

THE EXORCISM STORIES OF FORMOSA (Vol. 1)

東海伏妖誌（上卷）

A young man with an ancient sword at his side leaves his secluded family estate in Japan and crosses the ocean to Taiwan to battle supernatural forces. A story that weaves magic and adventure together seamlessly.

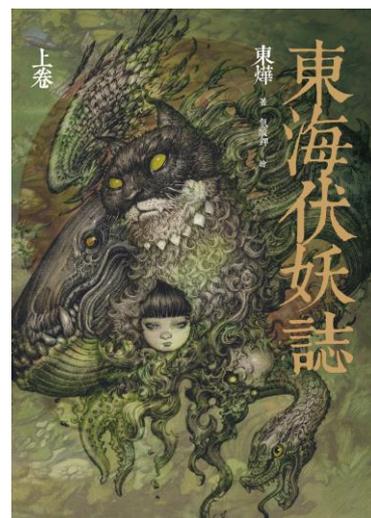
Centuries before the Common Era, the First Emperor of China sent a general named Hsu Fu into the Eastern Sea to find the Island of Immortality. Instead, Hsu Fu encountered a six-headed monster. During their battle, Hsu Fu let go of one of the two magical swords the First Emperor had given him. When his ship ended up at the islands now known as Japan, the ashamed Hsu Fu decided to stay there in exile rather than return home. For generations, the Hsu family lived secluded on White Fox Mountain, preserving their language, surname, and training in the mystic arts, until a young scion named Hsu Yu decides he wants more.

The rebellious Hsu Yu disobeys his rigid father's every wish until the old man decides he can restrain the youth no longer, and sends him off to find his roots with the family sword at his side. His sojourn to Taiwan is quickly opposed by six demons, the late incarnation of the ancient six-headed monster that faced Hsu Yu's ancestor. An ancient battle is renewed as the spirit of the sword reveals itself to Hsu Yu in a bid to guide and counsel him as he fights his way to the forgotten memories.

Author Dong Ye exerts the full force of his descriptive genius in every narrative moment, crafting a richly imaginative world that draws power from history, fantasy, and psychology in equal measure.

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Author Dong Ye has nearly done it all: studied computer engineering and Chinese literature, played music, opened a bar, and written works



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of fiction and poetry. Though he always dreamed of being an editor, he is currently a high school language arts teacher, as well as the author of several light novels.

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By Dong Ye

Translated by Mike Day

Chapter 1: The Fantastic Sea Cat

Watching the world transform for ten-odd years, Xu Yi was struck by the sensation that while things seemed the same on the surface, deep down the people and the times truly had changed. He sat in his chambers for a long while, staring at the *tachi* longsword hanging high above. As he eyed the blade, an exquisite item forged by an ancient technique, complex emotions welled up in his heart. The Emperor had lost much of his power since the Meiji Restoration, and all sorts of reforms had been carried out. Though the world had made progress in many ways, there was no doubt people were drifting further from tradition. The year before, an order had been issued to turn every blade to scrap metal, and all but the imperial family, soldiers, and police had been prohibited from wielding swords.

Forbidden from bearing blades, the people lost their fighting spirit; having lost their fighting spirit, they wasted their lives in idleness; when the people waste their lives in idleness, the country is doomed; thus went Xu Yi's worried train of thought. Though the political changes had nothing to do with him, as he turned them over and over in his mind, he couldn't help shaking his head and sighing. On leaving his chambers, he cast a parting glance at the blade. The handiwork of a master smith in the Heian period, this prized possession of his grandfather's had been hanging on the wall for ages. Since his ancestors hung up their swords, it had never once been taken down, let alone used to kill. In fact, Xu Yi thought, the sword wasn't the only thing with wasted potential. His family hadn't set foot outside Kyoto in two thousand years. Over the generations, their travels had taken them no further than the shopping district at the base of White Fox Mountain.

His ancestors had handed down a series of instructions: first, do not change the family name; second, always wear the clan's traditional dress; third, maintain the ancestral language; fourth, do not move away from the mountain, and fifth, never submit to serving the imperial court. There was one more instruction not enshrined in the family code: every generation of Xu family sons was duty-bound to pass down the arts of the Black Sorcerers' Clan. Xu Yi was a gaunt man who walked with a cane. He hobbled his way to the mouth of the mountain path, where he glimpsed the southern reaches of far-off Lake Biwa and verdant Mt. Hiei still farther in the distance. A cool breeze whisked gently past his face as the sun set, and he felt happy and carefree as he took in the view. Yet as he looked down, spying a young man in a turquoise gown spiritedly bounding up the stone steps toward him, his good humor disappeared completely.

Two days ago, he had sat in his chambers facing this same young man. For a long while they sat in total silence, watched over by the sword on the wall. Their silence had been prefaced by a heated exchange in which Xu Yi had flown into a rage, pounding the tea table and turning over the cups without shaking the young man's resolve in the slightest. The boy was stubborn, like his mother — the affection he had been heaping on the boy for years seemed to have only made him more so. When, early that day, his son jumped excitedly to his feet, pointed out the window at far-off Lake Biwa and swore never to take a wife, Xu Yi knew right away he could not sway the boy. He had kept the five family precepts always at the forefront of his mind, never daring to disobey them, but now he knew they were done for.

"As your son, I beg you, Father, give me a few more years." At the end of their heated argument that day, Xu Yu opened his big, bright, flashing eyes, and a stern look replaced his usual cheerful expression. "Father," he declared, "I simply want to carry out my heart's sole desire, and I will let you plan the rest. You may command me not to leave White Fox Mountain, to never take a single step down the mountain trail, and I will gladly submit to your will!"

Deep in his heart, Xu Yi understood his son's wish. Similar notions had crossed his mind as a boy. The charms of bustling Kyoto had tugged at his heartstrings, and when studying the treatises of the Black Sorcerers' Clan, he had developed an inner admiration and respect for China. On many occasions he had longed to steal down the mountain path and lay eyes on that far-off land. But in the end, it was all an empty fantasy. He had abided by his father's wishes, taken up the clan's traditional vocation, and under the direction of the elders, married and continued the family line. He had remained his entire life on the mountain, never once glimpsing the tile roofs of the houses in the city of Kyoto.

But his son, Xu Yu, was different. Xu Yi had had the boy — his first son — in middle age, and treasured him like a precious jewel. While naturally bright and clever, the boy was prone to act impetuously. First stealing away from the mountain at the age of nine, he had roamed further and further, to the shores of Lake Biwa and the forested depths of Mt. Hiei. He had even slipped away to Kyoto several times. But now, his ambition blazing brighter than ever, he dared put the Xu family bloodline in peril and propose returning to China, the land of the clan's roots.

Was it his fault for being unable to say "no?" Xu Yi deeply regretted not breaking the stubborn boy's legs after he made his first attempts to flee many years ago; perhaps if he had, they wouldn't be in this mess. He watched Xu Yu bounding up the mountain, trailed by two servants hobbling beneath the weight of heavy bags, apparently unable to catch up despite exerting all their strength. Xu Yi smiled bitterly and shook his head.

Xu Yi watched as his son drew nearer, rushing up the steps, small beads of sweat dripping down his forehead. At seventeen, he was tall and thin, with bright, clear eyes and lanky limbs that carried him easily up boulders and into trees when he was out making mischief on White Fox Mountain. Xu Yi saw that his son's once-pristine turquoise cloak was covered with dust and dirt, wet leaves and grass clinging to the shoulders, and knew without asking that the boy had been traipsing through the woods again.

Xu Yu ran up the steps, panting a bit but beaming radiantly, as if he had forgotten the quarrel with his father a few days earlier. On reaching the top, he bowed respectfully and said hello.

"I've been looking for you, Son. Where were you? Couldn't you have tried to make it back before dark?" He shot a sharp look at the boy, but there was no trace of admonishment in his tone, and he even flashed a small smile. He wasn't going to scold his son today. They had a more important matter to discuss.

"I kept the family code today, Dad. I didn't climb down the mountain. I only went for a stroll in the valley, and stopped to read a book." Xu Yu looked ashamed. It was true that he had had the servants out with bags of books, but he had only read a couple pages when a bird had flown by, and he had set off after it. He had chased the bird up a tree and nearly fallen out, returning home empty-handed.

"So that's where you've been all this time, reading books in the mountains. If you say so, Son." Xu Yi just shook his head with a forced smile, uninterested in poking holes in his son's flimsy lie. As he sat on the stone steps, his eyes fixed on the far-off setting sun, he fished in his breast pocket for a long object wrapped tightly in brocade. He had wavered over this decision for a long time. He beckoned Xu Yu with a wave of the hand. As his son sat down by his side at the gate to the mountain path, Xu Yi asked, "Do you know what this is?"

"Yes. It's a family heirloom, passed down for countless generations by the elders of the clan, each of whom added their magic power to seal it. It is an important object that absolutely must not be lost." Xu Yu started to nod, then shook his head, and asked curiously, "But I bet not even you know what's inside, do you, Dad?"

Xu Yi flashed a thin-lipped smile and said, "I'm glad you recognize it—that's the important thing. Son, though the clan's blood runs in the veins of us both, our personalities are as different as can be. You are headstrong, mischievous, and love making merry, like your mother. I am a cautious man who carefully safeguards the heritage handed down by our ancestors. Only once in my life did I dare break with tradition and disobey the clan's code. The night after the great ceremony, I took this object from your grandfather's hand, and couldn't help tearing off the wrapping and stealing a look."

"So you've seen it? What is it?" asked Xu Yu incredulously.

Xu Yi nodded. "I've seen it, but it was just a quick glance, and that was decades ago. I've never opened it since." Xu Yi handed the object to his son, patting the boy's hand gently as he said, "If you want to know what's inside, gather your patience and hear me out."

His eyes moved from the object in Xu Yu's hand to his son's face, which wore an expression of rapt interest. Satisfied, Xu Yi continued, "Two thousand years ago, the great Qin emperor conquered the six kingdoms and unified the empire. The heroic emperor realized that though he had bested every rival, there was an enemy on this earth over which he could never triumph. Do you know what that enemy was?"

"Death." Xu Yu answered immediately. "That is the aim of our occult practices, to triumph over death."

“Quick-witted, this one,” Xu Yi said, smiling faintly. “Fear of death motivates a man to try endless means of escape. He dispatched an alchemist to cross the eastern sea in search of the land of the immortals. You’ve heard that story, I suppose?”

“That was Xu Fu, ancient ancestor of our clan.” Xu Yu nodded. He had heard the tale from his father in his youth. Xu Yi nodded with him, then asked, “Do you know why he never returned to report on his mission after failing to find the land of the immortals?”

“Because he didn’t dare return to the capital having failed in his sacred task?” Xu Yu had guessed the answer, but Xu Yi still shook his head and said, “The real answer isn’t so simple. You’ve scratched the surface, and gotten one of the reasons right, but a second and third reason lie beneath.”

The instant he heard there was another reason, Xu Yu couldn’t help casting a curious glance at his father. Interlacing his fingers, Xu Yi continued, “After crossing the great sea, our ancestor never again set foot on the central plains. The first reason is that, as you said, he had spent the empire’s resources and failed to find the land of the immortals, so he could not stand to return home empty-handed; the second is that the first Qin emperor was by nature a suspicious man, and quick to execute. Our ancestor had served the emperor for years, but his heart wasn’t in the task, so he sought the land of the immortals as an excuse to escape from his dilemma. He was unsurprised to hear, several years into his voyage, that the great state of Qin had fallen into chaos, burning books and burying scholars.”

Xu Yu nodded continuously as he listened to his father speak. Seeing his father had paused, and seemed to be pondering something, he asked, “And the third reason?”

“When our ancestor departed, the emperor gave him a pair of precious charms believed to calm ocean storms and ward off sea monsters, but a great beast rose up unexpectedly from the ocean, and in the ensuing battle, one charm was lost. Though without ill intent, he had failed to care properly for the charms. If he had returned to the court, and the emperor had learned of this offense...” Xu Yi paused to take a breath, then went on, “These charms were magical items handed down for generations within our clan before we gifted them to the emperor; but now that they belonged to him, how could the loss of one be explained satisfactorily?”

Bending his head to look at the object in his hand, Xu Yu asked, “So this charm is the remaining one of the pair?”

“Precisely.” Xu Yi said, “Our ancestor sailed here from across the sea, failed to find the land of the immortals, and put down roots in the great marsh of the flatlands. The thousands of boys and girls who had accompanied him also settled here and began their own families, and that is how we came to be here today.”

“So what you’re saying is...” Xu Yu hesitated. He had never wondered about the origins of the people here, yet it turned out these events of ancient history were related to the tale of his own ancestor’s ocean voyage. Paying no heed to his son’s surprise, Xu Yi went on, “Our ancestors spread like leaves scattered by the wind, passing down their bloodline to the present day, and while some now serve as heads of state, our branch has never changed its name or dress, nor

abandoned its language; for two thousand years we have remained on White Fox Mountain, safeguarding our dark arts, ensuring the clan's heritage is preserved in perpetuity.”

In Xu Yu's boyhood, his father had told him a bit about the past, but he had never heard the whole tale from beginning to end until today. While short and succinct, the story left him speechless. His whole life, he had believed the Xu clan had crossed the broad sea to live in seclusion on the mountain, to concentrate fully on occult practices without distraction. He would never have guessed that the humble Xu clan had hidden ties to royalty.

“How could it be that in the same bloodline, there are heads of state serving in the royal palace, living in luxury and venerated by all, while others live in poverty in humble mountain huts — isn't it almost too much to believe?” Smiling gently, Xu Yi said, “But I can't laugh at you. My father only explained all this to me the day I was initiated into the clan's secrets and I took this charm from his hand. Back then, my shock was still greater than yours.”