

## Timescape 781

### Chapter 781: A Two-Month Prophecy

For the God-Merging School, having Seventh Prince publicly join was definitely like *adding flowers to the brocade*. The students of the school felt especially proud. Imperial princes were very special, so having one as a public member was like free advertising. The God-Merging School, which was already the most popular school of thought in the Imperial University, got even more applicants. After all, the fact that an imperial prince was willing to join that school was like a signal to everyone else.

Of course, Seventh Prince immediately became like a spokesperson for the God-Merging School, someone that everyone would be paying attention to.

That was exactly what Seventh Prince wanted. After King Heaventide was killed and Seventh Prince returned to the imperial capital like a bedraggled stray dog, he had lost a lot of his former glory. He had been left with no choice but to stay out of sight and avoid Xu Qing. However, the venom in his heart only grew more and more intense as time passed.

For this entire time, he had been waiting for his fifth brother to return. He and Fifth Prince had the same mother, and as a result, they were a lot closer to each other than most imperial princes were to the others.

What was more, Fifth Prince had battle prowess that was second only to Grand Prince. He was brave, a good fighter, and was favored by the emperor. He was the one who was apprenticed to the number one heavenly king, whom he had joined on a military campaign on the border of Firemoon territory. He rarely made the trip back to the capital.

Seventh Prince had recently received a secret intelligence report indicating that his fifth brother would be back soon. It was an exciting development. Therefore, Seventh Prince had followed along with Fifth Prince's arrangement for him. He had joined the God-Merging School, and even started cultivating different techniques that aligned with the dao of god-merging.

The God-Merging School was quick to take advantage of the situation. They provided a lot of help to Seventh Prince, to the point where the schoolmaster himself assisted him in changing his dao and replacing his flesh and blood.

In the month that passed after Seventh Prince joined up, he advanced by leaps and bounds. He had already replaced about thirty percent of himself with godly flesh, pushing him from Spirit Trove into the first stage of Void Returning. On the day he achieved the breakthrough, all eyes were on him. The students in the Imperial University who hadn't joined the God-Merging School all looked on with excitement.

Virtually overnight, the God-Merging School's position in the university became set in stone. Their numbers swelled, and their reputation as the number one school of thought spread into the outside world, such that lots of cultivators in the capital started getting interested in the dao of god-merging. The Xeno-Immortal School had only experienced things like that back when they were at their height of popularity. A storm of 'god-merging' was building in humankind.

Thanks to events in the God-Merging School, things in the Xeno-Immortal School started to quiet down significantly.

Of the various students who had joined recently, five had suddenly stopped showing up. Only the mysterious young woman and the four people who had joined after her continued to appear daily. Unfortunately, there was no momentum keeping things going. The three conclave students who had joined before Xu Qing had originally believed everything the schoolmaster said. But gradually, that belief started to devolve into suspicion. What they were mostly interested in was publishing the *Xeno-Immortal Enquirer*, and they dragged Xu Qing along with them as they did.

The schoolmaster... spent all day sighing. He was still determined to somehow restore the glory of the school, but seeing how quiet things were getting, it was hard to say how long he would hold on to his convictions.

Unless something dramatic happened, the Xeno-Immortal School was destined to return to its previous state. Unexpectedly, just such a thing happened, and... the fuse was the *Xeno-Immortal Enquirer*.

The goal of the tabloid as set by the three students wasn't to be practical and realistic. They wanted to have sensational news, funny anecdotes, and the like. Appealing to human nature was the best way to get sales. Normally speaking, because the Xeno-Immortal School ranked so low among the different schools of thought, they were never worried about repercussions of publishing sensational stories. As the saying went, *those who have nothing to lose do not fear those in power*.<sup>[1]</sup>

There had been instances before in which people came in person to complain. But the Xeno-Immortal School was as stubborn and difficult to deal with as *a rock stuck in a latrine*. In the end, such complainers would storm off without accomplishing anything. After all, the Xeno-Immortal School was known to be *poor and culturally void*, so there was little that could be done about them.  
[2]

In fact, the bigger the scene you created, the more you would amuse the staff of the Xeno-Immortal School. And then, the next day, there would likely be even more sensational stories about you making the rounds. Eventually, most people stopped paying attention to such things.

But after a true master appeared in the Xeno-Immortal School, they couldn't be described as 'having nothing to lose.' Quite the opposite; they now had a lot of power. Therefore... after a few sensational reports were published about the God-Merging School, that school finally came to make a scene.

The person who led the charge was no ordinary member. It was a very famous student who was second only to the chief student, and along with him came a group of several hundred ordinary students. As they walked through the streets, they garnered a lot of attention. They looked very angry, and as soon as they stepped into the Xeno-Immortal School's tower, the atmosphere became very tense. The students in the Xeno-Immortal School all stopped what they were doing and looked at the angry students from the God-Merging School.

"You've gone too far this time, Xeno-Immortal School!"

"You might have been a famous school of thought in the past, but now you've fallen into disgrace. How could you be so shameless? You make up vulgar stories for a laugh, just to sell your little tabloid!"

"And that's especially true of your late night edition!"

“We demand an explanation from the Xeno-Immortal School immediately!”

These students were yelling angrily, and they had bloodshot eyes.

In response to their words, the students who had recently joined the Xeno-Immortal School turned to look at Xu Qing and the other disciples in charge of the tabloid.

Xu Qing just stood there calmly. In contrast, the other three conclave students edged backward looking somewhat guilty.

The late night edition of the *Xeno-Immortal Enquirer* was relatively new. A month ago when the school was spiking in popularity, they added it as a way to bring in some more income. The contents were even more outrageous and explicit than the normal version. And the reaction to its publication had been very positive....

The schoolmaster looked very irritated as he glared at Xu Qing and the other three students. Then he turned to look at the angry crowd of students from the God-Merging School. He snorted coldly.

“Pipe down!”

The students from the God-Merging School bowed their heads. After all, according to the rules, the position of schoolmaster was to be respected. However, one student who had been the subject of the sensational stories wasn't going to keep his mouth shut.

“For years now, the Xeno-Immortal School has been publishing all kinds of ridiculous stories about the God-Merging School. In fact, any popular school of thought or student in the Imperial University eventually gets targeted by your rumor-mongering!

“Shameless behavior like that is going to harm the dignity of the Xeno-Immortal School. In fact, once that enigmatic master hears about this, he'll probably call your school of thought filthy and despicable! Or maybe the reason that enigmatic master hasn't shown his face is *because* of your little tabloid. If I were that Senior, and I saw the Xeno-Immortal School acting like this, I would be too humiliated to be associated with you!

“The Xeno-Immortal School hasn't just lost its former glory. It's also lost any respect it has from the students in the Imperial University. It's become the scum of the university! A complete disgrace!

“Therefore, we hereby demand that the Xeno-Immortal School make amends!”

The student spoke in a very loud voice. Once he was finished, the other students behind him started saying similar things. Already, a crowd was gathering outside the tower.

The members of the Xeno-Immortal School were wrapped up in different thoughts. Based on what Xu Qing was seeing, he got the feeling there was more to this situation than met the eye. It seemed like someone was using this as an opportunity to feel out the Xeno-Immortal School, and possibly crush them into the dust in their moment of declining fame.

The young woman was secretly getting excited. This seemed like a perfect situation to get new information, and she was keeping her eyes on the schoolmaster.

The schoolmaster's eyes narrowed. Naturally, he had also picked up on what was going on. Leaning forward slightly, he looked at the students from the God-Merging School.

“What do you mean by ‘make amends’?”

The student looked back at the schoolmaster and slowly said, “Close the Xeno-Immortal School and carry out a complete investigation into the matter!”

“Preposterous!” the schoolmaster said with a cold laugh. Standing, he looked at the God-Merging students, and then outside. “You people obviously came here hoping to get information about our Senior member. You could have just asked directly, instead of coming up with flimsy excuses.

“The enigmatic master from our Xeno-Immortal School hasn't made an appearance because he's in secluded meditation, trying to break through to the level of 1,000,000 soul threads!

“Before going into seclusion, the venerable Senior told me that he would come out within three months. On that day, 1,000,000 soul threads would swirl in the dome of heaven over the imperial capital. It would form a Xeno-Immortal sign, causing millions of beams of dawn light to illuminate the Xeno-Immortal School and return it to glory! As of this point, there are only two months left. If you want to confirm whether I'm speaking the truth or not, come back in two months to see with your own eyes.

“But as for now, you can kindly leave the Xeno-Immortal School!”

The schoolmaster's voice thrummed with determination and pride. Then he flicked his sleeve, causing the Xeno-Immortal School's tower to rumble. A force of expulsion quickly locked onto all of the students from the God-Merging School and forced them out. Having accomplished that, the schoolmaster tilted his chin arrogantly and sat back down. Although he looked calm, inside he was feeling extremely helpless. He had the opportunity to bring the Xeno-Immortal School back to the heights of prominence, but until that Senior member showed up, there wasn't much he could do.

In the end, he had to grit his teeth and resort to bragging to try to keep morale up. As far as the consequences for the bragging, he couldn't worry about that now. The situation in the Xeno-Immortal School couldn't be changed, and if it ended up being destroyed, then so be it.

Meanwhile, his words provoked quite a reaction from the students in the Xeno-Immortal School. The young woman's eyes glittered. As for the God-Merging School students who had been ejected from the tower, their eyes glittered brightly. It was the same with the students who had gathered as bystanders.

Xu Qing glanced at the schoolmaster, then checked the 1,000,000 soul threads in his sea of consciousness.... From what he could tell, the schoolmaster still had no idea who he actually was. That said, his words had been very convincing.

In the end, the students from the God-Merging School exchanged glances and left. Their attempt at probing for information had yielded some results.

The enigmatic master from the Xeno-Immortal School would reveal his face in two months. The news spread rapidly through the Imperial University, ensuring that the short-lived enthusiasm for the Xeno-Immortal School once again began to rise.

Around evening, when Xu Qing was leaving, he bowed to the schoolmaster. That was when he noticed the anxiety in the schoolmaster's eyes. And the way the schoolmaster shooed him away seemed to confirm that the man had no idea of Xu Qing's true identity.

I suppose... I can do some experiments with my soul seeds now.

Seven days later, when the other conclave students were getting ready to leave, an anonymous courier student arrived with a sealed bag that he presented to the schoolmaster.

The schoolmaster didn't ask any questions about it. In fact, it almost seemed like he had been waiting for this. Without the slightest hesitation, he opened the bag. Inside was a jade slip and a bottle with a violet snowflake inside.

When the schoolmaster saw those two things, he inhaled sharply. He wasn't sure what the snowflake was, but he could sense the fluctuations of the Xeno-Immortal School. Excitedly picking up the jade slip, he scanned the contents. Sometime later, his expression flickered as he put the jade slip down and looked at the bottle. Then... determination filled his eyes. He crushed the bottle, and the violet snowflake floated into his palm, where it sank into his flesh.

Soul threads began to proliferate explosively inside of him.

Chapter 782: Branches Grow, Leaves Sprout

The moment the schoolmaster absorbed the violet snowflake, Xu Qing, who was in his private chamber in Ningyan's mansion, opened his eyes. He looked in the direction of the Imperial University.

The schoolmaster really is a decisive individual.

Obviously, he had been the one to send that bag. The jade slip explained the pros and cons of using the snowflake. He hid nothing, and made it very clear that he could take the soul seed away with a thought.

That was something the schoolmaster could accept. After all, there was no one besides him who was so interested in seeing the Xeno-Immortal School return to the peak of glory. He was willing to sacrifice everything to see that happen. In reality, he had been waiting for that bag of holding for a while now. In the hopes of getting it, he had taken complete responsibility, and had pushed himself into a corner from which there was no retreat. He had done that on purpose. He had used his actions to create something like a blood tribute for the enigmatic master!

Xu Qing had witnessed all of that. Therefore, he sent a soul seed as a gift. And through the connection created by that soul seed, he was now able to sense the schoolmaster's progress assimilating it, and his cultivation.

That sensation was one-way. Xu Qing's recent research had given him a much more thorough understanding of soul seeds and how domineering they were. After they were absorbed, it was

difficult to trace them to their source. In contrast, the person who absorbed them was clearly visible to the senses of the source.

Based on what I can tell, after the schoolmaster absorbs the soul seed, he'll experience a huge increase in soul threads.... Of course, that's assuming his soul is strong enough. From what I can tell, his upgrade will also benefit me.

Xu Qing's eyes gleamed with determination. A short time later, he closed them and began meditating, absorbing mutagen from his surroundings and converting it into godsource. That was the best method he was aware of to make more soul threads. The only downside was that it was a slow process.

Time passed. The schoolmaster of the Xeno-Immortal School currently trembled excitedly as he used his techniques to make new soul threads. He could sense the number of threads within himself increasing dramatically. He started with 30,000, and with every second that passed, the number increased by several hundred. It was a freakish level of speed that left him completely blown away mentally.

This is what Xeno-Immortal School cultivation is supposed to be like!

He continued with his cultivation, full of vim and vigor. There was no question that the schoolmaster was the most suitable person in the Xeno-Immortal School to use a soul seed. He had done more research than anyone else into Xeno-Immortal School techniques. Though his ordinary cultivation didn't produce soul threads very quickly, his focus on soul nourishment over the years had resulted in his soul being very tough.

That was one of the unique things about the Xeno-Immortal School. That said, there was another school of thought who operated similarly. The God-Merging School. Because the God-Merging School required a godly body, it also involved strengthening the soul beyond what was common for ordinary people.

Due to the soul seed, the schoolmaster's soul vibrated for four straight hours. During that time, his soul thread count went from 30,000 to 40,000. At that point, the process slowed down, though it didn't stop.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing, who wasn't even in the Imperial University, used his soul thread connection to keep track of what the schoolmaster was accomplishing.

Thanks to the schoolmaster's rapid power up, the soul thread vortex in Xu Qing's sea of consciousness began to rotate more forcefully. Slowly but surely, a thread of godsource began to appear in the vortex. Although it was only one thread, to Xu Qing, that was a big boost. It was far superior to godsource formed by slowly absorbing mutagen and converting it. In fact, it was like the difference between heaven and earth.

It really does work!

Xu Qing's eyes glittered with further anticipation as he continued his cultivation.

The next morning at dawn, Xu Qing went to the Xeno-Immortal School tower. In a bit of a deviation from the norm, the schoolmaster wasn't present in the lower levels of the tower, which was quite a surprise to the other conclave students. Normally speaking, the schoolmaster rarely went to the top level. He preferred his chair in the main hall.

Only Xu Qing knew what was going on. The schoolmaster was still working on his cultivation. During the night, his soul thread count had already reached the level of 45,000.

Given that rate of speed, it will only take a few days for him to break through to 50,000. That's the weaving requirement for an earthchild.

As Xu Qing thought about that, he was roped into working on the *Xeno-Immortal Enquirer*. Thanks to the schoolmaster's two months of passionate promotion of the school, they were getting loads of hot tips for the tabloid. The mysterious young woman was now part of the group. She had taken the initiative to join the *Enquirer* team, and was currently pumping out tabloid jade slips and occasionally asking Xu Qing and the others for cultivation tips.

Three days passed.

At noon on the fourth day, as Xu Qing was browsing some of the ancient records in the Xeno-Immortal School, an astonishing shockwave rolled out of the top level of the tower. The shockwave contained godliness, and it caused every student in the Xeno-Immortal School to look up in shock.

That included Xu Qing. Beneath his mask, he was smiling. He could sense that the schoolmaster had broken past the level of 50,000 soul threads.

Next, a howl swept through the tower. A moment later, a massive godly earthchild flickered into being above it, right in mid-air above the Imperial University. It had a black body and a very strong aura, and caused widespread shock in the university. Students from numerous schools of thought looked over, and exclamations of astonishment could be heard everywhere.

The godly earthchild emanated intense pressure for a short time before transforming back into the form of the schoolmaster.

The commotion in the university grew even more intense.

"Is that... the schoolmaster of the Xeno-Immortal School??"

"He actually weaved a godly earthchild!"

"Another instance of major success in the Xeno-Immortal School?"

The conclave students of the Xeno-Immortal School rushed out and looked up at the schoolmaster, the astonishment visible in their eyes. Xu Qing had already grown used to assuming a surprised look.

The mysterious young woman was shaken to the core. *I knew it! The enigmatic master in question isn't the schoolmaster! But I'm going in the right direction. This Xeno-Immortal School... has some really big secrets!*

When the schoolmaster saw that he was the center of attention, he clasped his hands behind his back. And when he spoke, the cultivation base breakthrough thanks to the soul threads ensured that his voice echoed loudly for all to hear.

"You have just witnessed the private techniques of the Xeno-Immortal School! Those who cultivate the private techniques of our school of thought will, in three months at the most, form 50,000 soul threads. Of course, that's assuming your soul is strong enough."

All of the students who heard his words were shaken to the core.

Seeing that, the schoolmaster took a deep breath. Eyes shining with determination, he said, "Furthermore, starting today, the Xeno-Immortal School will break from tradition. We're opening our tower and accepting conclave students to learn our techniques. We want to open up a path for all human cultivators to walk!"

With that, the schoolmaster vanished.

Almost instantly, the entire Imperial University was abuzz with talk about the schoolmaster's transformation, and the fact that the Xeno-Immortal School was accepting new students.

The reputation of the school had been starting to plummet, but now it was rising again. The schoolmaster's huge measure of success, coupled with everything from before, merged into a tempest that affected all the schools of thought in the university.

Word quickly spread to the imperial capital. In no time at all, the Xeno-Immortal School became incredibly popular. In fact, Xu Qing and the other twelve conclave students soon had no personal time at all, as they were forced to deal with a constant stream of students coming to inquire about the school. That said, there weren't many people who were truly interested in becoming conclave students. Although the students were obviously moved, it was going to take more time, or some other dramatic event, to get them to make a final decision. For example, if another person appeared who achieved major success with soul threads, or if some of the students experienced dramatic progress in their cultivation.

Therefore, Xu Qing started to consider giving out another soul seed.... Before he could decide who to give it to, he sensed something about the schoolmaster through the soul seed.

On the third day after the schoolmaster succeeded with the earthchild, Xu Qing sensed the schoolmaster's soul seed forming a vortex. Although it wasn't as impressive as Xu Qing's, it still produced snowflakes. They weren't violet, but rather, green, indicating that they were on a lower level. But they worked all the same. And given that Xu Qing was the ultimate source, he could influence them.

That actually surpassed what Xu Qing had predicted would happen, and it was quite a surprise. Before he could analyze the situation deeply, the schoolmaster sent down a dharmic decree from the top level of the tower, calling Xu Qing and the original three conclave students up. He gave each one of them a bottle.

"Inside those bottles are dao seeds from the private technique of our Xeno-Immortal School. Absorb them and you'll qualify to learn the private technique!"

The other three conclave students were visibly excited. Meanwhile, Xu Qing scanned the bottle and found that it contained a single soul seed snowflake.

"The dao seed from the private technique is the result of countless years of research in our school of thought," the schoolmaster continued. "The reason I never gave them to you before is that they contained potential calamity. But I've resolved that, and they're now perfectly safe. Absorb them, then use the Xeno-Immortal School techniques you know, and your progress will accelerate dramatically."



The schoolmaster didn't mention that after they absorbed the soul seeds, he would still be able to control them. Eyes glittering like lightning, he looked at Xu Qing and the others.

“Break the bottles and absorb the seeds. I'll stand as dharma protector for you while you do.”

The three conclave disciples exchanged glances, then looked at the schoolmaster. It was impossible to tell exactly what they were thinking. But in the end, they chose to break the bottles, take out the green snowflakes, and absorb them.

Upon seeing the three students absorb the snowflakes, the schoolmaster nodded. Then he looked at Xu Qing.

“Sir Dark-Thunder, aren't you going to accept the dao seed?”

Though Xu Qing felt it was a very strange situation, he didn't hesitate to break the bottle and then absorb the tiny green snowflake. Though no one could sense it, not even the schoolmaster, the snowflake immediately melted. The vortex within Xu Qing sped up a bit.

Looking very pleased, the schoolmaster dismissed them and went back to meditating.

Xu Qing clasped hands respectfully, then left with the others. Later, on the way back to the mansion, Xu Qing confirmed that the green snowflake was actually subsidiary to his violet snowflakes.

I never could have guessed that something like this would happen. And how could I have known that the schoolmaster's subsidiary soul seeds would be so limited in number. If there were a hundred of them....

Xu Qing turned and looked back at the Imperial University. He suddenly had the premonition that the Xeno-Immortal School was going to experience a dramatic change thanks to his violet snowflakes. The school was definitely going to rise to prominence. If things went as normal, and the school didn't violate human morality, then he was more than happy to watch it climb to glorious heights. But if they did violate human morality, he would put an end to it immediately.

Chapter 783: The Xeno-Immortal School is Infected with True Evil

A cold winter wind blew through the capital, picking up scattered bits of snow from the ground and sending it dancing into the air. The wind blew on the three conclave students who had absorbed the schoolmaster's green snowflakes as they raced toward the university. All of them had started a new life recently.

Previously, they all had hundreds of soul threads, but now those numbers were increasing. As the original conclave students in the Xeno-Immortal School, they didn't have any special techniques, but their years of cultivation had made their souls a lot tougher than normal. As the morning sun rose, driving away the darkness and sending light out to illuminate everything, the three of them already looked a lot different than before. Their cultivation bases rose, and their gazes sharpened.

The soul fluctuations of the Xeno-Immortal School rolled off them. Even the student who made the slowest progress now had 3,000 soul threads, while the one who made the best progress... had 6,000.

When the three students reached the Xeno-Immortal School, the other nine conclave students, including the mysterious young woman, all looked at them in surprise.

The schoolmaster sat in his chair, his eyes overflowing with praise as he examined them.

The three students exchanged glances, and then, hearts overflowing with gratitude, they said, "Many thanks, Teacher!"

Despite the potential for hidden calamities, the fact that their soul threads had experienced such a dramatic increase left all of them feeling excited and determined.

"You did well in absorbing those Xeno-Immortal dao seeds," the schoolmaster said with a nod. "Next, you need to improve the durability of your souls. They need to be stronger! Remember, the tougher your souls, the more soul threads you'll be able to accumulate.

"My Xeno-Immortal dao seed is an important part of Xeno-Immortal School techniques. Our school's techniques are similar to imperial-class techniques, which as you know require a dao seed to cultivate!"

When the conclave students heard that, their hearts swelled with excitement. The young woman struggled to control her breathing, and was about to ask some questions.

But then, Xu Qing appeared outside the tower. As he walked in, all eyes and all senses focused on him. The other three students who had received dao seeds were visibly taken aback. The schoolmaster's eyes glittered brightly as he rose to his feet. The other nine conclave students were even more shaken.

Xu Qing pulsed with even stronger soul thread fluctuations. Based on what everyone could sense, he clearly had at least 10,000.

"Excellent. Excellent! Sir Dark-Thunder, the first time I laid eyes on you, I could sense you had an extraordinary future. Now it's obvious that you're truly suited to being in our Xeno-Immortal School."

The schoolmaster threw his head back and laughed heartily. Based on what he could sense, the soul seed he had given to Xu Qing had been fully absorbed. And by means of that soul seed, he could sense that Xu Qing's soul was very strong. Given how smoothly the absorption process had gone, it was clear that this Sir Dark-Thunder was a natural talent when it came to soul strengthening.

People like that weren't exactly common. That said, they weren't incredibly rare either, especially considering that people who qualified to come to the Imperial University were all inherently unique in some way.

Xu Qing bowed at the waist, all while feeling a bit helpless. This wasn't how he had intended things to go. That said, he wasn't ready to reveal his true identity, and thus, he had to make at least some soul threads lest he cast suspicion on himself. He had attempted to make a few ordinary soul threads to obfuscate the truth. But his godsource soul threads were so amazing that even just releasing a bit of their energy resulted in fluctuations equivalent to over 10,000 ordinary soul threads. And he couldn't take back that energy now.

The result was the scene playing out right now. Despite the annoying turn of events, Xu Qing was very pleased with what he had accomplished the previous night.

After the three conclave students began cultivating their soul seeds, it resulted in more godsource appearing in the vortex in Xu Qing's sea of consciousness.

However annoyed Xu Qing was at the moment, the schoolmaster was even more excited. Feeling very proud of Xu Qing and the other three students, he turned his attention to the remaining nine members of the conclave.

"Are you people watching? I know that all of you come from different organizations, but that's fine. You're all very lucky to be part of the Xeno-Immortal School's rise to prominence.

"The Imperial University is a tolerant place. And despite what our Xeno-Immortal School says about conclave students, we're also tolerant. Therefore, going forward, if you behave well, then whichever of you is the first to recruit an additional 100 conclave students will be the first to get one of these Xeno-Immortal dao seeds!"

The nine students, including the mysterious young woman, all bowed in response. Although some of them had some suspicions, the fact remained that Xu Qing and the other three had clearly succeeded. And that was a big impetus.

Just like that, a big recruitment drive began in the Xeno-Immortal School. In the following days, news of the success experienced by Xu Qing and the other three spread through the Imperial University. More people than ever showed up to make inquiries. And as more students personally confirmed the truth of the rumors... a tempest began to fill the university.

Many people related personal accounts and experiences proving that the Xeno-Immortal School's private techniques were real. And thus... a fourteenth conclave student joined. Then a fifteenth. In seven short days, the number of conclave students in the Xeno-Immortal School broke past the watershed point of 100. The school really was experiencing a revival.

During that week, Xu Qing and the other three students continued to progress, with the least progress being 5,000. Xu Qing and one other student both reached the level of about 13,000.

The other conclave students saw that, and their eyes became bloodshot as they worked even harder on their task. Regardless of anything, the enticement of the dao seeds was gripping the entire Imperial University.

Eventually, on the evening of the twelfth day, one of the conclave students succeeded in personally enticing a 100th person to join.

In the presence of all the conclave students, the schoolmaster held a solemn ceremony that emphasized the precious nature of the Xeno-Immortal dao seeds. Not giving any chance for hesitation, the schoolmaster handed over the dao seed and had him absorb it. It wasn't just the new conclave students who were paying close attention to the event. Schools of thought from throughout the Imperial University were watching.

As everyone looked on, the new conclave student shivered. Then soul threads erupted from inside of him. After about two hours passed, the soul thread count had surpassed 1,000.

As the soul thread aura spread, the tempest caused by the Xeno-Immortal School grew more intense in the Imperial University. The Xeno-Immortal School was now the hottest conversation topic around. New conclave students were joining on a daily basis, and they immediately began to recruit more students to join them. Thus, as time passed, more and more conclave students got dao seeds and officially started Xeno-Immortal cultivation.

The repeated successes created a vortex that sucked in more and more students. That said, not every conclave student was so devoted. There were some who had just come to watch from the sidelines. Those people simply wanted to see what was happening, and were obviously hesitant and curious about the dao seeds. The mysterious young woman was one of them. Such people got the sense that the Xeno-Immortal dao seeds probably contained some sort of deadly side-effects.

That said, the way the schoolmaster had compared Xeno-Immortal dao seeds with imperial-class techniques was enough of an explanation for most people. After all, cultivating imperial-class techniques really did result in the appearance of a seed.[1]

As a result, though people suspected that there could be side-effects, they were nothing more than that: suspicions that couldn't be proven.

When Xu Qing looked around at the Xeno-Immortal School's tower, and thought about how it had once been deserted, he had to admire the schoolmaster. Xu Qing knew full well that his soul seed was just a turning point. The schoolmaster's perseverance and hard work were also integral to the school's rise to prominence.

In terms of the reality of how soul seeds worked, Xu Qing wasn't worried. He had studied the green snowflake and could tell that, though it was somewhat strange, it was very high quality. In fact, it was perfect. What was more, it contained shades of a heavenly dao, as if it had actually been blessed by a heavenly dao.

As more conclave students came along and absorbed the green soul seeds, the schoolmaster received the benefits. After giving out over 90 soul seeds, his soul thread count reached the level of 80,000.

As the ultimate source, Xu Qing benefited even more. Godsource proliferated in the vortex in his sea of consciousness, turning into soul threads on a daily basis. As of now, he had gone from 1,000,000 soul threads to a total of over 1,100,000. When someone absorbed a soul seed, it would send something like roots throughout them, the point of which was to nourish the seed.

If one of these students eventually cultivates 50,000 soul threads, will it result in a branch appearing?

Xu Qing felt a lot of anticipation about that.

Thus it was that the Xeno-Immortal School, which had fallen into decline in the Imperial University, experienced a revival. Organizations throughout the imperial capital were now paying very close attention to it.

Of course, the other schools of thought in the university were paying even closer attention. That was especially true of the God-Merging School.

The Xeno-Immortal and God-Merging Schools were essentially two diverging concepts that were nearly as incompatible as fire and water. If one rose to prominence, it would obviously have a negative effect on the other.

Therefore, as the Xeno-Immortal School's revival picked up speed, a meeting was held in the God-Merging School's tower. The goal was to plan action against the Xeno-Immortal School.

The attendees included the schoolmaster of the God-Merging School, as well as other high-ranking members. In total, there were a hundred people present, all seated in an orderly fashion.

Seventh Prince was there, seated at the right hand of the schoolmaster and facing the other students. His eyes were now red, which indicated that he was now a chief student of the God-Merging School.

The discussion didn't begin with talk about the Xeno-Immortal School. Instead, it began with a summary of recent situations in their own school of thought, plus updates on personal cultivation. Since Seventh Prince was now the spokesperson for their school, he explained some about his own cultivation progress.

After the introductory elements were finished, the schoolmaster nodded. Casting an encouraging look at the crowd, he turned to Seventh Prince. "You are truly endowed with impressive talent, Seventh Prince. It's perfect for the dao of god-merging. If you keep up your cultivation in this way, then after a sixty-year-cycle, you'll have incredible results."

Seventh Prince waved his hand dismissively but said nothing. He didn't seem impressed or moved.

The schoolmaster smiled faintly, then turned to look at the chief student on his other side. "Sir Spiritsoul, take out the dao seed you got from the Xeno-Immortal School. I'd like to inspect it."

The other chief student with the red eyes waved his hand, causing a green snowflake to appear in front of him. Voice calm, he said, "One of the conclave students from the Xeno-Immortal School dug this out of himself and gave it to me. Please, take a look, Schoolmaster."

He flicked his sleeve, sending the snowflake flying to the schoolmaster.

The schoolmaster reached out with his finger, stopping the snowflake in midair. Eyes glittering, he looked at it closely. He bent over the snowflake, and then red threads emerged from his eyes. Well over a hundred of them appeared and stabbed into the snowflake. The snowflake vibrated, then collapsed into nothing. The schoolmaster seemed to be taking the situation very seriously. Shortly after, the red threads retracted. The schoolmaster closed his eyes.

The tower was completely silent as everyone looked at him.

Finally, he spoke in a hoarse voice. "That thing is fiendish, evil, and domineering. It can consume the souls of all living beings. The Xeno-Immortal School is infected with true evil!" He slowly stood. "Come with me. We're going to personally see what's going on over there!"

#### Chapter 784: God-Merging Raises Difficult Questions

It was evening, so the crowds of students in the Imperial University were thinning. Though there were some students who would stay in the university long-term, most of them left around evening. After all, what happened in the mortal world created fetters that held tight onto the heart. Severing them wasn't easy.

At the moment, a group of people from the God-Merging School was making its way through the emptying university. They were clustered around their schoolmaster, who walked at a steady pace, looking very scholarly and refined. Given his status in the university, wherever he went, students would stop and salute him respectfully. He would look at them kindly and nod. When he encountered students from his own school of thought, he would stop, assess their cultivation, and give them some friendly tips. His words and actions conformed perfectly with what the university expected of a teacher. It was one of the reasons why the God-Merging School's schoolmaster was so respected.

His actions drew the attention of many of the other schools of thought. Soon people realized that he was heading to the east. That was where the Xeno-Immortal School was located.

Many students who had been planning to leave were now swept up in the moment, and started following to see what was going to happen. Many already had speculations. It wasn't really hard to guess what would play out shortly. After all, the Xeno-Immortal School and the God-Merging School were really at odds in their ideals. And that was especially noteworthy considering the recent revival going on in the Xeno-Immortal School.

More and more students joined the crowd following the God-Merging School as they eventually arrived at the Xeno-Immortal School.

Xu Qing and his fellow students had just said their farewells and were about to leave. When he looked outside, his eyes glittered with a mysterious light, and he quickly backed up and stood behind someone else.

There were a few dozen conclave students working on their cultivation. All of them had green snowflakes inside them, and with that blessing, were able to produce large amounts of soul threads. The entire tower was full of the aura of Xeno-Immortal techniques, creating a pressure that even people outside could sense.

When the God-Merging School arrived, their godly aura entered the tower and clashed with the aura of the Xeno-Immortal techniques. The two seemed to be devouring each other, causing muffled rumbling sounds to echo out, like heavenly thunder.

The conclave students in the tower immediately noticed what was happening and opened their eyes. When they saw the God-Merging School outside, their expressions flickered, and they shot to their feet.

The schoolmaster of the God-Merging School stopped outside the tower.

The high-ranking members of the school, including Seventh Prince and the other chief student, entered ahead of him. The godly fluctuations coming off of them created something like a tempest that suppressed the Xeno-Immortal aura. The entire white tower filled with intense pressure, causing the Xeno-Immortal students to subconsciously back up.

Xu Qing's pupils constricted. To him, it felt like a group of powerful grues from a forbidden ground, disguised in human skin.

"As it turns out, the Xeno-Immortal School *is* full of true evil," Seventh Prince said, his eyes cold.

Xu Qing looked back at him with similarly cold eyes.

The eyes of the other conclave students of the Xeno-Immortal School glittered as they looked at the people from the God-Merging School. Though none of them had been members of the Xeno-Immortal School for long, and thus couldn't really say they endorsed the place, it was a fact that the dao seeds had helped them a lot. In fact, no other school of thought could compare in that regard. The benefits were real, and none of them were inclined to abandon them. Therefore, this overtly rude and aggressive act immediately made them think of the people from the God-Merging School as enemies.

"It doesn't matter if you're an imperial prince on the outside," one of the students said. "In the Imperial University, everyone is a student. Please, conduct yourself with dignity and speak with respect!"

Seventh Prince looked around apathetically, then took a few steps back to clear a path. The other high-ranking members of the God-Merging School did the same. Then their schoolmaster appeared. He looked calm as he walked into the tower. He didn't so much as glance at any of the students present, but instead, focused his gaze on the higher level of the tower.

"Schoolmaster of the Xeno-Immortal School, we've come from the God-Merging School to pay a formal visit."

He didn't speak very loudly, but his voice contained immense pressure. All of the students of the Xeno-Immortal School had no choice but to bow their heads.

Xu Qing was in the crowd, and he was surreptitiously examining the schoolmaster from the God-Merging School. This was his second time seeing the schoolmaster, and the feeling of familiarity from last time once again appeared.

There's something fishy about this person.

A moment later, a tremor passed through Xu Qing's thoughts, and he shifted his gaze to the higher level of the tower. He had just sensed the fluctuations of another green soul seed.

Is that...?

Around then, the schoolmaster of the Xeno-Immortal School spoke from the higher level.

"We have different daos. What's more, I'm too busy to see you. Please leave immediately and don't disturb the cultivation of the students here."

While the schoolmaster from the God-Merging School spoke in a calm and tranquil way, the schoolmaster from the Xeno-Immortal School spoke in a wild and arrogant way. Some of that was a result of rank and status. The God-Merging School was the number-one school of thought, so they needed to be calm and tranquil. And since the Xeno-Immortal School was rising to prominence, it made sense for them to be somewhat arrogant.

The words that had just been spoken pricked the ears of the people from the God-Merging School. However, their schoolmaster's facial expression didn't change, as if he didn't care at all what the other schoolmaster just said. Looking around at the Xeno-Immortal students, he spoke in a kind tone that seemed almost like a sigh.

“The Imperial University is a place where *a hundred flowers bloom*. Differing views can be expressed freely here. I congratulate the Xeno-Immortal School on their revival. It’s only by the fierce competition between schools of thought that new innovation can occur. It’s the only way to find a truly suitable dao for humankind.

“However, if a revival is instigated by true evil, with no regard for the safety of the students, then I can’t accept that. Neither can the Imperial University. Neither can humankind.

“I’ve been studying various ancient records to confirm certain historical truths. According to my findings, the Xeno-Immortal School never had anything like a ‘Xeno-Immortal dao seed.’ That’s a new development. And the dao seeds all of you have in you have some very serious problems.

“I personally studied one such dao seed, and I saw clear evidence of evil. If you absorb them, then going forward, your life force, your cultivation base, and your thoughts will be under the control of someone else. What’s more... with a single thought on the part of your leaders, you’ll be made to pay the ultimate price. At best, your soul will dim, at worst, you’ll lose your life.

“Therefore, I came here today to provide a warning. The Xeno-Immortal School needs to stop using this method. Beyond that, I encourage all students here to extrude their dao seeds, lest they provoke true calamity on themselves.”

His words caused no small amount of shock in the Xeno-Immortal School. The truth was that many students had wondered about this very possibility. However, the similarities between these dao seeds and those from imperial-class techniques were such that they’d been able to overlook that possibility. But now, a person as important as the schoolmaster of the God-Merging School brought up the same point. They couldn’t help but start thinking deeply about the situation.

Xu Qing had to admit that this schoolmaster from the God-Merging School, who seemed so familiar, had a way with words. It made sense that his little speech had already caused people to feel unsettled.

I wonder how our schoolmaster is going to resolve this situation.

Xu Qing looked toward the upper level of the tower.

Chapter 785: Second Violet Soul Seed

The Xeno-Immortal School’s white tower was completely silent. However, after only a moment passed, the Xeno-Immortal schoolmaster laughed coldly from the top level.

“What a disgrace for the schoolmaster of the God-Merging School to utter such ridiculous nonsense!” The Xeno-Immortal schoolmaster appeared, walking slowly down into the main hall. Looking coldly at the God-Merging schoolmaster, he said, “You were reading ancient records? Confirming historical truths? You claim that the



Xeno-Immortal School never produced dao seeds before? In that case, take a look at this and tell me what it is?"

The Xeno-Immortal schoolmaster pointed toward the top level of the tower. Instantly, terrifying soul thread fluctuations spread out, surpassing anything before. It seemed like the level of about 300,000.

As the fluctuations rolled out, a shimmering field of light appeared, upon which was visible an enormous figure. Shockingly, it was a godly earthchild.

However, it was different from the one the schoolmaster had weaved before. This earthchild seemed far more ancient, with a profound aura that surpassed any other earthchild. It seemed like Void Returning, and not ordinary Void Returning. The fluctuations were completely terrifying. What was more, within the earthchild was a green snowflake, glittering brightly as it connected to all the soul threads. It was a dao seed.

The God-Merging schoolmaster looked at it silently. All the other cultivators from the God-Merging School, including Seventh Prince, had slight frowns on their faces.

Meanwhile, the Xeno-Immortal students were astonished. It only took a moment for someone to guess where this earthchild came from, and it was mind-blowing to say the least.

"That is Patriarch Chen Daoze of our Xeno-Immortal School!" the Xeno-Immortal schoolmaster said, his voice echoing throughout the tower. "Most people on the outside believed that the patriarch achieved a major level of success by weaving an earthchild, only to die afterward of nirvanic extermination. They believed that he became a desiccated corpse that we kept stored here in the Xeno-Immortal School. But do you really think that our patriarch could die so easily?"

"The reality is that Patriarch Chen Daoze chose to enter a deep state of sleep to study his dao seed! The patriarch always had a dao seed inside of him. So where exactly did you get information claiming we never had dao seeds before?"

"Furthermore, since our patriarch himself fused with a dao seed, then who is the 'leader' you mentioned whose mere thought could lead to disaster? Please, tell me who the 'leader' of our patriarch is?" The Xeno-Immortal schoolmaster flicked his sleeve proudly and turned to his own students. "Look closely at the sleeping patriarch and tell me, are you looking at an illusory projection? You should be able to tell. And is the dao seed inside of him the same as the one inside all of you?"

The Xeno-Immortal students were shaken to the core. They had all noticed the green snowflake inside the patriarch's head, and the fact that it looked exactly like their own snowflakes. As the saying goes, *facts speak louder than words*, and what was more, they could topple all sorts of rumors.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered. Now he realized where the strange feeling from before came from. It was actually a bit of a surprise to him to find out that Chen Daoze wasn't actually dead.

Chen Daoze... must have a far stronger soul than the schoolmaster. Probably by many times over. Sadly, the blessing of the green snowflake would be very limited for him. If he had a violet snowflake, then he should definitely be able to break past the 500,000 soul thread level.

Xu Qing thought about it for a moment.

The God-Merging schoolmaster had no way to rebut the words of the Xeno-Immortal schoolmaster. Everyone from the God-Merging School was currently just standing there with serious looks on their faces. Seeing that, the Xeno-Immortal schoolmaster laughed coldly.

“When I mentioned someone being in seclusion, I was talking about our patriarch! In a month, he’s going to be coming out of seclusion. If you have suspicions, just wait a month. If you dare, we can have a dao debate then!”

His words immediately caused a stir, not just in the students in the tower, but in the other schools of thought that were paying attention to the situation.

In the Imperial University, dao debates were the highest form of intellectual interchange. In fact, they were the foundation of the university. Schools of thought were actually encouraged to have dao debates as a way to improve their level of persuasion and influence, and also to attract new recruits. In the early days of the Imperial University, dao debates happened all the time. There were even occasions in which dao debate between major schools of thought attracted the attention of the imperial clan. There were even times when the emperor himself attended. Over the years that had passed, and especially since the God-Merging School became popular, dao debates became less frequent. But now, the Xeno-Immortal schoolmaster had openly proposed a dao debate. [1]

His words came across like a general drawing his sword. The Xeno-Immortal students immediately got very excited. In contrast, the people from the God-Merging School stood there grimly.

A moment passed, whereupon the God-Merging schoolmaster looked away from the screen of light and directly at the Xeno-Immortal schoolmaster.

“That’s fine,” he said coolly. “In a month, when your patriarch comes out of seclusion, a dao debate will be held here in the Imperial University!”

The God-Merging schoolmaster turned and walked off. The high-level members of his school looked around grimly and then followed him.

The atmosphere in the Xeno-Immortal School was exuberant. Looking around proudly, the schoolmaster waved his hand to indicate that everyone should go back to what they were doing. Then he clasped his hands behind his back and went back upstairs.

Xu Qing looked long and hard at the departing cultivators from the God-Merging school, especially Seventh Prince and the schoolmaster. Then he looked up toward the top part of the Xeno-Immortal School tower.

Should I give out another soul seed?

He looked at the 99 violet snowflakes he had. After some thought, he left.

Later that night, a bag that looked exactly like the previous bag was delivered to the Xeno-Immortal School. The schoolmaster sensed it being delivered, but didn’t immediately rush out to get it. After

waiting a short time, he went downstairs. He wasn't concerned with who delivered it. He was fully aware that the enigmatic master he was dealing with didn't want to be revealed. Therefore, there was no reason to pry. What he cared about was whether or not the bag contained a violet snowflake. With the bag in hand, he hurried back into his private chamber.

As predicted, the bag contained a violet snowflake. The schoolmaster's heart leapt with excitement. A moment later, he took a deep breath and placed the bottle into the Xeno-Immortal School's restricted chamber, right in front of the sleeping Chen Daoze.

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That very night in the God-Merging School, something profoundly significant was taking place.... In the top level of their tower, in their Technique Library, Seventh Prince was looking through jade slip after jade slip.

Due to the unique characteristics of the Imperial University, the God-Merging School's Technique Library was a special place. That was where each student would record information about their cultivation. That way, later generations could learn from their experiences, and avoid making any big mistakes.

Seventh Prince was combing through those very records. He could have left whenever he wanted. But after returning from the Xeno-Immortal School, he thought about what his own schoolmaster had mentioned to him about the sixty-year-cycle.

He said I'd have incredible results after a sixty-year-cycle.... Unfortunately, the crown prince incense is going to burn out in a year. I don't have the option of waiting that long.

Though Seventh Prince had experienced a breakthrough recently, he still felt like he was advancing too slowly. He hated Xu Qing and wanted to get revenge, which fueled his desire to become the crown prince and gain control over humankind. In the past, everything had seemed possible thanks to having King Heaventide as an uncle. But now....

If I can have a shocking cultivation base... then all my problems will be easily solved!

Feeling somewhat fidgety, Seventh Prince kept thinking and reading. He wanted to find a shortcut! He had asked the schoolmaster for advice, but hadn't received any response.

About two hours later, Seventh Prince's eyes glittered as he looked at the jade slip in his hand. It contained insights into cultivation from a Senior member of the God-Merging School in the past. It talked about a theoretical method of taking the souls of fellow humans and using them to accelerate the godly entity transformation. It was a brutal technique that violated the moral norms of human nature, which was why it been abandoned. The person who came up with the idea ultimately used it on a small scale when dealing with personal enemies.

After some thought, Seventh Prince walked out of the Technique Library. He left the jade slip exactly where he found it.

Shortly after, in the peaceful Technique Library, the God-Merging schoolmaster appeared out of nowhere, standing in the exact spot where Seventh Prince had just stood. Looking down at the jade slip, he smiled faintly.

Chapter 786: He's a Xeno-Immortal

It was a calm and peaceful night for many. But for others, the wind pierced deep into their souls.

For example, there was Seventh Prince. After returning to his mansion, he seemed to simply go into meditation. But the truth was that his heart pounded as if he had been possessed. He just couldn't stop thinking about the content of that jade slip.

And then there was the patriarch of the Xeno-Immortal School, Chen Daoze. When the violet snowflake floated into his earthchild body, he experienced a dramatic proliferation in soul threads. His soul was stronger than the soul of any other person in the Xeno-Immortal School, and had long ago reached an astonishing level. That was why even the puny green snowflake had pushed his soul threads to the level of 300,000.

But now, with the violet soul seed, his soul thread count quickly climbed to 400,000. Then 500,000. And soon it approached 600,000.

The Xeno-Immortal schoolmaster activated a spell formation to keep the fluctuations concealed, otherwise it would have caused a big commotion. The schoolmaster had no choice but to cover those fluctuations. After all... this speed of cultivation was uncanny. When kept within reasonable bounds, fast cultivation would attract some attention. But heaven-defying speed could provoke terror. Thankfully, the schoolmaster was ensuring that no prying eyes noticed what happened.

Of course, he couldn't block Xu Qing's senses. That night, Xu Qing opened his eyes several times and looked in the direction of the Imperial University. His expression flickered between various emotions, and his heart was in turmoil.

I can't believe Chen Daoze's soul has reached a level like this....

By means of the soul seed, Xu Qing could sense the soul threads increasing in number. Of course, the godsource increase that he experienced as a result was also shocking.

Overnight, Xu Qing's soul threads increased by tens of thousands.

The Xeno-Immortal schoolmaster also experienced a dramatic night. As he personally watched the patriarch power up, it gave him a deeper understanding of soul seeds, but at the same time, struck fear into his heart. Although his words from earlier seemed perfectly reasonable, and also very convincing, the reality was that he had known the truth about soul seeds from the beginning, thanks to Xu Qing. But in the end, this was a chance to truly revive the Xeno-Immortal School, so even if the soul seed had been pure poison, he still would have consumed it. Maybe his decision would create a rocky future for the Xeno-Immortal School. He had no way of knowing. He just knew that the place was quietly dying, and thus, he'd chosen to make a dramatic gamble.

Even still, what was happening right now was shocking and fear-inspiring. Slowly but surely, Chen Daoze's earthchild form opened its eyes, and the schoolmaster suppressed his fear.

"This is godsource," a profound and ancient voice said.

"Greetings, Patriarch!" the schoolmaster said, bowing excitedly.

"Someone... has tread the path ahead of us, and thus proven that our Xeno-Immortal School techniques are feasible on a theoretical level. We use soul threads to imitate godsource. But this person reverse-engineered our process. They used the result to

determine the method. And in doing so, they used Xeno-Immortal School techniques as a personal blessing.

“Either a god or an immortal, determined with a single thought. Or perhaps... this is what a xeno-immortal truly is.”

Chen Daoze’s huge earthchild form blurred. Then rumbling sounds echoed out as the body became innumerable soul threads that shrank down and ultimately disappeared, revealing his true body, which hadn’t been seen for 5,000 years. He had deeply sunken eyes and a face full of wrinkles, a testament to the years of hardship he had experienced. His hair was light gray, and he was very skinny. Yet his eyes glittered with bright light; he had such indescribable wisdom that he could burn all souls and see through the substructure of humanity.

After speaking, he checked his body, and then a wistful look appeared in his eyes. He really had never imagined that he would wake up. He had long since resigned himself to slowly sinking away into death.

But now that he was awake, his heart filled with determination. Striding over to the schoolmaster, he clasped the man’s shoulder.

“There’s no need to think too much into this. In your heart, think of him as a xeno-immortal. Then all those complicated thoughts will be made much simpler.”

“Xeno-immortal...” the schoolmaster murmured. Nodding, he gritted his teeth and forced himself to forget about his fear and suspicions. When those attachments disappeared, and he truly opened his heart, the violet snowflake transformed again, this time becoming more deeply bound to him.

At the same time, his soul thread count increased. Breaking past his previous shackles, he reached the level of 100,000.

“You can’t go past that,” Chen Daoze said. “You’ve already surpassed the limitations of your soul. Given the nature of your soul, you previously wouldn’t even have been able to reach 100,000. This is the blessing that comes from those green snowflakes of yours.” Chen Daoze seemed as if he could see into the very depths of the schoolmaster. “If you want to break through, you should try to help those students absorb the green snowflakes. See if their soul thread count can climb high enough for you to... form the next level of dao seed!”

The schoolmaster’s eyes glittered brightly, and he nodded.

Seven days passed.

Xu Qing kept the same routine during that time. He would go to the Xeno-Immortal School tower every day, work on cultivation with the conclave students there, and benefit from the Xeno-Immortal School techniques. He had long since come to realize that as more people cultivated these techniques, the fluctuations in the tower became increasingly beneficial to his breathing exercises. The vortex in his sea of consciousness rotated even more freely.

As a result, Xu Qing liked this environment. He took note that the schoolmaster wasn't staying upstairs constantly. Instead, he came down to the main hall to give advice to students. It seemed almost as if he was trying to make some sort of decision.

He included Xu Qing in that process, but apparently, Xu Qing's cultivation speed was too slow. What was more, he didn't act as fawningly as some of the other students. And thus, as everyone else worked harder, they slowly surpassed Xu Qing.

That wasn't the case just with Xu Qing. There were other conclave students who fell behind as well, whether they had hesitated about the dao seeds or not. As of now, there were actually hundreds of conclave students in the Xeno-Immortal School, and there were plenty among them who had extraordinary souls. As a result, it was a given that some people would quickly catch up to the old guard.

Wherever large numbers of people gathered, different personalities could be found. And when you added in the fact that no one knew the true identity of anyone else, it meant that many people would reveal aspects of themselves that they normally kept hidden. For example, many people were much more ready to be disdainful or overbearing. Xu Qing had already experienced it a few times. That was especially true after the schoolmaster gave up on him. The new person the schoolmaster had chosen as his favorite would look at Xu Qing and the longtime students with pure arrogance.

Xu Qing didn't really care. He had already guessed what the schoolmaster was doing, and was actually curious to see how it worked out. Would the schoolmaster be able to use the green soul seeds to make a more advanced type of soul seed? The person he chose for the experiment was indeed extraordinary. With the help of the schoolmaster, that person's soul improved dramatically. His soul threads increased as well. In a single day, he became the first person among all the students to reach the level of 50,000 soul threads.

A tempest of soul thread fluctuations filled the tower, attracting quite a bit of attention. That was when the schoolmaster hurried that student up to the top level of the tower. No one had any idea what they discussed. But two hours later, that student came back down, and the schoolmaster announced that he was a chief student.

All the other students bowed their heads respectfully.

In any school of thought, the position of chief student was a very important one. Such a person's every word and action was as a representative of the school and its honor. Of course, chief students also earned instant respect from all the other students in that school of thought. The chief students were also quite the center of attention.

Xu Qing observed from some distance away. As he studied the preening chief student, he realized something.

It worked. The schoolmaster made the next type of soul seed.

The chief student didn't just have a green soul seed now. He also had a white snowflake, in the middle of forming.

As the other students clustered around the chief student and offered well-wishes and congratulations, Xu Qing left the tower.

The other longtime students left also. Among the group of students clustered around the chief student, some looked with disdain at those who were leaving. Others seemed outright hostile. Regardless, the Xeno-Immortal School now had a chief student, and that only attracted more attention. It also made one certain person even more determined than ever.

And that was Seventh Prince.

At the same time that the Xeno-Immortal student was forming 50,000 soul threads, Seventh Prince was in his mansion thinking about what the God-Merging schoolmaster had said about the Xeno-Immortal dao seeds.

“Evil....”

Seventh Prince’s eyes slowly closed, concealing the strange glow within them. He had made his decision. That night, he went to the northwest of the imperial capital.

There, in a building near Grand Prince’s mansion complex, faint lamp light flickered. A figure was there, seated cross-legged at a wooden table. He wore a voluminous black cloak that covered his facial features. At a certain point, he extended his arm, revealing a withered finger that toyed with the burning wick of the lamp. This person seemed like a black hole; the flickering light wasn’t capable of illuminating them, and instead, was sucked away. He sat there quietly. Waiting.

Sometime later, the sound of a breeze could be heard outside. Three people appeared outside the building. Pushing the door open, they entered, heads bowed, unspeaking.

A raspy voice spoke from the depths of the dark hood.

“One. Don’t try to figure out the identity of our employer. Not even I know.

“Two. Once this matter is concluded, all of you are free.

“Three. If anything unexpected happens, or if you’re discovered, you must self-detonate your fleshly body and reveal the Xeno-Immortal dao seed inside of you. All clues need to point to the Xeno-Immortal School. You can make your own decision about how to best make that happen.

“Four. Our employer wants 30,000,000 human souls. It doesn’t matter if they’re mortals or cultivators, as long as they’re human. Put them in these kettles and return them to me.”

The lamplight flickered as the cloaked individual disappeared into thin air, leaving behind three pitch-black kettles.

The three individuals looked silently at the kettles. Without a word, they picked them up, then vanished into the night. Each used their own ways of leaving the imperial capital, and going to other rings in the region, or even other regions....

Around the time they left, Xu Qing, who was currently in his private chamber focusing on the white snowflake, suddenly opened his eyes and looked off into the distance. He had just sensed three green soul seeds leaving the imperial capital.

Chapter 787: A Violation of Human Morality

As the Xeno-Immortal schoolmaster passed out green snowflakes over the past two months, Xu Qing was able to use his connection to them to keep tabs on many of the students from the Xeno-Immortal School.

If Xu Qing wanted to know their true identity, it would be a simple matter of course. That said, he wasn't interested in that. The Xeno-Immortal schoolmaster had remained in the Imperial University this entire time. He hadn't left even once. As a result, Xu Qing had no idea who he actually was.

These three weren't the only people he had sensed leaving the imperial capital after receiving Xeno-Immortal dao seeds. After all, members of the Imperial University were more than just students. They all had identities on the outside, and those came with various personal and public matters that had to be handled.

After sensing the three people leaving, Xu Qing closed his eyes and went back to breathing exercises. When the light of dawn shone over the city, he opened his eyes. Straightening up his garments, he pushed open the door of the private chamber and walked out. Snow landed on his face, which quickly melted.

He looked at the blue sky filling up with snow. He felt the cold wind. And he could hear the swordsmen from Sea-Sealing County working on their breathing exercises. Xu Qing gradually came to feel absent-minded.

The aura of winter was getting stronger.

It's been three months.

That was how long he'd been in the imperial capital. When he arrived, it was autumn. Now, it was nearly the middle of winter. During those three months, he had done a few high-profile things. But after joining the Imperial University, he had gradually melted into the crowd. That was how Xu Qing liked to do things. A high-profile action could establish some prestige. But after that, he preferred to stick to the shadows.

He wasn't the only one to fade from public view. The same occurred with Plumdark and the Captain.

Plumdark had been gone for half a month now. The difference between Ling'er and Plumdark was clear. The former stuck close to Xu Qing, while the latter was independent. Plumdark had her own things to deal with. Her own life to live. After the Dawning Sun went missing, and the atmosphere in the imperial capital became tense, she had gone to one of the other rings in the Imperial Region.

To her, this whole place was both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. And thus, she had gone to look for traces of the ancient past. She didn't come to say goodbye to Xu Qing. But she left behind a jade slip that had some of her aura attached to it.

Xu Qing respected her decision not to come in person, and didn't reach out to ask any questions.

After the big heist, the Captain vanished and had not yet shown up again. That made Xu Qing even more curious about what he'd stolen from the Star Emperor Preeminence Sect. Given what he knew of the Captain and how restless he was, Xu Qing knew he couldn't hole up anywhere for long. And that seemed to indicate there was a good chance the Captain had assumed a new identity.

As for what identity that was.... After some thinking, he looked in the direction of the branch sect of the Star Emperor Preeminence Sect.



I'd say there's a nine out of ten chance that he went back there. He probably wasn't aiming to steal only one thing.

Wu Jianwu and Kong Xianglong were both pursuing their own personal destined opportunities in the imperial capital.

Wu Jianwu went to the Daoist Literary Academy, which was an academy originally set up by Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity. It had fallen into decline, and was mostly a historical archive now. But for some reason, it really captured Wu Jianwu's attention. For roughly two months now he had been doing odd jobs there.

Kong Xianglong had chosen to pursue training at the Swordsage Division, in the hopes of following in the footsteps of his grandfather.

Everyone was wrapped up in their own pursuits.

In contrast to everyone else, Ningyan seemed very quiet. After the Dawning Sun incident, he spent most of his time in secluded meditation in front of his mother's portrait. He rarely came out. However, on this particular evening, because Xu Qing was heading out earlier than usual, they happened to pass each other. They exchanged a nod.

Xu Qing could sense that Ningyan's time spent in the shrine hall had resulted in his aura changing.

Everyone is growing.

Taking a deep breath, Xu Qing strode off into the snow. He was also growing. The wind picked up. By the time he reached the entrance of the Imperial University, snowflakes were everywhere.

Just like that, half a month passed.

Four more students in the Xeno-Immortal School reached the level of 50,000 soul threads. The schoolmaster treated them all with great importance, promoting them from the conclave to being successor students. They also earned the right to give lectures.

Rankings for ordinary students were as follows: initiate, conclave, successor.

And the successor students were allowed to recruit initiates and give them dao seeds.

According to new rules set forth by the schoolmaster, there would be a chief student competition every three months. The chief students would be able to practice cultivation in the presence of the patriarch, and receive personal instruction. What was more, they had priority pick of items from the sect that bolstered the soul, as well as the chance to get upgraded dao seeds.

Of course, such exciting possible rewards were guaranteed to lead to some chaotic developments. But at the same time, it led to rapid growth in membership for the Xeno-Immortal School.

Soon, white dao seeds were being distributed. In the past, there hadn't been enough dao seeds to simply give them to every conclave student. But now, as the Xeno-Immortal School expanded and white dao seeds appeared, conclave students who previously didn't have the chance to absorb green dao seeds were now getting their chance.

Thanks to the hard work of everyone involved, more students than ever were hoping to join the Xeno-Immortal School. Xu Qing had just entered the Imperial University and noticed the new recruitment efforts. There was already a crowd gathered outside the tower.

Soon enough, a hierarchy developed among the Xeno-Immortal students. Even when it came to daily cultivation routines, there were various cliques and groups. Xu Qing and the other older students did not bask in glory. Though they worked hard, it was a fact that the Imperial University was full of elite chosen. Therefore, it was only natural that the older students were ultimately surpassed.

Though no one else reached the level of 50,000 soul threads, the sight of the successor students advancing so dramatically caused many people to start getting nervous. As a result, some students' identity and status outside the university started to become relevant.

Xu Qing noticed all of that and didn't interfere.

The Xeno-Immortal School could make its own decisions about how it expanded. Besides, the more the school grew, the more he would benefit. During the half month that passed, his soul thread count reached the level of 1,300,000.

If I went all out, I could probably form my third-level god state. I just need to complete a secret trove, and I could step from Spirit Trove and into Void Returning

As for Xeno-Immortal techniques, they're actually suitable for any cultivation level. Going forward, I'll be able to take the power of gods and the techniques of cultivators and combine them. The resulting blessing will be even more effective.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered with anticipation. The Xeno-Immortal School was the best thing that happened to him since arriving in the imperial capital. The Emperor's Sword was different, as it represented a mission. But the Xeno-Immortal techniques were a way to constantly improve himself.

Before finding the Xeno-Immortal School, his godsource was completely independent. His cultivation base was also independent. Although they could be combined by means of his secret troves, that was only the first part of a larger process. And fundamentally speaking, they were still completely unique from each other. But the Xeno-Immortal School's techniques changed that.

I guess I'll just wait for the dao debate. Given Patriarch Chen Daoze's soul thread count right now, even if they can't come out on top against the God-Merging School, they'll still be in a good position. The Xeno-Immortal School is definitely on the road to a major revival.

Xu Qing was in a good mood that morning as he pondered such matters and walked toward the Xeno-Immortal School's white tower. He was just getting ready to step inside and start working on breathing exercises when a voice interrupted him.

"The lot of you go to the daoist rite center and get everything set up. Upperclassman Darkforest invited people from several schools of thought to a gathering. Make sure the incense is lit, the nice tea is ready, and that there isn't a speck of dust anywhere in the rite center."

The person speaking was a conclave student with more than 30,000 soul threads, and he was giving instructions to a handful of new students who hadn't yet joined any faction in the school. The Upperclassman Darkforest he had mentioned was one of the four newly promoted successor students. The factionless students were initially inclined to refuse to comply with his instructions. But considering it related to a successor student, they finally agreed.

Xu Qing ignored them, walked over to his usual corner, and sat down cross-legged. Before he could even close his eyes to begin meditating, the conclave student who had just given the orders looked at him. Considering that Xu Qing had been around since the beginning, he was obviously familiar with him.

“You too,” he said. “You go with them.”

Xu Qing’s expression remained the same as ever as he closed his eyes.

Seeing that kind of reaction caused the conclave student to frown beneath his mask. He then walked over to Xu Qing, which attracted the attention of many other students. Numerous eyes were fixed on the conclave student as he stopped in front of Xu Qing.

“I’m talking to you, Sir Dark-Thunder!”

Xu Qing slowly opened his eyes and looked calmly at the student in front of him. That single look caused the student to shiver from head to toe. All of his soul threads went into complete chaos. Some of them seemed like they might explode, and it caused intense pain to strike the students’ internal organs. Shocked, the student backed up a few paces.

The onlookers were surprised. They hadn’t sensed a thing. All they saw was the conclave student walk up to Xu Qing, and then suddenly back up looking surprised. There were already numerous theories in the minds of the onlookers.

Xu Qing closed his eyes and went back to meditating.

The conclave student shivered. A moment ago, he’d felt like the shadow of death was looming over him. His heart pounded with lingering fear, and he wanted to just drop the matter. But there were a lot of people watching, and as the saying goes, *if you ride a tiger, it’s hard to get off*.

He turned in place and quickly walked over to the spot where he and his faction usually meditated. There, he took out a communications jade slip unique to the Imperial University. With it, he sent a voice message.

Not long after, someone walked into the tower. It was none other than the successor student Darkforest. His arrival prompted many of the other students to get to their feet and bow to him. The conclave disciple who had clashed with Xu Qing hurried over, bowed, then whispered a few things into Darkforest’s ear, all while pointing at Xu Qing.

Darkforest turned to look coldly at Xu Qing.

“How amusing.”

He started walking toward Xu Qing, his 70,000 soul threads pulsing out to create a powerful pressure in the area.

Before he could take more than seven or eight steps, the sound of an explosive commotion rose up from the outside of the tower.

“Something big just happened in Heavenbright County! 1,000,000 mortals were sacrificed in some sort of ceremony!”

“The governor of Heavenbright personally went to investigate, and ended up executing the culprit. The murderer tried to destroy his own body, but the governor stopped him before he could. And guess what, a strange seed was found inside him!”

“People are saying that the governor of Heavenbright County suspects it’s a Xeno-Immortal dao seed. The matter has already been reported to the emperor. And that dao seed is already on the way to the emperor to be inspected!”

“People in the imperial palace are absolutely furious!”

As the words drifted into the Xeno-Immortal School, the students looked around in shock. Darkforest stopped in place, then turned to look outside.

Xu Qing opened his eyes, and they shone with a steely light.

### Chapter 788: Cleaning House

For countless years, the border regions of human territory were rife with war. After all, humans had once been the top species in Revered Ancient, and as a result, just about every region had major human populations. Later, when humans fell into decline, one border region after another was seized. Almost overnight, the humans there became outsiders and foreigners. As a result, ceremonies that involved sacrificing humans weren’t uncommon.

However... though war was common in the human border regions, large-scale atrocities weren’t very common. What was more, it wasn’t just one sacrificial ceremony that had been carried out in the Heavenbright County. It was three!

As a result, the human lives taken weren’t limited to hundreds of thousands. Instead, the death toll went into the millions. Most of the deaths were in mortal kingdoms, where their souls were extracted while they were alive, leading to brutal deaths. The vile nature of the atrocity shook humankind to the core.

When news reached the emperor, he was furious. After all, the three events in Heavenbright County were most likely just the tip of the iceberg, and it seemed very likely that similar things would happen in other locations. Whether it was an outright sacrifice or a part of some cultivation technique, a few million souls wouldn’t be enough. Perhaps the instances in other locations had been kept secret. Or perhaps the people in charge in those locations weren’t paying attention, and thus hadn’t noticed what was going on.

The emperor immediately issued a dharmic decree calling for a thorough investigation of the border regions. What was more, the Five Greater Celestial Divisions were all mobilized to aid in the investigation.

Next, another dharmic decree was issued regarding the Xeno-Immortal School.

The Xeno-Immortal School’s white tower was to be temporarily locked down, and the schoolmaster and patriarch were to remain there in confinement.

The decrees caused an immediate stir in the capital and the university. There were some people who started repeating what the God-Merging schoolmaster had said recently. In no time at all, lots of people were saying that there was something ‘evil’ about the Xeno-Immortal School. And all of the criticism was directed at the dao seeds.

The Xeno-Immortal School's revival was encountering a major obstacle. Whether it was the emperor's dharmic decree or the souring of public opinion, the school of thought was now under a lot of pressure. That was especially true... of those people who had already absorbed dao seeds. They were basically incapable of defending themselves. They knew more about the characteristics of dao seeds than any outsider. The dao seeds really could devour all types of souls.

Devouring souls with dao seeds would strengthen the person doing the devouring, and it would also result in more soul threads.

In the final analysis, it was at least theoretically possible for the souls of living beings to be absorbed into the dao seed to accelerate cultivation. It was relevant to note that the souls needed by the dao seeds weren't limited to those of humans. The souls of all living species in Revered Ancient could be devoured. Unfortunately, that detail didn't count as evidence of anything.

As time passed, and the situation developed, the Xeno-Immortal School went from being busy and bustling to being deserted again. The school went from a state of revival into a state of emptiness, like death. Some people even paid ridiculous prices to have their dao seeds extracted or transferred to others.

When Xu Qing saw that all the work he had put into reviving the Xeno-Immortal School was now in danger of being negated, it provoked, not a sensation of crisis, but rather, killing intent. Because the entire situation was essentially instigated by him, he felt the need to investigate on his own.

If the atrocities had really been committed by people with his own soul seeds, then it meant it was time to clean house, to take back the soul seeds of anyone who had left the capital, and make amends as best he could. But if the deed hadn't been done by the Xeno-Immortal School, and was instead a slanderous attack, then he didn't care who was behind it. He would find them and wipe them out. Too many people had died.

Xu Qing left the Imperial University and without any hesitation went to the teleportation portal to leave the imperial capital.

Once outside, he no longer suppressed the fluctuations of his soul seed. He unleashed them, which provided a big blessing to his senses. It almost felt like his mind was being struck by lightning as, in an instant, hundreds of threads appeared in his mind, each one linking to someone with a dao seed. He could sense all of them, whether they were violet, green, or even white.

The majority of the threads led to the imperial capital. But there were some leading to other places... specifically, there were eleven of them.

Some were nearby, some were far away. If the schoolmaster had been the one doing this, his limited range would have made it difficult to identify their specific locations. But Xu Qing was the ultimate source, so with work, he was able to trace the threads to their current locations.

There are ten of these soul seeds that have been fully absorbed. But one of them isn't.

It seemed logical to conclude that the soul seed which wasn't absorbed by anyone probably was the same one that the governor of Heavenbright County had extracted and was sending back to the capital.

Xu Qing closed his eyes and used the thread to determine the exact location of the soul seed. At the same time, he thought back to when he noticed this soul seed leaving the capital.

Shortly after, he opened his eyes.

*More than half a month ago, this one left as part of a group of three. Now, the other two....* Xu Qing's eyes glittered with an unusual light as he took a moment to lock onto the other two threads.

One of them was located in the 97th ring of the Imperial Region. Another was even farther away, in one of the seven major counties controlled by humans, Ninestate County. Xu Qing's killing intent surged as he flew up into the air. Taking out his ancient sun, he shot with shocking speed toward the 97th ring.

It was a distant location, but thankfully there were plenty of convenient teleportation portals along the way. By means of numerous teleportations, as well as the speed of his ancient sun, Xu Qing only took a day to travel from the Imperial Region's inner ring all the way to its distant 97th ring.

There were a total of 110 rings in the Imperial Region. As for the 97th, it had a large population of human mortals. When Xu Qing arrived, it was evening. The entire ring seemed peaceful and harmonious, with no hint that anything dramatic had played out there recently. Xu Qing narrowed his eyes, put away his ancient sun, and followed the soul thread fluctuations to the west. [1]

Red clouds covered the canopy of heaven, and as Xu Qing traveled through them, his killing intent built. Eventually, about an hour later, he reached the westernmost part of the ring lands.

These lands were expansive, featuring mostly plains and wide-open spaces. Within them were nine small human kingdoms. Although they were called kingdoms, the reality is that they were self-governing cities. Being part of the Imperial Region, which was the capital of humankind, things here were relatively peaceful.

Looking around, Xu Qing identified one particular kingdom that was named Everfavor. Smoke from kitchen chimneys curled up into the air, and even from a distance, it was possible to hear the noise from the bustling streets. There were all sorts of people visible, from servants to businessmen. There were some cultivators present, but not many. Of those, the highest cultivation base present was Nascent Soul, and that was in the kingdom's royal palace.

Xu Qing scanned the place with divine will, then vanished from midair. When he materialized, he was on the streets of the city. As he walked around, neither mortals nor cultivators had any way to detect his presence. It was as if he didn't exist.

That was one of the unique features of high-level cultivators. Because they had heavenly daos, they could form their own natural laws. And thus, if they didn't want people to see them, they wouldn't, unless they had a superior cultivation base.

Xu Qing wasn't in the mood to experience mortal life at the moment, so he immediately entered one of the shops on the street. It was a general store, operated by an old man who was currently asleep behind the counter, his head resting on his arms. There was also a young clerk present.

Xu Qing's arrival attracted the notice of the clerk. As for the sleeping shopkeeper he shivered, then suddenly disappeared into thin air.

Face expressionless, Xu Qing coolly said, "Get back here."

As the words left his mouth, natural laws transformed, creating a teleportation effect. Instantly, the shopkeeper returned, starting out blurry, but quickly becoming clear.

Looking overwhelmed with shock and horror, he shot to his feet. However, he couldn't possibly move quickly enough. Xu Qing flicked his sleeve and used an astral redirection technique to alter space. In the blink of an eye, he was outside of the city, some 5,000 kilometers up in the air.

The empyrean winds whistled loudly as the shopkeeper hovered in front of Xu Qing, his face a mask of suspicion and fear. He had been acting very cautiously ever since his compatriot failed at his mission and was killed. In fact, he had abandoned his mission immediately, created a host of clones that he sent out to throw anyone off his tracks, and then went into hiding.

His plan had been to see how things played out and wait for word from above before deciding what to do. And yet now, despite not one of his clones having been touched, this person had tracked down his true body.

That alone was enough to put him on guard. But what was truly astonishing to him was Xu Qing's identity.

It was only natural that he had seen Xu Qing before. But what was really terrifying was that the dao seed inside of him vibrated as if it didn't even belong to him. That was telling him that the true owner of the dao seed was this very person right in front of him, Region Lord Xu Qing, who was currently emanating a terrifying Xeno-Immortal aura.

He's the one secretly backing the Xeno-Immortal School!

The shopkeeper felt despair deep in his heart. There was no need for him to ask questions to confirm his theory. It was the only explanation.

Death filled his eyes as, without any hesitation, he bit into a poison caplet hidden in his tooth. Instantly, his life force started decaying. A tremor passed through him as the poison he had prepared rapidly destroyed his fleshly body. At the same time, his soul also ignited into flames. All of these things were measures taken to ensure that he died and no incriminating evidence was left behind. After accomplishing those things, and just before he died, the despair in his eyes vanished to be replaced with derision.

It was as if he was telling Xu Qing: *You found me? You're the ultimate source in the Xeno-Immortal School? Those things... don't matter at all!*

Xu Qing looked calmly at the shopkeeper as he did those things. He didn't stop him. After watching expressionlessly as the shopkeeper took numerous steps to kill himself, Xu Qing then raised his right hand.

The gnomons on his sundials moved, and a huge figure appeared behind him, out of which emerged 1,300,000 soul threads. From a distance, it almost looked like the arrival of a god.

Half a month ago, Xu Qing had done some experiments in his private chamber. By using soul threads to imitate his sundials, he could surpass his previous limitations and affect an enemy for seven breaths of time. This could be considered the fourth ability related to his sundials.

It was time reversal. As he pointed out with his right index finger, the shopkeeper with his dimming soul suddenly went right back to normal. He was understandably stunned.

"This...."

Chapter 789: You Can't Keep Secrets from Gods

The cultivator who looked like a shopkeeper was being battered by waves of astonishment. He had heard of techniques that could make time run backward. But in most cases, they were used to trace an event backward to observe what happened in the past. Such techniques weren't used to change anything. That was something only powerful Void Returning experts could do.

But now... despite having taken steps to kill himself, including using a deadly poison, detonating warding spells in his fleshly body, and igniting his soul, he was still alive when he should have been dead. And... it was all done by the wave of Xu Qing's hand. That alone caused everything to reverse, and made time go back to seven breaths earlier. His mind reeled as the terrifying Xu Qing floated in front of him, and his soul trembled. Even his eyes stung.

“This isn't possible!”

The cultivator shot backward and tried to do something else to kill himself. This time, he wasn't fast enough.

Xu Qing stepped forward, and instantly, he was in front of the shopkeeper. Reaching out, he grabbed the man's chin and squeezed, causing all of his teeth to fall out along with numerous poison caplets.

The cultivator's eyes gleamed with terror as he struggled to free himself.

But then soul threads emerged from Xu Qing, which stabbed into the man's flesh like sharp swords. All of the warding spells within him were destroyed before they could be activated.

The disguised cultivator grunted. At the same time, his soul seed seemed to turn traitor as it swiveled to face his own soul and suppress the flames that had been about to burst out. Every one of his plans had been thwarted by Xu Qing before they could even be used. It all happened in the time it takes a spark to fly off a piece of flint, and the entire time, Xu Qing's face remained completely expressionless.

To this cultivator, everything that just happened seemed outrageous and grisly.

To Xu Qing, it was all very simple. Having thwarted the cultivator's plans, he didn't feel like engaging in banter. This person's reaction earlier did more than enough to confirm his suspicions.

Without any hesitation, he clamped his left hand down onto the cultivator's head and sent divine will into him... in a soulsearch! In the cultivation world, a soulsearch was a very cruel and ruthless act. It was something that only high-level cultivators could use on low-level cultivators, and was often a punishment. When used carefully, the subject's soul might dim, but nothing more. In serious cases, it could result in both spiritual and physical aspects of the soul being destroyed.

When one was trying to get information, the soulsearch needed to be even more thorough, and could involve methods of slicing and extermination. That was what Xu Qing was doing.

This cultivator disguised as a shopkeeper had a soul that immediately began to show signs of collapse as soon as the soulsearch began. Cracks spread out on its surface, and the cultivator screamed miserably. It was like the wailing of ghosts and howling of wolves. Any mortals who heard it would have nightmares for years afterward, and even cultivators who saw something like this would feel a chill running down their spine.

Thankfully, they were 5,000 kilometers in the air, with no one around. It was a perfect situation in which no one could hear this man scream.



As Xu Qing slowly wiped his soul out of existence, he saw all the man's memories, and before long, a picture emerged of this man's life. His background and identity became clear. But at the same time, his life was so complex that Xu Qing didn't bother trying to understand it. He simply skipped to the part about half a month ago. That was where he found the information he sought. Half a month ago, in a mysterious building, a black-cloaked individual spoke.

Xu Qing wanted more details, but before he could get them, the image disappeared. The cultivator's soul was thoroughly destroyed, and could never be restored. The only thing left behind was a lifeless, unmoving lump of flesh. Xu Qing frowned slightly.

This guy's soul is inherently defective... ensuring he couldn't sustain this level of soulsearching.

Xu Qing thought back to what he'd seen of the man's life.

Years ago he joined an organization that was a mystery even to him. They gave him a new lease on life, but at the same time, completely controlled him. As for the details....

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed as he rifled through the man's bag of holding and found a black kettle. After scanning it with divine will, he scowled. There were hundreds of thousands of souls inside....

After some thought, Xu Qing blurred into motion. Vanishing from where he'd been, he shot in the direction of some of the locations from the cultivator's memories. Each of those places was a location he had set up for use in soul harvesting. However, after his companion was discovered, and security everywhere increased, the cultivator had gone into hiding and not activated any of the other extraction locations.

Xu Qing went to them one by one and destroyed them, though he kept a record of their existence to use as evidence.

After he was done, he left that part of the 97th ring. Naturally, he took the body of the disguised cultivator to use as evidence.

Five days later, he reached Ninestate County in the Daoheaven Region.

This was one of the seven main regions controlled by humans, and it wasn't particularly far away from the Imperial Region. Because of that, Xu Qing could use teleportations and other methods to get there fairly quickly.

It was late at night when he arrived.

Xu Qing had passed through this county on his way to the imperial capital, though he hadn't stayed here long. Now that he was back, his killing intent burned as he stepped off the teleportation portal. He immediately vanished and headed in the direction of the soul seed.

Of the initial group of three operatives, one had been killed by the governor of Heavenbright County. The other had been exterminated by Xu Qing. That left one more, and he... was right here. Other people would find it very hard to track him down, but because he had that soul seed, Xu Qing could see every trace of him very clearly.

It was time to clean house and find out what was going on. Xu Qing was planning to *cut the weeds and eliminate the roots*, but at the same time, he needed to do another soulsearch to try to identify that black-cloaked figure.

This soul seed has been in one spot for quite a few hours without moving.

Xu Qing teleported into Ninestate County in the middle of the night. About an hour later, he reached a remote mountain range. The mountains were pitch black, and the only sounds were the calls of the beasts and birds. There was also a wind that stirred the plants and vegetation. Other than that, everything was quiet.

After looking around, he burst into motion again. Next, he became visible in the depths of the mountains, right outside a gigantic natural cave.

He frowned. On the way here, he had sensed that something unusual was going on. Now that he was standing here, he could sense it even more clearly. Eyes glittering coldly, he waved his right hand, causing numerous hidden warding spells in the cave to deteriorate via mutagen. After they were disabled, he stepped into the cave.

There was a spell formation on the ground, and it was currently operational. There was a person laying in the middle of the formation. It was a middle-aged man with vigorous life force, except he wasn't moving. He was completely naked, and there was a spot on his belly that wriggled and writhed; that was the location where Xu Qing's soul seed was.

On the ground just outside of the spell formation was a jade slip.

Xu Qing examined the formation, then the jade slip. After scanning it with divine will to make sure it was safe, he picked it up. When he looked inside, an ancient voice entered his mind.

*"Whoever you are, the fact that you found this place indicates that you are like me, and are investigating the dao seeds of the Xeno-Immortal School. Well, I've already reached a conclusion in that regard. This person couldn't stand up to a soulsearch, and collapsed. But I used this spell formation to keep him alive, and prevent his soul from completely dispersing. He won't last much longer, so feel free to do whatever you wish with him."*

After a moment of thought, Xu Qing coolly said, "Parlor tricks. Little Shadow, spread out. Lock down the entire area, and use whatever methods necessary to locate anyone hiding in the area." [1]

Little Shadow immediately sent out fawning fluctuations, while simultaneously spreading out in all directions. It soon covered the entire mountain range, and then extended even further beyond the mountains. Every single bird and beast in that area trembled as the shadow possessed it. It took over everything.

Xu Qing, meanwhile, looked at the person in the spell formation. He didn't believe the message in the jade slip. It seemed much more plausible that the person he was after had used some mysterious method to extract the soul seed from within himself and implant it into this person. In that manner, he could *slip out of a predicament like a cicada sloughing its skin*.

It was possible this tactic wasn't specifically targeting Xu Qing. After all, his quarry had no idea that it was Xu Qing who was chasing him. But it could be something used to deal with all potential investigators. The message in the jade slip was probably deliberately mystifying.

What was most important in this situation was that he had somehow extracted the soul seed without Xu Qing realizing it. That said, he could think of a way to do that. And that was... to not actually extract the soul seed at all. There was only one way to do that while also achieving this result.

It's a clone!

Xu Qing looked at the unconscious person in the spell formation, and his eyes glittered with cold light. If a clone was the one that originally absorbed the dao seed, and the true form accompanied the clone the entire time, then it could easily lead to this very situation.

The biggest flaw that jumped out to Xu Qing was that... no one else could have reached this location as quickly as he had. And that meant that whoever set up this situation had anticipated that the clone would be dead before anyone showed up, while the formation provided cover for the rest of the story. Not even using a time-reversal technique would reveal any clues. The culprit really did soulsearch his own clone, then set up the formation so that the clone's soul wouldn't collapse, and the clone would stay alive for a time. However, by the time anyone came around and found the clone and the formation, it would be too late.

Xu Qing thought about it for a short time. If his speculations were correct, then his arrival this early was definitely outside of what the culprit had predicted. By extension, that implied that this hadn't been set up very long ago.

I can confirm it fairly easily.

Xu Qing sent his soul threads flying out, then used them to weave... his third-level god state. Rumbling sounds echoed out, wild colors flashed in heaven and earth, and winds screamed.

A terrifying figure appeared behind Xu Qing, which he merged with to become a single entity. It was like the arrival of a god. The surroundings blurred, mutagen erupted, and the cave walls began to crumble. The mountains became like a graveyard. The plants and vegetation became skeletons, and the cave became a gigantic skull. It was all an illusion, yet few people would be able to see the reality.

Within all the blurriness strode a figure. He had long, violet hair that draped on the ground behind him. He seemed fiendish to the extreme, with bones like crystal, and countless blood vessels filling his flesh. Violet feathers of flesh formed two huge wings on his back, and behind him was a violet moon. Shocking personhood roiled.

It was none other than Xu Qing.

Hē stepped over to the formation and extended his hand.

The unconscious figure flew up, and he grabbed him by the top of the head. This time, he didn't use a soulsearch. He used the power of his personhood to assess the unconscious person's life force, and follow the threads to his true form. He had sent Little Shadow out in case the hiding culprit got spooked and tried to teleport away.

“Life force traces, activate!” a godly voice said, shaking everything.

#### Chapter 790: An Unexpected Clue

The moment the voice echoed out, heaven and earth in this mountain range filled with darkness and gloom. The mountains instantly became like a forbidden ground where the living weren't welcome. And any living beings that were present were forced to prostrate. Plants and vegetation withered, while all sorts of animals mutated. And the darkness spread. Wherever it went, the world transformed, as if a veil were being lifted away to reveal the truth of what lay underneath.

From Xu Qing's perspective, everything seemed to be made of towering grave mounds, surrounded by rotting skeletons. He currently stood atop a massive skull that emanated a terrifying aura. His

violet hair swayed, while strands of blood danced around him. The person he held in his hand in front of him was starting to slowly writhe.

Murmuring sounds drifted out. The sky vibrated and the lands shook.

The stimulation forced the injured and unconscious person to suddenly open his eyes. He initially looked at Xu Qing with an expression of confusion, though that soon turned to surprise mixed with terror. He seemed like he wanted to speak, but when he opened his mouth, the only thing that came out was an agonized scream.

His cries had already surpassed those of his companion who had died a few days before. It wasn't just one scream. It was many....

And that was because his body had superimposed itself, almost as if he was a book to be flipped through. Each page showed him and his past, as well as potential futures. And though all of them were in different times and places, they were all screaming together. The screams of past, present, and future accompanied each other in a way that was vastly more horrifying than any of them separately.

Xu Qing in his god state looked on calmly. His godly nature was increasing, but thanks to the soul threads, his human nature hadn't disappeared. He was in a much more stable position than on previous occasions. In this state, it was much easier to guide godly nature with the same will as human nature.

The countless strands of blood stretching out of Xu Qing floated to the screaming figure in front of him and began to gently rifle through his past memories. Images flitted through Xu Qing's gaze, including those of the figure's dead companion. This wasn't a soulsearch. And in fact, it was a lot more direct than a soulsearch, as it was a godly ability.

By looking through his past, Xu Qing was able to get a fairly complete idea of the life he'd lived. Much like his companion, this person was born without a complete soul. Apparently, whatever mysterious organization was behind them was good at recruiting people like that. That said, this person's innate abilities were superior to his dead companion. Whether it was his cultivation base or his magical technique, they were all on a higher level.

Xu Qing looked through the images until he found the specific one he wanted. He saw a building, within which was a black-cloaked man with a lamp in his hand.

Xu Qing's face was completely expressionless as he looked at the image. The blood strands in front of him jerked backward, dragging the image away from him until it was floating in front of Xu Qing. Looking at the cloaked figure, Xu Qing chose not to do anything rash, and just put the image down at his side.

Then he turned to look at the screaming clone. He exhaled, and a violet mist emerged, which spread out to cover the clone. Strands of mist emerged from his head and spread out in various directions. There was one for each person who existed in his memories. And one of them was a life essence thread that was attached to his true life force. That one... led to a location not very far away in the north.

So, he is a clone.

He waved his hand gently, and the life essence thread swayed back and forth until the motion eventually reached the true form.

After finding various clues, Little Shadow locked onto a position, then turned into a long, streaming shadow that shot in the same direction as the life essence thread.

Meanwhile, about 500 kilometers away from Xu Qing, a cultivator raced along in a gray robe. He was middle-aged, with ordinary facial features. There didn't seem to be much about him that was special, such that he could easily blend into a crowd and not be noticed. He had small eyes, and though they occasionally glittered mysteriously, he kept that hidden. As he moved along, he analyzed his current situation and plans. Although everything was working perfectly so far, he knew that he couldn't afford to underestimate anyone. It was always possible someone could come along and figure out what was really going on.

I can worry about all of that later.

The gray-robed man accelerated in the direction of the neighboring county. He planned to use nonhuman teleportation portals to go into hiding and wait for further instructions from his superiors. But right then, his heart thumped, and his vision blurred. Terror filled his soul. Next, he heard words echoing in his soul.

*"So, he is a clone."*

The gray-robed man's expression flickered dramatically. Then, before he could even think of what to do, a powerful force flowed out of his soul, filling him and rendering him completely immobile. He fell out of the sky down to the ground.

He couldn't have been more shocked. At the same time, he wanted to fight back, except he didn't see any enemies nearby. And yet, that voice had been clear for him to hear, and the restraints immobilizing him were really there.

"What's going on?" the gray-robed man gasped. After slamming into the ground and coughing up some blood, he found that he could move again. He jumped up with the intention of fleeing, except then he suddenly went immobile again.

A fiendish, blood-colored eye appeared in his shadow beneath his feet.

*"Found... you..."*

Back in the cave, Xu Qing looked away from the life essence thread. He didn't need it anymore. Now that he'd found the true form, there was something he wanted to try out. Even if it didn't work, it wouldn't affect his goal of apprehending the true form. And it might get him some clues that would bring some clarity to the situation.

He looked back to the image he had placed to the side earlier. Specifically, he was looking at the cloaked figure with the lamp. As he stared, the violet moon behind him started shining more brightly.

Next, all the blood threads around him shot toward the figure in the black cloak. They pierced into the figure. This was using the past to verify the future. Nothing was impossible when using the power of gods. As long as something existed in memories, then it was possible to affect it directly.

The cloaked figure started trembling, and then began to shift from illusory to material. As the process played out, Xu Qing was able to use Little Shadow to see some of the cloaked person's life details.

He saw the cloaked figure on an altar, prostrating to the dome of heaven.... However, because of the angle, Xu Qing couldn't see exactly what he was worshipping.

He added more godsource in the hopes of getting a more complete vision. But then, without any warning at all, a power of will rose up within the cloaked person. It was like a parasite that was suddenly waking up. A cold snort echoed out from the cloaked person in the image. It directly entered Xu Qing's mind, where it turned into a surge of mutagen that swept through him. That mutagen seemed to have no foundation, as it came directly out of the illusory image.

Within the image, a blood rain fell. Howls of anguish echoed out endlessly, and mutagen flourished in darkness and gloom. The image itself emanated intense pressure.

Any other cultivator in this situation would have been in a tricky spot. But Xu Qing was in his god state, so he just sent more godsource out from his violet moon. Rumbling sounds echoed out as he took three steps backward while still in his god state.

The mutagen that had come from the cold snort faded away. That said, this individual was extraordinarily mighty; though he couldn't affect Xu Qing directly, he could affect the surroundings. All of a sudden, the source of the past image shattered. The screaming clone shivered, then collapsed into a pile of gore. The grave mounds that made up the mountains collapsed.

Within the rubble and the skeletons, Xu Qing stood, looking up into the sky, his eyes shining coldly.

The mutagen that came with that cold snort seems somehow familiar.... The image the mutagen formed was also very familiar.... The cloaked figure on the altar, worshipping the dome of heaven... now I realize why I recognize it. The mutagen is from the broken face. The image is from a moment in which the broken face's eyes opened. And the cloaked figure is bowing to that son of a bitch broken face!

Xu Qing's heart was as cold as ice.

Back in the continent of South Phoenix, he had learned of an organization that worshiped the broken face. They even called themselves believers. After arriving in the Imperial Region, he had again heard about that organization. He knew that their religious creed involved exercising faith in the broken face, all while searching for supposed godchildren. After finding those godchildren, they would slowly devour them, and use the process to get closer to their god.

Thanks to the introduction provided by Princess Anhai, Xu Qing knew that this organization wasn't just one of the ten superpower sects in humankind. They were powerful among all species. They could be found throughout Revered Ancient, and had congregations everywhere.

"Words of Truth!" Xu Qing murmured as he slowly transformed, leaving his third-level god state. The darkness and gloom around him changed. Everything blurred, and then he reappeared, looking just as he had before.

The rubble underfoot proved that everything that had played out was real. That said, his hair was still violet; apparently the third-level god state extended a bigger influence on him than he realized.

Around that time, a whistling sound could be heard as a gray-robed figure raced up behind Xu Qing. His expression was a mixture of fanaticism and piety, but at the same time, intense fear. After arriving, he dropped to his knees.

“Greetings to you, milord!” he said loudly. “There’s something your humble servant has long been wanting to say to you. I wish to express my sincerity, milord! Sir, you are a most esteemed and revered lord, a very wise and clever master, and your intelligence allows your humble servant to feel trusted and relied upon. With your direction, milord, I have made continuous progress, but at the same time, feel at ease, comfortable, and reassured!”

Little Shadow spoke in very sincere terms, although the eyes of the body it had possessed didn’t match, as they were filled with astonishment.

Xu Qing stood there in the night, his violet hair swaying in the wind.

The gray-robed man was now kowtowing repeatedly.

“Come on, let’s head back to the capital,” Xu Qing said, and he started walking.