

Read Beyond the Timescape Chapter 921: Full-Blooded Fardark

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As Lan Yao spoke, Feng Lintao looked at Xu Qing.

Though Xu Qing had astonishing battle prowess, these were two Smoldering Gods looking at him. Most relevant of all, the Captain was still their captive. And now his legs were twitching again.... No matter how he looked at it, he was in a passive position.

Without speaking a word, Xu Qing moved into the lead position, flying past Lan Yao and heading deeper into the pit. The Grand Darkheaven Armor glittered brightly, and his godly fleshly body power surged. The antemage armor covered him, and the nine lamps circled around him. With his long hair and green robe, Xu Qing seemed extraordinary in every way. What was more, the wave of his hand summoned a host of ghost-face centipedes, which moved ahead of him into the depths of the pit.

When Lan Yao saw that, her eyes glittered. As for Feng Lintao, he looked at the centipedes, his gaze stony. In the end, he didn't say anything.

And thus, Xu Qing led the other two down into the pit. He didn't move slowly, nor did he hold back like before. In fact, he moved at about the same speed as Feng Lintao and Lan Yao. Perhaps Xu Qing just got lucky, or perhaps the actions of the eight-colored peacock had a threatening effect, as they didn't encounter any resistance. Yet again, enough time passed for an incense stick to burn. At that point, they reached the bottom of the pit.

Astonishingly, there was a cave there. It was smaller than the cave above, and there were fewer buildings. In fact, there were only nine towers. They were in very good shape, with ancient symbols covering them. It was easy to imagine how those symbols must have glowed brightly in the past. The nine towers were also arrayed into a warding spell. However, because of the passage of so many years, and the invasion of mutagen, they seemed dormant.

Though there weren't many buildings here, there were far more withered roots than above. They were everywhere, even on the ground and walls. The area above the towers was full of roots as well.

Xu Qing's arrival seemed to bring with it an outside aura, and as a result, the tranquility of this location was altered, and strange transformations began.

The first to be affected were the roots, which crumbled into ash. The ash didn't dissipate into nothing. Instead, as Xu Qing watched, it converged into a host of dark and swarthy children. They appeared to be no more than five or six years old, and there were

hundreds of them. As they appeared, they lay on what roots hadn't collapsed, and stared at Xu Qing with pitch black eyes and looks of hunger and avarice.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered coldly as whistling sounds grew louder behind him due to the arrival of Lan Yao and Feng Lintao. The other two scanned the area visually and quickly noticed the gruish children. They did nothing.

Xu Qing was well aware that it was his turn to handle the situation. As a native of the Revered Ancient mainland, Xu Qing knew exactly where these children came from. At a glance, he could tell that they... were spirits of the dead who had been affected by mutagen and turned into grues. Grues like this might be difficult, if not impossible, for other people to deal with. But Xu Qing had killed too many things like this to count. And the easiest way to deal with them was Little Shadow.

That said, though he had relied on Little Shadow recently, that had only been the shadow's possession abilities. Neither Feng Lintao nor Lan Yao knew any other details about what it could do. At the moment, Xu Qing didn't want to reveal anything further to them. Therefore, he didn't use Little Shadow. What was more, he sent out the ghost-face centipedes to defend himself from any potential sneak attacks launched by Feng Lintao or Lan Yao.

Having accomplished those things, he thought back to the look of greed in Feng Lintao's eyes earlier, and the glances he had exchanged with Lan Yao.

Although I don't want to reveal too much about the shadow's abilities now... there are still some things it might be able to do....

With such thoughts in mind, Xu Qing stepped forward. As for the dark children on the withered branches, they suddenly opened their mouths, unleashed piercing cries that could shake the soul, and then lunged toward Xu Qing.

Just before they arrived, Xu Qing sent soul threads exploding out. In the blink of an eye, more than 10,000,000 stabbed forth. They moved with incredible speed, and were astoundingly piercing.

Every gruish child they reached stopped in midair. They had been pierced by the soul threads. Because of the soul threads connecting all of them, they were like a dark sea fixed in place in midair.

When Feng Lintao and Lan Yao saw all of that, their eyes glittered.

The soul threads had created something almost like the web of a spider, with Xu Qing in the middle and hundreds of dark, gruish children around him, unmoving.

Suddenly, the surrounding walls began to tremble, and the gruish children collapsed into black streams of energy. After, the 10,000,000 soul threads shrank back into Xu Qing.

Xu Qing's expression remained the same as ever as he stood to the side to make way. Looking at Feng Lintao, he said, "Your turn."

Feng Lintao looked back at him and said, "Those soul threads are very strange. What are they made of?"

Xu Qing didn't answer the question. Instead, he asked one. "Fellow Daoist Feng, those five feathers of yours are very strange. What are they made of?"

Feng Lintao frowned. "You think I would tell you?"

"I was going to say the same thing in response to you," Xu Qing said quietly.

Feng Lintao flicked his sleeve, and without another word, led the way onward. Upon reaching the fifth of the towers, he performed an incantation gesture to unleash a secret magic.

Lan Yao flew toward Xu Qing, but didn't get too close. Making sure to keep her eye on Feng Lintao, she laughingly said, "Fellow Daoist Firedark, those five feathers are collectively called Spirit of the True World. It's a Smoldering God secret magic, although not all Smoldering Gods have it."

Up ahead, Feng Lintao barked, "You're being too talkative, Fellow Daoist Lan!"

Lan Yao's eyes glittered coldly. "Fellow Daoist Feng, you use the secret magic of Spirit of the True World. Meanwhile, I inherited the legacy of the Devilbirds. I'm not subservient to you. So why does me saying one little thing equate to being too talkative? Watch your wording, Fellow Daoist Feng!"

Feng Lintao snorted but didn't say anything further. He just kept working on his magic.

Lan Yao, meanwhile, was apparently extremely irritated at him calling her too talkative, and glared at him icily. That said, she didn't say anything further to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing blinked a few times. Apparently, Lan Yao had actually been treating him with a bit of friendliness. He was just about to continue the conversation on his own when the fifth tower rumbled loudly and emitted bright white light.

The white light erupted from the top of the tower, flowing like water as it surrounded the tower and then moved along the withered roots. Most of the roots didn't seem affected by the light at all. They just flickered dimly; clearly, they didn't have any life force in them

to stimulate. However, there was one that glittered brightly, then revealed a white thread within it.

As the white thread spread through the root, it attracted the attention of all three cultivators. As they watched, the white thread spread through the root before vanishing. The root apparently still had no life force.

However, Feng Lintao looked very excited. Quickly performing a double-handed incantation gesture, he activated his legacy magic, causing the tower to once again flicker with bright light. After doing that nine times in a row, he lifted his hands and performed some calculations based on where the different bits of light appeared.

The sight of it made Xu Qing come to the conclusion that if Feng Lintao's story was true, it meant his ancestor had expended a lot of effort to make such thorough preparations. Anyone who wasn't aware of the secret would definitely have had a very hard time uncovering any of the clues.

As Xu Qing contemplated such things, time passed. Eventually, after making many calculations, Feng Lintao's eyes lit up and he looked over at a spot on the nearby wall of the cave.

"It's there!"

He leaped in that direction and pushed his hand against the wall. Loud rumbling sounds echoed out as the wall sank in and cracks appeared. There was nothing there.

Feng Lintao wasn't deterred. He quickly bit down on the tip of his tongue and spat out some blood. When the blood splashed onto the wall, the depressed spots glowed with red light. Then the dirt on the wall began to disappear, although the process was clearly going to take a long time.

"Fellow Daoist Lan, I'm only a half-blooded Fardark, so the power of my bloodline doesn't fulfill the requirements set forth by my ancestor. Quickly take out that blood pendant and give it to me! The blood of the species I sacrificed contains remnants of the Fardark bloodline. With 20,000,000 or so sacrificial subjects, it should be enough to stimulate my blood and open the warding spell!"

At long last Xu Qing found out the purpose of the blood sacrifices from earlier. That itself wasn't a surprise, but it was a surprise to him that Feng Lintao would sacrifice members of his own species. Clearly, the people he had sacrificed counted for little more than livestock to him.

Lan Yao had apparently come to similar conclusions, yet didn't seem very surprised. She took out the blood pendant, glanced at Feng Lintao, and then began to activate the magic. At the same time she said, "Turns out you're quite an extraordinary individual,

Fellow Daoist Feng. You sacrificed 20,000,000 of your own people! How very decisive. I get the feeling you're going to rise to *great* heights in the future."

Lan Yao was clearly still irritated at how he'd called her talkative, and was being sarcastic.

Meanwhile, the blood pendant rumbled, emitting a blood mist that contained innumerable souls that flew toward Feng Lintao. freewebnovel.com

In response to Lan Yao's words, Feng Lintao's eyes glittered coldly. However, he held back from doing anything. Grabbing the pendant, he sucked the souls into himself. Next, the wings behind him vanished, as did the third eye. As of now, there was no indication at all that he was a Devilbird. In fact, the skin over his entire body wriggled as a second head popped out of his neck. The Fardark species was two-headed!

With that done, Feng Lintao took a deep breath and spat out more blood. When it landed on the earthen wall, the dissolving process which had begun earlier sped up significantly. After a few dozen breaths of time passed, a small passage was visible!

An excited expression appeared on Lan Yao's face. It was the same with Feng Lintao. Acting in unison, they prepared to rush into the passage. Except... that was when something unexpected happened!

Read Beyond the Timescape Chapter 922: Ulterior Motives All Around

Chapter 922: Ulterior Motives All Around

An intense corpse energy spewed out of the just-opened passageway, along with two figures.

Feng Lintao's eyes flashed, and he stopped in place, but didn't fall back.

Lan Yao quickly performed an incantation gesture to activate a defensive barrier. Next, a boom rang out as Lan Yao retreated in the face of two puppets that resembled corpses. Both figures had two heads, bloodthirsty eyes, and mouths full of sharp teeth. They also emanated terrifying pressure.

Just as Lan Yao launched an attack, one of the puppets changed directions and shot toward Xu Qing. Fighting broke out instantly, and Xu Qing's heart sank a bit. This puppet had seemingly inexhaustible strength and a very tough body. It also seemed resistant to divine abilities. It was obviously an extraordinary puppet.

However, as they fought, Xu Qing looked at the passageway and then sent a thought out to the centipedes. He didn't do so by means of divine will, but rather, through the

violet crystal, which made it impossible for anyone else to detect. The ghost-face centipedes converged around Xu Qing and met the puppet head-on. Clearly, they weren't worried about dying, and some of them even self-detonated.

Lan Yao's heart pounded as she struggled to deal with the puppet attacking her.

In the briefest of moments, both Xu Qing and Lan Yao found themselves in difficult situations.

As for Feng Lintao, the two puppets seemingly ignored him. That caused Lan Yao's expression to darken. Then her eight-colored peacock appeared and lunged toward Feng Lintao.

"What's the meaning of this, Feng Lintao? Before I set out, I made sure my husband knew where I was going and what I was doing!"

Feng Lintao's eyes glittered. He was almost convinced to leave Lan Yao behind, but after some consideration, he offered an explanation.

"Don't misunderstand, Fellow Daoist Lan. I'm now a full-blooded Fardark. And my ancestor set all of this up! It's a given that the traps don't pose a threat to me now. Whether you believe it or not, Fellow Daoist Lan, I had no idea these two corpse puppets were here. It seems to me they were created by my ancestor using members of our own species. They're the guards here.

"If members of other species hadn't come today, they wouldn't have done anything. But I was careless. Calm down, Fellow Daoist Lan. I'll just go in and get the holy fardark nectar. Once I'm out, I'll give you your fair share."

With that, Feng Lintao rushed into the open passageway.

Unfortunately, there were a lot of shockwaves rippling out, plus Lan Yao was in the middle of fighting. Because Feng Lintao had been paying attention mostly to Lan Yao, he didn't notice that a shadow flitted out from beneath one of the exploding centipedes and slipped right into the passageway....

Lan Yao watched grimly as Feng Lintao left her behind. She unleashed an attack, but the puppet in front of her blocked it. Clearly, there was no way she would get free from the puppet anytime soon. A murderous look appeared in her eyes as she took out a seven-colored pearl and put it in her mouth. Her cultivation base then surged, and a shadowy projection appeared above the top of her head. The projection was blurry and difficult to make out clearly, but the cultivation base power it emitted was astonishing. The moment it was out in the open, it shot toward the puppet.

The puppet attempted to dodge out of the way, but completely and utterly failed. The shadowy figure slammed into it, and the extraordinary puppet exploded into bits. The projection also dissipated.

Lan Yao's face looked very pale, but she didn't fall back. Not even looking at Xu Qing, she raced into the passageway.

Xu Qing watched it all happen, and though he was surprised by her secret magic, he quickly recovered from his shock. Then he continued to fight with the puppet, not bothering to use any of his trump cards.

A few dozen breaths of time passed. Then, whistling sounds could be heard from the passageway. Lan Yao and Feng Lintao shot out into the open. Their expressions flickered dramatically as they came to a stop and went into incantation gestures, as if they expected a dangerous foe to emerge behind them.

Shortly after, rumbling sounds rose up, and a stream of golden light shot out after them.

It was an enormous, golden rat! Its fur was standing on end, it had glittering, golden eyes, and a host of razor-sharp teeth. In between the fur on its body were numerous faces growing out of its flesh, snarling viciously. The moment it appeared, its glittering eyes fixed on Feng Lintao and Lan Yao. It howled. All the faces on its body howled as well, creating a sound that could shake the soul. Then it suddenly vanished, only to reappear right in front of Feng Lintao, where it opened its mouth viciously.

Feng Lintao's face fell as he lunged backward. He waved his hand, and a shield appeared in front of him, the very same one he had used during his fight with Xu Qing.

A boom echoed out as the golden rat hit the shield. However, the shield, which had easily blocked Xu Qing, instantly shattered, and the pieces were sent flying in all directions.

At the same time, the golden rat seemed to be shaken, although that didn't reduce its ferocity. In fact, it seemed to get more ferocious. Just as it was about to press the attack, Lan Yao's eyes flashed, and she took advantage of the moment to rush back toward the passageway. Howling, the golden rat vanished, then reappeared in front of Lan Yao to block her path. Golden light shone brightly around it. Lan Yao's eight-colored peacock blocked the light, but in the process was ripped to shreds.

Xu Qing watched all of this with an expression of shock on his face. He could tell that this golden rat was a godly entity, and that it had very strong godliness. In fact, it seemed just on the verge of igniting godfire.

Hold on, no. It's not about to ignite godfire. It already did that in the past. Yet somehow the godfire was extinguished. Now it's built up enough reserves that it's on the verge of doing it again.

Xu Qing had dealt with enough gods that he could make such a determination at a glance.

Meanwhile, Feng Lintao scowled as he performed an incantation gesture and said, "Are you just going to stand around, Fellow Daoist Firedark? This godly rat got into the area with the holy fardark nectar from a different direction. It's obviously been holed up in there for a while. It was asleep.

"I ran into it and it started chasing me. If we don't kill it or at least trap it, then we have no chance of getting the holy fardark nectar! Although I didn't lay eyes on the holy fardark nectar earlier, I could smell it. It's definitely still in there! We have to go all out if we're going to have a chance. Also, I have a secret magic I can try to use to control that puppet a bit!"

Through all of this, Feng Lintao hadn't forgotten to keep the Captain at his side to use as a threat. The truth was that he was feeling very down. Though he had been the first into the passageway, he hadn't even reached the Fardark Cistern when he unexpectedly ran into the golden rat.

The rat hadn't been put there by his ancestor, and it wasn't something he had planned to deal with. Now, though, he had no choice other than to deal with it. Gritting his teeth, he spat some blood out of his mouth and activated a secret magic. The puppet engaged in combat with Xu Qing shivered, backed away, and then shot toward the golden rat.

Lan Yao saw all of this happening and realized there was no time to continue trying to one-up Feng Lintao. Backing up, she continued fighting and simultaneously said, "He's telling the truth, Fellow Daoist Firedark!"

A look of hesitation appeared on Xu Qing's face, although he already knew that Feng Lintao was telling the truth....

Finally, he said, "I want thirty percent of the holy fardark nectar!"

Feng Lintao gritted his teeth. "Fine!"

Lan Yao knew this wasn't a time to quibble, so she nodded.

Xu Qing was inclined to say something further. But knowing there wasn't time, he quickly pulled out the Spirit-Devouring Dagger and leaped forward to help Feng Lintao, Lan Yao, and the puppet to fight against the golden rat.

At the same time, he glanced at the passageway and sent a secret message to Little Shadow.

"Don't take all of it. Leave some behind!"

Read Beyond the Timescape Chapter 923: A Small Film

Chapter 923: A Small Film

Inside the cave, Xu Qing became a streak of light that shot toward the golden rat. 40,000,000 soul threads swept out to form a major world, giving him stupefying momentum.

Feng Lintao took a deep breath as five major worlds appeared around him, three illusory and two corporeal. All of them shone with different colored light as he closed in aggressively on the golden rat.

Lan Yao acted in kind. A storm of flower petals spun around her, turning into an eight-colored peacock that threw its head back, sucked in the surrounding energy of heaven and earth, expanded to a size of 300 meters, and then shot toward the golden rat.

The corpse puppet, not concerned with dying, charged toward the enemy.

Attacks came from four different directions, all them directed at the golden rat. There was an impressive amount of killing force on display. Rumbling sounds echoed out, and the walls of the cave shook so violently it seemed they might collapse. The ruins below crumbled and fell, and countless withered roots collapsed into ashes.

Yet the golden rat showed no sign of fear. Whether in terms of its fleshly body or its godliness, it was at the peak of what a godly entity could be, and was just a sliver away from being able to form godfire. Destructive power converged on the golden rat, but golden light surged out explosively to protect it.

In the blink of an eye, the entire cave was stained with the color gold. Devastating mightiness existed within that golden light.

When it hit Xu Qing's major world of 40,000,000 soul threads, it collapsed. Then the light's mountain-toppling, sea-draining force slammed into Xu Qing himself, causing blood to spray out of his mouth as he staggered backward. The golden light also ripped Feng Lintao's major worlds to shreds, then hit him and threw him backward.

It was the same with Lan Yao. Her eight-colored peacock was wiped out, and her face drained of color as she fell back and did her best to defend herself.

As for the corpse puppet... It shivered when the golden light struck. Then the golden rat appeared in front of it, opened its mouth, and bit down with its pitch black teeth. A loud crunching sound rang out. The rat gobbled down half of the entire corpse puppet, then head-butted the remaining half, sending it smashing into the nearby wall. It was destroyed.

Xu Qing and the other two cultivators were shocked by the sight of it.

After wiping out the puppet, the golden rat didn't continue fighting with Xu Qing and the others. Instead, it looked back at the passageway, its eyes shining fiercely.

"If that's all the two of you can do," Xu Qing said grimly, all while backing up, "then I might as well bow out now!"

This golden rat was just too terrifying for him to deal with. If he kept fighting, he could easily end up dead. Just that flash of light moments ago had crushed his major world. Then the rat destroyed that puppet. While Xu Qing could probably hold his own for a while, the price to pay would be enormous.

"Hold on a moment, Fellow Daoist Firedark," Feng Lintao said, looking at the rat. "There's something off about this golden rat. It seems like it's only concerned with blocking our path. Perhaps there's something inside the Fardark Cistern that it values. Or maybe it also wants to get into the cistern."

Xu Qing stopped in place.

Lan Yao was still breathing heavily, and her eyes shone with eight-colored light as she also looked at the golden rat. "There's something else that seems strange. This creature is at the peak of godliness, just on the verge of igniting godfire. It's essentially equivalent to a cultivator at the great circle of Smoldering God. However, though it has fearsome battle prowess, it's actually not quite as terrifying as an actual peak Smoldering God....

"Wait, now I get it! It used to be a god, but its godfire was extinguished, severely injuring it and destabilizing its foundation. And it's probably still suffering from the very same internal injuries it received in that battle! It hasn't recovered yet. What's more, it recently gave birth, which means... it's incomparably weak right now!"

The eight-colored light in Lan Yao's eyes gave her incredible vision, which allowed her to see many important things. As it turned out, her words conformed to what Xu Qing already knew. By means of Little Shadow, he knew that there were two eggs in the passageway....

"That said," Lan Yao continued, "the creature is beyond our ability to deal with. Thankfully, I have a secret treasure that should be able to trap it temporarily. It will take time to activate the treasure. Fellow Daoist Feng. Fellow Daoist Firedark. I'm going to need you to cover me during that time."

Feng Lintao nodded and then looked coldly at Xu Qing, all while tightening his grip on the Captain's neck. Cracking sounds echoed out. There was no need to give voice to any sort of threat.

Xu Qing scowled for a few breaths of time. Then he took a deep breath and said, "I'll stand guard for an incense stick's worth of time. After that, if you haven't trapped the

creature, then I'll leave and be done with this entire matter. And if I do leave, Fellow Daoist Feng, you need to release my Eldest Brother."

Feng Lintao nodded decisively. As long as Xu Qing didn't demand that the Captain be freed immediately, he could accept the terms.

Seeing that both Xu Qing and Feng Lintao had agreed, Lan Yao didn't hesitate for a moment. Dropping down into a cross-legged position, she took out a mirror and placed it in front of her. After performing a double-handed incantation gesture, she touched the mirror, causing bright light to shine as nine eyes appeared on its surface. The eyes were gruish to the extreme and pulsed with strange auras.

"Nine-Eyes Darkfiend Mirror!" Feng Lintao exclaimed, clearly somewhat taken aback. All of a sudden he felt a lot more confident in Lan Yao.

Xu Qing's eyes also glittered with strange light. *That mirror reminds me a lot of the Seven Blood Eyes taboo treasure....*

The moment the aura of the mirror spread out, the golden rat shifted its attention to Lan Yao. Its eyes gleamed fiercely, the golden light around it flickered brightly, and its body blurred. Then, a whistling sound filled the air as the rat sped toward Lan Yao.

Feng Lintao didn't hesitate to rush forward and block the rat's path.

Xu Qing gritted his teeth and joined in the effort. Explosive booms rang out. Xu Qing was shaken from head to toe, and couldn't see anything but golden light rushing toward him in terrifying fashion. Then he was tumbling back, blood spraying out of his mouth. Cracks had already appeared on his Grand Darkheaven Armor, as well as the Ninedawns mage armor. His god body was trembling, and his five yin organs and six yang organs were shaking.

Feng Lintao was also having a tough time, and blood sprayed out of his mouth constantly. However, as a critical moment developed, he begrudgingly took out a violet disc that he activated to create a defensive barrier. The barrier was astounding. Though it immediately started to fill with cracks, in the end, it did block the golden rat's attack.

Face ashen, Feng Lintao urgently said, "Sir Firedark, pour your cultivation base power into the disc!"

Even as he spoke, he poured his own cultivation base power into the violet disc, causing the defenses to hold strong. The violet disc was a trump card he had prepared for this mission. He had hoped to save it for later on, but was out of options at the moment, and had no choice but to use it.

Xu Qing said nothing. Just from looking at the violet disc, he could tell it was an extraordinary item. Therefore, he didn't hesitate to tap into his cultivation base and pour

power into the disc. Instantly, the disc expanded. Outside of the defenses, the rat sent golden light smashing into the barrier with terrifying force.

Rumbling booms echoed out as the barrier flickered. More cracks appeared. Both Xu Qing and Feng Lintao coughed up blood, but they were still able to keep the rat at bay.

The golden rat was starting to devolve into madness. Suddenly lurching to a halt midair, its golden hair stood on end, then began to shoot off its body like golden needles that headed directly toward Xu Qing and Feng Lintao. They moved with incredible speed, becoming like a golden tempest of destruction. More booms rang out as the violet barrier held strong for a few breaths of time. But then the cracks spread out so extensively that it collapsed.

The faces of Xu Qing and Feng Lintao fell. Neither one knowing whether the other had much strength left, they both fell back. As of now, it was going to be difficult for them to stand as dharma protectors.

Meanwhile, the golden needles bore down on Lan Yao. Just when it seemed like they might hit her, she opened her eyes. Looking furious, she waved her hand, causing the nine eyes on the mirror to also open. Considering that she was taking action right when necessary, it obviously called into question the truthfulness of her previous statement about needing a certain amount of time.

When the nine eyes on the mirror opened, nine streams of black light shot out, gazes that turned from illusory into corporeal in an instant. At the same time, a majestic force filled the area, causing the golden needles to stop moving.

The gazes locked onto the golden rat, and it shivered as it was locked into place in midair. Its aura surged as it struggled to break free.

“I can only keep it trapped for the time it takes an incense stick to burn. And if anything touches it during that time, it will break free!” Lan Yao spat out a mouthful of blood onto the mirror, and the nine eyes became even more demonic in appearance. Then she backed up, ignoring the mirror as she rushed toward the passageway.

Feng Lintao did the same, moving as fast as he could. Xu Qing blinked a few times, then followed.

In an instant, they disappeared, becoming streaks of light piercing through the passageway.

The golden rat wasn't there to block their path, but time was limited. Neither Lan Yao nor Feng Lintao had any duplicitous plans, and thus, everyone went through the passageway without any trouble. It didn't take long to reach the end of the passageway.

There, they found a cave. It wasn't very large, only about 300 meters from end to end. The walls were covered with crude marks that were evidence of the hasty manner in which the cave had been dug out years ago.

In the middle of it was a small cistern of liquid that was hardly more than a meter wide, above which hung a green root. As the three of them entered, a drop of liquid fell from the root into the pool. A pinging sound echoed out.

Xu Qing, Lan Yao, and Feng Lintao looked at the ripples that then spread across the surface. There was an egg in the cistern. What was more, the liquid of the cistern emanated a fragrant aroma that filled the area.

Xu Qing inhaled deeply, and suddenly felt his mind become very clear. In fact, the godly authority in the void soil within him stirred as a result. Countless laws of godly authority swirled within his mind and heart. Even Xu Qing was amazed by the effects.

"Holy fardark nectar!" Feng Lintao murmured. He and Lan Yao were both struggling to control their breathing.

However, as all three of them looked at the cistern, various expressions flashed across their faces. After all, it looked like there wasn't very much holy fardark nectar inside.... In fact, there was only a small film at the bottom.

Chapter 924: Who's the Oriole??

The small cistern had been accumulating liquid for tens of thousands of years.... Although holy fardark nectar required a large buildup of ordinary fardark nectar, it seemed inconceivable that after all the years of time that had passed, there would be such a small amount. Normally speaking, though it wouldn't be reasonable to expect the cistern to be overflowing, there should have been tens of times the amount that was present.

Except there was clearly only a small film of the nectar at the bottom of the cistern. No wonder a variety of facial expressions could be seen on Feng Lintao and Lan Yao. After all, they had paid a huge price to get this holy fardark nectar. They had made complicated plans, had hoodwinked each other back and forth, and had carried out devious plots. Though the end result was better than nothing, it was still a far cry from what they had expected.

"It must be the fault of that damned golden rat!!" Feng Lintao growled through gritted teeth. He'd had a bad feeling from the moment he laid eyes on that rat, and though he had been prepared for bad news at the end of the tunnel, that didn't stop him from feeling absolutely furious.

Unfortunately, there was nothing he could do other than narrow his eyes at the egg in the water.

Lan Yao said nothing, but her expression was steely.

As for Xu Qing, he was also frowning. After looking at the cistern, then the rest of the cave, he glanced back at the passageway. Not giving any hint as to what he was actually thinking, he started walking around the cave as if to look for other items of value.

Feng Lintao sneered at Xu Qing's behavior. With the exception of the golden rat, Feng Lintao knew about everything that was in this area. Considering that there wasn't anything present, he didn't bother keeping an eye on Xu Qing.

Lan Yao glanced at Xu Qing, then focused her gaze on the water. "There's no time to waste. Maybe there's not a lot, but it'll still be useful. As for that egg, I'm guessing that's what the rat was guarding."

As the words left her mouth, she hurried toward the cistern. Feng Lintao joined her, and Xu Qing followed. As the three of them neared, something dramatic happened!

The soil around the cistern caved in, and four shadowy figures jumped out. Astonishingly, they turned out to be four enormous puppets that resembled mantises. They were severely withered, and emanated powerful mutagen. What was more, their auras were unstable, and their gazes didn't contain even a scrap of intelligence. Apparently, they were acting on lingering instinct.

Upon appearing, one attacked Xu Qing, while the other three... all bore down on Lan Yao.

The moment they attacked, Feng Lintao spun, his aura flaring and his cultivation base rumbling as he launched an attack on Lan Yao. There was more! A shadowy form emerged from Feng Lintao's sleeve, which rapidly shot toward Lan Yao. That shadowy form was an intestine! It was the very same thing they had run into earlier. All of this takes a bit of time to describe, but it happened in the time it takes a spark to fly off a piece of flint.

Xu Qing didn't have it so bad, as he was just facing a single mantis. But Lan Yao had to deal with three mantises, and as they reached her, they all self-detonated. At the same time, the gruish intestine was wrapping around her, and Feng Lintao had also launched an attack. A huge boom rang out, along with a destructive shockwave, as Lan Yao exploded.

However, before Feng Lintao could manage to look pleased with the outcome, the remnants of Lan Yao's body transformed into a talisman of animal skin that floated off to the side. Then, fluctuations rolled out as Lan Yao formed anew. It was almost as if she had anticipated that this would happen.

Xu Qing immediately fell back. As he did, the mantis that had been fighting him returned to Feng Lintao's side.

Lan Yao smiled faintly. "You're not exactly living up to your word, Fellow Daoist Feng."

Feng Lintao smiled sarcastically. "Not quite, Fellow Daoist Lan. You're the one with ulterior motives. Did you really think I wouldn't notice?"

It didn't seem he was surprised at all that Lan Yao survived his attack. Turning to the entrance of the passageway, he coldly continued, "You've been following us this entire time, Fellow Daoist Yue Dong. Why not show your face? I've known all along that you and Lan Yao were secretly working together!"

Feng Lintao's words caused Lan Yao's smile to harden, and her eyes to glitter.

"What's the meaning of this, Fellow Daoist Feng?" Xu Qing asked, his eyes narrowing.

Feng Lintao chuckled coldly as he reached out and pointed toward the entrance of the passageway.

Rumbling sounds could be heard as, astonishingly, a figure flew out of the passageway. It was a woman. She was lithe and beautiful, and though she had a gentle disposition, her eyes were as cold as ice.

"Everyone says that you're both paranoid and clever, Feng Lintao. I guess they're right." This woman was none other than Yue Dong.

Lan Yao, seeing no more need to hide the truth, nodded. "I really didn't think Feng Lintao would figure out the truth...."

With another person in the mix, Xu Qing blinked a few times, then looked at the Captain in Feng Lintao's grip. He backed up a few steps to indicate that he didn't want to be a part of what was happening.

"Lan Yao and Yue Dong of the Devilbird species," Feng Lintao said. "Although it might not seem like the two of you have much to do with each other back home, I've known the truth for a long time. Your relationship is anything *but* that. And who could ever have guessed that you two, who have such a good reputation, would stoop to doing something as greedy and despicable as this? It seems that you don't intend to abide by the terms of our agreement, Fellow Daoist Lan."

Gritting his teeth, Feng Lintao turned to Xu Qing. "Do you see what's happening here, Fellow Daoist Firedark? I'm afraid I need to ask for further help from you. If you do, I'll reward you handsomely later!"

Xu Qing didn't respond. He knew that he was the key to the entire situation. If he helped Feng Lintao, then Lan Yao and Yue Dong wouldn't be able to achieve victory quickly enough. After all, the golden rat outside would only stay trapped for so long.

Lan Yao laughed coldly. "There's no need to paint yourself as a victim, Fellow Daoist Feng," she said. "Do you actually think I believed what you said? I've known all along that the deal you made with me was just an excuse. The only reason you told me about the holy fardark nectar was to lure me down here. Your goal in this mission isn't just the nectar. You also want sacred Devilbird blood.

"It's possible to enter Revered Ancient, but not leave it, so you clearly have a clever plan in the works! Fellow Daoist Firedark, you're a smart person. Don't let yourself be fooled. As long as you refrain from interfering here, everything will work out fine for you. Your Eldest Brother might be captive, but Fellow Daoist Feng won't dare harm him. If he kills your Eldest Brother, then he knows he'll be up against all three of us."

Lan Yao burst into motion, heading right toward Feng Lintao. At the same time, Yue Dong waved her hand through the air, causing a sealing mark to appear and cover the entrance of the passageway to prevent anyone from leaving. Then she took a step toward Feng Lintao. Performing an incantation gesture to unleash a divine ability, she joined Lan Yao in the attack. Within moments, the deafening sound of combat filled the cave.

As the two women pushed Feng Lintao into retreat, he looked grimly at Xu Qing. "Fellow Daoist Firedark, if you don't do something, I'll tell everyone your secret! Were you under the impression I don't know why there's so little holy fardark nectar here?"

Feng Lintao's words caused the faces of Lan Yao and Yue Dong to flicker.

Xu Qing's expression didn't change at all as he said, "Complete nonsense. I've been with you two this entire time. I know you want to drag me down with you, but you could at least come up with a better excuse. Go ahead and say anything you want, Fellow Daoist Feng.

"Just keep in mind that I'm not going to get involved with the situation between the three of you. Since you said you knew all along that someone was following us, then I can only assume that you made preparations to handle the situation, and don't actually need my help."

Xu Qing kept backing up until he was at the entrance of the passageway, where he coldly watched the fighting.

Lan Yao's eyes glittered at this development. As she fought, she chuckled and said, "Thank you for the reminder, Fellow Daoist Firedark. You're right. This Feng Lintao definitely has more tricks up his sleeve."

Lan Yao summoned her eight-colored peacock, and Yue Dong formed a body of ice and snow. As the temperature plummeted, she produced a spear of ice that she stabbed toward Feng Lintao. At the same time, five major worlds appeared around her, two of them corporeal and three illusory. That pressure combined with Lan Yao's eight-colored peacock formed a truly deadly combination.

Though Feng Lintao still seemed calm and collected, and obviously had a lot of magical treasures left, he still fell back. There was nothing flustered about him. In fact, he was sneering.

"That's fine. Since you people guessed that I have more tricks up my sleeve, I won't waste any more time here. You're right, Lan Yao. I do have multiple goals. The holy fardark nectar. Your blood. And I also want Fellow Daoist Yue Dong's primal yin. All of that will come in very handy in forming my sixth world!"

As he spoke, Feng Lintao kept one hand on the Captain, but used the other hand to pull something out into the open.

It was a vine! It was golden, and sparkled in an extraordinary manner. It was as thick as an arm, three meters long, and astonishingly intelligent. The moment it was out in the open, it erupted with a shocking aura, filling the cave with a tempest. What was more, the vine caused the projection of a starry sky to appear above Feng Lintao. It looked like an endless starry sky filled with infinite heavenly bodies. There was also an amazing vine in it, piercing through the river of stars as it traversed the starry sky.

The vine in Feng Lintao's hand was covered with innumerable mysterious magical symbols, which all came about naturally. It also had fruit attached to it which looked like stars. It was a truly shocking sight.

When Lan Yao and Yue Dong saw the vine and the starry sky, they were shocked to the core.

Lan Yao even blurted, "A sageheaven god vine! Born in the starry sky, when it matures, it can traverse star systems. Yours is in an infant form! It might be in infant form, but even that's incredible. How can you possibly have something like that?? Holy Lord Fardark was killed by that vine! And it even destroyed the Fardark holy land? You...."

Although Xu Qing had never seen this item before, he could sense how majestic the vine was, and it caused his expression to flicker.

Feng Lintao looked at Lan Yao and Yue Dong, and then laughed cruelly.

"The two of you don't need to know how I got it. It will be an honor for you to be killed by a sageheaven god vine. However, the first person to receive such a karmic blessing will be the person I'm holding in my hand. Whenever a sageheaven god vine is used, it requires a living sacrifice."

Feng Lintao laughed maniacally. He was no longer hiding his true intentions. Though it seemed like he had been holding the Captain as a hostage, the reality was that he'd been keeping him ready to use as a living sacrifice!

As he laughed, he sent some divine will into the golden vine. The vine instantly flared with golden light, and then a mouth opened up at its end, making it look like a snake. It lunged toward the Captain.

However... as it neared, something unimaginable happened!

The Captain's eyes opened, and they gleamed with unprecedented craziness and greed. He opened his mouth... and bit down onto the vine! Then he inhaled deeply, and the terrifying vine, for some unknown reason, began to tremble. It was as if the vine had encountered an archenemy and wanted to struggle free. However, the Captain's eyes flared with blue light as he sucked the entire vine into his mouth.

This development was completely and utterly astonishing to everyone present, except Xu Qing.

The Captain suddenly vanished, then reappeared next to Xu Qing, where he burped contentedly.

"The only reason I let myself be captured was that I smelled that vine. I've been waiting this whole time for you to take it out! What a long wait!"

Chapter 925: Let's Do This Together, Everyone!

Silence reigned in the cave.

Lan Yao stood there with a blank look on her face. Yue Dong's mind reeled as she felt completely stunned.

"He... he ate it?"

Both of them felt like what they had just witnessed wasn't even real, despite having seen it play out with their own eyes. It had been shocking to see Feng Lintao produce such a rare and powerful item. In fact, they had instantly been overwhelmed with a sensation of profound danger, to the point where they had been preparing to simply flee and give up on any hope of achieving their goals.

That was a sageheaven god vine! A matured version of that vine had wiped out an entire holy land. Its terrifying nature was a thing of legend, and was so well-known among the other holy lands that no one would ever dare to take it lightly.

And yet... a terrifying sageheaven god vine had just been eaten right in front of them.... Granted, it was an infant form. But for someone to swallow it down so casually was

something neither of the women could ever have imagined possible. In fact, it led them to wonder if Feng Lintao had actually been using a fake sageheaven god vine.

If they reacted in that manner, there was little need to mention how Feng Lintao reacted. His expression was one of blank astonishment. His eyes couldn't have been wider, and he was so completely and utterly thunderstruck that his mind contained nothing but deafening rumbling sounds. His mind seemed to empty of all thoughts, until there was nothing left behind. He looked stupefied as he stared dully at the Captain's mouth....

Considering how much of a paranoid and distrustful person Feng Lintao was, the only time he could possibly enter a state like this would be when gaining enlightenment of magical laws. In other words, it required a very special destined opportunity, along with the perfect circumstances, for him to empty his mind of all thought. It was a mental state lacking any impurities, and needed an immense level of good fortune to achieve. Truth be told, this was actually the first time he had ever entered a state like this.

Thankfully for him, that state didn't last for long. After a brief moment in which he lacked any thought in his mind, everything turned around, and he was filled with a myriad of conflicted thoughts.

Distracting thoughts filled him until he was shaking. When the effect reached his throat, he started breathing unstably. And then it reached his soul, and he started to suspect that maybe he hadn't pulled out that vine to begin with. But then he checked to see, and he found....

"Ahem," the Captain said, blinking a few times. Then he continued in a tone of voice that could drive anyone into a fury. "There's no need to check, Little Fengfeng. I can confirm that you didn't make a mistake. The flavor was very, very pure."

Murder. Execution.

The Captain's words perfectly provoked those two concepts.

When Feng Lintao heard his words, he started shaking even more violently, and his mind filled with an unending host of thoughts. Fury. Regret. Anxiety. Humiliation. Jealousy. Depression. All of them raged within his heart and mind. Pain filled his head, causing blood vessels to bulge on his forehead. Immense pressure and heat began to build within him. His chest felt like an empty hole that could devour anything and everything.

His face first turned pale, then bright red, then green, and finally as black as night. It was easy to imagine what was going on inside of him for his face to change between so many colors in such a short amount of time. Next, Feng Lintao coughed up a massive mouthful of blood, then emitted a scream that could destroy the heavens and crush the earth! It was filled with raging animosity and incomparable madness.

“I’m gonna kill you!!!”

Feng Lintao was devolving into insanity. In fact, his aura was surging so wildly that his three sealed major worlds suddenly showed signs of being unsealed. Surging with power and momentum, he launched himself at the Captain.

Seeing the maddened Feng Lintao rushing toward them caused Xu Qing’s eyes to glitter coldly. Claspng his right hand into a fist, he took a step forward and launched a vicious blow.

The Undying Emperor’s Fist rocketed forward. Simultaneously, The Emperor’s Sword’s slashed ruthlessly toward Feng Lintao.

The Captain, meanwhile, snorted coldly and cocked his head. As a result, a green vine shot out from the top of his head. It was several meters long, and as it whipped from one side to the other, it shattered the air.

Xu Qing’s fist slammed into Feng Lintao, and a boom rang out. Xu Qing grunted as he was shoved backward. As for Feng Lintao, he ignored any possible injuries as he lunged forward again.

But then The Emperor’s Sword flashed. Sword light swept forth, and blood sprayed everywhere as half of his arm was sliced off. Then the Captain’s vine lashed into Feng Lintao with terrifying force. A huge boom echoed out in all directions. Blood sprayed out of Feng Lintao’s mouth as he was sent spinning off to the side.

The Captain cleared his throat, smiled, and said, “I only just ate it, so I don’t have much control.”

It was hard to tell if even he believed what he was saying.

Meanwhile, Lan Yao and Yue Dong, though astonished by the developments, were still extraordinary individuals. Suppressing their surprise, they took advantage of the moment. Killing intent surging, they shot forward. Given how everything had played out, one thing was for sure: these two women were dead set on killing Feng Lintao. An eight-colored peacock shot toward him, surrounded by an eight-colored wind, eight-colored rain, and eight-colored clouds. From Yue Dong came an ice spear that destroyed everything in its path like a boulder crushing a drinking glass.

Seeing all of that caused a sensation of deadly crisis to explode in Feng Lintao. At the same time, it forced him to regain some of the mental clarity he had lost thanks to the Captain. He had no choice but to suppress some of the random thoughts in his mind. However, whether it was the madness or the humiliation, he couldn’t control all of the emotions. When your life was on the line, some things... just had to be sidelined!

Of course, most people might come to that realization but be unable to follow through. After all, given how much had been lost, the resulting emotions were nearly uncontrollable. But Feng Lintao was inherently paranoid and cautious, and was also unusually intelligent. As a result, he could make snap decisions.

Eyes glimmering with cold light, he unhesitatingly went into an incantation gesture. Instantly, one of his three sealed major worlds suddenly blurred, then collapsed. That collapse caused a terrifying power to spread out violently in all directions. Astonishingly, he was choosing to detonate one of his sealed major worlds!

It was an immense price to pay. After all, because it was sealed, the power of detonation couldn't reach its full potential. At the very best, it might be half of what it could be. What was more, because it was in a sealed state, that power couldn't be used to bolster himself. It was essentially like a one-off detonation of a magical treasure.

Furthermore, this act would reduce the number of major worlds he had by one. That would result in an actual drop in cultivation base, and recovering from it would be immeasurably difficult. In fact, it was even possible it *couldn't* be recovered from. When all was said and done, it was a ruthless decision for him to make.

Neither Lan Yao nor Yue Dong would have been able to do something like this, even in a moment of deadly crisis. Both would need to take time to think things through before going through with it. Even though only a portion of the detonation power could be released, and even though it could only be done once, it was still a violent and terrifying act. After all, this was an entire major world. Rumbling sounds echoed out as a violent shock wave spread out in all directions.

Lan Yao and Yue Dong were facing the brunt of the attack, and there was no way either one of them wanted to put everything on the line. Both chose to avoid the blast as best they could.

As for Xu Qing and the Captain... they didn't do anything to follow up on their first attack.

Feng Lintao, meanwhile, had already given up on trying to kill Xu Qing and the Captain. He was using the detonation of his major world as a way to try to escape with his own life. In the blink of an eye, he shot toward the entrance of the passageway. Reaching the obstacle Yue Dong had put up, he launched a fist strike.

He wanted out!

At the same time, the coldness in his eyes grew more intense. Though he had chosen to flee, he wasn't completely ready to just give up on everything. He was planning to free the golden rat on his way out! If he could add it to the chaos, then he had a chance to *take advantage of a crisis for personal gain*. Perhaps by launching a deadly counter

attack, he could actually reverse the situation. That was what made it worth it to detonate his major world.

Meanwhile, the other four people involved were all intelligent in their own ways. That was obvious when it came to Xu Qing and the Captain. It was also clear with Lan Yao, considering how she had plotted against Feng Lintao and turned the tables on him.

Although Yue Dong hadn't done very much so far, the fact she could do something akin to *asking a tiger for its skin*, went to show how extraordinary she was.

The moment Feng Lintao detonated his major world and made a break for the passageway, the others could guess what he was planning to do.

In the blink of an eye, the Captain's vine whipped through the air, and he shouted, "Let's do this together, everyone! We've got to kill him! If he lets loose that rat, we're all in deep trouble!"

The Captain seemed like he was ready to throw caution to the wind as he shot toward the passageway. Lan Yao and Yue Dong gritted their teeth and followed him.

It seemed like they were all going to focus on killing Feng Lintao. But then, an instant later, three out of the four people suddenly seemed to be moving a bit slower than the others....

Only Yue Dong actually closed in on Feng Lintao as he battered at the barrier to the passageway.

Xu Qing stopped in midair.

Lan Yao made an initial lunge toward the passageway, but then stopped and went back to the Fardark Cistern. There, she waved her hand to collect all of the holy fardark nectar plus the golden egg.

Yue Dong actually didn't seem surprised by the developments.

However, Lan Yao wasn't the only one to look back at the pool. The Captain's vine also did the same. freewebnovel.com

It shot with astonishing speed toward the golden egg, wrapped it up, and then scrambled to get some of the liquid from the pool. Unfortunately, because of targeting the egg first, the vine only managed to get about twenty percent of the nectar. The other eighty percent went to Lan Yao.

Although Lan Yao wasn't happy about losing the egg, when she thought about what she'd seen the Captain do moments ago, she looked at the vine, then backed away with her guard up.

The Captain was likewise not very happy to lose the rest of the nectar. However, he knew they were in a tight situation, so he didn't do anything to Lan Yao. That said, he did manage to collect the remnants of the destroyed mantis puppets.

By the time those things were accomplished, Feng Lintao and Yue Dong had reached a critical moment in their fight.

Thanks to Yue Dong's interference, Feng Lintao had failed to break open the barrier.

That said, Feng Lintao's decisiveness wasn't limited to what he had done already. Eyes shining with cold light, he suddenly detonated another of his sealed major worlds! As the devastating shockwave spread out, Yue Dong was thrown in the opposite direction. At the same time, the barrier crumbled.

Panting for breath, Feng Lintao unhesitatingly shot into the passageway.

At that exact moment, dark mist built up in Xu Qing's eyes, and the godly authority of taboo poison spread out. Hellfei appeared!

"Six Filths of the Gods!"

Chapter 926: Pulling Back the Curtain

Hellfei was terrifying, surrounded by roiling black mists of poison. As for the words that had just been spoken, they came out of Xu Qing's mouth, but simultaneously, out of Hellfei's mouth.

First filth: godfire's smoke rises and converges impurities.

Feng Lintao, who was speeding through the passageway after having just destroyed the barrier, suddenly shivered. Then his face fell as he realized that black splotches of impurity were popping up all over him.

Second filth: god soul's desire builds and converges mortality.

Next, he felt like all of his sensations were being stripped away.

Third filth: god body decaying and building rot.

The black splotches on his body began to rot, and his flesh started falling off. His bones started to decay.

Fourth filth: god shrine covered in dust and losing brilliance.

Feng Lintao screamed as he sensed that his dao foundation, which was already unstable thanks to the recent detonations, was crumbling. And yet, the curse wasn't over yet.

Fifth filth: godly nature is filth loses wisdom.

Sixth filth: godly fate births curses and severs life.

A power that could eradicate the soul rose within him. Feng Lintao felt like an evil ghost as his flesh blurred and rotted, and he began to emanate a stench like that of a corpse. But then, he abruptly lifted his hand and smacked it down on his chest, causing a mass of rotting blood and innumerable howling souls to burst out of him in terrifying fashion.

It was the blood and souls of 20,000,000 fellow members of his species that he had sacrificed and assimilated to become a full-blooded Fardark. Those that still remained had to be abandoned at this moment.

As the blood and the souls spread out, new wings formed behind him, and a third eye appeared on his forehead. The rest of the curse began to dissipate naturally, thanks to him forcing it out. Then he flapped his wings and shot toward the end of the passageway.

Though he had successfully suppressed Xu Qing's deadly curse, his momentum had been interrupted. Therefore, just as he was about to burst out of the passageway, Yue Dong also flapped her wings and chased after him. She also performed a double-handed incantation gesture, causing dozens of warding spells to appear in the passageway. She had obviously put them in place when she came through the passage as the last to enter. And now they were being activated to block the path of Feng Lintao.

Despite being slowed down by the warding spells, Feng Lintao had bought enough of an advantage to reach the other end of the passageway his ancestor had created. Except....

The moment he burst out into the open, Yue Dong accelerated dramatically, passing him and planting herself between him and the golden rat.

His plan was foiled. Acting without even thinking, he simply fled.

However, that was when Lan Yao appeared and blocked his path upward.

Next, Xu Qing and the Captain appeared. However, instead of launching deadly attacks at Feng Lintao, they shot toward the cave above. For them, this entire scenario involving the other three was simply a good opportunity to make an escape. As a matter of fact, it had all been set up by Xu Qing and the Captain in the passageway.

Otherwise, Xu Qing would never have used Six Filths of the Gods. He actually didn't want Feng Lintao to simply die. Keeping him alive was the best option, that way he could buy time while also preventing Feng Lintao from freeing the golden rat.

As for how the fight ultimately played out with the others, it didn't matter to Xu Qing. He and the Captain knew that they had already profited handsomely, and now was the time to get away before the situation turned bad.

However, even as Xu Qing and the Captain flew up into the air and were about to make their escape, a barrier appeared noiselessly in front of them. It was a silver web made of innumerable sparkling and translucent white threads. And it covered the entire top of the cave. It pulsed with a terrifying pressure as well as the power of an incredible sealing mark. In fact, it seemed even stronger than the power unleashed by Feng Lintao's major world detonations.

If that were all there was to it, it might not have been a big deal. Xu Qing and the Captain still had the emperor's corpse. If they entered it and used its power, they could break free if they paid enough of a price. Except... that there was a paper talisman on the sealing mark. It was silver, and the words on it were very clear to see. However, the meaning of the words was difficult to decipher, although it was clear that the thing was pulsing with a very holy aura. It wasn't the aura of a god. Rather, it was... the aura of a Grand Emperor!

Xu Qing and the Captain both reacted with visible expressions of surprise. They didn't need to take time thinking about where this sealing mark came from. It was obvious that it had secretly been put in place by Yue Dong.

She and Lan Yao had acted in perfect unison to carry out their plan. Given the effects of karma, it seemed very unlikely that she had acquired a treasure like this by stealing it. After all, a talisman like that was simply too valuable.

"Don't be in a rush to leave, Fellow Daoists," Yue Dong said coolly. "That sealing mark isn't there to target you. It's to make sure Feng Lintao doesn't escape. Once the two of us kill Feng Lintao, I'll remove it and let you go. By the way, if you can lend a helping hand, we should be able to kill him faster. That would be ideal. After all, the golden rat... is going to break free soon."

Behind her, the golden rat was visibly struggling. Although Lan Yao had said she could keep it trapped for the time it takes an incense stick to burn, it was clear the mirror wouldn't hold out much longer.

Xu Qing and the Captain both felt their hearts sink. Both of them had to admit that these three cultivators from the holy lands weren't just strong, and didn't just have a lot of magical treasures. They were also extremely clever, and all of them had harbored many ulterior motives that they kept hidden until the last minute. Even one slip-up when dealing with people like this could ultimately lead to death.

Meanwhile, Feng Lintao saw what was happening, and his face grew more ashen. His eyes also gleamed with despair. Laughing bitterly, he said, "A holy ancestor's sealing talisman? It takes a lot of battle credit to buy even one of them back home.... How could I ever have guessed that you would actually purchase something like that just to deal with me, Fellow Daoist Yue Dong?"

"We have a slight conflict relating to profit and loss. You already have the prize in hand. Yet you're still using a sealing mark like that to try to kill me? It's truly a surprise. We don't have any deep animosity between us!" By the time Feng Lintao finished speaking, his eyes were crimson and he was nearly shouting.

"No deep animosity? Is that so?" Yue Dong's eyes shone with killing intent. There was no longer any trace of gentleness in her expression, just profound hatred. In fact, she looked ready to eat someone alive. "You have Devilbird blood, Fellow Daoist Feng! And the two of us sisters figured out years ago exactly where you got it!"

"Did you really think you could keep it a secret? That no one would find out? The truth is... she had two older sisters! Us! She just didn't tell you! The reality is that all of the treasures on this mission were secondary. Our main goal was to deal with you!"

Lan Yao gritted her teeth, then shot toward Feng Lintao. Yue Dong did the same. Booms rang out as the three of them started fighting.

Feng Lintao was already badly injured, and though he was able to defend himself, he coughed up one mouthful of blood after another.

Up in midair, just beneath the sealing mark and the web, Xu Qing and the Captain looked on grimly. They didn't want to get involved, but they could see the golden rat struggling with increasing vigor. If it broke free.... They exchanged a glance, and could both tell what the other was thinking. They had that egg, and if the golden rat broke free, they would be first on its list to destroy.

There seemed to be only one way to get free, and that was to help Lan Yao and Yue Dong.

Furthermore... it seemed that there was some karma at play between the two young women and Feng Lintao. Although the details weren't clear, it seemed that they were trying to avenge their younger sister, and that gave a glimpse into their character.

Xu Qing and the Captain exchanged another glance. The two blinked, and then their eyes shone with determination.

"Bastards like that deserve to die!" the Captain shouted. Then he added, "Immortal ladies, we'll just stand here and wait!"

In response, Feng Lintao's face turned even paler. In his practice of cultivation up to this point, he had experienced many deadly crises. But he hadn't faced many crises as deadly as this one. Given his personality, he was usually the one targeting others. But now it seemed he was the target. And it was all because his sageheaven god vine had been eaten....

The thought caused veins to bulge on his forehead, and more pressure to build up inside him. He again forced the pressure away, and made himself stop thinking about things that would drive him mad. As he fought back, he was shoved backward over and over again. He coughed up numerous mouthfuls of blood, and looked like he was about to sink into the depths of despair.

However, at the same time, he was rapidly analyzing the situation, and came to the conclusion that if he wanted to free the golden rat, he was going to have to detonate another major world. Except, he had already detonated two. If he detonated a third... his cultivation base would truly be at the two-world Smoldering God level.

Given that he might die, he could theoretically accept that. Except, if he detonated that third world, and then managed to free the golden rat, then he would be even weaker than he was right now.

And that meant that the possibility of *taking advantage of a crisis for personal gain* would be smaller than ever. The more likely outcome would be that he would be *spinning a cocoon around himself*, and would ultimately end up dead at the hands of the golden rat. And there would be other prices to pay for a detonation.

If there was really no other option at hand, he would do it. At the very least, he could make sure to take a few of his enemies out with him. In fact, between the detonation of a major world and the golden rat, he might even be able to kill all of his enemies here.

Except, those two humans are intriguing.... Do they really have an idea of what's going on? And given what they just said.... Was that for my sake? Are they trying to reveal that they know I can get free??

Eyes glittering, Feng Lintao spat out a pearl, which was a life essence magical treasure. The moment it appeared, it started spinning rapidly as it shot toward Lan Yao and Yue Dong.

Then Feng Lintao spun in place and shot toward Xu Qing and the Captain.

Lan Yao and Yue Dong acted in unison to destroy the life essence magical treasure. However, it did its job of blocking their path.

Feng Lintao was coughing up blood like mad, and his aura was weakening dramatically as he flew toward Xu Qing and the Captain.

Yue Dong spoke in both grief and indignation as she said, "Fellow Daoists! Please, will the two of you help us? We don't need you to kill him, just stop him!"

She and Lan Yao were already chasing after Feng Lintao.

Killing intent flared in the eyes of Xu Qing and the Captain as they chose to help the two young women. Both launched attacks at Feng Lintao.

As for Feng Lintao, his eyes burned with madness. He was taking a huge risk! There were some things he couldn't speak out loud, as if he did, it would reveal his trump cards. He was betting that these two would be able to read the bigger picture. After all, if they helped the two women kill him, then they would immediately be facing the two women as enemies. They were sealed in here, and also had to consider the golden rat. But if Feng Lintao survived and escaped, then the two women would have to chase after him. It was really the only way for the two humans to ensure their survival.

Just as Feng Lintao ran into the attacks of Xu Qing and the Captain, the two of them dodged to the side to clear a path.

Yue Dong and Lan Yao were visibly shocked.

Feng Lintao didn't hesitate at all. He barreled forward to the sealing mark, where he detonated his third major world. At the same time, he waved his hand to produce a Grand Emperor's talisman that looked just like the one in the sealing mark.

Backed by the power of the world detonation, it became a stream of silver light that smashed into the sealing mark and punched right through it. Feng Lintao reached it in an instant.

Xu Qing and the Captain didn't hesitate to turn into bright beams of light that shot through the opening.

And thus, the three of them escape into the open.

As they sped off into the distance, Yue Dong and Lan Yao appeared outside the sealing mark. Looking at the three fleeing enemies, their expressions became very unsightly.

"Was my wording too on the nose?" Yue Dong said grimly. "Or did I seem insincere because I don't actually have any younger sister? Or did they detect my innate ability?"

"If the two of them believed me at all, then my innate ability should have convinced them that I was after revenge. They shouldn't have realized I was plotting against them, and I should have been able to use their emotions to control them. And my innate ability seemed to be working on them before."

“As for the secret treasure in Feng Lintao’s soul, it’s the legacy of the Fardark holy ancestor, which is why my innate ability is only partially effective on him. He probably believed that I have a sister who he stole blood from. But once he starts thinking about it, he’ll suspect the truth.

“This is the first time I’ve met someone in my own cultivation level who my innate ability failed to work on, much less someone lower than me....

“What a pity. Those two humans would have made great flesh puppets. And I’d say there’s an eighty to ninety percent chance they’re the ones responsible for the missing holy fardark nectar! What a pity. What a real pity....”

She turned to look at Lan Yao with cold eyes. It was as if, to her, Lan Yao wasn’t a person, but rather, a flesh puppet whose emotions she could control.

Lan Yao didn’t seem to hear Yue Dong’s ramblings. She gritted her teeth and looked angrily in the direction Feng Lintao had fled.

“Those two humans deserve to die. And Feng Lintao deserves to die even more. Thankfully, we dug up that evidence about him. We’ll definitely put him to death and avenge our sister!”

Her eyes were crimson and full of vicious hatred.

Chapter 927: Master Deluo

Yue Dong looked off in the direction in which Xu Qing and the Captain had fled. Although she was loath to let them off the hook, in the end, she decided not to pursue them. Right now, the most important thing to her weren’t more flesh puppets, nor the holy fardark nectar. Rather, she needed the Fardark holy ancestor legacy in Feng Lintao’s soul. After all, that was the legacy of a Quasi-Immortal Grand Emperor!

I can’t give Feng Lintao time to recover. Furthermore, he has one of my emotion seeds in him. Tracking him will be as easy as following a bright torch in the middle of the night.

Yue Dong’s eyes glittered as she made her decision. Without any hesitation, she flew at top speed over the horizon. Lan Yao gritted her teeth and followed after Yue Dong. As for the Grand Emperor’s talisman, it faded away and was taken with them.

The cave was completely silent. Only a few moments passed, and then the mirror emitted some cracking noises. Then an enraged roar echoed out, followed by a stream of golden light.

It was none other than the golden rat. The moment it broke out into the open, it emitted a shrill, miserable scream. It shivered from head to toe, as if immense pressure were weighing down on it and trying to force it out of these lands. Before long, the pressure turned into countless magical sealing marks that resembled blood vessels within it. Even its head was full of numerous magical symbols. The magical symbols seemed ancient, and they pulsed with godly fluctuations. Clearly they had been there for many years, and were the reason the golden rat had been unable to leave the cave. It had been suppressed there!

Intense stimulation filled the rat, causing its god soul to tremble, and provoking more shrill screams. As it struggled, the sealing marks almost seemed to come alive, flowing through its body and ultimately converging on its head, where they stabbed deep into it. They surrounded its mind and crushed down on its soul, wiping away any scraps of intelligence and making it like nothing more than an animal.

Most gruish of all was that signs of a paper talisman could barely be seen on its forehead. It was as if further struggle would cause its flesh and blood to turn into paper. It would become a paper rat. Its blood-red eyes stared up into the sky, and then it unleashed an astonishing roar of defiance.

Wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. Winds screamed. And then the entire sky seemed to turn into a massive vortex, within which was visible a cold eye staring down at the golden rat.

The strange eye almost looked like a painting. Even more strange, the magnificent vortex in the sky, if you looked at it closely... looked like it was made from paper.

A deep voice echoed out.

“Sir Nightcrusher, you have been refined for 30,000 years, and your godfire has been extinguished by me many times. Yet you still aren’t willing to be a night god under my command?”

The golden rat’s eyes grew even redder, and it shook even more violently. Then its pupils suddenly filled with a bit of intelligence. A moment passed in which it said nothing, and then it spoke in a hoarse voice that seemed to contain irreconcilable enmity.

“Master... Deluo...!” [1]

With a roar, the golden rat spun, rushed back into the cave and the passageway within.

Up above, the eye in the vortex turned even colder. “Fine. I still have plenty of time.”

As the voice echoed out, the vortex blurred and then disappeared.

All heaven and earth went back to normal.

Of course, the scene which played out there was visible only in that limited location. Xu Qing and the Captain were so far away that they couldn't see it, nor could the fleeing Feng Lintao nor Yue Dong or Lan Yao. That said, they were all extraordinary individuals, and thus, they could at least sense that something strange was going on behind him.

In fact, Xu Qing looked over his shoulder as he flew through the air, and his expression was one of suspicion. Next to him, the Captain looked up into the sky, looking similarly suspicious. They exchanged a glance, and didn't need to exchange any words to know what each other were thinking. They sped up.

Three days passed in a flash.

Xu Qing and the Captain used various methods of concealment and invisibility. As a result, they didn't run into any trouble. Before long, they left Fardark County and entered the border of the Imperial Region of humankind.

Eventually, they caught sight of a human city on one of the outer rings of the imperial Region. The familiar scenery and aura entered their hearts, and they felt like a great weight had been lifted off them. That said, they didn't let their guard down. Truth be told, the things they had witnessed in the past few days left them both feeling very shocked.

Once in the Imperial Region, they kept up the same pace as they traveled forward. As a result, they ended up passing over both mortal cities as well as occasional sects located atop lofty mountain peaks. The former weren't anything worth paying attention to. No mortal city would ever cause any trouble for Xu Qing or the Captain. The latter did occasionally contain powerful cultivators who noticed the two of them speeding along. Most of them felt fear in their hearts, and pretended not to notice them.
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But occasionally there were some mighty individuals who weren't pleased by the intrusion.

In fact, as Xu Qing and the Captain were flying over a bright red mountain range, a cold snort echoed out.

"Who goes there? How dare you look down on our Crimson Blood Sect by just flying right over us! Stop right there!"

Along with the voice came a blood mist that rose from the mountains into the air to block the path of Xu Qing and the Captain.

Xu Qing frowned and was about to say something.

Before he could, the Captain glared at the blood mist and yelled, "How dare you! This is Region Lord Xu of the Holytide Region, the respected Grand Darkheaven of the Firemoons! In the presence of Heavenly Marquis Xu Qing and his Eldest Brother, people like you should back down immediately!"

He finished his sentence in a voice that boomed like thunder and was filled with immeasurable pride. What was more, his words came out very smoothly, as though the Captain had been practicing them in his heart for a long time. In fact, it was almost as if he had been just waiting for something like this to happen.

The blood mist lurched to a halt.

The Captain snorted coldly, then continued on his way. Xu Qing said nothing. And thus, the two of them flew on without so much as slowing down.

After they left, the blood mist shrank down until it turned into an old man with red hair. He looked hesitantly off to the horizon. The truth was he hadn't dared to block the path of those two passersby. After all... the identity of the person the Captain had announced was completely spectacular!

That was especially true considering that this Patriarch Crimson Cloud was not the type of person who spent all his time in secluded meditation. He was very well aware of what was going on in the world, and over the past few years had heard a lot about the new region lord of the Holytide Region. He had also heard about him being named a heavenly marquis.

At the same time... thanks to the announcement sent out into Revered Ancient by the Firemoon Darkheaven people, he had heard the shocking news about a human becoming their Grand Darkheaven.

And the name of that esteemed person was none other than Xu Qing.

"Xu Qing..." he murmured. Although he couldn't be absolutely sure if the person who had passed by was actually Xu Qing, he didn't dare risk offending him either way.

After all, if he *wasn't* Xu Qing, it wouldn't benefit Patriarch Crimson Cloud. And if he was, it didn't make sense to do something inappropriate just in order to earn a tiny bit of face. In the end, all this person had done was pass by without calling out formal greetings.

So what if he passed through without being very polite? That's not a big deal.

Clearing his throat, Crimson Cloud turned back into a blood mist and returned to his mountain.

In that manner, Xu Qing and the Captain spent a few days flying through the outer rings of the Imperial Region. As they went on their way, they finally started to calm down a bit. In this territory, they were generally safe. If the people they had been dealing with really wanted to cause trouble for them, they wouldn't do it here. For all intents and purposes, the danger had passed.

After quite a bit of travel, they caught sight of their target destination. It was a huge, ancient teleportation portal, and it led to the inner rings of the Imperial Region.

Because of being located in a strategic location, it was guarded year-round. There were currently about 1,000,000 troops stationed there, and they were overseen by a heavenly marquis with a Void Returning cultivation base.

As Xu Qing and the Captain approached, vicious wills rose from the area. The heavenly marquis on duty flew out and hovered in midair looking very serious.

When he saw who was flying in his direction, his expression flickered, and his heart surged with emotion.

“Xu Qing!”

This heavenly marquis had once sat with Xu Qing in the imperial palace during court. He recognized Xu Qing, and had heard about how he became the Grand Darkheaven. Though that startling news had come several days ago, he still felt very excited. A Grand Darkheaven was the type of majestic person that ordinary individuals could only dream about meeting. Even more importantly, the Firemoons occupied such a high level of glory that countless other species could only bow to them in subservience. But most importantly of all, the conflict between humans and the Firemoons had been ended by a single request on his part.

Power, position, and status like that made him like an unmatched star to humankind! That wasn't to mention that he was the lord of an entire region! Although his cultivation base was only in Void Returning, this heavenly marquis had heard that he had fought the number one chosen among the Firemoons, the Smoldering God Sir Firedark. And he had crushed him!

Because of all of that, this heavenly marquis's heart was racing. However, he kept his facial expression neutral as he clasped hands and bowed.

“Well met, Heavenly Marquis Xu!”

Xu Qing and the Captain approached and stopped in midair. Their arrival, thanks to the words spoken by the other heavenly marquis, caused all of the 1,000,000 human cultivators in the area to look over. Although not all of them knew what Xu Qing looked like, they had all heard of Heavenly Marquis Xu. As a result, every single one of them excitedly clasped hands respectfully to him.

Over the past few days, it wasn't an exaggeration to say that just about everyone in Revered Ancient had heard stories about Xu Qing.

"Well, if it isn't Heavenly Marquis Wang," Xu Qing said, giving the other heavenly marquis a faint smile. "I'm trying to get to the imperial capital and was hoping to use this teleportation portal."

Heavenly Marquis Wang immediately nodded his head. "Heavenly Marquis Xu, your return is a momentous event for humankind. All teleportation portals are available for your use!"

With that, he gave some orders, and his subordinates scurried about as if they were dealing with a heavenly king. In fact, they even treated the Captain with great respect. The Captain enjoyed that quite a bit. As the work went about, countless human cultivators couldn't help but secretly look over at Xu Qing.

Soon, the teleportation portal activated. After bowing in farewell to Heavenly Marquis Wang, Xu Qing and the Captain stepped into the teleportation portal. The light of teleportation flared, and the two of them vanished. Although they were gone, everyone was still talking about him.

"That's the number one chosen of humankind!!"

"He's young, and he's got exceptional talent! Hahaha! Hey, once word gets out, maybe I'll start getting famous too. I'm the one who activated the teleportation portal for Heavenly Marquis Xu!"

Heavenly Marquis Wang looked at the empty teleportation portal and listened to the excited talk spreading among the troops. He sighed in his heart.

I bet the next time I run into him, he'll be a heavenly king at the very least!

1. In chapter 955 of *A World Worth Protecting*, in the scene which most people believe features Xu Qing, he mentions a Master Deluo, saying that he pursued him for three months, killing millions of his clones in the process. There is not much more information than that in that chapter. As of translating this chapter, there is very little information about this person, even in upcoming untranslated chapters of BTT. In *A World Worth Protecting* the name is rendered in MTL style as De Luozi, which is most likely incorrect. When the "zi" character is at the end of a two-character name in xianxia/Daoism, it's almost always a title (that I usually render as Master or Sir). The other two characters "De" and "Luo" can be interpreted many ways. Usually the first one is something related to morals or morality. Luo means net or sieve, and is a character that appears in "Allheaven" from ISSTH and also the term Nobleplexus I coined for this translation. For the time being I'm going to simply transliterate the name as Deluo. Later on if/when we get further information about what the name means, I might come up with a translation for it. ☹️

Chapter 928: Green Ox Return (Qing Niu Return)

The Captain and Xu Qing soon appeared in a teleportation portal in the inner ring of the Imperial Region.... Similar to the portal Princess Anhai had used when leading Xu Qing and the others from Sea-Sealing County, this particular portal didn't lead directly into the imperial capital. Before the guard staff at the portal outside the capital could even clearly see who had come through, Xu Qing and the Captain had flown off into the sky.

Some distance away, they hovered in the air, looking in the direction of the capital. The first thing that they noticed were all the statues lining the capital.

Xu Qing's mental state was very different compared to the first time he had laid eyes on those statues. Sighing inwardly, he looked at the rainbow bridge leading to the imperial palace, and far beyond all that, at Planet Ancient Emperor.

"Finally here," Xu Qing murmured as he thought back to all the familiar faces he would soon see. He smiled.

When the Captain noticed Xu Qing's expression, he shivered with excitement and said, "Say, little Junior Brother, back in that cave, remember what's-her-face... Yue Dong? Her words made it very clear that she deeply values her sisterly relationships. Given that we set that Feng fellow free, we're going to have to be very careful going forward." [1]

The Captain blinked a few times at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing looked back at him. "You don't seem very sorry about it."

The Captain chuckled darkly. "I get the feeling that shrew was just putting on a show for the other shrew, Lan Yao. Lan Yao looked pretty angry. And the whole cave seemed full of the sensation of revenge. HOWEVER! Given my very perceptive eyes, I could tell from the get-go that the shrew Yue Dong is a bad person. Of course, there's a reason I could sense that."

The Captain lifted his chin arrogantly. "It's because of my special constitution. You listen to me, little Ah Qing. From the time I was young until I grew up, and from ancient times until modern, I have been the person to hoodwink others. Cultivators. Gods. It doesn't matter! I can hoodwink anyone!

"After you hoodwink people so many times you lose track, you'll automatically gain some enlightenment of that type of great dao. And thus, I unconsciously developed an immunity to the hoodwinking of others. Anyone who dares to try to pull a fast one on me will be found out instantly! What about you? What clued you in to the fact that something suspicious was going on?" freewebnovel.com

The Captain was actually extremely curious about this point, and had thought it over quite a bit during their travels. The entire time, he had never been able to come up with a good way to ask about it.

Xu Qing looked his Eldest Brother straight in the eyes and said, "Thanks to spending so much time with you, Eldest Brother, I've also developed a bit of an immunity."

"Hey, I've never tried to hoodwink you!" the Captain said. Clearing his throat, he decided to change the topic. He smacked his forehead, and a green vine emerged, barely more than a meter long. He opened his mouth, then snapped his teeth shut, chomping the vine in half. He gave one half to Xu Qing. "Take it. Consider it a gift from your Eldest Brother. As bros, we should always split the loot 50/50!"

He looked anxiously at Xu Qing with an expression that indicated he was expecting Xu Qing to act similarly in return.

Xu Qing chuckled. In reality, he didn't care if the Captain split the vine with him. There hadn't been time to discuss it on the way, and now that they were back in human territory, he'd been planning to split up the loot he'd acquired, regardless of what the Captain said or did. For all intents and purposes, there wasn't any sort of loot whatsoever that the two of them couldn't split.

Xu Qing waved his hand, and the air in front of them rippled. Little Shadow appeared, then dutifully spat up a large amount of holy fardark nectar. There was so much that it could definitely have filled a huge cistern.

The Captain's eyes went wide. "Little Ah Qing, although I predicted from the beginning that you were the one who secretly drained the pool, I never could have guessed... that you took so much!!!"

Xu Qing was pleased with the results. Taking out two bottles, he split the holy fardark nectar into two parts, one of which he gave to the Captain. Then he looked at Little Shadow, who was obediently emanating some very cute fluctuations.

"Eldest Brother, do you have any more of Crimson Mother's flesh?"

Unfortunately, Xu Qing didn't have any left, which meant that he was going to have a hard time settling accounts with Little Shadow.

The Captain was at first stunned, but then he looked at the shadow, smiled, and gave three pieces of flesh to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing waved his hand. The shadow swelled excitedly as the three chunks of flesh tumbled into its mouth. It swallowed them, then swirled on the ground beneath Xu Qing's feet looking very happy. A moment later, it opened its mouth and spat out an egg. It was golden and pulsed with a godly resonance.

The Captain's eyes went wide. "There's another one? That rat must have been an amazing thing to have things like that. I never laid eyes on it personally, but I can sense how extraordinary it is.... That's especially true considering what we felt after we made our escape." He reached out to grab the egg. "Sadly, I'm not very good at incubating eggs...."

The Captain sighed begrudgingly. That was when Xu Qing suddenly thought of a certain person who he had seen furtively incubating some mutant beasts.

"Wu Jianwu is good at it," he said.

The Captain's eyes lit up. "That's right! He *is* good at it. I think we should loan these two eggs to Wu Jianwu and let him handle the incubating!"

"Good idea, Captain."

"Captain?" the Captain said. He thought for a moment, then took a deep breath. "I think I'm ready to retire 'the Captain.' Going forward, it's Erniu. What do you think?"

Xu Qing looked at him. He nodded. [2]

Erniu also nodded. Then he put away the two eggs and was just about to say something further when glittering light rose up from the distant imperial capital. Pulses of light shot up into the sky, forming auspicious clouds that filled half of the canopy of heaven. Bells tolled from within the capital, deafening and majestic.

They tolled twelve times! The sound resounded in the ears of everyone in the capital. It was a ceremony that surpassed anything for heavenly kings. Only when humans achieved a great victory, or were performing ancestral sacrifices, would the bells ring in that way. Today, though humankind hadn't necessarily achieved a great victory, it had at least resolved a big crisis. Furthermore, Xu Qing had amassed great glory. Though he was only one person, he was human, and therefore, that glory spread out to shine on the lands of humans as a whole. The bells tolled twelve times for a single person!

Xu Qing took a deep breath. Erniu's chest swelled as if he were a dragon or tiger, as if he were the one responsible for everything.

He quickly projected a message to Xu Qing. "*Little Junior Brother, release Ninedawns! Put on the Grand Darkheaven Armor! My dream is going to be fulfilled today with your help!*"

Xu Qing didn't really have many options. He knew what his Eldest Brother's dream was, and that was to return triumphantly to humankind as a darkheaven general. Normally speaking, it wasn't something Xu Qing would ever do. But since his Eldest Brother had asked....

The Grand Darkheaven Armor formed around him. The Ninedawns skulls howled as nine lamps appeared, which began to orbit around him. At the same time, his energy surged, causing wild colors to flash in the sky, and winds to scream.

Planet Ancient Emperor in the imperial capital was affected by the bells. The planet trembled, and then destiny aura surged within it, causing auspicious beasts to proliferate within the clouds. The dragon formed of human destiny appeared, swirling around, accompanied by the projections of various illustrious figures from human history. The dragon of destiny roared, and a host of figures flew out of the imperial capital, several thousand in number.

Among them were the important government officials of all rankings. There were nobles and other powerful experts, most of whom Xu Qing had seen before. Leading them was a dignified and imposing middle-aged man. He wore a long blue robe embroidered with white clouds, and was tall and burly, making him visually impressive to anyone who could see him. He had stalwart facial features, with eyes like torches that could see through everything, and would elicit feelings of respect in anyone. His prominent nose and thin lips made him seem full of unswerving determination. There was something very domineering about him, almost as if he was someone who had been born a leader.

This person led the way, flying forward like the wind, but not imparting a sense of calmness. His cultivation base? He was an eight-world Smoldering God! He was the number one heavenly king of humankind, King Firecrusher. He was a legend among humans, even a myth!

As the number one heavenly king, he was the strongest human expert that there was other than the emperor. He was like a needle in the ocean compared to humankind as a whole, and was like a god to the armed forces.

As the only human Smoldering God with eight worlds, and during a time when it was not appropriate for the emperor to leave the capital, and considering Grand Emperor Swordsage only had one sword left to use, King Firecrusher was responsible for handling any wartime affairs outside of the capital.

Although King Firecrusher had also done a lot to maintain the border with the Firemoon Darkheavens, he had also participated in countless other military operations. Whenever humans achieved a great victory, he played a part in it. And when things got tough, he never shirked his duties. Over the countless years he had lived, he had faced injury and death on too many occasions to count. And he had killed enough nonhumans to form a sea of corpses.

He had essentially spent his entire life in military service! He was now back, and he was the one who personally came out to receive Xu Qing! It went to show how seriously humankind was taking Xu Qing's return. And it was also a clear sign of how much the emperor and King Firecrusher valued Xu Qing.

Xu Qing was taken aback. Although he had never seen King Firecrusher, he had heard a lot about him in the capital. From the way everyone treated King Firecrusher, and from his terrifying cultivation base, which seemed to pulse with an aura of endless slaughter, it was possible to guess who he was. He was a heavenly king who had lived a life in military service. As such, Xu Qing respected him greatly.

Without any hesitation, and without paying any further attention to Erniu, Xu Qing put away the Grand Darkheaven Armor and Ninedawns skulls, then hurried forward solemnly. Clasp hands, he bowed.

“Well met, King Firecrusher. I am Xu Qing.”

King Firecrusher’s eyes glittered as he looked at Xu Qing. Then, his normally grim face broke out into a smile. “A 30,000-meter pillar of light in the assessment of the heart. Given a sword by the Grand Emperor. Lord of the Holytide Region. Respected by Firemoon Darkheavens. You’re the perfect example of what a human chosen should be like!”

King Firecrusher laughed heartily, his eyes overflowing with praise that came from the depths of his being. The nobles behind him might have been keeping their true thoughts hidden. But on the outside, they smiled as they respectfully bowed.

“You flatter me, Heavenly King,” Xu Qing replied in accordance with etiquette. “I don’t dare to claim credit for such things. In fact, without the help of my Eldest Brother here, I would never have succeeded.”

King Firecrusher’s gaze flitted to Erniu. “You schemed against three gods. You seized a god domain. You devoured the blood of the broken face. Just what I would expect of Chen Erniu! Maybe the Firemoon Darkheavens didn’t give you any Grand Darkheaven Armor, nor any glory. But on behalf of humankind, I offer you my full respect!”

Erniu’s eyes went wide and his heart started racing. Not only did this King Firecrusher understand him, but also seemed to know what he was truly thinking. *This guy is no simpleton. All it took was a single glance for him to realize how amazing I am. That I’m a child of destiny! That I’m outstanding!! He understands how worthy of admiration I am!*

Erniu rushed to bow in thanks.

King Firecrusher laughed again as he looked at Xu Qing and Erniu. Then he lifted his hand in a beckoning gesture.

“Come on. Let’s go home.”

1. The Captain uses the wrong character for one of the characters in Yue Dong’s name, although it’s pronounced the same. I’m honestly not sure if it’s intentional or a typo.

There doesn't seem to be any joke involved, so I'm not sure what to make of it. It seems likely it's a typo. ?

2. As I mentioned in a previous translator note, the author stealthily switched from using 'the Captain' to 'Erniu' without any explanation either within the narrative or in author notes. I'm going to make more of a hard transition. As a result, I added this brief section to create a narrative reason for the switch. It takes place roughly around this period, and this section seems like the perfect place for that change. ?

Deathblade's Thoughts

In case you missed it, the tReading the Path of Heaven did a great podcast on Beyond the Timescape. You can find the podcast wherever you get your podcasts, above is the YouTube link. It's more geared toward people who understand xianxia and cultivation novels, so if you know people who are fans of the genre but are not reading the story yet, think about sharing it with them! The hosts' enthusiasm is contagious!

Chapter 929: King Skycrusher!

Home. It was a word packed with meaning.

When it came to "going home," Xu Qing remembered Master Seventh saying something like that before. 'Home' generally means the same type of thing to most people, but at the same time, everyone would have their own unique interpretations.

When Master Seventh said home, he meant Seven Blood Eyes. When King Firecrusher said home, he meant humankind. To Palace Lord Kong, home was Sea-Sealing County.

As for Xu Qing, his path had taken him from the continent of South Phoenix to Emperor-Receiving Prefecture, then to Sea-Sealing County, then to the Holytide Region... and finally to the imperial capital of humankind.

As time passed, 'home' came to mean different things to him.

He went from his shack in the slums to Sergeant Thunder's residence in the scavenger basecamp. He moved on to Seven Blood Eyes, the Swordsage Palace in Sea-Sealing County, and now he was a resident in the imperial capital.

Without even realizing what was happening, Xu Qing had long since ceased to be that kid from long ago. The years hadn't taken away his good looks. But his life had continued. Thankfully... the timescape hadn't marched on fruitlessly.

What was past in the timescape couldn't be brought back. But the experiences of life were always there, and they became part of memory and part of fate. This process had a name. It was called 'growing up.'

Thirty years. From the time Xu Qing piled up all those corpses in the ruins of that city until now, thirty years had passed. [1]

King Firecrusher's words caused Xu Qing to enter something like a daze. In his mind's eye, he suddenly saw the inside of Ningyan's mansion. He saw a beautiful woman there, whose memory had long since become a part of him, deep in his heart.

He remembered the first time he saw her in the middle of the night, like a violet floating down from the canopy of heaven. He would never forget their journey on the Everlasting Immortal Profundity River. He could almost hear the familiar melody of *Parting with Sorrow*. It reminded him of the jianghu, and its tale of a lifetime of sorrow which culminated in a jug of unfiltered rice wine.[2]

Alone, one drank. Ripples spread through one's heart.

Those ripples reflected onto a woman who was on the bank of the river, her arms wrapped around her knees as she murmured, "Maybe there is a lamp in this world...."

That lamp had a name. It was the Plumdark Evergreen Lamp, and it had borne witness to the parting of sorrow back in that pitch-black phoenix palace. Its existence was like a cycle. The past became a vivid image.

"Home?" Xu Qing murmured, smiling. He had grown up. He might have been naive and ignorant in the past, but he was not that way anymore. Thus, he took a deep breath, and with Erniu looking doubtful off to the side, they followed the smiling King Firecrusher toward the imperial capital.

Auspicious signs were visible in the sky. Flowers covered the landscape. King Firecrusher walked with them, and the host of nobles and officials followed.

Once inside the capital, they saw hordes of commoners waiting to catch a glimpse of Xu Qing. When they did, their cheers rose high into the sky. Their adulation came from the depths of their hearts. The commoners were simple and sincere. If they believed someone to be a good person, they wouldn't hold back their praise and adoration. And any human who managed to establish prestige over nonhumans made them a hero to the people. It led to this spontaneous welcome right on the streets.

Of course, the fact that the nonhumans involved were Firemoon Darkheavens made things even more significant, and that was without even mentioning the Grand Darkheaven situation. To top it all off, the war had ended, thus ensuring that the glory which had been won wasn't limited to a single person, but became like auspicious clouds that covered everyone.

The end result was that Xu Qing got a hero's welcome. Destiny aura flowed toward him along with the cheers of the crowd, nourishing his void soil and The Emperor's Sword.

There were familiar faces in the crowd. For example, he saw Wu Jianwu, Kong Xianglong, as well as swordsages from Sea-Sealing County. They all nodded in greeting to him. Xu Qing didn't spot Plumdark, which caused his heart to start beating a bit faster.

Striding forward, he greeted Wu Jianwu and Kong Xianglong with the wave of a hand.

Kong Xianglong smiled and hurried toward him. Wu Jianwu didn't dare to misbehave in such circumstances, so he quickly followed Kong Xianglong's lead.

"Congratulations, Region Lord!" Kong Xianglong said, his smile turning into a serious expression as he clasped hands and bowed.

"There's no need to act like that around me, Big Bro Kong," Xu Qing said, smiling as he lifted Kong Xianglong up from his bow.

Meanwhile, Wu Jianwu opened his mouth to speak, but before any words could come out, Erniu was there, sliding his arm around Wu Jianwu's neck and pulling him close.

"How badly did you miss me, Little Jianjian?"

Xu Qing didn't bother watching to see how Wu Jianwu would react. Focusing on Kong Xianglong, he hesitated for a brief moment and then asked, "How has Ningyan been doing lately? And what about... Arch-Immortal Plumdark?"

An odd expression could be seen in Kong Xianglong's eyes. "After Ningyan got back, he spent time working hard for the sake of the people. He's been focused on cultivation, and finally reached the point of breaking out of Nascent Soul and into Spirit Trove. He's been in seclusion trying to achieve the breakthrough.

"As for Arch-Immortal Plumdark. Ahem. By the time I got back, the only thing left of her was a message she sent me to pass along to you. She said that if you came back and didn't ask about her, I was to tell you that she left the capital recently.... And she said that if you did ask about her, I was supposed to tell you... to do your own thing, and that she would come find you eventually."

Kong Xianglong studied Xu Qing briefly, then cast down his eyes and said nothing further. Of course, just about all the old-timers from Sea-Sealing County had heard rumors about Xu Qing and Arch-Immortal Plumdark, and his good friend Kong Xianglong was no exception....

Xu Qing smiled and asked nothing further. Clearing his thoughts, he looked in the direction of the imperial palace.

Upon entering the city, King Firecrusher had explained to Xu Qing that the emperor wanted to see him immediately. The heavenly marquises, heavenly kings, chief

minister, and all the other officials were waiting in the palace for him. Despite the glory and cultivation base progress Xu Qing had achieved, he still couldn't get a read on the emperor.

Looking at the rainbow bridge, he spotted the eleven huge sticks of incense. Smoke curled up from them and drifted high into the sky. They were the sticks of crown prince incense!

When Xu Qing left the capital, all eleven of the sticks of incense had been burning down at roughly the same rate. But now... the stick representing Ningyan wasn't burning the fastest, but at the same time, was close to being in last place. No wonder Ningyan had been working so hard on his cultivation.

There were three sticks that were burning the slowest. One of them represented Fourth Prince, who was subordinate to the imperial preceptor. Another represented Fifth Prince, who was associated with King Firecrusher. The third represented Grand Prince! Those three were roughly equal in terms of the standings.

Xu Qing studied the incense sticks thoughtfully. Fourth Prince was the apprentice of the imperial prince, and had clearly performed some amazing services. Fifth Prince was serving well in his duties to control the border. As for Grand Prince, he had obviously performed worthy services among the Firemoons.

Wrapped up in thoughts of what it all meant, Xu Qing followed as King Firecrusher led the way into the palace. Before long, they were in front of the main entrance. The two statues guarding them had their heads bowed reverentially.

Xu Qing's gaze pierced through the entrance, past the plaza, and toward the grand hall that represented the highest element of human will. The moment he did, an imposing gaze emerged from within the hall to look upon Xu Qing.

Xu Qing bowed his head, clasped hands, and bowed in the direction of the hall.

An instant later, a voice echoed out from the palace. "Heavenly Marquis Xu and Chen Erniu are hereby admitted for an audience with the emperor!"

Every syllable uttered by the voice resounded with the echoing might of heaven.

Xu Qing and Erniu exchanged a glance. Without the slightest hesitation, they entered the imperial palace.

King Firecrusher smiled faintly as he entered with them. The other nobles who qualified to enter did so, with the rest waiting outside.

After about ten breaths of time had passed, Xu Qing and the others had walked up the stairs and into the crowded hall.

Officials were gathered solemnly on either side. Up ahead, on the dais, were the heavenly marquises, and above them, the thrones of the thirty-three heavenly kings! For the most part, all of the marquises and kings were present. Further above them, at the highest spot above the gathered officials, was the Dragon Throne. There, the emperor's eyes glittered like the sea as he sat there, face expressionless, looking at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing respectfully bowed at the waist.

Erniu blinked a few times. Thinking about what King Firecrusher had just said, he decided to imitate Xu Qing and bow deeply.

"Xu Qing," the emperor said coolly, his low voice echoing in the hall. "You were in Firemoon territory for some years. During that time, you could observe Firemoon culture, witness the profundities of Darkheaven practices, and gain enlightenment of the dao of mages. You also encountered their grand steward. What was your impression of him?"

The emperor's words were followed by complete silence as everyone looked over at Xu Qing.

Stories about the Firemoons' three gods had long since spread throughout Revered Ancient. Although many secrets had been maintained, things were a bit different when it came to humans, and they had learned more than others.

Upon hearing the question, Xu Qing thought about Ninedawns being stabbed in the back. He thought about the grand steward longing for godly ascension, and how the three gods sacrificed the heroic souls of countless Firemoon Darkheavens. And finally he considered the grand steward's dismal end, and how he chose to sacrifice himself. They were such monumental things that Xu Qing didn't think it was possible to simply recount his 'impressions' of them.

After a long moment passed, Xu Qing spoke. "If you can't control your own life, how can you guide the fate of a species? In the end, such thinking is as *unrealistic as flowers in a mirror or the moon in the water*. One moment you're on top of everything, the next, you're dead."

The emperor said nothing. A moment passed. Then the emperor raised his hand in a signal to the chief minister.

The chief minister stepped forward. Eyes sparkling, he looked at Xu Qing and loudly announced, "These are the words of Emperor Dark War, who hath accepted the Mandate of Heaven and hath been enshrined by immortals. The destiny of humankind hath stirred. Region Lord Xu Qing of the Holytide Region has descended into the mortal world to bring peace to the conflict with the Nightshades, to sweep aside the rebellious nonhumans, and to establish the might and glory of humankind."

“Due to his propitious accomplishments and superior potential, he is hereby awarded with a greater spirit mansion. Furthermore, he is appointed... as King Skycrusher. He is also appointed as the ‘tutor of imperial princes!’[3]

When the imperial edict was read out loud, most people in the hall, with only a very few exceptions, were shaken to the core. In fact, it took a lot of willpower on their part to not react visibly.

Truth be told, Xu Qing’s accomplishments were befitting of an appointment to the position of heavenly king. But for him to be given the heavenly king name that had the character ‘crusher’ in it was monumentally significant. Heavenly kings with the character ‘crusher’ in their names were considered apex among heavenly kings. In fact, up to this point in the history of humankind, there had only been one such heavenly king.

That was shocking, let alone the fact that Xu Qing had been appointed as the tutor of imperial princes. It wasn’t necessarily a very high position, but it did give him authority over the children of the imperial house. Going forward, any imperial prince who encountered him would need to bow in greeting. Beyond that, once a crown prince was named, historical custom dictated that the tutor’s meritorious services would lead to him being promoted to ‘tutor of the crown prince.’ That was a position very similar to that of ‘mentor of the emperor.’

Everyone was astonished, including Xu Qing. And yet, the chief minister was not finished with the imperial edict.

“The righteous patriot Chen Erniu is supremely honorable and upright, with courage and insight far above the masses, talent to span heaven, and martial heroism of extraordinary quality. Therefore, the Creation Mansion has been specially tasked with using profound darknether iron, nineheavens ice crystal, and a total of fifteen other spectacular crafting materials to forge him a suit of Grand Zodiacist Armor![4]

“In human lands, heavenly kings and anyone of lower ranking are required to offer him formal greetings upon meeting.”

Although the reward seemed impressive, the truth was that it didn’t contain any official position. And yet, Erniu’s eyes shone brightly, and he was nearly trembling with excitement. Raising his voice, he said, “Long live the emperor!!”

1. I was tempted to remove this line from the text (as an edit), because I’m fairly certain it’s wrong. In [chapter 914](#) we were told it’s the year 2,939. We were introduced to the calendar date in [chapter 401](#), when it was 2931. That’s only 8 years. Although we weren’t given calendar dates before that, we were able to track time via the seasons and other clues, and I really don’t think 22 years passed between [chapter 3](#) (when Xu Qing piled up the corpses), and chapter 401. That said, maybe I missed something when it comes to the dates. I’ll leave a comment in this chapter, please feel free to respond to it if you have further information that I missed. In the end, the author’s

intention seems to be for 30 years to have passed. That's especially true in upcoming chapters. There are quite a few parts of the story where it's obvious based on various descriptions that many years are supposed to have passed. So I'll honor that intention and leave the "thirty years" reference in here as he wrote it. 📖

2. Xu Qing first saw Plumdark in [chapter 278](#). They journeyed on the river starting in [chapter 297](#), during which time he learned Parting with Sorrow in [chapter 299](#). 📖

3. The position of 'tutor of imperial princes' was mentioned previously in [chapter 796](#). I will also render it as 'imperial tutor' when appropriate. 📖

4. The armor is more specifically related to the Big Dipper. However, for reasons which will be made slightly more clear later, I'm coining the term Zodiacist to go along with the armor. 📖

Chapter 930: When the Big Dipper Points to Yi and Bright

Erniu didn't care about appointed positions as long as his reward in general was good enough. Of course, he was also a swordsage. Though neither King Firecrusher nor the emperor had mentioned that, Erniu didn't care. As far as he was concerned, prestige trumped all. The reality was that, though he was deeply connected to humankind, he actually didn't count as being fully human. As for what exact species he was, not even he knew for sure.

Ai, things were so rough for me in my past lives.

Sighing proudly, Erniu looked instinctively at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing sensed his gaze and looked back with a smile of congratulations.

Erniu was very pleased by that. Then he thought about his Grand Zodiacist Armor and got even more excited.

After explaining Erniu's reward, the chief minister paused for a moment to let everyone digest the information. Then he continued speaking.

"Humankind has destiny on its side; the Dawning light shook nonhumans in all directions. Then Sea-Sealing County waged war in Holytide, then expanded human territory into the two regions of the Nightshades."

These words caused the eyes of the gathered officials to glitter with excitement.

The previous imperial edict had named Xu Qing a heavenly king, and that had been somewhat expected. But as for the words uttered just now... everyone could tell that they were leading to something special.

Opening words like that couldn't indicate anything else, and now everyone was guessing what was to come.

"The war has ended with a formal letter of surrender from the Nightshade Region. What's more, all subsidiary species of the Firemoons have retreated and ceased hostilities. In a matter of days, an emissary will arrive to discuss a peace treaty to last a thousand years.... What's more, we've successfully acquired the Moonrite Region as allies.

"For countless years, humankind has worked toward the goals put in place by our ancestors. And today... we finally see the light of dawn!

"As of today, humankind has truly expanded. No longer do we have one region and seven counties. We now have four regions and seven counties!

"The Imperial Region, Holytide Region, Nightspirit Region, and Nightshade Region!

"Now we must make sacrifices to our ancestors, provide offerings to the souls of the fallen heroes, and to inform all under heaven of the existence of humankind!

"These are the words of Emperor Dark War, who hath accepted the Mandate of Heaven and hath been enshrined by immortals.

"In the year 2,939 of this dynasty, humankind will hold the ancestral sacrifices which have not been observed for the past 800 years. They will be held one hundred days from now, when the Big Dipper points to Yi and Bright. At that time, the ancient planet will be opened, and we will go to the Temple of Heaven. There, the emperor will bear the destiny of our species to once again offer sacrifices to the ancestors!"[1]

As the chief minister's words rang out, the gathered officials' hearts started racing.

Ancestral sacrifices were an extremely important ceremony to humans. In fact, it was essentially the most important formality there was. There was nothing more solemn. And normally speaking, they were only carried out when one emperor died and another took the throne, or humankind in general accomplished some heaven-shaking, earth-shattering deed.

After all, opening up Planet Ancient Emperor required a vast amount of precious resources. Even during the reign of previous emperors, when humankind was considered much stronger, their ancestral sacrifices would attract the attention of other species throughout Revered Ancient.

At the moment, humans were far from being as strong as they had been in the past. But they were rising to prominence. As a result, it was a given that their ancestral sacrifices would become the focus of many nonhumans. The mere thought of what was to come left everyone in the hall shaken.

However... as the imperial edict had indicated, humans really had achieved some unheard-of accomplishments. To call for ancestral sacrifices... was completely reasonable and logical.

Xu Qing was also shaken by what he was hearing, although there was no trace of surprise visible in his eyes. He had come back to the Imperial Region for the official purpose of reporting for duty. But he also had personal matters to deal with!

And that was Plumdark and her Plumdark Evergreen Lamp! He also wanted to lend Ningyan a helping hand. After all, that lamp... was on Planet Ancient Emperor. Planet Ancient Emperor was humankind's most profound reserve power. It had a terrifying spell formation on the outside and even more astonishing things on the inside. That was why truly opening it could only coincide with ancestral sacrifices.

With such thoughts on his mind, Xu Qing shivered mentally.

Meanwhile, the chief minister began speaking again. "During these ancestral sacrifices, there are certain individuals who have proven to have integrity and talent. They have selflessly devoted themselves to public interest, and as such, they will be given special glory. They are: Grand Prince Firemoon, who performed meritorious services; Fourth Prince, who earned renown in bloody battle; and Fifth Prince, who loyally defended the border. These three imperial princes performed spectacularly, and therefore, will be allowed to stand with the emperor during the ancestral sacrifices."

With that, the chief minister turned to face the emperor before bowing deeply.

The emperor nodded his head but said nothing.

As per etiquette, the chief minister held his bow for nine breaths of time before straightening up. Then he looked out at the gathered officials with gleaming eyes.

"Are there any other petitions to be submitted to the court today? If not, then this session is adjourned."

The officials bowed their heads.

However, that was when Xu Qing took a step forward and bowed to the emperor.

"I, Xu Qing, have a petition to submit."

His words caused all eyes to turn in his direction. The emperor looked at him, his gaze like the sea. The heavenly marquises and heavenly kings were looking at Xu Qing similarly. Even King Firecrusher looked very serious. Considering Xu Qing's current status and identity, whatever words came out of his mouth couldn't possibly be trivial.

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Looking very serious, the chief minister said, “King Skycrusher, what petition would you like to submit?”

After a moment of thought, Xu Qing decided not to speak the words aloud. He took out a jade slip, within which he inscribed the details of what he had seen in Fardark County, including the three cultivators from the holy lands, their actions, and other pertinent details. The only thing he left out was the information about how the holy fardark nectar was distributed. Then he waved his hand to send the jade slip flying to the chief minister.

The chief minister scanned the jade slip with divine will. His expression flickered and his eyes went wide. He looked at Xu Qing.

“Heavenly King Xu, this report—”

“It’s absolutely true,” Xu Qing replied in a low voice.

The chief minister’s reaction, and Xu Qing’s affirmation, caused everyone in the crowd to look on with even more serious expressions than before.

Only Erniu could possibly guess what Xu Qing had put into the jade slip. Smiling, he went back to fantasizing about what it would be like to parade around in the Grand Zodiacist Armor.

The chief minister, meanwhile, took a deep breath. Normally speaking, his willpower would prevent him from reacting in this way. But the news Xu Qing had just handed over was far too monumental. People had come from the holy lands!

Without any hesitation, the chief minister sent the jade slip to the emperor. The emperor also scanned it with divine will. He betrayed no reaction via facial expression, but there was something that glimmered deep in his eyes as he sent the jade slip to King Firecrusher. After King Firecrusher studied it, his expression darkened. He passed the slip to the other heavenly kings.

As the moments ticked by, anticipation built among the congregated officials. After all the heavenly kings had looked at the jade slip, their expressions were as solemn as stone. They did not pass the jade slip down to the heavenly marquises.

“This matter,” the emperor said, “does not need to pass beyond the heavenly kings.”

Of course, everyone was more curious than ever. But the officials had no choice but to bow their heads and continue to wonder what was going on.

The sky outside suddenly seemed to turn steely and forbidding. A rumble of thunder echoed out, and rain started to fall from the clouds.

As the sound of gurgling water became louder, Xu Qing stopped thinking about the situation with the holy lands. As far as he was concerned, that was something that people more important than himself needed to worry about. He was a mere Void Returning cultivator, and the holy lands were too monumental to be of concern to him. What was more, there was something left for him to handle that was far more important than any of the holy lands.

Therefore, he opened his mouth and said, “The main reason I went to Firemoon lands was for the sake of Ningyan. Imperial Prince Ningyan might not have personally accomplished much in terms of meritorious service. But whether it’s his morals or his devotion to public interest, he ranks among the best. Since Your Majesty has appointed me as the tutor for imperial princes, I would like to recommend that Ningyan be given the honor of standing with you during the ancestral sacrifices. I hope Your Majesty will approve this humble request.”

Xu Qing bowed at the waist.

There wasn’t a bit of insincerity in his words. Everyone knew about the relationship between Xu Qing and Ningyan, so it was no surprise. It only took a moment for the emperor to respond.

“Approved!”

After the words rang out, the emperor blurred before vanishing into thin air.

The session of court had been adjourned.

As everyone left the grand hall, most of the officials smiled, clasped hands respectfully to Xu Qing and Erniu, and offered some sincere words. It seemed as if everyone was pleased about what happened with the two of them.

The reality was that there were plenty of them who weren’t pleased at all. But expressions of goodwill were by far the majority. It was a result of status and human norms. When someone reaches extremely high heights, those who looked up to them generally did so with benevolence. After all, they could end up paying a very high price if they caused conflict. If the rewards had been even greater, maybe things would have been different. Maybe... not everyone would have reacted so pleasantly.

Xu Qing was aware of all that. *That’s just how humans are. We’re the same species, but it’s only because humans are in the spotlight right now that they act so kindly.*

After the imperial guards delivered a greater spirit mansion medallion to Xu Qing, he said his farewells to everyone and then left the imperial palace with Erniu. Bearing oilskin umbrellas, they walked down the street toward the greater spirit mansion.

The rainwater turned into threads that spilled down over the edges of the umbrellas. All heaven and earth was misty because of the rain. There weren't many pedestrians about. The crowds that had gathered to welcome Xu Qing had dispersed thanks to the rain. Therefore, he and Erniu were able to thread their way through whatever people remained on the streets, all while having a casual conversation.

"And therefore, little Ah Qing, we have to keep working hard! Now's not the time to fall behind. Trust me, you don't want to see what humans can be like if that happens." Erniu clasped Xu Qing on the shoulder.

Xu Qing's expression didn't change. "I've seen it already."

"Right. Forgot about your childhood. You really did see a lot of the ugly side of the world."

The two of them walked along listening to the rain, looking at the clouds, and enjoying the peace and quiet after everything that happened in Firemoon territory.

About two hours later they caught sight of the greater spirit mansion that Xu Qing had been given as a reward. It was one of only 108 greater spirit mansions in the imperial capital. At the moment, most were empty and sealed. Only heavenly kings could occupy such mansions.

Every single protective spell formation was astronomically expensive. After all, they were built onto the very spell formation nodes that powered the grand protective spell formation. Because of that, they had much higher levels of spirit energy than surrounding areas. Whether it was the construction materials or the furnishings, they offered the peak of what humankind was capable of providing. Of course, the built-in spell formations were astonishing.

What was more, each greater spirit mansion had unique aspects. For instance, Xu Qing's mansion had a spirit pond inside, which would provide a significant boost when working on the fleshly body or ordinary cultivation. Beyond that, spending long periods of time here could nourish the soul. That was why this particular greater spirit mansion was ranked in the top ten among the total 108. It went to show how much the emperor was favoring Xu Qing with the rewards.

Erniu bid farewell after they reached the entrance of the mansion.

"I won't be joining you," he said. "I'm going to try to track down the old man. I'm curious if he's still hanging around in the Imperial Region. After all, he got a lot of flesh from the broken face.... As our Master, he can't hog it all!"

Erniu hadn't mentioned anything about this on the return trip, but clearly he had been thinking about it. Erniu puffed up his chest and strolled away. Xu Qing watched him go.

Just before Erniu was about to disappear around the nearest corner, Xu Qing remembered something.

“Hold on, Eldest Brother!”

Erniu stopped and turned around, a perplexed look on his face.

Xu Qing, doing his best to not reveal even a scrap of emotion in his facial expression or tone of voice, said, “Do you happen to have any extra hairpins?”

1. Quasi-spoiler here. The line “when the Big Dipper points to Yi and Bright” is a dating system from ancient China that combines the position of some of the stars in the Big Dipper with the Heavenly Stems. The date when “the Big Dipper points to Yi” corresponds to the solar term “Clear and Bright,” which is when Tomb-Sweeping Festival is held (also known as Clear and Bright Festival). To be clear, I had no idea about this until researching this chapter. Later, the author will outright explain that the specific date is Tomb-Sweeping Festival, which leads me to suspect that most Chinese readers didn’t understand this part. That ancient dating system is not common, and nowadays seems to only be used in very specific contexts referring to specific dates. The Big Dipper is a big part of Chinese mythology and mysticism, and based on what I can tell, its usage here does not indicate some connection to our real-world constellations. ☹️