## Read Beyond the Timescape Chapter 931: A Secret and Intimate Meeting

Chapter 931: A Secret and Intimate Meeting

"Say what now?" Erniu said, looking completely taken aback. He really could never have guessed that Xu Qing would yell out to him and then say something like that. However, Erniu was someone who had definitely been around the block, so he recovered quickly. Eyes gleaming, he hurried over to Xu Qing's side. "I need details, little Ah Qing. Are you planning something big? Aiyaaaa. How come I feel like I'm more excited about this than you?"

Apparently Erniu had already forgotten all about their Master.

Xu Qing didn't like Erniu staring at him that way, but he maintained the same facial expression as before. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Erniu chuckled darkly, then quickly pulled out a collection of roughly a dozen boxes. He offered them all to Xu Qing. "These are very high-quality hairpins. For the most part, they're all unused. To this day I'm not sure why Big Spritey was so obsessed with things like this. All of them are crafted from exquisite materials, and I'd originally been planning to give them away as gifts. But you can take them. Take them all!"

Erniu's face glowed with excitement as he looked over Xu Qing's shoulder at the entrance of his mansion.

Xu Qing felt a headache coming on as he took the hairpins. "Eldest Brother, do you think it's possible Master will just leave after hearing we're back? Maybe he's going to abscond with all of that Father God flesh."

Erniu smiled enigmatically. "That won't work on me, little Ah Qing. Come on, you can't be so obvious! Talking like that won't do a thing to me. After all, our Master has true vision!"

Despite his words, Erniu actually felt his stomach rumbling.

Xu Qing blinked a couple times, then added, "Well, the Creation Mansion has a lot of nice things that they can use to make that Grand Zodiacist Armor. I'm sure many of the materials will be priceless, although I doubt you'll be able to tell that just by looking at the final product. And even if you can tell, it'll be hard to reproduce. After all, I doubt the emperor will be giving out any more rewards.

"If I were you, Eldest Brother, I would keep a close eye on the whole process. This is the first time you're getting a custom-made suit of armor. Obviously the materials are going to be very important." Xu Qing rarely spoke so much at one time.

In fact, it was a shock to Erniu. He actually hadn't thought of things in that way, and now that it had been proposed, he started to get a bit nervous.

Suddenly, light flickered around Xu Qing as his Grand Darkheaven Armor appeared. "You can take this armor with you, Eldest Brother. Use it as a point of comparison. And make sure that the Creation Mansion doesn't slack off in any way."

Erniu looked at the amazing Grand Darkheaven Armor, and then thought about his dream. Finally, he looked back at Xu Qing.

"You little punk," he said. "Ah, whatever."

Erniu could tell that Xu Qing wasn't inclined to go with him. At the same time, he had to admit that what Xu Qing said made sense. So he took the Grand Darkheaven Armor, suppressed his doubts, and sped off.[1]

After confirming that Erniu was really leaving, Xu Qing breathed a sigh of relief. Looking away, he turned to his mansion. After a moment passed, he pushed the large red door open. Spirit energy billowed out, causing his hair to stir. He could immediately sense how strong the spirit energy was. He stepped inside.

The moment he was inside, he activated the spell formation from the inside, cutting himself off from anyone on the outside.

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As the spell formation fluctuations rolled out, a wriggling blue worm appeared in midair.

Little Ah Qing is being such a stickler!

The worm wriggled helplessly. It could sense a faint connection to its clone in Xu Qing's bag of holding, but the spell formation barrier was too strong for anything else. Sighing, the worm had no choice but to leave.

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Outside of Ningyan's official residence, a figure in a plum-colored garment carried a white oilskin umbrella out onto the street, then began walking slowly in the direction of Xu Qing's greater spirit mansion. She was graceful and attractive, and had clearly spent a lot of time on her makeup.... That said, her cheeks were flush, and her expression was a strange mix between nervousness and anticipation.

The rain fell harder. An incense stick of time passed.

As was his custom, Xu Qing inspected the entire greater spirit mansion to make sure it was safe. After the place was secure he went to the spirit pool and began to think back to everything that happened in Firemoon territory.

It started with moving mountains. Then there was the Mountain and Sea Region, and after that the god domain. Finally, on the way back, he ran into three cultivators from the holy lands. The resulting dog-eat-dog twists and turns had left him feeling exhausted to the core. Now that things had calmed down, he could take advantage of the quiet in his mansion to sit next to the water, enjoy the spirit energy, and allow the warmth emanating from the pool to sink into him.

"I really need to get some rest," he murmured. "But I also need to visit the Xeno-Immortal School. It's time to study the legacy jade slips there again."

After confirming the path he was to follow, he realized that the Xeno-Immortal School had become the foundational element of his cultivation. Therefore he needed to spend some more time seeking enlightenment about it.

Only by completely and thoroughly absorbing the legacy of the Xeno-Immortal School could he use that information to *push out the old and bring in the new*.

The Xeno-Immortal School is just the beginning of the path. No one has walked that path to completion, so there are no techniques there to master. There are only concepts.... After coming to a complete understanding of everything, I'll have to create something new.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered brightly. Truth be told, that was how the path of cultivation usually worked. To a certain extent, the techniques created by people in the past couldn't be *too* heaven-defying, otherwise they wouldn't have survived through time.

If you wanted to go past a certain point, you had to do it on your own. If your cultivation base was too low, such acts of creation would require the help of others. A good example was how Master Seventh helped Xu Qing create his techniques.

Now that Xu Qing had stepped into Void Returning, then at least on a theoretical level, he qualified to create his own techniques. That said, the difficulty level would be high. After all, creating techniques required both destined opportunities and enlightenment.

Thankfully, I have the holy fardark nectar!

Xu Qing made a grasping gesture, and a small white bottle came to appear over his palm. The holy fardark nectar was apparently an extremely rare and precious material. If it weren't, there wouldn't have been three holy lands cultivators vying over it. It was particularly helpful and effective when seeking enlightenment.

When Xu Qing thought back to the events in that cave, he remembered that the mere smell of the nectar had caused his more than 100 void lineaments to stir.

Might as well see how it works.

He opened the bottle, and a fragrant aroma wafted out, filling the mansion. The water in the pool in front of him began to bubble.

Moved, Xu Qing thought about it for a moment, then put a drop of it into the pool.

When the drop fell into the water, it seethed. A dense mist spread out, causing the spirit levels in the pool to rise dramatically. Although the aroma grew slightly less strong as a result, it still filled the entire area.

After some more thought, Xu Qing shed his clothing, revealing his muscular body. After stepping into the pool, he settled into a cross-legged position.

Boundless spirit energy poured from the pool into Xu Qing. Within it was the drop of holy fardark nectar. Though it was diluted, some became part of the spirit water, and some became part of the spirit energy. As a result, he was able to absorb it. A comfortable sensation spread through his body and soul. He relaxed, slowly, until eventually all of his sensations became blank.

Time passed. Two hours later, he slowly opened his eyes. He looked dazed at first, but his eyes quickly became clear. Checking his void soil, he saw that the void lineaments there seemed a bit clearer than before.

Although I didn't gain anything specific, that feeling from just now....

Thinking about the sensation of emptiness, he cleared his mind and prepared to go back to seeking enlightenment. But then his expression flickered, and he sent his divine will into the mansion's spell formation. In that manner, he caught sight of a beautiful woman approaching.

She had an oilskin umbrella in one hand, but that didn't obscure her elegant good looks. Given the water on the ground, it was as if each step she took caused lotuses to bloom. In short, she was lithe and elegant as she reached the entrance of the mansion. Her graceful bearing and charm were enough to entrance anyone who saw her.

When Xu Qing scanned her with divine will, she lifted the umbrella slightly, revealing a scintillating smile.

"Why haven't you opened the door yet?" she asked in a soft voice.

Xu Qing's heart started to race. Getting out of the water, he quickly put some clothes on. Unsure of exactly what emotions he was experiencing, he finally waved his hand. freëwebnovel com

The door cracked open.

A graceful hand pushed it fully open. Then she stepped inside and closed the door behind her. The spell formation activated again.

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A blue worm appeared out of nowhere in midair. Erniu hadn't left after all...

"This is completely outrageous!" Erniu grumbled begrudgingly.

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Xu Qing couldn't hear him. He was focused on the beautiful woman in the plum colored gown who had appeared in front of him. He was already so nervous he felt like he couldn't move.

"Well met, Arch-Immortal Plumdark," he said in a somewhat hoarse voice.

She stood in front of the spirit pool, looking almost like she existed in a painting. Her charming eyes and beautiful smile were things no one could forget once they saw them. She looked at Xu Qing, then at the spirit pool. Her phoenix-like eyes glittered strangely for a moment, then went back to normal.

Smiling, she asked, "How come laying eyes on me makes you act so unnatural? Don't tell me that in the years Heavenly King Xu spent apart from me among the Firemoon Darkheavens, he encountered other, more beautiful and entrancing scenery on his path of life?"

As she spoke, she reached the edge of the water. After taking off her shoes, she sat down at the edge and slipped her feet into the spirit water. When she swished her feet back and forth gently, ripples spread out over the surface of the pond.

Xu Qing wasn't sure what to say, so he said nothing. After all, he was normally quiet to begin with, let alone in a situation like this. Finally, he waved his right hand to produce a dozen boxes that he put down in front of her.

Plumdark smiled mysteriously. The wave of her hand caused all the boxes to open, revealing the hairpins within....

Xu Qing had given her the entire set of hairpins from Erniu.

Even Plumdark was surprised by the sight. "So many! And they're all for me?"

Xu Qing nodded.

She blinked a few times, looking at him with soft, cherry-red lips that fluttered ever so slightly, making her seem even more flirtatious than before. "Who gives so many hairpins as a gift?"

Xu Qing wasn't sure how to answer, so he didn't.

She laughed softly as she collected up the hairpins. Leaving one out in the open, she looked back at Xu Qing. "Xu Qing, you dummy. Aren't you going to ask why I came here?"

Xu Qing felt like he was shaking as he instinctively said, "Arch... Arch-Immortal Plumdark, why did you come here?"

"To take a bath," she answered softly.

As the mist built up, it became harder and harder to see Plumdark, until only her flushed cheeks were visible.

1. This is what I was referring to earlier, although even in this chapter it's not totally clear. The two types of armor are supposed to be similar in that they are armor named after a specific person and their title. The Grand Darkheaven Armor is for the Grand Darkheaven, while the Grand Zodiacist Armor is for the Grand Zodiacist. 🖘

Chapter 932: When the Young General First Rides the Horse

The flirtatious voice merged with the mist, becoming charming and gentle as it spread.

Xu Qing couldn't stop his heart from racing, and he was so incredibly nervous that his mouth had gone dry. Yet he couldn't help but stare at Plumdark.

Within the swirling mist, her beautiful face was like a blooming flower. Her eyes, glittering, bright, and deep, seemed to contain myriads and myriads of worlds. They revealed the bashfulness and purity of a young woman, but at the same time, the profundity and wisdom of a mature lady. It made her both mysterious and fascinating. She blinked slowly, and it was like the bright glimmer of starlight on a dark night.

No one could look away from something like that. And in the process of looking, no one could miss the pale skin in the hazy atmosphere, or the faint flush on her cheeks. It was something delicate and tempting, and the mist only served to accentuate the effect.

In fact, as the mist grew thicker... Xu Qing's head felt like it was going to explode.

Plumdark slowly entered the water, leaving her plum-colored garment behind at the edge of the pool. Her unclothed form was as fair as snow, but also slightly flushed. Just when it seemed she might disappear in the mist, she turned around and smiled. It was just like the famous line of poetry: "If she but turned her head and smiled, there were cast a hundred spells; and the powder and paint of the Six Palaces faded into nothing." [1]

Her tender beauty and charming good looks were such that they could topple the heart of just about anyone. Then she spoke.

"Are you going to join me, Xu Qing...?"

She only spoke a few words, and in very rare fashion, her voice actually trembled. Then the mist wrapped her up, and she disappeared. Xu Qing also disappeared.

The water rippled. The mist seethed. No one knew what happened within, as no one could see.

The night passed.

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Outside of the mansion, the blue worm wriggled valiantly in an attempt to break inside and cause a ruckus. All such attempts failed. The only option was to begrudgingly wait.

That wait lasted... seven days.

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After Plumdark entered Xu Qing's greater spirit mansion, seven days passed in which no one emerged. At dawn on the eighth day, the mansion's large door slowly opened, and Plumdark walked out in her long gown.

She looked like a blooming orchid. The sun shone down onto her, illuminating legs as exquisite as porcelain. Her skin was as pure as the waters of a flowing spring, and she seemed both refreshed and relaxed. Seven days before, her long, black hair had flowed down around her like a waterfall. But now it was coiled on top of her head and secured in place with a golden phoenix hairpin.

Of course, that revealed some of her exquisite neckline. When the morning breeze blew, the pearls in the hairpin clinked against each other. She really looked like an immortal beauty descended into the lands of mortals. Some of the flush was still visible on her face, and the flirtatious look in her eyes hadn't disappeared. All of it made her look even more beautiful than before.

As the door opened, she looked back at Xu Qing and spoke in a heavenly voice. "So, we have a deal?"

"Yeah..." Xu Qing replied. Taking a deep breath, he nodded.

Plumdark smiled radiantly, then turned to leave. However, she only managed to take a few steps when she suddenly seemed uncomfortable. And yet her cheeks flushed even more deeply....

Xu Qing appeared to be in somewhat of a daze as he watched her leave.

Before he could start considering what happened during the past seven days, Erniu raced in. And he wasn't alone. He had Wu Jianwu with him.

"Oh! Little Ah Qing! What a coincidence to see you here! It's a good thing you provided me with that reminder a while back. I went to the Creation Mansion and kept an eye on them for seven days and seven nights. I didn't take one step away, and as a result, they didn't have any chances to skimp on the job."

Wu Jianwu looked like he wanted to say something, but hesitated. Not wanting to cause any trouble, he just kept his mouth shut.

Xu Qing turned to look calmly at Erniu. The dazed look in his eyes was gone.

"It really is a coincidence, Eldest Brother."

Erniu blinked a few times, then quickly looked Xu Qing up and down. Seeming very curious, he even walked a few circles around Xu Qing, his eyes glittering as he clucked his tongue. From what he could tell, Xu Qing looked calm, but his skin was unusually flushed....

"Something strange is going on, little Ah Qing. Something about you seems different." Erniu smiled enigmatically. "What's more, I'm fairly certain I spotted someone leaving your mansion just now.... Heh heh."

Xu Qing cleared his throat and opened his mouth to speak.

Before he could, Wu Jianwu, whose spirits seemed to have lifted, suddenly said, "When the young general first rides the horse, only heaven knows how long he'll last in battle; it seems he ran dry after seven days, but who knows how often he rested during that time!"

The moment after the words left his mouth, a wild wind suddenly swept through the area, picking him up and sending him flying off into the distance.

Xu Qing let out a cold harrumph.

Erniu cleared his throat. Seeing that Xu Qing felt somewhat embarrassed, he decided to help out.

"Ridiculous! That Wu Jianwu was just asking for a beating!" Raising his voice, he yelled, "Hey, Wu Jianwu. Remember to get back as quickly as possible!"

Then Erniu looked around Xu Qing's mansion.

Although Xu Qing couldn't do much when it came to his Eldest Brother, he had long since learned how to clean up after himself. Looking even more calm than before he asked, "Did you find Master?"

The mention of their Master caused Erniu's mood to suddenly shift. Gritting his teeth angrily, he said, "Don't even mention Master. The old man ran off!! You were right all along. A few days ago, I used some special methods to track him down. Unfortunately, by the time I found him, the old brat was long gone. He's obviously planning on hogging all the loot!

"Since when does a Master act like this, huh? It's outrageous! I'm definitely going to demand an explanation. In fact, I already thought of what to do next. Soon enough, you and I are going to take a trip back. As the dignified Eldest Brother, I'll summon Second Sib and Third Sib, and the four of us will finally confront Master!

"If he refuses to split the loot with us, then we'll all refuse to be his apprentices anymore. Let's see how the old man likes being all alone!"

Erniu spoke in an astonishingly commanding and proud voice, as if he had truly decided on a course of action.

Xu Qing blinked a few times, then quietly said, "Is it really a good idea to—"

"If he wants to make us mad, he can't blame us for wanting to get even!" Erniu snorted coldly. "I've already planned everything out. When the time comes, we just have to stay united!" [2]

By this point, the two of them had walked out of the mansion and sat down in the front veranda. Erniu was clearly brooding over the situation with their Master, and it wasn't until Wu Jianwu returned a short time later that he managed to divert his attention to something else. Wu Jianwu's face was swollen and bruised, but he was behaving well. [3]

He feared Xu Qing most, and after Xu Qing, Erniu. Earlier, he had let his mouth get the better of him and spouted some poetry without thinking. After that, Xu Qing taught him a lesson. Though he was actually feeling quite irritated, he didn't let it show, and acted very obedient. Sitting down in front of Xu Qing and Erniu, he kept his mouth shut tight.

"Little Jianjian," Erniu said in a serious tone, "I really have to thank you for what you agreed to do a few days ago. Don't worry. I, Chen Erniu, always do things in a fair and equitable manner. Your assistance will not be in vain! How about this? After the eggs hatch, you can keep the shells!"

With that, Erniu took out his egg and placed it down in front of Wu Jianwu. Xu Qing expressionlessly took out his egg.

Although Wu Jianwu was completely confident in being able to hatch the eggs, the reality was that the situation was a bit embarrassing. Earlier, he'd had no choice but to agree to Erniu's offer, but now that he was looking at the eggs in person, he felt hesitant.

Seeing that, Erniu smacked his shoulder. "Believe me, these two eggs are anything but ordinary. They're the children of a god! Their eggs are not made from ordinary eggshells! They're *god* shells! Most importantly, you already have experience incubating gods, so this will give you unheard-of experience for raising future pets.

"I know you have ambition. But those random pets of yours can't have anything more than an Imperial Sovereign bloodline. Think about it. What if you could simply wave your hand and produce, not the bloodline of an Imperial Sovereign, but rather, some actual, full-grown god pets! Now that would be impressive!

"At that time, if you want some relics of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity, what species in Revered Ancient would possibly dare to refuse your request?"

It was hard to say which of Erniu's arguments pushed Wu Jianwu over the edge. But by the end, his eyes shone with determination. Gritting his teeth, he agreed. Xu Qing nodded, and Wu Jianwu took the eggs and sped off.

After Wu Jianwu was a good distance away, his eyes started shining.

## God pets....

He struggled to control his breathing as a sense of determination rose up within him. If his Master from years ago had been present, he would definitely have had very mixed emotions. The reality was that... years ago in Seven Blood Eyes, Wu Jianwu had started out as a top chosen from the First Peak. But after acquiring a certain item, his dao had changed. And he had completely changed as well.

After Wu Jianwu left the greater spirit mansion, Erniu smacked the top of his head, causing a green vine to snake out. As it swirled in the area, it seemed intelligent.

"This little baby is a true treasure, little Ah Qing. You should really fuse with the one you have. If we raise them to maturity, heh heh... we'll be completely ferocious."

Xu Qing looked at the vine and could sense the strange power in it. He nodded. Waving his hand, he produced his own vine.

After some thought, he decided not to devour it. Instead, he pierced his skin and put a drop of blood onto the vine. The vine absorbed it, glittered, then shot into the wound. Soul fluctuations rolled out.

A moment later, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior suddenly went on guard, and Little Shadow shivered.

Erniu licked his lips. "Back in that cave, I got those random puppet parts. They're all broken, but they still have some impressive fluctuations. After a lot of thought, I realized they're still valuable. If we could only figure out how to put all the pieces back together, we might be able to make a full mantis... and that would be a very impressive weapon."

Erniu waved his hand and a host of spare parts flew out. Together with Xu Qing, he started studying them.

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Meanwhile, the teleportation portal outside the Imperial Region activated, and a group of figures appeared there.

The surrounding human cultivators looked on seriously, and Heavenly Marquis Wang seemed fully on guard.

The cultivators who had just teleported in had been at war with humankind not very long ago. They were a subsidiary species of the Firemoon Darkheaven people. They were Whitemarshes and Saias! Both species looked very different from humans, which made them stand out. All of them were scowling; clearly, none of them were happy with how the war ended.

However, there was nothing else they could do but carry out this mission, which was to sign a treaty with humankind.

Traveling with them was a Firemoon Darkheaven cultivator whose scowl was even deeper. He was Fan Shishuang! He looked irritated and felt even more irritated. But there was nothing he could do. He was acting as the inspections commissioner for the Firemoons, and had come along with these two species to bear witness to the ceasefire agreement.

I heard Xu Qing is back already. Why did I get such an unlucky assignment!

1. The poetry here comes from a famous poem by Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi. There is an entire Wikipedia page about the poem. As I've mentioned before, if I'm able to use

existing translations of poems, I do. If you want to read a translation of the poem (from which I took the quote in this chapter), you can go here. 🖘

- 2. When Erniu talks about "getting even," he uses a riff on an idiom here that makes no sense if translated directly. Literally, it translates as "if he does something on the first of the month, he can't blame us for doing something on the fifteenth of the month." The explanation behind the idiom is frankly too complicated for me to put here. In this context, the meaning, as I think I've conveyed in the translation, is that one person doing something will lead to another person doing something in response, presumably out of anger or for revenge. <sup>\*\*\*</sup>
- 3. What I'm rendering as 'veranda' is literally the 'front hall' of a building. Normally speaking, such locations do not have chairs or other seating locations, so I imagine they're sitting on the steps. That said, the narrative is not very clear. Here are a few results from an image search that show this part of a building. \*\*

Chapter 933: Immortal Cleansing

Time passed. Eventually, a month went by.

During that time, the imperial capital bustled with more noise and excitement than ever before. Although it wasn't accurate to say that literally every person had a smile on their face, there was no doubt that most people were very stirred up. There was less illegal activity in the marketplaces, and more peace, order, and kindness than there had been among humans in hundreds of years.

There were four reasons.

The first reason was Xu Qing's glorious return. Back when the commoners spontaneously welcomed him with loud cheering, it was largely due to that glory. When he was appointed as a heavenly king, the commotion grew even more intense. As the saying goes, *fame follows merit*.

Humans had been under immense pressure for many years. Although the Dawning Suns allowed everyone to hold their heads high, most people still felt depressed deep in their hearts. A decline of tens of thousands of years was not something that even Dawning Suns could get rid of easily.

After all, there were some very powerful nonhumans out there, and everyone from cultivators to mortals knew that. Humans, whether in terms of fleshly body or innate abilities, were simply not on par. The latter was especially noteworthy.

For some reason, the vast majority of human chosen didn't have any sort of innate ability, unless they acquired them via destined opportunity. But that was different from being born with such abilities. It was almost as if modern humans just didn't have any sort of inherent divine abilities. However, the historical record made it clear that in the

time of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity, humans absolutely did have an inborn innate ability.

It was called... the Spirit Ancestor Transformation. Nowadays, that innate ability didn't seem to be anywhere in the human bloodline.

Because of that, Xu Qing's rise to prominence was like a wave of heat that blasted through humankind. In the final analysis, humankind... needed a hero. Xu Qing came along at the right time and in the right circumstances, and made his debut to the entire species.

As far as the second reason for the clamor of excitement in the imperial capital, it was because of the Firemoon Darkheavens' subsidiary species, the Whitemarshes and the Saias.

The previous month, those two species sent high-level representatives to humankind to finalize a 1,000-year peace treaty. Things like that had happened many times in the era of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity, and it ultimately led to humans conquering all of Revered Ancient, freewebnovel.cm

But after Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity left, humans steadily fell into decline. Every treaty they entered was as the passive party. But this time it was different. In the imperial capital, cultivators and mortals alike felt the glory of their species, and were starting to get increasingly excited. The students in the Imperial University were high-spirited and full of mettle. Morale surged.

The third reason for the atmosphere in the capital was that the Clear and Bright solar term was coming. Ancestral sacrifices were a common thing among all humans, and households everywhere were making preparations for their own sacrificial offerings. [1]

The imperial edict related to the ancestral sacrifices was actually the fourth reason for the atmosphere.

The emperor would carry out ancestral sacrifices!

The ancestor of the emperor was Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity, who lived during humankind's peak level of glory. According to custom, it was only when something momentous happened that the emperor would carry out such ancestral sacrifices. Unless something momentous happened, a minor sacrifice would be offered every 1,000 years, and a major sacrifice would be offered every 10,000 years. The most recent sacrifice was 800 years in the past.

But now... the imperial edict stated directly why sacrifices were being offered 200 years early. The news spread very rapidly through the Imperial Region, the seven other counties controlled by humans, as well as the regions of Holytide, Nightspirit, and Nightshade. The news even reached the Moonrite Region. The date was set at 100

days after the edict was issued. When "the Big Dipper points to Yi and Bright" was mentioned in the imperial edict, it referred to Clear and Bright. A month had already passed, which left only two more months. Humans everywhere were making preparations.

As for Xu Qing, he only left his greater spirit mansion once during the month that passed. The place he visited was one of the Five Greater Celestial Divisions, specifically, the Swordsage Division. It was the headquarters for all swordsages in human lands, and it wasn't Xu Qing's first time visiting it. But everything about this visit was different compared to the last time. All of the swordsages presented themselves in ranks, and though their expressions were solemn, all looked at Xu Qing with excitement in their eyes.

Every glorious thing Xu Qing had accomplished was related to one of his identities. He was a swordsage. And he was the bearer of the sword for this generation. He bore The Emperor's Sword as he walked the world of mortals. That identity gave him a level of prestige among swordsages that was difficult to describe.

There were eight deputy sword lords, and all looked very solemn as they bowed to Xu Qing. As for the grand sword lord, he also served as a heavenly king. He was King Cloudwar, and he was present to personally receive Xu Qing.

"King Skycrusher," he said with a faint smile, clasping hands respectfully to Xu Qing.

Considering that Xu Qing was dealing with a heavenly king, there was no way he would be lax in etiquette. He also clasped hands respectfully, then explained why he had come. He wanted to pay respects to Grand Emperor Swordsage. It was a request that no one in the entire Imperial Region would be comfortable making, with the exception of the emperor himself. And if anyone had made that request other than the emperor, King Cloudwar would have rejected it. He wouldn't even have made an exception for King Firecrusher or the imperial preceptor. But Xu Qing was different. He was essentially the successor of the Grand Emperor, and because of that, was even more closely connected to him than the Swordsage Division itself.

As a result, King Cloudwar only considered the request for a brief moment before nodding. Then he personally escorted Xu Qing into the restricted area in the Swordsage Division. King Cloudwar stopped outside of the private chamber, and stood there with a solemn expression. Not even he dared to enter.

Xu Qing took a deep breath and walked in. He had questions that he wanted to ask the Grand Emperor. Whether it was about his thoughts on what was to come on Planet Ancient Emperor, or the transformations to the Emperor's Sword and the emperor's corpse he had experienced, all were unclear areas to him.

There weren't many people in the imperial capital that Xu Qing truly trusted. But his Eldest Brother couldn't provide the answers he needed, and his Master wasn't around.

Therefore, Xu Qing came up with the idea of asking Grand Emperor Swordsage for help.

A few days later, Xu Qing left with a thoughtful look on his face. He had some answers.

When it came to the first question, the Grand Emperor had remained silent for an entire day before giving Xu Qing a very simple answer.

"Wait and see."

In response to the second question, the Grand Emperor thought for two days before saying, "Perhaps it's just fate. If so, then the sword... will naturally respond to your heart and mind. Remember what I told you the first time we met? Never change."

As Xu Qing thought about what the Grand Emperor had told him, he found sadness rising within him. He had seen clearly that Grand Emperor Swordsage was in a much weaker state than before. Although it wasn't quite appropriate to say that he was like an oil lamp about to run out of fuel, he was getting closer to that stage.

The Grand Emperor... is struggling to hold on....

When Xu Qing thought about Grand Emperor Swordsage's life, he sighed. Clasping hands, he bowed deeply to the private chamber.

After returning to his greater spirit mansion, he didn't step out again for the rest of the month.

At first, Erniu came often to visit. He and Xu Qing researched the sageheaven god vines as well as the scattered parts of the puppets. Sadly, they never achieved any success. Erniu wasn't ready to give up, though. He took the puppet parts away in the hopes of finding someone who could help put them back together. At the same time, he didn't give up on trying to find Master Seventh.

In the days that followed, Xu Qing spent most of his time in the spirit pool, seeking enlightenment of the godly authority in his void soil. The holy fardark nectar was very helpful during the process. It was similar to the help that a Foundation Establishment cultivator could give to a Qi Condensation cultivator seeking enlightenment. It was deeply profound.

Every time Xu Qing sought enlightenment, he was able to completely clear his mind. And he was able to proceed from the most basic foundation of Void Returning into a much stabler and higher place. Progress in this level varied from person to person. Some people might succeed in ten years, others might need decades. With the holy fardark nectar, Xu Qing's progress was rapid.

As he worked on his cultivation in the spirit pool, and as he absorbed more and more of the holy fardark nectar, he would occasionally find himself in a very profound and mysterious state. It always seemed to happen by accident.

The sixth time it occurred, Xu Qing started to realize what was going on.

I should go to the Xeno-Immortal School and go through their legacy jade slips again.

He had the feeling that strange state was definitely worth further study. And studying had been something Xu Qing enjoyed from a young age. It didn't matter that his cultivation had reached such a high level; he still had that same thirst for knowledge.

The ancestral sacrifices were still sixty days away when Xu Qing left his greater spirit mansion and went to the Imperial University. Soon, he walked into the Xeno-Immortal School. His arrival caused a big uproar in the university in general, and an even bigger uproar in the Xeno-Immortal School.

All of the students looked at him worshipfully as the schoolmaster received him formally. This schoolmaster was the very one who had used Xu Qing's Xeno-Immortal soul thread as his own foundation. Upon laying eyes on Xu Qing, his expression was one of pure astonishment. Last month when Xu Qing returned, the schoolmaster had spotted him through the crowd. At that time, Xu Qing seemed like a spectacular, unsheathed blade. But this time when he laid eyes on Xu Qing, he couldn't assess his cultivation base at all. In fact, he had no fluctuations whatsoever, to the point where he seemed mortal.

In fact, as Xu Qing approached, the schoolmaster could just barely detect a fragrant aroma coming from him.

## Immortal cleansing??

The schoolmaster inhaled sharply. There was something else he could sense. Though Xu Qing still seemed mortal, there was also something indescribably profound and mysterious about him, something that seemed like it was part of his soul. The schoolmaster had no way of knowing the cause. As a matter of fact, Xu Qing didn't really understand it either. The reality was that holy fardark nectar did more than just help with enlightenment.

Using it for long periods of time would result in imperceptible changes and indescribable benefits. But fardark nectar was rare even years in the past, much less now. And even more relevant... this was fardark nectar that had percolated for tens of thousands of years to become holy fardark nectar!

Furthermore... other people who had the chance to use holy fardark nectar wouldn't use as much as Xu Qing had used. They would treat it like a precious treasure, and would occasionally use a single drop when seeking enlightenment. No one would do what Xu

Qing had done, which was add a drop to his spirit pool every day, and then bathe in it. Behavior like that would obviously increase the rate in which the holy fardark nectar's marvelous qualities were revealed.

And thus, as the schoolmaster stood there with his heart pounding, Xu Qing climbed to the top floor of the Xeno-Immortal School. That was where all of the school of thought's ancient records were housed. Though some were copied inscriptions, many were originals.

Xu Qing went into seclusion as he studied the records. He went through each jade slip in great detail. His goal was to gain complete and utter mastery of all the Xeno-Immortal School legacies and histories.

That's the only way I'll be able to create something new....

After some thought, he took out some holy fardark nectar. It wasn't the original nectar, but rather a spirit elixir he had created by mixing it with spirit water. After taking a drink, his mind became very clear, and he immersed himself in studying.

In a flash, a month passed.

At that point, an imperial edict was sent to Xu Qing, by means of an imperial guard who raced into the Xeno-Immortal School in the imperial university. That was when Xu Qing's session of seclusion ended.

1. 'Clear and Bright' (transliterated Qingming) corresponds to a time period in spring. There has already been one volume of this novel with that name, specifically, Volume 6. Clear and Bright is also associated with Qingming Festival (also called Tomb-Sweeping Festival, Pure Brightness Festival, or you could also call it Clear and Bright Festival). It's a traditional festival in which families visit the tombs of their deceased family members to clean the tombs and offer sacrifices to the ancestors. Solar terms link. Qingming/Tomb Sweeping Festival info. Culturally speaking, it makes perfect sense that the aforementioned ancestral sacrifices would take place during this time period, and in fact, on the specific festival day historically associated with such sacrifices.

Chapter 934: Making a Scene as Ordered

The imperial edict had to do with the emissaries from the Whitemarshes and Saias. Simply put, things weren't going smoothly with the peace treaty. In fact, on a few occasions, it seemed like war might break out again. Although that couldn't actually happen, the two species were being surly and unreasonable, and were making a lot of ridiculous demands. If the deadlock continued, it would overlap with the ancestral sacrifices, and that would mar the event.

Therefore... someone at court suggested that Xu Qing be sent to resolve the situation. A consensus was reached among the officials, and the result was an imperial edict.

Although Xu Qing was in seclusion doing research, he couldn't refuse to comply with an imperial edict. That was especially true considering that he was uniquely qualified to resolve the situation. After considering the matter, he left the Xeno-Immortal School, emerged from the Imperial University, and headed in the direction of the Foreign Affairs Pavilion, which was where the negotiations were taking place.

He set a comfortable pace, and as he walked, took time to consider the gains he had made in the last month. He had already thoroughly studied all of the legacies and ancient records of the Xeno-Immortal School. He had found some diagrams that depicted godly transformations. He had also come across plenty of information about his predecessors' experiences and aspirations regarding the school of thought. All those things were like nutrients that he had soaked up.

Gradually, a vague idea had begun to form in his mind, little more than an outline. That outline related to a way to create the perfect technique for himself while using Xeno-Immortal methods in Void Returning. That act of creation was going to be very difficult, especially considering that it would contain so many thoughts and concepts from the Xeno-Immortal School. In fact, all of those things would make the level of difficulty even higher.

That said, Xu Qing wasn't in a hurry. At least he had a direction to pursue.

It needs to be perfect. I have to do more tests before I can make a final decision....

As he considered the matter and walked along, he occasionally lifted his hands and made calculations based on his thought process. As he did, something gruish began to happen.

His entire person would occasionally blur, occasionally become clear, and occasionally superimpose over itself. Sometimes he would disappear altogether, only to reappear shortly after.

What was more, the extremely profound and mysterious aspect of him that the Xenolmmortal schoolmaster had noticed started growing more prominent. In addition, threads of magical laws would form in the air around him and circle around him.

That said, he didn't try to take hold of any of them. He just sensed them and observed them. Time passed as he slowly proceeded on his way.

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Intense negotiations had been going on in the Foreign Affairs Pavilion for more than a month.

Inside the pavilion, the humans sat on the left side, with Grand Prince in the lead position. He was ultimately responsible for signing the agreements and negotiating the terms. He was being assisted by personnel from the Foreign Affairs Division. There was even a heavenly king present to supervise.

That heavenly king happened to be a woman. She was the very same King Wildmist that was rumored to have an intimate relationship with Sixth Prince. King Wildmist sat there with her eyes closed, looking very calm. But everyone else had grim expressions on their faces, and some even looked angry as they stared at the nonhuman cultivators across from them.

On the right side of the pavilion were the Whitemarshes and the Saias. There were a few dozen of them in total. All had cold, arrogant expressions on their faces. Though none of them said anything antagonistic, they pulsed with killing intent and desolate auras.

Each species had one representative who emanated a particularly amazing aura. Those two were the heavenly kings who had come with their respective species. They were Smoldering Gods, but none had a large collection of worlds. More along the lines of one or two. Both of them were looking derisively at King Wildmist. The representatives who had been chosen to speak for their species were all sharp-tongued. Thanks to them, there hadn't been any progress with the treaty, and in fact, they just kept making increasingly aggressive demands. freewebnovel.com

"There's no need to even discuss that. We Whitemarshes are never going to return the territories we captured!"

"Captives? We Saias will only return one of your captives for each that you return to us. However many are left over, we'll sell them back to you at a price we deem fit. How could you high and mighty humans be so stingy when it comes to buying your own people back?"

"You know, we're entering into this thousand-year treaty all to deepen the friendship between our species. Therefore, when it comes to the interchange of secret magics, it's only natural that we demand to exchange them one-for-one!"

All of the demands caused the humans to look very grim. Grand Prince took a few breaths, then responded to them as if he were a Firemoon. Eyes flashing like lightning, he said, "If your two species do not return every square meter of the territories you captured, we humans will be happy to deliver a Dawning Sun to your doorstep. Want to test us out? We're happy to play things out all the way to the end!

"As for buying back the captives, you have ridiculous prices, and yet... we can agree to that!

"However, when it comes to the exchange of secret magics, we humans have a very long history. We once ruled all of Revered Ancient! Do you really think that we would just exchange our secret magics one-for-one with some random subsidiary species of the Firemoon Darkheavens? Don't make me laugh! The exchange rate will be thirty-for-one!"

When the Whitemarsh and Saia emissaries heard Grand Prince's response, they bristled with anger, and their eyes shone with cold light. As far as they were concerned, it was already a big favor for them to simply stop the war. And in the end, they weren't really happy about that. It was only because of their respect for the Firemoons that they had agreed.

Given their attitude, it was no wonder the negotiations were going poorly, and their arrogant attitude was really to be expected. In fact, as far as they could tell, if it hadn't been for the Firemoons stopping them, the war would have continued, and though they might not have completely devoured humankind, all it would have taken was a few more subsidiary species to join as allies, and they would definitely have inflicted a brutal defeat on the humans. That was why the two nonhuman heavenly kings present had eyes full of killing intent.

At the same time, King Wildmist wasn't backing down an inch. She was a woman, but she had a very violent personality. In fact, she was more bloodthirsty than most men. Especially noteworthy was the fact that when she led troops into battle against nonhumans, she never came back with prisoners. That was because whatever enemy troops she captured were summarily executed.

In order to achieve victory, she had massacred entire cities of nonhumans, and wouldn't even hesitate to sacrifice her own troops. In fact, she wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice herself if that was the price that needed to be paid. Because of that, when nonhumans heard the name of King Wildmist, they thought of madness and blood.

"Let's cut the crap," King Wildmist said. "We've been torturing ourselves for a month here. I don't have that kind of time on my hands. Go ahead and send out the orders to start the war up again. I didn't get my fill of slaughter during the fighting."

Her hoarse voice seemed to fill the entire hall with blood and death. The heavenly kings from the Whitemarshes and Saias surged with battle spirit as they rose to their feet.

Seeing that things had devolved to this point yet again caused Grand Prince's head to ache. It had already happened five times during the past month. Over and over again, things seemed like they would explode. Grand Prince knew that resuming the war wasn't an option, but he was still worried about the remote possibility of it somehow happening. After all, no one could be 100% certain of how things would turn out.

That was especially true considering that the supervisor from the Firemoons hadn't shown his face other than on the first day. If he came to the negotiations, things

wouldn't end up like this. He represented the Firemoon Darkheavens, and the ceasefire orders had come from all three of the Firemoon stewards.

Could it be that Fan Shishuang is actually hiding from Xu Qing? Grand Prince wasn't sure of all the details, but he was starting to get suspicious about Fan Shishuang's actions. As both sides seemed about to explode, Grand Prince could only steel himself and prepare to launch into the same conciliatory speech that he had used in the past.

But right then... a calm voice drifted in from outside the Foreign Affairs Pavilion.

"What's this racket about?"

The voice caused the humans' expressions to brighten. Grand Prince shot to his feet and hurried outside as quickly as if he had been going to receive the emperor.

The Whitemarsh and Saia cultivators reacted in the opposite manner. Their faces all fell. The two heavenly kings jumped up and hurried toward the door, their hearts pounding.

Everyone watched as a figure entered wearing a green jerkin, with long hair flowing down his back. He had extremely beautiful facial features, making him look like a wandering immortal. As the evening sun shone down, creating a halo around him, he looked calm and tranquil. He was none other than Xu Qing.

Grand Prince hurried up to him and bowed in the manner of a student offering respect to someone in the elder generation. "Greetings, Imperial Tutor."

The other human cultivators all bowed.

"Greetings, King Skycrusher," King Wildmist said, reigning in her killing intent. Keeping her face completely expressionless, she nodded in Xu Qing's direction.

Xu Qing nodded in response, then looked around the hall. His gaze eventually reached the nonhumans on the right side.

The Whitemarsh and Saia cultivators said nothing for a few breaths of time. Then, as Xu Qing's gaze turned colder and colder, they stepped out from behind their tables and knelt to bow. It didn't matter the level of cultivation base involved. Even the heavenly kings bowed! Though they balked internally, there was no level of irritation or resistance that could prevent them from bowing. That was because this was the Grand Darkheaven!

"Greetings, Grand Darkheaven!"

Subsidiary species were required to bow in the presence of the Grand Darkheaven! Even the two heavenly kings had to comply. As long as they cared about their species, they had to respect the Firemoon Darkheavens, and follow their rules. Breaking the rules was grounds for execution.

When the humans saw this happening, they were struck to the core with shock. Although they knew how impressive the Grand Darkheaven was, to see it play out in person was completely different. As of this moment, how could they not be astonished by Xu Qing?

Even King Wildmist was moved, and looked at him with shining eyes.

Xu Qing looked over the cultivators from the Firemoon subsidiary species, and then focused on one in particular.

"Where's Fan Shishuang?" he asked. Thanks to the imperial edict, he was well aware of who the Firemoons had sent to represent them.

"Grand Darkheaven, I believe King Fan is... in seclusion." The Whitemarsh that Xu Qing had fixed his gaze on was currently trembling inwardly. He had personally witnessed the battle between Xu Qing and Sir Firedark, and thus knew exactly how terrifying Xu Qing was.

Declining to comment any further on the situation, Xu Qing walked over to the human side of the hall and sat down in the corner.

"Carry on," he said.

With that, Xu Qing closed his eyes and focused on how to create something new with his understanding of Xeno-Immortal School methods. It almost looked as if he wasn't interested at all in the negotiations. But of course, his mere presence made his true attitude very clear.

Chapter 935: King Wildmist Harbors Hidden Intentions

After Xu Qing sat down, there wasn't a sound to be heard in the entire hall. About a dozen breaths of time passed.

Eventually, the Whitemarsh and Saia representatives got back to their feet and returned to their table. Their attitudes were now the opposite of before. They seemed to be astonished by Xu Qing, but at the same time hate and fear him. Of course, the latter two emotions were the most prevalent.

There were a few of the representatives who had personally witnessed the slaughters he carried out in the Mountain and Sea Region during the second round of the Great Hunt. Back then, if it weren't for Xu Qing killing Master Stillwinter, none of them would have had any chance of making it out of the situation alive. It was really only by chance that they actually survived.[1]

When you added in everything else Xu Qing had done among the Firemoon Darkheavens, you could say that he had crushed an entire generation of cultivators. To a certain extent, it was correct to say that the Firemoon side of the room understood Xu Qing better than the human side.

But the real nail in the coffin was the fight with Sir Firedark. Before that fight, there were still some among the Firemoons who weren't convinced that the rumors about Xu Qing were true. That fight ended such suspicions. The Whitemarshes and Saias knew all of that, and it was bolstered by what they had picked up on from Fan Shishuang. Fan Shishuang was obviously hiding from Xu Qing.... Therefore, it was very distressing to the Whitemarshes and Saias to have Xu Qing just sitting there.

Obviously, the humans felt the opposite. Every single human cultivator present felt very excited. And that was especially true when they realized that the previously aggressive and overbearing nonhumans across from them had changed their attitude.

Grand Prince was no exception. He was already sighing with relief in his heart. If it wasn't for the fact that he outright revered Xu Qing, he would never have personally gone to the emperor to suggest calling him in. If anything, he wished he hadn't waited so long to recommend the imperial tutor for the job. Now that he had some of his courage back, he stuck his jaw out and looked across the room. He didn't speak.

I should let them stew for a bit. Once the pressure has really ratcheted up, and the negotiations are about to end for the day, that will be the best point to start talking.

Having reached the conclusion that this was definitely the best idea, Grand Prince respectfully walked over to Xu Qing and poured him a cup of tea. Then he sat down next to him, looking very much like a student sitting in the presence of his teacher. Truth be told, he *was* a student. Because Xu Qing was the tutor for imperial princes, that meant he was their teacher. All imperial princes and princesses were required to defer to him.

Xu Qing opened his eyes and looked at Grand Prince.

Grand Prince bowed his head.

Xu Qing didn't say anything. However, based on his experiences, he could tell what Grand Prince was thinking. Xu Qing picked up the tea and took a drink.

About an hour passed.... The people on the human side were obviously not fools. All of them could tell that the tables had turned. And all of them knew the best way to take advantage of that reversal. All of them kept their gazes down and didn't say a single thing.

King Wildmist was just meditating.

The Whitemarshes and Saias felt the pressure mounting until they were screaming inside. They knew what was going on, and they knew that they weren't in the position to simply ignore the developments.

Xu Qing's mere presence caused the pressure to increase with every moment that passed.

About two hours later, the Whitemarsh heavenly king sighed.

At that point, Grand Prince decided that the time was just about right. Looking at the nonhuman representatives, he said, "Your two species will have half a month after the treaty is signed to return all the territory you took. All of it needs to be in perfect condition. Any damage inflicted on the landscape or resources plundered must be reversed.

"I already agreed to your offer to sell human captives back to us. We won't be going back on that point. As for the exchange of secret magics, it will be as I said before. Thirty-for-one. If you agree to these terms, we can sign the agreement today and be done with this matter. It's already been a month, after all."

The Whitemarshes and Saias sighed inwardly. The reality was that because orders had been given by the Firemoons, the war *couldn't* go on. However, based on their understanding of the Firemoons, they also knew that they wouldn't be stopped from trying to extract as much benefit from the humans in the ceasefire negotiations. If they failed to extract any benefit, they wouldn't be able to blame anyone. It was a delicate affair to balance, but also very important. As of right now... they could tell they wouldn't be getting any benefits at all.

Xu Qing was the Grand Darkheaven, and Fan Shishuang was obviously scared of him. If they kept dragging things out, then eventually Fan Shishuang would want to leave, and they might end up getting a worse deal than they already had. After all, in the past few days, Fan Shishuang had been urging them to hurry up.

With such thoughts in mind, the Whitemarsh and Saia representatives exchanged glances. Then they gritted their teeth, stood, and clasped hands to Xu Qing.

"Fine. We agree!"

"We're ready to sign right now!"

Grand Prince exulted in his heart that things were going so smoothly. So did the other human cultivators. And thus, they got down to work finalizing the details of the treaty.

Xu Qing just sat there with his eyes closed, contemplating matters and seeking enlightenment.

After enough time had passed for an incense stick to burn, they signed the agreement. Then the Whitemarshes and Saias bowed to Xu Qing and hurried away.

At that point, Xu Qing opened his eyes and politely declined the invitations from the other humans to join them in celebration.

Just as he was about to leave the Foreign Affairs Pavilion, King Wildmist suddenly stepped forward.

"Please wait a moment, King Skycrusher."

Xu Qing turned to look at her, the only female cultivator among the heavenly kings. "How can I help you, King Wildmist?"

"King Skycrusher, I'm going to be leaving the imperial capital after the ancestral sacrifices. I'll be stationed at the border of Soulwolf Skydemon lands. I'd like to invite you to come with me, King Skycrusher. You can settle down there for a while...."

Xu Qing frowned. Her words sounded like an invitation, yet it was coming out of nowhere. Also, considering King Wildmist's reputation, there was no way he could agree to such an invitation.

"With my weak cultivation base," he said calmly, "there seems little point in going there. Furthermore, I have other matters to attend to."

It was a polite refusal. And yet, King Wildmist seemed to completely ignore his refusal, and just kept talking. "The Soulwolf Skydemons aren't a very strong species, but they have a lot of resources that will be helpful in humankind's rise to prominence. My plan is to provoke them into attacking us so that we can send troops into their lands. King Skycrusher, you are both a heavenly king of humankind and the Grand Darkheaven. I don't need your strength. I need you to use your status as the Grand Darkheaven."

King Wildmist's words were as unyielding as before. Apparently, she had already made arrangements for Xu Qing before even talking to him.

Xu Qing had dealt with quite a few Smoldering Gods through the years, but it was his first time encountering someone like King Wildmist. That said, he didn't feel the need to pay any attention to her. He turned to leave.

But then, King Wildmist frowned. "King Skycrusher, this matter relates to the interests of humankind as a whole. Why are you refusing to help? For the moment, stay put so we can talk this over."

She reached out to grab him. The grasping motion caused magical laws in the area to glitter as a massive restraining force erupted. Behind them, Grand Prince and the others

were just making their way out of the hall. When they saw what was happening, their faces fell.

"King Wildmist, what are you doing?" Grand Prince blurted.

"I'm not doing anything," she replied coolly, her hand continuing to move forward. "I'd just like King Skycrusher to stay and talk things over, that's all."

Heaven and earth shook as King Wildmist's magical laws formed a huge hand. Just when it seemed the hand would reach Xu Qing, a green vine shot out of his palm, moving with blinding speed. A wild, desolate will erupted, along with the aura of a starry sky. It became an astonishing might that barreled toward the huge hand of magical laws.

It was none other than the sageheaven god vine that Xu Qing had absorbed two months ago! After two months of nourishing it, the vine had formed an initial level of battle prowess. It also had other terrifying aspects, such as the fact that when it was lashed out, it could ignore magical laws.

A boom rang out as the hand shattered to pieces.

Xu Qing looked coldly at King Wildmist.

King Wildmist frowned as she looked back at him.

Grand Prince and the others rushed forward to stand between them. Then Grand Prince looked furiously at King Wildmist.

"King Wildmist," he said, "you might be a heavenly king, but you just attacked the imperial tutor right in the capital! I have no choice but to report this to my father!"

King Wildmist didn't say anything in response.

Xu Qing stood there with narrowed eyes. He could tell there was some deeper meaning to King Wildmist's actions, but at the moment, he couldn't figure out what it was. It was impossible to tell what King Wildmist was thinking as she stepped past Grand Prince and rose up into midair.

"King Skycrusher, I bear you no ill will. I just wanted you to stay behind and talk. And now I'm going to say the same thing again. Stay. I want to talk with you about what I just mentioned a moment ago."

As the words left her mouth, King Wildmist again waved her hand. Again, her cultivation base surged and more magical laws formed. This time, they made a cloud that resembled a face, which then shot toward Xu Qing.

As it neared, an astonishing sword will shot up from Xu Qing. The Emperor's Sword appeared, glittering brightly. It slashed the face into two parts which tumbled to the side before collapsing into nothing.

The sword projection didn't pause for a moment as it continued on toward King Wildmist.

For the first time, King Wildmist's facial expression changed.

"The Emperor's Sword!!"

She fell back at top speed. Unfortunately, that sword was like a hammer crushing an ice cube. Not only did it not slow down as it neared, it actually sped up.

Just when it was about to hit, a sigh echoed through the air and King Firecrusher appeared in between Xu Qing and King Wildmist. He had his back to Xu Qing as he used himself to block the sword.

Xu Qing respected King Firecrusher a lot, so he sighed and waved his hand. The sword vanished, leaving behind nothing but a rushing wind.

King Firecrusher didn't turn around. Instead, he looked coldly at King Wildmist. "It doesn't matter if you really wanted help from King Skycrusher, or if you actually just wanted to use him as bait to win an advantage in the war. Maybe you even have backers who asked you to probe for information. Regardless, King Wildmist, I'm hereby notifying both you and your backers that, if this happens again, I'll *crush* you!"

King Wildmist said nothing. She just turned and left.

Eyes narrowed, King Firecrusher calmly continued, "I said I would crush you next time. But I didn't say you could leave now without providing compensation. One arm. And you can't have it back for a hundred years, unless full-scale war breaks out again!"

King Wildmist stopped in midair, reached up her right hand, and then ripped her left arm out of the socket. She threw it down, then disappeared.

1. Xu Qing killed Master Stillwinter in chapter 873.

Chapter 936: Hidden Currents Flow Again

Erniu had said that when you reach a certain level of success, the people you meet all treat you with kindness. Unfortunately... it wasn't true kindness. In reality, those people were suppressing their true feelings, and not daring to reveal the truth.

From beginning to end, humankind had never been scintillating and perfect. Whether it was everything Seventh Prince did, or the arrogant King Heaventide, or the various

human factions that had somehow managed to survive over the tens of thousands of years.... All had their own way of thinking, and all were out for their own interest. Under normal circumstances it wasn't uncommon for humans to cheat each other, fight each other, and struggle for power.[1]

Only when the emperor stepped in and forced everyone to cooperate did people get along and act united. But the reality was that such unity was only visible when the species was in mortal danger. Either that or... someone like Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity appeared who could put all the factions in line, suppress wickedness and replace it with virtue, and smooth out all the complications. It would also require crushing any who didn't cooperate!

But without such special circumstances, the brightness of day would turn into the darkness of night. Distractions, evil intentions, and personal profit would always exist.

Xu Qing understood that truth, and the scene which had played out today only deepened that understanding. It wasn't really important why King Wildmist had done what she did. Keeping his expression calm, Xu Qing turned to King Firecrusher.

King Firecrusher looked at him and quietly said, "Revered Ancient is cloaked in the darkness of night. You. Me. All living beings. We're all stuck in that darkness.... Some become mired in it. Others struggle to be free.... And that is because their hearts lead them in the direction of the light."

Sighing, King Firecrusher turned and walked toward Xu Qing.

As Xu Qing contemplated the words that had just been spoken, King Firecrusher continued speaking.

"Of course, there's another possibility. It could also be that King Wildmist chose this moment to assess *my* attitude...."

Xu Qing's eyes glittered brightly.

Around then, Grand Prince and the others reached Xu Qing. They looked alarmed and angry, especially Grand Prince, who was clearly furious with King Wildmist.

"Tutor..." he began.

Xu Qing interrupted with the shake of his head. "It has nothing to do with you."

Xu Qing turned and then vanished into thin air. When he reappeared, he was on the street not too far from the Foreign Affairs Pavilion. As he walked along, he thought back to what had just played out, and also what King Firecrusher had said.

Before long, he was back at his greater spirit mansion. For the time being, he wasn't going to worry about the events that just played out. Instead, he thought back to when he had first arrived in the imperial capital, and some of the things he had unwittingly been dragged into.

For example, there was the time he was ambushed on the street in the rain. There was the theft of the Dawning Sun. And then there was the case of the God-Merging School in the Imperial University. And of course, who could forget the strange figure he had seen in that room. Xu Qing found himself thinking about all those things.[2]

The emperor and the imperial preceptor are working on a deal. And at the same time, they're playing Go.... But there's a third party in the mix....

In the past, he himself had been a mere game piece on the board. Even though he had The Emperor's Sword, as long as he was in the Imperial Region, it would be impossible to escape that game board. Right now, his status and battle prowess only seemed to make him more desirable as a game piece.

Soon, he was standing outside of his greater spirit mansion. From there, he looked in the direction of the imperial palace. And he could see Planet Ancient Emperor hovering in the night. His eyes glittered.

I have the feeling all of the hidden currents will come to the surface when the emperor offers the ancestral sacrifices.

Lightning crashed, sending thunder rumbling out over the city, and stirring the clouds. The sky was changing. [3]

The clouds seethed as rain started to fall. The rain quickly grew heavy and monotonous.

Xu Qing pushed the door open, and as he stepped in, a figure rushed toward him through the rain.

"What's going on, little Junior Brother? I was just trailing a fellow that looked a lot like Master. I was just about to leave the city when I sensed the fluctuations of your sageheaven god vine. Did something happen?"

Erniu's arrival caused a smile to appear on Xu Qing's grim face. After witnessing firsthand the complicated elements of the world, as well as the malice that existed everywhere, it led to a very strange feeling on Xu Qing's part. To follow that up with a simple and sincere expression of concern from Erniu was really something precious. It didn't matter that that simplicity and sincerity would only be directed toward a few people. To Xu Qing, it was a blessing to just be one of those people.

Xu Qing's smile was one of joy. "It was a small, unimportant matter."

Erniu gaped at Xu Qing for a moment, then smiled. "Well in that case, I guess there's nothing to worry about. That said, little Ah Qing, normally speaking *I'm* the one that takes *you* on big jobs. And that means that if *you're* planning something big, you need to let me know. Otherwise your Eldest Brother is going to get pissed off!"

If nothing else, Erniu had a very, very sharp sense of smell.

Looking Erniu in the eyes, Xu Qing nodded. Then, he led Erniu into the spirit mansion. Once in the main hall, Erniu started brooding about the person he'd been following.

"I'm telling you, little Ah Qing, that person resembled the old codger by about seventy percent!"

Erniu had changed the way he referred to Master Seventh. He'd started with Master, then went to old man, then old brat, and finally old codger.

Xu Qing hesitated briefly, then said, "I'm sure Master has his own things to worry about, Eldest Brother. It's really not necessary for you to spend all your time looking for him...."

"No way!" Erniu said sharply. "If I don't track down that shifty geezer fast enough, we're going to start losing out on the flesh and blood of the broken face!"

Xu Qing could tell that Erniu had made his mind up. There wasn't much to be said. That said, he felt deep down that there was no way their Master would hog all the loot. There had to be some other reason from him to be acting this way.

After grumbling and cursing for a bit, Erniu finally waved his hand to produce a puppet. It was... extremely ugly. The various pieces had obviously been forced together, and there were many parts that didn't line up properly. As a result, the puppet just barely resembled a recognizable form.

Xu Qing looked at it and saw that it would only take a single blow of ordinary Spirit Trove strength to destroy it.

"It was too hard." Erniu sighed bitterly. "This was the best I could do. If I had known something like this would happen, I would have spent more time in past lives learning puppet arts.

"However, doing the work made me realize how interesting this puppet is. Very useful too. Remember how well things went for Feng Lintao when he could control the puppets? Giving up just isn't an option. I definitely have to figure out a way to fix the thingy. I guess I'll just have to keep asking around about who in the capital is really good with puppet arts."

Looking at the jury-rigged puppet, Xu Qing thought back to the events of the day. Then he said, "Eldest Brother, I might know someone who can help with puppet arts."

Erniu immediately looked up.

"Fan Shishuang," Xu Qing said.

Erniu's eyes lit up. "I vaguely remember him. He was the one who rushed out very dramatically outside of God Mountain, right? The wave of his hand produced a host of puppets that he tried to use to crush you? That's the crappy Fan Shishuang you're talking about? He's obviously skilled with puppets. But we can't go all the way back to Firemoon Darkheaven territory just to talk to him!"[4]

Erniu's time lately had been spent on researching puppets, keeping an eye on his Grand Zodiacist Armor, and trying to track down their Master. Considering how cautious Fan Shishuang had been since arriving, it was little wonder that Erniu had no idea he was around.

Xu Qing smiled. "He's here in the capital!"

Erniu's eyes lit up.

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Elsewhere in the capital, a massive bolt of lightning slashed through the dark clouds, providing a brief moment of dramatic illumination. Then came the deafening boom of thunder. The thunder was so loud that it shook the ground and reached the ears of everyone in the capital.

That included Fan Shishuang. He felt a surge of shock within him, and the drinking vessel in his hand trembled. Given his level of cultivation base and will, it was impossible for him to be so shaken by some simple thunder.

All of a sudden, the music around him grew louder, and a gentle voice pierced through the buzz of the crowd.

"Fellow Daoist Fan, I heard that you're leaving tomorrow. Therefore, I invited my Third Sister here to join our farewell banquet."

Fan Shishuang looked up. He was currently in a large hall, on either side of which were seated dozens of people. All were human chosen, and based on the introductions from earlier, Fan Shishuang could only come to the conclusion that they all came from noble houses or important sects. As far as he was concerned, such people weren't even important enough to talk to. They might as well have been a flock of sparrows.

Seated next to him was the Third Princess of the humans, whose name was Anhai, as well as Fourth Prince, who was the apprentice of the imperial preceptor. At the most, they were people Fan Shishuang might pay slightly closer attention to. And they also qualified to invite him to drink together.

Of course, there was another reason he had accepted the invitation. His mission had been accomplished and he was leaving the next day, so it didn't seem likely that Xu Qing would come looking for him to cause trouble. After coming to human lands, he hadn't seen anyone or even gone outside. Though he had announced he was going into seclusion to practice meditation, the reality was that he felt like he had lost face. And once word got back to the Firemoon Darkheaven people, he would surely be made fun of. Thus, he chose to make a public appearance on this day.

Looking at the kind and amiable Fourth Prince smiling at him caused Fan Shishuang to suppress the strange feeling of trepidation he had just experienced. Smiling, he grunted an acknowledgment of Fourth Prince.

Fourth Prince didn't find anything unusual about that reaction. He knew full well that this was an echelon cultivator from the Firemoon Darkheavens who had stepped into the Smoldering God level with near-record speed. And of course, he would eventually become an apex expert in that level. In fact, he had recently been named one of the Firemoon Darkheavens' heavenly kings. It made sense for someone like that to be proud and arrogant. Fourth Prince looked at Princess Anhai.

For some unknown reason, she had been spending a lot of time with Fourth Prince recently. Though she wasn't very pleased with this Firemoon chosen, she kept a smile on her face as she lifted her drinking vessel in a toast.

Fan Shishuang's gaze remained neutral as he tilted his drinking vessel in her direction as a response.

Everyone else present noted what had just happened, and though they didn't react visibly, the interchange was very noteworthy to them.

The human chosen sat there, contemplating the developments. All of them felt a lot of pressure at that moment. Though they seemed like they were just enjoying the music and dancing, the reality was that everyone single one of them was paying close attention to Fan Shishuang. After all, he was the most important guest.

- 1. King Heaventide was mentioned a lot, but the important part featuring him was primarily from chapter 733-. ?
- 2. Xu Qing was ambushed in the rain starting in chapter 755. The Dawning Sun theft was in . The God-Merging school situation obviously spanned many chapters, although the resolution started with the dao debate in . The strange figure in the room was actually in the chapter before that, . ?
- 3. In this case the description is about the weather change in the sky. However, as you probably know, the character usually translated as sky can also be translated as heaven. To talk about heaven changing is a metaphorical way of saying that the government/ruler will change. That doesn't necessarily mean the author is trying to hint

at something here. Maybe he just literally means that the weather is changing. Or is it foreshadowing? There's really no way to know. I checked the comments on this part in Chinese and noticed some readers making the connection to a change in rulership, but others did not seem to interpret it that way. ?

4. Remember many chapters ago how Erniu switched some of the characters in Tuo Shishan's name to make fun of him? He does the same thing here, and even inserts the same character for "poop" into it. The new characters create a name that sort of means "unparalleled poop." Incidentally, Fan Shishuang and his puppets faced off against Xu Qing in chapter 851. ?freewebnovel.com

Chapter 937: Flipping Out at the Mere Mention of Xu Qing

Pipa music filled the hall like a great sea.

The person playing the pipa was a famous master musician from the capital. She wasn't very old, and wore a long white gown. She had a semitransparent veil covering her face, which made her seem even more elegant. Her good looks matched the depth of her music. Because of her skill, it was usually only high officials and noble persons that could afford to hire her. Ordinary mortals would likely never hear her music, and no one could convince her otherwise.

Today, she had been invited by Princess Anhai and Fourth Prince to play here. All it took was a glance for her to determine who the main guest was. Although guests were important, they didn't affect her very much. Over the years, she had come to realize that most people who listened to her music didn't understand it. There were few who did. In fact, perhaps there was only one person.

To most people, she was just useful as background decoration, nothing more. She was well aware of that fact. And thus, she kept her eyes closed and focused on playing her pipa.

As her delicate hand swept across the strings, soft music flowed out, apparently telling a story from ancient times.

The music contained deep and profound meaning that could only be described as moving, and was the perfect accompaniment to the graceful dancing of the handmaidens in the hall. The onlookers almost looked drunk as a result.

That was just an act, though. Perhaps on another occasion, the people present really would have been slightly drunk. But right now... they were all mentally focused on the position of honor, where Princess Anhai and Fourth Prince were accompanying Fan Shishuang.

Everyone was thinking something different. Some people wanted to curry favor. Some were wondering how to take advantage of the situation. Others were just trying to figure

out what was going on behind the scenes. Perspectives differed based on the status and affiliations of the individual.

Princess Anhai and Fourth Prince were no exception.

Princess Anhai was pondering how to proceed without making any enemies.

Fourth Prince had different thoughts. Though nonhumans weren't allowed to meddle in matters related to imperial authority, in the end... if he could turn a Firemoon Darkheaven chosen into an ally, then he could at least bring Grand Prince down a notch or two. Grand Prince's accomplishments among the Firemoons had propelled him from a position of relative obscurity to the point of surpassing all the other imperial princes. In fact, he was one of the three rising stars. As a result, the other imperial princes were now paying much closer attention to him.

Fan Shishuang could tell what these people were thinking. He had suffered a loss to Xu Qing, and even feared him. But that didn't mean he was fundamentally inferior. In fact, as a chosen from the Firemoon echelon, he would be the center of attention whether among his own species or others.

In fact, scenes such as were playing out right now were old hat to him. People were always chasing after him, trying to use him, and trying to curry favor with him. He had long since become used to enjoying the perks provided because of the strength of his species and his own admirable qualities. That was just who he was, and it was part of his dao.

His dao was that of puppets, and also of all living beings. Therefore, he always tried to read the hearts of people he dealt with. It didn't matter if they were simple or complex, good or evil. Whatever they were, he could find ways to use that to his benefit. And it would help him continue on the dao of puppets for a long time.

The major worlds he had created were not as magnificent as those created by Sir Firedark. Nor were they as wondrous as Xu Qing's. But they were very unique.

They were puppet worlds. All of the living beings in the world were actually puppets that imitated real life, that played parts in a script that had long been arranged for them. If he ever reached the level of the nine-world Smoldering God, then his puppets could be created out of nothing. They would be extensions of his life force. At that time, he would use the identity of a creator to become an Imperial Sovereign! That was his dream. His path.

Although the way to Imperial Sovereign was severed, he had faith that the way could be opened again. And if it was unable to be repaired that way, he would make a new one.

Godly ascension!

Fan Shishuang's eyes narrowed as he ran his index finger along the decorative patterns on the side of his drinking vessel. Inside, he was laughing coldly. All it took was a glance for him to know what the other people present were thinking. It was an ability that had given him a tremendous advantage. In fact, without it, he wouldn't have survived the incident in which he provoked Xu Qing.

Tuo Shishan had never treated Xu Qing with hostility. Sir Heavenink was also quick to side with him. But Fan Shishuang and Master Stillwinter.... The latter had died, but even if he didn't, there would have been others who reached Smoldering God first and become one of the Firemoons' heavenly kings.

But why can't I get rid of this unsettling feeling...?

After arriving here among the humans, his first day had been spent discussing matters with the two subsidiary species. Other than that, he spent his entire time in seclusion. This was only the second day he had appeared in public.

Even as Fan Shishuang pondered the situation, the music suddenly picked up in tempo. It became more impassioned, more penetrating, as if it contained the rhythm of life itself. The complicated thoughts of the listeners faded away thanks to the vigorous music. Then, the music slowly faded away, leaving behind only a faint echo.

For the first time, Fan Shishuang felt moved on an emotional level. He looked over at the young woman who had been playing the pipa.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Su Yue," she replied softly. Without another word she gave a curtseying bow, then returned to her assigned seat.

Fourth Prince watched all of this happening with glittering eyes. He suddenly had an idea. Smiling, he raised his drinking vessel in a toast to Fan Shishuang.

Fan Shishuang's expression was the same as ever as he took a drink. The banquet got more exciting after that. Many people stood to offer toasts, and there was a buzz of conversation in the air. Fan Shishuang wasn't paying any attention to that. After all, these so-called chosen were like sparrows, while he was like a mighty eagle.

I really don't understand how someone like Xu Qing could come out of an environment like this!

Just thinking about Xu Qing made Fan Shishuang feel more depressed, and it caused his uneasy feeling to grow stronger. He still remembered how shaken he had been to personally watch Xu Qing kill Master Stillwinter. Later, in the god domain, he was shaken even more deeply. Then, during the ceremony at God Mountain, he also

watched Xu Qing defeat Sir Firedark. Because of all that, Xu Qing had become an insurmountable obstacle to him.

As he mulled such matters over, thunder boomed in the clouds outside.

It wouldn't be suitable to stay here for much longer.... The unease within Fan Shishuang was spiking again. Of course, he didn't dare to reveal his unpleasant feelings to the people who were toasting him, so he kept a smile on his face.

And yet, there are always people willing to dig for information, or at least, people who feel the need to prove how smart they are. At the moment, one of the young nobles was speaking.

"King Fan, we humans also got a new heavenly king recently. He's King Skycrusher, also known as Xu Qing. He—"

The mere mention of Xu Qing's name caused Fan Shishuang's heart to leap into his throat. His guard instantly went up.

Before the young noble could even finish speaking, Fan Shishuang looked up, his eyes blazing as he barked, "Shut up!"

His voice boomed in the hall like thunder. The young noble's face went pale, and he coughed up a massive mouthful of blood as he lurched backward in shock.

Fan Shishuang was scowling deeply, and his eyes were shining with vigilance. He had no desire whatsoever to provoke Xu Qing, and was convinced that the young noble had brought him up on purpose in the hopes that Fan Shishuang would say something disparaging. If word got to Xu Qing, then Fan Shishuang would quickly find himself in a lot of trouble. Convinced he was doing the right thing, Fan Shishuang did his best to hide what he was thinking. Snorting coldly, he stood to leave. He had no intention of staying any longer.

Everyone else present was surprised in some way. Some were confused, some looked on with glittering eyes, and some were already thinking of how to take advantage of the development.

Seeing that Fan Shishuang was leaving, Fourth Prince realized he needed to take action. Quickly rising, he opened his mouth to speak.

However, right then...

Thunder crashed loudly outside, even as the rain crashed down, two figures stepped into the hall.

They brought water vapor with them, which spread out around them, making them even more eye-catching. When they saw who had come, all of them reacted with visible surprise.

Princess Anhai got to her feet. After a moment of hesitation, so did Fourth Prince.

"Well met, Tutor," they both said.

The other nobles all reacted similarly, saying, "Well met, King Skycrusher."

Fan Shishuang stood stock still, neither continuing on his way nor going back to his seat. Inside he was reeling.

"Hahaha! It looks like those Whitemarshes were right, little Junior Brother. Little Fanfan is right here!"

Of course, the new arrivals were Xu Qing and Erniu. And right now, Erniu looked very pleased. Back in the greater spirit mansion when Xu Qing brought up Fan Shishuang, the two of them immediately went out to look for him. They first went to the Whitemarsh and Saia garrisons, only to be unable to find Fan Shishuang. Thankfully, some friendly questions asked by Xu Qing got the details they needed.

As Erniu spoke, Xu Qing looked around, glancing at Fourth Prince, giving a nod to Princess Anhai, and then turning grimly to Fan Shishuang.

"You're coming for a little walk with me, Fan Shishuang."

All eyes shifted to focus on Fan Shishuang.

Face was important to Fan Shishuang. However, it was also important to take timing into account, as well as the person you were dealing with.... And in these circumstances, he wasn't even capable of considering matters of face. Upon hearing Xu Qing's words, his expression flickered. Then his heart started pounding as he thought back to the death of Master Stillwinter and the brutal defeat of Sir Firedark. A feeling of shame and humiliation began to fill him.

Struggling to control his breathing, he said, "Xu Qing, you're... you're pushing things too far!! You might be the Grand Darkheaven, but that doesn't mean you can go out of your way to embarrass me! We don't have any grudge between us. Furthermore, I don't have any ulterior motives for this visit to human territory!

"My presence is just a formality! Furthermore, after I came here I spent my entire time in seclusion! A moment ago someone brought up your name as part of some conspiracy to frame me, but I immediately stopped him from talking!! If you're going to throw your weight around, Xu Qing, you... you at least need to be reasonable!"

Fan Shishuang felt so humiliated that his words came across as being very sincere.

Xu Qing listened with a strange look on his face. He could tell that Fan Shishuang was embarrassed. And considering he had come to ask for help, he let his face relax a bit and made sure to speak in a gentle tone.

"I came looking for you to ask for a favor."

Fan Shishuang hesitated suspiciously. "Really?"

"Really," Xu Qing replied with a curt nod. "Let's go."

He turned and walked out. Erniu nodded eagerly and made sure to look very sincere.

Fan Shishuang still hesitated. He knew that he didn't have the right to refuse, though. So despite the fact that he still didn't believe what Xu Qing just said, he gritted his teeth and walked out of the hall. Along with Xu Qing and Erniu, he disappeared into the rainy night.

Thunder crashed, lightning fell, and the rain came down harder.

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In a residence some distance away from that hall, an ancient sigh echoed out into the darkness.

"Why did he have to show up all of a sudden...?"

The person to reply spoke in a cold, high-pitched voice. "So, are we still going to kill Fan Shishuang? He doesn't seem to like to come out in public very often. Or should we... kill them both?"

Silence reigned for a short time. Then a third voice spoke, this one as cold as ice. "Xu Qing can't be touched. Let's wait until Fan Shishuang is alone again. Then we make our move."

"But all the arrangements were already made," the high-pitched voice said. "If there are too many delays—"

"I'll say it again," the cold voice interrupted with decisiveness that could sever nails and chop iron. "Don't touch Xu Qing!"

Chapter 938: A Gift From Zi Qing

Xu Qing led the way through the rain, followed by Fan Shishuang, with Erniu in the rear.

Their positioning made Fan Shishuang nervous. And considering he was in human territory without any backup, his anxiety only continued to mount.

## \*\*\* freewëbnove|.com

After the three of them left, Fourth Prince's banquet hall was completely silent. Everyone looked around without saying a word. Of course, that silence was only a foil to the tempests raging in their hearts and minds. They were shocked. Incredulous. And there were many other emotions assailing them.

They only knew how Xu Qing's time in Firemoon lands ended. They hadn't heard about what led up to Xu Qing becoming the Grand Darkheaven. They also had no idea what sort of tensions had come to exist between him and the Firemoon chosen.

What had just played out gave them some clues. After all, when all was said and done, it was common knowledge that Xu Qing had defeated Sir Firedark to secure his spot as the Grand Darkheaven. But clues were just clues, and they could really only guess at what exactly had happened that would make Fan Shishuang afraid of Xu Qing's mere presence.

After all, Fan Shishuang was a Smoldering God! He was an amazing chosen from the Firemoon Darkheaven echelon, and he was famous throughout Revered Ancient. Though he had spent almost his entire time with humankind in seclusion, which was slightly suspicious, there also wasn't anything incredibly unusual about it. As a cultivator who had just stepped into the Smoldering God level, he was in a critical time period, so it actually made sense for him to spend time in meditation.

What was more, he wasn't required to take part in the negotiations. He was only there to oversee matters and certify the signed treaty. The fact that he had reacted so quickly to prevent someone from talking about Xu Qing had only come across as him being displeased in some way. Anyone who didn't know the full story would probably assume that there was some major conflict between Xu Qing and Fan Shishuang.

But now... the truth was revealed! The reason Fan Shishuang had been in seclusion the entire time was that he was avoiding Xu Qing!

What was more, the displeasure he had revealed when stopping that young noble from talking about Xu Qing was real. The conflict was real. But the truth was that, in his vigilance, Fan Shishuang was very sensitive to anything that could cause further friction with Xu Qing. As everyone present reached similar conclusions, they were struck to the core.

When Xu Qing was with the Firemoon Darkheavens... he must have done some really terrifying things!

Princess Anhai looked a bit dazed as she thought back to all the times she had interacted with Xu Qing. It began in the Holytide Region at the banquet thrown by Seventh Prince. The next time she encountered him, he was already the region lord of Holytide. She was the one who escorted him into the Imperial Region.... She had witnessed him being summoned by Grand Emperor Swordsage, leading the Xeno-Immortal School to prominence, killing Seventh Prince, and in general, shaking the imperial capital to the core.

She had previously assumed that Xu Qing had already reached his peak. But then he became the Grand Darkheaven, was appointed as King Skycrusher, and was also named tutor for the imperial princes.... All of that made her feel like all she could do was look up and catch a glimpse of Xu Qing from behind.

Today, she had yet again witnessed how terrifying Xu Qing was. She and everyone else at the banquet had been careful to act appropriately around Fan Shishuang, and had been nervous in his presence. She could only imagine what kind of fearsome reputation Xu Qing must have won when he was with the Firemoon Darkheavens.

Fourth Prince's thoughts were in chaos, and his expression was flickering. However... there was a very strange gleam in his eyes.

Some people wanted to use me as bait to draw out Fan Shishuang. Master already saw through the whole situation and set everything up for me to succeed. But then Xu Qing showed up out of nowhere. I wonder... if he'll die as well!

Fourth Prince was already wrapped up in weighing all of the pros and cons.

There was another woman in the crowd who looked as surprised as everyone else. She was currently looking outside of the hall. She was none other than the famous master musician Su Yue. So, he's the brother of that certain person, huh...?

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Xu Qing had no way of noticing what was going on behind him. Before long, he had led Fan Shishuang and Erniu back to his greater spirit mansion. Once inside, he sat down calmly and looked at Fan Shishuang, who was trying his best to look dour and forbidding.

As for Erniu, he was smiling broadly. "Brother Fan, back when I was in Firemoon Darkheaven territory, I saw how spectacular you are. You really have the highest level of mastery possible when it comes to puppets.

"Given that, I'm certain you won't disappoint me. After all, if I end up disappointed, then my little Junior Brother will also be disappointed. And if we're *both* disappointed, well... then you'll be disappointed too." Erniu cleared his throat. Before Fan Shishuang could even say anything in response, Erniu quickly took out the jury-rigged puppet and put it

down on the ground. "Please, Brother Fan, can you help out with this? Fix it? Do your best... to get it back to its original condition?"

Erniu licked his lips. Xu Qing looked down, his face completely expressionless.

Fan Shishuang had been cursing inwardly, but showed no sign of that on his face. Now he could breathe a sigh of relief. As it turned out, they really did want him to do them a favor. There was no other hidden agenda. If he had been dealing with someone else, he might have dragged things out. But right now, he just wanted to leave as quickly as possible, and that meant both this mansion and these lands.

Therefore, it was without a word that he looked down at the jury-rigged puppet. He waved his hand, and the puppet collapsed into a pile of parts. He picked up one of the parts, took a deep breath to calm himself, and started studying it.

After taking a look, his expression flickered.

"This is old. Very old. I'd say that, at the very least, it's been around for tens of thousands of years. It's infected with corpse energy.... You know, this looks like the workmanship of the Fardarks. They were around in the time of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity.

"Their puppetry involved living sacrifices. They would use blood as food, meridians as connective elements, bones as building materials, and then would use a host of other items to create puppets of flesh and blood."

Fan Shishuang was really living up to his reputation of being a grandmaster of puppets, as he knew the entire history of the thing almost immediately.

Erniu let loose sighs of admiration, then followed them up with a loud cheer. Xu Qing made sure to put some praise into his gaze as well.

Fan Shishuang didn't react visibly to those expressions of appreciation, but inside he couldn't help but feel both proud and pleased.

Erniu blinked a few times. "Brother Fan, you're absolutely incredible! It seems to me you're not going to have any trouble getting this puppet back into perfect working order!"

Fan Shishuang coolly replied, "It's going to be difficult. But as long as you just give me all the materials, I can do it."

Erniu smiled. "Unfortunately, these are all the materials we have. But given your level of skill, Brother Fan, I'm sure you can make at least seven or eight versions. Er. Never mind. You know what, just keep it to five. That'll do. Whatever you make beyond that you can just keep as a reward!"

Fan Shishuang was cursing even more vehemently inside. These two damned idiots! Not only do they want me to work for free, but also, I have to provide the materials? This is beyond outrageous!

"The materials here aren't even enough to make one puppet. I'm going to need equipment forging materials such as earthlike megacrystals and crimsonsoul iron. Those types of things."

"We don't have any of that," Erniu said with a glare.

Xu Qing's expression darkened.

Gritting his teeth, Fan Shishuang looked at Erniu and then Xu Qing. After a moment he took a deep breath. "Both of you have to promise that, after this, we have a completely clean slate!"

When Erniu saw that a compromise had been reached, he smiled. "Agreed!"

Xu Qing thought about it and then nodded.

Fan Shishuang gritted his teeth and waved his hand to summon a host of equipment forging materials. As Xu Qing and Erniu watched, he started rebuilding the puppet.

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A month passed in short order.

During that time, Fan Shishuang went above and beyond. As Xu Qing and Erniu watched closely, he slowly put all the puppet pieces back together and made sure they operated smoothly. He used a lot of equipment forging materials.

Xu Qing didn't say much, but Erniu offered a lot of encouraging words and expressions of praise.

Although Fan Shishuang started to get annoyed with all that, it did result in him using more and more materials. In the end, he even took out some of the flesh, blood, and souls of various vicious beasts he had killed. By adding those elements into the puppet parts, he was able to make them very agile and lifelike.

On the final day, he performed an incantation gesture to finish the job. There were now two gigantic puppets clad in black armor standing in front of them. Both puppets emanated cold auras and terrifying pressure. Surprisingly, they were actually stronger than the versions Xu Qing had fought in the cave.

"That's the Smoldering God fleshly body level!!" Erniu said, looking visibly moved.

Truth be told, puppets like these were unheard of in human lands. In fact, even in all Erniu's past lives, he didn't remember seeing anything like them.

"It's my first time ever making puppets of this caliber," Fan Shishuang said. The reality was that even he felt a bit jealous of these puppets. Being a puppet grandmaster, he knew better than anyone how valuable they were.

Unfortunately, with these two watching me like a hawk, there's nothing I can do.... I had to use a lot of my valuable materials to push the puppets to this level. But in the end... the spare parts they provided had already been ensorcelled, and were very valuable. Whatever cultivator made these puppets originally was, at the very least, a Smoldering God, and maybe even an Imperial Sovereign.... Only someone like that could craft Smoldering God puppets. Without more spare parts... it won't be possible to make a third.

Fan Shishuang sighed inwardly and stowed any greedy thoughts. Standing, he looked coldly at Xu Qing and Erniu.

"Can I go now?"

Erniu hurriedly got to his feet and offered some more words of praise.

Xu Qing also flashed a smile. "Fellow Daoist Fan, you truly are amazing!"

Fan Shishuang betrayed no change in facial expression. However, inside he actually felt pleased with how Xu Qing and Erniu were treating him. A bit of excitement flared within him, only to be overwhelmed by grief. Actually, he had experienced a lot of mood changes like this in the past month. Right now, all he wanted to do was leave, so without another word, he flew out of Xu Qing's mansion and headed back to his garrison.

The two subsidiary species had long since left the imperial capital....

Naturally, Erniu and Xu Qing each took one puppet. Erniu left looking very pleased. He planned to study the puppet further, as he had specifically asked Fan Shishuang to add some tracking functions to it.

After leaving Xu Qing, Erniu grinned and licked his lips. I'm definitely going to find you, you old codger!

In that manner, time passed.

Soon, there were only two days left until the ancestral sacrifices.

Around that time, Xu Qing, who was in the spirit pool in his mansion, opened his eyes and looked outside.

Someone had delivered a wooden box. It was waiting at the front door. The person delivering it was a boy.

"I'm here on orders from the imperial preceptor to give you this item," he said. With that, the boy bowed and left.

Shortly after, the box crumbled to pieces, revealing what was inside.

It was a cloth doll that wasn't the work of a cultivator. Rather, it was from the mortal world. From the look of it, it had been ripped apart into many pieces, then put back together. Its facial expression made it seem like it was crying.

## Deathblade's Thoughts

In the title of this chapter, you can see that I've introduced the name Zi Qing. This is the transliteration of the Chinese that I've been rendering "Violet and Cyan." I will continue to use "Violet and Cyan" both as part of the full title and the name of the kingdom. However, in upcoming chapters, it sometimes uses those characters on their own as the name of the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan. Not only will transliterating it as a name make the reading a lot smoother, but also, it is a good visual reminder that these two individuals have the same character "Qing" in their name. In the case of the name of the kingdom and the associated title, I render it as "cyan." That character could also be rendered as Green, such as I did with the Green Spirit Pharmacy. I don't want to get into the weeds by providing a long explanation for why I've chosen to render these various terms and characters this way. Suffice it to say, I put a lot of thought into it, although some of it is also intuition and guesswork, as when I coined all of these terms, none of these later chapters had been written. From the very beginning, and even now, it's not really clear whether the name of the kingdom preceded the character's name, or in contrast, was named after him. The way it treats "Zi Qing" or "Violet and Cyan" did not initially sound like a name to me. To sum this all up: there is a certain point in some upcoming chapters in which the crown prince will be referred to simply as Zi Qing, and I figured now was as good a point as any to introduce the concept.

## Chapter 939: A Holy Ceremony

Seeing the cloth doll didn't provoke any change to Xu Qing's facial expression. But inside, he was assailed by waves of astonishment, because... he recognized it.

Back when he was a child in Peerless City, his big brother gave it to him as a birthday present. Later, catastrophe struck. Being only six or seven years old, Xu Qing had clutched the doll to him as he wept in the blood rain, crying out for daddy, mommy, and big brother. At a certain point he passed out. Upon awakening, the cloth doll was nowhere to be found. But here it was today. There was obviously significance to it.

He sent me this to get me thinking....

Xu Qing didn't say anything.

There were some things that he knew didn't make sense. For instance, during the fight against Crimson Mother back in the Moonrite Region, he had seen some memories in the violet crystal that clashed with what he remembered happening in the past....

In that image, a hand hit him in the head. Except what Xu Qing actually remembered didn't involve any hand at all. He had just passed out.

This patchwork doll was another example. Why had it been repaired and then delivered to him on this day? How did it end up being ripped apart?

Eventually, Xu Qing closed his eyes. He didn't pick up the cloth doll. He just left it lying outside the door.

Time passed. The wind picked up that night, kicking up dust that settled on the cloth doll. The wind brought coldness with it, and as a result, the patchwork doll looked like it was shivering. It was like that boy years ago, huddling against the cold in the slums.

A day passed.

There were now only twenty-four hours left until the ancestral sacrifices. All aristocrats and officials were at home, bathing and cleansing themselves in preparation for the event. That was the ceremonial process for ancestral sacrifices. Whether or not they qualified to go to Planet Ancient Emperor, that was what they did.

That was because there was a public and a private aspect to the ancestral sacrifices. The private aspect would be held on Planet Ancient Emperor, while the public would watch from off the planet.

Six hours before the ancestral sacrifices began, everyone would gather at sunrise at the Supreme Temple.[1]

Normally speaking, the Supreme Temple didn't even exist. Six hours before the ancestral sacrifices, it would appear outside the imperial palace in a special district that existed in its own spot in time.

Eight hours later, when Xu Qing left his mansion, it was nighttime. When he was about to walk past the cloth doll, he stopped and looked down at it. Then he looked away and continued walking.

He made good time and arrived at the Supreme Temple just as it was making its appearance. The sky was dark, but there was still colorful light visible. A magnificent, scintillating temple appeared out of time to hover in a spot east of the imperial palace.

Xu Qing wasn't the first to arrive. Everyone showed up at almost the same time looking very solemn.

Being a heavenly king, Xu Qing was able to stand up front. King Firecrusher was next to him.

Behind the heavenly kings were the heavenly marquises, and after them, the other government officials. There were thousands of them, but no one made any noise.

Everyone was looking toward the front. There, six figures stepped out of thin air.

One of them was the emperor, and the others were the imperial princes who qualified to join him. The emperor wore an unprecedentedly extravagant ceremonial garment. Behind him stood Grand Prince, Fourth Prince, Fifth Prince, and Twelfth Prince.

Ningyan spent most of his time in seclusion. But today could be considered a profoundly important element of cultivation, so he had to attend. Both he and the other princes were dressed differently than normal. They also wore extremely extravagant ceremonial clothing.

What had caught everyone by surprise was the fact that there was someone standing next to Twelfth Prince Ningyan. Unexpectedly, there was a fifth imperial prince there.

He was Tenth Prince! Naturally, he was only there because the emperor had permitted him to be present. And yet there hadn't been any imperial edict announced to that effect. That said, no one could claim to be an expert about how everything worked with imperial princes. As the tutor for the imperial princes, Xu Qing could probably have asked for more information, but he wasn't inclined to do so.

After about ten breaths of time passed, the emperor looked over the group of officials.

The emperor seemed to be in a different emotional state than usual. Normally speaking, he didn't reveal the slightest thing in his eyes, but right now... there was something glimmering there. It was as if his gaze just now had taken in all of the mountains and rivers in human lands, all of the people, and also the distant statue of the Grand Emperor. The emperor took a deep breath, whereupon his gaze and facial expression returned to normal. He turned around.

As the five imperial princes bowed their heads and backed up slightly, the emperor looked at the Supreme Temple. He walked toward it.

When he had walked about 30 meters, the five imperial princes somberly followed him.

During this six-hour period, the customs of the ancestral sacrifices dictated that the emperor would sit cross-legged in the Supreme Temple and wait. The imperial princes

who had been graced with the right to also be present in the ancestral sacrifices would be with him, kowtowing as they waited for dawn.

Both inside and outside the Supreme Temple, those six hours went by in silence. In fact, the entire imperial capital was completely quiet. As time ticked by, the sky started to grow light. Then, a blazing light on the horizon became a sea of flames that spread through the dome of heaven. It was as if some enormous giant had reached out and ripped away the veil of night.

The light of dawn shone out in all directions, covering everything. Then the chanting voice of the master of ceremonies echoed out, "The time of sacrifices has arrived!"

Outside of the Supreme Temple, everyone from the heavenly kings on high to the minor officials below dropped to their knees.

"Open the imperial planet!"

Magnificent bells tolled, creating a somber sound that echoed out everywhere. The light of dawn shone in the sky, while the destiny aura of humankind was like a swirling dragon, flying above the imperial capital and spitting out auspicious clouds. The images of all the famous sages of the past appeared in the canopy of heaven, and they bowed in the direction of the imperial palace. They weren't bowing to the reigning emperor, but rather, to... Planet Ancient Emperor.

Planet Ancient Emperor glittered with bright light, and intense rumbling sounds echoed out from it. Then, it shockingly rose up into the air, growing larger and larger from the perspective of all the onlookers.

The mist that covered the surface of the planet then seethed, causing seven colors to be visible. In the form of a rainbow, it stretched toward the Supreme Temple. In the end, it actually connected directly to the temple! The seven-colored mist became a path. A bridge.

From his place in the Supreme Temple, the emperor stepped out onto the seven-colored mist bridge and started walking. The five princes followed 30 meters behind.

A profound look gleamed in King Firecrusher's eyes as he walked forward. Along with all the other heavenly kings, he stepped onto the bridge. Xu Qing was among them, his expression solemn.

After them came the heavenly marquises and then all the other officials of varying ranks. Keeping organized into small groups about 30 meters apart from each other, they all slowly walked onto the bridge.

From a distance, it was possible to see a solemn group of thousands of humans, led by the emperor, walking closer and closer to Planet Ancient Emperor.

The commoners in the capital, as well as the many cultivators who didn't qualify to go to the Supreme Temple, looked up at the magnificent scene.

Then the chanting voice of the master of ceremonies once again pierced the silence with the names of some of the people in the procession.

"King Firecrusher, King Skycrusher...."

As the group proceeded along the rainbow bridge, the names continued to ring out. Not all the heavenly kings were named, nor all the heavenly marquises. And it was the same with all the other officials.

After the ninety-ninth name was announced, the voice spoke no more names.

"Ladies and gentlemen, all those whose names were just mentioned are qualified to enter the imperial planet to personally bear witness to the ancestral sacrifices."

As those words echoed out, the emperor reached the end of the bridge and, without so much as a pause, entered Planet Ancient Emperor. The five imperial princes followed him, and then all of the aristocracy and officials who had been called out by name.

Xu Qing was one of them. After he walked off of the bridge and onto Planet Ancient Emperor, the planet trembled and the surrounding mists seethed, making it just barely possible to spot a magnificent altar below. At the same time, the imperial capital's grand spell formation activated and went into defensive mode.

Those who didn't qualify to go to the planet waited worshipfully on the bridge. They were there to bear witness.

The altar on Planet Ancient Emperor was massive. As it rose up, it became clearer to see, until it was fully visible hovering in midair.

It became the Temple of Heaven![2]

The group of qualified participants appeared at the base of the Temple of Heaven.

Xu Qing instinctively looked around and thought, So this is... Planet Ancient Emperor.

What jumped out to him immediately was the incomparable power of destiny aura here, plus the imperial bloodline fluctuations. In addition, there was also a spectacular spirit energy. It would be hard for it to have been more intense. It became spirit streams that swept through Planet Ancient Emperor like magnificent spirit dragons.

There wasn't time for Xu Qing to sit around studying things, as the ancestral sacrifices were already beginning.

The chanting voice once again rang out.

"The emperor shall don his armor." freewebnovel.com

The ancestral sacrifices were a ceremony carried out by the emperor. As everyone watched, he walked forward, and as the sunlight shone down on him, he donned a rough hemp robe.

"Starting in ancient times, the emperors have accepted the orders of the immortals and ruled the cosmos. Therefore, when the emperor removes his crown and sheds his imperial shoes, it signifies a return to heaven and earth."

The emperor closed his eyes and the imperial crown on his head flew off, and his shoes vanished. Streams of destiny swept toward him, which he received with open arms.

Thus, without any crown on his head or shoes on his feet, the emperor started walking forward.

"Light the incense of human destiny aura; allow the ancestors to observe and enjoy."

The destiny aura in front of the emperor transformed into a large cauldron. Then three incense sticks appeared in the emperor's hand, which he placed into the cauldron. The incense lit up and smoke rose into the air. Rumbling sounds caused the clouds to tremble. Lightning crashed.

And then, a host of illusory doors appeared. They hovered in the air almost as if they existed in a different dimension of time. Black smoke pulsed out of them, as if they contained strange and marvelous entities that, upon sensing the incense of destiny aura, they wanted to break out of the doors and turn into demons, devils, ghosts, and monsters.

Yet as the doors trembled, streams of even more terrifying energy rose up from Planet Ancient Emperor beneath the Temple of Heaven. They were extremely domineering as they swirled through the area. Pressure weighed down, like that of an entire sea, and it was just possible to hear indistinct chanting. The shocking chanting caused all heaven and earth to tremble. The Temple of Heaven was an exception as everything else in the area, including the illusory doors, was shattered by the chanting, transforming into a spirit rain that fell down onto the planet.

To Xu Qing, who had never witnessed a ceremony like this before, it was astonishing.

After lighting the incense, the emperor continued on his way up the stairs toward the tallest part of the Temple of Heaven. Behind him, Ningyan and the other imperial princes all had rough hemp robes made from destiny aura. They also had taken off their headgear and shoes. They stepped onto the Temple of Heaven.

- 1. What I'm rendering as Supreme Temple bears the same name as a real-life location usually translated as Imperial Ancestral Temple. The reason I don't want to render it as Imperial Ancestral Temple is that it doesn't contain the word 'imperial' or 'ancestral' in Chinese. Functionally speaking, its English version describes perfectly what it does. But to maintain some translation accuracy, I'm calling it by a more direct version that corresponds to what it actually is in Chinese.
- 2. The Temple of Heaven here bears the same name as the real-life historical Temple of Heaven, which is where the emperors of the time would go to offer sacrifices. You've probably seen pictures of the round temple building (I shared one a few hundred chapters ago). In reality, that building is only one part of the larger Temple of Heaven complex, which features a number of different buildings, altars, etc. Here's the wiki for more info if you're interested. Based on the descriptions in the story, I don't think it's supposed to be the actual same building or set of buildings as the real-life version.

## Chapter 940: Astonishing Developments

Outside of Planet Ancient Emperor on the bridge of rainbow mist, there were several thousand aristocrats and officials who did not qualify to go to the planet. They stood there solemnly with their heads bowed. Beyond the bridge were even more cultivators kneeling in worship.

It was generally the same throughout the imperial capital. Destiny roared like a dragon as bright light shone in the sky. The grand spell formation was active, bringing brilliance to human lands.

It wasn't just like that in the capital itself. It was the same... in the Imperial Region, the seven counties, as well as Holytide, Nightspirit, Nightshade... and the border areas as well. There were solemn sacrifices being made everywhere. The governors and military forces throughout human lands had long since been notified. This was a grand ceremony for all humankind. Thus, people in all territories that knew what was happening were now all looking in the general direction of the Imperial Region.

All nonhumans who were in human lands now, as well as any organizations with unsavory elements, didn't dare to cause any trouble on this, the day of the human ancestral sacrifices. They wouldn't even cause minor bits of trouble. Trouble of any variety on a day like this would constitute disrespect for humankind in general. None of the nonhumans wanted to do something like that.

Within human lands, destiny aura surged. And because of the bloodline fluctuations, the sky above Revered Ancient trembled, and the clouds spread dramatically.

Allies everywhere were abiding by their treaties and agreements to offer similar sacrifices.

The Whitemarshes and Saias weren't worth mentioning. But in the Moonrite Region, the Heir Apparent and his siblings sighed deeply as they ascended the Moonrite Altar and looked in the direction of the imperial capital. They were independent and had set down their own roots. However... that didn't mean they wanted to be separate from humankind.

Outside of the borders of human lands, neighboring nonhumans were shaken, and sent large amounts of troops to the border. It wasn't that they planned to launch invasions. Rather, they feared the possibility of humans using their ancestral sacrifices as a distraction to launch invasions.

The stronger species in the Revered Ancient mainland were all looking in the direction of the humans' imperial capital. Many thoughts went through their heads. The truth was... some very dramatic things had happened to the Firemoons, and then almost immediately afterward, the humans carried out their ancestral sacrifices. In one short year, it was as if dramatic things were happening... one after another.

How could the powerful species *not* pay close attention? All of them were getting the sensation that dramatic events were on the horizon. On this day, humans were the focus of attention throughout Revered Ancient.

Myriads and myriads of wills converged. Myriads and myriads of minds were focused. Myriads and myriads of eyes watched. If there was some ceremony that could shake everything... then the wills, minds, and eyes of everyone in Revered Ancient were ready.

Meanwhile, streams of energy were emerging from the mysterious Planet Ancient Emperor. The remaining fragments of the strange time doors were swept up into a huge vortex. Rumbling sounds echoed out everywhere.

In the middle of the vortex, which was the focus of all gazes on Revered Ancient, was the majestic Temple of Heaven, as well as a hundred somber cultivators, the five imperial princes, and the emperor... alone at the front!

He wore no crown and had no shoes on his feet. That symbolized that he was one with both heaven and earth, and could carry out the ceremony with all sincerity. As he walked up the stairs of the altar, chanting accompanied his footfalls.

"The Forefathers of Deep Earth opened Revered Ancient. Services to the universe; blessings of celestial spirits; moral cultivation and martial might; the compassion of myriad species; generations continue; it lasts long and far.

"Strive for self-improvement; sacrifice and chant; tens upon tens of thousands of years pass; this is the east of Revered Ancient. Millions upon millions of descendants, spreading through the Big Dipper."

The words echoed left and right. Whether it was the people on the bridge or the cultivators on the planet. All were shaken. Xu Qing also looked up. Everyone looked surprised.

It was because... the speech about the ancestral sacrifices didn't mention Ancestral sacrifices. Instead... it mentioned the Forefathers!

The so-called Forefathers were the earliest immortals to come to the Revered Ancient mainland some tens upon tens of thousands of years in the past. They included members of many species, and one of them was human. They were the ones who established these lands, set up the first Ancient Emperor, and made sure that humans and nonhumans alike flourished.

Sacrifices which were made, not to Dark Serenity, but to humankind in general, were rare, though not completely unheard-of. In fact, this was how ancestral sacrifices were done during the time of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity. And now Emperor Dark War was continuing that practice.

Everyone was shaken, yet that didn't stop the emperor from continuing to climb the stairs. The chanting continued with a bit of trembling in the voice.

"And thus... in the ancient past, heaven lost authority, and earth lost reincarnation. After the Forefathers, events played out, species rose and fell, enemies clashed. Wars were fought and suffering abounded. There was 10,000 years of torment and the spilling of blood. Though Dark Serenity had risen up, the gods came. They wreaked havoc with their superior strength.

"Mountains and rivers were shattered. Living beings were plunged into misery and suffering. Chaos reigned. Dramatic events played out as neighbors went to war and society fell into great difficulty. Who was responsible for East Victory's failures? Who caught sight of Mirrorcloud weeping?

"Later, Crimson Mother of the Nightshades ran rampant, bringing darkness, coldness, and blood. But our troops went into battle, released the power of the sun at dawn, banishing humiliation and punishing the Nightshades. The heroic spirit of humankind was lit.

"Heaven and earth trembled. Opportunities presented. The cosmos opened and heroes appeared, ready to create glory for humans."

The words echoed like thunder as the emperor... reached the top of the Temple of Heaven! There he stood, the center of all attention.

The sound of chanting drifted out again, but this time it didn't come from the master of ceremonies. Instead, it came from the mouth of the emperor himself. It was his first time speaking up to this point.

"Constellations drift and time passes. The ancient slowly turns modern. The landscape becomes more beautiful, the people more elegant. As we strive through time toward the future, we are ready to face tribulation and war. Time and tide wait for no man.

"The mission is in my heart, and responsibility is my cloak. I, Dark War, can offer sacrifices with a clean conscience. I will live up to the dreams of my ancestors and fulfill the desires of my offspring. I swear to lift humankind up to the highest heights!

"Let the three sacrifices be carried out!"

The emperor looked up into the cosmos, through the void, and beyond Revered Ancient. There was a strange light in his eyes, and his expression was unusual. It was as if he had been waiting for this moment for a very long time.

"First sacrifice. Map of Humankind!"

The emperor waved his right hand, causing a convergence of destiny aura that manifested into the form of a huge map. That map depicted all known human territory. That included the four regions.

"Second sacrifice. Register of Heroic Spirits!"

As the words left the emperor's mouth, a large number of stone steles rumbled into existence. There seemed no end to them, and each one was covered with names. They were the names of all the cultivators that had died in the endless years since Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity left. It wasn't even possible to calculate how many names there were.

Xu Qing struggled to control his breathing as he noticed that on the stone stele in the very front, there was a familiar name. It was... the palace lord of the Swordsage Palace in Sea-Sealing County. Kong Liangxiu! Grief rose up within Xu Qing, as it did within the hearts of many of the other humans. All of them could see the names of family members and ancestors, which bore witness to the misery humankind had experienced through the years.

"Third sacrifice. Wind and Rain!"

When the emperor spoke those words, a great wind began to blow, accompanied by heavy rain. The wind was the wind of humankind, which had blown through countless years of time, across endless wars and battles. It had been collected from within time itself. The rain was the rain of humankind, which had fallen over countless years, bearing witness to the development of human society, bearing witness to sorrow and grief. It had been gathered from many different generations.

Then they were put together to be delivered on this day. The meaning conformed to the idiom... a fitting wind and favorable rain, expressing the hope for good harvests and general prosperity.

Although, was it possible this entire thing was a mockery? After all, this wind didn't fall from the sky. It blew from the lands up into the dome of heaven. And this rain didn't fall onto humans. It swept from the human world up into the canopy of heaven.

As of this moment, even the most dim-witted person could tell that something strange was going on. As Xu Qing stood on the ancient planet, his heart raced. The gathered officials struggled to control their breathing, and their eyes shone with astonishment. It was the same outside the planet. The officials on the bridge were trembling as anxiety filled them. Not all of the commoners had reacted yet, but there were some among them who were very perceptive, and were visibly alarmed.

The ancestral sacrifices continued.

"I can only hope the Forefathers will bless my offspring. Sacrifice to the spirits as if they are present, offer all sacrifices without violation."

After handing over all the sacrificial items, the emperor looked up into the dome of heaven, to the area beyond Revered Ancient... and kowtowed. Once. Again. And yet again! Every kowtow was performed with great decisiveness.

One bow. Three bows. Nine bows! Every single bow contained great determination! It almost seemed like this was a bidding of farewell!

Three kowtows and nine bows. In the world of Revered Ancient, the human's three periphery regions weren't affected much, but the lands in the Imperial Region started trembling. Mountains crumbled and rivers were rerouted.

And then... on the Temple of Heaven on Planet Ancient Emperor, illusory mountains rose up and river after river began to flow. That meant that the spirits of the mountains and rivers in the region were on the move!

Next, something like a sigh echoed out from the terrifying streams of energy in the area, as they started grouping together to form a host of shadowy figures. They approached the sacrificial offerings as if to partake in them. At the same time, an incredibly strong destiny aura erupted, covering the entire imperial capital, and forcing everyone to bow their heads from the great pressure.

The emperor looked at the mountains and rivers, and then the shadowy figures. He looked at the sacrificial offerings. Then he spoke in a voice that was raspy and soft.

"Please, accept these...."

He was planning to say the formal lines that indicated the sacrifice was over: *please accept these sacrificial items*. Except, before he could get halfway through the statement... something astonishing happened!

A voice rang out from behind the emperor.

"Dark War, are you really worthy to be the emperor of humankind? The ancestors have come, and heaven has opened. All humankind bears witness. And thus, as your son, I will wield the blade of humankind to put an end to you, you tyrannical, immoral, inhumane, and incompetent ruler who has brought nothing but violence and misery to the people!"

The voice echoed out into the void with a touch of madness. The world shook.

Xu Qing looked up. He knew instantly who that voice belonged to....

Atop the Temple of Heaven, the emperor slowly turned around. Of the five imperial princes standing behind him, four looked shocked, and were instinctively backing away. There was only one who stood there looking coldly at the emperor.

It was none other than... Ningyan!