

Timescape 761

Chapter 761: Title Conferment

As the chief minister's cold voice echoed out, an affirmative response rang out from beyond the entrance.

Moments later, five imperial guards in golden armor entered, pulsing with baleful auras. Though they looked young, they seemed surrounded by the aroma of blood and gore. What was more, the way they kept their energy linked as they walked forward showed how skilled they were at the use of formations. Each imperial guard was in charge of a prisoner. The prisoners included men and women, and all had bleak facial expressions. They were all wounded, and had clearly been ruthlessly interrogated. Their cultivation bases had been crippled.

The imperial guards strode up to the chief minister, where they bowed their heads and forced the prisoners onto their knees. No amount of struggling on the part of the prisoners did any good. With the imperial guards' hands clamped firmly atop the prisoners' heads, they had no choice but to prostrate on the ground.

Xu Qing sat on the first step just above them. Looking down at the five prisoners, he ultimately focused on the first of them, who was on the left-hand side.

He was a middle-aged man whose skin had been peeled off to reveal black paper underneath. The paper was torn, as if someone had ripped a piece off it to use as evidence.

As Xu Qing looked at the man, the man forced his head up and looked back. When their gazes met, Xu Qing's eyes turned cold; he could tell that this was the very same person who had attacked him. He could sense the aura clearly.

As for the other four, Xu Qing had never seen them before.

The chief minister cupped his hands in obeisance, then pointed to the middle-aged man on the left-hand side. "Your Majesty, the investigation into the assassination attempt is complete. This person's name is Pyrrole. He's half-human, half-demon, and he joined the Ghostwurm Nethersect at a young age. He has passable latent talent, but because of some bloodline issues, wasn't able to access his core. His Master wanted to investigate the situation, but a sixty-year-cycle ago, Pyrrole stole the Black Paper Taboo Magic and used it to betray his sect and disappear. He was never seen again after that.

"On the day of the assassination attempt, he used the Black Paper Taboo Magic both to orchestrate the attack and then to flee the imperial capital. It took half a month for the Swordsage Division to track him down and arrest him in the Ninewilds Plains. I've already clarified all the details of the case."

With that, the chief minister bowed his head and waited for the emperor to speak.

The hall was quiet. Everyone was looking at the five criminals and Xu Qing, with different thoughts running through their heads. As for Pyrrole, he was looking at Xu Qing and regretting that he'd failed to kill him. That failure was a tarnished spot on an otherwise amazing record.

"Execute him," the emperor said from the ninth step.

The imperial guard standing behind Pyrrole lifted a saber and slashed it through his neck. That saber was a precious treasure with a mighty power of extermination in it. The moment it passed through Pyrrole's neck, his entire body collapsed into a gory sludge. Even his soul was severed.

The guard lifted the head and showed it to the crowd. The criminal had been destroyed in body and soul. It only took a few moments for the head to collapse into ash.

The chief minister then pointed to the second criminal, who was an old man. His head was bowed, making it impossible to see his facial expression. However, he was severely injured, and also had some spikes driven into his flesh.

“The second to stand accused is Lin He, who operates under the secret codename 379. He currently serves as the deputy envoy of the Ministry of Supervision in the Special Operations Division. He attempted to cover for the guilty party during the investigation, and was also the one to provide details about Governor Xu's whereabouts on the night of the assassination attempt.”

“Execute him,” the emperor said calmly.

The guard behind him slashed down with his saber, killing Lin He in an instant. Moments later, his head collapsed into ash.

“The third to stand accused is Daoist Fire from the House of the Nine Deviations of Darkfire, where he serves as an honor guard. He was responsible for setting up the spell formations in advance. He also used deadly fire magics to facilitate the strategy of water fiends.

“The fourth to stand accused is Sir Fatedark from the Prehistoric Cyan Moon Sect, who ranks even higher than the other three conspirators. He's an elder in his sect, and on the night of the assassination attempt, he used a special item to prevent any fluctuations from leaving that specific street. That item was a heavenly king medallion!”

The chief minister's words struck shock into the hearts of everyone present. Some of them allowed that surprise to show on their faces, while others hid their reaction. The case so far had involved three of the superpower sects, plus the Special Operations Division of the Greater Celestial Divisions. What was more, the Prehistoric Cyan Moon Sect was the home sect of the imperial preceptor. But what was most shocking of all was that the chief minister had mentioned a heavenly king's medallion! That obviously implied that a heavenly king was involved.

“Whose medallion was it?” the emperor asked.

“That of King Heaventide.” The chief minister bowed his head.

The hall remained completely silent.

As for Xu Qing, his face had remained completely emotionless for the entire time, and he hadn't said a single word. He had listened to the chief minister and watched the executions almost as if he were an outsider.

Meanwhile, all gazes in the hall were now fixed on the fifth prisoner.

Based on what the chief minister had explained, the group of prisoners included the actual assassin, the person in charge of the spell formations, the person who had revealed Xu Qing's whereabouts and route, and someone who had interfered with the investigation. But for that medallion to mask fluctuations in the imperial capital meant that it was no ordinary item. Therefore, what he wanted to know now was who had been giving orders to these five conspirators.

The fifth prisoner was an old woman with gray hair, her body covered with wounds. However, her expression was one of boundless wisdom and insight. She gave them the impression that a single glance from her would reveal to her everything about you.

When Xu Qing looked at her, the old woman looked back at him and smiled.

"The fifth to stand accused wasn't directly involved. However, all four of the other conspirators were connected to her in some way.... This person is named Dao Po, and she's from..." The chief minister hesitated briefly. Even when mentioning the heavenly king, he had spoken as smoothly as ever. It was only at this point that he faltered. But then he took a deep breath and continued speaking. "... the Star-Plucking Tower!"

The crowd looked on solemnly.

A moment later, the emperor's voice rang out from the ninth step.

"Go ahead and execute them all."

"Yes, sir!" Three guards raised their glittering sabers, and a moment later, lifted up three heads. The bodies collapsed into gore, and then the heads crumbled into ash.

At that point, the emperor rose from the Dragon Throne.

Everyone in the crowd bowed their heads solemnly. The heavenly marquises in black court attire rose from their cross-legged positions. Xu Qing also stood, his expression somber, but his heart pounding.

"Xu Qing from Sea-Sealing County," the emperor said coolly.

Xu Qing took a step forward then swiveled to face the west. Clasping his hands, he bowed deeply.

"As my loyal subject, you have governed Sea-Sealing well, put Holytide in order, quelled the chaos in Nightspirit, maintained peace and tranquility, safeguarded human lands, and expanded territory dutifully. You are hereby officially appointed as region lord of Holytide, and will receive the full support of the heavenly marquises. What's more, after you attend Imperial University, you will be appointed as a heavenly marquis."

Outside, the dragons roared and exhaled dazzling light.

Massive amounts of destiny aura formed, then rushed into the hall and surrounded Xu Qing. In fact, the clouds on Planet Ancient Emperor stirred, and destiny aura rushed from there to Xu Qing. As the destiny aura converged on Xu Qing, he emanated a five-colored glow. The sable dragon on his court garment flew out into the open, devoured the destiny aura, and then roared to heaven.

This was the traditional human way of conferring titles! It meant that, as of this moment, Xu Qing was being officially protected by the destiny aura of humankind. Of course, he was only being given the title of region lord. Based on what the emperor had said, after Xu Qing went to the Imperial University for training, he would officially be given the title of heavenly marquis. It could only be imagined how shocking the destiny aura would be then.

Outside of the imperial palace, past the rainbow bridge, the Captain and Plumdark sat in a building waiting for Xu Qing.

When the auspicious signs filled heaven and earth, Plumdark nodded slightly. That said, she could sense that the destiny aura was somewhat lacking. *Only five colors, not seven. And there's no umbrella of destiny aura, nor the projections of past sages... the emperor is being a bit stingy.*

The Captain, meanwhile, was salivating like mad. As he looked at the destiny aura, his heart raced. *So much destiny aura.... If I got that, I would easily be able to remove three seals. I want to join the court too!!*

The Captain and Plumdark weren't the only ones to see the auspicious signs. All humans in the imperial capital looked up at the transformations, and soon, a swell of conversation filled the city.

Meanwhile, everyone in the palace hall looked at Xu Qing and cupped hands to salute him according to etiquette. Xu Qing's heart pounded as he sensed his cultivation base rotating faster than ever. This level of destiny aura was providing a big blessing to his battle prowess. As long as he was in human territory, he would be far stronger than before. In fact, he could sense that, mortals or not, as long as there were a lot of humans nearby, that blessing would be immense.

Xu Qing took a deep breath, then bowed to the emperor according to etiquette. At the moment, it didn't matter who the mastermind behind the assassination plot was, or whether or not the executions had just been for show. He would have to look into all of that later. The emperor's conferring of a title put the investigation to an end.

Xu Qing could tell that this title was a true blessing to him. Of course, people would all have their own opinions on what was really going on behind the scenes. There were some things that were a lot more meaningful before they were revealed publicly than after. Furthermore... Xu Qing was getting the feeling that the emperor was playing a game of Go with someone.

As for the identity of that person, based on today's events, plus what the clay fox had warned him about, he got the feeling it was the imperial preceptor, in other words, the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan!

Maybe the mastermind behind the assassination attempt was the emperor, or maybe it was the imperial preceptor. Either way, a successful assassination had never been the true goal. It had just been one move on the game board.

In that case, if one person has made a move, it goes without saying that the other person will also make a move....

As Xu Qing contemplated that, the destiny aura and auspicious signs faded away. At that point, the emperor's voice once again rang out, reaching the outside world, and echoing throughout the imperial palace.

“There is another matter that my people must know about.

“King Eastcauldron has won a great victory, and has now laid siege to the Nightshade imperial capital. More than half of the Nightshade Region is now occupied by our human forces!

“When I ascended the throne, I asked Grand Emperor Swordsage to promise that humankind would win great glory in my lifetime. I completed the work on the Dawning Suns, and thus, the Nightshades that so badly tormented previous emperors are about to be wiped out!

“To celebrate this historic expansion of human lands, I hereby open Planet Ancient Emperor, and allow the elites of humankind, plus the imperial princes, to seek enlightenment of the ancient dao legacies there! Any young one who receives a legacy from a Grand Emperor will receive a dragon pendant from me!”

The emperor's words crashed like thunder in the imperial capital, causing a mountain-toppling, sea-draining commotion. Countless chosen cultivators were shaken to the core.

“Planet Ancient Emperor is being opened for legacy seeking! This is the first time in three hundred years!”

“I'm definitely going to get a legacy!”

Chapter 762: Sit Facing the East; Observe the Stars

This could be considered one of the major ceremonial events of humankind. Planet Ancient Emperor was normally not opened up outside of use for ancestral sacrifices. In order to bring the ancient planet out of a state of sleep, a large amount of human destiny aura needed to be spent. What was more, much of the ancient planet's reserve powers needed to be used.

Back when humans conquered Revered Ancient, that was the location of the imperial palace. Before the broken face arrived, countless species would travel there as a pilgrimage. It was even featured in the art of many species. It represented heavenly might, and was considered a holy land to all.

When Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity and his subordinates left, that planet still maintained its lofty status. That was because it contained the legacies of 108 heavenly marquises who followed the Ancient Emperor, as well as the astonishing daos of the 33 heavenly kings of that time. For example, Li Zihua's legacy was still there.

What generated the most anticipation, though, were the sealing marks left behind by the nine Grand Emperors.

The time of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity was a golden age for humanity, when human destiny aura was at its peak. Because of that, nine amazing Grand Emperors rose up during that time. Any human who acquired the legacy of a Grand Emperor would achieve a seismic change in status and position. What was more, their cultivation would be dramatically affected.

Sadly, Planet Ancient Emperor wasn't opened up very often. As a result, not many people had been able to gain enlightenment of the legacies of the heavenly marquises or heavenly kings, although there were a few cases of successes. As for the Grand Emperor's sealing marks, none had succeeded in acquiring them. Most of the time, the success stories involved the legacies of the heavenly marquises, or lower than that, such as daoist magics left behind by heroic humans who had died in battle.

The numerous organizations and groups in the imperial capital were immediately shaken to the core....

In the Star Emperor Preeminence Sect's Heaven-Gazing Pavilion, Junior Emperor Peng, the same one who had hosted the banquet at the Red Dust Pavilion, opened his eyes.

The emperor is opening up the ancient planet. All human chosen can seek enlightenment of the ancient daos!

His eyes glittered brightly.

Ling Yao has rejected me so many times. Forget her primal yin. As a junior emperor with the bloodline of a Grand Emperor, I'll have a huge advantage with the legacies of Planet Ancient Emperor. If I can get one, then I'll get that dragon pendant and the protection of destiny aura. With that, I can easily step from Spirit Trove and into Void Returning. In fact, if things go well, I could very well reach Smoldering God.

In the northwest of the imperial capital was an ancient temple. From the outside, it looked like any ordinary temple, albeit mottled with age. However, there was another dimension inside, filled with numerous otherworldly paradises.

In one of those otherworldly paradises was a cultivator who resembled a monk. He was middle-aged, with no hair and a tattooed face. Close examination of the tattoos revealed that they depicted the broken face.

A voice spoke to the man, saying, "Burning Star, when Planet Ancient Emperor opens, you will represent Words of Truth to seek enlightenment there."

The middle-aged man opened his eyes and crossed his arms. "Understood," he said. He stood, put on a fresh white robe that included a voluminous hood, and started walking.

With his first step, he blurred. With his second step, he vanished. With his third step, he appeared on the rainbow bridge outside the imperial palace. There, he waited.

Similar scenes played out in all ten of the superpower sects. Out of the Red Dust Pavilion came Ling Yao. Other chosen emerged from the other sects.

In the Five Greater Celestial Divisions, qualified individuals who had been groomed for greatness emerged one by one. It was the same with the Five Lesser Celestial Divisions, and the children from the nobility.

Of course, it was also the same with the imperial princes and princesses.

Grand Princess and Second Princess had entered marriage alliances, and weren't in the imperial capital. Fifth Prince was with the number-one heavenly king, who was guarding the border with the Firemoon Darkheaven people. Grand Prince, who was beloved by the emperor, was not present. Nor were Eighth and Ninth Princes, who had all withdrawn their names immediately. But with those exceptions, all other princes and princesses would participate.

Most people wanted the dragon pendant because of the destiny aura it would provide, and the immense blessings it would bring. As for the imperial princes and princesses... they were more concerned with what the dragon pendant symbolized. After all, this was the first time since Emperor Dark War's ascendancy to the throne... that he was offering the dragon pendant, which symbolized the emperor himself, as a reward.

The implications were profound. And not one person who qualified to participate in this event was a fool. They all understood.

"The emperor is offering his dragon pendant.... If this is real, does it mean that the emperor is going to choose a crown prince?"

"Regardless, though it seems like this event is being put on for all the elites, the reality is that most people will be playing minor roles. The true centers of attention... will be the imperial princes."

"The emperor is going to be assessing his sons to see which one is most deeply approved by the ancestors!"

"Of course, if someone can stand out in seeking enlightenment, then it will be a big opportunity for them!"

As the buzz of conversation filled the city, numerous figures started gathering on the rainbow bridge. Before long, there were several thousand of them.

Inside the imperial palace, the emperor looked out from the ninth stair. With the slight flick of his sleeve, he started walking down the steps.

"My dear subjects, please accompany me as I inspect the future pillars of humankind. The current era is ours, while the future era belongs to them."

The emperor's voice contained rare emotion.

Everyone in the palace hall smiled, and their expressions contained similar levels of emotion. Seemingly mirroring the feelings of their monarch, they followed as the emperor led the way outside.

Xu Qing was among them. As for Ningyan, he purposely slowed down a bit until he was walking next to Xu Qing. The two of them exchanged a glance, and Xu Qing could see the loneliness in Ningyan's eyes. He knew that Ningyan feared the emperor, and also knew that everything which had just played out during the session of court had left Ningyan feeling nervous. Most relevant of all was that, during the entire time, the emperor hadn't even looked at Ningyan, nor said a single word. It was no wonder Ningyan was feeling lonely.

"You'll be fine," Xu Qing said with a nod.

Ningyan breathed a sigh of relief. Xu Qing felt like the big brother he'd never had, and he always felt safe by his side. In fact, he even made sure to step a bit closer to Xu Qing as they walked together. Inside, he felt bitter and sorrowful. On the one side was his own father, on the other side was his friend. And the entire time, his father acted as cold as winter. His father, always mighty and grand, and cold, without a bit of warmth for Ningyan. In contrast, his friend was amiable and trustworthy.

The hundreds of people emerging from the palace instantly attracted the attention of the chosen gathering on the rainbow bridge. With solemn expressions on their faces, they bowed in the direction of the palace hall.

The emperor extended his right hand and pushed it up toward the sky. Wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. Winds screamed. Golden dragons roared. And boundless destiny aura swept from the imperial palace toward Planet Ancient Emperor. As it wrapped around the surface of the planet, dragons roared, almost as if they were cheering.

The destiny aura cheered, and the humans cheered. Planet Ancient Emperor's clouds swirled, moving faster and faster until a heaven-rending, earth-crushing rumbling sound could be heard.

Then Planet Ancient Emperor began to open, like a massive eye. The moment it happened, heaven and earth went dim as boundless auspicious light erupted. The sea of clouds went wild as projected images of countless human heroes appeared in them. A huge vortex formed, out of which spread a shocking gravitational force.

The chief minister, who stood right behind the emperor, looked out at the rainbow bridge and called, "Planet Ancient Emperor is hereby opened. All elites of our species, you have one day. If you don't seek enlightenment now, when will you?"

The thousands of human chosen on the rainbow bridge took to flight immediately, rising into the air and into the gravitational force of Planet Ancient Emperor. They became like meteors shooting through the air. Before long, thousands of figures were just outside of Planet Ancient Emperor. Some sat atop the clouds, others sank into them. All closed their eyes to seek enlightenment. Princes and chosen alike mingled together.

There were different levels to which Planet Ancient Emperor could be opened, and on this occasion, it was limited to the first level. At this level, people couldn't actually enter the planet and reach its surface, but rather, could seek enlightenment in its cloud cover.

The seeking of enlightenment revolved around the legacies that drifted there. They looked differently and behaved differently, with some being very active on the outer layers, while others slept deep within the planet.

As a result, the seeking of enlightenment was like a two-way street. Although the cultivator's own qualities were important, what was of more importance was which legacy from Planet Ancient Emperor approved of them the most.

Xu Qing looked up at the thousands of people on Planet Ancient Emperor, and then he looked at Ningyan. "You should participate."

Ningyan hesitated, looked at Xu Qing, looked at the distant emperor, and then gritted his teeth and flew up toward the planet. A moment later, he was in the clouds above the planet, his expression serious as he settled down cross-legged and closed his eyes.

The emperor's gaze drifted across Planet Ancient Emperor, not stopping on anyone in particular. Eventually, he turned to look at Xu Qing.

"My dearest subject Xu Qing, given your age and cultivation base, if you wish to seek enlightenment, you may."

Xu Qing considered the matter. Under normal circumstances, he definitely would have attempted to seek enlightenment. After all, ancient legacies would always come with immense benefits. But he had other things to consider. He had been working for half a month on the blood pill Plumdark needed, and it was getting close to completion. Until it was done, he needed to check on it regularly and make adjustments.

I need to go check the pill furnace within about four hours. If I don't, all my work up to this point will have been a waste....

Having reached a decision, he bowed to the emperor.

"Many thanks, Your Majesty, but my powers of understanding are ordinary at best. I don't want to waste the destiny aura of humankind."

The emperor didn't make any attempt to persuade Xu Qing to change his mind. Instead, he looked at his guards. The guards knew exactly what that look meant, and they hurried to produce a row of tables outside the palace. When it was done, the emperor sat down, joined by the hundreds of officials who had attended court.

Immortal fruits and fine alcohols were served, allowing the emperor and his officials to watch the younger ones seeking enlightenment. The mood quickly became jovial. Many people chatted and laughed as they assessed the chosen from the various clans and organizations. Most words were those of praise.

Xu Qing suddenly noticed an old man standing next to him clad in blue court attire. The old man clasped hands and smiled.

"Exalted Xu, are you sure you don't want to seek enlightenment? It would be a shame to miss out on a rare opportunity like this."

Xu Qing returned his salute and politely said, "Sadly, I have limited aptitude."

The old man was about to reply when the emperor's voice rang out.

“Ladies and gentlemen, there is no distinction between emperor and official here. Which of my sons do you think is most suitable to become the crown prince?”

Nobody said a word in response. A long moment passed.

Then the chief minister quietly said, “The imperial preceptor assesses astrological phenomena and measures destiny aura. He must surely have an opinion.”

The emperor turned his head slightly to the left. There was nothing there, but the emperor still said, “What do you think, Imperial Preceptor?”

The moment those words left the emperor’s mouth, Xu Qing looked up at the spot to the emperor’s left.

He saw faint fluctuations, indicating a person was there who couldn’t be seen clearly.

Chapter 763: A Call from Planet Ancient Emperor

There are some things that, even if you’re absolutely convinced they will happen, will still impart a sense of shock and wonder when they actually play out. Of course, the level of shock and wonder is commensurate to how much the people involved care about what’s happening. Very dramatic events will lead to greater shock and wonder.

Although the spot to the left of the emperor seemed empty, faint fluctuations emanated from there, along with a gentle voice.

“I think you already know the answer, Your Majesty. Could the words of any other person actually cause Your Majesty to change his mind?”

As the voice echoed out, a person appeared in the empty space next to the emperor, attracting the attention of everyone present. He wore a white daoist robe, looked elegant and refined, and had a head of long violet hair. He seemed magical, like an impermanent spirit in the wind.

When Xu Qing heard that voice, and saw that person materialize, his face remained completely expressionless. However, his right hand slowly clenched into a fist, so hard that veins bulged on its surface. There was no need for any further confirmation or corroboration. Based on the voice and appearance of this person... Xu Qing knew who he was.

A month ago, the clay fox had warned him about this imperial preceptor, causing him to start speculating who he was. And yet, seeing him in person caused surprise and shock to assail him like a tempest.

He had no idea why this person had become the imperial preceptor, or why he had revealed his presence so casually. He also had no idea what sort of relationship this person had with the emperor, or what deals they might have made. He only knew that this person was from Torchlight. He was the one responsible for the death of Master Sixth, had orchestrated the coup in Sea-Sealing County, and... was Xu Qing’s mortal enemy who he couldn’t stand to live under the same sky with!

He only knew that this person... was that very same crow he’d sworn to kill! [1]

Xu Qing was not like he’d been in the past, when a single look at the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan would cause him to experience a breakdown. He could control his emotions much better now,

and was able to conceal them in the depths of his heart. Therefore, though Xu Qing's gaze hardened and he inhaled deeply, he just listened to what everyone else was saying.

“Greetings, Imperial Preceptor.” Everyone in the crowd bowed hands and respectfully uttered the same greeting.

In traditional human society, imperial preceptors didn't have any true power, but they were very important, and were generally second only to the emperor and the Grand Emperors.[2]

The emperor waited for everyone to greet the imperial preceptor, and then he smiled faintly as he looked at Planet Ancient Emperor.

Meanwhile, the imperial preceptor turned slightly in place to reveal that he was wearing a mask. It was a white mask featuring a smiling face. It looked very grish, and yet most people who looked at him wouldn't even notice the mask, as his eyes were so radiant that they captured all attention. As he looked at the gathered officials one by one, he nodded in greeting, until... his gaze reached Xu Qing.

Xu Qing looked at him.

The imperial preceptor smiled. He was arrogant in his own way, and did things the way he liked. If some other person was the imperial preceptor, they might choose not to reveal their true body the way he had. But he was the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan! He wasn't the type of person who would hide in the shadows, nor would he let his own goals influence how he acted. Therefore, he slowly reached up and took off his mask, revealing his true face to all of the officials.

It was the first time these officials had ever seen his face. Previously, only the emperor knew what he looked like. Up to this point, the most anyone else had seen was a white robe and a smiling white mask. But now, as he took the mask off and revealed his face, many people couldn't prevent shocked and bewildered looks from appearing on their own faces.

That was because... he looked about seventy-percent the same as Xu Qing! His face was somewhat paler, and also colder and more nefarious. Yet his radiant eyes didn't seem to contain even a trace of impurity. He had heroic, sword-like eyebrows, thin pursed lips, and angular features. Altogether, the imperial preceptor looked like a white dragon, incredibly beautiful, but also profoundly cold.

No one in the crowd said or did anything, but their minds were all racing. After all, the imperial preceptor and Xu Qing didn't just look similar physically. There was something else about the way they carried themselves that was very much alike.

Although such similarities could technically be the result of various magical techniques, that wasn't something the imperial preceptor would do considering his status. Therefore... there was only one explanation.

And that explanation caused everyone to think deeply about what was going on. Then people started thinking about the assassination attempt, whereupon many furtive glances were cast in the emperor's direction.

Meanwhile, the imperial preceptor ignored the gazes of the crowd. Smiling warmly at Xu Qing, he said, “We meet again, lil' bro.”

Xu Qing looked back calmly at the imperial preceptor, not saying a word.

“I wasn’t behind the assassination attempt,” the imperial preceptor continued. “Such things are beneath me. I would never do something like that.”

Turning, he sat down next to the emperor and looked up at the chosen on Planet Ancient Emperor. The officials all did the same.

Xu Qing’s facial expression didn’t change. It was almost as if he hadn’t even seen the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan. He just sat there as if nothing had happened, all while keeping his attention on Ningyan. He also calculated how long it was before he needed to leave. He had to do those things to control the tempest in his heart.

Everything was as quiet and still as a lake with no wind or waves. Yet every single person was shocked, to the point that, if their shock could all be combined, it would turn into an astonishing tidal wave. As the quiet persisted, time passed. Eventually, two hours had gone by.

At that point, there was finally a development among the various chosen seeking enlightenment on Planet Ancient Emperor.

Among the thousands of cultivators seated cross-legged in the clouds, there were some around whom auspicious signs appeared, turning into supernatural phenomena that shone with dazzling light. That indicated that the person had either succeeded, or was about to. And the amount of auspicious phenomena and shining light would indicate how deep their enlightenment was.

There were many more people who were still in the middle of the process. Those who succeeded had not gained enlightenment of any of the heavenly marquises’ legacies, but rather, the legacy daos of heroes who had died over the years in war. They included divine abilities, techniques, and the like. Though they weren’t on the same level as the heavenly marquises’ legacies, they were still destined opportunities.

“That’s the combined sword technique of Chen Qinghai, the commander of 10,000 men who was a close follower of Grand Emperor Swordsage. Not bad. Not bad at all. The chosen sent out by the Swordsage Division are extraordinary. That legacy is second only to one from a heavenly marquis!”

“The heroic martyr Chen Qinghai isn’t the only one whose legacies have been acquired. Look over there, everyone. See that yin-yang statue? You can find a description of that in certain ancient records. It’s the Black-White Fiendification Art. I’m not familiar with whoever’s gaining enlightenment of it. Based on their outfit, they’re presumably a disciple from the Godharvest Deep Universe Sect.”

As the officials chatted about the proceedings, the atmosphere started to grow lively. More and more disciples were gaining enlightenment. Auspicious, multicolored light shone up constantly from the planet. Whenever someone succeeded in gaining enlightenment, they would be teleported off Planet Ancient Emperor and back to the rainbow bridge. Each person only had one chance to seek enlightenment.

Xu Qing was looking in Ningyan's direction. By the time two hours passed, nothing had happened with Ningyan. He was obviously working very hard, yet hadn't had any success. Xu Qing wasn't worried. Ningyan had good aptitude, and even if he didn't acquire something on the level of the heavenly kings, he would surely benefit somehow.

With such thoughts on his mind, Xu Qing looked away from Ningyan and at the others, all while trying to dispel the tempest in his heart. For the most part, he didn't recognize any of the chosen participating in the enlightenment session. That said, based on their clothing, he could identify the imperial princes. Plus, there were a few people he had seen before.

For example, there was Princess Anhai, as well as Seventh Prince. As for the latter, it was Xu Qing's first time seeing him since arriving in the imperial capital. When Xu Qing spotted Seventh Prince, his gaze turned cold. However, seeing that he wasn't surrounded by any auspicious signs or dazzling light, he decided to check closer on Princess Anhai.

But then, his heart surged, and he suddenly shifted his gaze to a spot in the clouds where no one was seeking enlightenment. The swirling clouds there seemed thinner than in other locations, making it just barely possible to make out some mountains of Planet Ancient Emperor beneath it.

Those mountains were what attracted Xu Qing's attention. It was a great distance away, and it was only the top cloud layer of Planet Ancient Emperor that had been opened. No one could actually go to the surface of the planet. And yet, Xu Qing could sense some faint fluctuations coming from the lands of the planet. Despite how faint they were, they seemed to be calling out to him.

As Xu Qing examined the area with the thin clouds, he saw that though there were people seeking enlightenment nearby, none were actually in that specific area.

It was almost as if... they couldn't sense that call because it was too specific.

What is that...? Is it a legacy?

From what Xu Qing could tell, the bits of enlightenment sought and received by everyone else were like thoughts drifting among the clouds. In contrast, this call from the mountains was a unique energy from a physical object of some sort.

As Xu Qing pondered what that meant, the clouds on Planet Ancient Emperor shifted again, rising up to cover everyone except for one person.

The dramatic motion of the clouds attracted the attention of the onlookers. Everyone looked over to see a huge vortex forming around the one person that was visible. A most holy sign appeared around that person as well, 30,000 meters tall. What was more, golden fire spread out around him.

"The legacy of a heavenly marquis!"

"That's the daoist magic of Exalted Celestial Flame Halberd, who ranked number ten among the 108 heavenly marquises."

"The person gaining enlightenment... is the grandson of the minister of war. It's Meng Yunbai!"

Within the imperial capital, people from powerful organizations and rogue cultivators alike were looking at Planet Ancient Emperor and were visibly moved. Even many of the other seekers of enlightenment opened their eyes and looked in the direction of Meng Yunbai, their eyes glittering with surprise, confusion, envy, and defiance. Outside of the imperial palace, the gathered officials smiled, and the emperor's eyes shone with praise.

Xu Qing was the only one who, after briefly glancing at Meng Yunbai, shifted his attention back to that area of thinning clouds with the mountains beneath it.

The call is getting a lot stronger....

Chapter 764: Dancing in Vain to the East Wind

Xu Qing thought about it for a moment. He was getting the sensation that, as more of the chosen succeeded at gaining enlightenment, the summoning call from Planet Ancient Emperor was getting stronger. He couldn't be absolutely certain. But it felt like the clouds and auspicious light were somehow strengthening the call.

Xu Qing had no idea why that might be happening. Nor did he know what was in those mountains. But there was one thing he was certain of. Whatever was in the mountains was astounding.

He tried to respond to the call. To sense more about it. No such efforts amounted to anything. It didn't have anything to do with his physical position. After all, he hadn't gone to seek enlightenment, so he didn't need to be seated cross-legged in the clouds. Besides, his current position could also be considered very close to the planet.

As a result, the biggest obstacle to any response from Xu Qing were the sealing marks covering the planet itself. The emperor had only opened the outer layer of seals. Beneath that layer were many more successive layers, almost like egg shells, one after another. Those outer shells couldn't stop the summoning call, but they could block Xu Qing's response to it.

As Xu Qing continued to ponder the situation, he sensed the call increasing in intensity again. Eyes narrowing, he looked at the planet as a second vortex suddenly appeared.

The first cloud vortex had sprung up for Meng Yunbai when he acquired the heavenly marquis legacy. The second was forming around a bald, middle-aged cultivator wearing a hemp robe.

He was from Words of Truth, and his name was Flame Star. At the moment, he was surrounded by the projection of a crimson scorpion. Even from a distance, it was possible to see the scorpion howling to heaven, its tail swaying. It even formed afterimages as it rocked back and forth. The scorpion even influenced the outside world, sending out a fiendish aura in all directions. The vicious thing also emanated a terrifying aura that was no weaker than the holy sign caused by Meng Yunbai's enlightenment. What was more, it seemed far more brutal.

The two vortexes were in two different locations on Planet Ancient Emperor, and though they exerted an influence on each other, they were also limited to their own specific area. That said, they did affect the other chosen, causing them to be covered over by clouds.

"It's only been two hours, but there are already two chosen who've gained enlightenment of heavenly marquis legacies. It seems this Nightshade war has really bolstered our human destiny aura."

“What a pity one of them is from Words of Truth....”

“People from Words of Truth really are eccentric weirdos. On an individual basis, they’re sometimes tolerable. After all, they mostly focus on painstakingly practicing cultivation all the time. But if you start getting into their teachings, you’ll find that they’re even more insane than the Church of Departure.”

Xu Qing didn’t pay much attention to the chatter around him. He was focused completely on the summoning call. As of now, he was convinced that the successes at enlightenment were strengthening the call, especially the heavenly marquis legacies.

Whenever someone succeeds at enlightenment, it’s as if something inside Planet Ancient Emperor is absorbing the streams of consciousness. And that process is loosening the seals on the planet. That’s why the call is getting stronger.

As Xu Qing came to that understanding, he kept a close eye on the clouds, all while hoping that more people succeeded at gaining enlightenment.

That was when a familiar voice spoke from next to the emperor, which drifted out and reached Xu Qing’s ears.

“Your Majesty, not much time has passed, and already, some of our human chosen have gained enlightenment. Why not open up another sealing level? Although it will reduce the amount of time, it should also increase the chances of success.”

The person who had spoken was none other than the imperial preceptor.

Everyone looked over at the emperor. When Planet Ancient Emperor was opened up, each sealing layer made the legacies in the clouds stronger, but at the same time, reduced the overall length of time that the seals would remain open.

The emperor turned his head slowly to look at the imperial preceptor.

The preceptor smiled.

A long moment passed, and then the emperor said, “Very well.”

When the emperor gave orders, they would be strictly enforced. The moment the words left his mouth, intense rumbling sounds echoed out from Planet Ancient Emperor, and the destiny aura became countless golden dragons. Another sealing layer was being opened up.

More clouds seethed, and radiant light spread to cover the entire ancient planet. What was more, thanks to the boost provided by the opening of the sealing layer, dozens of chosen almost instantly succeeded at gaining enlightenment. And there were two of them who acquired heavenly marquis legacies.

One of them was Junior Emperor Peng from the Star Emperor Preeminence Sect. As a vortex sprang into being around him, his expression was one of defiance; he actually wasn’t pleased, yet wasn’t in the position to give up.

The other person was one of the imperial princes. Sixth Prince!

Many people took note of the fact that Sixth Prince was the first of the imperial princes to gain enlightenment. Sixth Prince was normally a licentious playboy whose mansion was filled with beautiful girls, and who seemed to have little interest in life other than throwing big parties. In fact, many people hardly associated Sixth Prince with the concept of cultivation. He didn't seem to care about power and influence, and only cared for romance. What was more, his relationship with the female King Wildmist was unusual and somewhat suspicious. Yet today, he was the first to succeed at enlightenment.

The heavenly marquis legacy he acquired was different from any of the others. It came from the dao of Marquis Flowermidst, and was primarily a dual cultivation technique....

“It actually fits perfectly with Sixth Prince’s personality and temperament. That must be why he succeeded at enlightenment.”

Within the crowd, some people smiled and some people frowned. The emperor revealed no facial expression at all, making it impossible to tell if he was pleased or not. The imperial preceptor smiled faintly.

Xu Qing wasn't paying attention to Sixth Prince and his success. Because the second sealing layer on the planet had been opened, the summoning call had become even stronger. In fact, after the two heavenly marquis legacies, the call grew shockingly intense to Xu Qing's senses. What was more, he could now tell for certain that the call was targeting him specifically. No one else had sensed it.

What exactly is it...?

As Xu Qing pondered that question, time passed.

Thanks to the second sealing layer being opened, successes occurred almost constantly. Over the course of an incense stick's worth of time, the eyes of all the participants began to shine brightly.

A storm was building on Planet Ancient Emperor, spreading to cover the entire planet, and even covering the vortexes caused by the heavenly marquis legacies. Within that storm was visible a figure, seemingly walking out from ancient times, step by step. He was burly and tall, with a suit of blood-red armor, long crimson hair, and a pressure that caused the entire imperial capital to tremble.

“Heavenly king!”

“That's King Nightslaughter!”

“He was a close follower of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity, and waged war against 137 species. Every single battle he fought was a massacre. Eventually, the emperor appointed him as the leader of five regions. I can't believe it's King Nightslaughter!”

Everyone in the crowd was stunned, and the populace of the imperial capital was shaken to the core. This was the first time in a thousand years that the legacy of a heavenly king had appeared!

The person gaining enlightenment of this heavenly king legacy wasn't a chosen from one of the sects. It was the talented and erudite Third Prince who was currently assigned to a position at the

Imperial University. From a distance, it was possible to see the tempest surrounding Third Prince, causing his hair to whip around him wildly. His facial features were delicate, yet heroic. Within his narrow eyes swirled streams of light that added luster to his appearance.

His success caused smiles to appear on the faces of the officials, and resulted in many words of praise. The emperor even nodded slightly.

Of course, no one had any idea if all of this was happening naturally or if it had been set up.

Regardless, the nod from the emperor revealed his attitude, and to many people, it was a signal.

Yet even as Third Prince made a scene, another loud rumbling sound echoed out from Planet Ancient Emperor. This time, it came from a different direction. It came from Fourth Prince. There, a massive tornado sprang up, suppressing all of the heavenly marquis vortexes and those gaining enlightenment within them.

It was the second heavenly tempest to spring up on the planet.

The projection of another heavenly king appeared, striding forward. Before the figure could even become clear, Fourth Prince opened his eyes from within the storm and viciously slapped his own chest. That blow caused blood to spray out of his mouth, which transformed into a blood-red umbrella that floated over his head, preventing any enlightenment.

The heavenly king stopped walking, then slowly faded away along with the tempest. That scene caused the eyes of many onlookers to glitter. Some distance away, Third Prince noticed what was happening and scowled.

“He actually rejected that heavenly king legacy!”

“You only get one chance at enlightenment, and if you accept something, it means you can’t accept anything else. Fourth Prince stopped the enlightenment before it really began, which means he actually has another opportunity.”

“Not even that is satisfactory for him? I guess that means he wants the legacy of a Grand Emperor. If it works, people will call him courageous. But if it doesn’t work, he’ll be called a moron!”

Fourth Prince’s actions made him quite the center of attention. Many in the audience looked over to see how the imperial preceptor was reacting. After all, Fourth Prince was the imperial preceptor’s successor apprentice. And when you consider how the emperor had reacted to Third Prince’s enlightenment, there were obviously layers of meaning to unpack.

The atmosphere outside the palace was lively. However, just as before, Xu Qing wasn’t paying attention to any of that. He was still focused on that summoning call. And he was frowning.

When Fourth Prince seemed on the verge of succeeding at enlightenment, that summoning call had surged like the tide. But then Fourth Prince gave up, and that tide ebbed.

Xu Qing looked at Fourth Prince briefly. He instinctively disliked him, but at the same time, had to admit that his powers of understanding were shocking.

After about an incense stick's worth of time had passed after Fourth Prince abandoned the heavenly king legacy, intense ripples spread out on Planet Ancient Emperor. Numerous golden dragons roared, and the destiny aura surged like the sea. Blinding light erupted from the planet, suppressing the tempests of the heavenly king legacies, and attracting the attention of everyone in the imperial capital. Outside the palace, many officials rose to their feet with serious expressions on their faces.

“Those fluctuations....”

“They surpass those of heavenly king legacies. Don't tell me....”

The imperial palace went silent. The populace of the imperial capital all had grave expressions on their faces. And Fourth Prince was incapable of concealing how excited he was as he looked up.

Shockingly, a host of figures were appearing in the sky of Planet Ancient Emperor. They were illustrious figures from the past, including heavenly marquises and heavenly kings. As they appeared in dazzling glory, it was to the shock of all onlookers that they faced Fourth Prince and bowed!

That struck the onlookers to the core. After all, according to the ancient records, that was the sign of successful enlightenment of Grand Emperor sealing marks! This was the first time anything like this had happened during the reign of Emperor Dark War!

Then it became obvious that the illustrious figures from the past weren't bowing to Fourth Prince. Rather, they were bowing toward Planet Ancient Emperor, where a spectacular mountain was rising up. As the mountain floated up into the air, it crumbled, revealing something sharp that had been concealed inside.

It was a sword! The sword of Grand Emperor Swordsage!

Emperor Dark War's expression was grave as he shot to his feet and looked at The Emperor's Sword. The officials behind him reacted similarly, their eyes shining brightly as they looked at Fourth Prince. The other imperial princes were similarly moved.

This dramatic legacy ensured that Fourth Prince stood out above all others.

Then, as Fourth Prince excitedly reached up to The Emperor's Sword, Xu Qing, who had also risen to his feet, looked at the sword and realized that the call was coming from it. And then... he extended his hand.

The Emperor's Sword rising from Planet Ancient Emperor vibrated and then emitted a sound like metal scraping against rock. It burst into motion, shooting past Fourth Prince. Fourth Prince was stunned as the sword whistled by, creating such a strong wind that he was shoved away from it. Yet his gaze followed it as it shot toward the imperial palace....

Chapter 765: Bear The Emperor's Sword, Walk the World

Images of illustrious individuals from the past congregated on Planet Ancient Emperor. The seething clouds erupted, creating blooms like flower blossoms that turned into canopies. Dazzling light illuminated the canopies with five auspicious colors. Golden dragons swirled in the air, inhaling and exhaling energy, which completely obscured the other chosen seeking enlightenment.

The chosen, sensing what was happening, opened their eyes and looked in the direction of the dazzling light shooting toward the imperial palace. Everyone was bewildered.

Ningyan was in the group, his eyes wide and his mind spinning. His gaze was focused on that dazzling light, and within it, The Emperor's Sword. The sword was made of ancient bronze, had decorative patterns carved into it, and seemed completely domineering and overwhelming.

It happened so suddenly that people didn't really have a chance to react before the heaven-rending, earth-crushing Emperor's Sword had arrived in front of the imperial palace. Without even a slight pause, the sword shot toward the group gathered there. The air shattered, and the palace trembled. Much of the palace crumbled, to the shock of everyone present.

The majestic sword pulsed with the destiny aura of humankind, and contained something profoundly ancient. It passed by the emperor himself, went along the right-hand side of the chief minister, and shot through the crowd toward... Xu Qing's right hand.

In the blink of an eye, the sword lurched to a halt right above Xu Qing. An intense thrumming sound filled the air, and the sword, as if seeking its own master, slowly lowered into Xu Qing's hand. He closed his fingers around the hilt. The moment he did, thunderous rumbling echoed out. The illustrious figures from the past were all compelled to follow the ancient ceremonial forms, and clasped hands submissively.

All of the officials gathered in front of the palace were cultivators, and regardless of their personality or cultivation base, they could be considered dragons amongst men. But right now, they were shaken to the core as they looked at Xu Qing and the sword he held.

The bronze Emperor's Sword was four feet and seven inches long, with an incredibly sharp edge and a domineering sword energy. It seemed like a sword that could sever heaven. It glittered as Xu Qing held it, sending out towering sword light that stirred the wind and clouds. Everyone who could see it with their own eyes felt drawn to it. That sword light would cause all other divine weapons to turn dark, and could force an army of a thousand into retreat.

The ground quaked as ancient sword light became a force that could topple the ages. White light contained suns and moons, while violet energy harnessed the constellations of the Dipper and Ox.

[1]

Everyone was deeply shaken. As of now, the thousands of chosen seeking enlightenment were irrelevant. It didn't matter how they gained enlightenment or what kind of show they put on. Xu Qing was so superior that he was on a completely different level. All of them had gained enlightenment of legacies, while Xu Qing had waved his hand and summoned The Emperor's Sword!

It was especially noteworthy because it was the sword of Grand Emperor Swordsage! The meaning was profound.

Grand Emperor Swordsage had been the founder of the Sword Division, and after that, the Swordsage Division. He defended humankind down to the very end. What was more, his sword could be used to cut down anyone who posed an obstacle to the development of humankind. Even the emperor!

It didn't take long for people to realize what sword this was, and what its background was. And then they thought about how, when Xu Qing first arrived in the imperial capital, he had caused the Grand Emperor to wake up. Now it seemed obvious that these two separate events were connected.

“The successor of the Sword Division!”

The gathered officials looked at Xu Qing and they looked at The Emperor's Sword. Although various thoughts ran through their heads, all of them looked respectful, although it wasn't directed at Xu Qing specifically, but at The Emperor's Sword.

Xu Qing, meanwhile, was also shaken as he looked at the sword. Then he thought about what Grand Emperor Swordsage had said to him when they met. Everything... fit together. That said, Xu Qing wasn't exactly happy. The moment he took hold of that sword, his suspicion from earlier was confirmed. The Grand Emperor was going to perish, and Xu Qing was being bequeathed an important responsibility. Maybe he wasn't the only one the Grand Emperor would bequeath with responsibility, but either way, the sword was extremely important.

Inside, Xu Qing sighed and prepared to put the sword away. But before he could, sword light flared, creating a sea of light that completely surrounded Xu Qing. Then the sword flew out of his hand and shot toward his forehead. In the blink of an eye, The Emperor's Sword and its sword light vanished inside. A tremor passed through him as his three god troves rumbled into being behind him, emanating terrifying pressure.

At the same time... a fourth secret trove appeared! It was only a vague outline, but it was there. And it caused Xu Qing's cultivation base to rise and his energy to improve. The fourth secret trove was nothing but a mass of mist, but if you looked closely, you would see The Emperor's Sword inside of it. It was powering up, all while emanating a shocking sharpness that could cause ghosts and gods alike to weep. This was an Emperor's Sword secret trove!

The moment it appeared, Xu Qing's three god troves trembled and emanated godly might. The Emperor's Sword secret trove wasn't outdone, as it pulsed with astonishing sword might.

Unlike Xu Qing's god troves, it had nothing to do with gods. But The Emperor's Sword still had terrifying power, and also a very high level of personhood. That said, Xu Qing couldn't unleash it yet, as he couldn't control it.

That was because it contained a sword with a mission. It wasn't something that human willpower could manipulate. Rather than saying that it had recognized Xu Qing as its lord and master, it was more proper to say that the Grand Emperor had chosen him as the bearer of the sword.

He was to carry The Emperor's Sword out in the world. The sword was actually waiting. It needed an appropriate moment to attend to its mission, whereupon it would fly out from the secret trove with deadly force.

Of course, as the bearer of the sword, Xu Qing would benefit greatly from the sword will and energy it emitted. As Xu Qing looked at the Emperor's Sword secret trove, he gained understanding in his heart. The sword thrummed as the secret trove faded and disappeared along with the three god troves. Heaven and earth went silent.

The emperor looked at Xu Qing deeply, then smiled. “Well done.”

Next to him, the imperial preceptor's facial expression didn't change. The smile didn't leave his face.

Xu Qing looked at the imperial preceptor and attempted to summon The Emperor's Sword. If it worked, then he would use its power right here and now. Sadly... the Emperor's Sword didn't stir. Xu Qing sighed inwardly.

When the sword disappeared, the fluctuations on Planet Ancient Emperor died down. The images of the figures of the past faded away, and everything went back to normal. The legacy storm around Third Prince reappeared. Everything was just like it had been before The Emperor's Sword appeared. The rest of the chosen seeking enlightenment couldn't help but feel defeated. Only a few of them maintained an even keel.

Ningyan was one of the latter. He had been shocked at first, but knowing what he did about Xu Qing and his background, it was actually not very surprising.

Another who continued on as before was Third Prince. He was more than happy to see Xu Qing take action. After all, if Fourth Prince had succeeded at gaining enlightenment of a Grand Emperor's legacy, then the entire event would have centered around Fourth Prince's unparalleled accomplishments. Things had actually turned out perfectly as far as Third Prince was concerned.

Of course, everything that played out really stirred up Fourth Prince emotionally. He normally looked cultured, refined, civilized, and benevolent. But today... as he sat there cross-legged in the clouds, he looked in the direction of the imperial palace with a grim look on his face. He knew that he had just lost a lot of face. What was more, he came out looking like a moron. A laughingstock. His legacy had been whisked away from him, and in the presence of his own Master and father.

However, after only a few breaths of time passed, his expression returned to normal. He once again looked cultured and refined. He even clasped hands in the direction of the imperial palace, which was a show of respect to The Emperor's Sword and also an expression of congratulations to Xu Qing. Having a disposition like that only made him more likable to most people.

Though Fourth Prince looked calm and relaxed, there were other people who didn't seem ready to abandon the opportunities presented to them.

Therefore, even as Xu Qing was calculating the time and preparing to use The Emperor's Sword as a pretext to take his leave, someone stood up on the rainbow bridge, just in front of the guards in golden armor. Clasp hands, he bowed in the direction of the imperial palace.

“Greetings, my Emperor! I am your humble servant Tuo Muwei, born in the Dropcloud Region, and returned to my people a sixty-year-cycle ago. Just now, I personally witnessed Region Lord Xu steal Fourth Prince's legacy in front of a huge crowd. I simply can't let this stand!

“We cultivators need a clear mind to make progress. What's more, you previously announced to the public that humankind needs to improve its martial abilities. Therefore, your humble servant would like to be so bold as to ask Region Lord Xu for some guidance in that regard.

“Please, grant me permission, Emperor!”

Tuo Muwei was a burly man wearing a long hemp robe. He was tall and muscular, with free-flowing hair and sharp eyes that pulsed with death. He emitted the fluctuations of the great circle of Spirit Trove. He had five secret troves behind him, and clearly specialized in body refinement. As he stood there, his energy and blood surged, and the secret troves behind him combined to make a blood cloud that spread in all directions.

The moment he spoke, all eyes outside the imperial palace turned to focus on him.

Up on Planet Ancient Emperor, Fourth Prince suddenly looked up, and his eyes glittered with killing intent. Tuo Muwei was actually part of his organization, but Fourth Prince hadn't put him up to this. In fact, this was actually a very unfavorable development for Fourth Prince. Although a clever person would realize there was more going on here than met the eye, the reality was that even baseless rumors could have a profound effect.

What was more, if his father became displeased, then it wouldn't matter if the accusations were false. He could still be affected. Thus, killing intent burned in Fourth Prince's heart. Rising to his feet, he bowed in the direction of the imperial palace.

“Tuo Muwei!” he shouted. “How dare you harbor evil intentions! Back down immediately!”

Tuo Muwei bowed his head. “Orders received. I, Tuo Muwei, have acted impulsively. However, Region Lord Xu's actions are truly malevolent and greedy to the extreme. He doesn't deserve the title he was conferred with, and definitely does not deserve to have The Emperor's Sword!”

His words caused Fourth Prince's face to become a mask of fury. Though Tuo Muwei had bowed his head, the words he spoke were actually like a deadly weapon. Fourth Prince was just preparing to berate him further when the emperor spoke in a cool voice.

“For throwing the ceremony into chaos, you shall be executed.”

Two of the guards in the golden armor hefted their sharp swords and then slashed them down. When the emperor gave orders, they were strictly enforced. And thus, the swords sliced into Tuo Muwei... and chopped him into four pieces, which flopped onto the ground. Everyone maintained reverent attitudes.

As for Xu Qing, he had been calm the entire time, as none of this was his responsibility. Now, he clasped hands to the emperor.

“Your Majesty, after acquiring The Emperor's Sword, my secret trove is somewhat unstable. I hereby request permission to leave and stabilize my enlightenment.”

“Permission granted.” The Emperor looked up at the planet.

Xu Qing turned, nodded to the crowd, and then walked across the Immortal Reception Plaza and out the door, completely ignoring the corpse on the ground.

The wind blew as he calmly left.

Chapter 766: Planet Ancient Emperor's Mysterious Ceremony

As Xu Qing walked out of the main entrance of the imperial palace, his audience with the emperor was officially over. However, his heart was in turmoil. He felt like there was a wild animal inside of him trying to break out. He did his best to maintain control, keeping his facial expression calm as he walked toward the Captain and Plumdark, who were waiting for him outside. He even smiled.

The Captain seemed distracted, presumably by Xu Qing's performance. In contrast, Plumdark remained focused.

Therefore, all it took was a single look at Xu Qing for Plumdark to make the decision to leave with him. The Captain stayed, claiming that he wanted to wait for Ningyan. However, given the way the Captain was eyeing Planet Ancient Emperor with such longing, Xu Qing could imagine that he was probably planning some big job. The look in his eyes was the one that appeared when he was gathering information.

Xu Qing's audience with the emperor had resulted in significant gains. First, he acquired a title that came with a lot of destiny aura. Second, he confirmed the identity of the imperial preceptor. And third, he acquired The Emperor's Sword.

That said, Xu Qing wasn't pleased with his performance, as some things hadn't gone smoothly. Of even greater significance was that he couldn't allow his thoughts to calm down. If he did that, his mind would fill with killing intent toward the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan.

Plumdark, with her keen senses, had picked up on that. It didn't matter how Xu Qing tried to hide it, she could sense... that there was a tempest raging within him. Thus, she took his hand just as he had done with hers in *Forbidden by the Immortal*. Warmth seeped into him.

"Let's go home," she said.

They exchanged a glance as the wind stirred their hair. Xu Qing took a few breaths, then started walking. As he did, he quietly explained all the details of what had happened.

Plumdark listened attentively. When they got back to Ningyan's mansion, they stood on the shore of the lake. Plumdark spoke, her voice soft and gentle.

"You handled yourself well when you saw the crow. And I agree with your conclusions. There's no way the emperor doesn't know the crow's true identity. And that means... the two of them must have some sort of deal with each other.

"The fact that the sword wouldn't stir against the crow isn't very surprising. The sword is intended to benefit the public, not be used for private situations. It can sense transformations to the destiny aura of humankind, and can be used in critical moments to prevent catastrophes.

"The areas you're not content with during your meeting with the emperor are, frankly, harmless. I suspect the emperor and the crow are playing a game of Go with each other, and each is focused on their own game pieces.

"When it comes to your killing intent toward the crow, the reality is that until you're absolutely certain you can kill him, you need to keep yourself safe. Endure the killing intent. That's the most important thing.

“Our trip here to the imperial capital is destined to be full of twists and turns. But remember, Ah Qing, you’re not in this alone. Whatever you do... I’ll be here with you. If you want to kill the crow, then let’s wait until the right opportunity comes along, and we can do it together!”

The surface of the lake shimmered as a fish jumped out of the water, then splashed down, causing ripples to flow out in all directions.

Xu Qing looked at Plumdark and nodded.

“Okay,” Plumdark said with a smile. “I know you came back early because you’re worried about that pill. Why don’t we go check the pill furnace?” As the sunlight shone onto her fair skin, it was like a veil that perfectly highlighted her beauty. She was like a blooming orchid, consummately beautiful.

Xu Qing’s heart started beating faster as Plumdark clasped his hand and walked with him to the pill concocting workshop. The pill furnace in the workshop was in good condition, and the pill was fine. Another weight slipped away from Xu Qing’s heart.

Time passed. Soon it was evening, and the sky was filled with red clouds.

The session of enlightenment on Planet Ancient Emperor had originally been scheduled to last for a day. But after the second layer of sealing was opened, that time shrank down. By the time evening arrived, the event was over. After, news spread quickly about the results of the enlightenment.

After Xu Qing’s departure, three more heavenly marquis legacies appeared. What was more, there was an additional individual who gained enlightenment of a heavenly king legacy.

It was Tenth Prince! That news caused quite a stir.

As for Ningyan... he came out empty-handed. When he came back, Ningyan didn’t look the least bit dejected. He was actually in high spirits, thanks to what happened with Xu Qing. After all, Xu Qing’s glory would rub off on him. That said, if you looked deep into his eyes, you would see disappointment lurking there. The desire to prove himself to his father was something that had long existed in his heart.

Considering how much Xu Qing had on his mind, he was in no position to offer comfort.

On that night, there were quite a few people in the mansion who couldn’t sleep.

Xu Qing and Plumdark were working on the medicinal pill, which had reached the final, critical stage in the concocting process. If everything went well, the pill would be finished by the following night.

The Captain was lost in thought, and occasionally took out a jade slip to record notes. He also drew a lot of pictures, all of them related to the research he had started doing on Planet Ancient Emperor. This was a relatively rare situation for him. When he planned big jobs, he would usually gather a lot of information, but wouldn’t necessarily plan things out in detail.

But this was different. After all... in all of his previous lives, he had always failed and died at Planet Ancient Emperor.

Ningyan spent the night in the shrine hall, where he sat cross-legged in front of the portrait of his mother. Speaking in an undertone, he talked about what had occurred after she passed away. And though he never said the words, "I miss you," it was obvious from everything he said about how he felt.

Kong Xianglong was also in a contemplative mood. He had witnessed most of what happened with Xu Qing, and already heard stories. Although he was truly happy, he also had a goal for himself. He wouldn't allow himself to fall behind Xu Qing.

The only person who didn't have a lot on their mind was Wu Jianwu. Not being in the mood for cultivation, he just snored the night away.

The night passed without incident.

The sun rose and a new day began. Everyone seemed to have cleared their minds during the night. Ningyan was in high spirits, and remained in the shrine hall working on breathing exercises and cultivation.

The Captain's eyebrows danced up and down as he rushed out to gather more information.

Xu Qing's pill was complete. When he opened the pill furnace, a blood-red pill floated out, covered with golden striations.

Plumdark inhaled sharply. Eyes gleaming with anticipation, she waved her hand and simultaneously took out a geomantic compass. The compass was what she had been working on recently, and it was designed to bolster her senses. Taking the blood pill, she put it into a slot in the middle of the compass. As soon as the pill clicked into place, blood-red light flared, and the compass vibrated. The concentric rings on the compass began to rotate, whereupon Plumdark sat down cross-legged, put both hands on the compass, and then cast her senses outward.

Her senses were immediately boosted dramatically, and everything around her seemed to vanish except for that one lamp connected to her by destiny. In fact, that lamp... was now clearer than ever.

Xu Qing sat down cross-legged off to the side to act as dharma protector. At the same time, he considered what he would be doing next.

For one, I need to help Plumdark find that lamp. But also... I should go visit the Imperial University.

The Imperial University was the most prestigious educational establishment for humans. Xu Qing had heard about it a lot recently, and knew that whether it was the imperial princes or the officials, they had all spent time studying there. And it was common for chosen disciples from the superpower sects to long for such qualifications.

In some respects, the Imperial University was actually like a sect of its own. However, it was the most orthodox type of sect imaginable, meaning that it did not foster sectarianism. All techniques and all types of knowledge were there to be studied.[1]

On the way here, Princess Anhai mentioned the Imperial University and said that it emphasizes different schools of thought.... There are several thousand different schools of thought, some more prominent than others. All of them have their own dao, and their own systems of understanding regarding the world and cultivation.

By using different methods and different directions, they seek to identify the most suitable paths for humankind to use to rise to prominence in cultivation.

The different schools of thought don't have entrance requirements. As long as you qualify to go to the Imperial University, you can join any of them. Everything is set up to further the academic interests, so your background and status don't matter there.

The Imperial University is a standalone dimension; when you enter it, you're automatically clad in a special daoist robe and mask that covers your aura. You're also prohibited from revealing who you really are. It's only when you graduate that your true identity is revealed. If you have the ability, you can even establish your own school of thought, with the goal of attracting students and earning approval of your theories....

These rules for the Imperial University were established by Emperor Dark War, despite many objections. But over the years, the university has churned out countless techniques, as well as one chosen disciple after another. It's a place where human philosophy can flourish, where a hundred flowers can blossom, and where people can talk freely about their personal dao.... [2]

Thinking back to everything Princess Anhai had told him, and then considering what he had seen in the presence of the emperor himself, Xu Qing had to admit that he really didn't understand Emperor Dark War.

The clay fox said that the emperor is up to something big. But what is it...?

After a while, a new thought occurred to him.

Chapter 767: Imperial University

Plumdark leaned up against the railing of the pill workshop in Ningyan's mansion, looking off at the planet in the distance. "Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity's original imperial palace is now the location where all human ancestral sacrifices are offered. I can sense that the lamp... is there. In the depths of Planet Ancient Emperor."

It was evening, and the cloud cover on the planet was the golden color of dusk. There were golden dragons drifting through the clouds, inhaling and exhaling flows of energy that were both holy and mysterious.

"I tried calling out to it, but it didn't work. The lamp is protected by a very powerful warding spell that keeps it very firmly in place.... If I want to get it, I'll have to go to the planet itself.

"Based on what I could sense, the sealing marks covering the planet consist of some that always existed, and some that were added in later generations. If I try to force my way in, it will cause a big scene. If I want to get it without anyone realizing it, I need to find an opportunity to get onto the planet unnoticed."

Plumdark frowned. Opportunities like that weren't exactly common. But what was of greater significance was the question of... what was the lamp doing on Planet Ancient Emperor? Plumdark looked at Xu Qing and refrained from asking that most pertinent of questions. She didn't want him distracted by it.

Xu Qing was also looking thoughtfully at Planet Ancient Emperor. Plumdark had found the lamp, only for it to be located somewhere that was virtually impossible to reach. It was a far too sensitive and important place, and it was kept under tight guard. He literally couldn't go there.

Taking into consideration all humans, there was only one person who could go to Planet Ancient Emperor. And that was the emperor. Only he could open the seals.

The reality was that Xu Qing had already started thinking about the things that Plumdark had held back from saying out loud. Someone had taken that lamp and placed it on Planet Ancient Emperor. It was a strange affair. If you analyzed the situation from the very beginning, there were many possibilities regarding who might have taken the lamp. But in the end, there was only one type of person who could have put it on Planet Ancient Emperor, and that was an emperor. Had an emperor taken the lamp? Perhaps not. But... it was definitely an emperor who put it on the planet. And asking the reigning emperor for the lamp obviously wasn't an option.

After some thought, Xu Qing said, "Actually, there's another person who can go to Planet Ancient Emperor."

Plumdark turned to look at him.

"On the way here," he continued, "Princess Anhai mentioned that there's someone besides the emperor who can participate in the ancestral sacrifices. The crown prince. Except that there's no crown prince right now. If there was, and that crown prince was willing to help, then we might have that chance to get onto the planet."

Xu Qing looked away from the ancient planet.

Plumdark smiled. Turning to look in the direction of the mansion's shrine hall, she softly said, "There's a way to get onto the planet without causing a stir, but I need to make some preparations. As for your idea, if you're thinking of trying to help Ningyan become the crown prince, that seems difficult. He's a good kid, but an effort like that is nothing to take lightly."

As for Ningyan, he had just finished a session of cultivation and was seated cross-legged in front of his mother's portrait in the shrine hall. After resting for a bit, his eyes gleamed with determination, and he started another cultivation session. For him, the experience of seeking enlightenment on Planet Ancient Emperor had been an unforgettable experience. All his brothers and sisters had all benefited in some way, albeit not all of them got heavenly marquis legacies. In contrast, he hadn't acquired anything. Although it seemed on the surface that he didn't care about that, the reality was that he wasn't willing to settle for nothing.

Seven days passed.

Getting the Plumdark Evergreen Lamp wasn't something that would happen overnight. It required meticulous planning. Xu Qing even consulted the Captain about it. After all, given what Xu Qing knew about the Captain, it seemed highly likely that he was already working on a plan regarding the planet.

He was right. The Captain was very excited to hear about the situation, and in the end, he thumped his chest and said that he would definitely come up with a way to help.

Plumdark was working on her own idea, while Ningyan was focused more on cultivation than he ever had been. He spent just about every day in the shrine hall meditating.

After the enlightenment event on Planet Ancient Emperor, the imperial capital settled down.

The Nightshade war was going smoothly. The involvement of the Firemoon Darkheavens wasn't as much of an obstacle to humankind as had previously been imagined. They seemed more interested in putting on a show of involvement, but were actually holding back to see how the humans would react.

Xu Qing had no idea how the emperor was dealing with the situation. Having handled all pressing matters, including stabilizing The Emperor's Sword, he made the decision to go to the Imperial University. After all, he had come to the imperial capital with the necessary qualifications, and he was interested to see what kind of knowledge was available in Emperor Dark War's Imperial University.

Xu Qing had always placed high value on knowledge. He was well aware that, compared to the collective knowledge of humankind, what he knew was a mere drop of water in the ocean. He wanted to learn more, and also wanted to see what sparks might fly when different schools of thought clashed.

It was early in the morning when Xu Qing arrived in the north of the imperial capital, where the Imperial University was located. The university was massive, almost like a city of its own, filled with numerous white towers. It was very clean and orderly, and there weren't many people visible inside.

There were two statues at the entrance. One depicted a tall old man in a scholar's robe, the other was a short youngster in a simple hemp garment. The old man seemed ancient and wise, and he had his hands clasped in front of him. The youngster seemed lively but respectful, and was bowing at the waist. They seemed to be greeting each other.

It represented decorum shown between young and old, as well as the passing on of knowledge. The youngster bowed, and the old man clasped his hands, indicating that there was no difference in status between them, other than their age. It showed that there was no selfish clinging to legacy, and absolutely no sectarian differences. What was more, they were clearly wishing each other well.

The emperor himself had arranged for these statues to serve as the entrance to the Imperial University. Between them was a shimmering light that served as the main door leading inside.

Behind the door were the orderly white towers. There was a bustle of activity as people entered the door, including powerful and important people as well as coarse and ignoble individuals. It didn't matter who anyone was, once they went through that door, they were the equal of everyone else. They were all students. Some people found ways to make sure others knew who they were. But overall, people in the Imperial University abided by the rules set forth by Emperor Dark War.

Xu Qing could sense that when he walked through the door. Walking through the door didn't lead to the area of white towers that was visible in the imperial capital. Instead, it was a massive standalone dimension that was really like a huge city. The architectural style was the same, and there were many white towers of varying sizes. As it turned out, what was visible on the outside was actually a miniaturized projection of the real Imperial University.

There were many students inside, all of them dressed alike. They wore the same type of hemp garment worn by the statue of the youngster outside. All wore masks, which would change one's voice and hide one's true gender.

It was all controlled by the university itself. Even the auras were masked. And when one entered, it was by random teleportation that they went to a different location each time. As a result, it was impossible for people to determine the true identities of everyone else.[1]

Xu Qing materialized in the southwestern part of the Imperial University. As he walked through the crowds, he saw that some people made their way along in groups of between three to five. Others hurried on their way alone. Some people simply sat cross-legged in open areas, seemingly lost in thought.

The white towers were the different schools of thought that made up the Imperial University. The height of each individual tower corresponded to how many people were members of that specific school of thought. Some of the tallest towers had people streaming in and out constantly. There were other towers that most people walked past without even looking at.

In some cases, students would stand at the entrance of their own tower and try to get others to join them.

“Hey, you! Come check out our Spirit Forging School. The technique of spirit forging is all about the concept of the soul taking flight. Our fleshly bodies are mere vessels. Only by cultivating the soul to the highest level can we reach true transcendence and create heavenly daos.”

“Of all the schools of thought in the Imperial University, our Heavenly Person School is one of the most profound. There are three types of people: heavenly, earthly, and mortal. They correspond to three levels. If you come to the Heavenly Person School, you can transform from mortal to earthly, and then rise from earthly to heavenly. You can gain enlightenment of all living things and all types of plants and vegetation!”

“According to the old saying, there are a total of 3,000 daos, none of which are stronger or weaker than the others. Even though the dao of plants and vegetation is considered unorthodox, it can still be used to pluck stars. We welcome you to come learn about our Grand School of Plants and Vegetation!”

As Xu Qing walked along, he heard a cacophony of voices, and there were even some occasions in which people blocked his path to introduce their school of thought. There were some schools of thought who had philosophical differences with others, leading to spirited discussions.

At first, Xu Qing felt very out of place. He had never been anywhere like this. After a while, he decided to go into some of the towers. Though he didn't officially join any of them, he was still able to study the information inside. They were like libraries, and the official members were also willing to answer any questions.

Xu Qing was immediately moved. Inside the Grand School of Plants and Vegetation, he saw information that he'd previously studied, but also some unique perspectives that were new to him.

In the Spirit Forging School, he encountered some concepts about cultivation that he found very thought-provoking. There was one location called the Tamer School that was very unique. They focused on taming, not beasts, but rather, the destiny aura of nonhumans.

Xu Qing quickly came to realize that the Imperial University was a very interesting place deserving of a lot of respect. It was impossible to say whether the knowledge here would stand the test of time. But the sparks of information and inspiration were certainly driving innovation.

As he proceeded along and got familiar with the Imperial University, he eventually reached what was known as the biggest school of thought there. The God-Merging School. Roughly thirty percent of all students were members.

The school focused on transforming the body. The process involved taking flesh from godly entities and grafting it onto one's own body. Then, after slowly getting used to the change, one could slowly learn to control the godliness. In the end, after all of one's flesh was replaced with godly flesh, then mutagen... would no longer be harmful, and could be treated just like spirit energy.

The ultimate goal of this school was 'god-merging.' By merging with the flesh of gods, one could achieve godly ascension.

The schoolmaster was a very sophisticated middle-aged man who wore scholar robes that were different from the other students. Though his mask made it impossible to see his facial features, there was something very scholarly and refined about him.

By chance, when Xu Qing stopped in front of that school's tower, the schoolmaster appeared.

Xu Qing stopped in place.

There was something about this person that reminded him of someone from Sea-Sealing County.

Chapter 768: Not Quasi-Immortal, But Rather, Xeno-Immortal

This person reminded Xu Qing of Bai Xiaozhuo, the original governor of Sea-Sealing County in the days of the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan. When the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan was destroyed, Bai Xiaozhuo sacrificed all of the people in the county to open the eyes of the broken face. Then he followed the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan in reincarnation.

Just before Bai Xiaozhuo was devoured by Emperor Ancient Spirit, the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan arrived and demanded back the fragment of time that Bai Xiaozhuo had taken. [1]

Xu Qing averted his gaze slightly. Considering that the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan was the imperial preceptor, it wasn't a stretch to imagine that he might have brought Bai Xiaozhuo back to life and set him up as the schoolmaster of the God-Merging School.

Xu Qing couldn't be certain that the seemingly implausible scenario was as he imagined it. However... the concept of 'god-merging' made him think about Master Shengyun and his father. Given how new Xu Qing was to the Imperial University, he wasn't familiar with all the details of 'god-merging.' He would need time to learn more, and thus, he melted into the crowd.

Given that he wore the same clothing and mask as everyone else, and his aura was masked, it only took a moment for him to disappear.

The schoolmaster of the God-Merging School stopped in place and scanned the crowd, his eyes glittering thoughtfully.

He had sensed that someone nearby was looking at him in an unusual way. However, thanks to the unusual characteristics of the Imperial University, there was no way for him to determine who it was. After a bit of consideration, he put such thoughts aside and went into the tower.

Xu Qing left the God-Merging School and spent more time exploring the Imperial University. That was what he usually did.

As he went along, he occasionally went into some of the towers to scan the knowledge therein. The more Xu Qing looked around, the deeper his respect grew for the Imperial University. The wealth of information here would be almost impossible to collect in one place in the outside world. And if it were collected, it would likely be stolen.

Yet in this place, there were no doors or locks. All of the knowledge was there for the taking. In one tower belonging to the Myriad Magics School, he saw secret techniques from Sea-Sealing County sects.

There was even one school of thought that focused on the research of taboo treasures. It specialized in cognitive methods, and would use the power of gods to mass-produce magical treasures. Although the learning curve was incredibly steep, Xu Qing had to admit that they had some very innovative ideas.

A student outside was trying to draw in newcomers. "Magical treasures that get infused with enough mutagen will experience strange transformations. The success rate is very low. However, in the course of our research, our school has discovered that the process can be carried out artificially!"

Xu Qing's interest was piqued, so he went inside to learn more. Time passed as he went here and there in the university. Eventually, night fell.

Although there were still people around at night, there weren't as many as during the day time. Xu Qing had spent an entire day visiting dozens of the different schools of thought. He was very pleased. The information he had taken in was extremely eye-opening, and gave him a lot to think about.

This place is amazing!

Before leaving, he looked out at the seemingly endless white towers, and his eyes gleamed with determination. He had already decided to spend all of the coming days here.

Half a month went by.

During that time, Xu Qing immersed himself in study in the Imperial University. In the evenings he would return to Ningyan's mansion to work on his cultivation, but other than that, he spent all his time at the university. Of the thousands of schools of thought, he had already familiarized himself with about a thousand.

He soaked up the knowledge like a sponge thrown into the sea. Thanks to his studies, his understanding of cultivation techniques changed on a fundamental level. And thanks to the sparks

that flew because of the clash of ideas, he was coming to a deeper understanding of his own path of cultivation.

This would never have been possible for him in Sea-Sealing County. And even if the information had been explained to him, without experiencing the process himself, and digging in deeper, he wouldn't have been able to truly grasp it all.

Most importantly of all, as he amassed more knowledge, he gained a much deeper understanding of the techniques that humans had developed after the departure of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity. He felt like he was standing on the shoulders of giants, and thus glimpsed the distant path to be walked.

From the look of it, most of these schools of thoughts are seeking... a path to breaking through!

Xu Qing was currently in the Myriad Magics School reading a jade slip, a thoughtful expression on his face. That was when he heard a familiar voice from behind him.

“We meet again, Sir Dark-Thunder.”

Xu Qing looked over his shoulder to see a student approaching. Although the university masked everyone's aura, after spending enough time in the place, most cultivators were able to use certain clues to recognize familiar people.

“Elder Brother Dustcloud,” Xu Qing said politely.

This was a friend he had made in the Myriad Magics School. Over the past half month, they had run into each other several times. At first, they had just nodded to each other in greeting. But eventually they struck up a conversation. At this point, Xu Qing had conversed with Elder Brother Dustcloud more than anyone else in the Imperial University. They had exchanged names, although both knew that they were only code names for use in the Imperial University.

Glancing at the jade slip in Xu Qing's hand, Dustcloud smiled and said, “Looking at some ancient magics?”

Xu Qing nodded. “I was just thinking that most of these schools of thought seem focused on breakthroughs.”

“You've hit the nail on the head. As a matter of fact, that's actually the original reason why the emperor set up the Imperial University.” Dustcloud had long since realized that this ‘Sir Dark-Thunder’ was new to the Imperial University. People like that weren't very common. Usually, only a few dozen people per month were allowed in. That said, he didn't feel any need to pry. “The cultivation path of humankind has been severed. Actually, after the broken face of the god arrived, the cultivation path of all species was severed.” He sighed. “Specifically, what was severed was the method of becoming an Imperial Sovereign.

“The heavenly daos were affected, and mutagen entered the world. To the mortals, it's basically poison. To low-level cultivators, it's a torment. And to high-level cultivators, it's a severed path.

“Only people with ancient bloodlines have a chance to force their way into the Smoldering God level and then become an Imperial Sovereign.

“But even that’s a dead end. It’s basically impossible to break through from Imperial Sovereign to Grand Emperor. And that’s why so many schools of thought have spent time and effort researching that topic. They want to reestablish the path to Imperial Sovereign. And the really ambitious ones theorize how to reopen the path to Grand Emperor.

“The God-Merging School is the best example. A lot of people put stock in their theories, which is why they’re the number-one school of thought despite being relatively new. That said, I don’t agree with them.” Dustcloud shook his head.

“What was the ancient path?” Xu Qing asked. He hadn’t seen any ancient records in the Myriad Magics School that discussed this subject.

“That of the Summer Immortal,” Dustcloud said. He looked at Xu Qing, gathered his thoughts, then continued, “But the ancient path isn’t favored in the Myriad Magics School. If you want to learn more about it, you’ll need to visit the Xeno-Immortal School. That school... used to be the number-one school of thought, back when the Imperial University was first founded. Later on, their theories came to be viewed as unrealistic, and they slowly fell into decline.”

Xu Qing nodded, said farewell, and left to find the Xeno-Immortal School.

After Xu Qing was gone, another student that knew Dustcloud walked over to him. Looking at Xu Qing walking off into the distance, he lowered his voice and said, “Elder Brother Dustcloud, do you have any idea who that Sir Dark-Thunder really is? It seemed like you spent more time talking to him just now than you have in the past.”

Dustcloud smiled beneath his mask and clasped the other student’s shoulder. “In all likelihood, he’s a very important person who became a student here recently. Either way, it’s still good to make friends.”

The other student nodded thoughtfully.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing thought about what Dustcloud had told him, all while searching for the Xeno-Immortal School. He also pondered why Dustcloud had told him so much. It was actually the third time that Dustcloud had volunteered so much information. Xu Qing already had an idea of why. After all, everyone in the imperial capital knew that he’d earned a place in the Imperial University. Anyone who put any thought into the matter would be able to surmise that he would go there eventually.

He’s clever and circumspect. He’s probably someone important.

With a final glance at the Myriad Magics School, he disappeared into the crowd. About two hours later, he found himself looking at a specific white tower in the east of the Imperial University. On

the outside, it didn't look different from the other towers. However, while most of the towers were bustling places, this one seemed bleak and empty. In fact, it almost looked abandoned.

Xu Qing was actually surprised. This was the most depressing tower he had seen in the past half month. After walking inside he found that there were only three students inside, sitting there looking bored. They didn't even look up when he entered.

There were a lot of jade slips in the Xeno-Immortal School, but they weren't organized. Instead, they were just piled up in the corners.

The schoolmaster was present. In most other schools of thought, you would only see a schoolmaster if you randomly encountered them. Most of the time, they would stay in the top levels of the towers. But here....

The schoolmaster was squatting in front of a pile of jade slips, which he was rifling through as if looking for something.

Xu Qing looked around for a moment, then said, "Excuse me, do you have any jade slips that talk about the ancient path of the Summer Immortal?"

"What would be the point of that?" one of the three lazy students said, sounding annoyed. "Get lost, buddy. We're not fans of strangers here."

Xu Qing frowned and looked over. Meanwhile, the schoolmaster pulled a jade slip out of the pile and threw it over to Xu Qing.

"We don't have any real information about Summer Immortals here, just speculation from later generations. If you want to take a look, go ahead. But then you can beat it. I'm not a fan of strangers here."

Xu Qing took the jade slip and started looking through the information.

The slip didn't go into detail about Summer Immortals, other than speculations. And even then, the information was vague. There was only one section of text that was relatively straightforward.

"A thought from a Summer Immortal can transform an immortal body.

"Think of it as a concept. However, the Immortal path has been severed, and there's no way to pursue it. After Imperial Sovereign is Quasi-Immortal. That said, alternative means might be possible.

"I have a theory. Temper the soul to make threads. Use the sea of consciousness to weave the image of a god. Use the soul as the control. Use thoughts as the body. When the image of the god is complete, it could possibly be used to control the same source.

"The mental god can be used as nutrients to restore Immortals!

"Success in this method might lead to, not Quasi-Immortal, but rather, Xeno-Immortal!"

Chapter 769: Favor in This Life leads to Success in the Next

This was the Xeno-Immortal School!

Xu Qing's eyes glittered. The jade slip didn't contain a lot of information, but what information it did contain was magnificent. It concisely expressed the basics of the Xeno-Immortal School. Although the jade slip didn't go into detail about the specific techniques involved, the description was enough to give Xu Qing a general understanding.

The technique seems similar to that of the God-Merging School. One of them stores up godliness, the other merges with it. The former involved using a complete human body, then creating the outline of a god in the sea of consciousness. The goal was to use that god-storing technique to make oneself into a Xeno-Immortal.

The latter involves abandoning one's human body, and replacing it with the body of a god. The ultimate goal is to achieve pure godly ascension and become a human god.

This line of thinking... is astounding. No wonder Dustcloud said that the Xeno-Immortal School used to be the number one school of thought in the Imperial University.

With such thoughts on his mind, Xu Qing looked around at the empty school and realized that there was a very fatal flaw. And that fatal flaw led to the downfall of the Xeno-Immortal School.

The requirements to practice this kind of cultivation are terrifyingly high! You have to use your soul to create threads, then use them to form the outline of a god or a godly entity. That alone is inherently dangerous. Furthermore, progress is going to be slow.

That's why Dustcloud said that this school's theories were unrealistic. Or could it be that no one actually succeeded with it?

After some more thought and analysis, Xu Qing turned to the schoolmaster, who was still rifling through the jade slips. "Is it true that no one has ever succeeded with your technique?"

"Who said nobody ever succeeded?" the schoolmaster said, sounding displeased. He snorted coldly, then proudly continued, "Eight thousand years ago, our Xeno-Immortal School's Li Xuanfeng successfully wove an earthchild that manifested physically, bolstering his battle prowess to an astonishing degree." [1]

Almost as soon as the schoolmaster stopped talking, one of the three lazy students said, "Riiiiight. It only took Patriarch Li Xuanfeng *a thousand years* of cultivation to weave that godly earthchild. It took so long he nearly ran out of longevity. He really was awesome!"

The schoolmaster turned and glared at the student. "It might have taken a while, but after Patriarch Li Xuanfeng succeeded, he used the god-storing technique in his sea of consciousness to dramatically boost his battle prowess!"

"Exactly!" exclaimed one of the other students. "Exactly!! And then he got killed by a Spirit Trove nonhuman who had only practiced cultivation for five hundred years. Amazing!"

The schoolmaster's glare grew even more intense. He was clearly very displeased. "Also, wasn't it only five thousand years ago that our school's Patriarch Chen Daoze also succeeded? With one thought, he could summon a godly entity from within him, leading to a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering transformation." [2]

"Oooh, right!" said the student seated in the middle of the other two. "Except that afterward, he couldn't transform back.... We still have his body here in the tower. Teacher, the God-Merging School mentioned that they want to buy it. Why don't we sell it to them?"

"Don't even mention the God-Merging School to me. Their theories are a bunch of hogwash. Is a monkey wearing human clothing actually a human?" The schoolmaster flicked his sleeve, making it very clear how much he disdained the God-Merging School.

The three students all sighed. Then the one in the middle looked at Xu Qing and said, "I suggest you get out of here while you can. The three of us are stuck. Years ago, we foolishly came here thinking there might be some valuable things that other people had missed out on. We even thought we could turn this place around and make out like bandits in the process.... But then this old codger tricked us into believing that only 'conclave disciples' could study with him. We ended up signing a contract for life!

"That's why we're stuck as members forever. You're probably not from the imperial capital, are you? Otherwise you'd know all of this stuff. Seriously, you don't want to get involved with this place."

Perhaps it was because the schoolmaster knew that his facial expression was hidden by the mask that he'd picked up the habit of snorting coldly a lot. With just such a cold snort, he squatted back down and started rifling through the jade slips again.

The tower went silent again.

Xu Qing looked at the three students, then the schoolmaster. "I'll take my leave now," he said.

After he was about 300 meters away, he turned and looked back at the Xeno-Immortal School. Given its location in the east of the Imperial University, he could imagine how bustling the place must have been in the past. But now it was empty, a shell of its former self that few people went inside.

There were only three students there. From what Xu Qing could tell, their story seemed authentic. They really had been tricked into joining the school, which was why they seemed full of rancorous energy. As for the schoolmaster, he probably had a guilty conscience, which was why he went around snorting coldly all the time, hoping to keep his last scraps of dignity as the schoolmaster.

So, two people succeeded in the past, and were able to weave godly projections in their sea of consciousness, then manifest them externally. I wonder what that looked like?

Thinking about such things, Xu Qing disappeared into the crowd.

In the blink of an eye, another half a month went by.

Xu Qing had visited most of the schools of thought in the Imperial University, and had already accumulated a lot of knowledge. That said, most of it was lacking in detail. Given the time he had on his hands, he couldn't gain a deep understanding.

In the end, he chose not to formally join any of the schools. The main reason for not making a choice was that he couldn't stop thinking about Summer Immortals. The term seemed to possess a strange power that made it impossible for him to get it out of his mind.

Ultimately, Xu Qing couldn't forget what his Master had mentioned after upgrading Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior.

"I reforged it using a Summer Immortal magic I found in some ancient records. As a result, you can call it an immortal weapon now!"

[3]

The moon currently shone brightly, making the stars less visible. Xu Qing sat in the courtyard in Ningyan's mansion, looking up into the sky at the moon and thinking about everything.

Back when Master first mentioned the term Summer Immortal, I didn't understand what he meant. I assumed it was some special theory related to magical devices. But after coming here to the imperial capital, and chatting with Princess Anhai, I started to suspect there was more to it. And that trend continued during the last month I spent studying in the Imperial University, and especially after going to the Xeno-Immortal School....

The light of the moon fell onto Xu Qing like a gauzy veil, making it seem like he was wreathed in moonlight. Although, the light shining off him quickly turned violet.

How could Master know of Summer Immortal techniques.... And how could he be proficient in their use? Now that I think about it, it seems like he was planting a concept in my mind with what he said. A seed that would sprout as my understanding expanded here in the capital.

Xu Qing took out the Spike of Misfortune and studied it.

Time passed. About two hours later, he heard the sound of footsteps accompanied by someone humming a little tune.

The Captain swaggered out a moment later. He was in a good mood, and had obviously been drinking. When he caught sight of Xu Qing in the moonlight, he grinned.

"Little Ah Qing! How have things been at the Imperial University? I feel like I haven't seen you in days. Let me tell you, I found a *really* great place recently. Have you heard about the Red Dust Pavilion?"

Xu Qing could smell the alcohol as the Captain sat down next to him and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Well," the Captain went on, "the Red Dust Pavilion is amazing."

Xu Qing looked up at him. "I've been there. I was on the way back when the assassination attempt happened. I told you."

The Captain blinked a few times and then laughed. “Of course I remember! I mean, I went there for the specific purpose of looking into the assassination attempt.”

The Captain produced a jug of alcohol and handed it to Xu Qing.

In order not to ruin the Captain’s mood, Xu Qing decided not to mention the clay fox. He sipped some of the alcohol, and almost immediately felt slightly dizzy. It was, of course, the Red Dust Pavilion’s famous Drunken Immortal.

“Something on your mind?” the Captain asked, taking back the alcohol and sipping some.

Xu Qing thought for a moment. “Eldest Brother... do you know our Master’s background?”

The Captain had been about to tilt the jug back to take another drink, but he stopped and looked at Xu Qing.

Noticing the serious expression on Xu Qing’s face, the Captain chuckled. “The old man? He has a mysterious background. I mean, look at the apprentices he takes. There’s me, the number one chosen in all of Revered Ancient.”

Xu Qing blinked a few times and then nodded earnestly.

Looking very pleased, the Captain continued, “And then there’s you, the number two chosen in all of Revered Ancient. Second Sib, heh heh. Well she was destined to get married, which is great. You probably guessed that, right? I was a bit doubtful, so last time I was back in Sea-Sealing County I checked in to make sure.

“Finally there’s Third Sib, that damn miscreant. Believe me, even though he seems like he’s keeping a low profile, that guy is a schemer through and through. And he has plenty of secrets. In fact, I suspect... that he has something to do with the Ghost Emperor!

“The thing is that nobody knows what species the Ghost Emperor is, or where he came from. But his weapon contains the sealing mark of a god domain, and he killed god domain cultivators. So, you tell me. How could a top expert like that not have an amazing history? Therefore, given everything, I have a very outrageous speculation, which is that he actually comes from....”

The Captain pointed up to the dome of heaven.

Xu Qing’s pupils constricted. The dome of heaven contained the broken face of the god, and beyond that, the starry sky. And there was more.

“The holy lands!” The Captain burped and then laughed. “Anyway, that’s pure speculation on my part. As for Master, well, let me tell you a little secret. In one of my past lives, I met someone who was very much like the old man. They didn’t *look* alike. It was more like a feeling....”

Xu Qing’s eyes narrowed.

“Another thing. In this life, when I had just become an apprentice, I remember feeling like I had seen him before on more than one occasion. That said, I have a lot of missing memories.” Shaking his head, the Captain stood and stretched. “Don’t think too much into it, little Ah Qing. Be like me. Just focus on being happy. Live every day to the fullest. That’s the best way to live.”

Swaying a bit as he walked, the Captain headed toward his room. However, after taking only about seven or eight steps through the moonlight, he stopped with his back to Xu Qing.

“Little Ah Qing, do you remember what I said to you back in Seven Blood Eyes when you became an apprentice?”

“One bow for the Ancient Emperor. Three bows for heaven and earth. Nine bows for the Master.

“Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity is the great founder. All humans owe him a single bow of respect.

“Heaven, earth, celestial, terrestrial. They bear the weight of all. All humans owe them three bows of respect.

“However amazing the Ancient Emperor was, he did not show you favor. Heaven and earth, and all other living beings in this sea of suffering, have done nothing to save you. Only Master will ascend to heaven and descend to hell for you. Only he will show you favor. Only he will save you. Only he will expend all effort so that you can walk a great dao. Therefore, you owe him nine bows of respect!”
[4]

As the moon shone down in the courtyard, the Captain’s voice seemed to echo from the ancient past into the current life.

“In this life, it’s not just you and I who’ll travel the world together. We’ll do it with Master too.”

Chapter 770: The Tempest Builds

Eldest Brother has many past lives, and has been reincarnated many times. He’s profoundly mysterious. Second Elder Sister found a destined opportunity in Huang Yan. And being loved by Flame Phoenix has its own extraordinary aspects. Third Elder Brother... is connected to the Ghost Emperor. Either that or he’s from the holy lands. And then there’s me.... What’s so unique about me?

Even after thinking about it, Xu Qing couldn’t come up with anything about himself that was very unique and special, with the exception... of his relationship to the crow.

There were also the scenes in the violet crystal he had witnessed when he faced Crimson Mother, except he wasn’t even sure if they were real. He had seen a time period in which he died, which was an image that conflicted with his actual experience.

“Have I really died before?” Xu Qing murmured into the moonlight. His words disappeared into the darkness.

It was almost as if the cloud cover sensed that, and then there was a flash as lightning fell noiselessly. Shortly after, the thunder caught up. Rumbling booms filled the imperial capital as fat raindrops started falling. It rained the whole night. When dawn came, there was still a haze that filled the air and made many people want to just stay inside where it was warm and dry.

It started raining again in the afternoon.

Xu Qing didn't go to the Imperial University. He had already visited all the different schools of thought, and now he just had to make a choice.

Besides, he also had an appointment. He had been invited to meet with Princess Anhai. If it had been anyone else, he could have refused. But considering how kind she had been when escorting him to the imperial capital, he didn't think it would be appropriate to decline, not even if he did so tactfully. That was just his personality.

The rain still poured down when evening came, so Xu Qing left the mansion with an oil-paper umbrella in his hand. A cultivator could rely on their cultivation base to keep the rain away. But sometimes when walking among mortals, there was no need to stand out as different. It was an aspect of mental cultivation that Xu Qing had gained enlightenment of from the Mental State School in the Imperial University.

Xu Qing walked the streets of the imperial capital, keeping an eye on the other pedestrians as he contemplated the various schools in the Imperial University. He also mused about what was going to happen at this meeting.

Rain pattered onto the umbrella, then turned into streams of water pouring down. On the way down, the wind would hit the streams of water, causing them to bend and sway. In the end, the water once again turned into raindrops that fell to the ground with all the other rain.

The raindrop is a raindrop. Then it isn't a raindrop. Then it becomes a raindrop again.

Xu Qing looked up into the canopy of heaven. Gradually, his muddled mental state from learning about his Master's origin and everything his Eldest Brother had talked about began to calm down.

Life is wonderful because of the unknown. I guess it doesn't really matter if I died before or not. What's important is that I'm still alive. And if I can make my life a little bit better, that would be great.

That had been Xu Qing's dream when he lived back in the slums, and still was. That part of him hadn't changed. Keep on living. Only by staying alive could he eventually remove the veil from his eyes and find out the truth. And then... he could travel the world... with his Master, his Eldest Brother, and his other fellow apprentices.

He took a deep breath and started walking through the rain again. The sky was dark by the time he reached the southwestern part of the capital. There he found a palace with a phoenix theme. He stopped and looked at it.

This was Princess Anhai's mansion outside of the imperial palace.

Xu Qing wasn't the only one coming to this meeting. There were other elite cultivators from the Imperial Region, including close friends of the princess and other outstanding individuals. Xu Qing knew that this entire event was a show of kindness on the part of Princess Anhai. She was arranging to introduce him to more people.

Xu Qing wasn't an expert in social niceties, but when people showed kindness to him, he accepted it. Just as he stepped into Princess Anhai's mansion, a loud crack of thunder echoed out. Heaven and earth trembled. It was almost like the shout of a god, causing the raindrops to explode and turn into mist. It was loud enough to cause the hearts of many to pound.

Xu Qing frowned, stopped walking, and looked up into the pitch-black canopy of heaven.

Of course, a thunderclap couldn't do anything to him. But the uneasy feeling he'd been experiencing grew stronger because of the thunder. It was a warning from his heavenly dao bluegreen dragon.

That was noteworthy, as his heavenly dao bluegreen dragon hadn't even provided a warning about the assassination attempt. But now he could sense it clearly.

Something big is about to happen. But what...?

With such thoughts on his mind, he entered Princess Anhai's mansion.

In the northern part of the imperial capital, there was a mysterious building complex built of a host of neatly arranged black towers.

The tall towers formed the borders, with the shorter ones being in the middle. The borders were tightly guarded by patrolling cultivators, and there were shocking spell formations. In fact, this place was a focus of the imperial capital's grand spell formation.

It was one of the Five Greater Celestial Divisions, the Creation Division, which focused on the research of immortal skills and the study of gods. It was also the place where all the research and development of the Dawning Suns had occurred. When it came to humankind as a whole, this division had a big responsibility. [1]

The Creation Division itself was important, but there was more. The emperor had assigned his ninth son a post there. When Ninth Prince accepted the post in the Creation Division, he swore an oath to refrain from any of the succession struggles to secure the spot of crown prince. Nor would he pick sides with any of the others involved in such struggles. That was why he hadn't participated in the enlightenment event at Planet Ancient Emperor.

As far as he was concerned, the most important pursuit he could focus on was research of gods and immortal skills. In the end, he lived up to the emperor's expectations, and his work on the Dawning Suns was declared a major meritorious service. Normally speaking, he wouldn't go out in public unless he was summoned by the emperor. But today... as thunder crashed in the sky and rain poured down, he could be seen staggering out of one of the inner buildings in the Creation Division. His expression was one of alarm, even terror. He was shaking, and didn't do anything to stop the rain from soaking him.

“As the ninth son of the emperor, and the keeper of law and order in the Creation Division, I hereby order this place to be locked down immediately! Nobody is to leave. Any who violate this command shall be executed immediately!!”

As his voice echoed through the booming thunder, the imperial capital’s grand spell formation created a sealing power that descended on the Creation Division. All the other cultivators present looked around in bewilderment.

Ninth Prince ignored them. Pulling out a jade slip, he sent a voice message. Finally, he stood in place, guarding over the Creation Division as he waited... for the emperor to arrive.

At the same time, other high-ranking leaders in the Creation Division came out into the rain, their faces ashen and unsightly.

Back at Princess Anhai’s mansion, a lovely banquet was underway. Princess Anhai sat in the position of honor, with Xu Qing next to her, and everyone else seated in rows on either side.

There were a few dozen people present, including both men and women. They were either important government officials or elite chosen. Meng Yunbai was there, and was chatting enthusiastically with those around him. Princess Anhai had put a lot of thought into every invitation she sent, all with the goal of ensuring that nothing inappropriate happened during the event. All of the people present liked Xu Qing to a degree, and also respected him.

Xu Qing was in the same generation as these cultivators, but he had a special status. It was also profoundly significant that he had acquired The Emperor’s Sword. Therefore, even though Xu Qing wasn’t very adept at formal occasions like this, he still got along well with everyone.

After three rounds of drinking were done, the atmosphere was noisy and energetic. At that point, Princess Anhai steered the conversation in the direction of the Imperial University.

“Did everyone hear about the announcement from the God-Merging School? In half a month, they’re going to have a conclave trial to pick a hundred people to join their conclave.”

“When you talk about the God-Merging School, you have to talk about its schoolmaster. Except the schoolmaster’s identity is a big secret.... That said, according to what I’ve heard, he’s merged eighty percent of his body, but covers the effects with a magical treasure.”

“His battle prowess is completely astonishing. I heard that the schoolmaster of the God-Merging School would only need one palm strike to crush a first-stage Void Returning godly entity.”

“For a chosen like that to keep such a low profile hints at some amazing future developments.”

People sighed in amazement. The discussion continued, touching on some of the other schools of thought, such as the Spirit Forging School, the Myriad Magics School, the Mental State School, and the Tranquil Treasure School. People talked about the students and schoolmasters from those schools, and everyone generally sighed in admiration. There were many opinions on the true identities of the schoolmasters, with some people even speculating that some of them were imperial princes. It was abundantly clear that the big schools of thought from the Imperial University exerted influence that went far beyond the university.

“I think it’s a pity that the God-Merging School has become the most orthodox school in the university. All the other schools of thought have fallen behind. In other words, the chances of outright clashes between schools of thought is minimal. Some of the ancient records I read about the Imperial University indicate that throughout the history of the university, there have been four instances of a school war. Every single time, the emperor gets involved, and the ramifications are profound.”

Some people sighed. Others nodded. The conversation went on. Eventually, someone mentioned the Xeno-Immortal School.

“I’m actually a lot more interested in the Xeno-Immortal School than any of the other schools of thought. Sadly, the place is basically deserted. In the final analysis, their cultivation methods are too difficult, and their standard for latent talent is too high. Although, all of that could be overlooked. What’s of even greater significance is that they’ve never produced a single person who succeeded.”

The person who had brought up the Xeno-Immortal School was a young man named Mu Nan. He looked elegant, with a warm smile. Based on Princess Anhai’s introduction when he arrived, he was from the main headquarters of the human branch of the Church of Departure.

“Granted, they have two heroes who died for their cause by partially succeeding. One of them was killed. The other transformed his body but couldn’t reverse the process. I’m pretty sure they enshrined the body of the latter. However, after all their years of isolation, nobody has actually seen the body. That said, I saw some recorded images at the Church which show Chen Daoze’s soul-weaved state.”

With that, he glanced casually at Xu Qing.

Looking back at him placidly, Xu Qing said, “Any chance you can share that image with us, Fellow Daoist Mu Nan?”

Mu Nan grinned. “It’s top secret in my church, so normally speaking, outsiders aren’t allowed to see it. But you’re different, Region Lord Xu.”

Mu Nan took out a jade slip and sent it floating through the air toward Xu Qing.

Xu Qing took it and focused on it. Instantly, an image appeared in his head. It showed a middle-aged cultivator in a daoist robe. He waved his hand, and a massive amount of mutagen poured into him. As that happened, he transformed, turning into an extremely vicious godly entity.

Xu Qing didn't react physically to what he was seeing, but his heart started pounding. And that was because it looked very similar to his god states!

At that exact moment, bells started tolling in the imperial capital, so loud that they surpassed the volume of the thunder. They rang nine times.

Everyone at the banquet froze briefly, then got to their feet.

“The imperial bells rang nine times. That means something big is happening!”

A grave expression could be seen on Xu Qing's face. The warning from his heavenly dao bluegreen dragon had left him unsettled, and that feeling was only growing more intense. All of a sudden, a crashing boom could be heard from outside Princess Anhai's mansion.

A moment later, a squad of imperial guards stormed in, their golden armor flashing.

A somber and desolate aura filled the banquet hall. As everyone looked over in confusion, the leader of the squad looked coldly at Xu Qing. After bowing at the waist, he said, “Region Lord Xu, you have been invited to the imperial palace for an audience with the emperor!”