been.

Xu Qing didn’t say anything. In a flash, he shot through the window and into the private dining room, where he took a seat at the table. Back when the Captain had returned, there were certain things he’d wanted to ask about the Captain’s bedraggled state, but hadn’t because of Zhang San’s presence.

“Captain, why did the statue’s nose explode?” he asked, sounding very serious. He felt like he absolutely had to ask this question. If he didn’t, then given the Captain’s suspicious personality, he definitely wouldn’t be able to feel at ease. And of course, Xu Qing wanted the Captain to feel at ease.

“You don’t know?” the Captain said, taking a bite of an apple and grinning at Xu Qing.

Looking surprised, Xu Qing shook his head.

“Come on, my deputy director. Don’t forget that I taught you all your acting skills. We both know exactly why the statue’s nose exploded. You can’t fool me.”

Having finished his apple, the Captain took out a pear and bit into it.

“This time, I’ll take the blame,” the Captain continued, looking very mysterious and solemn. “After all, I am your boss. I won’t even charge you spirit stones for it. I only have two requirements.”

Xu Qing frowned, looking a bit hesitant.

Seeing that, the Captain took out another pear and tossed it to Xu Qing.

“Allow me to explain. It’s that reason. Yeah, I saw it all with my own eyes.” He sighed.

“Whatever. Let me explain my two requirements. What’s the first?” Sounding very grave, he continued, “It’s that you can never, ever bring up the story of me disguising myself as Third Princess. That slate is wiped clean! What’s the second? It’s that you still have to pay me the 100,000 spirit stones you owe!! If you agree to those stipulations, then I’ll take the blame for you for the Seazombie incident.”

The Captain inhaled deeply, then bit the pear in half and looked closely at Xu Qing to see his reaction.

Xu Qing sat there quietly for a moment, then shook his head. “Since it was my fault, I’ll just announce it publicly. I’ll tell everyone that I did it. I should be the #1 on the bounty list. I was the mastermind behind the zombie ancestor statue incident. As for you, Captain, you were simply an accomplice.”

Having said that, Xu Qing stood to leave.

All of a sudden, the Captain looked nervous. Obviously he felt proud of being the mastermind, and in his attempt to blackmail Xu Qing, had made a fool of himself in trying to be clever.

Clearing his throat, he chuckled and said, “Ah, look at you. You’re so serious. I was just joking around! I was responsible for everything. I was the mastermind. And there’s nobody who can take that away from me!”

“No, it was me,” Xu Qing said, sounding very serious.

“It wasn’t you. It was me!” The Captain now sounded even more anxious.

“No, it wasn’t. It was me!” Xu Qing stared at the Captain.

Sounding incomparably serious, the Captain said, “Xu Qing, I have to give you some constructive criticism here. I’m stating very plainly that it wasn’t you. Therefore, it wasn’t. It was me!”

Xu Qing suddenly looked uncertain. “It really was you?”

“Of course it was me! I ate Joine’s flesh, then took a bite of the statue. The power of Joine’s flesh erupted, creating a chain reaction within the divine likeness that resulted in the explosion. It was a reaction to the godliness! After I got back, I read through some of the ancient records, and found that both Joine and the Seazombies share some common ancestry. That’s clearly why her aura provoked a reaction from the zombie ancestor statue!”

Xu Qing looked stunned. After some thought, he nodded. But then he looked hesitant, and was about to ask another question, when the Captain rose and laughed heartily.

“Sorry, little Junior Brother, but I have another matter to attend to. I’ll see myself out. Don’t think too much about this. The whole thing really was my fault. Ai. There’s so much to handle at work. I really wish it wasn’t like this.... By the way, it won’t be long now before I’ll get the information I need about that big plan I mentioned. Then I can explain everything.”

The Captain hurried out of the private dining room. Once he was down on the street, he pulled out another apple, took a bite, then sighed.

It seems like it really wasn’t the brat who did it. So, was I actually the one at fault? Hmm. Yeah, I guess it was me.

It seemed reasonable, and the Captain actually felt wonderful about that. After all, as the boss, it made sense that he would be the mastermind.

Back in the private dining room, Xu Qing breathed a sigh of relief. At long last, he felt he could rest at ease.

After all that, I doubt the Captain will suspect me.

Feeling satisfied with how everything ended up, he left Dreamsense Mansion and headed back to his berth. There, he worked on his cultivation and waited in anticipation to hear about the Captain’s big plan.

A month passed.

During that time, the war with the Seazombies reached a critical point.

Countless species were watching, because... after occupying those three fortified islands, there was nothing blocking Seven Blood Eyes’ path to the Seazombies ancestral land. And thus began a general offensive to take the main island!

Meanwhile, Harbor 176’s museum finally opened for business.

Zhang San did a spectacular job of fusing together the two pieces of the nose, to the point where it was almost impossible to tell that they weren’t one unified nose. He had also added two everburning flames to the exhibit.

And the patriarch’s calligraphy hung over it all.

The opening of the museum caused a big stir in the sect. Out on the battlefield, the patriarch and all the other top members of the sect were very supportive. It also caused a commotion among surrounding peoples on the sea, many of whom couldn't wait to come see the exhibit.

Harbor 176 was soon busier than it had ever been. People poured in from everywhere. And just as Zhang San had said, they didn't need to worry about guarding the museum. The sect handled that for them. The Gold Core elders who remained behind in the sect had received orders from the patriarch himself to keep the museum safe.

Also, the reward for Xu Qing and Chen Erniu was finally announced by the patriarch.

“Chen Erniu and Xu Qing will serve as envoy disciples of Seven Blood Eyes. Chen Erniu will be promoted within the echelon. And Xu Qing is hereby added to the echelon! They will both be allowed to summon a projection of the sect's magical treasure three times! Both will be given a destined opportunity for Gold Core, after the war is over! The above items are the first part of the reward. Further aspects of the reward will be discussed after the war!”

The entire sect was abuzz, firstly, because of the mention of the echelon. The other was because of the use of the term ‘envoy disciple.’

Truth be told, no one in Seven Blood Eyes had any idea what an ‘envoy disciple’ was. That was because, up to this point... there had never been any envoy disciples in Seven Blood Eyes.

Soon enough, people came to know what envoy disciples were.

Xu Qing and the Captain were assigned the task of representing the seven peaklords in receiving and entertaining visitors who came to see the zombie ancestor's nose.

Chapter 199: A Drama Featuring Two Phoenixes

The so-called ‘envoy disciples’ were basically outward-facing representatives of Seven Blood Eyes. When nonhumans came to visit Seven Blood Eyes, they would interact with Xu Qing and the Captain, and in turn, that would remind them of how badly the Seazombies had lost face thanks to those two. And thanks to the museum, many nonhumans were coming to visit. As a result, Xu Qing and the Captain were both very busy.

At the moment, Xu Qing stood at the entrance of Harbor 176 awaiting a group of nonhumans as evening deepened.

Thanks to the glow of the setting sun, his unusually attractive face was clearly visible. As the sea breeze blew, his hair drifted like a black waterfall, concealing the coldness and irritation in his eyes.

This was the seventh group of nonhumans that Xu Qing had received after the patriarch had appointed him an envoy disciple half a month ago. He still wasn't used to it, and in fact, he simply hated this kind of assignment. He didn't like putting on a show for people, and it made him feel very unsafe. That said, though ‘envoy disciple’ was just a title and nothing more, it did provide him a measure of protection.

It actually dispelled malicious intentions in many. After all... it meant that he was the official face of Seven Blood Eyes. On the other hand, having public duties ensured that if something dangerous did happen, it would be far more dangerous than an ordinary situation.

Xu Qing had heard about the echelon before. Seven Blood Eyes and the Seazombies both had such groups, though they were different. In the past, the echelon referred to the successor apprentices of the peaklords of the seven peaks. Getting into the echelon meant you had a very special status, as the peaklords were picked from within the echelon. They also received greater compensation from the sect. As for Xu Qing, he was the only disciple in the echelon who wasn't an apprentice of a peaklord.

Chen Erniu got promoted within the echelon.... That means he must be the Eldest Brother of the Seventh Peak.

Xu Qing was certain of that, yet at the same time, felt that the Captain had even bigger secrets. Given that, Xu Qing felt like he didn't have any options. There was no way he could refuse the patriarch's assignment.

The sea breeze lifted his hair, brushing against his face and interrupting his train of thought. Looking up, he impatiently murmured, "Why aren't they here yet?"

"Elder Brother Xu, I heard that the Seastar people all have strange starfish attached to their backs. Normally speaking, they avoid daylight, so considering it's almost night, I imagine they'll be here soon."

Xu Qing wasn't waiting there alone. There were over thirty disciples standing behind him. The Captain had handled the details. He was a lot more interested in assignments like this.

The Captain was the one who made the assignments for the disciples, and Xu Qing was like his trump card. If a visiting group was made up of mostly female cultivators, the Captain would be sure to have Xu Qing join them. Sure enough, whenever Xu Qing showed up, female nonhuman cultivators who came to visit the nose museum would be very curious about him. Xu Qing had originally refused to cooperate, until he realized that if his missions were focused on female-majority groups, he would actually have fewer missions overall.

The Captain, worrying that Xu Qing would feel out of sorts, had arranged for two fellow disciples he was familiar with to be his assistants.

One of them was the person who had just spoken. Gu Muqing. [1]

Gu Muqing had a soft voice, and her refined, delicate good looks made her seem like a stunning lotus in a vase. She had a faint smile and an immature, energetic air to her. Her orange daoist robe clung to her like the brilliant evening clouds.

Seeing how Gu Muqing was acting, Ding Xue stepped forward and said, "Elder Brother Xu, the Seastar people are really pushing it! I can't believe they're late. I guess it doesn't matter, though. Did I mention I just got accepted by the Seven Sect Coalition? Once the war is over, I'll go there to study the dao of plants and vegetation. Eventually, I'll be so important I can force the Seastars to come in person to apologize to you! Elder Brother, I've been studying really hard lately. If you want, you can give me a quiz!"

As she finished speaking, she flashed a spirit note and a jade slip. [2]

Ding Xue had a sweet disposition, skin as fair as snow, and dark hair. Beneath her straight nose were dainty, rose-colored lips, slightly parted, like a flirtatious rose. When she spoke, she seemed as

innocent as an orchid, her glistening eyes so captivating that one could easily become lost in them. Ding Xue was the second assistant the Captain had arranged for Xu Qing.

The two young women were standing on either side of Xu Qing. Both had their own merits, making them as difficult to compare as plums, orchids, bamboo, and chrysanthemums.

Behind the group of three were over thirty Seven Blood Eyes disciples, including Zhao Zhongheng.

Over the past half month, Zhao Zhongheng had sighed too many times to count, yet he still managed to have a smile on his face. As for the other disciples, they all looked at Xu Qing as if they were staring at a divine being.

During the past half month, Gu Muqing and Ding Xue had seemingly got along, but the truth was that they were diametrically opposed to each other. And it was becoming more obvious.

Right now, Gu Muqing was glaring at Ding Xue.

Ding Xue, not wanting to be outdone, raised her eyebrows and pouted slightly. "Elder Sister Gu, even if the Seastar people have a good excuse, that has nothing to do with us. I wouldn't care if they kept us waiting, but it really irritates me that they're keeping Big Bro Xu Qing waiting. Don't tell me you're fine with that? Big Bro Xu Qing is so hardworking when it comes to cultivation, but now they're making him stand around. It's really outrageous."

Gu Muqing took a deep breath. She was a quiet person who valued elegance, but over the past half month, she had nearly lost her temper on several occasions. She just didn't have a way with words like Ding Xue. Every time Ding Xue made a scene like this, Gu Muqing inwardly cursed her whorish, slutty ways.

"Ding Xue, why are you always calling me Elder Sister? I'm only seventeen years old. Might I ask how old you are?"

Ding Xue's eyes turned red, and she bowed her head. "I'm sorry, Elder Sister," she said quietly. "I... I'm just not good with words. If I said something to offend you, Elder Sister, it was purely an accident. I'm just really worried about Big Bro Xu Qing."

Veins bulged on Gu Muqing's forehead, and she struggled to control her breathing.

Meanwhile, the disciples behind them could hear everything they were saying, and many of them were now looking at Ding Xue with deep admiration. As always, Ding Xue came out on top.

Xu Qing glanced curiously at Ding Xue, then Gu Muqing. Then he ignored them. His time spent with them recently had been very strange, and he'd come to the conclusion that they just didn't get along when on assignments together. He was about to say something when, all of a sudden, a deep rumbling sound could be heard from out at sea.

Looking out into the evening, Xu Qing saw that there were now waves rolling out across the previously tranquil water. As the rumbling sounds grew larger, he spotted a huge, pitch black, star-shaped battleship about 3,000 meters away. Actually, it was a procession, as there were six more battleships of the same type behind the first one. As they emanated shocking pressure in all directions, the seven huge eyes on the mountain peaks glittered with red light, as if inspecting them.

Xu Qing's expression didn't change. As long as the spell formation was active in the sect, it would keep things safe. Beyond that, about half a month ago, Sixth Peaklord had returned to the sect to rest and recuperate. With Sixth Peaklord on duty, Xu Qing felt a lot more at ease.

As the seven star-shaped battleships got closer, Xu Qing was able to make out cultivators standing on them. It seemed that each ship had about thirty of them.

The Seastar people looked like humans, with the only difference being that they had blue hair and blue eyes. They also had the strange starfish-like growths on their backs that Gu Muqing had just mentioned.

Altogether, they were coming to Seven Blood Eyes with over two hundred people, and female cultivators made up about seventy percent of that group. As for the three women who led the group, they had terrifying fluctuations that reminded Xu Qing of the three-headed six-armed Seazombie he'd encountered.

The three leaders were middle-aged, and standing in front of them was a beautiful young woman who looked to be about sixteen or seventeen. She had blue hair, wore a beautiful gown, and had unusually pale skin. When she scanned the shore, she barely looked at Gu Muqing and Ding Xue, and instead focused on Xu Qing. She was, in fact, a Seastar princess.

"Honored Seastar guests, welcome to Seven Blood Eyes," Xu Qing said formally, clasping his hands in greeting.

"You're Xu Qing?" the Seastar princess said with a smile, eyeing him curiously.

"Yes, ma'am," Xu Qing replied with a nod. "The hour is late. Tomorrow I'll take you to see the Seazombie's holy item." With that, he turned to the disciples behind him to issue orders. "Take our Seastar friends to their accommodations."

"Hold on a moment," the princess said. "Elder Brother Xu Qing, we Seastars absolutely detest the Seazombies. I very much admire you for what you did, so I'd like to give you a gift. Please accept it."

She gave a meaningful look to her attendants behind her, who took out a conch shell and presented it to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing looked at the young woman.

"Elder Brother Xu Qing, this is a special magical device my people created. Blow the conch shell, and you'll receive a blessing from us. Also, it can summon all nearby soft-bodied animals from the Forbidden Sea." With that, she clasped hands and bowed slightly. Meanwhile, all of the other Seastar people were debarking, and most of them were looking at Xu Qing.

Ding Xue frowned slightly, and didn't seem very pleased. And though Gu Muqing didn't show it, she also wasn't very happy.

Ding Xue could guess what all those female Seastars were thinking when they looked at Xu Qing, so she was just about to open her mouth and say something when, all of a sudden, another rumbling

sound pierced the evening silence. Figures appeared, flying through the air from the interior of the harbor. The Seastar people all seemed to go on guard, and the three middle-aged women's eyes glittered.

Xu Qing looked in that direction, and immediately realized that it was the Captain and Second Highness. [3]

The Captain was in such a hurry that, when he arrived, he didn't even greet the Seastars. Instead, he just looked at Xu Qing and said, "The patriarch just sent word that Eastnether Isle is sending a visitor!"

"Eastnether Isle?" Xu Qing said in surprise.

Off to the side, Ding Xue's expression flickered, and the three Gold Core Seastars looked visibly surprised.

Sounding very serious, the Captain explained, "The islemaster of Eastnether Isle is an old woman named Guru Eastnether. After the patriarch achieved his breakthrough, his cultivation base reached the same level as hers.... But the visitor isn't Guru Eastnether. It's her granddaughter. And she has a violent personality.... You need to be careful."

Even as the words left his mouth, a huge wave suddenly rose up, rushing toward the harbor with crushing might.

Chapter 200: Coming With Harmful Intentions

The pressure was incredibly domineering, and the wave of black water which appeared at the entrance of the port instantly turned into a huge wall that rumbled toward the main sluiceway. The wave was so massive, and contained such brutal power, that it provoked a reaction from the grand spell formation. The seven distant eyes glittered, and in response, a screen of red light appeared to block the progress of the wave.

However, the rumbling grew louder, until it was so deafening that the people in Harbor 176 felt like heavenly thunder was crashing in their ears. Xu Qing frowned and waved his hand, causing dharma force to sweep out and cover Gu Muqing and Ding Xue, blocking the sound from entering their mind. Unfortunately, the rest of the disciples didn't have it as easy, and one after another, they coughed up blood and staggered backward. This sound was so intense that it was injuring Qi Condensation cultivators!

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed, while the Captain rubbed his chin and looked at Second Highness.

Second Highness also frowned as she looked past the sluiceway and barked, "What's the meaning of this?"

"Aiyaaa, Big Sis, don't be angry!" responded a melodious voice from beyond the sluiceway.

A moment later, a massive octopus tentacle stretched out of the water in roughly that same spot. It was many meters wide, and several hundred meters long as it stretched over the sluiceway and into the port itself. Then a massive octopus rose out of the water, using its tentacles to simply climb over the gate.

Atop the octopus sat a young woman who appeared to be in her teens. It was hard to determine her specific age, though, because of her physical appearance; her style wasn't typical of a young woman. She wore tight black clothing and had very short hair. That said, she was cute, and even seemed dainty as her gigantic octopus made its way toward Harbor 176.

Upon nearing, the giant octopus dripped black water everywhere, some of which splashed on the Seven Blood Eyes disciples. Meanwhile, the Seastars all trembled and bowed their heads. Shockingly, this octopus radiated the same type of aura as a Gold Core elder! Terrifying sea beasts this huge had battle prowess automatically surpassing cultivators in the same level as them. And right now, this octopus was emitting pressure without the slightest scruple.

Xu Qing backed up a few steps to avoid the splashing water, all while coldly eyeing the young woman in black as she got to her feet atop the huge octopus. She was probably around fifteen or sixteen, with an oval face, thin lips, lively eyes, and delicate features. Hopping off the octopus, she landed on the dock, glanced at Xu Qing and the Captain, and then rushed over to Second Highness.

"Don't blame me, Big Sis! It's all Stinker's fault! I'll handle the punishment!" As the words left her mouth, the young woman waved her hand, causing a host of sharp black spikes to appear in the air and then shoot toward her own octopus, pulsing with astonishing energy. And they weren't aimed at its tough hide, but instead, its eyes. The octopus trembled, not daring to move as the black spikes stabbed into it. A moment later, black blood oozed down out of its eyes.

Seeing all this, Xu Qing's pupils constricted. And as he looked more closely at the girl in the black clothing, his heart beat a bit faster. The reason was that, though this girl looked like an ordinary human, she was actually different. She wasn't like the Captain, or the Seazombie dao child, or the elders or peaklords. She seemed... much more pure!

It was a purity that Xu Qing understood very clearly, and it was why his heart was suddenly racing. She doesn't have any mutagen in her!

It was the first time Xu Qing had ever encountered any other cultivator who lacked mutagen. She was so pure she seemed like the daughter of a god! What was more, Xu Qing could just barely make out the evidence that she had many more than 100 dharma apertures open. She hadn't quite reached the level of 120. Rather, she had 104 of them open. What was more, she was clearly continuing to open more and more of them, and it didn't seem like she would stop at 120. It was entirely possible she would go past that level.

That in itself was no shock to Xu Qing, as he had previously come to the realization that 120... wasn't the final limit.

Frowning in irritation, Second Highness said, "Yanyan, this is Seven Blood Eyes. You—"

"Okay, okay," Yanyan said sweetly, slipping her arms around Second Highness' arm. "My bad, Big Sis." Clearly, Yanyan was close to the Second Highness. [1]

Shaking her head, Second Highness looked at the Captain. "Eldest Brother, uh... look, Yanyan didn't do any of this on purpose."

Smiling, the Captain measured up Yanyan.

She looked curiously back at him. Smiling to reveal two dimples, she said, “Don’t look at me like that. If you do, I’ll have Stinker dig your eyes out.”

The Captain’s eyes glittered as he intentionally opened them even wider. Producing an apple, he took a bite and said, “That’s totally fine. In fact, I’ll dig them out for you. How about we trade? My eyes for a bottle of Eastnether serum?”

Yanyan’s eyebrows shot up, but then Second Highness tightened her arm around her. Yanyan snorted coldly, then finally looked over at Xu Qing. Before, she had barely looked at him, but now her gaze met his face.

“Big Sis, this guy isn’t a fellow disciple of yours, is he? I’d like to use his face for a mask. It’d look great!”

It didn’t seem like she was joking around. Her eyes glittered with a very odd light, while at the same time, the huge octopus looked coldly at Xu Qing.

Everyone present was getting very nervous, and the Seastars were edging away.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing didn’t say anything, but his dharma force was already converging, and his shadow was ready to act at any moment.

As Yanyan’s eyes narrowed, Second Highness sighed inwardly.

“Absolutely not!” Second Highness said sharply. It went without saying that Second Highness was familiar with Xu Qing, and knew that he was friends with Huang Yan. “Sorry about this, Xu Qing. You might as well take off now. I’ll explain all of this to Huang Yan later.”

Xu Qing nodded and turned to leave.

However, upon hearing Huang Yan’s name, Yanyan suddenly smiled. “Why are you protecting this guy, Big Sis? Do you have a crush on him? In that case, I don’t want his face after all. Instead, I’ll slash it to ribbons!”

She burst into motion, speeding toward Xu Qing with deep hostility burning in her eyes.

Though she moved with unfathomable speed, Xu Qing had been on guard the entire time. His life flames instantly burned to life as he entered the profound radiance state and shot toward Yanyan.

At the same time, the octopus erupted with the pressure of the Gold Core level, and was about to unleash its own attack when a roar of rage erupted from the Sixth Peak like thunder from heaven.

“How impudent!”

The octopus shivered, and its aura collapsed under the sudden pressure. The invisible force was so great that it couldn’t move.

The Captain chose that moment to shoot toward the octopus. Bursting with frigid energy, he headed right toward one of the tentacles and bit into it.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing and Yanyan smashed into each other. A boom rang out as she slashed her sharp nails toward his face. He dodged, and then a dagger materialized in his right hand, which he swept toward her throat.

She twisted to the side to avoid the dagger, but then Xu Qing's knee slammed into her chest. She crumpled with a booming thud as she flew past him.

Not pausing for a moment, Xu Qing took out a small bottle of black liquid and smashed it between his hands with all the force he could muster.

The bottle shattered, and black liquid splashed out in all directions. Some landed on him, but most of it splattered on Yanyan's hand, which had been stretching toward him from behind.

Expression flickering, she flicked her hand at the wrist, but wasn't able to get the black liquid off of her. That black liquid was actually a host of tiny beetles, and the moment they touched her skin, they started burrowing into her pores.

"You!" she blurted.

However, Xu Qing's eyes were burning with killing intent. His black iron skewer appeared, and shot toward Yanyan, joined by his shadow.

In that moment of potentially deadly crisis, an irritated voice echoed from the Sixth Peak.

"That's enough."

A tremor passed through Xu Qing, and he suddenly felt powerless to do anything other than back up.

It was the same with Yanyan. Face pale, she stepped backward. After looking down at her hand, she took out a medicinal pill and consumed it, but it didn't do anything. Finally, she had to grit her teeth and produce a golden paper talisman. After applying it to her hand, she was able to stop the spread of the black beetles.

Hurrying over, Second Highness sighed again and gave Xu Qing an apologetic look. Wrapping her arm around Yanyan, she began to lead her away.

"You're Xu Qing, right?" Yanyan said venomously as she walked off. "I'm going to remember you. I have my sights set on that face of yours. By the way, tell that fatso Huang Yan that if he keeps going after my Big Sis, I'll make sure he ends up dead!"

Off to the side, the Captain was struggling to rip off some Gold Core flesh, but was having trouble. Eventually, he had to settle for biting off the tip of a tentacle.

The octopus struggled against him, but had been fully suppressed, and couldn't move. All it could do was make some piteous whimpering sounds. Sadly, Yanyan had already forgotten about the octopus.

As for the Seastars, they were looking at Xu Qing and the Captain with open reverence.

In their eyes, both of them seemed completely crazy. One of them, when facing a suppressed Gold Core sea beast, had immediately tried to take a bite out of its flesh. Meanwhile, the other had openly attacked a junior princess from Eastnether Isle. And he had obviously been trying to kill her.

It's hard to say which is crazier! These two are not to be trifled with!

Then they thought about the bounty put up by the Seazombies, and came to the conclusion that it made sense for two people like this to have done something so dramatic.

With things calmed down, people went their separate ways. Eventually, the only ones left behind were Xu Qing, the Captain, the suppressed octopus, as well as Ding Xue and Gu Muqing. The Captain dismissed the latter two.

Ding Xue was obviously worried, but knew that the Captain and Xu Qing had things to discuss, so she took her leave. Gu Muqing also turned to leave, then stopped and gave a medicinal pill bottle to Xu Qing.

“Elder Brother Xu Qing, this pill works wonders in treating insect wounds.”

Xu Qing nodded in thanks and took the bottle. When the two young women were gone, the Captain shouldered the tentacle tip he’d bitten off, then sauntered over to Xu Qing.

“None of this is my business,” he said with a grin, “but just so you know, that girlie has had a crush on Second Sib for years. Obviously, she came here to cause trouble for Huang Yan, and once she found out you’re good friends with him, dragged you into it. She obviously didn’t realize you’d be so hard to deal with.”

Xu Qing’s eyes glittered coldly, but he didn’t say anything. Instead, he started walking toward the octopus.

“Hey, what’re you doing?” the Captain said.

“Chopping off a tentacle,” Xu Qing replied quietly.

“No, don’t! The suppression time is almost over!!”

“If you help, it’ll be easier to chop it off.” As the octopus glared angrily, Xu Qing summoned another dagger and started chopping.