Timescape 741

Chapter 741: As Before, Water Flows Amidst the Flowers

It was spring in South Phoenix. It was an overcast day, so despite being noon, the oppressive clouds clustered together, spreading as far as the eye could see and blocking out the sunlight. A chill filled everything. Though it was a season of awakenings, there seemed little signs of life. In fact, a vague sense of pressure weighed on a certain ancient city there.

That city had existed for a very, very long time. If you searched through various ancient records, you would find that it had been built during the time period of the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan. Of course, this Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan was not the famous one from history, but rather, the one that had existed in South Phoenix.

Legend had it that the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan in South Phoenix was actually started by survivors of the ancient and mysterious kingdom of the same name. Apparently, that kingdom had been cursed, and rumor had it the two characters 'Violet' and 'Cyan' inherited that prohibition. Thus, the South Phoenix version of the Kingdom of Violet and Cyan didn't last for very long. After a period of rebellion, eight noble clans took over. That was how the Violet Lands came to be.

Countless years had passed since then, but the capital city had the same architecture as the early days. Not many people could be seen on the streets of the city. In the extremely rigid hierarchical Violet Lands, the majority of people were treated like animals. That was just how this world worked, and such things couldn't be changed easily. Even if you forced a change, things would eventually go back to how they were before. After all, behind any civilization, you would find both oppression and repression.

Xu Qing quietly walked along the streets in the Violet Lands, passing ancient buildings. He took in the architecture and the people, the wind stirring his hair as he walked. He had old friends in this city. And his Teacher was in this city as well. When it came to his old friends, Xu Qing scanned the city with divine will to make sure they were well. That was good enough.

As for his Teacher... Xu Qing spotted a flower shop near the public cemetery that specialized in funerary items. The shopkeeper was a middle-aged man who smiled obsequiously upon spotting Xu Qing. Xu Qing was dressed well and was very handsome, and thus, ordinary people would instantly come to the conclusion that he was someone important. If Xu Qing were to guess, this shopkeeper probably thought he was an important young person from one of the eight clans. And of course, the shopkeeper wouldn't cause any problems for people like that.

Xu Qing bought a bundle of white gardenias, then entered the cemetery and found Grandmaster Bai's grave. When he saw how many other flowers were on the grave, his gaze softened. Putting the flowers down, he dropped to his knees and kowtowed.

"Rest well, Teacher," he said softly. He closed his eyes.

The clouds above shifted, creating an opening that allowed a stream of sunlight to shine down onto the cemetery. It was like the beautiful light of dawn, and it made the cemetery like a paradise in the middle of doomsday. It was as if spring had finally come.

Of course, that shining light quickly caught the attention of people in the Violet Lands. Streams of divine will converged. The cultivators of the Violet Lands were shocked, as nothing like that had

ever happened at that cemetery. By that point, there was no one at Grandmaster Bai's grave. There was only a bundle of white gardenias, slowly blooming. In the language of flowers, that meant that spring had come. Xu Qing was long gone.

Not much time had passed since the incident in the Violet Lands, but the sky was different, and the season was different. It was spring in the Violet Lands, but in the east of South Phoenix, winter was just starting. The frigid wind slashed the lands like a blade, causing snowflakes to swirl. Everything was gripped by merciless cold. Out in the wilderness, it was possible to see unmoving, shadowy forms. They were people who had been forced to migrate, but sadly froze to death in the cold. The world hadn't changed just because Xu Qing became the ruler of a region. After all... the broken face existed eternally in the dome of heaven.

Xu Qing quietly entered the old scavenger basecamp. It looked just like before. For the most part, everyone he'd known here before was dead, and their houses had been taken over by others. The newcomers continued the same old work of going into the forbidden region to harvest seven-leaf clovers. The camp was dirty, cold, and reeked of blood. The tents with the feathers were there just like before.

Xu Qing studied the camp briefly, then proceeded into the forbidden region. The moment he entered it, the entire place filled with rumbling sounds. The fog that filled it grew thicker and filled with bolts of red lightning. The trees trembled along with all of the beasts.

The sudden development caught the attention of the scavengers in the basecamp. Then, threatening howls emerged from the depths of the forbidden region. They sounded like a vicious beast that was backing away from a dangerous enemy. The howls of an animal facing a threat were the most powerless imaginable.

Zither music drifted everywhere as if to stop Xu Qing from proceeding. But it did nothing.

Xu Qing's expression didn't change. However, his every footstep caused the forbidden region to shake. Soon, all of the beasts in the place chose to prostrate to him.

However, the zither music didn't stop. Xu Qing was starting to get annoyed. He glared coldly into the depths of the forbidden region.

"Pipe down."

His shadow spread out from his feet, and a greedy salivating sound drowned out the zither music.

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior flew out and floated in midair, his pointed tip aimed straight at the center of the forbidden region. He seemed like he was ready to punch countless holes into anyone who didn't follow Xu Qing's orders. The zither music finally stopped.

The flowers and plants parted for Xu Qing. Trees uprooted themselves. And before long, a straight path was visible in front of him. At the end of the path was a large tree with a lone gravestone in front of it.

Xu Qing calmly walked up to the grave, leaned against the tree, and sank to the ground. A bottle gourd appeared in his hand. He took a drink, then poured a bit out onto the grave. He didn't say

anything because... he didn't need to. As he sat there, he felt at peace. He could almost see Sergeant Thunder sitting there drinking with him and looking into the sky. The afterglow of the setting sun was visible in the distance.

When Xu Qing finally did speak, his voice was hoarse. "Sergeant Thunder, I finally found that lifespan flower for you...."

His words contained reminiscence, regret, and other emotions that were difficult to express with words. They also contained the helplessness of life.

Finally, he sighed and drained the last bit of alcohol from the gourd.

The sun had set. The moon had risen.

Xu Qing kowtowed to the grave, then stood and walked off. The flowers and plants quickly grew back to cover the grave.

The wind carried Xu Qing's voice back after he'd left. "I won't wipe you out of existence as long as you stand guard here."

As his voice echoed out, a shadowy figure appeared by the grave. It wasn't Sergeant Thunder's wife. It was an old woman. If you looked very closely at her, you would realize that she had a zither inside of her with its strings broken. She was the lady of this forbidden region. As Xu Qing left, she bowed her head, indicating that she would respect his wishes.

Xu Qing flew through the sky under the light of the moon. Wherever he went, the light of the moon changed. It became violet.

The violet moonlight created a halo that made Xu Qing seem like a divine being as he flew through the night. He soon arrived at the only forbidden ground in the continent of South Phoenix. What was more, it was also... the largest forbidden ground Xu Qing had ever seen.

Forbidden by the Phoenix. It took up more than half of the continent, and if Flame Phoenix wanted, it could easily swallow the rest of it. Because the forbidden ground was so large, it was home to many species of grues. In fact, there were so many species living there that no one really knew the true extent of it.

Outsiders had to abide by Flame Phoenix's rules. They couldn't initiate any harm. That said, if any outsiders caused trouble, they wouldn't be shown any mercy. Because of the terrifying nature of Forbidden by the Phoenix, many of the species of Revered Ancient had come to call the lord of the place Flame Phoenix, or sometimes, in a show of even greater respect, South Phoenix. Hē was mysterious, ancient, and was one of those rare entities who was kind toward other living beings.

When Xu Qing arrived at the edge of Forbidden by the Phoenix, he landed on an outcropping in the Mountains of Truth.

There was someone who had obviously known he was coming, and had come to wait for him there. It was a fat young man who was casually sucking on an egg. Looking very proud of himself, he leaned up against the side of the mountain singing a little song.

"It's not that I love this mortal coil, but I see the threads of past fate;

"The flowers bloom and fall as, waiting for my wife, I slowly turn to stone; "I'll go if I must, but I might not linger there;

"Adorn my head not with mountain blossoms, and ask me not where I truly belong!"

As Huang Yan sang, Xu Qing approached and sat down next to him.

Huang Yan grinned and tossed him an egg. Eyebrows dancing up and down, he winked and said, "Your sister-in-law hasn't given birth yet, and her temper is just out of control. Ai. It's a good thing you came to have an egg with me."

Just like in the past, Xu Qing poked a hole in the egg and took a sip. It was sweet beyond compare.

"How much longer until Second Elder Sister gives birth?" Xu Qing asked.

Huang Yan patted his belly, looking very pleased with himself. "My kind surpasses mortals by a long shot. We're naturally born as preheaven spirits. So it's only natural we have a very long gestation period. My guess is that she'll give birth in the next few decades."

Xu Qing nodded. If that was the case, he would probably be able to come back before Second Elder Sister gave birth.

In that manner, Xu Qing and Huang Yan sat together, drank from their eggs, and talked about what they'd been up to lately. Huang Yan explained that he was very excited at the prospect of becoming a father. Xu Qing told him all about what happened in Moonrite, and how he had to go to the imperial capital.

Time slipped by slowly but surely. Eventually the sun rose. The two of them looked at each other and chuckled.

Xu Qing straightened out his garments and stood. He didn't ask Huang Yan if he was Flame Phoenix. That wasn't important. What was important was that Huang Yan was his friend.

Since Huang Yan didn't bring it up either, it didn't need to be discussed. However, before Xu Qing left, Huang Yan, after a moment of thought, took out a bag of holding, as well as a red feather. He handed them to Xu Qing. The feather was sparkling and translucent, almost as if it was made from jade. It emanated a faint heat, and contained a strong godly might. It was different from the auras of gods that Xu Qing had encountered in the past. Furthermore, it seemed very, very ancient.

"A gift for you. On the way to the imperial capital, you'll pass through Southtrust County. I have a younger sister who lives there. She visited South Phoenix a while back and liked the fruit here. Unfortunately, the harvest wasn't very good back then. But this year the harvest is great, so if possible, I'd like you to deliver some of the fruits to her. My little sister has a really bad temper. But she's like me. She has a spirit of loyalty and self-sacrifice."

Xu Qing nodded in agreement, then looked at Huang Yan. "Take care of yourself."

With that, he flew up into the sky.

Huang Yan stood on the outcropping looking at him go. He seemed a bit sad.

"Xu Qing!" he called. "Remember what I said before. If you don't like it out there you can always come back to South Phoenix. You'll be safe here!"

Xu Qing nodded solemnly, then made his way off into the distance.

Huang Yan faded away. As he did, a pair of huge eyes suddenly opened in the depths of Forbidden by the Phoenix, letting out an aura that caused all living beings in the forbidden ground to bow.

Looking off into the distance, he murmured, "Take care of yourself."

Chapter 742: A Leisurely Trip Afar; the Dao Exists as Long as Suns and Moons

Xu Qing had visited everyone he needed to visit in the continent of South Phoenix.

After arriving back at Sea-Sealing County, a month passed. During that time, Marquis Yao and Master Seventh made all of the necessary arrangements for the transfer of power in the Holytide Region and the half of the Nightspirit Region that they controlled.

At the same time, seven magnificent bridges were erected across the Yin Sacrifice River, connecting the Holytide Region to the Moonrite Region. Those bridges ensured that the two regions were now closely connected. Already, merchant caravans could be seen crossing both ways. The bridges made things a lot more convenient for low-level cultivators. Teleportation portals were also constructed connecting the two regions.

In some respects, the southern parts of Revered Ancient now contained two-and-a-half regions all joined together thanks to Xu Qing. It was a rare thing among the countless species of Revered Ancient. Humans were now far more than just feudal lords, which was quite a shock to many nonhumans.

Meanwhile, all of the developments ensured that new power structures were rising up in various counties and prefectures. For the most part, the new leadership all came from Sea-Sealing County. Grand Duke Holytide cooperated, so everything went very smoothly.

Eventually, a regional capital was established. Xu Qing was nominated as the region lord, not because of his cultivation base, but because he had formed an alliance with Moonrite, forced Grand Duke Holytide into submission, and earned the veneration of the Nightshade high priests. It would have been hard for any other person to turn Moonrite, Holytide, and Nightspirit into a unified whole.

However, it wasn't possible for a single mind to manage an entire region, so a council was formed in the regional capital. Marquis Yao, the three Holytide emperors, and Pope You Sang were on the council, along with a representative from Moonrite. There were also members from smaller species and groups throughout the various regions. They would handle the day-to-day affairs of the twoand-a-half regions.

Anything that surpassed them would be escalated to the regional senate. The senate didn't have many members. They included: Grand Duke Holytide; Ninth Sib; a Nightshade high priest who was entirely wrapped in cloth; and Master Seventh. In addition to those four, there were the Heir Apparent and Xu Qing. With those structures in place, the Holytide Region, Moonrite Region, and half of the Nightspirit Region truly began to flourish. They worked together, both to thrive, and to keep each other safe.

After everything was set up, the time came for a long journey; Xu Qing and Ningyan set off for the Imperial Region to meet with the emperor.

It was very different from the way Xu Qing and the Captain snuck off to the Moonrite Region. For one thing, they had very different statuses now. Given who Xu Qing was, and the power he wielded, there was no way he could sneak around on his own. They departed with a lot of ceremony and pomp.

Swordsages from Sea-Sealing County would accompany them. And the party would be led by none other than the palace lord of the Swordsage Palace, Li Yunshan. Kong Xianglong was also coming along. Plumdark joined as well. Originally, Wu Jianwu didn't want to come, but in the end, couldn't resist Ningyan's enthusiasm, and reluctantly agreed to come.

Of course, there was one other person coming along that couldn't be left behind. It was the Captain.

After all of the arrangements were meticulously made, the traveling party left for the Imperial Region.

The Imperial Region was a great distance away from the Holytide Region. Because of the fact that Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity had conquered all of Revered Ancient, it was located in the center of the continent. Long ago, countless species had made pilgrimages there, as it was the pinnacle of Revered Ancient, and also a holy land. That region didn't just have a special significance. It also had very unique geographical features. In order to travel there using normal means, it would take many years, and you would have to pass through the lands of countless species.

Therefore, traveling to the Imperial Region required the use of long-range teleportation portals, and the journey needed to be made along a specific route. That route had existed even in the days of the Ancient Emperor. It was called Dark Serenity's Ancient Road. [1]

Humankind had seven counties built along the ancient road. That route was how Seventh Prince, as well as King Heaventide and his army, were able to travel from the imperial capital to Holytide so quickly. Each of those seven locations had massive teleportation portals. Of course, using them required the approval of the regions on both sides of the teleportation. A unilateral teleportation wouldn't work.

Also, getting to the imperial capital was quite different than coming from it. When imperial forces came from the capital, they could bypass the dual-region controls, which made the process much faster. The opposite didn't work.

Considering that these teleportation portals could cross entire regions, it was a given that it took a long time to prepare them for use. What was more, it was outrageously expensive. And Xu Qing had to pay for it. Thankfully, the imperial edict made it so that the Holytide Region was a lot more important than before, so all of the negotiations went smoothly.

The Holytide Region had one of those teleportation portals as well; it was located in Peaceful Prefecture, where it took up almost half of the entire prefecture. In recent years, it had only been activated once, when Seventh Prince arrived. He was the only person who had the authority to use

it. However, the huge teleportation portal was in such a state of disrepair that Seventh Prince refused to use it again. As a result, a second portal was built in the Holytide Region. King Heaventide had arrived via that second portal.

At that moment, Xu Qing and the rest of the traveling party were standing on that very same portal. It was also roughly the size of half a prefecture, making it so large you couldn't see to one end from the other. It was made from green jade and covered with countless magical symbols.

The green jade glowed, and the magical symbols flickered. Rumbling sounds echoed out like heavenly thunder. And then blinding light as bright as the sun rose up from the portal.

As the portal activated, the Captain's face was a mask of anticipation. He had plenty of plans and arrangements for this, his first visit to the Imperial Region.

The Imperial Region is huge! I haven't visited it in this life yet. Though I did visit it in a few previous lives, every tomb-raiding effort I attempted ended in failure. Let's see if I succeed this time!

He licked his lips, and a crazy look appeared in his eyes.

Wu Jianwu stood next to the Captain, and when he saw that look, he snorted coldly and proudly lifted his chin. "Your fiery heart counts for naught but zero; I'm going to the capital to worship a hero!"

The main reason he'd agreed to join Ningyan on this journey was that he wanted to visit Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity's imperial palace and see if there was any poetry from the Ancient Emperor there. He felt he'd reached a bottleneck in his own poetry, and the solution was to read more of the Ancient Emperor's work. The mere thought caused Wu Jianwu's eyes to glitter.

Ningyan saw the looks in the eyes of the Captain and Wu Jianwu, but didn't pay them much heed. Many thoughts were running through his head, many of them tinged with regret. He thought about the reason why he'd secretly fled all those years ago. He thought about how cold and unforgiving the imperial capital was. And he thought about how much he didn't want to go back, although staying away was unrealistic.

With Biggest Bro around, I should be fine.

Taking in a deep breath, he instinctively looked over at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing stood with Plumdark and Kong Xianglong. Palace Lord Li Yunshan was also there, and he was talking to Xu Qing.

"Region Lord, the journey to the Imperial Region will involve seven teleportations, and we will pass through all of the other six human counties. Extreme long-range teleportations like this can be unsettling. After each one, we'll need to take time to rest.

"The first stop will be Extreme Peace County, which is part of the Audeng Region. In that region, there are a lot of conflicts between human factions. As a result, over the years, Extreme Peace County hasn't seen anything resembling extreme peace."

Li Yunshan knew that he was responsible for keeping the traveling party safe, and had done a lot of research. As a result, he sounded very confident.

"That said, Extreme Peace County and Sea-Sealing County have had dealings through the years, so communication went well. They've already made preparations to allow us to teleport in. In a moment, the process will begin.

"In order to play things as safely as possible, we'll travel in three groups. The first group will consist of myself and the swordsages. The second group will be all of the people coming with you, Region Lord. Finally, you'll come through."

Xu Qing courteously nodded. He didn't find anything unusual about Li Yunshan's arrangements. He was looking forward to this trip to the imperial capital.

Plumdark smiled, reached out, and took Xu Qing's hand. He looked at her as the green light of the teleportation portal grew brighter and brighter, and the rumbling sounds grew more intense. The first teleportation was beginning. A wind kicked up, stirring Plumdark's long, dark hair, and making her seem even more beautiful.

As the wind died back down, Plumdark's voice reached his ears.

"Xu Qing, I have a premonition that this trip to the imperial capital is going to be very meaningful for you."

As she looked into his eyes and smiled, she, along with Ningyan and the others, disappeared in the second wave of teleportations.

Xu Qing was left standing alone on the portal. Taking a deep breath, he looked up into the canopy of heaven.

Ninth Sib appeared there, looking down at him. He would not be going with Xu Qing to the imperial capital. At a certain point, the baby eagle needed to stretch its wings and grow up. You couldn't follow it around for its entire life. Sometimes, letting go was the only option. He had already explained his reasoning to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing understood. Clasping hands, he bowed toward the sky, then bowed to Sea-Sealing County.

Green light flared, covering everything. When it faded, everything became still and quiet, and Xu Qing was gone.

Ninth Sib began the trip back to Moonrite.

Meanwhile, Master Seventh stood in a building in the county capital of Sea-Sealing County, looking in the direction of the teleportation portal. He looked a bit melancholy, like a parent watching children leaving for a long trip.

Big Sib died enough times in previous lives to know what the imperial capital is like. I don't need to worry about him. If he wants to keep courting death, then death will come.

Fourth Sib... really does need to go to the imperial capital. There are things about the history of Revered Ancient that I could tell him, but he'll understand better if he sees them himself.

That's especially true of Summer Immortals.

Master Seventh closed his eyes.

Chapter 743: A Huge Life Form in Extreme Peace County

Revered Ancient was astonishingly large. In the era of the Ancient Emperors, a survey revealed that it contained a total of 365 regions.

After the great catastrophe, many of them were divided up. What was more, tectonic shifts resulted in even more changes. As species divided the lands up, people lost track of how many regions there were in total. That said, based on the understanding of many species, about thirty percent of Revered Ancient were dead lands where life didn't exist.

Eventually, five god domains came to exist, with three of them being in those dead lands. Of course, even outside of the dead lands, the regions were so huge that cultivators couldn't traverse them in a lifetime. Only by using long-range teleportations was it possible for people to travel long distances. That said, because those teleportation portals were controlled by different species in different regions, traveling from one to the other was difficult. And there were many regions that couldn't even build such portals.

Generally speaking, teleportation routes had to be set up between two portals controlled by the same species. In other words, traveling amongst portals in one small area was usually easy. But going between portals controlled by different species was the opposite. Thanks to the advantage humankind had long ago, they managed to maintain control of the ancient road that led from the Imperial capital all the way to the Holytide Region.

The next stop on the route after leaving the Holytide Region was the Audeng Region. That name had existed even in the time of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity, and had not changed since then. In fact, it was even possible it had existed before then. There were many stories about its history, but among them, one was the most commonly repeated.

It related to the name of a heavenly dao. Supposedly, the very first heavenly dao in Revered Ancient had started out as a cultivator who eventually sacrificed himself to stand guard over the continent. His name was Audeng, and the region that bore his name now was his hometown. The region was now controlled by three major species, all of whom claimed to be descendants of Audeng. All of them had many other species that worked for them, and were constantly at war, viewing the other species as foreigners and outsiders.

Because of the endless war, the commoners had rough lives. The lands were all in varying states of decay, and it was a struggle just to stay alive. However, that was the reason why the humans were able to keep control of Extreme Peace County. The downside was that they had to pay rent to the three greater species.

Those three species collectively had a single domain treasure. The domain treasure was faulty, and needed blood sacrifices to keep it working. And control of it was split between the three species. Its functionality was primarily defensive, which meant that the interior of the Audeng Region could be controlled easily, but expansion wasn't really possible. However, that was enough.

When it came to the rent that had to be paid, for reasons of face, the Imperial Region didn't make any statement about it. But the successive governors of Extreme Peace County knew that, in order to keep the county safe, they had to cooperate.

However, once humankind revealed their Dawning Suns, everything changed. When that happened, humans everywhere lifted their heads proudly. In the administrative districts outside the capital, the effects were pronounced. For instance, Extreme Peace County stopped paying rent to the three species of that region, and those species didn't say anything in response.

In Tranquil Sun Prefecture in Extreme Peace County, the night sky was suddenly illuminated by the glittering light of teleportation. From a distance, the cultivators of Extreme Peace County were waiting in combat readiness, their expressions somber as they looked in the direction of the teleportation portal. Although they weren't unfamiliar with Sea-Sealing County, neither were they particularly close with them. Regardless, news about the things happening recently in Sea-Sealing County had spread like wildfire through Revered Ancient. Thus, they were paying very close attention to teleportations coming from Sea-Sealing County.

As a glittering sea of light expanded, a group of 30,000 swordsages appeared on the platform, led by Li Yunshan. The moment they appeared, all of them revealed varying degrees of discomfort. Despite how severe such symptoms were, the swordsages kept them under control. Following Li Yunshan's arrangements, they scattered, forming into ranks and then staring around vigilantly.

After it was clear the situation was safe, the next group came in, composed of Plumdark, Ningyan, and the others. After that was finished, Xu Qing arrived.

A very dry wind blew. Xu Qing was used to South Phoenix, Sea-Sealing County, and the Holytide Region, all of which were close to the sea, with climates that were generally cool and humid. Even the Moonrite Region was mostly cold. Therefore, being in a landlocked place like Extreme Peace County, the climate difference was immediately noticeable.

In terms of a reaction to the long-range teleportation, Xu Qing had a god body, so he didn't feel uncomfortable at all.

"Extreme Peace County," the Captain said, stretching his arms. "What a good name! Little Ah Qing, what do you say we change the name of Mount Heavenly Ox? We could call it Mount Extreme Ox! I feel like the 'extreme' character is really impressive."

Seeing how excited the Captain was at the prospect, Xu Qing gave it some serious thought. "We could try that."

The Captain smiled broadly. Off to the side, Ningyan nodded, and even went so far as to thump his own chest.

"No problem, Captain," he said. "If I can build my power base, then we can add the character Ox to everything in the region!"

The Captain's eyes lit up, and he dragged Ningyan off to the side to discuss the details.

Xu Qing ignored them. Looking up into the sky, he saw that the moon here was different than in the Holytide Region. It was very far away, and it wasn't circular. It was actually triangular, almost like a mountain in the sky. What was more, it cast blue light down onto the lands below.

This was the third moon Xu Qing had ever seen. After gazing at it for a bit, he turned his attention to the Extreme Peace County cultivators off in the distance watching the teleportation portal. Li Yunshan had already flown over to talk to them.

After teleporting in, Plumdark had been focused on the actual portal beneath their feet. A strange expression could be seen on her face as she approached Xu Qing.

"Xu Qing," she said, "something's off about this teleportation portal."

As the lingering glow of the teleportation illuminated Plumdark in the dark of night, she seemed like an immortal being, her skin as fair as snow, the long sleeves of her garments swaying in the wind. Her eyes resembled limpid autumn waters, and she almost seemed to shimmer, making her stand out among the crowd.

In response to her comment, Xu Qing looked down at the teleportation portal. He sent his shadow spreading out underneath the moonlight to check, and a moment later, excited fluctuations reached him.

"Huge ... life "

Xu Qing's eyes glittered. Meanwhile, Li Yunshan flew back from his meeting with the Extreme Peace County cultivators.

"I'm afraid we need to wait here for a time," he said.

"Because of the teleportation portal?" Xu Qing asked.

Li Yunshan nodded. "There are certain things about Extreme Peace County that are a mystery to us in Sea-Sealing County. This teleportation portal is one of them. Preparations need to be made in order to activate it again. It normally would take about seven days. However, in three days, something will happen that the portal will need half a month to recover from."

"It's... alive?" Plumdark asked suddenly.

Her words were noticed by Ningyan and Wu Jianwu. Kong Xianglong also looked curiously at the portal underfoot. It didn't look any different from any other teleportation portal. As for the Captain, his eyes glittered as he squatted down and touched the platform curiously.

Li Yunshan took a deep breath. He had only just now learned this information from the Extreme Peace County forces, and it had been very surprising.

"According to what Extreme Peace County told me, this ancient teleportation portal was looked at by the broken face. Strangely, though, this location didn't turn into a forbidden region. However, when that happened, the ancient teleportation portal... gained consciousness. The invasion brought life to it. Put simply, it is indeed alive.

"Every half month, the portal will transform, turning into a vicious beast that roams Extreme Peace County looking to amuse itself. Wherever it goes, it randomly teleports people to other locations. The teleportations are limited to this county. The living portal has a temperament similar to a child, and is not malevolent. As a result, the locals view the whole thing similar to weather changes.

"There are some benefits. Whenever the living portal goes back to sleep, the teleportations can be carried out for free. As a result, the county doesn't do anything about it. And that's why we need to wait for half a month before the next teleportation."

When Li Yunshan finished his explanation, he looked at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing didn't say anything. Plumdark, the Captain, and Li Yunshan discussed the matter a bit more, and ultimately decided to just wait. And thus, they set up a camp about 50 kilometers away from the portal.

The local cultivators kept distance between themselves and Xu Qing's group. They were clearly staying on guard. It wasn't just them. The county capital of Extreme Peace County was nearby, and they were on guard as well. In fact, so were all of the species and organizations in the county. All species issued orders to stay away from Tranquil Sun Prefecture.

Xu Qing made sure not to disturb the locals. After the camp was set up, he closed his eyes and focused on meditation. So did everyone else, except for the Captain, who went out curiously to look at the ancient teleportation portal.

Late in the night three days later, a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering rumbling sound echoed out from the portal. The quaking ground caused Xu Qing to open his eyes and walk out of his tent.

Plumdark, Ningyan, Li Yunshan, Kong Xianglong, and everyone else also stepped out and looked off into the distance. Before long, they saw something spectacular.

The huge teleportation portal shone with dark blue light. At the same time, the moonlight dimmed, as if all of it were being sucked into the portal. Blue hairs grew off the portal, more and more of them, like a coat of fur. As the rumbling sounds continued, the portal... uprooted itself. The ground shook, and the sky turned dark. The portal floated up, flat and covered with drifting hair. It didn't look dangerous. It was almost like a big, hairy mooncake. A haircake....

And when it opened its two, huge eyes, it actually looked somewhat cute. It made a happy little noise, then floated off into the distance. Birds in the sky scattered in fear, but they weren't fast enough, and as the portal passed them, they were teleported to other locations. That seemed to make the portal happy, and it continued off into the distance.

"This huge world really is full of extraordinary things..." Li Yunshan said with a sigh.

Plumdark's eyes glittered with reminiscence as she looked at the haircake floating off into the distance.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing's heart was racing. Over the years that had passed, he had seen many mysterious and fantastic things in Revered Ancient. Every time it was different. After all, what Revered Ancient could reveal to him personally was just the tip of the iceberg.

As everyone looked on in surprise, the Captain licked his lips, and his eyes shone brightly.

This thingy looks like a real treasure. And since it appeared to me, that means we're connected by destiny!

Chapter 744: Chen Erniu the Sleazeball

Xu Qing had no way of hearing what the Captain was thinking. But he noticed the look in the Captain's eyes, and it was quite familiar. It reminded him of the time back when Seven Blood Eyes had just established itself in Emperor-Receiving Prefecture, and they caught sight of Nethersprite flying along in some very luxurious clothing. The Captain had the same look in his eyes as when he looked at Nethersprite's clothing back then. Showing off in front of the Captain would only result in attracting his attention. [1]

Xu Qing shook his head. He was used to this sort of thing, and decided not to even say anything. What happened over the next few days with the Captain proved that Xu Qing's speculations were correct....

The Captain had obviously taken a liking to the haircake. Perhaps he was just curious, or maybe he wanted to make a friend. Either way, the Captain snuck away to follow it around. On more than one occasion, he tried to get close to it.

"Hold on, Big Hairy. I only have half a month! I just know I'll regret it for the rest of my life if I don't at least say hi and get to know you a bit. There are a lot of Hairys in Revered Ancient, but you're the most special of them all."

Maybe it was because the Captain's words didn't seem sincere, or possibly it was the impure look in his eyes. Either way, before the Captain could ever get very close, light surrounded him and he disappeared as he was teleported away.

However, the Captain knew how to persevere. In fact, that was essentially the foundation of his crazy personality. Therefore, he just rushed back and picked up where he left off. This time, he made sure to call out a very warm greeting to ensure he didn't come across as being malicious. In fact, to make himself seem even more sincere, he casually took out a peach and started eating it. After all, it was only when eating peaches that he could reveal the true tenderness in his heart.

"Hello there! You're so very classy! That's why I wanted to come over and get to know you!"

Swish!

The haircake zipped off, but not before teleporting the Captain away.

About two hours later, the Captain raced back, waving his hand the entire way. "Don't run! Don't you know that you bear a striking resemblance to an old friend of mine! My very best friend, actually. I—"

Swish!

He disappeared again. Seven days later after innumerable kind words, and the same amount of teleportations, Big Hairy finally took notice of the Captain. Suspicion glittered in its eyes as it let the Captain get within about 30 meters of it for the first time.

The Captain immediately started to get excited. It actually felt similar to how he had been able to slowly get closer and closer to Li Shitao. Trying very hard to seem tender and gentle, he munched on a peach, issued continuous words of pacification, and slowly tried to get even closer.

However, the haircake was clearly vigilant, as it sent light swirling around the Captain to teleport him away.

Suddenly feeling very anxious, the Captain said, "You dropped something, Big Hairy! I just want to give it back to you!"

Ignoring the distress it caused him, the Captain took out a small piece of Crimson Mother's flesh, about the size of a fingernail. Holding it out, he inched forward. The moment that flesh was in the open, the haircake's eyes went wide, and it let its guard down a bit. The Captain took advantage of that to get closer.

He tossed the little chunk of meat into the haircake's mouth. Then, he pounced, reaching out to grab a handful of blue hairs. He yanked his hand back, and a ripping sound could be heard as several hundred pieces of hair ripped out. The haircake shivered, and blinding light spread out in all directions.

Even the clouds in the area were teleported away, as was the Captain. However, this was a bit different than anything from before, as the haircake didn't go back to playing around after the teleportation. As soon as the teleportation completed, it rushed off in a very specific direction.

What followed over the next few days was that people in Extreme Peace County frequently saw a very shocking scene playing out in the sky. The haircake was surrounded by a sea of light as it chased a shadow figure. Whenever it caught up, it would open its mouth and start chewing, only to quickly realize it hadn't caught the true form of its quarry. Looking angry, it would continue searching.

The same thing happened over and over again. The screams from the quarry echoed out far and wide.

When the Sea-Sealing County cultivators saw what was happening, strange expressions appeared on their faces. Ningyan and Wu Jianwu sighed, but didn't seem very surprised. Plumdark didn't pay any attention.

Xu Qing also sighed. Eventually, when it was nearing time to leave, he saw a blue worm wriggling in front of him.

"Was it worth it, Eldest Brother?"

The blue worm was about the size of a thumb, and it had the Captain's head. It was, in fact, the Captain. And he looked very pleased with himself.

"Of course it was!" he said. "I'm fine. Totally fine! As I guessed, that haircake is actually female. It's only natural she would have a bit of a temper. So I prepared a few clones for her to play around with. Considering what I acquired, it was totally worth it!

"Little Ah Qing, this teleportation portal is a complicated thing. Normally, the gaze of the broken face produces forbidden regions. For that gaze to turn something into a new life form is very rare. It's almost like a child of the broken face! And that means it must have some of the broken face's characteristics!

"Trust me, spending that bit of Crimson Mother's flesh wasn't a waste at all. Getting a handful of those hairs is extremely significant!"

"As long as you're happy," Xu Qing said. Not feeling inclined to pay any more attention, he closed his eyes and went back to meditating.

The Captain wriggled off to the side in worm form, where he lay and thought about how he would make use of the amazing hairs he had acquired.

The haircake continued to rampage for a few more days. It still seemed angry, but at the same time, it was getting close to time for it to sleep again. Although it wasn't ready to give up, it had no choice but to return to Tranquil Sun Prefecture, drop back down to the ground, suck all of its hairs back up, and then turn back into an ordinary portal.

The time had come for Xu Qing and everyone else to leave. Keeping their guard up the entire time, they went to the portal, where light flared as the teleportation began. When that happened, the portal vibrated a few times, as if the sleeping haircake had sensed a familiar aura and wanted to wake up. Unfortunately, it couldn't awaken. In the end, the teleportation light begrudgingly wrapped everyone up and sent them away.

The next leg of the journey involved taking multiple teleportations across multiple regions. There were some delays, but overall the journey went well. Three days after that long trek, they reached the last major teleportation portal in the last county.

This county was called Southtrust, and it was the closest administrative district to the Imperial Region. It was located in the Gray Sea Region.

There was a sea in the Gray Sea Region, but it was different from ordinary seas. In this region, there was a type of flying flower that was similar to a dandelion. During most parts of the year, they caused the ground to be covered with something that resembled gray cotton. It looked almost like a sea. That was how the place got its name. In some ways, it resembled the white wind in the Bitter Life Mountains, although it was fundamentally different.

When Xu Qing and everyone else appeared, it was in the peak season of the flying flowers, so everywhere they looked, gray cotton filled the sky and covered the land, creating a gray sea. It looked beautiful. However, to the people who lived in this area, it was actually a miserable disaster. If you breathed in that gray cotton, your life force would rapidly wither away. Therefore, the people who lived here had to constantly keep protective shields around them, or they had to dress in all-encompassing clothing.

As a result, the inhabitants of this region tended to be quiet and taciturn. Xu Qing and the others could sense that when they arrived.

This place was different than Extreme Peace County. The people here weren't on guard like they'd been over there. What was more, they were much more scattered.

Actually, that trend wasn't unique to Southtrust County. The further they got away from Sea-Sealing County, the less people seemed to be on guard. Apparently, the Holytide Region was so far away that word hadn't spread very far; what rumors had reached this distance didn't affect things very much.

Since Southtrust County was so close to the Imperial Region, it made sense that they had close ties to the imperial capital. In fact, there were even influential people from the capital who, having come out on the bottom politically, settled down there.

That wasn't of much concern to Xu Qing and his traveling party. After leaving the teleportation portal, they planned to just wait until the portal was ready for use again, then finish the last leg of their journey. They were now one teleportation away from the Imperial Region.

We'll be there soon. Xu Qing looked off into the endless grayness in the direction of the Imperial Region. *This is the county where Huang Yan's sister lives*.

Xu Qing wasn't even sure how to search for that sister. According to what Huang Yan told him, that feather would attract her attention and bring her to him.

After thinking about it for a time, Xu Qing looked around until he spotted Ningyan.

Ningyan looked different than he had in any other county. He seemed ill at ease, even nervous. Realizing Xu Qing was looking at him, he took a deep breath and walked over.

"Biggest Bro, I can sense the bloodline aura of my third sister.... She's not trying to hide it. Presumably she's sensed me as well."

"Princess Anhai?" Xu Qing asked, thinking back to the imperial princess he had seen sitting next to Seventh Prince. [2]

"I have an idea of why she's here. There's an elderly person here that she knows well. It's her wet nurse, who was also the wet nurse of Fifth Prince. Because she and Fifth Prince did so well after they grew up, the emperor made special arrangements for their wet nurse to retire here, which is also her hometown."

Even as Ningyan explained these things, a figure appeared, floating through the gray sea to appear in front of Xu Qing and his traveling party. She was a handmaiden with piercing eyes and a profound cultivation base. The first thing she did was glance at Li Yunshan and Plumdark. Then she looked at Xu Qing. Finally, she turned her attention to Ningyan.

Curtseying formally, she said, "Well met, Your Majesty Twelfth Prince. The princess is currently having a meal with Nanny Sun. When she sensed your aura, she arranged for me to invite you to join her."

Chapter 745: Seven-Colored Empress Spirit Aurora

Xu Qing didn't know much about Princess Anhai. On the day of that banquet with Seventh Prince, she hadn't said more than a few things. That said, considering how things played out in the Holytide Region after that, she was clearly a very sharp individual. What was more, even back then, Seventh Prince had seemed leery of her.

The way her handmaiden acted was also telling. She was neither servile nor overbearing, and acted very respectful, both in the way she carried herself and in her choice of words.

Xu Qing looked at Ningyan. Ningyan hesitated. The handmaiden didn't say anything further. Bowing to Ningyan and Xu Qing, she left.

Ningyan sighed. Looking at Xu Qing with some hesitation, he cautiously said, "Biggest Bro, that Nanny Sun is very close friends with Third Sister's mother and Fifth Brother's mother. Relationships around here are very complicated. I should probably go. Would you mind accompanying me, Biggest Bro?"

The closer Ningyan got to the Imperial Region, the more nervous he felt. It was clear how torn he was about going back.

Xu Qing thought about it. There were still a few more days before the teleportation portal would be ready, and Ningyan's request seemed sincere. Xu Qing nodded.

"Let's go," he said.

Ningyan immediately brightened up. With Xu Qing around, he would be a bit more confident.

Plumdark and Li Yunshan needed to keep the defensive spell formation operational, so they wouldn't go along. And the Captain, after months of researching the haircake's hair, didn't have the energy to join them.

So Xu Qing and Ningyan took a contingent of swordsage guards with them and went to Nanny Sun's residence. There was no need to get directions. Ningyan could sense Princess Anhai, and thus, it didn't take long before they reached an outer courtyard that resembled a garden. It wasn't very large, and was full of flowers. It also had a permanent spell formation that kept the gray cotton out. There were ornamental rocks made from jade, as well as a spirit spring that filled the courtyard with spirit energy that surpassed anything from ordinary sects in Sea-Sealing County.

A banquet was taking place in the middle of the courtyard. In the seat of honor was an old woman with an amiable smile on her face and fine clothing. She was laughing and chatting with a young woman dressed in court attire.

There were two other rows of tables filled with guests. People toasted each other, ate, and enjoyed themselves. At the same time, a host of handmaidens drifted amongst the tables, clearing away dirty dishes and bringing new food.

In the very middle of it all were nine athletic-looking cultivators all fighting each other. The magical techniques, and their resulting shockwaves, were extraordinary, and it made for a very entertaining fight.

Because of the bloodline fluctuations, Princess Anhai noticed immediately when Ningyan and Xu Qing arrived. She leaned over and said something to the old woman, who nodded in response.

As Xu Qing and Ningyan neared, the courtyard's spell formation opened to let them in. Ningyan took a deep breath, glanced at Xu Qing, and then forced himself to remain calm. Along with Xu Qing, he walked through the spell formation and into the courtyard. The fighting stopped briefly, as the cultivators respectfully made way.

Ningyan hurried forward. Stopping in front of the old woman, he said, "Well met, Nanny Sun."

Nanny Sun looked Ningyan up and down coolly, then nodded. After that, she seemed to ignore him. She didn't even bother looking at Xu Qing before going back to talking with Princess Anhai.

Princess Anhai engaged Nanny Sun in conversation, but also flashed an apologetic nod to Ningyan and Xu Qing.

Ningyan hardly seemed to notice, as if he were used to being treated apathetically. In fact, he seemed to think things were going well so far. Picking a spot at the far end of one of the tables, he sat down.

Xu Qing was even less concerned with people being apathetic. All he cared about was if someone was being malicious. Face calm, he sat down next to Ningyan.

The banquet continued. Their arrival had been noticed by the other guests. Some discussed their presence, some smiled and nodded at them, others looked at them disdainfully. After everything Xu Qing had experienced in life, he knew that in some cases, the facial expressions revealed by people like this did reflect their actual disposition. But most of the time... they were just masks. Therefore, paying attention to facial expressions wasn't very useful.

Picking up the flagon of alcohol, he took a drink. When he did, his eyes narrowed. *This alcohol tastes a lot better than the kind from Sea-Sealing County*.

It was clearly alcohol, but had a very full body when consumed. It made Xu Qing think of the common idiom *a rare beverage*, *an elixir of jade* used to describe fine liquor. After his first sip, he decided to take a few more sips.

Next to him, Ningyan blinked a few times then quietly said, "Biggest Bro, after we get to the imperial capital, I can take you to a few breweries I know of. They have some very fine alcohol there that I can get for you."

Xu Qing nodded. Then he sat there sipping the alcohol and waiting for the banquet to conclude.

Time passed. There were more performances, and many of the guests chatted with each other in a very lively fashion. Occasionally, Princess Anhai would say something that pleased Nanny Sun, and everyone would smile. Xu Qing just sat there enjoying the alcohol. Ningyan accompanied him. When they ran out, Ningyan would call a handmaiden over to bring more.

Princess Anhai didn't seem to have any ill intentions. On a few occasions, she tried to pull Xu Qing and Ningyan into the conversation. Such attempts all failed. Nanny Sun, though not hostile, didn't seem to care about them, and continued to treat them indifferently. Finally, Princess Anhai seemed

to realize she wasn't going to be able to talk with them, and sent a handmaiden over with a message.

"Please, don't misunderstand," the handmaiden said quietly. "The princess has good intentions. However, even though Nanny Sun isn't in the imperial capital anymore, she still has deep connections there. She has close friends among the family of many princes, princesses, and other royalty. With her approval, it would be possible to smooth out many threats to His Majesty Ningyan. The princess was originally hoping to do just that."

Xu Qing nodded and lifted his cup in a toast to Princess Anhai. Princess Anhai nodded. As it turned out, she did have good intentions, it was just that Nanny Sun clearly didn't like Ningyan very much.

Soon, it was nearing sunset, and the clouds above were a rosy red color. After all the drinking, Xu Qing belched slightly. He felt very comfortable after the drinking, and was just about to take Ningyan and leave.

But then a sound like heavenly thunder filled the sky. The clouds seethed, parting to reveal a sevencolored beam of light, almost like a multicolored waterfall. Within that seven-colored waterfall was a huge peacock, so large it seemed to fill the entire sky. After appearing, it became clear that the seven colors actually came from its tail. This peacock was unusually mighty and beautiful, so much so that the sky and lands seemed to become dull in its presence. Much of Southtrust County was shaken by what was happening, and that included the courtyard where the banquet was taking place. Everyone stood and looked up into the sky. That included Nanny Sun, whose eyes shone with delight as she looked up.

"Empress Spirit Aurora!"

The Gray Sea Region had a lot of forbidden regions, but it only had one forbidden ground. Its name was Light Tomb. That forbidden ground had an empress named Aurora, who treated all species with kindness. Also being terrifyingly powerful, the species in the Gray Sea Region were mostly able to live peacefully. [1]

As a result, she came to be known as Empress Spirit Aurora. She didn't make public appearances often, but whenever she did, her seven-colored light would purify the gray cotton, making it even more beautiful. As a result, throughout the Gray Sea Region, her presence was considered an auspicious sign.

She'd had dealings with Nanny Sun in the past. In fact, years ago, she had shown favor to Nanny Sun, which added another layer of protection in the eyes of many people.

When Nanny Sun saw her benefactor arriving, she smiled respectfully. Then she prepared to watch Empress Spirit Aurora leave. After all, she was well aware that Empress Spirit Aurora didn't appear publicly very often; the fact that she was here now must mean she had something important to do. As far as she was concerned, Empress Spirit Aurora was surely just passing by, not here to see her specifically.

Only moments later, though, shock filled her. And it wasn't just her. Everyone else in the courtyard, including Princess Anhai, became deeply astonished.

That was because the incredibly auspicious Empress Spirit Aurora didn't depart as they expected. Instead, she approached the courtyard. As she did, she transformed, leaving her peacock form and taking human form. She was graceful, with a cold, elegant facial expression. She was very beautiful, like a plum flower in winter. Her looks would capture the attention of anyone who saw her, and might make them forget that even small twigs can have sharp thorns. Her long, black hair was coiled and bound with a hairpin, the pearls of which emanated a seven-colored glow as she approached. She wore palace attire and resembled an immortal, graceful and proud, with phoenixlike eyes that would incline anyone who looked into them to bow their head. Her violet garment swayed in the wind, making her seem even more attractive and elegant.

Nanny Sun looked very serious as she respectfully said, "I offer respectful greetings, Empress Spirit Aurora."

Everyone else in the courtyard, even Princess Anhai, clasped hands and bowed. Ningyan inhaled sharply, and was clearly entranced by this woman's beauty. It was hard to say if his face was red because he was blushing, or because of the glow being emitted by Empress Spirit Aurora.

The immortal-like Empress Spirit Aurora looked calmly at everyone bowing to her. She nodded at Nanny Sun, then ignored her as she entered the courtyard. As everyone watched, she walked to the far end of one of the tables.

Ningyan stood there getting more and more excited as he assumed that she was looking at him. But then, he was shaken with the realization that she wasn't looking at him. She was looking at... Xu Qing.

Empress Spirit Aurora stopped in front of Xu Qing.

"Xu Qing?" she said. "Huang Yan told me about you."

Everyone present felt like they were being struck by lightning, and stared at what was happening with utter disbelief.

That was especially true of Nanny Sun. She had heard of Xu Qing, but didn't care much about him. And even if she did think of him as being important in some ways, considering their difference in age, there was no need for her to try to make friends with him. If they were kindred spirits, then their acquaintance would come naturally. If they weren't kindred spirits, then he was nothing more than a passerby. But then, the rarely seen Empress Spirit Aurora specifically came to visit this Xu Qing. Nanny Sun's entire way of thinking was shaken.

As for Xu Qing, he was a little surprised, but at the same time, this was within the realm of what he had expected could happen. He quickly clasped hands and bowed, then took out the feather Huang Yan had given him, as well as the bag.

Empress Spirit Aurora glanced at the feather, then took the bag. Opening it, she found a red fruit which she put into her mouth. After looking around, she sat down next to Xu Qing and indicated for him to sit as well. Xu Qing obediently complied. She took out another fruit and offered it to him.

"Want something to eat?"

He accepted the fruit and put it in his mouth. His eyes lit up. The fruit had a very unique flavor that was even more pleasurable than the alcohol he had just consumed.

Everyone else in the courtyard looked around awkwardly. Ningyan, his heart racing, looked at Xu Qing and exulted in his heart.

This is what the Biggest Bro is supposed to be like!

Chest swelling, he sat down.

After a moment of awkward silence in the courtyard, Nanny Sun arranged for the performances to continue. This time, everything proceeded with much more solemnity, and many a glance was cast in Xu Qing's direction.

The smile gradually returned to Nanny Sun's face. She looked at Xu Qing, then Ningyan, and after some thought, kindly said, "Your Majesty Twelfth Prince, come over here and let me take a look at you, boy. Time really has flown by. I can still remember like yesterday that time years ago when your mother moved in to the palace. The ceremony put on by His Majesty was spectacular."

Chapter 746: What Was Once the Number One Region in Revered Ancient

Nanny Sun's words caused the guests of the banquet to look down to hide their facial expressions. There were some people who were taboo.... Not to be mentioned....

Princess Anhai's eyes glittered. She was fully aware that her former wet nurse had been a very connected person when she was young, and had plenty of tactics to deal with court politics. If she hadn't been like that, she would never have been a wet nurse to both Princess Anhai and Fifth Prince. Nor would she have survived in the imperial palace, or been rewarded by the emperor with a retirement in her hometown.

It went without saying that Nanny Sun was very intelligent and also fiercely loyal to the emperor. Given her experience and breadth of knowledge, she was keenly aware of how words could sometimes be weaponized, or used to tacitly explain your attitude. Sometimes, a few short words could be packed with meaning. And of course, the words she had just spoken were just like that: profoundly meaningful.

Princess Anhai looked thoughtfully at Nanny Sun with her kind facial expression. The truth was that Princess Anhai had never been able to dig up any information about Nanny Sun's life before she entered service in the imperial palace. Apparently, nobody knew anything about her. No amount of digging by Princess Anhai had resulted in any information. All she knew was that she'd had a daughter who died young. Then her own mother had submitted an official request to the court for her to enter service in the palace as Princess Anhai's wet nurse.

Of course, wet nurses in the imperial palace had a lot more to do than just breast-feed babies. They occupied a very special position. In order to prevent political friction between the harem and the imperial clan, the emperor's household used the tactic of keeping the princes and their birth mothers from becoming very close. And the wet nurses were an important part of that tactic.

They would actually live with the imperial princes and princesses, accompanying them and acting as teachers from the time they were young until they were considered adults. They essentially took over the role of mother, spending almost all their time with the princes and princesses. The wet nurses would shape the world view of the young ones, thus greatly influencing their future, their attitude, and the way they went about handling matters. In the imperial household, the wet nurses were also teachers and mothers.

As Princess Anhai considered those things, Nanny Sun reached out and patted her arm. Princess Anhai looked up, then smiled instinctively and turned to Ningyan.

Ningyan had a complicated facial expression. Nanny Sun's words obviously made him think of his own mother, dredging up a sense of melancholy along with many old memories. He had already reached the point where he couldn't quite remember what his mother looked like. Her name was taboo in the imperial capital. People didn't even talk about her. In fact, he didn't remember even hearing her name until after she had passed away.

Ningyan took a deep breath, walked up to Nanny Sun, and bowed.

Nanny Sun looked at Ningyan and kept the kind smile on her face as she indicated he should sit at her side, opposite Princess Anhai. After he sat down, she reached out and clasped his hand. Inside, she was sighing. She'd known all along why Anhai had brought Ningyan to the banquet. However, after Nanny Sun left the imperial capital, she'd always been reluctant to meddle with affairs there.

After all, the death of King Heaventide, and the emperor's imperial decree, were both deeply meaningful. However you looked at it, it seemed to indicate that a tempestuous succession struggle was about to strike the imperial capital.

There was another relevant factor related to Ningyan.... Something that had been buried in history and that few people knew about was that Nanny Sun had personally watched Ningyan's mother as she rose to prominence. Nanny Sun had witnessed her outstanding talents, but had also been there when, overnight, everything ended in blood-soaked tragedy. An imperial prince had even died during that time. That prince was Ningyan's older twin brother. From that day on, Ningyan had been alienated by most people in the palace. Her previous indifferent attitude toward Ningyan and Xu Qing hadn't been born of malice. Rather, it was a case of *I'll mind my business, you mind yours*.

But when Empress Spirit Aurora came, that changed everything. Nanny Sun wasn't going to take any desperate risks. But on the other hand, she had to do something. And thus, she spoke the words she did, and acted as she had.

Everyone in attendance at the banquet had connections in the imperial capital. Rumors about her words and actions would quickly spread. And that was enough.

The banquet proceeded until the moon hung high in the sky. At that point, Empress Spirit Aurora stretched, rose, and left. Xu Qing also got up and bid farewell to Nanny Sun.

Nanny Sun looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, then took out three jade slips and held them out to Ningyan. She explained that she wanted him to deliver them to three of her old friends in the capital. Ningyan looked instinctively at Xu Qing, who nodded at him. Taking a deep breath, he solemnly took the three jade slips. With that, they left.

The moon shone down on them as they walked back to the teleportation portal. Thoughts of the past had caused Ningyan's mood to sink, and he just walked quietly alongside Xu Qing.

About halfway back, Xu Qing reached out and clasped Ningyan's shoulder. "You'll be fine. Regardless of anything, you're always going to be a swordsage from Sea-Sealing County."

Xu Qing's words warmed Ningyan's heart. He sighed softly. "Thank you, Biggest Bro. Actually, you're right. I just don't want to lose any face for you. The reality is that the position of imperial

prince isn't much of a position at all. I've long been sidelined, and nobody wants to have anything to do with me.

"I know why. It's my mother. In the imperial capital, she's a taboo subject.... I used to have an older brother. My twin. He was a lot more decisive than me. And smarter. He was basically better than me in every respect. He was a bit taciturn, but there wasn't anything that could knock him down. He always treated me amazingly. When we were young, and I was especially weak, he would keep me safe. But he died the day after my mother died. So did everyone else in the house at the time, except for me, the most useless of all.

"After that, I felt lost in the imperial capital. All I could do was carefully try to navigate things on my own. Oh how *amazing* the imperial capital is...." Ningyan shook his head bitterly. "Some years later, my father issued an imperial decree sending me to Sea-Sealing County. I was supposed to go undercover there and keep records about everything going on. That was when I ran into you, Biggest Bro."

Ningyan looked over at Xu Qing in the moonlight. He had never talked to anyone about these things before. It was because, along his journey, he had somehow started to feel like Xu Qing was an older brother to him.

Xu Qing looked up into the dome of heaven, as if he was thinking about someone.... Finally, he reached over and tousled Ningyan's hair. "If you're not happy in the imperial capital, then we'll go back to Sea-Sealing County together."

"Okay!" Ningyan said, nodding firmly.

Xu Qing smiled, and they continued on their way.

A few days later, the Southtrust County teleportation portal activated. Xu Qing and the traveling party entered it, and this time they had an additional member of the party.

Princess Anhai.

Before the portal was activated, she had requested to go back to the Imperial Region with Xu Qing's group.

Three regions away from the Gray Sea Region, on a vast plain, was a massive teleportation portal that currently flared with glittering light. It was at least three times larger than any of the other ancient portals Xu Qing had seen on the journey. What was more, the entire thing was crafted from the highest quality spirit stone. A host of monolithic stones surrounded the portal, all of them carved with magical symbols that emitted terrifying fluctuations.

Some distance away was a military encampment. They were responsible for standing guard over the teleportation portal. In fact, soldiers from there patrolled the area constantly.

There wasn't just one teleportation portal present. There were many, and all of them went to different locations. What was more, there were military encampments for all of them. This entire area was circular in shape. In fact, it was like a huge ring, larger than some small-sized regions. And this was only one part of the Imperial Region. There was an outer ring, separated by a sea of nothingness, followed by a slightly smaller ring. Then another, and another. In total there were about a hundred.

And in the middle of those rings was a gargantuan planet. Even from a great distance, it was possible to see its shape. It wasn't covered with solid matter, but rather, gas! Its surface was covered with clouds, out of which vortexes would occasionally appear, along with crashing lightning. This planet was a gas giant! The planet had rings around it, which were concentric continents. Beneath the planet was a pitch black abyss.

As Xu Qing's party appeared on the outermost ring, Princess Anhai began to speak.

"Welcome to the Imperial Region! The entire region is actually suspended in midair. Beneath it is an abyss so deep that nobody knows what's inside. Legend has it the abyss leads to a place called Brilliant Heaven.

"The Imperial Region is actually an astonishing gas giant. Years ago, Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity pulled it here from beyond the heavens and turned it into the imperial palace. Nowadays, it's considered an ancestral land for all humans.

"Not even children of the imperial clan are allowed to go inside the gas giant. Only the emperor and the crown prince can go inside to offer ancestral sacrifices.

"The gas giant is surrounded by a hundred rings, which is where the common citizens live. Right now, we're standing on the outermost ring. Although it looks like solid ground, it's actually pure light, solidified by means of a divine ability.

"As you get closer to the planet, you'll find that the rings are increasingly formed from gas. Of course, the qualifications to live on the rings increase as you get further in. The innermost ring... is the imperial capital."

Everyone from Sea-Sealing County was stunned. It didn't matter the level of their cultivation base, or how worldly wise they were. Princess Anhai's description struck everyone to the core.

The only exceptions were the Captain, who sneered slightly, and Plumdark, who looked at the planet with her eyes glittering. Everyone else, despite being shaken, managed to recover their composure quickly. Xu Qing, meanwhile, looked at Princess Anhai and nodded.

Princess Anhai's expression didn't change. However, she was secretly surprised. Considering that the Imperial Region had once been the number-one region in Revered Ancient, when ordinary people saw it for the first time, they usually had a hard time processing what they were seeing. But these Sea-Sealing County cultivators had recovered very quickly.

Suppressing her surprise, she led Xu Qing and everyone else onward. A few days later, thanks to Princess Anhai's arrangements, they were nearing the inner ring that was the imperial capital.

The gas giant became clearer and clearer. The clouds on its surface swirled endlessly. Occasionally, they would part, revealing an astonishing statue of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity.

The statue sat cross-legged on the planet, and though it wasn't alive, it looked extremely lifelike.

Chapter 747: Revered Ancient's Last Summer Immortal

"The planet has a name. Planet Ancient Emperor! It's not just the imperial palace constructed by Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity. There's also a legacy in it that, supposedly, only people with imperial energy can gain enlightenment of. To this day, none of the successive imperial clans have succeeded at it."

As Princess Anhai led them along, she continued to introduce the Imperial Region to everyone. "I once had the chance to read some ancient records that talked about the origin of the huge statue of the Ancient Emperor that rests on the planet. It wasn't always there. After the Ancient Emperor left, that statue was brought from beyond the heavens by Emperor Mirrorcloud. Along with it came a dharmic decree from the holy lands. The ancient records I was reading didn't explain what was in that decree. Few people know the details.

"Although Planet Ancient Emperor is considered the ancestral land of all humankind, it's also a restricted area. You can only go inside to seek enlightenment during special time periods."

As Xu Qing and everyone else learned more about the Imperial Region, they got closer and closer. Everyone was listening very closely to the information. As for the Captain, he looked at Planet Ancient Emperor with deep longing hidden in his eyes.

Damn. In my attempts to get in there, I died multiple times in past lives... and never succeeded. Then his gaze fell to the abyss, and he sighed again. I never got in there either.

Plumdark had a complicated expression on her face. She looked at Planet Ancient Emperor with reminiscence flickering in her eyes. It wasn't lost on her that the planet up ahead was her home in a past life.

Although Ningyan didn't know as much about Planet Ancient Emperor as Princess Anhai, he had grown up here, so he was used to the general concept. As she explained all the history and other information, he nodded frequently.

Wu Jianwu was visibly excited, and was convinced that he had an eighty to ninety percent chance of improving his poetry here. He could only imagine what poems might be there to be found in the imperial palace chambers.

As for Xu Qing, his attention wasn't focused solely on Planet Ancient Emperor. He was looking through the rings to the abyss beneath the Imperial Region.

Princess Anhai had mentioned a legend that this very abyss led to a place called 'Brilliant Heaven.' Although few people could know what Brilliant Heaven was, after what Xu Qing had experienced in the Moonrite Region... he had an idea of what it was. It was the original home of both Crimson Mother and Li Zihua. It was also a highly suppressed taboo in Revered Ancient.

As Princess Anhai continued with her introduction, she started talking about something that completely interrupted Xu Qing's train of thought. "Legacies have been left behind on the planet by various heavenly marquises, heavenly kings, and Grand Emperors who died in battle over the years. There are also legacies from heavenly marquises and heavenly kings who left for the holy lands.

"The last person to leave behind a legacy was Grand Emperor Swordsage, who was the very last Grand Emperor of humankind. In order to make sure humanity wasn't wiped out in war, he left a clone behind in the Imperial Region. The legacy left behind by the Grand Emperor is The Emperor's Sword. It's located in the depths of Planet Ancient Emperor, where it has remained buried for countless years...." [1]

Xu Qing looked back at Planet Ancient Emperor. To him, Grand Emperor Swordsage had deep significance. One of his main goals for this trip was to find the Grand Emperor and bow to him.

"Your Majesty Anhai," he said suddenly, "is Grand Emperor Swordsage's clone on Planet Ancient Emperor, or...."

It was the first time he'd spoken since arriving at the Imperial Region.

Princess Anhai was more than happy to answer his question. "Grand Emperor Swordsage's clone turned into a statue, but it's not on Planet Ancient Emperor. It's outside, where it forms the final line of defense for the ancestral lands of all humankind. It'll take a few more teleportations to reach the inner ring, and the imperial capital. Once we're there, you can see it for yourself."

Xu Qing nodded as they continued on their way.

Time passed. Because of having Princess Anhai with them, they were able to proceed through the Imperial Region without any trouble. Three more teleportations later, which was early in the morning of the next day, they finally saw the imperial capital.

That was also where Xu Qing spotted... Grand Emperor Swordsage!

The entire inner ring was the capital. Along its borders were numerous towering black towers, along with a host of statues. They circled around the entire Planet Ancient Emperor. Each statue was different in style and form. All were human, and they included men and women, old and young. They all had varying facial expressions. The seven emotions and six sensory pleasures were all visible on different statues.

"The black towers are part of the imperial capital's grand spell formation. The statues, with the exception of the statue of Grand Emperor Swordsage, were all built by later generations. They're the saints and emperors who have died in the years since the time of the Ancient Emperors.

"Among them are the original one-hundred-and-eight heavenly marquises, the thirty-three heavenly kings of the past, and nine Grand Emperors.

"Unfortunately, humankind fell into decline. Later on, Emperor Eastglory had twenty-seven heavenly kings who qualified to become statues here. But after the Darkheaven Rebellion, humankind truly fell into dark times. During Emperor Sageheaven's time, only five heavenly kings could qualify. Things seemed to go well during the reign of Emperor Mirrorcloud, yet there were only six heavenly kings who qualified then.

"By the time Emperor Dao Life came, no one qualified other than the emperor himself. Now here we are, in the Dark War calendar, and things haven't changed." Princess Anhai sighed softly.

Off to the side, Kong Xianglong, who had been silent the whole time, couldn't hold back from asking, "What cultivation base is required to qualify?"

"Imperial Sovereign. In the time of the Ancient Emperors, only Imperial Sovereigns could serve as heavenly marquises. The so-called heavenly marquises were like nobility from heaven, who could crush all the lands of an entire region.

"Only peak Imperial Sovereigns could become heavenly kings. Heavenly kings could crush multiple regions, or just one, depending on their whim. And the orders of heavenly kings could only be surpassed by those of the emperor."

At this point, Princess Anhai looked at Xu Qing. "Senior Li Zihua of the Moonrite Region was an Imperial Sovereign, and thus, he was one of the heavenly kings that served the Ancient Emperor of the time. He has a statue here as well."

"What about the Grand Emperors?" Xu Qing said.

"In the days of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity, many species would produce Grand Emperors. That said, they were relatively rare. Only humans, who benefited from the destiny aura of Revered Ancient, were able to produce nine. Their cultivation base surpassed that of the Imperial Sovereigns. As a result, they were also called... Quasi-Immortals. After the time of the Ancient Emperors, even now, there are no species who have produced Grand Emperors." [2]

"Quasi-Immortal..." Xu Qing murmured, his eyes gleaming as he looked in the direction of the inner ring. He saw all the statues there, and also noticed that, in front of all the other statues, there was one particular statue that looked different.

It depicted a middle-aged man who initially seemed like a scholar. But if you looked closer, you would see a sharp glint in his eyes. He seemed domineering, as if his anger could shatter the ground in front of him and set the dome of heaven ablaze. It was as if his gaze was the type that could even kill gods. His hands were clasped behind his back, and a towering sword energy pulsed from behind him, becoming dazzling white light. All-in-all the statue was extremely realistic, as if he was a real person standing there. He was the last Grand Emperor of humankind, and also the only one who didn't leave with Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity. He stayed behind to make sure humankind wasn't wiped out in war. He was Grand Emperor Swordsage.

As Xu Qing looked at the statue, he took in a deep breath and inclined his head respectfully. At the same time, he asked Princess Anhai a question that he had wondered about for a long time. "What cultivation base did Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity have?"

Everyone else looked over. The Captain seemed extremely curious. Only Plumdark kept her gaze on Planet Ancient Emperor.

Anhai was silent for a moment. Then she sighed.

"Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity's cultivation base is a bit of a mystery. That said, there are some imperial records that contain a description of him.

"Toward the end of the rebellion, the emperor came from the south. When he stepped onto Receiving Prefecture, the lands quaked to meet him. The heavenly daos blessed him from the dome of heaven, calling him a Quasi-Immortal. Three thousand years later, humans were once again in power. Countless species offered worship, and Grand Emperors bowed their heads, all of them calling him a Summer Immortal."

Xu Qing's pupils constricted.

"Summer Immortal!" Plumdark said from off to the side. "Despite all the species that exist and all the years that have passed, he was... the last Summer Immortal in Revered Ancient."

Everyone in the group suddenly looked over at Plumdark. Even Princess Anhai did so. Plumdark closed her eyes and said nothing further. Everyone stood there silently.

Xu Qing had long since noticed that Plumdark seemed to be wrestling old memories, and thus chose not to ask any further questions. They proceeded on their way. As they neared, the statue of Grand Emperor Swordsage became easier to see. As for the black towers in between the statues, they glittered with mysterious light that spread out, connecting all of the towers and encircling the imperial capital.

Meanwhile, streams of divine sense emerged from the inner ring, along with numerous gazes. All of them locked onto Xu Qing and his group. The divine will and gazes contained different sensations. Some of them were on guard, some had mixed feelings, some were simply curious, some were hostile, and some seemed judgmental....

Although Xu Qing had never been to the imperial capital before, his name had long since reached these parts.

He was the most respected person in his region, backed by multiple Smoldering Gods, and the leader of the Nightshade high priests. He had participated in the killing of a god, and was also responsible for the death of King Heaventide.... Because of that, the imperial princes, princesses, and other nobility had no choice but to take him seriously. And of course, from the moment he stepped onto the teleportation portal to begin his journey, intelligence reports about him had circulated, which many people studied closely. Now, he had finally arrived.

They stopped at the void that led to the inner ring. As they stood there, Xu Qing could sense the terrifying power of the grand spell formation protecting the imperial capital. It contained a boundless mightiness, as well as the power to inspect anyone. If you entered the bounds of that spell formation, every secret within you would be revealed, including anything in your bag of holding. Normally speaking, such a high level of security wouldn't be used outside of extraordinary circumstances. After all, just about everyone who came and went from the imperial capital had lots of secrets.

Xu Qing frowned and looked at Anhai.

She also frowned, took out a jade slip, and sent a message. She didn't look very happy. "A few days ago some nonhuman agents showed up and triggered the grand spell formation. Since then, it's been on high alert, scanning everything...."

The Captain sidled over to Xu Qing, smiled, and said, "It's a pretext that no one could possibly find fault with. They want to use the imperial capital's spell formation to scan us. Interesting. Seems the people here really are clever and shrewd. And dangerous."

Chapter 748: A Storm Gathers

The fact that the imperial capital's grand spell formation was powered up to its highest level of scanning right when Xu Qing came could either be a very big coincidence, or it was as the Captain had said, and it was all intentional.

The reality was that the Captain was right. As Xu Qing and his group stopped outside of the grand spell formation, there were people inside the imperial capital who were chuckling coldly. And there were many organizations in the capital who were watching to see what would happen.

To them, Xu Qing and these people from Sea-Sealing County were all strangers. Though they knew some of them had impressive backgrounds, all of their information came solely from intelligence reports. None had interacted with any of them personally. In the imperial capital, where relationships were extremely complicated, and it was always hard to tell what people were thinking, one had to be very careful around strangers.

Therefore, most organizations in the capital wanted to just wait to see how things played out. They were more than happy to watch the results of other people meddling. That would also give them a good idea of how they should act in the future. After all, there was no black or white in this world. Alliances and loyalties. Profits and losses. Those were the things which drove action. Friendship and hatred were like masks that could be switched on a whim.

Sometimes such changes happened in an instant, other times they took a long time. But everything was always done out of expediency. It was the same with humans and nonhumans alike. It was just the natural order of things, and also a key factor in any society.

As they became the center of attention, the Captain smiled and looked at Xu Qing.

"What do you think, little Junior Brother?"

Xu Qing's expression remained neutral as he looked at the spell formation. "Since people want a show, let's give it to them."

He walked toward the spell formation. He had faith in the violet crystal. Neither Emperor Ancient Spirit nor Crimson Mother had noticed it, so he doubted this spell formation would be able to either. Other than the violet crystal, Xu Qing didn't have anything he felt the need to hide.

As he entered the range of the spell formation, ripples flowed out, covering him. The scanning... had begun.

The moment the power of scanning was unleashed, the spell formation vibrated and sent out a stream of dazzling blue light. That blue color was the spell formation's way of indicating the threat level of the person being scanned.

Xu Qing could sense that this development was because of his god body. Clearly, his fleshly body was provoking a reaction in the spell formation.

Inside the imperial capital, various parties looked on thoughtfully. When they saw the blue light, they were surprised. However, as Xu Qing continued walking, and the scanning power went deeper, the spell formation color changed. It went from blue to yellow. Loud rumblings sounds rose up!

Xu Qing could sense why it was happening. It was because of his god troves. In fact, the air behind him rippled as his god troves became visible.

The nobility in the capital would have been fine with such an outcome. Yellow light was acceptable. But then, in the blink of an eye, their hearts leaped into their throats as the spell formation scanned a little metal ball that Xu Qing kept at his waist. As soon as the spell formation touched that ball, it floated up and emitted blinding light!

The imperial capital's spell formation made a loud whining noise, almost anxious. That instantly captured the attention of everyone looking on. What was more, the spell formation changed from yellow to orange!

It was a strong warning, indicating that the subject of the scan was extremely dangerous!

Princess Anhai's expression flickered, and as she looked at Xu Qing in the spell formation, she felt deep astonishment.

He really does have a Dawning Sun!

But things were far from over yet. Xu Qing took another step forward, and Crimson Mother's flesh in his god troves and bag of holding caused blood-colored light to glitter around him. That bloodcolored light filled the surroundings with the aura of a god. In response, the spell formation erupted, and all the nearby black towers shook violently. This time, the light coming from the spell formation turned pure red! The color red was a huge warning sign!

All organizations in the imperial capital were now watching very seriously. The parties who had secretly arranged for this to play out were looking on with grave expressions.

"Crimson Mother's flesh!"

"According to the stories, he just helped out a bit. But that's obviously nonsense! You can tell just by looking at him right now!"

"He didn't just participate in killing Crimson Mother. He got some actual flesh!"

Meanwhile, Xu Qing had begun the process of combining some of Crimson Mother's flesh with the ancient sun, leading to an even more astounding result. This was not simply a matter of adding one thing to another....

In the blink of an eye, the spell formation's color went from red to black!! All lands in the imperial capital were shaken. All of the defenses for this core area of humankind flared to life. Ancient bells and drums rang out in the capital.

Ding... dong... ding....

The ancient bells shook heaven and earth. The hearts of everyone raced. All parties in the imperial capital were visibly taken aback.

Next, a host of terrifying auras from within the imperial capital locked down the area.

The Captain was startled, and everyone from Sea-Sealing County looked around with grim expressions. Li Yunshan's eyes shone with cold light, and Plumdark's eyes glittered mysteriously as she looked at Planet Ancient Emperor. The cloud cover on the planet stirred imperceptibly. It seemed like a catastrophe could strike at any moment.

That was when the Captain raised his voice and said, "The region lord of our Holytide Region has come here at the behest of the emperor himself. And yet people are using this spell formation to humiliate him? To try to force him to tap into his reserve powers? What's the meaning of this?

"Could it be that someone wants to sow discord between the Holytide and Imperial Regions? Does someone really want to fracture humankind at a time like this? How... devious and malicious!"

The people who had orchestrated this behind the scenes were stunned. The truth was that they had hoped to probe Xu Qing. However, the result was far, far beyond anything they had predicted would happen! In fact, it had reached a level they couldn't deal with.

They had just wanted to intimidate Xu Qing a little bit, not unleash a tempest. In fact, things had already reached the point of slipping out of control, which they couldn't let happen. The black-colored warning indicated an extremely dangerous threat. What was more, people could tell that everything was happening because of the spell formation's reaction; Xu Qing wasn't doing anything to make it happen.

An instant later, various people took steps to end the interference with the spell formation. Tonguelashings were given. And the Administration Division, which was responsible for maintaining the spell formation, stepped in. Almost instantly, the fluctuations coming off the grand spell formation died down. After only a few breaths of time, the spell formation was back to normal, and was no longer scanning anyone.

The Captain, Li Yunshan, and Plumdark rushed over to Xu Qing, who stood there with his eyes closed. There, they performed incantation gestures to keep the surroundings under control.

As all parties were closely watching Xu Qing, his eyes opened. He had ceased combining Crimson Mother's flesh and the ancient sun.

The Captain took a deep breath, looked at Xu Qing, and smiled wryly. He wasn't completely sure what Xu Qing had been planning to do, but the thought scared him. Regardless, he had been able to sense that Xu Qing was about to do something crazy. As for the various groups in the Imperial Region... they sensed it too.

Plumdark didn't say anything. She helped Xu Qing straighten out his garments. Her gaze was soft but determined as she looked into his eyes. He smiled and nodded at her. Then he looked at the Captain, blinked a few times, and finally turned his attention to the path ahead. The now-calm spell formation opened up for him, allowing him and the others from Sea-Sealing County to enter without hindrance.

Once inside the imperial capital, Xu Qing looked ahead and saw a roadway of white jade stretching out in front of him. There were actually over a thousand such roadways in the inner ring. They shone like suns, casting out dazzling light as they linked together the urban areas with everything else.

That distant urban area was made of countless buildings. They had roofs with white tiles, and came in all sizes. Though they seemed ancient, they were also grand and magnificent. The architectural style alone was impressive. Scattered randomly were five-sided, three-story buildings that seemed especially unique. Everything was beautiful and refined, and when combined with the amazing architecture, it was no wonder this was the most imposing city that humans controlled.

There was one particular building that stood out among all the others. Though it was very far away, it was possible to see that it was an eight-sided tower, pure white, like a temple of heaven amongst the clouds. It was even taller than all of the statues.

With its peak among the clouds, and surrounded by swirling mists, it was just barely possible to see that the huge building was surrounded by flying animals. It looked very auspicious.

Princess Anhai took a deep breath, regained her composure, and walked over to Xu Qing. Noticing what he was looking at, she quietly said, "That's the residence of the imperial preceptor. It's called Star-Plucking Tower. The imperial preceptor is very mysterious, and generally refuses audiences except when summoned by my father, the emperor. In fact, I myself have only laid eyes on him once from behind."

Xu Qing looked at Star-Plucking Tower and nodded.

"The imperial capital has the imperial palace, of course. But there are also the ten divisions, specifically, the Five Greater Celestial Divisions and the Five Lesser Celestial Divisions. [1]

"It's a very ancient system. Most of the other administrative districts have palaces associated with the Five Greater Celestial Divisions. Specifically those are: Swordsage, Justice, and Administration. But there's also Special Operations, which handles foreign affairs and other special circumstances. Last is the division responsible for immortal skills and gods. The Creation Division. The Five Greater Celestial Divisions wield immense authority over humans, and also protect us against threats from the outside. "As for the Five Lesser Celestial Divisions, they primarily focus on internal affairs. They include the Spiritual Governance Division, the Public Safety Division, the Official Affairs Division, the Education Division, and the People's Division."

Xu Qing's gaze shifted from the Star-Plucking Tower to somewhere else off in the distance.

At the very far side of the urban area up ahead, he saw a road made of a rainbow. It was massive and shocking, and it rose off of the inner ring, through the void, and onto Planet Ancient Emperor.

Located at the end of that road, right where it met Planet Ancient Emperor, there was a massive, shocking imperial palace. The palace floated in the void, incredibly awe-inspiring as it glittered with golden light. It was filled with beautiful statues and paintings, bejeweled jade palaces, and intricate building complexes. It almost looked like a huge spell formation, and at the same time, served as the main entrance to Planet Ancient Emperor!

Even from a distance, it was possible to sense the boundless aura of Planet Ancient Emperor. And the imperial palace was part of that, making it very eye-catching.

As Princess Anhai continued with her introductions, and Xu Qing looked at the imperial palace, there was a gaze that originated in that very palace and landed on Xu Qing. That gaze then swiveled to Plumdark. After a time, it retracted.

In the looming Star-Plucking Tower stood the imperial preceptor, clad in a long, violet robe, his violet hair cascading down his back. His gaze was soft and warm as he looked down at the lands below. He smiled.

"You're finally here, lil' bro."

Somewhere else in the city was a very busy, very loud, and very extravagant brothel that featured extraordinary architecture and fantastic building materials. Deep in the shrine hall of that brothel was a household shrine. Inside of it was a clay fox.... The clay fox stirred. Her nose twitched.

I smell your primal yang, you naughty little boy....

Chapter 749: Lending Requires Repayment

They reached the end of the white jade road, and were now situated just outside of the capital city of humanity. Li Yunshan and the 30,000 swordsages couldn't proceed any further. Compared to the imperial capital as a whole, their numbers didn't count for much. But their relative unimportance didn't mean they could overstep authority.

Li Yunshan understood that, so after escorting Xu Qing to the end of the white jade road, he took most of the swordsages back to set up camp. Kong Xianglong, along with a hundred swordsages, were assigned to stay with Xu Qing as he entered the capital city with Princess Anhai.

Because of the dramatic situation with the spell formation, the streets in the capital weren't as busy as before. Although the situation had ultimately been resolved, many people still chose to remain

indoors. That said, the place was still more bustling than Sea-Sealing County. And as time progressed, more and more people filled the streets.

As Princess Anhai led Xu Qing and the others through the capital, she continued explaining things to them.

"Xu Qing, the imperial capital has the Five Greater Celestial Divisions and the Five Lesser Celestial Divisions. But there are other things you need to be cautious about.

"For instance, the fact that the Mansion of the Thirty-Three Heavenly Kings... now has only thirty-two heavenly kings." Princess Anhai hesitated briefly, then continued, "In addition to that, you have all the important officials from the imperial court, such as the prime minister, master of records, and the minister of war. [1]

"There are also the imperial princes, who have the authority to establish their own government offices, although their power is limited to the capital city itself.

"After that, you have the ten superpower sects of humankind. Those sects have profound reserve powers, and some of them have a history tracing all the way back to the time of the Ancient Emperors."

Hearing that, the Captain blinked a few times and looked at Princess Anhai. "I heard that one of the most famous of those sects is called... the Summer Immortal Palace?"

The name caused Xu Qing's heart to nearly skip a beat. He looked at Princess Anhai.

Ningyan, though obviously familiar with this place, didn't know as much about matters as Anhai, so his ears perked up as well. Wu Jianwu looked excited as well; anything that had to do with Dark Serenity was something he was interested in.

In contrast, Kong Xianglong didn't seem very interested in the subject, and was instead taking his responsibility seriously, as he was keeping an eye on the surroundings to make sure there were no threats to Xu Qing.

Princess Anhai nodded in response to the question. "The ten superpower sects are... the sect founded by Grand Emperor Starry Sky, the Star Emperor Preeminence Sect; the sect from which came Heavenly King Emptyspirit, the Godharvest Deep Universe Sect; the sect that wields the dao of the underworld, the Ghostwyrm Nethersect; and the sect the imperial preceptor comes from, the Prehistoric Cyan Moon Sect.

"Then come the organizations that have more modern origins: the House of the Nine Deviations of Darkfire; the organization that does business in many major regions, the Red Dust Emotional Suppression Pavilion; the terrifyingly powerful religious group called the Church of Departure; the sect that worships the broken face, and has long been searching for godchildren, Words of Truth; and finally, the sect located in the abyss beneath the Imperial Region, who has a very special mission, the Hidden Earth Society." [2]

Princess Anhai had provided a lot of information. It seemed that every one of the superpower sects had their own unique characteristics. As for the Church of Departure, Xu Qing had long known that they wielded power all throughout Revered Ancient. They preached about departing from Revered Ancient and searching for the holy lands. It had adherents among all species, and though its leadership was generally mysterious, Xu Qing remembered that its leader was called the Arbiter of Destiny. [3]

When it came to the Hidden Earth Society, not even Princess Anhai knew the details of their mission. After all, she didn't know much about Brilliant Heaven. But after hearing about them, Xu Qing already had some speculations. It seemed likely that a sect located in that abyss would likely have a mission that didn't focus on the outside. Rather... they were standing guard over the main entrance.

Xu Qing had also heard of Words of Truth, even way back in the continent of South Phoenix. However, they were quite a mystery to him, as he'd never had any dealings with them. It was only now that he learned they were one of the superpower organizations in the imperial capital.

"Words of Truth worships the broken face?" Xu Qing asked, suspicion flickering in his eyes.

Princess Anhai sighed. "Some people revere the broken face. Some people loathe the broken face. So it's only natural that some people worship the broken face. That's the case among all the countless species that exist, including humans. Words of Truth is similar to the Church of Departure, in that they have adherents of all types.

"Their doctrines revolve around finding godchildren.... They believe that anyone who survives being looked at by the broken face is the family of a god, and has the potential to be a godchild. That's why they look for such people all over Revered Ancient.

"From what I've heard, they highly value any living person out there who has sustained the gaze of the broken face many times, yet hasn't died. And they believe that person isn't just the family of a god, but rather, one of the godchildren they seek. By finding such people, killing them, and sacrificing them as food, they can acquire god power."

Xu Qing didn't say anything in response.

"The final superpower sect," Princess Anhai continued, "is the one you mentioned, the Summer Immortal Palace.

"It's a very unique organization. Supposedly, the Summer Immortal Palace was the very first sect to arise among all the species in Revered Ancient. In fact, in the early days, the Summer Immortal Palace didn't just have human members. Eventually, it broke apart, and nowadays, all major species have a Summer Immortal Palace. "Legend has it that back in the time of Emperor Ancient Spirit, the Summer Immortal Palace worked closely with the heavenly daos, and in some cases could surpass imperial authority. That's why Emperor Ancient Spirit tried to supplant the heavenly daos, because of conflict with the Summer Immortal Palace.

"After the time of Emperor Ancient Spirit, it was Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity who went on to conquer Revered Ancient. After he did, he got rid of the Summer Immortal Palace system, ensuring that nothing could surpass imperial power. He also put treaties in place regarding the Summer Immortal Palaces among other species.

"After that, the Summer Immortal Palace closed their doors and ceased to regularly deal with the outside. Every few thousand years, they'll send out a disciple, not to participate in fighting or wars, but to wander the lands and record the history of the species. Down to this day, the Summer Immortal Palace still abides by the treaties put in place by Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity."

Around this time, they reached an eight-sided pagoda constructed of white wood. The entire structure was surrounded by a white wall; from the fluctuations pulsing off of it, it was clearly designed to keep out intruders.

"The imperial preceptor, who comes from the Prehistoric Cyan Moon Sect, is usually here in the Star-Plucking Tower. But even most of the highest ranking nobles and officials have never seen him. Only father and Fourth Prince know what he looks like.

"Fourth Prince is the imperial preceptor's apprentice. People say the imperial preceptor has truly celestial abilities, and is a genius when it comes to strategy."

Princess Anhai looked up at the clouds surrounding the auspicious tower surrounded by flying beasts.

Xu Qing nodded. It was clearly an expression of goodwill for Princess Anhai to escort him this far, and offer so many explanations.

At the moment, she was looking at Xu Qing. "Young sir, I need to return to my palace. Things can change in an instant here in the imperial capital. People here are complicated, and the relationship networks are even more complicated. Young sir, I just hope you can stay on guard and be cautious."

She gave a curtseying bow. Xu Qing bowed back to her. It was obvious she wanted to make friends with him, and when people were kind to him, he would return the gesture.

"I hope everything goes well for you, Princess. As long as I'm here in the imperial capital, I'm happy to help you with anything. Just say the word."

Anhai smiled and left.

As they watched her depart, Ningyan blinked a few times and was about to say something. Then he glanced at Plumdark and decided to keep his mouth shut.

Of course, Plumdark noticed that. Voice cool, she said, "Ningyan, let's go to your mansion."

Ningyan quickly nodded, then led the way further into the imperial capital.

When imperial princes came of age, they earned the right to live outside the palace. As a result, all of them had personal mansions in the capital city. Ningyan's was located in the north district, which was some distance away. It could even be considered a quiet corner of the city.

The mansion was by no means small. It had three main levels, and on the outside, there was a placid lake that was integrated into the architecture of the mansion. Both in terms of the scenery and the atmosphere, it was very stylistic. The architecture was delicate and refined. Bells hung from the eaves of the buildings, which chimed in the wind. That wind would stir up little waves on the lake, and would also cool down the surroundings.

Plumdark looked around and was clearly very pleased.

Xu Qing could see that this place looked different from the other residences they had passed along the way.

Off to the side, the Captain let loose an exclamation of praise. "A lovely breeze. Rippling waters. The sounds fill the heart and the mind. Very unique. Usually, places like this have some nice treasure sitting around."

He looked at the lake and licked his lips.

Looking with melancholy at the mansion, Ningyan quietly said, "Mom had this place built before she died. She designed everything."

He led them inside, not via flight, but by walking directly across the lake.

As he stepped onto the water, a seven-colored koi fish breached the surface. The sunlight shone onto it in glittering splendor, and its whiskers whipped through the air as it splashed back down. The water droplets made for a very beautiful scene. There were actually many such koi fish in the water, and they seemed intelligent. Recognizing their master, they leaped in and out of the water as they escorted the group to the shore.

Sadly, as soon as they stepped onto solid ground, the dreamy sensation from earlier vanished as they saw how dilapidated the mansion was.

From a distance, it looked fine. But getting close, it was clear that being uninhabited for years, the mansion was in disrepair. The red door was covered with mottled mold. The bells were rusty. And upon opening the main gate, the inner courtyard was full of weeds. It looked very desolate.

Despite the bitterness in his heart, Ningyan forced a smile onto his face and turned to Xu Qing and the Captain.

"I'm home."

Xu Qing clasped Ningyan's shoulder.

At the same time, the Captain waved his hand dismissively. "You have a nice home, Little Ningy. Come. Let's clean it up together. The feng shui here is clearly amazing. Based on my calculations, it all conforms to the pattern of hidden dragons! And that means your future is going to be anything but simple, ya little punk!"

Heart swelling with appreciation, Ningyan nodded. And thus, they went to work cleaning up the mansion. It didn't take very long. With everyone working together, it only took a short time before the mansion was spotless. Kong Xianglong took the swordsages to patrol the area and make sure everything was safe.

After looking through all the rooms, Ningyan felt more down than ever, and just stood there, almost in a daze.

"You okay?" Xu Qing asked.

Ningyan hesitated, and then decided to just explain how he felt. "There's something missing. Something related to my mom. I left in a hurry all those years ago, and couldn't take it with me, so I left it here.

"I don't see it here now, so I just sent a message to Third Sister asking if she had any info. She asked around and found that Tenth Prince personally took it away.

"Tenth Prince's mother comes from the clan that produced King Firecrusher, the number-one heavenly king of humankind. OI' Tenth has a domineering personality, and though the number-one heavenly king never liked him much, few people would dare provoke him. Since he took that thing, it's not going to be easy to get it back."

Xu Qing mulled Ningyan's words over quickly, then turned to look at Kong Xianglong.

Kong Xianglong looked back with glittering eyes. He could tell what Xu Qing was thinking.

"Big Bro Kong, send a jade slip to Tenth Prince at his mansion. Tell him he has one day to return that item."

Chapter 750: Grand Emperor Awakening

Every movement and action taken by Xu Qing and his group was being observed by various organizations in the imperial capital. Everyone was watching. From the moment they entered the Imperial Region, they had been under observation, and that was more the case now that they were in the city.

As soon as Kong Xianglong sent the swordsages out, countless gazes locked onto them. They instantly noted that the swordsages went to Tenth Prince's mansion. Based on various clues and information channels, it didn't take long for people to determine the reason.

Twelfth Prince had lost something that had been stored in his mansion, and it turned out Tenth Prince had taken it without notice. Tenth Prince had a domineering personality, which was why the number-one heavenly king from his mother's clan didn't like him very much. Given that personality, it seemed a given that he would ignore the jade slip delivered to him by the swordsages. "How interesting. I wonder how Xu Qing and his friends from Sea-Sealing County will handle this?"

"When people come to the imperial capital, they either keep a low profile or make a big splash. We'll be able to learn a lot about this Xu Qing based on what happens."

"Maybe the number-one heavenly king doesn't like Tenth Prince very much. But in the end, they're on the same side. This is actually kind of funny."

Organizations and government offices throughout the capital chose to simply observe. That was how they usually dealt with unknown entities. It was essentially an instinct, and generally speaking, it was the most correct course of action.

Xu Qing had sensed what was going on the moment he entered the city. Therefore, as everyone stood by and did nothing, he stepped out into the afternoon light. As he walked down the street, he could sense people watching him from every direction. There were spies in the crowd, and also streams of divine will locked onto his location. There was no question that everything he did here in the imperial capital would be observed by someone. He understood the situation, and knew there was nothing he could do to change it. So he kept his expression neutral.

In terms of what happened after that jade slip reached Tenth Prince, the reality was that Xu Qing didn't care. He had already determined how to resolve the situation.

If Tenth Prince accepted the jade slip, fine. If he didn't.... Xu Qing's eyes glittered coldly. He had already chosen to make a splash. After dealing with the misery of life as a youngster, he had learned through experience. Growing up in the slums, he had made it a practice of killing people who tried to harm him, then hanging their heads on his door as a warning. [1]

In short, he was ruthless. But in addition, he was patient. Patient and vicious. Those qualities came out in different ways depending on the circumstances. And based on Xu Qing's experiences, he felt that, as a newcomer, making a splash right away was the best way to settle conflicts. That was why he hadn't done anything to restrain the ancient sun back when dealing with the spell formation.

So he ignored the people watching him from afar and the spies shadowing him on the street. He walked along calmly, taking in the unfamiliar city that was the top location for all humankind.

Ningyan also went out, as did Plumdark and the Captain, though none of them went with Xu Qing.

Before leaving, Plumdark had exchanged a glance with Xu Qing, and he immediately understood that she was going to start looking for her lamp. Plumdark was completely different from Ling'er. If Ling'er were here, she would want to stay as close as possible to Xu Qing. Not Plumdark. She did things her own way, and had her own way of thinking.

The Captain worked all of the shiftiness out before leaving. Based on his behavior, Xu Qing had no trouble guessing what he was up to. He was going to start figuring out where all the treasure was in the imperial capital. Either that, or he was going to work on tracking down traces of his past lives.

Xu Qing shook his head. As the afternoon sunlight filtered down, he walked past building after building, street after street, all while planning out what to do going forward. This was what he usually did in unfamiliar environments. He kept his guard up and stayed vigilant. It didn't matter how high his status had climbed, that fundamental aspect of his personality hadn't changed. That said, he didn't let it show. He kept everything hidden, just as he had learned to do from others in Seven Blood Eyes. [2]

Tense on the inside, relaxed on the outside. That was his mental state. From an outsider's perspective, he seemed completely calm. As he walked, he mentally reviewed everything Princess Anhai had told him about the state of the imperial capital, including the details of the important officials and the imperial children. After combining that with information that Ningyan had given him, Xu Qing felt that he had a pretty solid understanding.

Three imperial daughters. Twelve imperial sons. Grand Princess and Second Princess entered into marriage alliances with nonhumans... and aren't in the capital.

The emperor had fifteen children. And in many respects, they were the foundation of what happened with all the other organizations. Just about everyone had connections to the imperial children.

Of the imperial daughters, only Anhai has the right to establish a mansion in the city. However, she didn't choose to do that. She stuck close to the emperor. She has a lot of organizations that back her. The patriarch of her mother's clan is the number-two heavenly king, King Eastcauldron, who is actually the commanding officer in the current hostilities with the Nightshades. Now, after the imperial daughters, we have the imperial sons....

Xu Qing looked thoughtfully in the direction of the Nightshade lands.

Grand Prince is an accomplished warrior, but is reckless and disorganized. His mother is a Firemoon Darkheaven, which is a bit awkward for him. He's either hated or viewed with suspicion. Even the emperor doesn't seem to like him very much. After all, despite how his son is such an avid warrior, he hasn't sent him to the front lines, but instead kept him here in the capital.

Second Prince keeps a low profile, and is known to be humble and kind. His grandfather was prime minister in his time, and worked hard to help Emperor Dark War ascend the throne. Although Second Prince's clan never produced a heavenly king, followers of the prime minister can be found in all parts of society.

Third Prince is extremely talented, and is a font of knowledge. He has vassals from all over working in his mansion, including quite a few nonhumans. He's an erudite learner, and thus, it's no surprise he holds a position at the Imperial University.

Fourth Prince is cultured and refined. He's friendly, likes to help others, and is well-liked by his brothers and sisters. Though his mother is a commoner, he earned the approval of the Prehistoric Cyan Moon Sect, and took the imperial preceptor as Master.

As Xu Qing thought about such things, he found himself looking in the direction of the Star-Plucking Tower. He didn't have much information about the imperial preceptor, so it was hard to form any impression of him.

Fifth Prince... has the same mother as Seventh Prince. He has the most impressive battle prowess among the imperial sons, second only to Grand Prince. He's also brave and good at fighting, and has earned the notice of the emperor, who arranged for him to be the apprentice of the number-one

heavenly king. Along with the first heavenly king, he's stationed on the Firemoon border, and rarely comes back to attend court. Because of my past with Seventh Prince, I probably ought to treat Fifth Prince as a potential enemy.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed as he continued with his assessment.

Both Ningyan and Anhai said that Sixth Prince is a real playboy. That said, he treats people well. All the young women in his mansion are completely obsessed with him. In fact, Anhai even mentioned a rumor that the only female heavenly king among the thirty-three heavenly kings, King Wildmist, is also infatuated with him.

And then there's Seventh Prince.... After the death of King Heaventide, he returned here to the capital and hasn't appeared in public.

Xu Qing laughed coldly.

Eighth Prince is known as the richest of all the imperial sons. His mother's clan is the wealthiest merchant clan among all humankind. Eight Prince has financial support from multiple fronts, and is richer than many entire nations.

Ninth Prince is intelligent and skilled. He cares little for the outside world, and focuses completely on matters related to creation. The emperor assigned him to the Creation Division, where he was largely responsible for... creating the Dawning Suns!

As for Tenth Prince, the most important thing about him was that he ranked higher than Eleventh and Twelfth Prince.

Eleventh Prince was Ningyan's twin brother. However, after he died, that left behind only Ningyan. It was all related to their mother. And that was taboo in the imperial capital.

When Princess Anhai had come to that part of her explanation, she transmitted some information to Xu Qing so that Ningyan didn't hear.

"Ningyan's mother was a mortal! She had no talent for cultivation at all. However, she was devastatingly beautiful, and the emperor was deeply in love with her. After she died, he had her portrait hung in the imperial palace, and he takes time every day to look at it. When he does, his expression is one of pain and sorrow. Since then, he hasn't had any other children, and he hasn't let any other wives or daoist partners wait on him. Her death is actually a mystery. Not even I know the details of what happened."

Xu Qing's eyes glittered. He had long come to realize that Ningyan's whole story revolved around his mother. Because of his mother, Ningyan experienced a lot of hardship. At the same time, there were still unexplained mysteries.

Xu Qing stopped and rubbed the bridge of his nose. He looked up into the sky, where the setting sun was turning red. Somehow, he had already walked around the city for about four hours. He had even used teleportation portals a few times. After reviewing all the information he knew about the imperial children, he had a general understanding of the big picture in the capital. That said, he also

knew that what he knew was only the surface. Everyone wore masks, though they were usually manifestations of their inner attitudes.

Xu Qing rubbed his own face.

I suppose I'm the same.

Overhead, the red light from the setting sun created a rosy glow in the clouds. Sunsets like this were beautiful, but at the same time, seemed filled with the color of blood. It made Xu Qing think of a certain day back in Seven Blood Eyes when the same color in the sky had heralded a very tragic event. [3]

Xu Qing's gaze fell onto a huge statue right in front of him.

Without even realizing it, he had walked to the eastern part of the city, close to the rainbow road. And he was standing right in front of the statue of Grand Emperor Swordsage.

Looking at the statue, he thought about the assessment of the heart, and what the grand emperor had shown to him... how the broken face's true body encircled the Revered Ancient mainland. He thought about what was said during that assessment, especially the last thing Grand Emperor Swordsage told him.

"I hope that no matter what happens... you never change!"

As Xu Qing looked at the statue, there were numerous spies in the crowd behind him, watching his every move and keeping others informed of his whereabouts. Divine will proliferated. Numerous government departments were using a variety of methods to keep track of Xu Qing and his actions. After all, he was basically a walking Dawning Sun.

"The subject has gone through three districts and has stopped to study nineteen buildings."

"The subject seems to be memorizing the layout of the city."

"The subject teleported."

"The subject is standing in front of the statue of Grand Emperor Swordsage. He's just looking at it."

"The subject... is bowing to Grand Emperor Swordsage."

"The statue of Grand Emperor Swordsage... is moving!!!"

"What's going on here? The Grand Emperor... is about to wake up??"

As messages sped to different corners of the city, a buzz began to build. All eyes widened with shock and disbelief.

From a distance, the statue of the grand emperor towered high into the sky, as if to guard all humans. Down below, Xu Qing, clad in a green jerkin, respectfully bowed. One of them was massive, the other tiny, and they were separated in life by countless years. But then a hoarse voice

echoed out, seemingly from nowhere, filled with ancient time. It echoed through heaven and earth, thrumming with mightiness.

"You're here."