

Beyond the Timescape

Chapter 1051: Devil-Spirit Rot-Crushing

For 5,000 kilometers in every direction, the lands looked like a shattered mirror. Black fire rose up from the cracks and crevices, turning the entire area into a sea of flames.

As it burned, countless human souls shrieked in grief. They couldn't break free, as they were bound in the sea of flames, which surrounded the long spear.

Mount Heaven's East didn't exist anymore. In the spot where it had once stood there was now a shocking spear plunged into the earth. Standing on the spear was a figure that resembled a devil looking down on the world, surrounded by swirling red hair. Within that figure were seven brilliant balls of fire.

He was none other than Sir Westdevil.

But what Xu Qing was focused on was the heaven-devil projection behind Sir Westdevil. It filled him with a sense of both vigilance and impending danger.

Though the heaven-devil was illusory, the burly figure in the scintillating pitch-black armor imparted a sense of immense pressure. His eyes were filled with callous coldness, as well as a fiendish light that could penetrate to the core of a person. His long hair swirled like fire in the middle of the night, and emanated a gruish glow. His fingers were long, with sharp nails that seemed like they could rip anything to shreds. His entire body was covered with complex magical symbols, which seemed to serve both as his source of power and as the carrier of some mysterious curse.

His arrival caused darkness to build around him, a wind to kick up, and lightning to crackle. It was a pure manifestation of might and power.

Authority... thought Xu Qing, his eyes glittering as he looked at the devilish projection. He could clearly sense the fluctuations of dao lineament authority. And he could tell that this was not an ordinary type of authority.

"My authority is called devil-spirit rot-crushing," Sir Westdevil said coolly as he looked down at Xu Qing. "Frankly speaking, it doesn't matter whether or not you admit to being Sir Blood Dust.

"I'm from the seventeenth Imperial Sovereign mountain, and I'm here to fight you. To avoid claims of bullying the weak, I'll only attack with three divine abilities. If you perish, Lu Lingzi will have no grounds to complain. If you survive my three attacks, then consider it good fortune that I spare your life."

With that, he pointed directly at Xu Qing. Instantly, the air in front of Xu Qing shattered as a spear appeared that was several feet thick and several dozen meters long. It immediately shot toward Xu Qing. Where it passed, natural and magical laws shattered, which showed how astonishingly powerful it was, and highlighted the authority it contained.

As it locked on to Xu Qing's mind and heart, it pulsed with a horrifying aura that was very close to the strength of an Imperial Sovereign. It arrived in an instant.

Xu Qing's pupils constricted. This Sir Westdevil was stronger than any of the other Smoldering Gods he had encountered. In fact, this was probably the strongest Smoldering God he had ever faced. Without any hesitation, he shot backward at top speed, all while keeping his eyes fixed on the spear.

Unfortunately, even as he started moving, a second spear appeared, its tip glittering as it shot toward Xu Qing with just as much power as the first spear.

And yet, the deadly attack wasn't over yet. There was more to come. In the blink of an eye, a third, fourth, and fifth spear appeared.... Ultimately, a total of nine heaven-shaking, earth-shattering spears appeared, all in different spots, and all of them closing in on Xu Qing with deadly force.

It seemed like the spears were about to pierce through him. However, Sir Westdevil clearly didn't know much about Xu Qing. Perhaps it would be accurate to say that he did know a lot about Sir Blood Dust. But he was dealing with Xu Qing, not Sir Blood Dust.

The nine spears of this attack contained power similar to that of an Imperial Sovereign, and they were arranged in something like a sealing mark. Unfortunately... they didn't seal sound.

The nine spears thrummed with destructive power, letting loose deafening rumbling sounds as they smashed together in the same spot.

However, Xu Qing had already disappeared, leaving behind only a fading shadow. His true form had merged into sound and vanished into thin air. When he reappeared, he was behind Sir Westdevil. Without the slightest pause, he thrust his hand out.

Unfortunately, Sir Westdevil had abundant experience in battle, and had lightning-fast reflexes. At almost the exact moment that Xu Qing launched his counter attack, Sir Westdevil also blurred into nothing.

Xu Qing's palm struck nothing but air. He looked up.

Sir Westdevil appeared high above, looking down at Xu Qing with shining eyes.

"Well, isn't this interesting," he said, again lifting his hand and pointing at Xu Qing. The black sea of flames erupted, causing flames to shoot up into the sky. Within them, the souls of the human quivered as they turned into numerous spears.

There were well over 10,000 of them that flew up, like a reverse rain that was focused completely on Xu Qing. Even more terrifying was that as the spears shot through the air, they proliferated, splitting apart. Each individual spear became ten, until there were more than 100,000. They moved with shocking speed, and what was more, they didn't emit any sound.

Although they weren't as mighty as the previous attack, the sheer numbers involved made them far more capable of inflicting annihilation. This soundless attack was Sir Westdevil's second move.

In the blink of an eye they were about to hit Xu Qing.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed as he considered what to do. In the end, he didn't evade. Instead, energy and blood surged within him, and he closed his eyes. 100,000 spears shot toward him from all sides and slammed into him. Light flared. Natural laws shattered. Magical laws vanished like smoke in the wind.

Yet Xu Qing didn't seem affected. In fact, when the spears hit him, they unleashed a force of annihilation that swept back onto themselves. The spears were destroyed by their own power! They simply couldn't do anything to Xu Qing's fleshly body defenses.

Sir Westdevil's eyes narrowed. However, he didn't seem surprised. After all, he had been told already that this person excelled in defenses. And as it turned out, he had made this attack for another reason. When the spears shattered, they caused more black flames to sweep out. And the gruish fire was now right next to Xu Qing's fleshly body. Instead of burning him, they formed a host of small-scale flame vortexes that spun rapidly.

Seeing that, Sir Westdevil's eyes flashed with killing intent.

"Now's my chance."

He shot down toward Xu Qing. As he closed in, he extended his right hand. The heaven-devil projection did the same. And then, the heaven-devil's eyes shone with underworld light as he gave voice to a complicated enchantment. It spoke every word clearly, yet no one who heard those words could possibly understand them.

As the enchantment echoed out, the black flame vortexes spun faster and headed toward Xu Qing's forehead. At the same time, any spears that hadn't exploded yet began to do so. More black fire burned, and more flame vortexes formed.

All of them were converging on Xu Qing's forehead. In the blink of an eye, they merged together to create one incredible vortex.

As the vortex spun over Xu Qing's forehead, Sir Westdevil reached out with his right hand. Within his palm was a strand of his own soul! He was using a killing move! And this killing move wasn't about annihilation!

Everything he had said and done up to this point was a smokescreen. They were deceptions to hide his true strategy.

Spirit substitution! Put precisely, he didn't actually want to defeat Xu Qing. And the reason he had rushed tirelessly from the battlefield had nothing to do with matters of face for the seventeenth Imperial Sovereign mountain. He had come for the Netherflame Secret Magic! He wanted to use Xu Qing as a substitute to get that secret magic!

For most people, that would have been a very difficult thing. But when it came to his special devil-spirit rot-crushing authority, the reality was that annihilation was only a secondary manifestation

of its power. That authority had another ability hidden deep within it. And it was the ability of spirit substitution.

It was like a forced transfer. The soul strand he had produced was the secret technique that could be used to force the transfer. That soul wouldn't fall under the control of the target. Rather, it would instantly come back on its own. It was a heaven-devil transfer!

Unfortunately, there are always counterparts to everything. When one person plots against someone else, it's entirely possible that the other person would be doing the same.

As the vortex spun over Xu Qing's forehead, and Sir Westdevil reached out with a soul strand in his hand to make the transfer... Xu Qing's eyes snapped open. They glowed with cold light!

The authority of Six Thieves Deceive Life erupted, filling the area. Instantly, Xu Qing could see threads of the seven emotions and six sensory pleasures surrounding Six Thieves Deceive Life. They connected to him. And thus, the Sixth Thieves became a path. A path that led to the soul.

Within Xu Qing's sea of consciousness, his soul stepped forward onto the road. It emerged from his forehead and directly faced the incoming right hand of Sir Westdevil!

Floating next to Xu Qing's soul form was a black carving knife. It didn't matter what transfer was going to happen, or what technique was being used. The carving knife slashed down. That slash caused the soul strand in Sir Westdevil's right hand to emit a shriek of anguish as it was cut in half.

Xu Qing wasn't finished. His soul bore the knife forward, charging toward Sir Westdevil and slashing into his sea of consciousness.

Sir Westdevil's sea of consciousness was vast and filled with black fire. Seven major worlds orbited above the fire, and seated cross-legged beneath them was a heaven-devil with a long spear in its hands.

Upon spotting the heaven-devil, Xu Qing's killing intent surged, and he rushed toward it with the knife.

The heaven-devil's eyes opened and it rose to its feet. Then its spear surged with power as it stabbed it toward Xu Qing.

The knife and the spear clashed. As rumbling sounds echoed out, the knife remained unscathed. In contrast, the spear exploded. The heaven-devil fell back.

Xu Qing was about to pursue it when a sense of impending crisis filled his soul form. Behind the fleeing heaven-devil, he spotted what appeared to be an ancient and rusty bell. As it floated up, it pulsed with terrifying power.

The eyes of Xu Qing's soul form flickered. Without any hesitation, he fell back. As he left Sir Westdevil's sea of consciousness, returning to his body, a terrifying power erupted out.

Xu Qing and Sir Westdevil backed away from each other in midair until they were about 300 meters apart.

Sir Westdevil scowled. He still felt lingering fear from the danger he had just been in. Glaring at Xu Qing, he said, “You knew from the beginning what I was planning to do!”

Xu Qing’s face remained calm as he replied, “I didn’t know the exact details. But based on your words and actions, it wasn’t hard to guess that you weren’t actually trying to kill me.”

Sir Westdevil looked at him, his eyes glittering. Then he turned to leave.

Xu Qing lifted his hand, and the air vibrated. A tempest sprang up in front of Sir Westdevil, blocking his path.

Sir Westdevil stopped in place and looked back at Xu Qing with a grim expression. “I made my three moves. And I promised to spare your life if you survived. You’re making a mistake.”

Xu Qing shook his head. “I never promised to spare *your* life.”

And then he took a step forward. Killing intent surged.

Chapter 1052: Devil Transformation

As Xu Qing stepped forward, he unleashed every bit of his sound authority. Using that, he entered sound. That single step took him 300 meters so quickly it was like a minor teleportation.

Sir Westdevil had incredibly quick reflexes, and shot backward the moment Xu Qing spoke. Unfortunately, it was like Xu Qing had become part of space-time itself, as he instantly appeared right behind Sir Westdevil. There, his dao lineaments glittered, and the power of his authority erupted.

The might of erasure touched on everything, like an invisible hand preparing to wipe away anything it contacted. Combined with the deadly effects of the sound that he gathered, it created unsurpassably terrifying fluctuations that completely swept over Sir Westdevil. This was Xu Qing’s counterattack.

The attack landed, and rumbling sounds filled heaven and earth.

Sir Westdevil’s expression flickered as a tremor passed through him from head to toe. The first thing he sensed was the surrounding sound vanishing from his ears. It was as if it didn’t even exist. It had all been taken away and turned into an explosive weapon in the hands of Xu Qing.

As sound waves covered Sir Westdevil, blood sprayed out of his mouth, and it looked like his body was already starting to crumble. Even his heartbeat was like a blade slashing into him.

The mightiness of the authority of erasure turned into a blade that began to erase all traces of Sir Westdevil. Bits of his life force, traces of his karma, traces of his existence.... Sir Westdevil began to breathe heavily, and his heart was pounding from the feeling of deadly crisis building within him. Back when Xu Qing’s soul launched a deadly attack into his sea of consciousness, he had felt fear for the first time. This was the second time.

The command medallion the empress had given to Xu Qing was indeed astonishing. Unexpectedly, it was even capable of allowing Xu Qing to attack Sir Westdevil in this manner. The undetectable change to perceptions made it so that Xu Qing was very confident in attacking.

Unfortunately... Sir Westdevil was a top chosen, and he had abundant battle experience. Despite facing this attack from Xu Qing which placed him in immediate danger, he still managed to launch a counterattack.

As the sound authority erupted, and the power of erasure surged, Sir Westdevil unhesitatingly caused a black glow to flicker in his eyes. That black glow started out as a pinprick, but quickly filled his pupils as well as his sea of consciousness. The flames in his seven major worlds instantly went out.

The moment it happened... the heaven-devil behind him seemed to be resurrected. It lifted its head, its mouth twisted in a ferocious grin, and it took a step forward. In the shortest of moments, it fused with Sir Westdevil.

Sir Westdevil threw his head back and let loose a monstrous howl. Wild colors flashed in heaven and earth, all while an astonishing devil energy surged out of him with mountain-toppling, sea-draining force. The power of sound authority was crushed. The authority of erasure was suddenly struggling.

Sir Westdevil also changed shape! He became an incarnation of a heaven-devil! He wore vicious pitch-black armor, and was hundreds of meters tall. His fingernails were so sharp they seemed like they could shred space-time itself. His hair was no longer bright red, but pitch black, and spread out so dramatically it could obscure the sky and block the sun. The black fire in the area burned with even greater intensity.

This was a divine ability of authority that Sir Westdevil rarely used. It was the Heaven-Devil Transformation! The reason he rarely used it was that there was a major flaw with this authority. The more Sir Westdevil used it, and the longer he used it, the more quickly he lost his sense of self. And unless he constantly improved his cultivation base, then ultimately he would be absorbed by the authority, and would become a mindless heaven-devil. Unfortunately, this moment of crisis meant that he couldn't hold back.

After turning into a heaven-devil, he waved his hand, and his seven major worlds appeared in the open to block Xu Qing. Loud rumbling sounds echoed out as the worlds shifted to line up in a row.

A very gruish scene then played out. The seven worlds began to grow larger, causing the space between Xu Qing and Sir Westdevil to ripple and distort. And thus, despite the fact that neither party was backing up, the worlds stretched space so that they were extremely far apart.

The authority lineaments caused Xu Qing's vigilance to increase dramatically. However, so did his killing intent. And thus, his hands flashed in a double-handed incantation gesture as he sent both godly authority and cultivator authority rushing toward Sir Westdevil.

Sir Westdevil in heaven-devil form looked out with abstruse, pitch-black eyes. Then he extended his massive right hand toward the huge spear stabbed into the earth. The spear thrummed as it flew out of the ground, shrank down, and landed in his hand. Then he stabbed it viciously toward Xu Qing.

A high-pitched piercing sound rang out as Xu Qing dodged. At the same time, he fought back with sound-seizing, once again using sound authority to perform a minor teleportation and grueishly appeared right next to Sir Westdevil.

Sir Westdevil scowled and quickly launched a counterattack. But Xu Qing just disappeared again, to reappear on the other side of Sir Westdevil.

And thus, he repeatedly used sound authority to teleport to different locations around Sir Westdevil. It didn't matter that Sir Westdevil wasn't making any sound. His blood was flowing, his heart was beating, and his life force was burning, which created an intangible sound of its own. And Xu Qing could control all of that. As a result, Sir Westdevil's spear never managed to do anything to Xu Qing.

Sir Westdevil's heart continued to sink. The longer he used the Heaven-Devil Transformation, the greater danger he was in. And this Sir Blood Dust had astonishing defenses as well as grueish escape magics. He was also very fast.

It took almost no time for Sir Westdevil to be in a very dangerous situation. Finally, determination flashed in his eyes. Lifting his right hand, he shoved it out, causing the spear to shoot up into the sky. At the same time, his hands flashed in a double-handed incantation gesture, and he shoved them out. Then he spoke five words.

“Seven Prisons Heaven-Devil World!”

Five mouthfuls of blood sprayed out, all while his body withered dramatically. This magic produced astounding mightiness. Rumbling sounds filled heaven and earth as all of the devil energy around him erupted, filling an area of 50,000 kilometers.

Xu Qing's eyes hardened as he found himself surrounded by the devil energy. Simultaneously, Sir Westdevil's first major world began to descend in illusory form. It slammed into the ground, creating a prison around Xu Qing.

Things weren't over yet. Instantly, the second, third and fourth worlds followed suit.... All seven worlds fell down, overlapping to create a heaven-devil prison. It crushed down on anything and sealed everything.

Sir Westdevil was seated cross-legged on the very top of the heaven-devil prison. His devil energy was surging out, filling the prison, and causing heavenly lightning and earthly fire to fill the place. He was trying to assimilate Xu Qing.

Inside the heaven-devil world, flames raged, and lightning crashed.

Xu Qing's expression was grim as he sensed what was happening and looked up toward the canopy of heaven. He could see Sir Westdevil on the outside. He could also sense that his opponent's divine ability was causing him to wither and weaken. He knew that this was Sir Westdevil's trump card.

Then, just as he was preparing to do something, his expression flickered as he sensed his candle tattoo stirring. The candle started madly sucking in the surrounding fire, and its aura of awakening rose up dramatically again.

Xu Qing frowned. Though he wasn't sure what had caused this to happen, he knew that as long as he broke free very soon, he could deal with the situation. His eyes flickered with cold light, all while the carving knife manifestation of the godly authority of fate emerged from his forehead. He was planning to use the power of that carving knife to carve out an unavoidable death for his opponent!

Deathblade's Thoughts

This chapter is about 1,000 characters shorter than average.

Chapter 1053: Carving Your Fate

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Within that 50,000-kilometer area, black flames burned, the heat distorting everything as the fire made something like a sealing mark. The flattened lands also featured Sir Westdevil's seven major worlds, which were organized atop each other to make a seven-layer prison.

With that blessing, Sir Westdevil was able to unleash the most powerful manifestation of his gruish authority. It was... the Seven Prisons Heaven-Devil World.

That world had a heaven that was the darkest black imaginable, and an earth that was boundlessly crimson. Heaven-devil fire raged, burning with utter madness as if to incinerate all prisoners within that world, destroying them in body and soul.

Sir Westdevil sat cross-legged outside of the heaven-devil world, his motions mirrored exactly by the illusory heaven-devil projection behind him. He was severely withered, and his aura was very weak. His Heaven-Devil Transformation had obviously required him to pay a heavy price, and it was the same with the Seven Prisons Heaven-Devil World.

However, he didn't seem concerned about that. He was completely focused on assimilating Xu Qing. Xu Qing was so difficult to deal with that their clashes up to this point had been as effective as striking a wad of cotton.

Xu Qing had obviously sustained numerous blows that should have seriously injured him. But his gruish transformation ability and his perverse level of speed made it possible for him to appear at any spot at any time. If that were all there were to it, it might not have been a big deal. It wasn't as if Sir Westdevil didn't have defensive techniques. But Xu Qing's strange melting ability was very pernicious. Every time they made contact with each other, Sir Westdevil found that his energy, lineaments, defenses, and life force were melting. Normally speaking, he wouldn't have cared about that. But he couldn't sustain his Heaven-Devil Transformation for very long, and as a result, this fight was becoming extremely frustrating.

The only upside was that his killing intent was constantly growing stronger. Therefore, he was holding nothing back. He was using all trump cards possible to negate his opponent's advantage, and change the tide of battle to his favor. His devil energy rumbled as he constantly bolstered the heaven-devil world. At the same time, he sent the spear stabbing down into the world. As a result, the assimilating devil fire in the world grew more intense.

Within the heaven-devil world, Xu Qing's eyes glittered with mysterious light. He was currently ignoring how the red candle was devouring the devil fire. He was also ignoring how the candle's aura of awakening was growing stronger. His current focus was on the carving knife formed from his godly authority of fate. This was his first time to actually use the power of the godly authority of fate. However, he had done a lot of research and also had been given advice by the empress. As a result, he had a good initial understanding of the godly authority.

Therefore, he took a deep breath and extended his right hand. The carving knife shivered, then shot toward Xu Qing and settled onto his hand. It glittered brightly, sending out majestic and astonishing fluctuations that caused all the surroundings to pulsate.

Being on the outside, Sir Westdevil was unable to see anything on the inside. Therefore, he kept his guard up. Gritting his teeth, he burned his own heart-blood to bolster the assimilation process.

As for Xu Qing, his expression was grave. His heart wasn't beating, and his view of the world had become a monochrome made of black and white. The black was space, the white was time. Between the black and white were innumerable gray strands. They were the fate of all living beings.

When Xu Qing's heart stopped beating, his emotions became outstandingly calm. There were no fluctuations whatsoever. It was as if all bits of human nature had completely disappeared from within him. The only thing left was godly nature. What was more, this was a godliness that contained no mercy whatsoever. Nor did it contain death. It only contained control over fate.

"Sir Westdevil," called Xu Qing, his voice thrumming with the might of godly authority.

When his voice echoed out, Sir Westdevil shivered from head to toe. He had suddenly felt a profound sense of fear filling him, something that caused him to struggle merely to breathe.

Within the heaven-devil world, Xu Qing's breathing caused the countless gray threads to all vanish, with the exception of one that remained behind in front of him. It undulated constantly, all while growing larger. Astonishingly, when it was completely unfurled, it showed Sir Westdevil's past, present, and future.

The past was already sealed. The present was developing. The future was full of constants.

There were infinite images of Sir Westdevil's future, all floating in front of Xu Qing. As Xu Qing well knew, they were all possibilities of what could happen.

Zi Qing could select one of those and pick it as the only possible future. But Xu Qing's control of fate wasn't about influenced constants. It was about creating variables. Therefore, he took his own will and put it into the carving knife, then sliced out a first stroke.

That stroke didn't require any sort of innate artistic ability, as it didn't matter if the final product resembled the original. The only relevant things were the thoughts and desires of the person doing the carving.

Xu Qing's thought consisted of one concept.

This person must die.

The first carving stroke formed an image of Sir Westdevil dying. It was a miserable death in which he was decapitated and his body shriveled up. This was reaped karma.

Next, Xu Qing's hand moved as he carved the second concept. This time, in order to lead to the reaped karma, he added the sown karma.

The head of the corpse is lopped off by The Emperor's Sword!

The carving knife fell, and the image in front of Xu Qing showed The Emperor's Sword beheading Sir Westdevil from behind. The moment the image took shape, Xu Qing shivered and his mind spun. He coughed up a massive mouthful of blood, and the entire heaven-devil world shook.

Something incredibly terrifying was coming. It was a transformation to fate!

That was because, before this moment, though Sir Westdevil's countless future constants did contain versions of him dying, they weren't all instances of him dying, and definitely none in which he was killed by The Emperor's Sword.

Originally speaking, nothing like that existed. But now those images had appeared, and as they were sealed into Sir Westdevil's fate threads, he gained an additional future. What was more, it was the only future that had anything to do with The Emperor's Sword. That indicated that, as long as The Emperor's Sword appeared in his presence, then Sir Westdevil's future could not end with any other possibility.

This was the power of a god. This was godly authority!

Unfortunately, the price to pay was enormous. As the image was carved, Xu Qing's five yin organs writhed, his soul filled with stinging pain, and blood sprayed out of his mouth. It wasn't just one mouthful of blood. It was seven or eight successive mouthfuls.

His powerful fleshly body suddenly showed signs of withering. A sense of weakness filled the depths of his soul, and quickly spread into his sea of consciousness.

Then his Emperor's Sword secret trove... suddenly erupted. The trove gate, which had already been opened, emitted raging sword energy. Within that secret trove, the emperor's soul was fused with The Emperor's Sword. And that sword had been powering up this entire time. As the sword energy rumbled, the actual sword trembled... and then shot forth.

It flew out of the trove gate, flew out of the sea of consciousness, pierced out of the inside of Xu Qing's body and emerged into the open. In the blink of an eye, the heaven-devil world began to shake violently as The Emperor's Sword shot upward, its power crushing everything. It was bolstered by the emperor's soul, blessed by fate, and was able to conquer every obstacle!

This one sword... could pierce worlds! And it stabbed directly toward Sir Westdevil, who was still in his astonishing state of transformation.

Sir Westdevil's mind reeled, and his flesh seemed to be screaming out because of the danger. Lunging backward, he held nothing back to defend himself.

The heaven-devil spear shot toward The Emperor's Sword. When the two weapons clashed, the spear shattered!

The Emperor's Sword pierced onward toward the terrified Sir Westdevil. With only one burst of momentum, it stabbed right toward his neck!

When Sir Westdevil realized the sword was about to plunge into his neck and kill him, he let loose a roar of defiance. All of a sudden, an ancient bell appeared, surrounding him and providing an obstacle to the sword.

RUMBLE!

Cracks spread out over the bell, but it didn't explode! It actually blocked The Emperor's Sword!

Xu Qing sat cross-legged in the heaven-devil world, blood constantly spraying out of his mouth. This was the price for dealing with fate! He had to bear the consequences of the fate he carved. What was more, once the path of fate was set, he had to suffer the backlash of any attempts by the target to fight against that fate.

If he could deal with that, then the fate would be completed. But if he couldn't, that carved image of fate would fail. The carver had to pay an extremely heavy price.

At the moment, Xu Qing's soul was weak, and cracks were already spreading out across his fleshly body. When it came to dealing with a chosen like Sir Westdevil, there was still a big disparity in battle prowess. Killing a person like this was going to be extremely difficult.

Up in midair, Sir Westdevil was breathing heavily as he stared at The Emperor's Sword on the other side of the bell. However, after sensing that his ancient treasure had managed to resist the attack, the fear in his heart finally began to subside. And thus, his eyes turned cold.

"You're not Sir Blood Dust!" he said. "That sword is not something that comes from my species. And this power... you're stirring my fate! That's the power of a god! Who are you really...?"

Sir Westdevil's eyes glittered with understanding. And then a sense of wild joy rose within him as he realized that, if this person had a secret identity, it was highly likely that Lu Lingzi would also have another identity. This was something big. Furthermore, if he was wrong about that speculation, it wouldn't really matter. But if he was right, then he would earn an incredible amount of battle credit!

Shivering slightly, he began to contemplate methods of getting away from this fight. At the same time he pulled out a jade slip to send a message to his Master. However, as he backed up and took out the jade slip... he suddenly saw something playing out that hadn't previously existed in his fate.

From the moment he had gained enlightenment of his authority, the heaven-devil behind him had always moved in harmony with him, no matter what type of battle he had fought. But not now. It was the first time it had ever happened.

Instead, it looked down at Sir Westdevil, and there was greed in its eyes. Then it lunged toward him!

Sir Westdevil's mind and heart were instantly thrown into chaos as he looked over his shoulder in incredulity. There wasn't time for him to shout out, much less take evasive action. The suddenly traitorous heaven-devil slammed into him.

A howl of anguish erupted from Sir Westdevil's mouth. He wanted to struggle free. He wanted to fight back. But he was powerless. This heaven-devil was almost the same as him, but stronger, and thus, none of his efforts amounted to anything. He could do nothing as the heaven-devil entered him and began attacking him wildly.

Down in the heaven-devil world, Xu Qing's face was pale and he was getting very weak. His soul was listless. However, his eyes shone with merciless coldness. He was not surprised by any of this.

If Sir Westdevil's gray fate threads could be magnified exponentially, it would be possible to see that the fate image Xu Qing had carved included the rebellion of the heaven-devil! That was because Xu Qing's carving didn't contain only two concepts. It contained a third! And in that third concept, the heaven-devil turned traitor!

Xu Qing was fully aware of the extent of his battle prowess, and knew that directly fighting a chosen like Sir Westdevil would be extremely difficult. However, just because he couldn't kill someone didn't mean that person couldn't die.

Therefore, he had carved out that the true death fate of Sir Westdevil wasn't because of The Emperor's Sword, but rather, because his own heaven-devil revolted against him! It was a case of using *four ounces to move a thousand catties*.

That was why the first concept that he had carved wasn't just a simple beheading. It was also a withering of his body, something akin to life force being sucked out. That reaping of karma was the result of two things. First was the beheading by The Emperor's Sword, while the withering came from the heaven-devil rebellion.

That was why the second concept Xu Qing carved was: *The head of the corpse is lopped off by The Emperor's Sword!*

What was beheaded was the corpse! That was because Xu Qing couldn't sustain the fate of the Emperor's Sword executing this opponent. However, he could sustain the instigation of the heaven-devil rebellion.

More blood sprayed out of Xu Qing's mouth as, outside of the heaven-devil world, Sir Westdevil screamed, and his body rapidly withered. The heaven-devil was absorbing his life force.

That included the bell blocking The Emperor's Sword. And then, since the sword had nothing opposing it, it slashed forth and beheaded the corpse of Sir Westdevil. It was... exactly the same as the first concept from Xu Qing's carving!

"Sir Westdevil was not killed by me. He was killed by the heaven-devil." Xu Qing rose to his feet as the heaven-devil world collapsed around him.

Chapter 1054: A Woman Battles Fiercely to Protect Her Children

Chapter 1054: A Woman Battles Fiercely to Protect Her Children

The 50,000 kilometers of black fire went out. The heaven-devil prison formed by the seven major worlds collapsed. The dome of heaven returned, the lands went back to normal. The mountains and rivers were there just as before.

Xu Qing stood on the level ground, his face pale and his soul weak. The ground before him, and the front of his garment, were both soaked in the blood that he had been coughing up constantly. In fact, the act of standing had caused a bit more blood to ooze out of his mouth and drip down to the ground.

He took a breath. This was the first time he had officially used the godly authority of fate. Considering that, it was also his first time getting a deeper understanding of the paramount godly authority. The more he understood it, the more he feared it. This godly authority was terrifying to the extreme. The price to use it... was similarly extreme.

It was clear that if he hadn't come up with a third concept, then it wouldn't have been possible for him to sustain the effort of carving Sir Westdevil's fate. And in all likelihood, he would have ended up dead.

And even though he had used that third concept, and thus had been able to *move a thousand catties with four ounces*, he had still been forced to pay a huge price to transform Sir Westdevil's fate and put him to death.

His soul was now very weak. His fleshly body was cracked and crumbling. His cultivation base power was running on fumes, and both his cultivator authority and godly authority were extremely dim.

This godly authority is not something I can use casually....

Taking a deep breath, he wiped away the blood from the ground, then turned to leave.

Sir Westdevil's death was definitely going to cause some big waves, and sticking around would be dangerous. However, he had only taken a single step before he stopped and frowned grimly.

A flame wisp had appeared on the red candle on his back! It was already so intensely hot that everything in the area was rippling and distorting. The candle's aura of awakening had surged, and it seemed to be taking advantage of the moment to ignite itself. If it fully ignited, Xu Qing wasn't sure how much danger he would be in, but the sense of crisis in his heart was already significant.

That sense of crisis was like a sea of flames threatening to overwhelm him. As a result, Xu Qing couldn't leave the area. The most important thing right now was to handle the red candle.

Therefore, he didn't hesitate for an instant to temporarily ignore his injuries and tap into his authority of erasure, all while reaching out to Little Shadow as well. The authority shot toward the red candle, and Little Shadow trembled and followed.

In the middle of the candle, the flame wisp glittered.... It was just on the verge of igniting!

When Little Shadow and the authority arrived, they worked together to suppress the candle and extinguish it. Because the candle had absorbed the devil fire, it was now showing signs of waking up.

Thankfully, Xu Qing had worked quickly and efficiently to smash the heaven-devil world, and therefore, the candle had only been able to absorb a limited amount of the devil fire. And the combined effort of Little Shadow and the authority of erasure immediately proved effective.

It didn't take long before the flame wisp vanished along with a defiant howl. The fluctuations of awakening had been thoroughly crushed.

Unfortunately, the sense of crisis didn't disappear. It came partly from the dome of heaven, and partly from Sir Westdevil's withered carcass. The former was outright terrifying, while the other brought lingering traces of fear. The carcass was so withered it was starting to smoke.

Then the smoke converged into the image of a heaven-devil. When it formed, it didn't look at Xu Qing, but rather, at the horizon. Then it vanished, leaving behind only a few words.

"The fruit of Sir Westdevil had not ripened. But since you stirred his fate, I had no choice but to devour that fruit early. You need to make up for any karma going forward.... I hope that you can avoid the coming deadly trial. If you don't die... then I'll find you in the future."

Normally, Xu Qing would have found such words to be very thought-provoking. But at the moment, he was far more focused on that sense of crisis coming from the dome of heaven. That crisis surpassed anything from this heaven-devil, and it also surpassed Sir Westdevil himself. In fact, it surpassed any enemy cultivator Xu Qing had ever faced.

To him, it felt like a god! And that was because this was the power of an Imperial Sovereign who could indeed fight against gods. This wasn't an Imperial Sovereign who had just broken through, like Floating Fiend. Instead, this was someone who could truly be considered almighty within the Imperial Sovereign level.

Xu Qing's soul was trembling, his mind was spinning, and his authority was in chaos. The sensation of crisis rose explosively within him, and the shadow of death seemed to overwhelm everything. He wanted to flee, but he couldn't.

The sky pulsated as a massive mirror came into view. It was fully 500,000 kilometers in size, such that it was like heaven itself! It was circular and pitch black. And of course, everything it covered was cast into darkness.

Then... snowflakes started drifting out of the mirror, filling the darkness with snow. The snow was also black. There was no wind, but the snowflakes drifted about as if guided by natural and magical laws. It was as if the entire area had become a world of its own.

And Xu Qing was inside it. The heaven of that world was the black mirror, and it now seemed as if it was falling. Collapsing. It dropped an inch, and all of the mountains in that 500,000 kilometers blurred and vanished.

Then, the outline of all those mountains appeared within the mirror. They had been sucked into the nonexistent reality of the mirror.

Xu Qing shivered as cracks spread out across him, and a sensation of imminent death filled him. His eyes were already bloodshot, and he wanted to struggle, but couldn't. All he could do was cough up mouthful after mouthful of blood. In fact, blood was seeping out of him all over, until it ran down like a river. In the end, he simply couldn't stand up to this Imperial Sovereign.

When this Imperial Sovereign took action, Xu Qing's godly authority and cultivator authority became meaningless.

The black mirror that was now the canopy of heaven dropped down by another inch. Within the 500,000-kilometer area, all of the rivers blurred and disappeared. Their outlines appeared in the mirror.

Next came the lands. All the lands in the 500,000-kilometer area rippled and disappeared.

And then, within the black mirror, something else appeared. It was... an outline of Xu Qing himself, slowly starting to form. Death had come. All it would take would be for the mirror to drop down another inch.

Xu Qing was shivering from head to toe, and he was soaked in blood. And yet, there was no despair in his eyes. Instead, there was a crazy look. He knew that he wasn't a match for an Imperial Sovereign. Whether it was Floating Fiend or whatever cultivator he was dealing with now, it didn't matter if he had some destined opportunity and a boost to his battle prowess. Imperial Sovereigns were not people he could harm. However... that didn't mean he was out of options here.

Looking very crazy, he threw his head back and roared. And then, just as he was about to burst into motion, the black mirror... dropped down another inch. It seemed that something very dramatic was about to happen.

But then, a burly figure appeared out of thin air. He entered the world created by the black mirror, approached Xu Qing, and stood in front of him. He looked like a mountain himself, towering over the chaotic battlefield.

He was Lu Lingzi!

Of course, it was more accurate to say that it was Empress Summer Departure in the form of Lu Lingzi. The moment shē appeared in front of Xu Qing, shē blocked the tempest winds, blocked death, and dispelled all the pressure weighing down on him.

Xu Qing relaxed slightly. Now he didn't have to put everything on the line. Clasp hands, he bowed. The empress looked up at the black mirror above. The passage of that gaze was like a grand army that could send fires raging and mountains crumbling into ruin. And that gaze... focused on the middle of the mirror.

It was a gaze full of power, and it caused the black mirror to tremble. It was a gaze of abstrusity, and it caused a pinpoint of light to appear within the black mirror.

That pinpoint of light was a sun in the night. The moment it appeared, boundless white light spread out everywhere, shattering the darkness with unstoppable momentum. It spread through the mirror. Where it went, the outlines of the mountains in the mirror vanished. The rivers and lakes and lands and even the blurry outline of Xu Qing were all wiped away.

The black mirror was turning white!

When the outlines disappeared, everything in the 500,000-kilometer area reversed. Everything was returning. This was a confrontation between 'Lu Lingzi' and this unknown Imperial Sovereign. And the confrontation wasn't over.

At about the same time as the mirror turned white, a cold harrumph echoed through the sky. The mirror shattered, and every bit of white turned back into black. And then a middle-aged man appeared. The shattered bits of the mirror converged in the dome of heaven.

It was... the seventeenth Imperial Sovereign of the western Devilbirds. He was none other than Sir Westdevil's Master.

He hovered in the sky looking at the empress for a moment, then flicked his sleeve, causing endless amounts of black snow to appear.

The empress' facial expression didn't change as her forehead split open and a blood-red eye appeared. Instantly, the sky rippled as a large red sun rose behind the seventeenth Imperial Sovereign.

The empress coolly said, "Sir Blood Dust, as you know, my authority relates to wind. Do you know how the authority of wind manifests at a higher level?"

Xu Qing inhaled and shook his head.

The empress' expression remained placid. "Air has weight. And so does wind. Watch."

The empress reached a hand out and pushed it down.

Instantly, the red sun behind the seventeenth Imperial Sovereign blurred. Then, all of the air in the 500,000-kilometer area started converging there. In the blink of an eye, the effects spread beyond 500,000 kilometers to 5,000,000... and the movement created wind.

In the briefest of moments, a rumbling tempest formed. But the real deadly attack didn't come from the wind, but rather... the weight of the air.

That weight all bore down on the seventeenth Imperial Sovereign, causing his expression to flicker. He was unable to resist and unable to flee. Under the consummate force of this authority, he immediately fell down toward the ground below. The ground quaked as he slammed into it, and there was suppressed, unable to free himself no matter how he struggled.

And then an even more shocking scene played out. The air converged on him, weighing down with such intensity that it broke open his defenses and entered his body, causing him to scream shrilly. Numerous wounds opened up, yet no blood flowed out. Instead, it went inward.

The pain was incredible.

Lu Lingzi was just that horrifyingly mighty. It was the first time that mightiness was being made manifest among the western Devilbirds!

Chapter 1055: Turn Around

The ground trembled with lingering aftershocks.

The seventeenth Imperial Sovereign's struggles were so ineffective that he couldn't even launch a counterattack. It was clear that this Imperial Sovereign's understanding of his personal authority was far inferior to Lu Lingzi's understanding.

That was especially true of the wounds. They were innumerable. All the air from the 5,000,000-kilometer area poured into him, seeping into every crevice of his fleshly body and soul, as if to completely fill them. When the process was complete, the seventeenth Imperial Sovereign would be destroyed in body and soul.

The dramatic scene was so shocking that, almost instantly, people started showing up to see what was going on. Some came as their true selves, others sent divine will. Some had grave expressions, others were shocked, and there were some who seemed thoughtful. And yet all of them were equally taken aback!

"It's hard to believe this Lu Lingzi has achieved such a deep level of understanding about this authority!"

"No wonder Grand Emperor Devilbird is taking him seriously. And it's also no surprise that the Lan Clan's plot against him failed so spectacularly!"

"And then there's that Sir Blood Dust.... He's definitely not somebody to take lightly. And he clearly has more secrets besides having the Netherflame Secret Magic. It's just too bad that Lu Lingzi covered for him during his fight with Sir Westdevil."

"Yeah, but it's very telling that the heaven-devil formed from Sir Westdevil's authority just up and fled. It was probably some unknown method that caused the heaven-devil to turn traitor."

"That heaven-devil authority might be shockingly deadly, and can give the enlightened astonishingly quick progress. But the side effects can be very difficult to deal with. You're constantly dealing with the danger of the heaven-devil rebelling and turning on you."

As various parties reeled in shock, Xu Qing came to his own conclusions about what was going on.

The empress' arrival didn't just lead to him sighing with relief. It also confirmed his previous speculation; the empress wanted to have the initiative here in the lands of the western Devilbirds.

And the empress had seized that initiative just now, by taking all the air in a 5,000,000-kilometer area and directing it at the seventeenth Imperial Sovereign.

This was how to establish prestige. And it was also a way to send a message.

Xu Qing suddenly realized he'd come to a better understanding of how to handle important matters. It was very much in line with what he had learned from Master Seventh.

He looked over at the struggling seventeenth Imperial Sovereign. From the way the Imperial Sovereign's face was distorted, Xu Qing could well imagine how terrifying it was to deal with that immense weight.

The empress' face remained calm the entire time. And then, instead of outright killing him, shē waited until the very last moment before closing the blood-red eye on hēr forehead. Shē retracted the authority.

The moment that eye closed, the sun shē had summoned vanished. The air that was weighing down on the Imperial Sovereign was scattered by the wind.

Without that immense weight on him, the seventeenth Imperial Sovereign's injuries quickly healed up. Then he blurred, vanished from the spot he occupied, and reappeared up in midair. There he looked at the empress, his expression complicated. He said nothing. He wasn't the only one to react in such a way. The others who had come to watch the fight were equally silent. This demonstration of superiority, followed by clear humility, was what a truly powerful expert was like.

"Can you move?" the empress asked Xu Qing.

He quickly nodded.

"Then let's go. We're returning to the eastern Devilbirds." The empress strode toward the horizon.

Xu Qing didn't hesitate to fly up into the air and follow hēr.

And thus, the Imperial Sovereigns of the western Devilbirds looked on as the empress led Xu Qing away through the dome of heaven. Eventually, they disappeared over the horizon. No one attempted to block their path.

Sir Westdevil had apparently been forgotten. Dead was dead.

It was only the seventeenth Imperial Sovereign who looked over at Sir Westdevil's corpse, which was a withered husk after having been attacked by the heaven-devil. Eventually, he sighed, cleared his thoughts, and left.

The trip to the west was over. The wind returned, blowing through the 5,000,000-kilometer area, and clearing the area of the gazes of all onlookers.

On the wing-like dao altar of the western Devilbirds, Grand Emperor Devilbird sat cross-legged looking at the scene play out. When it was all over, he retracted his gaze.

“How amusing,” he murmured. “Is shē really so confident I’ll let hēr do what shē wants?”

Cruel laughter rang out in response to his words. At the same time, a black figure wreathed in flames and chains appeared in midair. “Of course shē’s confident!”

Grand Emperor Devilbird looked up at the black-cloaked figure. A long moment passed, and then he laughed.

By now, the empress was nearing the border between the west and east. Xu Qing was following close behind. The empress hadn’t said anything during the journey, nor had Xu Qing. Thinking back to everything that happened in the west, he tried to come up with a more accurate theory about what was really going on.

After the empress arrived in the western Devilbird lands, Grand Emperor Devilbird issued orders that set the tone for what was to come. After that, most of the Imperial Sovereigns issued challenges.

Given the balance of power between the eastern and western Devilbirds, it’s not hard to figure out what’s going on. The Devilbirds from the two areas are at odds with each other.

That’s especially true considering the sensitive nature of Lu Lingzi’s status. He’s an apprentice of Grand Emperor Netherflame, and is also a consummate chosen among the eastern Devilbirds. He thwarted the Lan Clan’s plot, then accumulated enough bloodline power to become an Imperial Sovereign.

Then he did something really outstanding. He revealed the secret of Grand Emperor Netherflame’s secluded meditation facilities to everyone. Without shedding any blood, he united the Imperial Sovereigns of the eastern Devilbirds, and smoothly took over the power structures and resources of the Lan Clan.

During that time, he handed out numerous invitations to enter the secluded meditation facilities of Grand Emperor Netherflame, which secretly implied that he was actually plotting to kill certain people. That, in turn, broke down the barrier between the east and west, and ensured that the western Devilbirds could also get involved.

After analyzing all of this, Xu Qing was starting to realize why the western Devilbirds were acting in the way they were.

Lu Lingzi’s background, status, methods, and the fact that he was rising to prominence ensured that many in the Devilbird holy land were watching him now. However, there were some things that obviously weren’t so simple. That was why, after Grand Emperor Devilbird set the tone for things, the western Devilbirds had obviously been given an unstated mission to crush Lu Lingzi.

But the empress didn’t face that challenge head-on. Instead, I was sent to deliver challenges, which meant that shē kept the initiative.

Xu Qing could thus come to the conclusion that he had successfully accomplished his mission. That was why the empress had taken such forceful action when the seventeenth Imperial Sovereign showed up.

I guess the big question is whether or not Grand Emperor Devilbird saw through all of this. And if he did, does it mean that he had some reason for letting it all happen?

Xu Qing looked at the empress in front of him as he considered the matter. He had already come up with a possible answer to the question....

In that manner, time passed.

The empress was neither in a hurry nor moving slowly. As the afterglow of sunset shone onto the tenth Imperial Sovereign mountain, the rogue cultivators there looked up at the two returning figures. As they bowed their heads in excitement and reverence, Xu Qing and the empress landed on the mountain.

Upon entering the grand hall, Xu Qing bowed, then hesitated briefly before telling the empress about the red candle tattoo.

The empress listened, then calmly said, “And here I thought you were going to keep hiding it. Turn around and remove your outer robe.”[1]

Xu Qing immediately removed his outer robe and turned his back to show the candle tattoo. After studying it in detail, the empress’ eyes glittered in surprise.

“That candle doesn’t come from Revered Ancient,” shē said in a cool voice. “It’s from an ancient organization in the Ninth Star Ring. I’ve never heard of it transferring onto the body of a cultivator. But I do know that, when ignited, it can incinerate souls. I could help you seal it. However, to you, this thing can be both a detriment and a blessing. It just depends on how you use it. Therefore, I’ll leave it up to you whether or not to seal it.”

With that, shē walked to the end of the hall and sat down cross-legged.

Xu Qing considered the matter as he put his clothes back on. For the time being, he wasn’t going to ask the empress to seal it. He would study it further before making a final decision. Clasp hands, he bowed, then turned to leave.

That was when the empress’ voice once again echoed out. “Don’t leave the Imperial Sovereign mountain. In five days, you’ll take a command medallion from me to the Immortal Skills Hall of the eastern Devilbirds.”

Xu Qing blinked a few times and suddenly found himself thinking about his Eldest Brother. He turned to look at the empress. “Your Majesty, the eastern Devilbirds’ Immortal Skills Hall is where—”

The empress snorted coldly. “They sent out a notice yesterday inviting all eastern Devilbird Imperial Sovereigns to send emissaries to witness their grand immortal adept ceremony.

“They also notified everyone that the apprentice of the former grand immortal adept, Yue Dong, was competing with the current grand elder to earn the title of grand immortal adept. However, Yue Dong was defeated and taken captive by the grand elder.

“In five days, the Immortal Skills Hall will hold their succession ceremony, and will take Yue Dong’s Six Thieves Deceive Life away. The ceremony has to be approved by all of the Imperial Sovereigns, which is why everyone was invited to bear witness.”

An odd expression appeared on Xu Qing’s face. Obviously... the empress knew who Yue Dong really was. However, when he heard that his Eldest Brother had been defeated and taken captive by the grand elder of the Immortal Skills Hall, it seemed to him... that it was probably all part of his Eldest Brother’s plan. He was all too familiar with his unreliable and crazy Eldest Brother.

“I want you to head over there and see how they plan to take away Yue Dong’s immortal skill,” the empress said.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Xu Qing said loudly.

Upon seeing Xu Qing react in this way, the empress reached up and kneaded the bridge of her nose. Shē had been worried all along that unforeseen variables would pop up. That was why shē had tried to send Xu Qing and Erniu away, only for them to show up anyway. The only question now was which of them would cause more trouble.

“Generally speaking, the Imperial Sovereigns don’t interfere in the internal affairs of the Immortal Skills Hall. They’ll support whoever wins. Once you’re over there, *do not* cause a big scene. And tell your Elder Brother that High God Sunfire previously requested that he be sent to fight for the Firemoons in the war. I tactfully refused.”

Xu Qing could hear the veiled threat in her words. Quickly bowing, he bid farewell.

The empress shook her head as shē watched him leave. *No wonder their Master sends them out instead of keeping them around....*

Five days passed in a flash.

At dawn, Xu Qing flew off of the tenth Imperial Sovereign mountain and headed at top speed toward the eastern Devilbirds’ Immortal Skills Hall.

He wasn’t feeling worried at all. In contrast, he was looking forward to what was coming.

1. If directly translated from Chinese, what the empress literally says is “take off your clothes.” However, she’s not asking him to strip naked, so I’m adding a bit of clarity here. Traditional types of ancient Chinese clothing for men would usually involve multiple layers of garments, including pants and one or two layers of robes. Of course there could be additional elements. If you’ve watched your fair share of kung fu and wuxia movies, you’ll know what I’m talking about. In movies, especially the older kung fu ones, the male characters will inevitably end up topless during fight scenes as their robe is either taken off or ripped off. Anyway, in this passage, the empress is obviously asking Xu Qing to take off the clothing covering his back. ㄟ

Chapter 1056: Miserable Niuniu

Xu Qing didn't feel any reason to be worried about his Eldest Brother's safety. In all the time he had known his Eldest Brother, he had never seen an instance in which Erniu suffered. It was always other people who did the suffering. Among his victims was a godly entity from the Forbidden Sea, the three soul fragments of the Ghost Emperor, and most impressive of all... Crimson Mother and even the broken face of Eminent Desolation. Erniu had bitten chunks out of all of them.

From Xu Qing's perspective, it seemed completely impossible that his crazy Eldest Brother would somehow meet misfortune in one of the Immortal Skills Halls in the Devilbird holy land. After all, his Eldest Brother had gone to the Immortal Skills Hall on purpose, and before leaving, he had seemed solemnly confident.

What was more, Xu Qing was going as an emissary of the tenth Imperial Sovereign, to bear witness to the event and see what the fuss was all about. In the past, he was always going on big jobs *with* his Eldest Brother. This was his first chance to go watch things play out as a spectator.

That said, I should do my best to keep things from getting out of hand. Given what the empress had asked of him, he felt like it was his responsibility to make sure his Eldest Brother didn't cause too much of a scene. But when he thought about how much his Eldest Brother tended to stir up trouble, he felt a bit less confident. *I can at least try to convince him to keep a low profile.*

Feeling a bit better, he sped on his way. About four hours later, as he flew over the horizon, he saw the city where he and his Eldest Brother had parted ways some time ago. The eastern Devilbirds' Immortal Skills Hall was located about 500 kilometers north of that very city.

Xu Qing didn't pause for a moment. He flew over the city, crossed those 500 kilometers, and arrived at a white lake! Very much like the western Devilbirds' Immortal Skills Hall, this hall was built on a lake. The difference was that one lake was black and the other was white.

This one was called Deceive Life Lake. In the middle of the lake was a palace that looked like a temple. It was pitch black and made of jade, making the contrast between it and the lake very striking.

The lake in western Devilbird lands had been full of immortal adepts seeking enlightenment. This one was different. Perhaps the place was emptier, or perhaps it was because of the ceremony that was about to take place. Either way, there were no immortal adepts seated in meditation. The place looked empty. The black Immortal Skills Hall itself looked to be in bad shape, and the damage didn't look old. In fact, it looked like it had been inflicted recently.

Taking it all in, Xu Qing crossed the lake and stopped in midair above the Immortal Skills Hall. Keeping his hands clasped behind his back, he said, "Would the immortal adept in charge here please come out to see me immediately?"

His voice boomed like thunder, causing the air to ripple and distort, and sending waves rolling out over the lake.

Eight figures flew out from the Immortal Skills Hall and toward Xu Qing. The person in the lead was a middle-aged immortal adept. When he looked at Xu Qing, his pupils constricted, and he suddenly assumed a much more respectful posture. Stopping a few dozen meters away, he bowed deeply.

“Well met, Fellow Daoist Blood Dust. We offer respectful greetings. We were busy with other guests that had just arrived, and thus neglected to receive you promptly. Please don’t take offense, Fellow Daoist.”

The immortal adept seemed very sincere. As for the others gathered behind him, they had very serious looks on their faces as they ducked their heads and bowed.

The reason for their attitude was that Sir Blood Dust’s reputation had skyrocketed recently in the Devilbird holy land. News about his challenges to the western Devilbirds, and especially his fight with Sir Westdevil, had already spread far and wide. When you added in the fact that he was backed by the tenth Imperial Sovereign, it ensured that the struggling Immortal Skills Hall wouldn’t dare to be negligent when dealing with him.

Xu Qing kept his expression neutral as he nodded his head. When the middle-aged immortal adept saw that Xu Qing didn’t seem offended, he breathed an inner sigh of relief. He had heard about how ruthless Sir Blood Dust usually was, and how deadly his divine abilities were.

Keeping his guard up, he gestured and said, “Please, follow me inside, Fellow Daoist Blood Dust!”

However, that was when Xu Qing turned to look at the horizon.

Looking stunned, the middle-aged immortal adept looked in the same direction. Laughter rang out from that spot.

“Is that Fellow Daoist Blood Dust over there?” A burly man was approaching. He wore a long blue robe and had eyes that flashed like lightning. As he neared, he pulsed with the cultivation base fluctuations of a nine-world Smoldering God, which created massive pressure in the area.

The middle-aged immortal adept quickly bowed. “Greetings, Revered One!”

Xu Qing’s facial expression was the same as ever. Based on Sir Blood Dust’s memories, he knew that this person was the eldest son of the fifth Imperial Sovereign. His name was Lin Kun.[1]

However, Sir Blood Dust and Lin Kun never had much dealings, and Lin Kun had obviously not given him much thought. But things were clearly different now.

Xu Qing clasped hands and bowed slightly.

Lin Kun neared, laughing heartily. “There’s no need for such formality, Fellow Daoist Blood Dust. I heard all about your heroic actions among the western Devilbirds, and I was cheering you on the entire time!” It was hard to say how sincere Lin Kun was being. Both his facial expression and his wording seemed very cordial. “Now that I can lay eyes on you in person, I can tell you really are a hero!”

It was only natural that a person's true intentions couldn't be determined by just looking at their facial expression. As such, Xu Qing wouldn't form a good opinion based on only a few words. He shook his head.

"It was all due to the protection of an Imperial Sovereign," he said. "Your humble servant is a mere follower of an Imperial Sovereign. Granted, I earned some prestige. But if you had been in my shoes, Fellow Daoist Lin, you would probably have become even more famous."

Lin Kun smiled even more broadly in response to Xu Qing's sincerity. He then went on to say a few more things, hidden within which were some probing words.

Xu Qing had plenty of experience in this kind of thing. He engaged in conversation naturally, not making any mistakes, and even managing to cleverly praise Lin Kun. On the surface, at least, it seemed that the two of them were getting along very well. And thus, the middle-aged immortal adept led them into the Immortal Skills Hall.

On the way, Lin Kun looked at the damage that had been done to the Immortal Skills Hall. Smiling, he looked at Xu Qing.

"Brother Blood Dust, while you were over in western Devilbird lands, some big things happened here at the Immortal Skills Hall. The apprentice of the former grand immortal adept returned. Her name is Yue Dong. She wanted to take over as the new grand immortal adept. However, several of the famous elders opposed her, and the friction got really intense.

"Yue Dong has some serious skills, and is also very charismatic. Not only did she win over quite a few of the other immortal adepts, but also, she got outside help. She somehow managed to convince the young lord of the Yun Clan to help her kill some of the elders!

"Given how things were playing out, Yue Dong was on the track to victory. And if she won, she would have become the grand immortal adept. But at the most critical point of the fight, the grand elder came out of several years of secluded meditation. He immediately stepped in, stopped the fighting, arrested Yue Dong, and calmed everything down."

As they walked along, Lin Kun made his explanation and also kept an eye on Xu Qing to gauge his reaction.

Upon hearing Yue Dong's name, Xu Qing's eyes turned cold.

Lin Kun smiled faintly. "Brother Blood Dust, I heard that you and Yue Dong hate each other. Maybe you won't be able to strike the killing blow yourself, but at least you'll be able to witness the end of her life. Hopefully that will ease some of your frustration."

Xu Qing shook his head. "No. I hope she comes out on top. If she does, then I'll have the chance to personally kill her. It doesn't sit well with me to let others do things in my stead."

Lin Kun nodded. He could sympathize with such sentiment, and in fact, if he were in Sir Blood Dust's shoes, he would feel exactly the same. If he had an enemy he simply wasn't strong enough to get revenge on, it wouldn't be worth worrying about. But if he did have the means to get revenge, then doing it personally would be the best.

They continued to chat as the middle-aged immortal adept led them down a long corridor in the Immortal Skills Hall. Eventually, they reached a circular arena. It was magnificently constructed, being filled with carvings of ancient mutant beasts. It also had portraits of outstanding heroes who wielded immortal skills in the time of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity.

And in the middle of it all was a woman suspended in midair by means of six iron chains, arms and legs splayed so that she resembled the character 大. She was none other than Yue Dong. Her hair was disheveled, she was soaked with blood, and she wasn't moving. She had so much blood on her it seemed like she probably didn't have any left inside to bleed out. She looked like she hardly had any breath in her.

Arrayed around her were ten huge thrones. Each one was made from immortal jade, making them look like scintillating treasures, or like ten beautiful suns.

Six of the thrones were already occupied by cultivators. Some were men and some were women. Most shocking was that all of them were nine-world Smoldering Gods. They were all emissaries of Imperial Sovereign mountains.

When Xu Qing and Lin Kun entered, the six of them looked over. And they focused... on Xu Qing. Each individual knew what they were thinking, but no one else did. None would reveal any facial expression unless it was on purpose. Most looked calm, although some nodded at him.

Xu Qing reacted in kind. Then he and Lin Kun flew over to sit, each one of them on one of the thrones.

Xu Qing sat on the tenth throne. As he did, he looked at Yue Dong. The moment he did, he could tell that Erniu was fine. After all, he was well aware that Erniu had an endless supply of blood. How could he possibly bleed out?[2]

Is Eldest Brother deliberately trying to make the enemy think he's weak? Or is he trying to gain leverage somehow? I guess it doesn't matter. Presumably, he'll wait until just the right moment to turn things around. The reason for all of this is definitely to make sure this grand elder is convinced that Eldest Brother can't do anything to turn the situation around. I just wish I knew the details of the plan. I wonder what Eldest Brother is going to do next?

As Xu Qing was wrapped up in such thoughts, Yue Dong shivered slightly. It was as if she realized something was going on, and was trying to wake up. Unfortunately, her wounds were so severe that it wasn't even possible for her to open her eyes.

Time ticked by. Eventually, the emissaries from the other two Imperial Sovereigns arrived and took their places.

Then the officiator emerged. He was an old man wearing a black robe, with long white hair. What was more, he was so withered he almost looked like a skeleton. Strangely, he was backed by projections that resembled himself as a middle-aged man, a young man, and a boy. His true form carried a huge magic staff, and he pulsed with terrifying fluctuations that reminded Xu Qing of the majesty of the sea. This old man was different from any other Smoldering God he had ever encountered. What was more, he also pulsed with fluctuations of immortal skills.

His arrival caused the entire arena to quiet down. Everyone, including Xu Qing, looked at him with serious expressions.

“In compliance with the ancient decrees,” he said in a hoarse voice, “when a new grand immortal adept appears, all the Imperial Sovereigns will come to bear witness. That is why you have been invited here today.”

With that, he raised his magic staff and pointed it at Yue Dong. “Yue Dong betrayed the dao of the immortal skills. Thus, I invited everyone here, not just to bear witness to the rise of a new grand immortal adept, but also, to watch as she is stripped of her Six Thieves immortal seal. I hereby request that the emissaries of the Imperial Sovereign mountains take out their command medallions. The immortal assimilation ceremony is about to begin!”

1. Lin Kun: Lin is #18 on the list of 100 common Chinese surnames. It also means “woods, forest.” Kun is one of the Eight Trigrams that symbolizes earth, and is generally associated with yin and feminine things. Madam Deathblade says that this is a “handsome and ordinary-sounding name.” ㊦

2. I was initially inclined to render Yue Dong like this: ‘Yue Dong,’ considering that ‘she’ really isn’t Yue Dong at all. However, that quickly got too complicated. So going forward in this scene, I’ll just render the name as Yue Dong even though we all know she’s really Erniu. This is the same way I’ve been handling Lu Lingzi who is really the empress. ㊦

Chapter 1057: A Megavillain from Antiquity

In the eastern Devilbirds’ Immortal Skills Hall, the black-robed grand elder had a voice that sounded like metal scraping against rock. His voice seemed to overlap with itself, probably because as the old version of himself spoke, so did the middle-aged version behind him, as well as the young man and boy versions. It was a very gruish sight.

Clearly, though the grand elder didn’t carry the legacy of the immortal skill Six Thieves Deceive Life, whatever immortal skill he did possess was spectacular.

When his words finished echoing out into the arena, he swung his magic staff out into the air. Though it didn’t seem to strike anything, the sound of a tolling bell rang out. It was like a crack of thunder, and at the same time, seemed like the cry of countless living beings. It created a mountain-toppling, sea-draining momentum that distorted the air and blurred everything in the area.

In fact, it caused an enormous vortex to spring up. The vortex rotated, becoming like a black hole that led to parts unknown.

The emissaries from the Imperial Sovereign mountains looked on intently. As for Xu Qing, his expression was the same as ever, but he was clearly intrigued. The other nine emissaries all seemed thoughtful in various ways, and were clearly seeing the grand elder in a new light.

“Emissaries from the Imperial Sovereign mountains,” the old man said, “in compliance with the ancient agreement, please produce your command medallions and permit the Immortal Skills Hall to activate the Immortal-Refining Pill Cauldron!”

The emissaries from the Imperial Sovereign mountains exchanged glances. Then the representative from the fifth Imperial Sovereign mountain waved his hand, sending a command medallion flying out to hover over his head, where it cast out dazzling light. The other emissaries followed suit.

The agreement between the Immortal Skills Hall and the Imperial Sovereign mountains was designed in such a way that the former was kept in check by the latter. And every time a new grand immortal adept was named, that person was required to gain the approval of all the mountains.

There were even more restrictions in place when it came to using the Immortal-Refining Pill Cauldron. It could only be activated by means of command medallions. After all, it was an extremely rare treasure that was one-of-a-kind in the Devilbird holy land. In the past, it represented the epitome of orthodox governance among the eastern Devilbirds. And even nowadays, when the east was in decline, it served as a deterrent to ensure the western Devilbirds' Immortal Skills Hall could never successfully make any moves.

Although there were technically limitations placed on the Immortal Skills Hall in the east, the reality was that the Imperial Sovereign mountains had never interfered in the hall's internal affairs.

After the other Imperial Sovereign mountain emissaries took out their command medallions, Xu Qing considered the situation briefly before doing the same.

Ten command medallions appeared, casting out a dazzling sea of light that poured into the vortex below. As a result, the vortex began to shine with many colors and rumble loudly. Then, astonishing, something emerged from the vortex.

It started with a skull! There was no flesh on it. It was pure bone, and it pulsed with astonishing malevolence. Next came a lid that was some 300 meters wide. After that came the enormous body of a cauldron.

Ultimately, what came out of the vortex was a massive pill cauldron that was several hundred meters in size! Unexpectedly, it was pure white, as it was crafted from bone. It was covered with innumerable magical symbols, and it pulsed with a sensation of malice and ancient time.

When it was out in the open, it seemed to bring with it a wind from antiquity, along with a begrudging, maddened roar. Everyone looked at it in shock.

There were only a few people present who had seen the Immortal-Refining Pill Cauldron in years past. Everyone else had only heard the stories about it, and were only seeing it in person for the first time.

Xu Qing was looking very closely at it. And there was one part that he was most interested in. The skull. There was something about it that seemed... familiar! All of a sudden, a very preposterous thought occurred to Xu Qing. However, before he could explore it, one of the other Imperial Sovereign mountain emissaries spoke.

“Grand Elder, is this one of the six bone cauldrons crafted by Grand Emperor Immortal Skill, the original creator of the immortal skills?”

The grand elder nodded, his eyes shining. “Grand Emperor Immortal Skill was human, and chose to be forgotten by history, which is why no one knows his actual name. Not even we practitioners of immortal skills know much about him.

“However, we immortal adepts have not forgotten his accomplishments. This pill cauldron was crafted during the early years of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity’s conquest of Revered Ancient. At that time, Grand Emperor Immortal Skill slaughtered six megavillains and used their skulls to create six cauldrons!

“The skull you see here is the refined skull of one of those megavillains. As for the bones that make this cauldron, it’s impossible to say which species they came from. The megavillain does look human, but at the same time, doesn’t seem human.

“Based on the traditions of the Immortal Skills Hall, the megavillain had a towering cultivation base comparable to that of a Grand Emperor. What was more, this person was well-known for being incredibly crazy, and possessed a level of greed that made peoples’ hair stand up in anger.

“By taking advantage of the wartime situation in Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity’s time, this megavillain was able to infiltrate countless species and steal treasures from them. In his final heist, he attempted to steal Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity’s imperial crown, but failed. The enraged Dark Serenity sent Grand Emperor Immortal Skill after him.

“Eventually, Grand Emperor Immortal Skill set up an incredible spell formation designed to trap and kill the megavillain. Because his greed was imbued into the cauldron, it’s possible to instill that greed into an immortal skill by use of the cauldron.”

All of the emissaries from the Imperial Sovereign mountains reacted with varying levels of surprise to the grand elder’s story. Although all of them had heard of or seen the cauldron before, this was their first time hearing about its background.

And then there was Xu Qing.... He already had a very strange feeling, and his previous speculation was now getting increasingly intense. And then his gaze shifted from the skull on the cauldron over to Yue Dong suspended in midair.

Don’t tell me that Eldest Brother... wants this cauldron?

As Xu Qing pondered that concept, the grand elder finished with his introduction of the cauldron and then threw his hands into the air.

“Having assumed the title of grand immortal adept, and with the command medallions of ten Imperial Sovereign mountains, I hereby activate this bone cauldron to refine the traitor Yue Dong into... a six thieves immortal pill!

“Cauldron: ignite!”

The huge bone cauldron immediately started vibrating. The white lake surrounding the Immortal Skills Hall started seething, and the water transformed into white fire. The fire then poured into the Immortal Skills Hall, filling the arena, and ultimately entering the bone cauldron. It hissed and popped as it burned. The grand elder’s eyes shone brightly as he pointed out with his magic staff.

“Cauldron: activate!” he shouted.

The lid of the cauldron rumbled loudly as it tipped to one side. Boundless fire then shot out of the cauldron and surrounded Yue Dong. The chains binding her couldn’t sustain the heat and began to melt. As a result, Yue Dong fell down into the flaming interior of the cauldron!

Xu Qing hesitated, but suppressed his impulse to take action. Instead, he would trust his Eldest Brother.

The grand elder strode forward to the cauldron, his black robe billowing around him. As everyone looked on, he took a deep breath, lifted his left hand, and then made a grasping gesture in the direction of the middle-aged version of himself behind him. The middle-aged figure collapsed into a mass of gore that swept into the grand elder’s hand.

“Fetch the Star-Shredding Wind from the starry sky and use it to catalyze the body!”

The wind he had just mentioned appeared, filled with a terrifying power that caused the gazes of all onlookers to harden.

The grand elder flicked his left hand, and the Star-Shredding Wind entered the cauldron. The cauldron rumbled loudly. Because the cauldron was open, everyone could see clearly that Yue Dong was inside. And when the Star-Shredding Wind hit her, it started shredding her flesh off of her. Next, the grand elder made a grasping gesture toward the younger version of himself, whose flesh crumbled into a black liquid.

“Fetch the Un-Withering Water from the darkness of hell to melt the soul!”

The black water rushed into the cauldron. When it hit Yue Dong, her expression distorted as if she were experiencing unimaginable pain. In fact, it was the pain of the soul melting.

Xu Qing’s expression flickered, but after looking closely at what was happening, he suppressed any urge to take action.

The grand elder’s ceremony continued. He had obviously prepared very thoroughly for this day. By using flesh from various stages of his immortal skill, he was creating his ‘immortal-refining’ materials. Next, the boy behind him shattered. It turned into a piercing howl.

“Fetch the Howl of Defiance from ancient antiquity to call to the immortal!”

The howl entered the cauldron.

Yue Dong shivered as threads of the seven emotions and six sensory pleasures transformed from intangible to tangible.

The grand elder hefted his magic staff, and it crackled with lightning and thunder. In a flash, the staff shattered and turned into flesh and blood. That magic staff was actually formed from the flesh and blood of the grand elder’s immortal skill. Now that flesh and blood quivered as it shot into the cauldron.

“Fetch the Lightning of Eternity from primal-chaos to form the seal!”

Things weren't over yet. There was one final step in the ceremony.

It was fire!

The ground quaked as eight scales flew out from the vortex in the cauldron. Each scale had glittering striations on it, and each one was a different color. When combined, they created an eight-colored glow. They included all of the seven ordinary colors, plus black! And those eight colors combined with the white fire from the lake made... a total of nine colors!

The nine-colored flame entered the cauldron and instantly began raging! It was Immortal-Seizing Flame, and stretching back to ancient times, it was the method the Immortal Skills Hall used to punish traitors. The grand elder's ceremony consisted of wind, rain, thunder, lightning, and fire! Now that they were complete, he raised his right hand.

"Cauldron: combine!"

He was preparing to close the cauldron and begin the refining process.

Xu Qing watched all of this play out. And though at first he was fairly certain everything was going according to his Eldest Brother's plan, he was now starting to waver. Everything seemed to be so real.

I can't let the grand elder do anything more!

With that, Xu Qing prepared to act. Except... that was when something extremely dramatic happened!

Inside the nearly-closed cauldron, the only thing left of Yue Dong was the head. The eyes on that head, which had been closed the entire time so far, suddenly opened! And they shone with an incredibly crazy look.

"I've been waiting for this exact moment, you old codger!"

Yue Dong suddenly spat out a mouthful of blood. It wasn't 'her' blood. Instead, it came from the grand elder. 'She' had acquired it secretly during their fight earlier.

As of now, the cauldron contained the middle-aged version of the grand elder, the young version, the boy version, as well as the flesh and blood from his staff. Now, with this mouthful of blood.... The cauldron contained five things connected closely to the grand elder.

And that conformed perfectly to Erniu's secret magic!

The Grand Five Ox Essence-Tracing Grand Merciless Dao!

That secret magic was able to lock onto the target and drag them into Erniu's presence.

A vortex appeared inside the cauldron, and it immediately exerted a massive gravitational force. At the same time, the skull that was part of the cauldron started glowing with a mysterious light. It was as if there was some sort of resonance bolstering it.

Outside of the cauldron, the grand elder's face fell as the secret magic locked onto him and... he vanished! When he reappeared... he was inside the cauldron! And then the cauldron's lid slammed shut.

All of the onlookers were shocked, and the nine emissaries from the other Imperial Sovereign mountains shot to their feet.

Chapter 1058: These Are My Damn Bones!

In the arena in the Immortal Skills Hall of the eastern Devilbirds, the bone cauldron thrummed loudly. It was surrounded by intense, raging, nine-colored fire. The magical symbols covering the cauldron were pulsing with dazzling light that caused the flames to rage even further. The refinement process... had officially begun!

Among the emissaries of the Imperial Sovereign mountains, there were three who had very grim expressions on their faces. The others seemed bewildered.

This turn of events was completely out of the blue. None of them could have predicted that the grand elder who had started this very ceremony would, in his moment of dominance, suddenly meet with failure. After all, the grand elder would never have invited the emissaries from the Imperial Sovereign mountains unless he was completely confident in succeeding.

Of course, in order to start this ceremony to begin with, he had to invite the emissaries. But regardless, he wouldn't have done so unless he was certain nothing unexpected would happen. And yet... something unexpected had just happened.

No one knew how Yue Dong had fooled the grand elder and suddenly seized the upper hand. But there was no doubt that there was now a lot of suspense over who would ultimately become the grand immortal adept.

Obviously, the identity of the grand immortal adept would have different ramifications on the interests of different Imperial Sovereign mountains. Some of them would prefer that the grand elder succeed. Others were partial toward Yue Dong. Yet others were neutral.

Among those who supported the grand elder were the third and seventh Imperial Sovereign mountains. And thus, when the dramatic developments occurred, the emissaries from those mountains wanted to interfere. Before they could, the emissaries from the fourth and sixth mountains blocked their paths. Those emissaries glared at each other without saying a word. Their actions revealed all their intentions, and instantly, the atmosphere became very tense.

As those four faced off, a whistling sound entered the Immortal Skills Hall. Along with it came a group of black-robed cultivators along with some immortal adepts. Leading them was a young man in a fancy robe.

Pulsing with killing intent, the young man and the cultivators following him immediately started fighting with the immortal adepts who supported the grand elder.

As for the young man, he shot with incredible speed past the fighting and leaped up into the air over the cauldron. As the air rippled and distorted, three immortal adepts who were personal friends of the grand elder rushed forth to meet him.

These three immortal adepts were extraordinary cultivators, and didn't hesitate to unleash a gruish immortal skill that caused three pitch-black fangs to shoot toward the young man in the fancy robe. The young man didn't seem surprised at all, as if he had anticipated that these three would attack him. Quickly taking out a bell, he threw it viciously toward the pill cauldron.

A clang rang out as the bell expanded to a size of several hundred meters, making it so large it could settle down over the cauldron, completely covering it. Waves of energy rolled off it in every direction. All of this takes a bit of time to describe, but actually happened in the time it takes a spark to fly off a piece of flint.

After the bell landed, the three immortal adepts' attacks landed on the young man in the fancy robe, and he tumbled backward with blood spraying out of his mouth. However, his voice was cold when he said, "That bell shows the attitude of the Yun Clan! Our clan backs Yue Dong as the grand immortal adept!"

The immortal adepts loyal to the grand elder glared grimly at the young man in the fancy robe. The emissaries from the Imperial Sovereign mountains also looked over at him.

"The Cloud Heaven Bell!"

The bell was quite famous among the eastern Devilbirds. It was a precious treasure of the Yun Clan, and that clan was just as powerful as the Lan Clan.[1]

As for this young man in the fancy robe, he was also quite famous. He was the young lord of the Yun Clan!

When the emissaries from the Imperial Sovereign mountains realized who he was, strange looks appeared on their faces. It was no secret among the eastern Devilbirds that Young Lord Yun had long been pursuing Yue Dong, and most intelligence reports indicated that he had helped her out recently at the Immortal Skills Hall. But everyone had assumed that he was acting on his own. After all, when Yue Dong was arrested, he had been driven out of the Immortal Skills Hall. But now... he arrived at precisely the right moment, and with the Yun Clan's precious treasure in tow!

That was a totally different thing. He was now here representing the Yun Clan! And that gave an entirely different meaning to this conflict for the position of grand immortal adept.

In reality, it wasn't the Yun Clan or the immortal adepts who were in control of this battle. It was... the ten Imperial Sovereign mountains. They were the ones with the true authority.

From the group of immortal adepts that supported the grand elder emerged a middle-aged man who clasped hands to the emissaries from the mountains. "Yue Dong betrayed the Immortal Skills Hall. Clearly, she hoodwinked Young Lord Yun into getting her the support of the Yun Clan. Unless Patriarch Yun himself shows up, the Immortal Skills Hall won't acknowledge the wishes of the Yun Clan. Therefore, I would like to request that all of you emissaries help quell this chaos. Afterward, the Immortal Skills Hall will definitely repay you for your kindness!"

Upon hearing this, Young Lord Yun's face turned grim. Clapping hands to the emissaries of the Imperial Sovereign mountains, he said, "This is an internal matter of the Immortal Skills Hall. Miss Yue Dong didn't betray the Immortal Skills Hall in any way. She is the only apprentice of the former grand immortal adept, and she commands the Six Thieves Deceive Life immortal skill. She is the true successor.

"The grand elder has evil intentions. Instead of respecting the traditions of the Immortal Skills Hall, he plotted to become the new grand immortal adept. He couldn't be more ruthless and malevolent! I sincerely hope that all of you can maintain your neutrality of years past, and not interfere in the internal affairs of the Immortal Skills Hall!"

Young Lord Yun clasped hands respectfully. Inside, he was very worried about how things would work out. When he went to get the precious treasure of his clan, things had gone very smoothly. That alone went to show what the patriarch of his clan was thinking.

If Young Lord Yun succeeded, then the support of the Yun Clan would turn into a reality. But if he failed, then the Yun Clan would say that he took the precious treasure without permission, and that they had never intended to interfere.

Thus, his gaze swept over the emissaries from the Imperial Sovereign mountains, especially those from the fourth and sixth mountains. He knew that both of them had secretly been in communication with Yue Dong, and actually supported her claim to the title.

The emissaries from the fourth and sixth mountains thought about it. They had already done everything they could by blocking the emissaries from the third and seventh mountains. If they actually spoke up now, it would be pushing things too far. As of now, an equilibrium had been reached. As everyone remained silent in thought, the emissary from the first Imperial Sovereign mountain spoke.

"Fellow Daoist Yun, at what point did the Yun Clan gain the right to speak for the Immortal Skills Hall?" The emissary from the first mountain was an old man. He currently sat on his throne with his eyes closed. When he spoke, his voice seemed to thrum as if overlapping with itself. "The ancient agreement states that the Imperial Sovereign mountains can jointly make decisions about the Immortal Skills Hall. We refrain from interfering in order to show respect. But that doesn't mean we *can't* interfere. We just wait until the right time to do so. And now is just such a time. Everyone, I suggest we open the cauldron and assist the grand elder. We should quell this chaos and end this entire affair."

Young Lord Yun's expression flickered. At the same time, the supporters of the grand elder looked excited. All of them knew that the opinion of the first Imperial Sovereign mountain carried a lot of weight.

The other emissaries looked thoughtful, and even those from the fourth and sixth mountain seemed like they were weighing their options. It looked like a decision was about to be made.

However, that was when Xu Qing spoke in a voice like a chill winter wind.

"I disagree!"

All eyes looked in his direction. The old man from the first mountain opened his eyes and did the same.

Sir Blood Dust's opinion carried a lot of weight. And the tenth Imperial Sovereign's opinion carried even more weight than that. Therefore, the fact that the tenth Imperial Sovereign mountain disagreed caused the first emissary's heart to start pounding.

As everyone looked at Xu Qing, his facial expression remained placid. He could see what was going on here, and now knew with certainty that everything had been planned out by his Eldest Brother. Given that, he couldn't allow anyone to mess up his Eldest Brother's plan.

"Before I came here, my Imperial Sovereign issued orders stating that the tenth Imperial Sovereign mountain would not participate in any infighting in the Immortal Skills Hall. Our mountain... will support the winner, and no one else!"

With that, he looked over at the emissary from the first mountain, his gaze strong and unwavering.

The other emissaries said nothing. They were just waiting to see what would happen between Xu Qing and the old man.

The old man from the first mountain looked at Xu Qing for a moment, then spoke in a hoarse voice. "I find this very strange, Sir Blood Dust. You have a beef with Yue Dong. So why are you doing this?"

"If I have to pick between my Imperial Sovereign's orders and my personal vendetta," Xu Qing said calmly. "I'll naturally choose the former." Then his voice turned icy and sinister as he continued, "Besides, I would love for Yue Dong to become the grand immortal adept. That will just make it all the more satisfying when I kill her myself."

The old man from the first mountain looked at him through narrowed eyes. "And what will you do if I ignore your wishes?"

Xu Qing's facial expression didn't change. "You can find out if you want."

The atmosphere in the arena suddenly became much more tense. It was as if two violent tempests were building around Xu Qing and the first mountain emissary, and they were about to collide with one another.

However, Sir Blood Dust's actions among the western Devilbirds were being talked about everywhere. And everyone was shocked by the fact that he had killed Sir Westdevil. Even the old man from the first mountain was feeling a bit leery of him.

Inside the cauldron, the grand elder's heart was pounding. He had inspected Yue Dong thoroughly on several occasions. He had also gone so far as to shatter her meridians, drain most of her blood, and place warding spells all over her. How could he have ever guessed that, at the most critical of moments, she would use some gruish magic to teleport him to the interior of the cauldron and become part of the refining process?

He still had contingency plans. For one thing, he had long since reached out to the first Imperial Sovereign mountain and gained their support. As such, he was certain that all he had to do was wait for a bit, and help would come from outside of the cauldron. Of course, that would also mean that his relationship with his saviors would change forever.

There was another reason he was completely confident that he would be able to get out of his situation. That confidence came because of how much he understood the bone cauldron, and how well he could control it!

Although he couldn't control the cauldron as well as the previous grand immortal adept, he was still confident that there was no way Yue Dong could possibly match up to him in understanding or control.

According to the rules of the Immortal Skills Hall, only the grand immortal adept and the grand elder had the right to use the cauldron. Since the grand immortal adept had perished, he as the grand elder was naturally a hundred percent confident in being able to use the cauldron as an asset.

"Yue Dong," he said coolly, "you don't understand this pill cauldron. From the moment you entered it, your fate was sealed. Therefore, this little plot of yours is completely pointless."

He quickly performed an incantation gesture, causing the cauldron to tremble. Then he flew up, calling on his control over the cauldron to open it and escape. The cauldron trembled, and the lid blurred. It seemed like the grand elder was going to be free a moment later.

However, that was when Yue Dong, who had only her head left, suddenly laughed sarcastically.

"I don't understand this cauldron?" Erniu said. "Fuse permanently!"

All of a sudden, the vortex above the pill cauldron vanished, and countless amounts of flesh and blood emerged from it. They spread out, covering the lid and body of the cauldron... and fused them together permanently! It was as if they all had the same origin, and were now inseparable.

No matter how the grand elder used his immortal skill, nothing happened. It was as if... his qualifications had become nothing but a show.

The grand elder was understandably bewildered. When he had been teleported into the pill cauldron, he had been taken aback. It was no exaggeration to say that he had been sucked into an extremely dangerous situation.

"This can't be happening! You're not Yue Dong! Yue Dong couldn't do this. Who... who are you??"

Erniu laughed cruelly as his head floated there. "Anything can happen. This pill cauldron is made from my damn stuff! As for who the hell I am, let me freaking tell you. This cauldron was refined from *me*. So who do you think I am?"

Inside, Erniu was thinking fondly back to that time he, Master Seventh, and Xu Qing had visited that operations palace beneath Sea-Sealing County. There had been an Immortal Skills Hall there, and he had actually seen a statue of Grand Emperor Immortal Skill. [2]

Back then, the old man wanted me to bow to Grand Emperor Immortal Skill, but I said no. That bitch is the last person I would ever bow to. He was the same damned Grand Emperor who killed me in my third life and refined me into a cauldron.

That was only my third life! Back then, I was so pure, and didn't understand the treachery of the heart. So what if I took a few treasures from some random species? And all I wanted to do was play around with Dark Serenity's imperial crown! What's the big deal about that? Dark Serenity didn't even complain about it. It was that bitch Grand Emperor who took it upon himself to kill me.

And you know, I would have been fine with being killed, if that was all that happened. But no, he had to turn my corpse into a pill cauldron. How outrageous! And he even made my skull into the lid? Completely ridiculous! Thankfully I spotted the cauldron in Yue Dong's memories. Otherwise, an entire lifetime of planning wouldn't have been enough to track down the corpse of my pure and innocent third life.

1. Yun is a surname, but it also means cloud. So the 'cloud' from the Cloud Heaven Bell is the same as their clan surname. ❸

2. The time Erniu, Master Seventh, and Xu Qing visited the Immortal Skills Hall in Sea-Sealing County was in chapter 519. ❹

Chapter 1059: You Stole Everything!

Chapter 1059: You Stole Everything!

In the Immortal Skills Hall of the eastern Devilbirds, the unique properties of the bone cauldron made it impossible for anyone to know what was happening inside it. But they could see the cauldron vibrating. The nine-colored flames indicated that the refinement process had already started.

Previously, the grand elder had held the upper hand. But not now, and the immortal adepts who had sided with him were now very anxious as they cast glances at the emissary from the first mountain.

Young Lord Yun in his fancy robe was also nervous about how things would turn out. He knew about the conflict between Sir Blood Dust and Yue Dong, and was aware that the former was intent on killing the latter. That said, what Sir Blood Dust had said just now was good for Yue Dong. For now, all he could do was place all his hope in Sir Blood Dust.

The emissaries from the other mountains said nothing. They just looked at Xu Qing and the first emissary. Of the two of them, one had risen to prominence recently, and was about as famous as you could get, while the other was a very senior figure with a good reputation.

Of course, the Imperial Sovereigns who backed those two, the tenth and first, were much the same. In other words, whoever came out on top of this clash would make the final decision.

"Look, boy," said the old man from the first mountain. "I admire you for what you did among the western Devilbirds. But you're in the east now, and you're pushing things a bit too far."

Inside, he was sighing regretfully. He didn't want to take any action right now, but he did represent an Imperial Sovereign, so doing nothing wouldn't be appropriate. Unfortunately, *if you ride a tiger, it's hard to get off*, and thus, he slowly rose from his throne. Nine-world Smoldering God fluctuations rolled off him with mountain-toppling, sea-draining force as projections of worlds appeared around him.

He took a step forward and it caused the entire Immortal Skills Hall to tremble. Even the sky outside flashed with wild colors.

Xu Qing didn't react at all to the display of force. Although he wasn't confident that he could beat a nine-world Smoldering God in a fight, just as when dealing with Sir Westdevil, he could definitely inflict some nasty damage. That said, he didn't need to win. He just needed to buy enough time.

Therefore, he also rose to his feet, his hair whipping about him, his blood-red robe flapping. Blood clouds rolled out and around, which turned into blood dragons that howled loudly. What was more, the godly authority of sound stirred within him, all while the godly authority of fate turned into a carving knife that glinted coldly. Black lotus flowers appeared around him as well, which formed a high level of defense.

All of this caused quite a reaction from the others present, and everyone was thinking about what Sir Blood Dust had recently done among the western Devilbirds.

"Grand Emperor Netherflame's secret magic."

"It provides amazing defenses, can shake nine-world Smoldering Gods, and basically makes you invincible to anything under an Imperial Sovereign!"

"Don't forget that Sir Westdevil actually died, right? Although the exact details aren't clear, we know that Sir Blood Dust has some incredibly astonishing trump cards."

As everyone reeled, the old man from the first mountain vanished, then reappeared in midair.

Xu Qing also blurred and reappeared in midair. It looked like the two might begin fighting at any moment.

However, that was when laughter broke out from a spot between the two of them. Lin Kun, the fifth mountain representative Xu Qing had run into earlier, suddenly appeared in between them, his nine-world aura exploding out to create a barrier.

"Do the two of you mind taking some advice from me? The ancient agreement states that although the Imperial Sovereign mountains can interfere with the internal affairs of the Immortal Skills Hall, the reality is that throughout all history, the Imperial Sovereign mountains have never exercised that right.

"Brother Zhang, as the official representative of the first Imperial Sovereign mountain, are you really sure that at this exact moment, when the fires of war burn all around us, and Grand Emperor Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities are about to be opened, that you want to respond to Sir Blood Dust's formal dissent by forcefully interfering in the affairs of the Immortal Skills Hall?"

Lin Kun looked deeply at the old man from the first mountain. “Brother Zhang, there will be consequences for this. In fact, before I came here today, my venerable father ordered me to support any decisions made by the tenth Imperial Sovereign mountain. As such, I highly suggest that you think thrice before taking action.”

The old man from the first mountain had a very grim look on his face. He looked at Lin Kun. He looked at Xu Qing again. Then, after a long moment of silence, he gave a cold harrumph.

“Since you put it that way, Fellow Daoist Lin, I suppose I’ll just drop the matter.” With that, he returned to his throne, sat down, and closed his eyes. Now that he had backed down, the conflict was over.

Xu Qing didn’t care one way or another. He had been able to tell from the beginning that, though the old man from the first mountain had been acting aggressively, he hadn’t been interested in fighting. In other words, averting a fight was the best outcome.

It was really Lin Kun who had resolved the issue, so Xu Qing looked over at him and nodded.

Lin Kun grinned. He obviously had his own motives for doing what he did. For one thing, he had sensed that the old man from the first mountain had been looking for a way to get out of an open conflict. It hadn’t been hard for Lin Kun to provide that to him. Another reason was that he wanted to show some goodwill toward Sir Blood Dust.

His one action had resulted in two benefits. What was more, he had cleverly highlighted that the fifth Imperial Sovereign wanted to respect the Immortal Skills Hall’s right to select their own grand immortal adept. It was just like the saying *killing three birds with one stone*. Still smiling, he went back to his place along with Xu Qing.

The scene that had just played out caused all of the grand elder’s supporters among the immortal adepts to look a bit pale in the face. And though they weren’t exactly happy with this result, it was clear that the emissaries had made up their minds, and there was nothing to do about it. They could only grin and bear it.

Young Lord Yun breathed a sigh of relief and looked back at the cauldron in the middle of the arena. It was currently letting off some intense fluctuations.

Given what Yue Dong’s head had just said, and the fact that the cauldron had been fused shut, the grand elder was reeling in mind and heart. He almost couldn’t believe what was happening. There was no doubt about it; Yue Dong’s words surpassed anything he could have imagined.

“You’re saying... that this cauldron is made from your bones? You’re... the megavillain that Grand Emperor Immortal Skill killed? That’s not possible!”

The grand elder struggled to control his breathing. His first reaction was to disbelieve. But there was no doubt that his control over the cauldron had disappeared. And it was also true that the words spoken by Yue Dong had caused the flesh and blood to fuse with the bone. It truly surpassed believability.

“It doesn’t matter if you’re lying or telling the truth. You’re not strong enough. That’s the most important thing. If you were strong enough, you wouldn’t have to resort to tricks like this.”

The grand elder’s eyes glittered coldly. He knew that the truth didn’t really matter. What mattered... was whether or not he could come out on top in the end. Therefore, the killing intent in his eyes and heart began to rage.

“I’ll put you to death! That’ll resolve everything!”

The grand elder burst into motion, heading right toward Yue Dong’s head. His nine-world cultivation base, combined with his gruish immortal skill, gave him astonishing speed. In the shortest of moments, he was right in front of her.

It didn’t matter how quickly that head fell back. Trying to evade was pointless. The grand elder pulled his hand back and then viciously slapped the head. A boom rang out, and Yue Dong’s head exploded.

And yet, the grand elder’s face just turned grimmer. That was because... as soon as the head exploded, all of the flesh and blood converged together... and the head formed anew!

But this time, it didn’t look like Yue Dong. It was Erniu. “You want to put *me* to death, you old codger? You couldn’t do it in an entire lifetime!”

Not offering a response, the grand elder attacked again, this time using an immortal skill. The only thing visible was a huge gray hand that appeared in front of Erniu. It instantly stabbed into him to drag out his soul. What flesh remained rotted into a black sludge that dripped down to the ground. However... it only took a moment for a blue worm to fly out from within that sludge. It exploded into a blood mist, which then shrank back down to reveal Erniu’s head.

This time, however, he looked quite pale. Despite that, he was still shouting arrogantly. “Bring it on, bitch! Let’s see what happens first, fool, you killing me, or me killing you! Let’s do it! Let’s have a little contest and see who’s tougher between the two of us!

“You’d better watch out for my immortal skill, and let me tell you, I want *your* immortal skill! And incidentally, I’m not interested in wasting my damn time *studying* immortal skills. I’m going to refine you and gobble down your immortal skill in one bite!”

The grand elder was really starting to get nervous, as the refinement process of the cauldron was already starting to affect him. Therefore, he didn’t hesitate to attack again. And yet, every time he blew up Erniu’s head, it would gruishly form again. The only upside was that it looked paler and paler each time. This enemy seemed like some sort of freak who couldn’t be wiped out of existence no matter how hard you tried.

Meanwhile, in the time that had been bought, Erniu crazily unleashed his trump card. “You have your wind, rain, thunder, lightning, and fire? Well I’ll use my damned metal, wood, water, fire, and earth! I hereby summon from my past life’s... eternal frigid water!”

He opened his mouth and spat out a stream of ice-cold water that filled the cauldron and made the refinement process become even more intense.

The grand elder took a deep breath. Looking more anxious than ever, he launched another attack.

After Erniu was resurrected again, he shouted, “I hereby summon my current life’s... undying life force fire!”

A pop rang out as Erniu exploded, then formed again. “I hereby summon the North Emperor’s corpse coffin of wood! I hereby summon from the immortal world the North Emperor’s burial earth!”

With every shout, he spat out something. Life force flame. A coffin’s wood. Burial earth. The refinement in the cauldron grew even more mighty.

After all, each of those four items was extraordinary. Collectively, they included his past and present life, as well as the personhood of the North Emperor’s coffin and burial soil. With that bolstering the refinement, it became heaven-shakingly, earth-shatteringly powerful.

Given how strong the grand elder was, he immediately ignited his fleshly body. His soul also burned. And in that critical moment, his killing intent reached an even higher level. He again attacked Erniu.

Erniu exploded, then formed again. His eyes were flashing with a crazy light. This was the pinnacle of life, and as such, he shouted, “And now, water, fire, earth, and wood are complete. The only piece missing is metal! I hereby summon the karmic bones of metal! I shall borrow the boundless power of karma to shatter your immortal skill!”

As Erniu howled deafeningly, he took out a finger-nail sized piece of bone. Astonishingly, it was the color gold! Dazzling golden light shone out along with an incomparably powerful karmic force.

The grand elder’s face fell.

Erniu was wrapped up in both craziness and weakness. But he was also feeling very pleased with himself.

“This is from my little Junior Brother, from when he self-detonated all those years ago in the imperial capital. Spirit energy burned, drawing on flesh and blood until the entire body shattered, bones included, to produce this little treasure! Back then, I managed to snatch it away secretly. And today... I’ll use it to take care of you!”[1]

1. Xu Qing self-detonated in [chapter 966](#). ❹

Chapter 1060: So Showy

Xu Qing sat in the arena in the Immortal Skills Hall, frowning slightly. After taking in his surroundings, he focused on the bone cauldron. A moment ago he had sensed something very peculiar, as if something that belonged to him had suddenly appeared. Unfortunately, when he focused on that sensation, it became vague. He just couldn’t pin down what was causing it.

What’s going on?

No amount of thought would clear up the matter, though, so he put it aside and kept looking at the cauldron.

Eldest Brother should be wrapping things up with a success shortly. I wonder how he managed to turn things around with the grand elder. I bet it has something to do with the cauldron. By the time this is over, it should be very close to when the empress opens Grand Emperor Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered. He was fully aware that when it came to his cultivation base level, he was at a standstill thanks to his fleshly body. He had put a lot of thought into how to proceed, but currently only had two good ideas.

The first was to use that white dust and the Mask of Wishes. However, that was only the backup plan. The other option, which seemed more likely to succeed, was to find a destined opportunity in the secluded meditation facilities.

I hope that place has something that can help me achieve a breakthrough! But if not, then when I get out of the Devilbird holy land, I'll go back to South Phoenix and go into seclusion. I'll use the Mask of Wishes to make a clone, and then use the white dust to wipe out any karma from it.

He continued to think about those matters as time passed.

The immortal adepts were doing much the same thing. They were wrapped up in various thoughts as they watched the pill cauldron. Slowly but surely, the immortal adepts were starting to get really nervous. Some wanted the grand elder to succeed. Others were rooting for Yue Dong. Regardless of who came out on top in the end... the eastern Devilbirds' Immortal Skills Hall was going to have a new grand immortal adept soon.

Of course, the atmosphere was a lot more intense inside of the cauldron. The grand elder was nervous as he struggled, shouted, and constantly attacked Erniu. Erniu's head exploded and formed again repeatedly, and he was just as nervous. And yet, even though he was nervous, he was also giving full reign to his craziness.

"You're dead," he said through gritted teeth. "Dead, dead, dead!"

The five items he had spat out that conformed to metal, wood, water, fire, and earth were bolstering the refinement process. And thanks to the outworking of his will, the interior of the cauldron was burning with great intensity. The will of refinement was growing increasingly shocking.

As far as the grand elder was concerned, that meant that death was looming. He was having more and more trouble standing strong. That was especially true considering that Erniu was calling on all sorts of ancient magics. It didn't even matter how effective they were, he was throwing them out. Some were ancient curses that not even the grand elder could possibly know about.

At this point, the grand elder had already slapped his opponent to death dozens of times. But no matter how many times he shattered bones, shredded flesh, and scattered the resulting ash, Erniu would form anew.

This time, after he formed, he said, *“Great daos are naturally occurring preheaven phenomena; from the amorphous ultimate to the supreme ultimate, the dao is hidden in the formless; the supreme ultimate as well as heaven and earth are made manifest in the self. Therefore... the will of the dao is in my own body!”*[1]

A mysterious will began to gather in the cauldron thanks to Erniu’s ancient enchantment.

The grand elder was shaken. However, after a short time, that mysterious will didn’t seem to be doing anything. In fact, maybe it had never been there to begin with. It was as if the person uttering the enchantment either lacked the power to complete it or... had uttered it incorrectly.

“It didn’t work?” Erniu said with a scowl. “That’s fine! I got more damn enchantments!

“Yin and yang birthed the five elements, and the five elements gave forth one nature. One nature leads to good fortune and one form creates the cosmos and the human form. That is the refining of the five elements: be refined!”

Another mysterious will appeared, causing the grand elder to reel from a sensation of imminent death. And yet, that mysterious will quickly disappeared.

The grand elder’s face was pale, and his heart was pounding. He was now becoming less and less suspicious about the identity of this opponent. He was now fairly convinced that he was actually that ancient megavillain. Only someone like that could possibly utter such unheard-of and terrifying ancient enchantments.

I can’t let this go on! Gritting his teeth, the grand elder fought back against the refinement power of the cauldron, all while sending more attacks at Erniu.

Erniu’s head exploded. When he formed anew, it became clear that he was getting worn down. Though he recovered, it didn’t happen instantly. Instead, it took some time. And yet, his level of craziness only seemed to increase.

“I won’t accept this, you old codger! I’m going to put you to death for sure! But maybe I should just refine you first!”

As he navigated this narrow space between life and death, he shouted, *“The brilliant double yang brings sunrise in the east; those who hear the curse will die; those who encounter the curse will perish!”*

This enchantment sounded very dangerous, except... it didn’t do anything.

“One: sever the path of plague in heaven. Two: sever the road of pestilence in earth. Three: sever the path available to men. Four: sever the invisible gate of ghosts. Five: seve...”

“Cry out to the constellation. Sunset brings gods and immortals. The turtle god combines virtues, commanding myriads of ghosts. Assistants of the left and right, stand before the altar and heed mine command to... go to... shit, I forgot!”

“In the dim and dark, heaven and earth were born together; when they disperse they become energy, when they gather they form. They are the ancestor of the five elements and the quintessence of the six combinations!”

As Erniu went increasingly crazy, the cauldron rumbled loudly. The mysterious will would form, then disappear. It was the same with extermination and refinement.

Because of everything that was happening, the grand elder was reaching a pinnacle of mental torment. In fact, he was starting to suspect that his enemy was doing all of this on purpose. The refinement power of the cauldron only grew more intense, burning him, his soul, and everything else about him.

Dammit, why hasn't the first mountain emissary opened the cauldron yet?

The grand elder's hair was disheveled, and his eyes were bloodshot as he charged again toward Erniu.

Glaring at the grand elder, Erniu howled, *“Meteoroid ancestral art: the way of heaven complete, three and five multiplied, sun and moon together; all dying together!”*

“Dark Night! I hereby summon the emissary of death into this cauldron to devour the flesh and blood in front of me!”

“Moonfire god magic! Let all who see me go blind, and all who hear me go deaf!”

“Dao of Ghosts! In ancient times, ghosts were closer than gods. Remember my true name for all to know. One: if you know the ghost's name, evil will not encroach. Two: if you call the ghost's name, you can exorcize them rightly; ghosts high above and down below will be slaughtered. Three: state the ghost's name and myriad ghosts will heed your command!”

“Ancient Spirit ancestral magic! Enter the netherworld, preach of the energy. Those who dare plot against me will suffer calamity!”

“Hark to me! The just give grace. The rebels avenge. If the latter lags in life, he will die beyond the shadow of a doubt!”

Erniu was going crazy. At this very difficult time, at this moment of crisis, all he could do was toss out every enchantment he could think of. They included daoist magics, god magics, immortal skills, nonhuman arts, and even ghost techniques. All were magics that he had secretly learned. He was going all out in every way possible, shaking the grand elder and inflicting incomparable torment on him.

As the interior of the cauldron rumbled continuously, the grand elder struggled to breathe. With every moment that passed, he got more and more confused. He had fought many opponents throughout his life, but had never faced an opponent like this before....

If the magical techniques had been equally effective, it wouldn't have been as maddening. But what was actually happening was that several in a row wouldn't work, only for the next to work very effectively. It was exhausting trying to defend against something like that.

"Green is the wood of the east. Crimson is the fire of the south. White is the metal of the west. Black is the water of the north. Let the metal, wood, water, and fire, that which belongs to the wind of the four seasons, combine with earth to make a furnace!"

"Refine! Refine! Refine!"

"Refine, damn you!!"

The nine-colored flame in the cauldron surged, entering Erniu's eternal flame. Now it was a ten-colored flame, and it raged with terrifying intensity.

The fire was so hot that there was no need for the grand elder to do anything to Erniu's head. It burst into flame. And as the grand elder howled in agony, the head collapsed.

Yet Erniu was laughing madly. "You think *you* can refine *me*, jackass? Bring it on! I've never seen anyone in my entire life that feared death less than me!"

Ten hours passed.

Outside of the cauldron, Young Lord Yun and the immortal adepts were nervous and restless. A killing air was building up again.

Then, all of a sudden, a deafening booming rang out from the cauldron.

The Imperial Sovereign mountain emissaries, who had been sitting there with their eyes closed, all looked up. That included Xu Qing. His eyes contained anticipation. And as he looked at the cauldron... the booming grew louder.

The lid of the cauldron clanged open. Ten-colored flame erupted from within, climbing high to the top of the arena, where it made a flame vortex that swirled out in all directions.

At the same time, a blurry figure floated up from the inside of the cauldron! Upon emerging fully into the open, the figure grew clear. It was Yue Dong, clad in a red gown. Her hair drifted around her beautiful face, and in the light of the flame, it looked like it was dancing.

The immortal adepts were all shaken to the core, the reason being that there were people behind her! Astonishingly, the middle-aged, young man, and boy forms of the grand elder were there. As for his true form, it was nowhere to be seen. Apparently he had been devoured and replaced by Yue Dong!

Yue Dong's eyes opened. The moment they did, the emotions of the crowd were stirred like the strings of an instrument.

It was the immortal skill of Six Thieves Deceive Life! As the emotions stirred, Yue Dong coldly waved a hand, causing the cauldron below to rise up into the air. It grew smaller and smaller, until it was the size of a hand. Then it floated over to hover above her right palm, where it spun endlessly. Incredible pressure rolled out.

Xu Qing calmed himself. He was now certain that the cauldron must be related to one of his Eldest Brother's past lives. He was about to look away from Yue Dong, when he suddenly frowned and looked more closely. At her forehead.

Though nothing looked out of the ordinary about that spot, Xu Qing got the feeling that there was something extremely familiar there. Something that came from him.

Young Lord Yun took a deep breath. His gaze softened as he faced Yue Dong, bowed, and loudly said, "Well met, Grand Immortal Adept!"

The immortal adepts who had backed Yue Dong were finally reacting. They were excitedly bowing. Yue Dong's success meant that, going forward, they would be the driving force in the Immortal Skills Hall. The immortal adepts who had backed the grand elder looked bitter. They knew that they had lost and had no choice but to bow their heads and clasp hands.

The only people who qualified to *not* clasp hands and bow were the emissaries from the Imperial Sovereign mountains. However, out of respect for the new grand immortal adept, they stood and inclined their heads.

"Many thanks to all of you for coming to the ceremony," Yue Dong said calmly. "The formalities are over, so all of you can feel free to take your leave. However, I would like one of you to stay for a moment." Her gaze shifted to Xu Qing, whereupon it turned very cold. "Sir Blood Dust, the time has come to sort out our issues."

Xu Qing looked calmly at her, focusing on her forehead. "That's just what I was thinking."

1. Erniu's words contain a lot of real-life Daoist terminology. Much of it seems to come from a text written by Huo Jizhi, a Southern Song Dynasty Daoist who I can't find any information about in English. From this point onward in this chapter, there is A LOT of fancy-sounding stuff similar to this, in other words, bits and pieces of things taken from real life texts. At a certain point, I just stopped doing research on each one, because A) they don't relate to their "real-life" applications and B) the point is not to understand what they mean; they are just supposed to sound cool. ❸

Chapter 1061: Back When You Blew Yourself Up

As Xu Qing spoke, a somber and desolate will erupted from him. It was as if a winter wind was sweeping through the arena, filling everyone with ice.

The immortal adepts, regardless of who they backed, now had Yue Dong as their leader. Therefore, it was only natural that they would close ranks to face a common enemy. Thus, they glared menacingly at Xu Qing.

Young Lord Yun's heart filled also with killing intent; he was not going to allow anybody to harm Yue Dong.

The Imperial Sovereign mountain emissaries had all heard about the enmity between Sir Blood Dust and Yue Dong, but they had no reason to interfere. Besides, none of them thought that the two would actually try to kill each other right here. At the most, they might have a bit of a fight. And even if things did get deadly, it wasn't their concern.

Therefore, after hearing what was said, the old man from the first Imperial Sovereign mountain turned to leave, his face grim. One by one, the other emissaries also left. One of the last to go was Lin Kun from the fifth mountain. Just before walking out, he looked at Xu Qing. Xu Qing gave him a nod. Lin Kun smiled back and was gone.

That left only one Imperial Sovereign mountain emissary, and it was Xu Qing, who stood facing the immortal adepts and Young Lord Yun, his face completely expressionless.

Yue Dong's eyes glittered coldly. "Everyone out. Unless I give the order, no one is allowed to enter."

The immortal adepts ducked their heads. Each had their own thoughts and perspectives, but in the end, Yue Dong had issued orders and they had to follow them.

However, Young Lord Yun didn't leave. In fact, he walked over to Yue Dong as if he planned to stand with her against Xu Qing.

Truth be told, Erniu was getting a bit frustrated with this guy. Young Lord Yun... had really been a bit too helpful. No matter how coldly Erniu treated him, he would give anything and do anything that was asked of him.

"This is a private matter between Sir Blood Dust and myself," Erniu said coldly.

Young Lord Yun stopped in place. Seeing how determined Yue Dong was, he took a deep breath and chose to abide by her wishes. "Fine. I'll wait outside. Dong— um, just call for me and I'll come back in."

Casting a malevolent glare at Xu Qing, he left reluctantly.

Xu Qing wasn't really sure what to make of it. Once Young Lord Yun was gone, he looked over as Yue Dong waved a hand to seal the area with warding spells.... Only then did Xu Qing let an odd expression appear on his face.

"What are you looking at me like that for, little Ah Qing?" Erniu said, a glare in his eyes but embarrassment in his heart.

Xu Qing shook his head. "Nothing, Eldest Brother. Congratulations on becoming the grand immortal adept of the eastern Devilbirds' Immortal Skills Hall!"

He clasped hands and bowed.

Given Xu Qing's wording, Erniu decided not to bicker about his facial expression from moments ago. Feeling very pleased with himself, he stuck his chin up. "Your Eldest Brother has only just shown the tip of the iceberg when it comes to true skill. The truth is that I couldn't care less about being some pitiful grand immortal adept."

Despite his words, his expression and the way his chin was stuck up gave a clear message to Xu Qing. He was saying... *hurry up and praise me! Lay it on thick!*

Xu Qing knew Erniu very well. Glancing at Erniu's forehead, he thought for a moment, then softly said, "There are countless individuals among the eastern Devilbirds who long to be the grand immortal adept, but have no way of achieving that goal. That just goes to show how outstanding you are, Eldest Brother. In fact, I don't think there's anyone in the Devilbird holy land that can compare to you."

Such praise caused Erniu to burst with joy.

Xu Qing again looked at Erniu's forehead. "After all, that grand elder was a Smoldering God. And that power of wind, rain, thunder, lightning, and fire was very impressive...."

Xu Qing intentionally stopped talking for a moment and looked at Erniu.

Erniu disdainfully said, "That was nothing. I brought things to the table that were a hell of a lot more impressive than that damn old codger's wind, rain, thunder, lightning, and fire. I used metal, wood, water, fire, and earth! Every single one of the five elements is a precious treasure!"

Xu Qing thought for a moment, then, without revealing even a hint that he wasn't sincere, said, "I think I get it, Eldest Brother. You must have used the 'wood' from the five elements at a key moment in the refining and fusing process."

Erniu sneered superciliously. "You clearly *don't* get it. Wood couldn't possibly work. It was all about metal!"

"Metal?" Xu Qing shook his head as if he was very confused.

Seeing that, Erniu couldn't help but continue, "You're so naive sometimes, little Ah Qing. Look, I didn't just use some random metal. I used metal from back when you blew yourself up— er, I mean...." Erniu suddenly stopped talking. Looking as if he'd accidentally revealed something he shouldn't have, he quickly changed the topic. "So, after announcing my identity, um... er...."

As beads of sweat popped out on Erniu's forehead, Xu Qing looked at him with glittering eyes. Seeing that Erniu was having trouble coming up with a cover story, he said, "Eldest Brother, what were you saying about me blowing myself up?"

Smiling woodenly, Erniu took a few steps back.

Xu Qing, meanwhile, stepped forward so quickly it was almost like a teleportation as he appeared right in front of Erniu. He stared at his forehead. "Eldest Brother, you have something hidden in your forehead, and it feels like it's connected to me. Is that the metal you're talking about?"

Erniu was now sweating even more. Realizing that he couldn't hide the truth any longer, he rolled his eyes and began to speak in a very formal manner. "Since you've finally uncovered the truth, I can now breathe a sigh of relief. You see, back when you blew yourself up in the imperial capital, your body was mostly turned into ash. The only exception was a tiny fragment of bone. Acting on your behalf, I went through untold hardships to track it down. My plan was originally to return it to you.

"But then I started worrying that it would bring back bad memories. In order to avoid bringing you any mental hardship, I decided to keep it as a souvenir...." Suddenly brimming with conviction, he said, "Is there something so wrong with keeping a souvenir??"

Xu Qing looked at Erniu silently for a long moment. Then, he scowled and shook his head. "Eldest Brother, that cauldron is made from one of your past lives, isn't it? No wonder you were killed back then. You took all the loot, didn't you?"

Erniu guiltily opened his mouth to speak.

However, that was when the warding spells protecting the arena suddenly trembled. It was Young Lord Yun, who was so worried he was trying to find out what was going on inside. Erniu quickly sent a message outside to placate him. The trembling stopped.

Xu Qing looked at the spot where Young Lord Yun had left the arena, then thought about everything he had observed regarding his Eldest Brother. "Eldest Brother," he said sincerely, "you should really... cherish that guy."

Erniu had very thick skin. Pretending he didn't get what Xu Qing meant, he waved his hand dismissively. "That's not important for now. Little Ah Qing, it's only a few more days until Grand Emperor Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities will be opened. That... person you went to the western Devilbirds with.... How do you say? Is it *that* person?"

Xu Qing nodded.

Erniu inhaled sharply. "I was right! So, this is a situation of hogging the loot. Well, in any case, little Ah Qing, when you and that person went to the western Devilbirds, you had a really good opportunity on your hands. Did you really just go to issue a few challenges and get famous?" Erniu looked suspiciously at Xu Qing. "That's not our style. Over the years, we've always taken advantage of opportunities to earn some profit, right?"

Xu Qing blinked a few times. "I took a trip to the Immortal Skills Hall there."

The Captain's eyes lit up. "And then what?"

"And then I got a sealing mark." Xu Qing opened his hand, and the Five Dogs Cleave Immortals symbol appeared on his palm.

Erniu's eyes went wide as he stared at the symbol. "Hahaha! Just what I would expect of my little Junior Brother. We do have the same style. It's like I said, only a fool would neglect to take advantage of opportunities. That symbol... is nothing short of a treasure!"

Xu Qing shook his head. “Sadly, based on my study of Five Dogs Cleave Immortals, I can tell you that this symbol can only be acquired by means of a special ceremony and a legacy transfer. I only have this one symbol, and not even I can use it under normal circumstances.”

“Oh? Let me have a try.” He reached toward the symbol on Xu Qing’s palm as if he were unleashing an immortal skill. The three projections behind him also reached out. Grabbing the symbol, he pulled it back and pushed it onto his forehead.

As Xu Qing looked on, Erniu and the projections behind him all closed their eyes. They were obviously immersing themselves in this weakened version of Five Dogs Cleave Immortals.

Sometime later, Erniu opened his eyes, and they glittered with lingering fear. He gave the symbol back to Xu Qing.

“Incredible! But you’re right. Without that special legacy and ceremony, you can only sense it, not use it....” Erniu frowned. “You just said you can’t use it under normal circumstances. Does that mean... that you can use it under abnormal circumstances?”

Xu Qing’s eyes flashed as he looked at the symbol on his palm. “After I got back here to the east, I tried to use my daybreak light to copy it. It didn’t work. However, it gave me an idea. I decided to use the weakened version of the immortal skill on myself over and over, to build my tolerance and eventually become immune to it.

“The way immunity works is that your body gains an increasingly deep understanding of invading forces. Over time, the immunity builds. On the one hand, I lack the legacy and the ceremony, so I can’t take the initiative to study the immortal skill.

“However, I can use the symbol to unleash the immortal skill on myself, and become increasingly immune to it. After a certain point, my immunity will be complete. And at that point, I’ll have memorized the immortal skill and will be able to use it instinctively.

“By building immunity and instinctively memorizing the immortal skill, I’ll eventually learn how to control it, and bypass its inherent restrictions. At that point, I’ll be able to unleash it on my own, and will thus be able to use daybreak light to copy it.

“My daybreak light copies will have the full might of the immortal skill, as the copies are internally the same as the real thing.” Xu Qing looked at Erniu.

Erniu’s eyes were very wide, and he almost looked like he was in a daze. A long moment passed in which he realized that Xu Qing’s idea was a very sound one. “A fantastic idea. Almost preposterous. But it seems to me... like it will work!”

Xu Qing nodded and looked at the warding spells protecting the arena. “Of course, it’s all built on the premise that I can keep myself safe while constantly using the immortal skill on myself. It might be a weakened version of Five Dogs Cleave Immortals, but it’s still very gruish. Therefore, Eldest Brother, I have a request to make. I need you to stand as dharma protector for me. If things go bad, then you’ll need to combine our Six Thieves authority to pull me out of the Five Dogs immortal skill.”

Erniu nodded gravely. They discussed some more details, then Xu Qing made a show of leaving. Erniu gave some orders, then went into seclusion. Later that night, Xu Qing returned. And thus, the two of them started doing research and study into the immortal skills. Time passed. Five days.

Everyone in the Devilbird holy land was paying close attention to what was happening. Grand Emperor Devilbird came with his retainers. As the Imperial Sovereigns of the eastern Devilbirds watched closely, he and Lu Lingzi... got to work. The day had come to open Grand Emperor Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities!

Chapter 1062: Open the Tomb!

Chapter 1062: Open the Tomb!

The tolling of bells could be heard coming from the dao altar in the lands of the eastern Devilbirds. The sound was like a tempest that swept far and wide.

In the east, all clans, all rogue cultivators, and all of the Imperial Sovereign mountains heard the bells and looked up. All of them knew... that the day had come in which Grand Emperor Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities would be opened.

In the Devilbird holy land, Grand Emperor Netherflame was a name that brought with it both grandeur and terror. He did not become a Grand Emperor in the ordinary way. Many years ago, he had gone missing for a time, only to return with Grand Emperor personhood. At the peak of his glory, he took control of the eastern Devilbirds, using his terrifying strength to unite the east and the west. Even other celestial-level holy lands would defer to him.

Grand Emperor Netherflame had reached the peak of Grand Emperor personhood, making him only half a step away from being a Summer Immortal. Even this generation's Grand Emperor Devilbird had to bend the knee to him. Although that Grand Emperor was able to accept the legacy of the Devilbird name, he was actually little more than a puppet to Netherflame.

Back then, the Devilbird holy land was at the peak of glory, and was considered number one among the celestial-level holy lands. One would think that a Grand Emperor with personhood like that wouldn't easily perish. And it seemed like it should be easy for a person such as him to extend his longevity if he wished. But strangely enough, Grand Emperor Netherflame only occupied the peak of glory for a short time. After failing to break through to the Summer Immortal level, he ended his life in a matter of a few thousands of years.

No one knew the details of why that was. Most people speculated that it was related to the manner in which he had achieved his Grand Emperor cultivation base.

That was what led to Grand Emperor Netherflame going into seclusion a thousand years ago. Given how much time had passed, no one was really sure whether he was alive or dead.

Because he had gone into seclusion, the political structure of the Devilbirds had changed. Grand Emperor Devilbird, who had long been a mere puppet, was finally able to rise to prominence.

To the cultivators of the Devilbird holy land, this day was going to bring closure to things. Therefore, there were countless spectators paying attention to what was happening. In fact, the war with humankind wasn't even important at this point. The Devilbirds retreated and focused completely on defense. They even activated the holy land grand spell formation to make sure there were no accidents.

Right now, everyone was focused on the dao altar of the eastern Devilbirds. That was where Grand Emperor Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities were located.

As the bells tolled, figures teleported to that spot. At the same time, beams of light shot over the horizon from the west.

The tolling of the bells reached the Immortal Skills Halls as well. Though Erniu's meditation chamber was sealed, the sound of the bells reached the inside. Xu Qing and Erniu opened their eyes and ceased their research into Five Dogs Cleave Immortals.

Erniu sighed. "You finally woke up. I was worried that if you didn't, I'd have to carry you all the way there."

In the days that had passed, Xu Qing had done a lot of tests with Five Dogs Cleave Immortals. As a result, he had built up quite an immunity, and had also memorized a lot about the immortal skill. He had faced a few dangerous situations, but had dealt with all of them with the help of Erniu as his dharma protector.

"We just don't have enough time." Xu Qing was disappointed. If they had another half a month, he was confident he could make a complete copy of the immortal skill. As of now, the process was only half-complete. Of course, Grand Emperor Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities were a lot more important to him and Erniu than the immortal skill.

I really hope I can find a destined opportunity there that will help me to achieve a cultivation base breakthrough!

Taking a deep breath, he stood and looked at Erniu. "Should we get going, Eldest Brother?"

Erniu's eyes shone with anticipation. Licking his lips, he rubbed his hands together and chuckled. "Before we leave, I have a little treasure to give you."

Erniu pulled out a cracked egg from his bag of holding and handed it to Xu Qing. There was something profound about this egg, as it caused the air in the area to ripple and distort.

Xu Qing recognized it instantly. "What are you doing with that?"

It was a golden rat egg. Each of them had acquired one, but had handed them over to the more experienced Wu Jianwu to deal with. Later, they went with Yu Liuchen to the outer sea, where they met that terrifying old man who said he was from the Fifth Star Ring. They had personally witnessed that old man's golden rat, and could tell just from looking at it that it was like a precious treasure. That was when he and Erniu had realized how valuable those golden rats were.

"Back when we returned to the imperial capital, you spent all your time worrying about Feng Lintao. But not me! I went and found Wu Jianwu." Erniu suddenly looked very proud. "This golden

rat is a real treasure. I was worried that if Wu Jianwu actually hatched it, he would realize how amazing it is and take it as his own pet. So I took them back from him so that we could hatch them. Thanks to my hard work, this one is just about to hatch.”

Erniu looked very pleased with himself. “Considering we have no idea how long we’ll be in Netherflame’s secluded meditation facilities, I figured you should have yours. My guess is that it’ll hatch in a few days. Although there’s no way to know how strong the golden rat will be when it comes out, it’ll definitely be worth having.”

Xu Qing carefully put the egg away. Then he exchanged a glance with Erniu. Both of them were looking forward very much to what was to come.

Then Erniu suddenly seemed to turn serious. “Little Ah Qing, I have an additional objective in the secluded meditation facilities. It has something to do with one of my past lives.... However, at the moment I’m not totally sure if it’ll work out. Once I’m sure, I’ll need some help from you.” ҫANḡbĒĚ

Xu Qing didn’t ask for any details. He just nodded.

Erniu grinned, clasped Xu Qing’s shoulder, then took a step forward and vanished from the meditation chamber. When he reappeared, he was outside of the Immortal Skills Hall.

Xu Qing was in midair, high above the Immortal Skills Hall. After looking down briefly at it, he blurred into motion toward the dao altar.

Outside of the Immortal Skills Hall, Erniu, still in the form of Yue Dong, coolly said, “Immortal Skills Hall, heed my command: you will come with your grand immortal adept to the Grand Emperor’s dao altar!”

A horde of immortal adepts flew up into the air to join him.

Young Lord Yun wasn’t around, as he had been summoned back by his patriarch three days ago.

It took only a moment for a host of people to be flying through the air.

Outside of Grand Emperor Netherflame’s huge wing-shaped dao altar, eastern Devilbird cultivators had already locked down all roads and paths in the area. Only designated people were allowed through. There were already three people who had arrived at the dao altar, and were hovering cross-legged in midair as they waited.

When Xu Qing arrived, he saw them and recognized two of them. One of them was Lin Kun, son of the fifth Imperial Sovereign. The other was Young Lord Yun.

Clearly, there had been some secret discussions among the eastern Devilbirds, and those two had been selected to join the Tenth Imperial Sovereign in entering the secluded meditation facilities.

The third person was a young man who didn’t look very special but had a Smoldering God cultivation base. He was from the ninth Imperial Sovereign mountain.

They were the first to arrive, but there were others. After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, the bells tolled for a third time... and a huge rift opened up in the sky. The empress emerged in the form of Lu Lingzi.

Everyone bowed.

The empress nodded, then settled down cross-legged in midair to wait.

The bells tolled a fourth time, and the empress' eyes opened to look at six figures stepping out of thin air.

In the lead was a man clad in an imperial robe, with an imperial crown on his head. The moment he appeared, wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. Winds screamed. Lin Kun and the other two, along with all the other cultivators in the area, and even the Imperial Sovereigns of the east... were all shaken to the core and bowed their heads.

“Well met, Grand Emperor.”

This was the current Grand Emperor Devilbird. He was flanked by five people. Three were men and two were women. They included: a ruddy-faced middle-aged man; a hunch-backed old man; a young man with a face as fair as jade; a woman wearing palace attire; a woman wearing a simple green garment. These were obviously the people from the western Devilbirds who had been chosen to go into the secluded meditation facilities.

“Is everyone here?” Grand Emperor Devilbird asked coolly.

Everyone present trembled instinctively because of the pressure rolling off the Grand Emperor.

The only exception was the empress, who simply looked back at him calmly and said, “There are two more coming.”

Grand Emperor Devilbird looked deeply at the empress and then smiled faintly. “They’ve already arrived.”

A sound like singing immortals drifted over the horizon as a group of immortal adepts appeared, shouldering a massive palanquin. Inside of the palanquin was a woman. She had a very arrogant look on her face, but then....

“Come here,” the empress said.

Shivering, the woman flew over to the empress and stood obediently by her side. Meanwhile, Xu Qing also flew over, surrounded by a seething blood cloud. He stood at the empress' other side.

Now there were six people in each group. The empress and Grand Emperor Devilbird were each leading a group of five others.

After glancing at Xu Qing and Erniu, Grand Emperor Devilbird said, “Grand Emperor Netherflame is the paramount entity of our Devilbird holy land. I originally didn't approve of opening his secluded meditation facilities. But given that Lu Lingzi is his apprentice, and that his other apprentices gave their approval, then I had no reason to reject the proposal.

“However, I do have one demand. All of you must show respect! The primary objective in going inside is to perform an inspection. We cannot disturb the Grand Emperor’s meditation! If it turns out that the Grand Emperor truly has passed away... then all of you will kowtow three times, then do nothing more to disturb him.”

By the time Grand Emperor Devilbird finished speaking, his voice bordered on being aggressive. Everyone clasped hands and bowed in a respectful show of acknowledgment. Seeing that caused Grand Emperor Devilbird’s expression to soften. Then he turned to the enormous dao altar. Eyes glimmering with reminiscence, he sighed.

“Grand Emperor Netherflame’s secluded meditation facilities might seem like they’re in the dao altar. The reality is that they are a mysterious heaven beyond heaven. They were acquired from the starry sky by Grand Emperor Netherflame.

“If he has truly perished, then because the heaven beyond heaven is sealed, it will contain all of his memories incarnated as worlds.

“It’s also possible that the Grand Emperor’s legacy will be there. Before the Grand Emperor returned, no one had any clue about the details of his cultivation in the starry sky, or what he did out there. Nor does anyone know what else exists in his memories.

“Out of respect for the Grand Emperor, I hope that if any of you see such things, you not spread word about them later.”

Grand Emperor Devilbird shook his head and strode forward. Reaching the apex of the dao altar, he sat down and waved his hand. Instantly, the entire dao altar rumbled and changed from being dim into shining brilliantly.

“You may now do as you see fit. I will stand as dharma protector for all of you going forward.”

The dao altar shone brilliantly as Grand Emperor Devilbird’s words echoed through heaven and earth. The Imperial Sovereigns of the eastern Devilbirds were observing intently. So were the western Devilbirds. The same went for the rogue cultivators and the various clans. Everyone was watching.

Under the focus of countless gazes and streams of divine will, the empress strode toward the dao altar. There was no explosion of light. There was no complicated ceremony. The only thing that happened was that a third eye opened on the empress’ forehead.

One by one, drops of blood flew out. It was the blood of the Lan Clan, which had the same origin as the Grand Emperor’s blood. It pulsed with something mysterious, including natural and magical laws.

The blood converged in front of the empress, then landed on the dao altar. Under the gaze of the third eye, they became a blood-red vortex that rumbled loudly as it revealed a pathway.

Without any hesitation, the empress stepped inside. Xu Qing and Erniu similarly showed no hesitation as they flew after the empress.

Next came Young Lord Yun, Lin Kun, and the young man from the ninth Imperial Sovereign mountain. The group from the western Devilbirds followed. After they were inside, the vortex of blood became a mist that spread out and vanished. The vortex was gone.

Atop the dao altar, Grand Emperor Devilbird closed his eyes. *A big show packed with secret agendas....*

Xu Qing wasn't sure how everyone else was reacting upon entering Grand Emperor Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities. But he was frowning.

Upon entering the vortex, his vision swam. When things became clear again, he heard music, smelled rouge, and saw dancing....

He was standing in a luxurious palace constructed from elegantly carved jade. Also inside the palace were no less than a thousand young women wearing flowing gowns that were nearly transparent. The skin beneath the fabric would stir the heart of anyone. The women were either singing, dancing, or conversing intimately, making the entire palace seem like a place of luxury.

The women came from all species, but there was one thing about them that was the same. They were all extremely beautiful. All of them were looking at him with either caution or desire. It was as if fire burned in their eyes.

Xu Qing was already on guard. Looking around, he realized that the palace was surrounded by some unknown land mass. After scanning his surroundings with divine will, he was shocked to realize that... he was the only male present. This seemed to be a nation made up entirely of women.

What was more, his own physical appearance had changed. He was now a young man, and he was seated on a throne at the head of the hall. It was almost as if he was an emperor of some sort. Spread out in front of him was a meal of the finest delicacies, including food and alcohol fit for immortals and spirits.

Is this one of the memories of Grand Emperor Netherflame, transformed into a world?

Erniu was thinking the same thing. However, Erniu was currently located on a barren planet a great distance away.

Erniu was visibly taken aback. As he looked around, he saw that this planet was completely empty. It had a gray sky, blackened lands, and no plants whatsoever. He saw rotting flesh and bones. He saw piles of excrement. And there were even huge maggots that were now crawling toward him. The noxious smell that filled the area made him want to vomit.

This place was like hell. As for himself, he was a rotting corpse.

Is this... a world made from the memories of Grand Emperor Netherflame? How could he remember something like this? Did everyone else come here also?

Alarmed, he looked at the maggots, wondering if little Ah Qing was inside one of them.

Deathblade's Thoughts

Hey everyone, my latest fantasy novel is finally available in physical form (paperback). Get it [here](#)!

Beyond the Timescape

Chapter 1063: Chronoflitter

On the barren wasteland planet, Erniu sighed regretfully. He had not found little Ah Qing in any of the maggots....

Next, his attention turned to the corpses, and he begrudgingly continued his search.

A full-scale war had broken out in another of Netherflame's memory worlds, a world that consisted of a starry sky.

Leading a massive army was Netherflame himself, clad in a pitch-black suit of armor that made it look like he had climbed out of death itself. He was waging war against a host of nonhumans, unleashing mad and brutal slaughter. The sound of magical techniques mixed with terrifying screams to echo out nonstop.

Eventually, a figure appeared off in the distance, pulsing with astonishing godly might. Seemingly unconcerned with either side of the conflict, that figure shot directly toward Netherflame. A moment later, that individual's finger stabbed into Netherflame's forehead, shattering his body, shattering the starry sky, and shattering the memory world.

As the fragments scattered, the figure became clear. It was the empress. Unlike Xu Qing and Erniu, who had appeared in the memory worlds in Netherflame's place, the empress had come in true form.

Did you really perish, causing your memories to scatter and become worlds? Or did you use scattered memories to create an outer layer of defense? Which is it, Netherflame? Are you actually dead, or are you really alive?

The empress continued onward.

The others who had entered the secluded meditation facilities were in various locations. Some were searching their surroundings, some were ignoring them, some were immersing themselves in the worlds they had entered. Each were doing different things based on their own different goals.

For example, on a sprawling pitch-black plain was the old man from the western Devilbirds. The ground seemed to contract beneath him with each step he took. Though he looked like he was

strolling along casually, his every step took him a shocking distance. As he walked, he was accompanied by a clanking sound, as if there were iron chains wrapped around him beneath his black cloak.

Eventually, he reached a section of broken land that turned out to be a massive ravine. Upon reaching the edge of the ravine, he looked down into its depths. He chuckled hoarsely.

So this is where it is.

As I recall, Grand Emperor Devilbird said that if we encounter memory worlds, it indicates that Grand Emperor Netherflame perished.

Xu Qing looked around at all the women in the grand hall. He definitely wasn't going to take action before analyzing the situation fully.

That said, I can't just blindly trust what Grand Emperor Devilbird says. Regardless, this seems to be one of Grand Emperor Netherflame's memory worlds. In that case... what's the significance of this particular memory? Is it a legacy? Or are the worlds like some sort of maze that I need to navigate?

As Xu Qing pondered these things, his gaze suddenly shifted to the right and turned cold.

On that side of him was a bewitchingly charming young woman, clad in a sheer garment that hardly covered half her body. Her cheeks were flush, and her eyes flashed seductively as she crawled toward him on all fours. Her manner of crawling only accentuated her alluring curves.

Xu Qing said nothing. His eyes grew colder.

The coldness of his gaze caused the crawling woman to shiver. Her expression became one of terror, and she slowly backed away from him.

He looked away, only to frown a moment later. A ripping sensation appeared, filling the world, the hall, and him. It was as if this world was rejecting him. Along with it came a sense of great danger, as if his action just now had attracted the attention of the world he occupied.

What was even more noteworthy to Xu Qing was that he felt an immense pressure, as if an entire mountain was weighing down on him. The upside was that the ripping sensation wasn't very strong, as if it was only a warning.

"How interesting..." he murmured. Eyes narrowing, he stood, walked off the dais, across the hall, and toward the doors.

Along the way, the women in the hall noticed him, and looks of terror and confusion appeared on their faces.

Xu Qing ignored them. He wanted to find out what was causing the ripping sensation. As he neared the doors, the women in the hall seemed to become more agitated, all while their voices faded, becoming softer and softer. By the time Xu Qing was only one step away from the doors... the hall was completely silent.

The music stopped. The lascivious sounds ceased. There wasn't even the sound of breathing. And every single woman present was looking directly at Xu Qing, their gazes cold and full of death. The ripping sensation appeared again.

Xu Qing stopped in place and looked back at the women. Now he understood where the ripping sensation was coming from.

This world is indeed one of Grand Emperor Netherflame's memory fragments. And I'm standing in for him in this memory. Therefore, I'm supposed to do the same things he did back when this event actually played out.

If I don't, then I'll be viewed as an enemy invader, and the ripping sensation will appear. The entire world will view me with hostility, and terrifying pressure will build up. In other words, if I want things to go smoothly, I need to do what Grand Emperor Netherflame did.

After some thought, he walked back across the hall and back to the throne.

As he did, the music came back. The women's expressions returned to normal. The licentious sounds started up again. Many of the women neared Xu Qing, bowing their heads flirtatiously, undulating their bodies, their expressions those of desire.

And yet, Xu Qing continued to frown. It was because he could still sense the ripping sensation. Returning to the throne hadn't caused it to go away.

Leaving isn't the right thing to do. But neither is staying. So what did Netherflame do back then?

Xu Qing's eyes glittered as he made a decision. Turning to one of the approaching women, he clenched his hand into a fist and punched her. There was a boom, and the ripping sensation vanished. Xu Qing realized at that moment that when this event occurred in the past, Netherflame had also chosen to launch an attack.

A moment later, the doors of the hall opened, and Xu Qing walked out. The wind carried the aroma of flowers, and as it lifted Xu Qing's hair, it caused the doors to swing open. As it blew into the hall, it became clear... that though there were no corpses inside, there also weren't any living women. There were only a host of withered flower pistils.

Everything was an illusion.

As soon as Xu Qing walked out of the hall, the nation of women transformed dramatically.

The earth quaked. The sky went dark. The wind and clouds seethed. Buildings crumbled as huge vines spread out, covering everything. And at the ends of the vine were hosts of branches, with flowers and flower pistils. Each flower pistil was a woman.

The nation of women was crumbling as the massive vines spread, each of which split dozens of times to create dozens of pistils. Licentious sounds built up, growing louder and louder as it surrounded Xu Qing.

And then, as the ground in the middle of the nation of women collapsed, a 30,000-meter flower rose up. This was the main flower, and in the middle of all the petals was a single flower pistil, which was the queen.

It's a euphoria iris!

Xu Qing's eyes glittered. He recognized this flower. He had seen one back in Daybreak Prefecture, and had rescued Ningyan from it.... The main difference was that the version he had seen all those years ago was very small compared to this one, which was gargantuan.[1]

The moment Xu Qing looked at it, all of the countless pistil-women looked at him, laughed, then raced toward him.

Face completely expressionless, Xu Qing shot up into the air to avoid the vines. Then he thrust his right hand out and pushed down. The power of taboo poison created a black miasma that shot toward the vines. Wherever it passed, the laughter of the pistil-women turned into shrieks of agony as they melted.

The ripping sensation came back, stronger than ever, filling him with a ripple of fear. It was as if some terrifying entity was coming, something that he couldn't possibly fight. The more he attacked, the stronger the sensation got.

"Hold on," he murmured. He retracted the taboo poison and backed up, all while analyzing the situation. As the vines whistled toward him, the queen pointed at him.

Instantly, a host of innumerable flowers popped into being around Xu Qing, and their pistils exploded toward him. Xu Qing evaded all but one of the pistils, which hit him and left behind a deep wound. Put precisely, it slashed through Netherflame's body within this memory world. But Xu Qing could feel the pain it inflicted.

The memory itself is attacking me!

As he experienced the pain, he realized that the ripping sensation was ebbing again. Apparently, the combination of being wounded, and the arrival of that terrifying entity, was causing the ripping to go away.

This all seems to indicate one thing. I can't fight back! This flower is going to kill me! Does that mean that Netherflame was killed by this flower?

Xu Qing refused to believe it. Unfortunately, the ripping sensation seemed to indicate that something even more terrifying was about to happen.

There's still something else I can try!

Eyes flashing, he summoned the carving knife made of the godly authority of fate. But then, even as his sea of consciousness surged, cracking sounds suddenly rang out from his bag of holding.

Xu Qing backed up, a puzzled expression appearing on his face.

The golden rat egg in his bag of holding was starting to hatch. It seemed like it could be because of the carving knife, although he couldn't be sure. A stream of golden light shot out, swirled around the egg, devoured the egg, then emerged from the bag of holding without him doing a thing.

A small golden rat landed on his palm. With some struggle, it opened its eyes, looked at Xu Qing, and squeaked. Then it nuzzled his palm and pulsed with emotional fluctuations of familiarity.

All of a sudden, the memory world began to change. The sound vanished. The flower pistils stopped moving. The queen froze in place, as did her facial expression.

Everything seemed to go still.

Xu Qing was stunned. This definitely was not something he had predicted would happen.

He had been aware that these golden rats were extraordinary. After all, the old man from the Fifth Star Ring had one, and it was intelligent enough to flee through time from him. Because of that, Xu Qing had been looking forward to seeing what his rat would be like. But regardless of that, he could never have predicted that the moment the rat emerged, it would do something like this.

Meanwhile, in a much deeper memory world in Grand Emperor Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities, there was a very strange heaven and earth.

In this place, heaven was made of flesh, and it was covered with countless downy hairs. Every single strand of that hair was a memory world. As for the earth, it was made up of a transparent sea. On top of the sea was a conglomeration of flesh that looked like a huge tumor.

Inside of the tumor was a middle-aged cultivator, seated cross-legged. He looked threatening without being angry, and pulsed with an extremely ancient and terrifying aura. His eyes were currently closed. All of a sudden, they snapped open, and he looked out into the memory world.

"So, a chronoflitter? Who would have guessed that an animal like that would appear now?"[2]

1. Xu Qing rescued Ningyan from the euphoria iris in [chapter 491](#). There are some slight differences in the description of the flowers between that chapter and this one. What's more, the author actually didn't use the same name in this chapter, although it's very close (he just changed one character). My guess is that he didn't take time to go back and double-check what he called it before. I'm going with the original version of the name to maintain continuity. Another confusing element is pistil/stamen. In Chinese, there is one word that can mean both things. Essentially, that word means "floral reproductive organ." You can get more specific in Chinese by adding the word male or female to clarify if it's a stamen or pistil. I feel like it would be weird to use "floral reproductive organs," and would rather use pistil or stamen depending on how it's described. In chapter 491, the way it described those flower parts corresponds to what we would call the stamen in English. In this chapter, the way it describes a single thing in the middle of the flowers seems to correspond to a pistil. I don't think the author is concerned with the difference between pistils and stamens. In Chinese, the term is much less scientific-sounding. 雌雄

2. I've coined the term 'chronoflitter' after consulting with the author. In Chinese, the name of the animal is made up of two characters. One is the character for "leave/depart" and the other is "the

present.” It’s a fairly obvious meaning when you read it in Chinese. It means “to leave the present.” That said, it’s also *not* necessarily so clear what it means, because each character can have multiple meanings. After struggling for a while without much context, I finally reached out to the author for clarification. For the English version, I’m combining the prefix “chrono” which relates to time, and “flit” as in “to flit away.” 飞

Chapter 1064: Seeing Initial Clues

Chapter 1064: Seeing Initial Clues

The golden rat that belonged to the old man from the Fifth Star Ring was so quick it could move faster than time. It left no traces of its passage, and could also hide within time itself. Only a truly almighty expert could ever detect it. That just went to show how terrifying it was.

Of course, to reach the same level as that rat from the Fifth Star Ring, this new rat would have to mature. And that would involve going through a host of tribulations, the type that were so difficult that only one out of a hundred individuals could survive. Accomplishing that would require paying a huge cost.

It wasn’t just that mysterious middle-aged cultivator who noticed what happened with the Chronoflitter.

Outside of the Devilbird holy land, in the Revered Ancient mainland, in the cave in Fardark territory, Sir Nightcrusher suddenly opened his eyes. They shone with bright golden light as hē looked up in the direction of the Devilbird holy land. Hīs blood was telling hīm that a descendant of hīs had just been born.[1]

A complicated look appeared in those eyes. Years ago, when Master Righteous Veil captured hīm and extinguished hīs godfire, hē did not have any descendants. Those two eggs were really hīs last hope to gain freedom. Using an innate ability, hē had extracted some of his bloodline power, then used time itself to conceal it from karma, and thus prevent Master Righteous Veil from noticing. And in the end... Xu Qing and Erniu took the eggs away. [2]

Although it seemed like that entire event was random, the truth was that only hē knew how much of it played out according to hīs own plan. Sir Nightcrusher eventually closed hīs eyes, whereupon hīs life force began to seep away. The only thing left behind was a faint murmur.

“Chronoflitter. Chronoflitter. The Chronoflitter Dynasty. Burrow through time. Pierce myriad spaces. Flee without a trace....”

In the nation of women in Grand Emperor Netherflame’s secluded meditation facilities, Xu Qing was feeling deeply shaken. He looked at the little golden rat in his palm, then at the huge euphoria iris. The moment the golden rat had been born, the latter went completely still and quiet. It wasn’t just the flower. Everything around him reacted the same. It went silent.

Only Xu Qing and the golden rat weren't affected. The little rat squeaked and nuzzled Xu Qing's finger. Then it seemed to pulse with incredible hunger. Flashing with golden light, it flew off Xu Qing's palm, opened its mouth, and took a big bite out of space itself.

A rift appeared as space was torn open, and the rat swallowed the portion it had bitten. Unfortunately, it was still a juvenile, so doing this sort of thing was a bit difficult for it. The action had weakened it. However, it was still hungry, so it ravenously took another bite.

Space split open, and that disturbed the stillness. An instant later, everything went back to normal. The euphoria iris started flailing about again.

Astonishingly to Xu Qing, as everything went back to normal, a terrifying will approached through the void, heading toward the euphoria iris. Just barely sensing this will caused Xu Qing to shiver in fear, as if he were sinking into a sea of death.

There was no time for thinking or planning. Without the slightest hesitation, he grabbed the little golden rat, who seemed intent on taking a third bite. Then Xu Qing blurred into motion, becoming a stream of light that shot through the gap in space. As the terrifying will closed in at top speed, Xu Qing vanished.

Once through, he caught sight of a dazzling starry sky. He had no idea if there was a real starry sky outside of the memory world. But he knew that, regardless, he was in danger. Therefore, he didn't slow down a bit.

A moment later, the sense of danger from that terrifying will vanished. Yet he didn't let his guard down. That was because this boundless and indescribably beautiful starry sky also contained danger.

There was a tempest churning there. It swept everywhere, shattering heavenly bodies as it turned into something like a black hole that could devour anything and everything.

Xu Qing was on the edge of the tempest. Given the critical nature of the moment, he didn't spend time thinking. He waved his hand to summon the Sageheaven Pagoda, and stepped inside. Without a moment of hesitation, he sent the pagoda racing away from the tempest.

This was the best thing Xu Qing could think to do. After all, the mysterious pagoda was designed to traverse starry skies. And the sageheaven god vine, which was part of the pagoda, was a mutant entity *from* the starry sky.

After about an hour, the speeding pagoda had left the outer border of the tempest. Seeing that, Xu Qing breathed a sigh of relief. At the same time, he could sense longing from the sageheaven god vine.

It was a longing directed toward the starry sky itself. It deeply wished that Xu Qing would let it leave the pagoda and roam wildly. After a bit of thought, Xu Qing cast his senses out to confirm that the tempest was a great distance away. Then he sent a message of approval to the vine.

The vine let loose a sound like a cheer. Unwrapping from the pagoda, it swelled in size, reaching a length of 30,000 meters. Then, it wrapped one end of itself around the pagoda, while the other end swayed back and forth.

Seeing that, Xu Qing stepped out of the pagoda. The vine swirled around, letting loose more cheering. The free end then stretched forward so he could step onto it. A tremor passed through it, and then a mysterious will spread out, and it started speeding through the starry sky like a fish through water.

If an ordinary cultivator could see what was happening, they would be shaken to the core. There was Xu Qing, his long robe whipping about him as he sat atop the god vine. The vine was 30,000 meters long, and looked completely glorious. It glittered with starlight, and its leaves pulsated as the starry sky seemed to part, making a path for it to fly along like a dragon.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered. From the sense of joy coming from the vine, and its speed, he could tell that the starry sky truly was its domain.

As they sped through the starry sky, they passed countless fragments that shone like heavenly bodies. There were images in the fragments. They were memory worlds!

However, after what he had just experienced in the world of the euphoria irises, Xu Qing knew how dangerous the memory worlds could be. He wouldn't go into one casually, and thus, instructed the god vine to skirt them.

At the same time, he started searching for whatever worlds contained the empress and his Eldest Brother.

This place is where a Grand Emperor went into secluded meditation. There is danger everywhere. Finding the empress as quickly as possible is definitely the right thing to do.

Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing had the vine speed up.

In the blood-red world, in the transparent tumor of flesh atop the huge sea, the middle-aged cultivator who had sensed the chronoflitter suddenly looked up again. He looked up at the fine hair covering the flesh that was the dome of heaven, and then his pupils constricted, as if he had just caught sight of something completely unbelievable.

An instant later, he struggled to control his breathing as he closed his eyes to think.

His eyes opened a moment later, and they glowed with a strange light as he raised his hand and pointed to the dome of heaven. The fine hair above stopped moving briefly, then started intertwining as if arranging into a specific pattern.

Xu Qing was far away in the starry sky, in a place where there were seven or eight memory worlds. However, those worlds were slowly blurring until they disappeared, to be replaced by a far larger memory world. What was more, that memory world was moving forward slowly, almost as if it were making a path for Xu Qing to follow.

Sometime later, the god vine shot through the starry sky, bringing Xu Qing close to the memory fragment ahead, which was larger than any other he had seen up to this point. The image within

that memory fragment was a necropolis. After some thought, he instructed the god vine to go around it.

But then, golden light flared in his bag of holding, and the little golden rat shot out, pulsing with a sensation of longing. It became a beam of golden light that shot with astonishing speed toward the memory world.

Xu Qing's face fell. He had no time to stop it, and thus, could only frown and send the god vine flying toward the memory fragment.

A moment later, he entered it. His vision blurred, he felt like he was piercing through something. He felt the exact same sensation as when he'd entered the world of euphoria irises.

When his vision cleared, he saw a sprawling necropolis in front of him. At the entrance of the necropolis was a blue pool of water, the fragrant aroma of which filled the first level of the necropolis.

The little golden rat had jumped into the pool, and was excitedly drinking, which caused its aura to grow stronger.

There were no other entities present.

Xu Qing checked himself and found that, yet again, he looked like Netherflame. But this time, he was covered with wounds and splattered with blood. He felt incredibly weak. He had clearly just fought a brutal battle.

Just as he was gaining his bearings, an emotionless stream of divine will emerged from the depths of the necropolis.

"Master Netherflame, you are the first person in the past 30,000 years to pass the 931st assessment of our Heavenmaker species. As stipulated, you may now cleanse your fleshly body once, for the time it takes an incense stick to burn."

Xu Qing looked more closely at the pool of water. A moment later, he walked up to it and looked at the golden rat.

This memory world is strange. There was no test. Nothing difficult happened. It just directly led to the acquisition of a destined opportunity.

Eyes narrowing, he sent his divine will out to check the pool. The moment his divine will touched it, his expression flickered, and his eyes shone.

He had no idea what the 'water' in the pond was made of. But... just now, when his divine will touched it, something that Xu Qing didn't understand happened, which resulted in his fleshly body and soul being deeply nourished. In fact, he could tell that the soul injuries he had sustained in his fight with Sir Westdevil had recovered by more than half.

But of even greater significance was what happened with his fleshly body! He got the clear sensation... that his fleshly body was being replenished. Put precisely, it was being filled with life

force. Though his fleshly body had seemed fine before, the reality was that it had a huge deficit. Now, strength was pouring into it.

What kind of water is this that can cause a sensation like this in a fleshly body made from Eminent Desolation's flesh and blood?

Xu Qing took a deep breath. After a bit of thought, as well as some observation, including a look at the little golden rat, he decided that the water was safe. Eyes shining with determination, he knelt down and dipped his right hand into the water.

The moment he made contact, he felt massive amounts of life force pouring into him. His mind reeled as his cultivation base and aura erupted. And most important, his fleshly body surged with strength. He was becoming increasingly flawless!

In another memory world, Grand Emperor Netherflame had just fought a fierce battle with a clone of himself. He now stood amidst sprawling ruins, clad in a long violet robe, his hand clenched around the neck of a second version of himself.

Out of the captives' eyes, ears, nose, and mouth flowed streams of white energy.

The version in the violet robe absorbed the energy, while the captive version trembled and howled in agony. Eventually, the captive version's shape began to change. Instead of looking like Netherflame, the captive looked like a woman. It was one of the two women who had come from the western Devilbirds. The absorption process continued. Sometime later, the woman's external form collapsed, revealing that she was actually an old hag!

If Xu Qing had been there, he would have recognized her. That old woman... was actually the seventh Imperial Sovereign from the western Devilbirds' seventh Imperial Sovereign mountain! Her eyes shone with despair and venom.

"Who... are you...?"

The violet-clad Netherflame said nothing, and his facial expression didn't change. Eventually, the seventh Imperial Sovereign collapsed into dust. Netherflame licked his lips, turned, and walked off.

As he did, Netherflame's outer form changed. It faded away, turning into a tall figure with long black hair and a young face.

He was none other than Yue Dong's pursuer, Young Lord Yun!

However, though his physical appearance was that of Young Lord Yun, his eyes seemed profoundly ancient. The truth was that he wasn't Young Lord Yun, he was actually the patriarch of the Yun Clan. He was Patriarch Yun![3]

Ascending to the highest point in that world, he clasped hands to the dome of heaven. "Your humble servant has complied with your orders from years ago, Grand Emperor, and come here for an audience. Everything you predicted would happen over the past years has indeed come true. The

sons rebelled. The Lan Clan plotted evil. And as they fought, both in the open and in the shadows, they sought to open the way to the grotto-heaven.”

The dome of heaven swirled. Winds shifted. A pair of cold eyes appeared and looked down.

A moment later, Young Lord Yun clasped hands and bowed. “Your orders shall be followed!”

1. Sir Nightcrusher appeared last in [chapter 927](#). [㊦]

2. Master Righteous Veil was mentioned in [chapter 927](#), [961](#), and [1040](#). I originally rendered his name as Master Deluo, but eventually consulted the author about it, after which I settled on Righteous Veil. For more information about that, check the footnote in [chapter 927](#). [㊦]

3. The line elaborating on the identity of this person isn’t actually in the original text. I added it. The reason is that a few chapters from now, it becomes clear that this character is not the young lord but the patriarch, except that there is no explanation other than the line in this chapter about his eyes looking ancient. I was initially confused and thought the author had made a mistake. However, it’s clear based on later events and references that this character is the patriarch. There is never any explanation about when the switch happened. Was he always the patriarch? Or did he switch roles after going offscreen a while back? We don’t know for sure, although there are vague clues in previous and subsequent chapters. Regardless, I feel it makes slightly more sense to just outright explain who he is, rather than assume the audience will realize from this seemingly throwaway line of text that he’s actually the patriarch of the clan. [㊦]

Chapter 1065: I Already Conquered This Planet!

In the world made of Grand Emperor Netherflame’s memories of the Heavenmaker species, the massive necropolis was wreathed in shadows. The walls were carved with complex designs, but looking closely at them would reveal only a blur. It was impossible to make out any details about them. It was only possible to sense that the designs were like liquid, constantly flowing to form a host of ever-changing images.

The necropolis was completely empty. The only beings inside were Xu Qing and the golden rat, both of whom were at the blue pool.

There were no bystanders. There was no sound. There was only time, slowly passing. So far, enough time had passed for an incense stick to burn.

Xu Qing looked down at the pool and sensed the terrifying life force flowing constantly into him, healing his injuries and nourishing his fleshly body. The sense of strength within him was growing increasingly intense, as was the feeling of flawlessness.

The Heavenmaker species....

Xu Qing had never heard of such a species before. However, given how astounding this pool of water was, he could tell that they were incredibly powerful. All in all, this was the first time Xu

Qing had encountered anything that could bolster this fleshly body of his. Furthermore, from the moment he started the absorption process, he could tell with certainty that the pond was not harmful.

Too bad everything just happened so fast.

His eyes flashed as he looked at the little golden rat splashing in the water. The rat was continuing to madly absorb the water. Apparently, the unusual water was so important to it that it didn't want to waste even a fraction of a moment.

Xu Qing thought about the situation for a moment, and in the end, decided not to do as the rat was doing and immerse himself in the pool. Although the water was obviously beneficial to him, he was also slightly suspicious about this good fortune coming out of nowhere.

Therefore, he stopped after putting only his hand in the water.

As Xu Qing carefully controlled how much he was absorbing, the rat's belly began to swell up. Eventually, it reached its limit and reluctantly returned to his side.

Looking hesitant, Xu Qing finally pulled his hand away to end the destined opportunity. However, he did take out a bottle from this bag of holding, in the hopes that he could fill it with water and take it away.

Intentionally speaking out loud, he said, "I need to think more about where this destined opportunity came from. Only then can I decide whether or not to bathe in the water. Even if I can't take it away, I'm not going to risk immersing myself. Hopefully this works."

He had been acting very cautiously so far, including what he was doing right now. Some time passed, and then he shook his head and sighed. It wasn't possible to extract the water and take it away.

"What a pity," he murmured. "What a real pity...."

But he wasn't ready to give up just yet, so he spent some time thinking of other possible ways to take the water. Unfortunately, all attempts failed. Although the water would enter the bottle, it would subsequently disappear.

Xu Qing sighed again, then stood to leave. At the same time, he gestured to the little golden rat to bite open a rift in space.

The rat burped. Then, looking very happy, it opened its mouth wide and bit down onto the air. A loud crunch rang out, and the same thing happened which had happened in the world of euphoria irises. A spatial rift opened up.

This time, however, the little golden rat didn't seem interested in the spatial shard that resulted. Instead of eating it, it ignored it and lazily lay down on Xu Qing's shoulder.

Xu Qing took a deep breath, then turned into a stream of light that shot toward the rift. He vanished inside.

Everything looked normal.

After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, Xu Qing came back out. When he emerged, his eyes were sparkling. He was not as hesitant as before.

I was very careful in everything I did. I wanted to make it seem like I was suspicious of the destined opportunity, and in the end, I chose to just leave. As it turns out, I really could leave if I wanted to. There are a few possible explanations.

First, it's possible there was never anybody manipulating things from behind the scenes. Everything was a big coincidence, and I was just overthinking things. After all, if there is someone manipulating things, it would make sense for them to let me take the water out of the pool to get me to let my guard down. Except, I failed to take the water away. What's more, nothing prevented me from leaving the place.

A second possibility is that there really is somebody manipulating things, and they didn't want me to take the water away. But they did let me leave, which begs the question of what their purpose is....

Xu Qing's eyes glittered brightly. If the second option is the correct one, then maybe the person is simply putting a game piece into play randomly in the hopes of it paying off later. Either way, if there's somebody trying to manipulate me, then it makes no difference if I take the destined opportunity or not. Ultimately, they could make a move on me either way.

Xu Qing's eyes shone with determination, but at the same time, he still had suspicions. However, the good fortune in front of him was just too amazing, and considering he had already done some tests, he finally gritted his teeth.

Blurring into motion, he entered the pool of water, settled down cross-legged, and began to absorb it. The water seethed and a vortex formed.

Xu Qing absorbed it, causing it to pour into him. The sensation of nourishment was a hundred times that of before. It was the same with the feeling of life force.

After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, Xu Qing opened his eyes. He had reached his limit. As it turned out, the water in the pool couldn't provide unlimited bolstering to a fleshly body made from Eminent Desolation's flesh and blood.

At the same time, Xu Qing found that the world around him was starting to blur and fade away.

Then the emotionless divine will that had spoken to him earlier returned.

"An incense stick of time has passed. Your good fortune is over."

The world vanished, and Xu Qing found himself in the starry sky again. The sageheaven god vine flew over to him. Xu Qing looked around and thought back to everything that happened in the Heavenmaker necropolis. Making sure to keep his guard up, he had the god vine fly off into the distance.

Time slipped by slowly but surely.

A few days later, as Xu Qing was continuing to check memory worlds, his heart leaped. It was because the sageheaven god vine had suddenly transmitted emotional fluctuations that indicated it had recognized something with a similar origin as itself.

The only explanation was that it had found Erniu.

Xu Qing immediately sent instructions to the vine with divine will, and it rushed in that direction. It didn't take long to arrive. Xu Qing found himself looking at a very small memory fragment that depicted a barren planet full of filth and decay.

Erniu... was there.

When Xu Qing saw what was going on, a strange expression appeared on his face. Without the slightest hesitation, he sent the god vine forward to enter the place.

At the last moment, though, he backed up, his eyes shining. He couldn't enter the world!

Don't tell me that if somebody else is inside a memory world, others are prohibited from entering? Is it because the memory worlds only contain one Netherflame, which prevents others from coming inside...?

After some more thought, he looked at Erniu's memory world again, then waved his hand and sent the golden rat flying out.

"Bite it open!"

On the barren planet, Erniu was hopping vigorously on one leg. That was because he only had one leg. As he hopped, he cursed constantly.

What the hell kind of place is this? It's bad enough there's no spirit energy and the place has massive pressure weighing down. And of course there's the terrifying sealing in place. I can't even use one damn bit of my cultivation base!

To make it even worse, I'm incarnated as a weak and dying version of Netherflame! And I'm even missing body parts....

But most outrageous of all are the maggots! How come there are so many maggots here? And every single one has extraordinary god power fluctuations! Freaking... maggots with godliness? What the hell is this place? A world of maggot gods?

He had been hopping around for quite a while trying to find a way to leave, or at least determine what Netherflame had done. But no matter what Erniu did, he found himself in error. Looking at the maggots surrounding him, his eyes began to shine with madness.

"I still have one option left. You want to eat me? Well, I'll eat you! Let's see who can eat who first!"

Despite the fact that Erniu prided himself on not being a picky eater, he couldn't stomach the idea of eating maggots. Unfortunately, he was truly out of options. Shouting, he prepared to go all out.

However, that was when an intense rumbling sound filled the sky, like thunder. As it spread out, the canopy of heaven sank down. It looked as if some enormous entity were attacking the sky from the other side.

Then everything went back to normal.

Stunned, Erniu looked up. "What's going on?"

The moment the words left his mouth, another sound filled the sky. This time it wasn't rumbling, but rather, a cracking sound. The canopy of heaven, which had just repaired itself, looked like it was being bitten. And then a small rift opened up. Then, a loud tearing sound could be heard as the rift turned into a large opening.

Erniu's heart pounded. Then his eyes went wide with disbelief as he realized he could see a starry sky on the other side of the rift.

And within that starry sky was a huge god vine. The vine's leaves were spread wide, and the vine itself was shining brightly. Looking almost like a dragon, it swept through the opening and screamed through the sky.

Most astonishing of all was that there was someone standing on the vine. He had long flowing hair and a blood-red robe. He was none other than Xu Qing in the form of Sir Blood Dust. The god vine served as a foil, and starlight as the backdrop as his terrifying energy crushed down on everything.

Because of the opening in the canopy of heaven, the sealing power was vanishing. And with Xu Qing's energy crushing down on everything, the countless maggots were being blasted away.

Erniu looked completely bedraggled as he stood there on one leg looking blankly at Xu Qing. Finally, he took a deep breath. Puffing his chest out, he proudly said, "You're too late, little Junior Brother. Your Eldest Brother already conquered this planet!"

The empress was traversing the starry sky in a very different way than Xu Qing. Whenever shē appeared in front of a memory world, it would tremble before collapsing noiselessly into a mass of glittering light motes that would ultimately fade into nothing... The empress clearly had a sense of where shē was going.

After following that path to the end... a very specific memory fragment appeared in front of hēr. When shē got close to it, it didn't collapse.

The memory world was filled with darkness and an aura of death. And it was raining.

Chapter 1066: Burial Mounds in the Rain

On one of Grand Emperor Netherflame's random memory worlds, there was a pitch black plain, within which was a massive ravine. It was like an abyss.

An old man in a black robe sped through that abyss. He no longer looked like Netherflame. Instead, he seemed ancient. He was the very same black-robed individual who had appeared on Grand Emperor Devilbird's dao altar. His chains clinked as he moved forward, and they were intensely hot, though there was no indication that he felt any pain because of them. In contrast, he seemed very excited.[1]

Almost there....

The black-robed old man struggled to control his breathing as he accelerated, going faster and faster for the time it takes an incense stick to burn. Then, he abruptly stopped in place. The abyss ended up ahead. And at that spot was a well.

The old man excitedly approached the well and looked down into it. There was water inside, and within it was the blurry reflection of a world. It was a world full of darkness and death. And it was raining.

"This is the place!"

He took a deep breath and, looking very determined, shot into the well.

In another memory world, one full of birdsong and the fragrance of flowers, puffy white clouds floated across the sky and immortal cranes soared back and forth. It was like a celestial paradise. Immortal mountains rose up everywhere, surrounded by clouds, and it was even possible to see immortal palaces built on them.

Outside of the seventeenth immortal palace, Patriarch Yun stood. Looking over his shoulder at the impressive scenery, he hoarsely said, "It's about to start raining."

He pushed open the door of the immortal palace. The moment he did, a wind sprang up in the world. All of a sudden, humidity began to spread through the world. Inside the immortal palace, the sky was dark and it was raining.

Patriarch Yun stepped inside, his expression reverent, as if he were beginning a pilgrimage.

Throughout Grand Emperor Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities, the western Devilbirds, as well as Lin Kun of the eastern Devilbirds, had used a variety of methods to leave the memory shards they were in. Then they used various methods to find and explore other memory worlds.

But whatever worlds they were on, one after another, the weather changed. Clouds seethed and rain started to fall.

“It’s raining?” A raindrop hit one of the leaves of the sageheaven god vine in front of Xu Qing. The rift in the gray sky was already starting to close. But elsewhere, the clouds had grown thick and rain was falling.

It fell on Xu Qing, on the ground, and on Erniu’s head as he stood there with his mouth hanging open.

“Let’s go, Eldest Brother,” Xu Qing said calmly. His next goal was to go find the empress. After everything he had experienced in this gruish place, he had come to the conclusion that the safest place to be was at the empress’ side.

However, Erniu clearly had different ideas. As far as he was concerned, he had endured a lot of hardship on this planet. And after Xu Qing’s very amazing entrance scene, Erniu was not exactly feeling very great. And thus, his unyielding heart began to race.

I didn’t get a damned thing from this stupid place. What a waste of effort and suffering!

Of course, what he thought and what he said were very different things. Looking very proud, he coolly said, “Don’t be in such a hurry to leave, little Ah Qing. Although I conquered this planet already, I was only just about to harvest the destined opportunity from here. I suppose that means you’re lucky. You showed up at just the right time. As the Eldest Brother, I’m not going to bicker with you over particulars. Just enjoy the show as your Eldest Brother rises to prominence!”

Erniu stuck his chin up, rolled his shoulders, then waved his voluminous sleeve. He looked truly arrogant. That was especially true considering he had only one hand and one leg. Plus, his hair was disheveled, and he was covered in all sorts of wounds. He actually looked quite tragic.

Xu Qing, meanwhile, sighed inwardly. He knew full well that his Eldest Brother’s competitive heart had been riled up.

Jumping off the god vine, he landed next to Erniu and cooperatively said, “What destined opportunity are you talking about?”

“Well,” Erniu said, his eyes sparkling, “what else but the most amazing good fortune that Grand Emperor Netherflame ever acquired!”

Erniu licked his lips, then looked around at the planet full of maggots and corpses. Lowering his voice, he continued, “You just got here, little Ah Qing, so you have no idea what I went through here. I already explored this entire place, and fully analyzed the karma. Don’t pay attention to how bad things look. The reality is that, based on my detailed analysis, the worse a place looks—like this one—the greater the destined opportunities that are hidden here.

“After all, this memory world obviously contains something that left a profound impression on Grand Emperor Netherflame.... What’s more, my analysis also confirmed that the version of Grand Emperor Netherflame that I have assumed sustained grievous wounds that pushed him close to death. And that begs the question: how did he recover? Also, how did he escape this place?

“Ordinarily speaking, he should have died, beyond the shadow of any doubt. Yet he didn’t. He escaped! And that proves that there is some sort of incredible destined opportunity here. An amazing good fortune. And Grand Emperor Netherflame acquired it!

“Whatever good fortune that was, the fact that I’m standing in for Netherflame here means that only I can get it!”

Erniu was actually correct. And after hearing his explanation, Xu Qing, who understood a good deal about karma, looked around with glittering eyes. When Erniu realized that Xu Qing actually agreed with him, Erniu felt even more confident. He cleared his throat.

“I might seem like I’m in bad shape, and truth be told, those maggots gave me a run for the money. But the reality is that I did it all on purpose. I was simply trying to get into the same sense of despair that Grand Emperor Netherflame felt back then.”

It took Erniu a bit of jabbering, but he had eventually arrived at his main point. There was no doubt about it. Erniu had had a rough time, and his analysis made a lot of sense.

Eyebrows dancing up and down, Xu Qing said, “So, Eldest Brother, did you find the destined opportunity already?”

Erniu blinked a few times. “Almost. It should only take a few more tries. There are only two things I haven’t tried yet. One: eat the maggots. Two: die!

“Originally, it would have been hard to explore the second option. Based on my analysis, if Netherflame died to get the destined opportunity, then he had to have used some unique treasure to make sure that he was resurrected after dying. Unfortunately, I have no such treasures.... But now that you’re here, I have an option that comes very close to option two....”

Erniu looked at him. Xu Qing looked back at him and immediately understood what he meant.

“Eldest Brother, are you suggesting that the two of us use threads of the seven emotions and six sensory pleasures that come from Six Thieves Deceive Life?”

Erniu nodded. “Exactly! The two of us both have the same Six Thieves authority. The threads of the seven emotions and six sensory pleasures that they create are connected. You know, like a rope. That rope, attached to my greed, can become the lifeline that pulls me out of death! So that’s what we’re going to do!”

Erniu’s eyes shone with madness as his Six Thieves authority glittered, and the threads of the seven emotions and six sensory pleasures appeared.

After seeing his Eldest Brother’s fierce determination, Xu Qing thought briefly, then tapped into his own Six Thieves authority. His own threads of seven emotions and six sensory pleasures appeared, and linked with Erniu’s. As the threads overlapped and connected, an intense sensation of greed and madness flowed out from Erniu’s threads. Along with them came a strong desire for victory.

“Are you sure?” Xu Qing asked.

“Absolutely,” Erniu replied. “Don’t worry. My desire to stay alive might not be the strongest. But I have plenty of greed. As long as I’m greedy enough, everything else will be a breeze.”

Erniu took a deep breath, gritted his teeth, then winked.

Xu Qing could sense that the threads really could tap into Erniu's deepest emotions of greed. Most importantly, he noticed that wink. And thus, he sat down cross-legged without any sign that anything was amiss.

Erniu also sat down, then lifted his hand and slammed it down onto the top of his head. A boom rang out, and he crumpled to the ground.

However, he wasn't dead. Gasping for breath, he weakly said, "Help me, little Ah Qing. I can't actually kill myself...."

With a bit of an odd expression on his face, Xu Qing reached out and touched Erniu's chest with his finger. A boom rang out from that spot, and Erniu's life force drained away even more quickly.

Xu Qing's gaze hardened as he realized that the connected threads were extracting his life force.

Time passed slowly but surely.

Erniu, who was standing in for Netherflame, had almost no life force left. Xu Qing's authority glittered as he finally yanked Erniu back from the brink. Erniu shivered, and his greed surged. Life force was thus stimulated, and he breathed in raggedly. Then his eyes snapped open. At first, they seemed blank, but as he recovered, they filled with excitement.

"I sensed the power of death.... I was right! The destined opportunity here can only be acquired by dying! Okay, let's do it again, little Ah Qing. This time, wait a bit longer before saving me."

Erniu looked at Xu Qing with great anticipation.

Knowing he had no choice in the matter, Xu Qing launched another blow.

Erniu toppled.

This time, as his life force faded away, Xu Qing held back from saving him. Eventually, when the threads of the seven emotions and six sensory pleasures grew dim, as did the greed, Xu Qing knew he couldn't wait any longer. His authority surged, and he began to yank Erniu back again. His carving knife of fate shone brightly.

Erniu's greed surged, and it seemed that he wished to awaken. But then, an aura of death swept out from the planet, through Erniu's body, and into the threads. A gray mist appeared that seemed about to completely overwhelm Erniu.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered. He could tell that whatever his Eldest Brother was after, it had just appeared. Given how well he knew Erniu, that wink had made everything clear.

Without a moment of hesitation, he used his carving knife to slash viciously at the gray mist.

At the same time, the fading greed suddenly seemed to shed its disguise and become incredibly strong. Greed towered to heaven, seemingly turning into a heavenly dog that howled noiselessly and then started gobbling up the mist.

All of a sudden, wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. Intense rumbling sounds rose into the dome of heaven. All of the corpses on the barren planet opened their eyes. Countless maggots screamed, trembled, then exploded one after another.

Xu Qing observed as the gray mist inside Erniu rapidly returned to the planet. However, there was a bit of it that was snagged and eaten by Erniu's greed.

What was more, Xu Qing could also see that the carving knife of fate he had already retracted also had some gray mist on it, which it had absorbed in the moment of impact. Xu Qing's eyes gleamed.

An aura of death erupted within Erniu, causing him to rise up into the air. As he hovered in midair, all of the corpses on the planet kowtowed to him. The living maggots shrank back and pulsed with a will of allegiance.

Erniu slowly opened his eyes. They were gray. A moment later, the gray color vanished, replaced by pure greed. Erniu laughed maniacally.

"I've conquered this planet!"

Xu Qing felt a bit relieved, and was about to open his mouth and speak when something dramatic happened.

Rain began to pour down. It was much heavier than before, forming streams and then thick sheets. Within the sheets of water, a world was visible. It was a dark world filled with countless grave mounds....

It was raining outside and inside.

At that moment, the rain became a medium that could fuse everything, including the laughing Erniu and the grim-faced Xu Qing. Everything was being devoured.

1. The black-robed figure appeared in chapter 1037. ㊞

Chapter 1067: Awaken, My Warriors

In every single one of the countless memory worlds of Grand Emperor Netherflame, it was raining. And it fell on all the people who had entered those worlds. That included both Lin Kun and the western Devilbird cultivators. No one could evade it.

With the passage of time, the rain fell harder. All of the worlds became filled with a torrential downpour. Within the sheets of rain, it was possible to see a dim world of death and burial mounds. Eventually, that world overtook everything. It was like a devouring. All of the memory worlds... became burial mounds!

Xu Qing opened his eyes and wondered where he was. He was lying down, and everything was pitch black. It felt humid. He couldn't use his cultivation base to cast his senses out. All he could do was grope around and use his sense of touch to try to identify his surroundings.

All he felt around him was cold wood. Around him. Beneath him. It was all the same. He was in a very narrow but somewhat long space, so confined that he couldn't sit up.

"This is a coffin!" he murmured. It was obviously a serious situation.

It had just started raining on the barren planet where I found Eldest Brother. It was a gruish rain. I remember that sheets of rain formed, within which a world was vaguely visible. That world had a ton of burial mounds in it.... Does that mean I'm in one of those burial mounds? I suppose my cultivation base senses have been sealed. And presumably... so has my entire cultivation base. In that case, who am I supposed to be? Netherflame?

He put his hand up to his face to feel its features. His pupils constricted. He wasn't Netherflame, nor was he Sir Blood Dust.

He had just felt his own real face!

This is a very gruish world.

He clenched his right hand into a fist and then punched the coffin lid above him. The blow caused the coffin to shiver, and a crack appeared. However, only an instant later, a sealing power swept forth and sealed the crack.

When Xu Qing reached out and felt the lid, he decided not to waste energy on any more blows. Inside his sea of consciousness, his godly authority of fate stirred, and the carving knife appeared. He slashed it at the coffin lid. The result was a sound like a mirror shattering.

The sense of sealing dispersed by a great deal, which restored much of Xu Qing's cultivation base and its senses. The carving knife of fate had paramount godly authority personhood, which meant that very few sealing powers in existence could stand up to it.

Xu Qing immediately launched a second blow. A muffled boom echoed out. The boom filled the coffin, then pierced out into the world beyond.

RUMBLE!

RUMBLE!

RUMBLE!

The sky was pitch black. Rain was falling. And a muffled boom brought a bit of life to the previously deathly still night. A second boom echoed out.

Lands and sky alike were all as dark as could be. However, it was just barely possible to see that the ground was covered with burial mounds. They were seemingly endless. It was a graveyard. A cold, sinister feeling filled the area.

One of the burial mounds was issuing loud booms. Then, all of a sudden, the grave mound began to crumble in on itself. A hand shot out from the dirt! If a timid mortal saw what was happening, they would be shocked to the core. In fact, even in the cultivation world, this wasn't something commonly seen.

Before long, Xu Qing was crawling out of the dirt. Once out in the open, he looked around vigilantly at the rain-soaked graveyard.

All he saw was darkness and graves. There was something very gruish about the darkness. His divine sense couldn't go very far, making only about 300 meters visible in each direction. The grave mounds looked vaguely like evil ghosts.

Xu Qing's vigilance grew more intense. As he was surveying his surroundings, he heard booming sounds off in the distance. Eyes narrowing, he started moving, albeit cautiously, in the direction of the sound. Eventually, the source of the sound was within the range of his divine sense. He stopped moving.

The booming grew louder, until finally, a grave mound caved in and golden light shot out of it. Astonishingly, a little golden rat was visible within the golden light.

It wasn't Xu Qing's rat. And it looked like it had just been born and was trying to chew on space. Unfortunately, the space here was very difficult for a newborn golden rat to chew. After gnawing a few times, the little rat started to get anxious.

The sight of the rat caused Xu Qing to breathe a sigh of relief. He hurried over to the grave mound. As he neared, he saw Erniu climbing out into the open.

"Where the hell am I?" Erniu said, spitting out dirt. He was back to his normal appearance, although he was still bedraggled, and also looked quite depressed.

As far as Erniu was concerned, he had just worked very hard to conquer that planet, and had acquired a legacy of death. But in his moment of triumph, he had suddenly been devoured by that strange rain. Normally speaking, he devoured other people! Rare were the occasions when *he* was devoured. And that wasn't to mention that the culprit was some rain....

Erniu was obviously not very pleased with the situation. Upon noticing Xu Qing approaching, he climbed out more quickly.

By the time Xu Qing arrived, Erniu was out in the open. After straightening out his hair, he stuck his chin up and prepared to speak. But then... his face fell. Xu Qing suddenly lurched to a halt, and his face also fell. Together, the two of them looked up.

A terrifying pressure had appeared out of nowhere, and it was weighing down on them. The pressure caused all of the grave mounds to tremble, and even the rain was forced to stop falling.

Xu Qing and Erniu were shaken to the core.

The intensity of the pressure surpassed that of a Smoldering God, and was definitely on the level of an Imperial Sovereign. And not an ordinary Imperial Sovereign. The pressure caused Xu Qing and Erniu to gasp for breath. They were rooted in place.

Something was now floating overhead. It was a shocking head, some tens of thousands of meters wide! Its features were vaguely human, but its skin was gray, and its eyes were extremely cold.

Hovering as it was above Xu Qing and Erniu, it blocked the rain. And it was looking down at them.

The two of them were minuscule compared to the head. Like bugs. Thus, it was no surprise that the gruish head quickly looked away from them to assess the surrounding graveyard. But then something happened that caused the scalps of Xu Qing and Erniu to go numb.

The head opened its mouth and inhaled deeply. That inhalation unleashed a terrifying gravitational force in the area. Unending soil rose up into the air. Innumerable rain drops flew toward the mouth.

It was as if it were eating.

The earth rose up, revealing coffins, and they also started flying into the mouth. Great crunching sounds rang out as the gruish head snapped them up. Strangely, no matter how much the head put into its mouth, it all vanished, as if the interior of the head was a bottomless pit.

The trembling Xu Qing and Erniu could do little more than fight back against the gravitational force. It took all their strength just to remain in one spot. Gradually, they lost the ability to hold firm.

As the crisis built, Xu Qing looked at Erniu. Erniu knew exactly what that look meant. Without any hesitation, he shouted, "Awaken, my warriors!"

A gray mist erupted from Erniu, causing the power of death to arrive. The grave mounds that had been thrown into chaos by the gravitational force suddenly trembled, and corpses started crawling out of the coffins. There were a lot of them. Because of the gravitational force, the corpses didn't need any orders from Erniu. They immediately shot toward the huge mouth of that head.

In a very short period of time, the head devoured over 10,000 of them. Apparently, the head had gotten enough, as it started chewing. The gravitational force disappeared and the head blurred and vanished.

Xu Qing breathed a sigh of relief and looked at Erniu. Erniu's eyes gleamed with lingering fear as he looked back. Both could see how the other was shaken.

It had truly been a moment of danger. They had only just arrived in this world and had already encountered an extremely gruish and terrifying entity. They could only imagine what other dangers lurked in the rain.

"On the one hand, the more dangerous a place is, the more good stuff will be there. However... Little Ah Qing, I feel like the best thing to do is find the empress as quickly as possible."

As crazy as his Eldest Brother was, even he was thinking the same thing as Xu Qing. Xu Qing didn't need any convincing. He nodded, and the two of them prepared to start moving. Unfortunately, that was when the terrifying pressure suddenly returned.

The head was back. It was floating right above the two of them. This time, it was closer than before. And it was staring at the two of them.

Before either of them could do a thing, the head inhaled. This time, the gravitational force didn't spread out widely. Instead, it was focused directly on the two of them.

In the blink of an eye, and before Xu Qing and Erniu could fight back, they were sucked up. However, the head didn't devour them. Instead, it just brought Xu Qing and Erniu up to it, bound them so they couldn't move, and then flew off with them in tow. The land screamed past below. The rain did nothing to block the path of the head.

Xu Qing and Erniu couldn't move at all. They could only exchange terrified glances and try to think of ways to escape. Unfortunately, the head was just too powerful, so nothing they did could affect it.

As their anxiety mounted, the head reached another graveyard, where it suddenly stopped moving. Then it exhaled.

Xu Qing and Erniu were thrown down into the graveyard.

Next, the head opened its mouth. The widespread gravitational force appeared again, and the head looked down coldly at them.

Apparently, it was telling them it was ready to start eating.

Deathblade's Thoughts

"The chapters are getting shorter!" If you haven't seen it already, check out this post I made on X, in which I show 2 years' worth of data about the length of the chapters. Are the chapters actually getting shorter????

Chapter 1068: A Wonderful Family

Xu Qing and Erniu were completely and utterly incapable of fighting back or defending against this terrifying head. Along the way, they had been bound so thoroughly that nothing they had attempted had given any hint that they could free themselves. All their efforts had failed.

Upon being freed, and checking to see the head's facial expression, Erniu inhaled sharply.

"Uh... does it want us to cook for it or something?"

Xu Qing was getting a sense of what the head wanted. Presumably, it had taken note of how his Eldest Brother summoned all of those corpses, which had saved it a lot of effort. In one fell swoop, it had acquired all the food it had been after there. That was what had led to it taking them captive.

The reason he had been included probably had something to do with how he lent the power of his carving knife with its gray mist to the effort.

Xu Qing looked at Erniu. *That's most likely what's going on here....*

Meanwhile, the huge head was looking at them like two servants who were loafing around instead of getting to work. Therefore, it intensified the gravitational force coming out of its mouth, which swept over Xu Qing and Erniu like a warning.

The two of them were shaken. Without any hesitation, Xu Qing unleashed the gray mist from his carving knife of fate.

At the same time, Erniu held nothing back as he shouted, "Awaken!"

The graveyard trembled, and the burial mounds began to collapse. Corpses started crawling out in response to the summons. An instant later, the gravitational force pulled them up into the air and into the head's mouth. It lasted for the time it takes an incense stick to burn, during which time Xu Qing and Erniu kept working hard to facilitate the process. After that, the gravitational force faded away, and an expression of contentment appeared on the head's face.

Apparently, it had been a long time since it was able to feed until it was full. After all, in the past, it had been forced to eat a lot of dirt along with the food. Now it had someone to extract and clean the food for it.[1]

Seeing the head looking so content actually caused Erniu to scowl on the verge of tears. Xu Qing was also frowning. The reality was that they were in a very passive position in which they couldn't take the initiative at all. Before they could even start formulating a plan, the gravitational force sprang up again, and they shot uncontrollably back up to the head. And then they started moving again....

The head screamed along to the next big restaurant. As a result, Xu Qing and Erniu were able to travel a huge distance in a very short time. They soon appeared in a mountainous region. Just like before, the lands were pitch black. Rain was falling. And as Xu Qing and Erniu looked around, they were shocked to realize that the so-called mountains... were actually enormous burial mounds.

In the previous locations they had visited, the burial mounds were ordinary in size. But here, they were the size of mountains. The place was also dotted with smaller gravestones and tombs.

Upon stopping in midair, the huge head opened its mouth, but this time there was no gravitational force. Instead, the head howled. The sound was like thunder as it echoed through the rain.

Next, Xu Qing and Erniu bore witness to something completely shocking.

There was a howl of response. And then another. In fact, there were many of them, all coming from different directions. And then... a head appeared that was only slightly smaller than the head which had captured them, moving with stupefying speed in their direction. From the look of things, this head was female, and from the fluctuations coming off of it, it was also in the Imperial Sovereign level.

Meanwhile, seven or eight smaller heads rushed from other directions. They looked almost like children. They were much weaker, being only in Void Returning.

Xu Qing's heart sank. Erniu was trembling.

"It's a whole family?" Erniu murmured.

It was indeed a family. Upon reuniting, they all noticed Xu Qing and Erniu. As they edged closer to them, they opened their mouths as if to devour them. However, that was when the biggest head of them all, the one that had captured the two of them, let loose a howl. It seemed to be warning its mate and children. Next... the eyes of the other heads opened wide and began sparkling.

Seeing that, Xu Qing and Erniu had no choice but to sigh. They were completely helpless, and were captives of this family. Thus, they had no choice but to work hard getting them food.

And the restaurant was this huge area of burial mounds. With the two of them working together, it wasn't long before corpses appeared. Unfortunately, they failed to summon anything out of the massive burial mounds.

As for the family... at first, they unleashed their own gravitational forces to devour the corpses. As a result, some of the burial soil still ended up getting mixed in with the corpses. But eventually, the floating heads stopped using their gravitational force. They would just wait for the corpses to climb out into the open, and then gobble them up one by one. They would occasionally howl, which seemed to be their family method of chatting during a meal.

Xu Qing and Erniu were quickly becoming exhausted. After all, doing this constant summoning work was very draining. Unfortunately, the family had a huge appetite.

Erniu sighed inwardly. *They've eaten a few mountains each? How could they not be full?*

Then he gave Xu Qing a look. Xu Qing could tell what he meant. The two of them sent the gray mist into one of the mountainous burial mounds. Although it didn't summon anything out, their previous work had brought them to the realization that they could stimulate whatever was inside.

And there was always the possibility that such stimulation could lead to an awakening. As for what would happen after that, they couldn't do much about it. After some hard work, they got the burial mound to start rumbling. The mountain shook, and then a huge hand stretched out from inside.

The instant it appeared, the biggest head's eyes glittered. The expression on the face was enigmatic, as if it completely understood what Xu Qing and Erniu were trying to do. It didn't seem surprised at all that this huge corpse had shown up. Without any hesitation, it and its mate shot forward and slammed into the huge hand.

The hand trembled as if in fear, and then began to retract. The two heads, however, were very fierce. They continued to slam into the mountain, sending dirt spraying everywhere.

Without any hesitation, Xu Qing and Erniu fled in the opposite direction.

The little heads wanted to stop them, but weren't fast enough. Before long, Xu Qing and Erniu had disappeared over the horizon. They hardly took a breath for the time it takes an incense stick to burn, nor did they slow down or exchange words. They just fled.

Unfortunately, it didn't take long for a familiar pressure to appear. The huge head appeared in front of them. First it looked at the surrounding grave mounds, then it looked at the two of them with that same enigmatic smile from before.

Xu Qing and Erniu lurched to a halt, their scalps tingling. At the same time, the rest of the family of heads raced into the vicinity and surrounded them.

Heart pounding in the face of disaster, Xu Qing solemnly said, "This area has a higher concentration of corpses."

Erniu nodded fervently. Putting a fawning expression onto his face, he said, "That's right! Exactly! We weren't running away. We were scouting for areas with more corpses. This area is perfect."

With a moment of hesitation, he and Xu Qing started the summoning work again. Before long, rumbling sounds echoed out, and burial mounds started collapsing. Corpses crawled out, turning into food that the family made short work of.

Xu Qing and Erniu felt more helpless than ever. Not daring to harbor any further thoughts of escape for the time being, they focused on summoning. Occasionally, slip-ups would occur, and their summoning wouldn't succeed. However, accidents sometimes led to unexpected successes. As their summoning work yielded fewer and fewer corpses in the area, and they were just about to give up, an enraged howl erupted from under the ground.

"Who's interrupting my cultivation??"

The ground shook violently and dirt sprayed in all directions as a huge vortex appeared. An old man emerged from the vortex, a frown on his face, his eyes sinister and cold. He was actually one of the western Devilbirds. Given the energy that surged around him, it was clear that he was actually an Imperial Sovereign. His authority related to death, which was why he had been delighted to sense the death aura in this rain world. As far as he was concerned, this was the ideal place to practice cultivation. As such, he had chosen to just settle down cross-legged in a subterranean cavern and absorb the death aura. But then the gravitational force appeared, and sensing the disturbance, he had emerged with a cold expression on his face.

When Xu Qing and Erniu saw him, strange expressions appeared on their faces.

Even as the old man's words echoed out, he stopped in place and looked up to see Xu Qing and Erniu. He recognized who they were, yet didn't reveal that via his facial expression. And that was because of the terrifying heads. In fact, his heart was already pounding. Moments ago, he hadn't sensed any terrifying entities outside. He had only noticed Xu Qing and Erniu. Otherwise, he would never have shown his face.

But now... he was nearly shivering with fear. And it was all because the family of heads were all looking directly at him.

Seeing that, Erniu's eyes lit up, and he suddenly realized that he wasn't in that bad of a position after all. Sticking his chin up, he coolly said, "Did I hear someone bitching just now?"

The old man suppressed the fury that flared in his heart. Keeping his eyes on the two huge heads, he took a cautious step backward.

But Erniu wasn't going to let an opportunity like this pass, so he looked down arrogantly at the Imperial Sovereign below and continued, "And what was he bitching about?"

The old man choked down his humiliation. Never in his life had someone talked to him like this. But all he could do was grit his teeth helplessly and keep trying to back up.

That was when Xu Qing narrowed his eyes and said, "Drop your bag of holding!"

The old man's face fell. However, that was when the huge head let loose a wave of pressure.

Shaken, the old man had no choice but to suppress his feelings, throw down his bag of holding, and turn to flee.

Erniu licked his lips. "Drop that bracelet too. And your hairpin. And the belt too. It's obviously a treasure. Oh, don't forget that jade pendant as well. Drop it too. That's a nice robe! Take it off!"

The old man let loose a bellow of rage. But that only caused the pressure from the huge head to increase. Trembling in fear, the old man gnashed his teeth and threw down his bracelet, hair pin, belt, pendant, as well as his outer robe.... Then he fled at top speed.

The huge head glanced at him but didn't give chase. As for the things he had left behind, the head wasn't interested in them. It just looked around for more food.

Xu Qing and Erniu were a bit disappointed. That said, at least they got some loot. They quickly collected all the things the old man had thrown onto the ground. Then they exchanged a look, and could tell that they were both thinking the same thing.

What a wonderful family.

In the depths of the rain-soaked world of graveyards, there was a towering mountain that was actually a tomb. The mountain was completely still. The only motion to be seen was the empress, strolling through the mausoleum in the middle of the mountain.

There were countless corpses around hēr, but they were all turning into dust. It was the same with the huge coffin in the middle of the mausoleum. The terrifying entity in the coffin never woke up. It just faded away for all eternity.

No expression could be seen on the empress' face as shē strode to the far end of the mausoleum.

There was a stone door there. The empress stood in front of the door, hēr vision piercing through to the other side. There was a majestic crypt inside. It was full of skeletons. There were so many piled together they formed something like a sea of bones.

In the middle of them was an altar. Atop the altar was a corpse, glittering with silver light. It also pulsed with immortal energy and the mightiness of a Grand Emperor. Sadly, this individual had long since perished.

Floating around it in the air were a host of multi-colored legacy seals. Each pulsed with extraordinary fluctuations, indicating that they were fantastic in nature. There were also dao lineaments visible. They were made from authority, and contained terrifying mightiness. Also present were various Grand Emperor treasures, dormant, but shining brightly. If even one of these things appeared in the outside world, they would drive Imperial Sovereigns mad with desire.

Especially noteworthy was that the cross-legged corpse held a black crystal in its hands. Within it was a swirling mist that contained the face of Grand Emperor Devilbird!

Astonishingly, there were eight doors leading into the crypt, all of them sealed tightly. The empress was only standing in front of one of those doors. Shē didn't open the door. Shē just looked at it thoughtfully.

The legacy seals are real. The dao lineaments of authority are real. The Grand Emperor treasures are also real. As for the corpse of that immortal, it certainly seems to have the aura of Netherflame. The skeletons were likely used as a source of life force. This is how you would expect to find Netherflame in his state of seclusion.

The empress' gaze came to focus on the black crystal in the gnarled hands of the corpse.

That's the fate-soul of Grand Emperor Devilbird, which was taken away by Netherflame when he was at the peak of his power. Whoever controls that will control the fate of Grand Emperor Devilbird. And that's what Grand Emperor Devilbird wants back!

1. In Chinese the verbiage is a bit different. It uses the word that translates as “to peel” (as opposed to clean), and is the verb usually used when talking about peeling shellfish. In the context it makes sense in Chinese, but I think using the verb “peel” is confusing in English, thus my translation choice. 剥

Chapter 1069: The Precious Treasure's In There

Chapter 1069: The Precious Treasure's In There

After looking through the stone door at the immortal's corpse, the empress sighed and retracted hēr vision. Next, shē sent hēr vision to the other seven doors. One by one shē examined them. Upon reaching the third door, hēr eyes narrowed before closing. Then shē sat down cross-legged to wait quietly.

Standing in front of that third door was the very same figure who had been furtively making his way through the secluded meditation facilities. He was the black-robed man wrapped in chains.... He stood in front of the stone door, his vision piercing through it to examine the crypt beyond, and specifically, the black crystal in the hands of the immortal's corpse. He didn't do anything rash. Expression turning grim, he chose to sit cross-legged and wait.

In the world of rain, other people were using their own special knowledge and abilities to close in on the crypt. All of them were looking for stone doors. Different people had different advantages. Some had intelligence reports that gave them a deeper understanding of Grand Emperor Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities. Some had more acute senses thanks to their cultivation base.

Other than Xu Qing and Erniu, everyone who came to the secluded meditation facilities were powerful experts who were pursuing their own hidden agendas. In contrast, Xu Qing and Erniu were like headless flies buzzing around in the rain, with absolutely no idea that there were stone doors somewhere leading into a crypt.

Fate was a fickle thing. After driving away the Imperial Sovereign, the two of them summoned corpses from a few dozen graveyards. Only then did the family of heads finally get full.

Xu Qing and Erniu had been kept so busy that they had no time to look through the bag of holding. Both of them were exhausted to the bone. However, there were some upsides. In the beginning, they had been unfamiliar with the gray mist and how to use it. But now that they had so much practice, they were nothing short of skilled. That was especially true of Erniu. Given that he had taken the lead, his level of skill had reached the point of perfection.

As for earning their freedom... that hadn't happened yet. After eating to their fill, the family of heads took the two of them back to their lair.

The lair was actually a massive necropolis! In fact, the necropolis was so big it was basically a mountain.

During their entire journey so far, Xu Qing and Erniu had not seen any mountains as majestic as this. It was so big it seemed to touch the sky, and covered such a large area it seemed like it was the biggest thing in this world. The necropolis was filled with all sorts of catacombs, as well as a host of warding spells. That said, when the family returned, the warding spells seemed little more than facades.

Once inside, the family scattered. The two main heads went to the main palace, where they immediately went to sleep. The smaller heads went to their own subsidiary palaces, where they also went to sleep. The truth was that they really had eaten to their fill, and now they needed time to digest. Before long, thunderous snoring had filled the necropolis.

Xu Qing and Erniu finally had their freedom back.

"Only a necropolis this big could fit a family like this," Erniu said. "Looks to me like each member of this family used to be a corpse in the past. For whatever reason, they became intelligent and somehow woke up."

The two of them exchanged a glance, waited for a bit to make sure the family was really asleep, and then started looking for a way out. Before long, they sighed in disappointment. Their freedom was obviously very limited. There wasn't much special about the necropolis, but sadly, it wasn't possible to leave it.

It wasn't that they couldn't get past the warding spell. Rather, after they got a certain distance from the mountain, a feeling of fear began to build up within them. The thunderous snoring would stop, making it seem like the huge heads were about to wake up.

"Dammit!" Erniu snapped angrily. "They're not going to let us go! They've probably never eaten this well before, and now they're addicted!"

Finally, Erniu decided to look through the loot from the Imperial Sovereign in the hopes that it would help him calm down.

Xu Qing, on the other hand, looked thoughtful. He wasn't interested in checking the loot. Instead, he looked around at the various catacombs. Finally, he said, "Eldest Brother, remember your idea back on that barren planet? You theorized that Netherflame must have had some destined opportunity. And thus, the worse things got for you there, the more likely it was that you would get some good fortune. So... what about this place?"

Xu Qing's eyes shone. "I just counted the catacombs here, and they match up perfectly to the number of family members. And though the warding spells were all intact, they did nothing to prevent the family from entering.

"In that case, it seems very likely to me that this necropolis was made for this family. And if that's the case, then why did they wake up? Could it be because of whatever destined opportunity or good fortune is here? Maybe that's what provoked the transformation to their corpses!"

Xu Qing looked at Erniu.

Erniu thought about it for a bit, whereupon his eyes lit up. "Good thinking, little Ah Qing! Your analysis conforms exactly to what I was thinking! In fact, I was just going to say that we should search this whole place thoroughly."

Erniu rubbed his hands together and looked around.

Xu Qing didn't feel the need to bicker with Erniu. Since his Eldest Brother agreed with him, he didn't hesitate to get to work. And thus, they split up and started searching. In that matter, time slipped by slowly but surely.

Soon, seven days passed. The family slept the whole time. Clearly they weren't planning to wake up of their own accord. During that time, Xu Qing and Erniu performed a thorough search of the place. They even managed to study the smaller palaces of the small heads. Unfortunately, they did not find any sort of destined opportunity. The necropolis seemed completely devoid of anything useful. Whatever things they did find were decaying and unusable.

Finally, the two of them appeared outside of the main palace where the two big heads were sleeping. This was the last place they could think of that might have some destined opportunity inside.

“Don’t tell me it’s in there,” Erniu said, struggling to control his breathing.

Xu Qing’s eyes sparkled.

Going into the sleeping chambers of the two main heads was going to be dangerous. But given that they had reached this point, it seemed likely that they would face danger no matter what they did.

After exchanging a glance, they gritted their teeth and went inside. They were met with thunderous snoring sounds. The two heads were leaning up against each other, asleep.

This area was much like every other place they had searched. It was empty. However... there was a stone door on the far end of the room. It seemed very ancient, and was carved with complex symbols that were reminiscent of antiquity. Clearly, the door had been there for a very long time.

Upon seeing that door, both Xu Qing and Erniu felt their heart rate increasing. They had searched this entire place, and this door was the only thing that seemed unusual. They exchanged another glance, then looked at the two heads to make sure they were really asleep. Then they carefully proceeded toward the door.

Upon reaching it, their pupils constricted. Being up close caused the sensation of ancientness to increase. There was also a strong aura of death coming from the other side of the door.

“The precious treasure is in there!!” Erniu murmured. His nose twitched, and his eyes shone with a very crazy look. “Based on my extensive experience hunting for treasure, little Ah Qing, I have a premonition that we’ve found the treasure we’re looking for!!”

Gnawing his lip in excitement, Erniu hurried forward and put his hand on the surface of the door. Heart racing, he pushed. The door didn’t move at all.

Xu Qing reached out, and the two of them pushed together. The door shifted slightly but didn’t open.

Erniu was starting to get anxious. Eyes shining with blue light, he shot a look to Xu Qing, who turned to the two sleeping heads.

Focusing on the one who had captured them, he clasped hands and bowed. “Senior, thank you for taking care of us on our journey. Considering that you brought the two of us here, I find it hard to believe that you *don’t* want us to open this door. Therefore, I hope you can help us out.”

During their time together, the huge head had never spoken to them. It seemed to act based on instinct. However, Xu Qing had never forgotten the enigmatic smile it gave. And it seemed to tacitly approve of how they had extorted that Imperial Sovereign....

As a result, Xu Qing refused to believe that it wasn’t intelligent. In fact, he was convinced that it had brought them here for the express purpose... of having them open this door. Erniu was clearly thinking the same thing, because as Xu Qing turned and bowed, so did he.

The snoring stopped. The two heads opened their eyes and looked at Xu Qing and Erniu. Then their gazes shifted to the stone door, and their expressions became various serious. They even looked a little bit fearful.

However, in the end... either Xu Qing and Erniu were right, or there was some other explanation that wasn't forthcoming. Either way, the two heads exchanged a glance, then exhaled sharply.

Their two exhalations hit the stone door. The stone door rumbled, and Xu Qing and Erniu took advantage of the moment to shove it. A rumbling boom echoed out as the door opened by a crack. Instantly, an aura of death poured out, and they sensed dao lineament fluctuations.

Both were shaken. Through the small crack that had opened, both of them had seen... a mind-blowing scene. It was a majestic crypt. There were countless bones piled around an altar. An immortal corpse was seated cross-legged on the altar, surrounded by legacy seals and dao lineaments of authority. And floating everywhere... were Grand Emperor treasures!

Both Xu Qing and Erniu were now thinking exactly the same thing. *This is Grand Emperor Netherflame's secluded meditation chamber!*

At the same time, they noticed that there were other stone doors leading into the chamber. Some were sealed shut. Others... had been opened. The opened doors all had figures seated cross-legged on the other side. There were a total of three. All of them... were western Devilbird cultivators who had been with them on the dao altar!

The moment that Xu Qing and Erniu saw them, the three figures looked up. All of them saw Xu Qing and Erniu through the opening in their door. Their gazes met.

Chapter 1070: A Tense Moment

Of the three people at the other doors, one was a teenager. He looked to be no more than fourteen or fifteen years old. His facial features were delicate, even pretty. He had long hair bound with a ribbon, and when he looked at Xu Qing and Erniu, he smiled, revealing pearly white teeth. He seemed pure and innocent, without a trace of malice or evil in him.

Next to him was a huge black silkworm that was larger than he was. It was covered with waving tentacles that made it look unusually malevolent. Coming out of the silkworm's mouth was a strand of black silk that was connected to one of the Grand Emperor treasures by the immortal's corpse. It looked like a jade bottle. The silk was pulled taut. Apparently, the treasure was resisting the silk, and yet, was slowly being pulled away.

In another direction, seated beyond another of the open doors, was a young woman. She was exquisitely beautiful, with eyebrows like crescent moons, a long straight nose, and cherry-red lips. However, there was something very cold about her, including her gaze. She wore palace attire, a voluminous gown with wide sleeves that made her seem aloof and out of touch with reality.[1]

The arrival of Xu Qing and Erniu on the scene caused her to frown slightly. However, she quickly looked away from them and focused on an octagonal mirror floating in front of her. The mirror was currently facing the crypt and pulling everything there inside of it as a reflection. That included the immortal's corpse, as well as all the legacies, authorities, and treasures surrounding it. The woman was currently inserting her hand into the mirror to take something. Unfortunately, it was a difficult task that she had not yet succeeded at.

The third party was a young man. He wore a green scholar's robe, and had his hair bound atop his head with a simple hairpin. He seemed calm and collected, with an erudite air about him. He was very thin, like a bamboo stalk, and had attractive facial features and sparkling eyes. Of the three, he paid the least attention to Xu Qing and Erniu. His gaze flitted over them briefly, no more.

He was fully focused on a burning stick of incense in front of him. The incense was about as thick as a finger, and it was bright red. As it burned, it sent out puffs of smoke. The scholar would then blow on the smoke, sending it into the crypt toward the legacy seals.

It was a very strange smoke. As it continued to blow into the crypt, some of the legacy seals flickered with increasing intensity, as if they were becoming alive. They even seemed to be growing tiny limbs. And then they began to form ranks and slowly start walking toward the young man.

When Xu Qing and Erniu saw all of this, various thoughts ran through their heads. After extorting that Imperial Sovereign earlier, they had begun to speculate about the identities of the others who had come into Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities.

After laying eyes on these people, Xu Qing realized that their speculations were correct. *They're all Imperial Sovereigns in disguise! As for this crypt, it's full of danger and the unknown. The Imperial Sovereigns from the western Devilbirds are obviously being very careful. What's more, you can tell... that none of them want to actually go inside the crypt. That's why they're using different ways of extracting the good fortune!*

Furthermore... the fact that they're all here goes to show that they all knew about this crypt and were ready to come here!

Erniu came to the same conclusion as Xu Qing. The two of them exchanged a glance and could see the serious look in the other's eyes. After all, there was no denying the fact that they were the weakest people in the group. If even one of these people chose to attack them, they would have to take the situation very seriously.

Thankfully, we have a wonderful family backing us up.... Erniu looked over his shoulder with a fawning look, then gritted his teeth. "Little Junior Brother, we can't worry about blowing our cover now. Our disguises are already gone. They've probably already guessed who we really are. And therefore, we—"

"We need to go for broke!" Xu Qing finished, speaking in a voice so decisive it could *sever nails and chop iron*.

Erniu's eyes burned with a crazy look. At the same time, both of them shoved hard on the stone door. They held nothing back. Rumbling sounds echoed out as the stone door slowly opened.

Not even Imperial Sovereigns were willing to enter this crypt. And though Xu Qing and Erniu were both a bit crazy, there was a big difference between acting crazy and acting suicidal. At the very least... things hadn't reached the point where they would need to act suicidal. Therefore, after opening the door, they looked around the crypt and all the skeletons. At that point, they made a joint decision.

Gray mist appeared in Erniu's eyes. Mist also began to pour off Xu Qing's carving knife of fate. Their power merged, and they sent it into the crypt.

In the blink of an eye, the eyes of one particular skeleton began to glow. And then, it shakily lurched onto all fours and started crawling toward the altar and the immortal's corpse. At first, it moved in a rather wobbly fashion. But soon enough, it was moving more smoothly and with greater speed.

If Xu Qing and Erniu had tried this back when they first got this power of death, they would never have been able to exercise such control. It would have been too difficult. But after all of their work gathering food for the family of heads, they had so much practice that their level of control had reached the point of perfection.

Before long, the skeleton reached the altar and managed to hop up onto it. There, it slammed into one of the Grand Emperor treasures that resembled a shield. It slammed into it in a way that would hopefully send it flying toward Xu Qing and Erniu. Instead, the moment it made impact, the treasure sent out a force of rejection that ripped the skeleton into shreds.

The treasure didn't budge an inch. The other three people at the other doors didn't bother looking at what was happening.

Xu Qing and Erniu looked on with glittering eyes. Next... about eight skeletons rushed toward the altar, where they slammed into the shield. Some popping sounds rang out as the skeletons turned into ashes. Next, a few dozen skeletons rose up. Then came over a hundred.

In the end, several hundred skeletons charged forth, each trying to outdo the other as they slammed into the shield. At long last, the shield moved. As the process went on like that, the shield slowly but surely inched toward Xu Qing and Erniu at the stone door. The progress was slow, but that was only considering the process on its own.

If you compared it to how things were going with the other three parties, it was actually moving quite quickly. As a result, the three Imperial Sovereigns took notice and looked over.

Meanwhile, something else was happening at two of the other doors. The black-robed figure on the other side of one of the stone doors was watching things play out, and he was frowning.

At another door was the empress. Shē had an odd expression on hēr face as shē watched the skeletons slamming into the shield. Then shē saw the look of anticipation on the faces of Xu Qing and Erniu, and shē sighed.

In that matter, time slipped by slowly but surely. Two hours went by.

Two more individuals arrived. The first was the son of the fifth Imperial Sovereign, Lin Kun.

Of course... it wasn't really Lin Kun. It was a person disguised as Lin Kun. He was actually the fifth Imperial Sovereign of the eastern Devilbirds, who was one of Grand Emperor Netherflame's apprentices! Upon arriving, he showed no interest in any of the treasures. Instead, he focused on the dao lineaments of authority, which caused his eyes to gleam in anticipation. His method of acquisition was unique. He just sat down cross-legged and exuded fluctuations of the same origin as one of the lineaments. As a result, the dao lineament started inching toward him.

The last to arrive was someone familiar to Xu Qing and Erniu. It was the old man they had clashed with earlier.

Upon arriving, he looked around at the crypt, at all the parties present, and of course, he saw Xu Qing and Erniu. The moment he caught sight of those two, his killing intent raged inside of him. However, after scanning the crypt and noting the stone door where Xu Qing and Erniu stood, he suppressed his killing intent.

There's no rush. If they somehow manage to make it out of this alive, I'll definitely track them down and wipe them out of existence!

With a cold snort, he sat down and unleashed his aura of death, which he used like a fishing hook to snag one of the dao lineaments of authority.

This time, another incense stick's worth of time passed.

Everyone continued on with their differing methods of acquiring their targets. Everyone was making progress, especially Xu Qing and Erniu. The shield was only about 30 meters away from them at this point. The only downside as far as they were concerned was that the huge heads seemed scared of the crypt, and weren't helping them with gravitational force.

"It doesn't matter," said Erniu, licking his lips. "As long as things go on like this, it will only take an incense stick of time before the treasure is ours."

Unfortunately, whoever had set up this entire situation obviously wanted people to go into the crypt, because that was when something unexpected happened.

Just when everyone was about to succeed in getting what they wanted, one of the previously sealed stone doors suddenly slammed open. Unexpectedly, someone shot out of the door. To the shock of everyone, this newcomer moved with incredible speed as they entered the crypt.

It was an old woman! It was very clearly the same old woman that Patriarch Yun had killed. But here she was.

With the wave of her hand, she sent Imperial Sovereign fluctuations raging out into a tempest. The silk thread snapped. The mirror wobbled out of control. The death aura was severed. The awakening legacies were blocked. The connections to the authority were cut. And it caused Xu Qing and Erniu's shield to shoot back in the opposite direction. It all happened before anyone could react.

As everyone looked on with glittering eyes, the woman walked up to the immortal's corpse and sat down cross-legged.

Voice cold, she said, "Since all of you are afraid of taking risks, don't come in here."

The old woman closed her eyes and performed a double-handed incantation gesture. Opening her mouth in the direction of the immortal's corpse, she inhaled deeply. That action caused an intangible connection to spring up between her and the corpse. It was impossible to tell what shocking technique the woman was using. But regardless, the corpse started crumbling. And as the old woman absorbed it, her own aura began to rise dramatically.

She got stronger and stronger. Apparently, she was absorbing Grand Emperor Netherflame's personhood. And as she inhaled, all of the legacies and authorities trembled and began to shoot toward her, as if she were their master and they wanted to fuse with her.

All of a sudden, all of the Grand Emperor treasures seemed to have spirit automatons that were on the verge of waking up. This dramatic turn of events upset the balance of power!

This was a conspiracy! It didn't matter who could or couldn't see what was really going on with the old woman. Everyone knew that if they didn't do something, the old woman would succeed. And if she got everything in the crypt, then the rest of them would be in great, unpredictable danger. Most importantly, the old woman... was also absorbing the black crystal with Grand Emperor Devilbird's fate-soul in it!

It was a critical moment, and everyone had grim looks on their faces. As for Lin Kun, a cold look gleamed in his eyes as he shot forward to prevent the old woman from absorbing everything around her. Booms rang out as the two started fighting.

The other Imperial Sovereigns hesitated.

As for Xu Qing and Erniu, they exchanged a glance, then gritted their teeth and unleashed as much gray mist as they could. Countless skeletons in the crypts shivered and woke up. After crawling to their feet, they shot toward the legacies, authorities, and Grand Emperor treasures.

1. There is no one specific fashion that you could point to as being 'palace attire.' In real life, fashion changed through the ages. The idea is that this woman would be dressed in the manner of a princess, concubine, or other noble lady who might be found in an imperial palace. Here are a couple examples. ٢٤

Chapter 1071: Pulling Chestnuts Out of the Fire

Chapter 1071: Pulling Chestnuts Out of the Fire

The crypt was descending into chaos. Countless skeletons on the ground were awake. After scrambling to their feet, they began to hurl themselves at the nearest legacies, authorities, and Grand Emperor treasures. Getting one such reward would be amazing enough. Getting two would be incredible.

Up in midair, the old woman had temporarily been interrupted by the fifth Imperial Sovereign, who was disguised as Lin Kun. As the two of them fought back and forth, magical techniques glittered brightly, and Imperial Sovereign auras flared, sending out terrifying and deadly shockwaves in every direction. Every clash of their different authorities caused ripples in the surrounding natural and magical laws.

Booms rang out constantly. The shockwaves ripped skeletons to shreds. However, there were so many skeletons present that there were always more ready to jump toward the legacies,

authorities, and treasures. Those who got close tried to knock them close to the stone door where Xu Qing and Erniu waited.

The old woman proved to be spectacular. As she fought with the fifth Imperial Sovereign, she completely held her own, and even managed to launch quite a few of her own blows. What was more, her absorption efforts hadn't been completely interrupted. She was still making some headway. The immortal's corpse was gradually disappearing.

That said, the speed of absorption had been greatly reduced. What was more, with the skeletons hitting all the various legacies, authorities, and treasures, sending them flying toward Xu Qing and Erniu, the entire momentum of the situation had changed. All of this takes a bit of time to describe, but actually happened in the time it takes a spark to fly off a piece of flint.

The previous balance of power had been completely disrupted by the arrival of the old woman and the interference of the fifth Imperial Sovereign. Things were instantly changing in a very dramatic way.

The other parties present reacted grimly. However, some looked thoughtful, while others had cold looks in their eyes. That said... as Imperial Sovereigns all of them were shrewd individuals, so none of them would reveal their true feelings and intentions in their reactions. What was more, it went without saying that all of them had prepared well before coming here. In fact, it would be completely accurate to say that all of them were revealing precisely the reaction they wanted to reveal. Only they knew what was going on inside.

Regardless, the situation had changed in a big way, and the resulting chain reaction was only going to lead to more changes.

A few breaths of time passed, after which the third Imperial Sovereign stepped forth. She was the young woman in palace attire with the octagonal mirror. As she stepped through the stone door and into the crypt, she blurred and disappeared. When she came back into the view, she was behind the old woman. She sent one hand shooting toward a nearby dao lineament of authority, while she used her other hand to shove the old woman. Her action instantly caused the action to ratchet up.

The old woman howled as she was forced to stop absorbing the immortal's corpse. The moment she did, she suddenly flared with black light that turned into a huge black hole. Wherever it went, it created an impassable obstacle.

Both the fifth Imperial Sovereign and the young woman in palace attire were visibly taken aback. Both of them simultaneously shot backward, yet didn't forget to reach out and grab some good fortune.

Meanwhile, the fourth Imperial Sovereign flew into the crypt. That was the same teenager who had smiled at Xu Qing and Erniu, the one with the silkworm. He moved with astonishing speed as he headed, not toward the old woman, but toward one of the legacy seals.

Next, a cold harrumph echoed out as the scholarly-looking young man seemed to superimpose over himself, then disappear like a bubble popping. When he reappeared... he was right next to a Grand Emperor treasure that looked like a geomantic compass. He reached out to grab it. The moment his hand closed around it, a shadowy form screamed past him.

It was the old Imperial Sovereign, who had clashed earlier with Xu Qing and Erniu. He had also chosen to enter the crypt. However, he had chosen a different strategy than the others. Instead of attacking the old woman or going after a treasure, he flicked his sleeve. Instantly, a tempest of death energy swept out.

The tempest didn't affect the other Imperial Sovereigns. However, it was fatal to the animated skeletons under the control of Xu Qing and Erniu. In the blink of an eye, rumbling booms rang out. It was like a purification that ripped all of the skeletons it contacted into shreds. He was clearly targeting them. Having accomplished that, the old man laughed coldly and started scrambling to acquire loot.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered coldly, and waves of hatred caused Erniu's face to distort with rage.

"He knew we wouldn't dare to go in there, didn't he?" Erniu said. "Bitch! He's specifically stopping us from getting any loot. This calls for vengeance! The most ultimate vengeance possible!!"

Erniu's eyes were flashing with a crazy light. To see so many treasures right in front of him, but be unable to get any of them, was really driving him mad. And then he did something really, really crazy. A blade suddenly appeared in his hand. He lifted it up... and then chopped it toward his own neck. Grabbing his severed head with his free hand, he tossed it to Xu Qing.

As his head flew through the air, it yelled, "Keep this safe for me, little Ah Qing!"

Then, his headless body exploded with a thump. Innumerable blue worms then scattered, pulsing with greed and craziness, as well as a good touch of ferocity, as they shot through the stone door and into the crypt. They moved in the direction of the Grand Emperor treasure that he and Xu Qing had targeted first, the shield.

Xu Qing was not at all surprised by his Eldest Brother's actions, and cooperated perfectly. In fact, at almost exactly the same time as the host of worms shot forth, the authority of Six Thieves Deceive Life rose within Xu Qing. It turned into a host of threads of the seven emotions and six sensory pleasures, and all of them connected to his Eldest Brother's head, which he held in his arms. Doing so would help his Eldest Brother to avoid soul damage.

At the same time, Xu Qing lifted his left hand and produced a mask. It was a merciful-looking mask, and in fact, it was the same mask he had acquired in that Immortal Skills Hall years ago. It was named Mercy. The skin mask, when worn, would transfer to the wearer half of the pain of anything they looked at. [1]

Without any hesitation, Xu Qing put the mask on and looked at Erniu.

The crypt was really devolving into intense chaos. The old woman was now a black hole that was getting bigger and bigger. The fifth Imperial Sovereign and the young woman in palace attire were falling back and grabbing legacies on the way. The teenager and the scholar, as well as the old man. All were keeping their guard up against each other, but at the same time, grabbing whatever loot they could. No one showed any sign that they trusted anyone else, and everyone was out for their own self-interest.

And thus, as the blue worms made their way toward the Grand Emperor treasure, they first had to deal with the energy and pressure of numerous Imperial Sovereigns, and then the shock waves of their own fighting. And then they had to face the direct threat of the old man.

As Xu Qing shared the pain of all that, he trembled. Then blood sprayed out of his mouth and dribbled down the mask. Ripping sensations filled his fleshly body, and his soul was overwhelmed with pain. He staggered backward, ultimately reaching out to steady himself by leaning against the wall. He seemed very weak. At the same time, blood oozed out of the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth of Erniu's head, and his head itself looked like it was starting to decay.

More than half of the worms had already been ripped to shreds. The rest were crumbling in the face of the old man's tempest.

The cultivation base disparity left Xu Qing and Erniu completely unable to make any significant gains.

However... in just the same way that it's impossible to tell what someone is thinking by just looking at them, it's also difficult to tell what's happening in a chaotic situation just by looking at it. In fact, the reality is that the more chaos there is, the more order there often is. And thus... as the chaos spread, and it seemed various parties were acting in their own interests as they fought for a lot, all of them suddenly turned in place as if they had all been moving into specific positions. Their auras then erupted. It was as if they had been using the chaos as a mere pretext to secretly lock down one specific area. And then, as if acting on part of the plan, they all took action.

The teenager attacked, producing a huge red hammer. The scholar's killing intent became an ancient book that pulsed with authority as its pages flapped wildly. The old man caused a convergence of death energy that formed a gate of death. When that gate opened, a black hand emerged.

Then there was the fifth Imperial Sovereign and the young woman dressed in palace attire. Both unleashed trump cards.

The moment the attacks were unleashed, the weakened Xu Qing's eyes glittered. The sense of weakness vanished, and the sageheaven god vine shot out from him and into the crypt, where it circled around the shield-like Grand Emperor treasure. It yanked forcefully.

Inside the crypt, there was one blue worm that was still alive. It suddenly jumped up, splitting apart into hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of smaller versions. And all of them slammed into the shield. It looked as though Erniu had been trying to seize a treasure, but the reality was that all it took was a glance between him and Xu Qing for them to come up with this plan.

If he succeeded by himself, it would have been great. But if not, he could be the helping hand. And thus, Xu Qing made his move. Rumbling booms echoed out.

Meanwhile, the area that all the other Imperial Sovereigns had attacked rippled and distorted. A figure shot out from that spot. It had attempted to avoid the attack, but hadn't been fast enough. As blood sprayed everywhere, the figure crumbled into pieces as it used a special magic, and paid a high price, to escape death. By the time it reappeared, it was safe on the altar, having teleported there.

It was none other than Patriarch Yun. His face was grim as he realized that his plan had been seen through by the others. What was more, it was obvious that everyone else had already agreed to work together against him. At the same time, he looked over at the stone door where Xu Qing and Erniu were. He saw that the shield-shaped treasure was being battered by the blue worms and also tugged upon by the vine.

But right now, it wasn't important to pay attention to the Grand Emperor treasures, but rather, the other Imperial Sovereigns. Patriarch Yun looked away from Xu Qing and Erniu.

The others had obviously noticed what Xu Qing and Erniu had been up to. And the other Imperial Sovereigns had noticed both the old man's frown and Patriarch Yun. Obviously there was something going on between them.

The moment the old woman had appeared, it had been obvious to them all that there was something suspicious about her. In fact, some people had realized from the beginning that she was a reanimated corpse. It was obviously some scheme, and since everyone knew that it was going to be impossible to avoid getting dragged into it, they decided to simply bide their time and launch attacks at a key moment.

"So it's you," the fifth Imperial Sovereign said, glaring coldly at Patriarch Yun.

"There's no point in wasting words," said the woman in palace attire, killing intent blazing in her eyes. "Kill him!" She took the lead in shooting straight toward Patriarch Yun.

And yet even as everyone shot forth....

A strange expression appeared on Patriarch Yun's face. As everyone closed in, he lifted his right hand and slapped himself on the forehead. A boom rang out as he killed himself. The moment he died, his fleshly body exploded, sending massive amounts of blood raining down onto the immortal's corpse. The old woman closed her eyes, whereupon her fleshly body collapsed into ashes.

A wind picked up in the crypt. The wind caused all of the legacies to tremble. All of the dao lineaments of authority vibrated. All of the Grand Emperor treasures seemed like they were about to wake up!

And then the immortal's corpse, which had just been showered in blood... slowly opened its eyes. A terrifying aura raged out!

1. Xu Qing got the mask of Mercy in chapter 520.1 弑

Chapter 1072: The Immortal's Corpse Awakens

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The aura darkened the sky of the world outside. Before, it had been dusky, but now, it became deep and pitch black. The rainwater was also affected, as a resonance came into being. Looking out, it was possible to see that every raindrop that existed in the world seemed to now have life force, and was bowing in obeisance to the immortal's corpse.

Burial mounds rumbled and collapsed as innumerable corpses climbed out into the open. In life, they had been warriors, but they had long been waiting in death for a master to command them. Now it seemed that their master had returned and called out to them. As a result, they were also coming back. Howls and roars filled heaven and earth.

The reason for it all was that, deep in that crypt, the immortal's corpse was waking up.

All of the floating dao lineaments seemed to cheer in exultation and shoot toward the immortal's corpse. Nothing stopped them. Nothing slowed them down. The instant they came near, the immortal's corpse pulled them inside. As the authority returned and the dao lineaments floated over, a will of awakening surged.

Wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. The wind screamed dramatically. And all the legacy seals became like a raging sea flowing back to the immortal's corpse.

One by one, the Grand Emperor treasures started shaking back and forth. A rushing sound filled the crypt as the spirit automatons of the precious treasures stirred. They were awake, and the instant it happened, they could sense the aura of their master, and began converging. All of a sudden, a suit of armor appeared on the immortal's corpse. At its right hand appeared a long spear, and at its left hand... was nothing. Beneath the corpse's feet, a geomantic compass appeared, while overhead, suns, moons, stars, and heavenly bodies popped into being. Behind the corpse was a collection of concentric halos slowly circling. It was a dramatic and majestic sight.

Meanwhile, the various Imperial Sovereigns in the crypt were all shocked to the core, and that showed in their facial expressions. As cultivators from the Devilbird holy land, they weren't unfamiliar with Grand Emperor Netherflame. In fact, they had lived in the time a thousand years ago when Grand Emperor Netherflame ruled with an iron fist.

In fact, it was no exaggeration to say that most of them had personally witnessed Netherflame's rise to prominence. And that meant that they knew exactly how brutal Grand Emperor Netherflame was. In fact, they revered him as surely as if he were a god.

After confirming for sure that Grand Emperor Netherflame was dead, years had passed. And only after some very serious promises being made had they agreed to come on this mission. That was one of the reasons why everyone had been so cautious before coming. That and their greed.

After all, there were a lot of stories circulating in the outside world about Grand Emperor Netherflame. Some people claimed that he had joined the paramount organization in this part of the starry sky, and had benefited a lot from their assistance. Other people said that he had acquired a legacy that surpassed the reserve powers of a Summer Immortal. Yet others were certain that noble blood flowed through his veins. And some people even believed that he had an extraordinary shackle-breaking magic hidden on him.

Of course, such stories only started spreading after Netherflame went missing as a Smoldering God and then returned as a Grand Emperor.

Regardless, there was definitely some karmic relationship between his meteoric success and ultimate decline. Because of that, all Devilbird Imperial Sovereigns wanted to reveal the secrets and seize the destined opportunity as a means of breaking through their own cultivation base shackles.

Maybe it would lead to similar meteoric successes and ultimate declines. But cultivators had long since ceased practicing cultivation for the mere purpose of living forever. The best way to live without regrets was really to reach the highest heights.

Unfortunately, the most dangerous situation they could possibly imagine was now playing out right in front of them. Netherflame wasn't really dead!

As the legacies, authorities, and precious treasures shot back, and as the aura in the area grew stronger, the entire crypt started shaking dramatically. Everyone was inclined to flee. But as the immortal's corpse looked around coldly, their dao lineaments trembled, their fleshly bodies were bound in place, their souls dimmed, and they lost their ability to move.

Xu Qing and Erniu suffered the effects even more dramatically. They weren't Imperial Sovereigns, so facing an aura like this caused their minds and hearts to reel. Thankfully, they hadn't actually entered the crypt, and thus weren't facing the aura directly. Only because of that were they able to somehow endure the effects.

Meanwhile, Erniu, having acquired the shield-like treasure, sent his extremely weakened fleshly body of blue worms back to his head. When the two merged together, the worms turned into the body of a puerile young boy. Considering that he had the body of a boy but the head of a man, he looked very, very strange. As for his facial expression, it was one of pure craziness.

Although both of them had to fight back with full force just to stand up to the aura, it now seemed that the Grand Emperor treasure they had was waking up.

Considering how hard they had worked to get that treasure... neither Xu Qing nor Erniu could possibly be content with it returning to the immortal's corpse.

Erniu's eyes were bright red. Looking very anxious, he shouted, "I sacrificed my damn body to get this thing. Now you want to call it back to you?"

With that, he shoved the shield into his mouth and swallowed it. In the blink of an eye, he looked like a woman that was ten months pregnant. He appeared to be on the verge of bursting.

But Erniu gritted his teeth. From the look of it, he would rather die than give up at this point. Three breaths of time passed in which Erniu looked increasingly anxious with every moment that passed. Then his belly actually split open. The shield was just about to burst out into the open.

Without an instant of hesitation, Xu Qing gritted his teeth and pulled out a needle. It was none other than the Grand Emperor needle that he had acquired sometime back.

He started stitching. The karmic stitching this needle was capable of was nothing short of extraordinary. And therefore, he was able to patch up Erniu's ruptured belly.

Then Xu Qing took out his Grand Emperor shears and viciously slashed out with them. He was hoping to sever the connection between the treasure and the immortal's corpse.

It didn't work perfectly. The connection remained. What was more, the rupture in Erniu's belly seemed to be on the verge of opening up again....

But then, the huge head behind them opened its mouth and inhaled. The gravitational force erupted, latching onto Xu Qing and Erniu. Shivering, they tapped into that force to overcome the force trying to pull the shield out of Erniu's belly.

The Imperial Sovereigns in the crypt weren't paying much attention to all of that. They were focused on the immortal's corpse.

However... the immortal's corpse was paying attention to what Xu Qing and Erniu were doing.

The corpse opened its eyes, and they were gray. They swiveled, locking onto the stone door where Xu Qing and Erniu were. Then its gaze shifted to the various Imperial Sovereigns.... It opened its mouth and inhaled. The sound of a heartbeat rang out from its chest.

Thump-thump.

The terrifying sound hit the heart and mind like a sledgehammer. Blood sprayed out of the mouths of Xu Qing and Erniu, and their ears rang. Souls vibrating, they staggered backward.

As for the various Imperial Sovereigns, they bore the brunt of the attack, and found blood dribbling out of their mouths. All of them fought back ferociously. The teenager's fleshly body split apart as he tried to flee in soul form. The scholar's dao lineament flickered as he tried to turn the pages of his book. The woman in palace attire, as well as the old man, both used different trump cards, paying whatever heavy price they had to. The fifth Imperial Sovereign had a pained look on his face, and seemed like he wanted to say something. But in the end, he didn't speak even half of a word to his Master's corpse. Unfortunately for them, all reactionary measures taken were completely ineffective.

They all failed. Perhaps if they weren't in this crypt, things might have been different. But they *were* in the crypt, and this place belonged to this immortal's corpse. This was unstoppable power. It was a level of personhood that was completely beyond them, and thus nothing they did amounted to anything.

The immortal's corpse didn't seem to be in a hurry. After looking around, its gaze settled on the fifth Imperial Sovereign. As everyone looked on in despair, it lifted its right hand. Black fire erupted all over its body. It burned the altar and the surroundings, and began spreading through the entire crypt to form a black lotus.

The arrival of the black lotus made the situation even more dangerous. At the same time, lotuses of black flame materialized underneath every single one of the Imperial Sovereigns. All of them were bound more securely in place, and began to howl in agony. The sound of it filled the crypt.

Just when it seemed like everyone was going to be reduced to ashes by the lotuses of flame, one of the two unopened doors in the crypt suddenly opened.

Black chains shot out, upon which burned black flames that seemed similar to the flames from the lotuses. Popping sounds rang out as the chains moved with incredible speed, ignoring the power of the lotus to shoot directly toward the immortal's corpse.

The level of speed was so shocking that it seemed to contain a karmic rhythm. In the shortest of moments, it wrapped around the immortal's corpse, binding it and causing the flames around it to surge. The chains appeared with such suddenness, and did their job so quickly, that in an instant, the black flame lotus seemed like it was on the verge of being suppressed.

The Imperial Sovereigns took advantage of the moment to whip out their various magics to try to free themselves.

At the same time, a dark figure stepped through the open door. It was the black-cloaked man.

After he appeared, he took only a single step. With that step, he spanned the crypt and appeared right next to the immortal's corpse. Reaching out with astonishing speed, he grabbed the black crystal with Grand Emperor Devilbird's fate-soul in it. After taking the crystal, the black-robed man didn't seem happy. Instead, a grim look appeared on his face as he shot backward.

As for the Imperial Sovereigns, after breaking free, they prepared to flee. Before they could move, the immortal's corpse spoke in a raspy voice.

"Be sealed."

In an instant, the huge flame lotus began spinning in the opposite direction, resulting in an intense gravitational force. Because of the gravitational force, the crypt doors all slammed shut. Escape was impossible.

Xu Qing and Erniu wanted to avoid the effects but couldn't. The gravitational force dragged them into the crypt, whereupon the stone door closed behind them. The two of them were visibly taken aback. Everyone else in the crypt reacted similarly.

The ceiling overhead disappeared in a mass of folds. The walls also folded in on themselves. Rumbling sounds then filled the crypt as it collapsed. A cave appeared, and beneath it was another world. It was a transparent sea. However, there was a red glow atop it, as well as an enormous ball of flesh that resembled a fetus!

Astonishingly, there was a terrifying figure seated cross-legged within it! Before it could become clear, a blood-colored vortex appeared in the world beneath the crypt, cutting off all fields of view.

A blood-red tentacle-covered hand then emerged from the vortex. Then the aura of the immortal's corpse rocketed upward as the hand shot toward the black-robed figure.

Chapter 1073: Everyone's Here

It was a well-formed hand, bulging with blood vessels and covered with rotting tentacles. Malicious and evil in appearance, it pulsed with a terrifying mightiness. And it seemed capable of holding up heaven and ripping apart space. Its astounding size could shake anyone to the core of their being. In fact, it imparted a god-like sensation that distorted everything in the area and could invade all living things.

The moment it appeared, time seemed to stop, and space seemed to hover on the verge of being ripped to shreds. Everything seemed to become secondary in comparison to this hand. It was the focus of any and all attention. Contained within it was something violent and brutal. Its will could crush all around it, causing all of the Imperial Sovereigns to tremble down to their souls and be frozen in place physically.

That was even more the case with Xu Qing and the Captain. The blood-colored hand caused blood to ooze out of their eyes, ears, noses, and mouths. The world seemed to be turned upside down, throwing their senses into chaos. It was like they were little rowboats on an angry sea, being tossed about hither and thither.

At that critical moment, as Xu Qing struggled not to explode, he pulled out the command medallion the empress had given him and pushed down on it hard. A gentle power emerged from the medallion, which surrounded both him and Erniu and reduced the tempestuous pressure from the hand.

The person most shocked by all of this was the black-robed figure in midair. The moment the hand appeared, his pupils constricted, and he unhesitatingly shot backward in retreat.

At the same time, his hands flashed in an incantation gesture. Clinking sounds rang out as a group of black chains appeared around him, like a host of black serpents that shot toward the huge hand. The chains were engulfed in terrifying flames as they quickly circled around the hand. The chains tightened in an attempt to bind the hand.

But then something grisly happened. The chains that had been so effective on the corpse earlier had now clearly encountered something far more powerful. Despite wrapping around the hand, they didn't do anything to restrict it. The hand was like an orbiting moon or planet. It couldn't be held back. In fact, almost instantly, the chains binding it began to snap, one by one. In the blink of an eye, they were swept away.

And then the blood-red hand was even stronger than before. Moving with enough destructive force to shatter all obstacles, it shot toward the black-robed figure.

The black-robed man's face fell dramatically. Holding nothing back, he tapped into a secret magic that caused blood to spray out of his mouth. His goal was to avoid the huge hand, but sadly for him, he wasn't fast enough.

The hand shattered time and sealed everything. It was impossible to evade, couldn't be resisted, and smashed everything in front of it. Then it was right in front of the black-robed man.

No matter what grisly tricks the black-robed man used, they did nothing to the blood-red hand. Ultimately, as the black-robed man's face went pale and he howled in rage, the hand grabbed him!

All onlookers were stunned. Given everything that had happened before, everything that had played out, including Patriarch Yun's sacrifice to awaken the immortal's corpse and suppress all the other Imperial Sovereigns, had all been a complicated trick....

A trick to lure out the black-robed man and seize his soul! It was clearly a trap that had been baited with him in mind. And now, the bait had been taken, and the prey had fallen into the trap. Thus, the hand appeared.

A vicious expression could be seen on the face of the black-robed man as dark flames spouted out of him, along with a host of sealing marks. He was trying to fight back. And it was pointless.

The blood-red hand pulled him back toward the vortex.

However, at that critical moment... the black-robed man's eyes glittered with a mysterious light, and he growled, "Split away!"

All of a sudden, it looked like he was splitting apart. A shadowy projection was emerging from him. Another figure was coming out from inside the black-robed man.

This figure looked completely different. He had a square face, thick eyebrows, big eyes, and a burly frame. His expression was threatening without being angry, and he abounded with a terrifying pressure.

The moment Xu Qing laid eyes on him, his mind reeled. This person... was the very same person who had escorted them to the dao altar and opened the secluded meditation facilities. He had then sat down cross-legged at the top of the dao altar to wait for everyone to return. He was... Grand Emperor Devilbird!

Obviously, the Devilbird outside wasn't the true form. The version coming out right now was the true body. The black-robed man had obviously been an exterior layer of defense for the true body.

Because of this projection, Devilbird was now *slipping out of a predicament like a cicada sloughing its skin*. He was now splitting away from the black-robed man.

The moment he appeared, Grand Emperor fluctuations exploded out, and his actual body began to form. Grand Emperor treasures appeared all around him. Dao lineaments rose up from him, and concentric halos of black mist could be seen at his back. The might of a Grand Emperor was incredibly strong.

As he stared at the hand, his gaze was astonishingly aggressive, like lightning.

"So, you finally showed your face!" Grand Emperor Devilbird said.

Meanwhile, the black-robed man howled in anguish as he was dragged into the vortex by the blood-red hand. An instant later, he was gone. Everyone looking on was stunned.

Then Grand Emperor Devilbird spoke again. "I knew all along you weren't dead, Netherflame. You were struggling at death's door. The memory worlds from before were simply there to confuse anyone who came this way. In fact, this whole crypt is also nothing more than a smokescreen.

“That said, one thing that did surprise me, Netherflame, is how daring you are. In order to lure me in here, you actually put your fate-soul in this place. You wanted me to personally witness the fate-soul about to be assimilated, all to give me no choice but to intervene.”

Grand Emperor Devilbird looked coldly at the blood-red vortex, his eyes burning with killing intent.

The vortex spun, emitting loud rumbling sounds, but no words of response.

“But of course, how could I come here unprepared?” Next, Grand Emperor Devilbird looked, not at any of the people present, but at the final remaining stone door that hadn’t been opened. “You’re here, empress of humankind. So why haven’t you shown yourself yet?”

Every single Imperial Sovereign present was visibly surprised as they turned to look in the same direction as Grand Emperor Devilbird. After all, there was only one person who could be referred to as the empress of humankind. And that was Empress Summer Departure, who had reached godly ascension!

As everyone looked over, the empress appeared. At first, everyone saw Lu Lingzi standing there. But that form faded away, revealing the empress’ true form! Destiny aura went wild in the area, taking the shape of countless humans. At the same time, an imperial robe and crown appeared on the empress.

As of that moment, all human lands outside of the Devilbird holy land, plus the will of all humans, seethed, causing destiny aura to surge forth to bolster the empress. A terrifying aura and momentum began to build up on the empress.

It caused all of the Imperial Sovereigns to tremble and struggle to breathe. That was especially true of those who had previously considered stirring up trouble with Lu Lingzi.

All of this was both expected and unexpected. Unexpected things often happened in circumstances like this. And after Xu Qing and Erniu appeared, the arrival of the empress fell into the realm of being expected. Either way, the Imperial Sovereigns present were all taking the situation very seriously.

The empress’ expression was the same as ever as shē took a step forward and then appeared right in front of Xu Qing and Erniu. There, shē blocked the tempest and negated the pressure.

Xu Qing breathed an inner sigh of relief, as did Erniu. Both of them didn’t hesitate for a moment to clasp hands in greeting.

The empress didn’t turn to look at them. Instead, shē looked at Grand Emperor Devilbird up in midair. Clearly, shē had expected that shē would be called out by him at some point.

“The Devilbird holy land will leave human skies,” she said coolly. “And Netherflame’s soul will be given to me.”

Grand Emperor Devilbird smiled. He knew that it would be difficult to please the empress considering he had revealed hēr true identity. What was more, he knew that though he and the empress were at war, there was something far more important to him personally than victory.

And that was the life or death of Netherflame. He wanted Netherflame to die so that he could get his fate-soul. There was no conflict between him and the empress in that regard.

Back when he had suspected that Lu Lingzi wasn't really Lu Lingzi, he hadn't interfered. He had allowed Lu Lingzi to return, and had even opened the secluded meditation facilities. In the final analysis, he had actually hoped that the empress would test him out and ultimately choose to join forces with him when things reached a critical point. What was more, the empress' demands came as no surprise to him.

"My fate-soul has two parts. I already took the first part. But the second part is still down there." Grand Emperor Devilbird's eyes shone with determination. "Join forces with me. You can take Netherflame, and I'll take my own fate-soul. When we both get what we want, the Devilbird holy land will leave human skies!"

"Deal!" the empress replied.

With that, Devilbird moved over to the vortex, stopped, and looked back at the empress. freewebnovel.com

The empress looked around at the Imperial Sovereigns, especially the old man who commanded that death energy. When the empress looked at him, he shivered and then bowed his head respectfully.

They might be enemies, but this was an Altar God he was dealing with, and not even he was brave enough to look someone like that in the eyes. That was especially true considering... he could tell that look had been a warning.

The empress looked away, then joined Devilbird by the vortex. The two of them then stepped inside and vanished.

Everyone else hesitated about whether to follow. Before any of them could decide, a will of extermination filled the crypt. Everything started withering up. It was vanishing.

Seeing that, the Imperial Sovereigns gritted their teeth and flew over to the vortex. One by one, they entered. The old man who had clashed with Xu Qing and Erniu was apparently worried about a misunderstanding. Not daring to be the last to enter, he jostled with the fifth Imperial Sovereign to beat him into the vortex. It didn't take long for all the Imperial Sovereigns to be gone.

Xu Qing and Erniu looked at each other. They could see the determination in each other's eyes. Both took deep breaths and burst into motion. They also entered the vortex, and rumbling sounds echoed out as they vanished.

When they reappeared, they were in a blood-red world. In this place, heaven was made of flesh, and it was covered with countless downy hairs. The lands below were covered with a transparent sea. On top of the sea was a conglomeration of flesh that looked like a huge tumor.

Inside of the tumor was a middle-aged cultivator, seated cross-legged. He pulsed with an extremely ancient and terrifying aura as he slowly opened his eyes and looked up at the group above.

"Everyone's here. Welcome. The time has come for all of you to witness my rebirth."

Chapter 1074: Cleaning Vegetables

Chapter 1074: Cleaning Vegetables

Atop the huge sea, inside the horrifying magenta tumor, a voice spoke, and an aura spread out.... A storm sprang up on the transparent sea, giving birth to a tsunami. A screaming sound shook everything, and huge waves swept back and forth that seemed capable of overturning heaven and earth. The sky of flesh quivered. Countless fleshy tentacles swayed back and forth. And the opening the group had just come through was already closing. The area had become a deadly danger zone.

The mocking voice that had just spoken echoed within the danger zone, reaching the ears of the Imperial Sovereigns, causing grim expressions to reach their faces and filling their hearts with regret. They should not have come here.

Sometimes, though, the advancement of the cultivation base did not reduce one's capacity for greed. It all came down to how much something was worth. Powerful experts like Imperial Sovereigns were not people who lacked the capacity to fight hard for what they wanted. And they were not cowards. Otherwise, they would not have been able to tread their path to the current position. Therefore, it made sense that they would take a chance by coming to a place like this.

Right now, all of them were instinctively backing up and activating their most powerful defenses. At the same time, they were trying to come up with ways of dealing with the situation, while simultaneously putting most of their hope in Grand Emperor Devilbird. All of them, with the exception of the fifth Imperial Sovereign, had come here, not because it was their idea, but because Grand Emperor Devilbird had persuaded them and even sworn dao oaths to convince them.

The way things played out wasn't set in stone. That was especially true about the empress joining forces with Devilbird. In other words, it was still possible that they could get their hands on authority legacies or Grand Emperor treasures.

As for Xu Qing and Erniu.... They each had their own unique objectives.

Xu Qing's goal was relatively simple. He wanted a way to break through the shackles confining his cultivation base. And the power emanating off this transparent sea, though neither spirit power nor god power, did contain a life force that gave him a bit of hope. *This is the perfect place for cultivation base advancement!*

Erniu, meanwhile, was looking at that huge tumor. Specifically, he was licking his lips as he looked at the figure inside. His original goal in coming to this place had been to gain control of a Grand Emperor's corpse.

Of course, a goal like that was not going to be easy to accomplish. So he had a second goal as well, and that was to activate the bone cauldron made from his past life to find the memories of his third life. The reality was that he was missing memories from his first, second, and third lives. And he had the feeling that the only way to start finding the memories from the first and second lives was to start by getting control of his third life memories.

Therefore, he had multiple objectives in mind as he slowly backed up.

At exactly the same moment that the empress and Grand Emperor Devilbird were already shooting toward the tumor...

As Grand Emperor Netherflame sat within the huge tumor on the transparent sea, he lifted his right hand. The dome of heaven trembled and then sank downward.

The sight of it struck everyone to the core. This was a case of heaven destroying earth! Everything was being crushed.

The air vibrated as if it were turning solid, and then began to converge inward. It was the same with the sea below, which began to rise up to connect with the sky and the air. The entire world was contracted as if to form a powerful sealing mark.

All Xu Qing could sense was that heaven and earth were blurring, and seemingly infinite pressure was building up. And yet, after he got over his shock and looked around, everything looked normal.

The sky was still made of flesh. The earth was still covered by the transparent sea. There were no other dramatic transformations anywhere else.

The only difference was that... the empress and Grand Emperor Devilbird were now surrounded by a sphere-like magenta tumor. It was formed from the sky, the sea, and the air. That was because the event which just occurred had been focused on the empress and Grand Emperor Devilbird!

Xu Qing realized that he would have a hard time describing exactly how it played out. All he knew was that he had a feeling inside him that this entire world was like a fruit. They were currently in the core of that fruit, and just now, Grand Emperor Netherflame had used an unimaginable power to carve a sphere out in the middle of that fruit. The empress and Grand Emperor Devilbird were now sealed within that sphere.

Before Xu Qing's senses could process it, heaven and earth rumbled, and the same thing happened again. In fact, it happened twenty-three times in a row before it stopped.

Everything was back to normal. However, everything seemed... flimsier than before. Everyone was stunned.

And Netherflame's voice then echoed out again from within the tumor. "I've been planning this for a thousand years. I just needed Devilbird to show up at the right moment. Then I could possess him and use him as a body in which to be reborn. And you are the nutrients I need for that rebirth. Granted, I didn't expect an Altar God to show up. To be honest, it was... a pleasant surprise."

Netherflame's gaze came to rest on the empress and Grand Emperor Devilbird in the tumor. Then he looked at the rest of the surprised cultivators present. "I have thirty-three worlds. I already peeled away twenty-three of them to perform this sealing. That means there are ten left for the rest of you."

Netherflame lifted his hand and then gently lowered it. It didn't matter how people struggled, fought back, or tried to evade. Nothing helped. Instantly... heaven and earth filled with rumbling sounds. One world became a mass of flesh that surrounded the young woman in palace attire.

Another world became a cage that sealed the fifth Imperial Sovereign. As for the scholar, the teenager, and the old man with the grudge against Xu Qing and Erniu, none of them were able to escape the fate of being surrounded by one of the worlds peeled away by Netherflame. All of them became tumors floating in midair. Another tumor contained Xu Qing and Erniu.

Having accomplished that, Netherflame closed his eyes. Then his chest heaved as he started performing breathing exercises. When he inhaled, the floating balls of flesh quivered and began to contract. When he exhaled, the fleshy tumors shivered again and expanded. Because of his breathing, the people caught in the tumors felt their life force and cultivation bases weakening. A sensation of crisis was starting to grow strong.

However, at that critical moment, the tumor of twenty-three worlds that held the empress and Grand Emperor Devilbird began to tremble. And then the tumor started to act in exactly the opposite way as everything else. When Netherflame inhaled, the interior of the tumor expanded. And when he exhaled, the opposite happened. It was using Netherflame's strength to create a conflicting force that sent cracks spreading out through the tumor.

Netherflame frowned slightly.

As the cracks proliferated, streams of godlight began to seep out, along with the power of Devilbird's authority. It took only three breaths of time. At that point, the sealing tumor of twenty-three worlds emitted a loud bang as it exploded.

The empress flew out and shot toward the tumor containing Netherflame. The mere passage of the empress caused heaven and earth to shatter. Grand Emperor Devilbird was next to the empress, his killing intent surging. They were unstoppable.

In the blink of an eye, the two of them smashed into the tumor containing Netherflame, and began to fight. The tumor swelled and became nothing but a chaotic blur. No one could see what was happening inside.

That said, no one was keen on trying to find out. The Imperial Sovereigns were taking advantage of the moment to unleash various trump cards to break free from their own sealing tumors.

Some used secret magics, others used Grand Emperor treasures they had kept in reserve. No one held anything back.

Xu Qing and Erniu were also going all out to break free, using the empress's medallion and Xu Qing's carving knife. Unfortunately, the tumors were fantastically gruish. It was as if they took advantage of cracks between fate to create layer after layer. It was never-ending. Erniu opened his mouth and took a bite, but that didn't do anything.

It was the same everywhere. No matter what anyone did, it was pointless.... Even if they broke through a layer of the sealing, there was always another sealing beyond that. People started wondering if they were seeing things.

Erniu inhaled sharply. "Are these sealing marks really made from only one world each? If we couldn't break out of them, that would make sense. But look at all the Imperial Sovereigns! They're using all sorts of trump cards. Even Grand Emperor treasures! And not even that is doing anything."

His eyes glittered. “Wait a second,” he continued suspiciously. “Why would Netherflame say that to begin with? Maybe... these sealing marks aren’t made from worlds at all! And if that’s the case, why would Netherflame do all of this? What would be the point of tricking us? Wouldn’t it make more sense to put a bunch of sealing marks on the empress and Devilbird? After all, they’re a much bigger threat than us.”

Clearly, Xu Qing and Erniu weren’t the only ones pursuing this train of thought. The Imperial Sovereigns were starting to come to the same conclusion.

And then, just as Erniu gave voice to that concept, something dramatic happened!

Almost all of the tumors started twitching violently and at the same time, contracting and expanding rapidly. And that caused immense pressure to weigh down on the Imperial Sovereigns. In fact, it was a pressure that surpassed what Imperial Sovereigns could sustain.

An instant later, howls of anguish rang out of their mouths. Their bodies then began to collapse and be assimilated. Their life force was being forcefully sucked out. The pressure also caused their cultivation bases to be brutally stripped away. The same thing happened with their souls and authority. Even their magical treasures were unable to escape the effects. The pressure caused them to collapse and be sucked up. It was almost as if they were turning into spirit stones!

This was a consummate level of power, something they couldn’t fight against. They could only writhe in helpless agony and despair.

Of course, that was happening to *almost* all of the tumors. The reason for the word *almost*... was that it wasn’t happening to the tumor that contained Xu Qing and Erniu! Their tumor wasn’t contracting. It was only expanding. And that was because something dramatic was happening inside....

That development caused Erniu to inhale sharply, and it filled Xu Qing with a sense of unbounded danger. A boundless life force swept toward them from all directions, and it... directly entered the tumor that contained them!

Astonishingly, it was the life force that was being stripped away from the Imperial Sovereigns. Unseen hands were manipulating things to send all of it to Xu Qing and Erniu. The previous expansion was clearly intended to make room for it all.

In the blink of an eye, the life force quintessence of all of the Imperial Sovereigns had become a liquid that pooled all the way up to Xu Qing’s ankles. And as it coursed into his flesh and blood, it provided incredible nourishment. And the focus of that nourishment was his fleshly body.

When Erniu saw that, he gasped.

As for Xu Qing, he was shaken to his core as he suddenly recalled something. It was something that happened in the world of the Heavenmakers.

Someone is catalyzing my fleshly body into maturity!

His heart was racing as he thought back to that experience. He suddenly got the sensation that being cleansed by the Heavenmakers' might have seemed like good fortune in and of itself. But the reality was that it was like... cleaning vegetables!

Before you eat something, you need to clean it thoroughly.

Deathblade's Thoughts

Chapter 1075: That Body Of Yours... Is Mine

Xu Qing had already begun picking up on the clues back in that memory world of the Heavenmakers. After a lot of testing and probing, he had ultimately decided to absorb some of the water in the pool. However, he had come to the conclusion that the good fortune was likely a case of someone randomly putting a game piece on the board in the hopes of using it later. And right now, he was scowling deeply.

It wasn't a case of randomly playing a game piece. It was a case of someone setting me up! And they were doing it for a specific reason....

Xu Qing didn't need to put a lot of thought into it. He now realized that, given what happened before, Grand Emperor Netherflame's first objective was Devilbird. And the entire purpose of his secluded meditation facilities was to lure Devilbird inside at the right time. But then Xu Qing also came... which forced Netherflame to change his plan.

The only question is whether I've become Plan A or Plan B. After all, there's some major karma at play because of me having a body made from Eminent Desolation's flesh and blood. Will he be willing to ignore that future karma just to seize this body?

As Xu Qing's mind raced, the howls of agony continued to echo out from the surrounding tumors.

The woman in palace attire, the teenager, the scholar, and the old man, and even the fifth Imperial Sovereign were all trembling as they slowly withered up. Their life force, cultivation base, and even their essence, was all being sucked away. They had no way to stop it from becoming liquid that poured into the tumor with Xu Qing.

By now, it had gone past his ankles and up to his knees. The liquid seemed to have a will of its own as it rushed madly inside Xu Qing, swirling through his fleshly body. Not only was it nourishing his fleshly body, but also, it was causing certain transformations. The pain was intense and all-encompassing. Xu Qing fought against it instinctively.

The will within the liquid, upon sensing Xu Qing fighting back, became even more aggressive, and began trying to wipe out Xu Qing's soul.

Xu Qing was beginning to lose consciousness as the union between his soul and fleshly body began to break down. There was nothing he could do to reverse the situation. All he could do was use his carving knife of fate to protect his soul. He felt like a rowboat in a tempest, struggling to hold on. At the same time, he was trying various methods of breaking free. But nothing worked.

“In that case...” he murmured. Eyes glittering with cold light and heart filling with determination, he settled down cross-legged. And with that, he stopped preventing his fleshly body from absorbing the liquid. Because of that, the will of the liquid stopped working so hard to wipe out his soul. His body trembled as massive amounts of quintessence poured into his body, nourishing it and making it stronger.

Erniu could sense that something wasn't quite right. He took a deep breath and prepared to help, but realized how unbelievably powerful the liquid was. He blinked a few times. That was when he realized Xu Qing was working hard to absorb it.

Eyes glittering, he loudly said, “Let me help you, little Junior Brother!”

With that, he suddenly sat down cross-legged, settling himself as if to help Xu Qing out by doing his own deep breathing. Unfortunately, an action like that wouldn't be permitted. The moment he started breathing, an incredible force of expulsion erupted within the tumor. Rumbling sounds filled the tumor as the force of expulsion ejected Erniu from inside.

Xu Qing's eyes snapped open and he burst into motion. As he did, a gravitational force appeared, wrapping around him and dragging him back so he couldn't leave.

In that manner, Erniu became the third person after the empress and Grand Emperor Devilbird who escaped one of the tumors. After the expulsion came a wave of killing intent.

It rumbled loudly as it swept over Erniu from head to toe. Cracking sounds rang out, accompanied by Erniu's howls of pain. All of the bones in his body were shattered, his flesh was crushed, and he began to fall apart. Masses of shredded flesh began to fall down into the transparent sea below. They sank down to the bottom.

Xu Qing heard Erniu screaming and saw his body collapsing. Unfortunately, he had no attention to spare. Besides, Xu Qing was confident that killing Erniu wouldn't be an easy task for anyone.

What was more, Xu Qing knew that he was currently facing the most deadly crisis he had faced in his entire life. It was a situation in which it was going to be difficult to find help from any external source. If he wanted to break free, he would have to rely on himself.

Xu Qing gritted his teeth, and his eyes flashed with cold light. Even as he continued to focus on absorbing the surrounding liquid, the liquid continued to build up around him.

The life force liquid from the Imperial Sovereigns had currently gone past his chest and was up to his neck. And the level was still rising. Before long, it went past his head. He was fully immersed.

Things weren't over yet. The Imperial Sovereigns howled as they grew weaker and weaker, all while the tumor Xu Qing was in reached the point of being more than eighty percent full. The astonishing amount of life force quintessence that was nourishing Xu Qing's fleshly body had reached an unfathomable level.

His body was made from the broken face's flesh and blood, and though it seemed like a unified whole, it actually wasn't. Over the past few years, Xu Qing had been working hard to fuse all the pieces together, and even more importantly, improve the level of his soul. He needed to achieve a state of balance to be in the safest position. Whether it was the immortal mercury from the very

beginning or the dao lineament of authority, his ultimate goal had always been the same. Unfortunately, progress had been very slow.

Eventually, he came to Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities, where he found the pool in the Heavenmaker world. And now he was absorbing the life force, cultivation bases, souls, and quintessence liquid of numerous Imperial Sovereigns. As a result, his fleshly body was being pushed toward a state of completion. His aura was climbing higher, pushing against the shackles of the Smoldering God and climbing toward the level of an Imperial Sovereign.

The ideal outcome would be for his soul to follow along to a similar result. Unfortunately, his soul was not growing. Only his fleshly body was being catalyzed. And that made him like a child donning a thousand-pound suit of armor. In the end, either his soul would be crushed, or the fleshly body would be rejected. If he tried to stop the process, the will of the liquid would explosively crush his soul. If he didn't stop it, then the stronger his fleshly body got, the harder it would be for his soul to stay inside. It was a lose-lose situation.

Xu Qing's decision was to just keep focusing on absorbing the liquid. His soul filled with pain, and felt like it might be forcefully ejected from his body, but he didn't hesitate. He just kept absorbing the liquid, his eyes glinting coldly the entire time.

He was waiting. He was waiting for the force of rejection against his soul to reach the highest level possible.

And thus, time slipped by.

The howls from the Imperial Sovereigns grew weaker. The chunks of Erniu's flesh sank deeper into the transparent sea.

And then another dramatic event unfolded. A heaven-shaking, earth-shattering rumbling sound emerged from the tumor where the empress and Grand Emperor Devilbird had disappeared. Then the tumor began to expand rapidly, getting bigger and bigger. The fighting inside seemed to have reached a climax. Ultimately, the tumor couldn't hold itself together. It exploded violently. Massive amounts of flesh and blood rained down onto the transparent sea.

The empress and Grand Emperor Devilbird flew out and hovered in midair. Their eyes were both grim as they looked at the flesh and blood raining down. They also took note of what had been playing out while they were gone. They saw the Imperial Sovereigns withering up, and they saw Xu Qing's aura rising explosively.

The empress frowned. Grand Emperor Devilbird looked at the tumor that contained Xu Qing, and his eyes narrowed.

At the same time, now that the tumor had exploded, allowing the empress and Grand Emperor Devilbird to emerge, Grand Emperor Netherflame finally appeared. A meaningful smile played out on his face as he looked at the empress.

"You didn't come here just for my soul. You probably want my sealed grotto-heaven, don't you? Let me guess, you want to resurrect someone."[1]

The empress' expression was the same as ever as shē coldly replied, "You're not a complete version of Netherflame."

Netherflame smiled but didn't respond. Turning, he looked down into the transparent sea. The entire sea then turned into a vortex. Loud rumbling sounds echoed out, and a terrifying aura spread out. Sky-obscuring, sun-blocking winds sprang up.

Then a gruish figure rose out of the vortex. The left side had a humanoid shape, and had clearly been reborn. But the right side had not been fully reborn. It had no skin, only a network of blood vessels. It looked shocking and ghastly. The sense of incompleteness in it was clear.

Seeing this emerging figure caused Grand Emperor Devilbird to breathe heavily, all while his pupils constricted. Along with the gruish figure came a host of dancing lightning bolts. The dome of heaven trembled, the sea water seethed, and an aura that was immeasurably close to a Summer Immortal erupted out.

"So, it's an omniscient god," the figure growled as it looked at the empress with a gaze that seemed to contain magical laws. "You're right. He's an incomplete version of me. Put precisely, he's one of my two clones. And he has some karma connecting him to those two human chosen of yours. That's because, before changing appearances, he had a different identity in the Devilbird holy land. He was the grand immortal adept of the eastern Devilbirds.

"In order to welcome you, I didn't just prepare that immortal puppet in the crypt, I also sent this clone out to die under the pretense of seeking the legacy of the Six Thieves Deceive Life. And now, as a show of respect, I've come out with my true form."

The half-complete half-blood-vessel-filled Netherflame smiled. "And therefore, this ceremony is now ready to be completed. Devilbird, have you thought about what I said to you?"

Netherflame looked at Devilbird. Devilbird's expression darkened. Turning to look at Xu Qing in the tumor, his eyes filled with a decisive look. Spinning in place, he shot toward the empress. At the same time, the clone of Netherflame that they had been fighting erupted with killing intent and also flew toward the empress. The three of them started fighting.

Heaven and earth rocked back and forth. The air crumbled. The entire world began to break apart like a shattering mirror.

Only Netherflame's true form didn't seem affected. He simply began to walk toward a shard of the world that contained Xu Qing in the tumor. At the same time, he said, "Devilbird, I swear a dao oath that, after this is over, your fate-soul will be returned to you unharmed, and forever after, you and I will have no conflict. Clone, I promise that, after this is over, you can have the freedom you so desire. As for you, empress... after this is over, you can have the grotto-heaven. Go ahead and resurrect the person you want to resurrect. All I want is for the lot of you to leave me alone while I'm reborn."

As Netherflame spoke, his eyes locked onto Xu Qing with the same greed and admiration one would expect of someone staring at a precious treasure.

His original plan had been to possess Devilbird. Using the body of a Grand Emperor as the second half of his reborn self would help him rise to the level of a Summer Immortal. Although there would be side-effects, he was confident that, over time, he would be able to recover from them.

But then he had seen Xu Qing! It had stunned him deeply, and as a result, he had changed his plan. He had abandoned any thoughts of possessing Devilbird, and had instead secretly reached out to communicate with him. And then he had manipulated things perfectly to reach this current situation.

Netherflame strode up to the tumor with Xu Qing in it. Looking inside, he licked his lips. *A fleshly body like that is simply unimaginable. So what if I have to devour some of its karma....*

At this point, his greed had reached the level where he couldn't control it.

“That body of yours... is mine.”

With that, he extended his right hand, pushing it into the tumor to rest on the top of Xu Qing's head.

1. The term “grotto-heaven” came up previously in chapter 1064. This is a term from real-life Daoism, referring to a sacred site that's usually a cave or some subterranean location. Here is a [wiki article](#) with more information about how it's used in real life. ❹

Chapter 1076: Enter the Place, Become an External Evil

Chapter 1076: Enter the Place, Become an External Evil

The sky of flesh was like a shattered mirror. Innumerable rifts split the world into numerous fragments. And within every single one of those fragments was a unique heaven and earth.

Within one of those worlds was the empress, Grand Emperor Devilbird, and Netherflame's clone, who was the grand immortal adept from the eastern Devilbirds.

The other Imperial Sovereigns, who were now hardly more than desiccated corpses, were gasping for breath in their own fragments.

In the very middle of them all was the fragment with Xu Qing and Netherflame's true self. Xu Qing sat cross-legged, his eyes closed, seemingly unaware of anything happening on the outside. He wasn't even moving.

Netherflame's gruish form was half a complete person, with the other half a mass of blood vessels. A malevolent look of greed and anticipation filled his face. He had plunged his right hand into the tumor and placed it on Xu Qing's head, and was sending terrifying energy directly through that hand and into Xu Qing.

When he spoke, his voice was raspy, but grew louder and louder as he went along. “I have two clones. One is that grand immortal adept of the eastern Devilbirds. The other... is the grand immortal adept of the western Devilbirds. You have an immortal skill from there, but little did you know that the immortal skills of the Devilbird holy land are all legacies passed down by me.

“So, boy, I know about your karma. I know that you have an almighty warding spell on you. But my act of possessing you isn’t going to be a simple invasion. Nor will it be some crass devouring. Instead... I’ll use the immortal skill Six Thieves Deceive Life!”

As his energy poured in through the top of Xu Qing’s head, innumerable strands of the seven emotions and six sensory pleasures spread out, covering Xu Qing and boring into him through his every pore. Xu Qing’s seven emotions were stirred. And along with the six sensory pleasures, which had the same origin, they made him ripe for growth. Next....

“Immortal skill: Five Dogs Cleave Immortals!”

The stingy dog cleaves to a place and loses treasure; the greedy dog cleaves to a place and is bound; the foolish dog cleaves to a place and falls into death; the depraved dog cleaves to a place and falls into hell; the austere dog cleaves to a place and forever loses the body.

This art had been passed down over many years, and had eventually come to be regarded as a gruish magical technique designed to kill. But the truth was that, when it was originally created, it was intended for... possession! [1]

Therefore, in this case, Netherflame’s memories became the stingy dog that would enter Xu Qing’s ‘place’ and cleave to it. It would forcefully cover over Xu Qing’s memories, creating countless white hairs that would make a door of entrance. [2]

That door of entrance was what would allow the possession to take place! When the door opened up inside Xu Qing, it would also form inside Netherflame. The opening of the door would also connect them. Netherflame’s soul would become a gruish white eye. And when the door opened inside him, it would charge into Xu Qing through the door.

Outside evil would invade, spinning to create a vortex.

Having insatiable desire. That is called greed. The greedy dog cleaves to a place and is bound. Renouncing the rules of life. That is called foolishness. The foolish dog cleaves to a place and falls into death.

A power of separation exploded out. Netherflame’s terrifying soul would cleave to him, and would forcibly rip his soul away from his fleshly body. As a result, Xu Qing’s body and soul would be completely unrelated to each other.

When the vortex formed, a white mouth appeared.

Arguing without understanding the facts. That is called depravity. The depraved dog cleaves to a place and falls into hell.

The mouth viciously bit down. It took a bite of his soul!

At that moment of crisis, the eyes of Xu Qing's soul suddenly opened, and they brimmed with determination and craziness. From the moment Xu Qing realized he was in a deadly situation, he had known that he wasn't possibly strong enough to fight back against Netherflame's malicious possession attempt. Any type of resistance would be pointless.

Since he didn't have the option of fighting back, he decided to intentionally absorb quintessence liquid to nourish his fleshly body and push his body into a state of being increasingly whole. The process itself would cause his fleshly body to reject his soul with increasing intensity.

That was actually what he wanted!

Of course, the process would involve immensely painful pressure on his soul.

The protection provided by his carving knife would be key. Right now, the Five Dogs immortal skill was just increasing the rejection from his fleshly body to his soul, and was actually pushing it toward a crescendo. It was essentially driving his soul away.

As far as Xu Qing was concerned, this was actually his best shot at survival! And thus....

"Five Dogs Cleave Immortals!"

The immortal skill also exploded within Xu Qing's sea of consciousness. He wasn't trying to stop Netherflame from carrying out his possession. He wasn't resisting at all. It was as if his fleshly body didn't even belong to him! He just... abandoned it without hesitation!

At the same time, he took advantage of the possession of Five Dogs Cleave Immortals, and he also took advantage of the force of expulsion from his fleshly body toward his soul.

The former was a pulling force, the latter was a pushing force. With those two forces working together, Xu Qing's soul shot out just before it was devoured. It went through the door Netherflame had opened. And left the body!

In the moment that the other soul possessed him, he burned his own soul, used his tattoo of fate, and tapped into the warding spells his Master had put in place. He did not hold anything back. Just when his own soul was about to collapse, he stepped through the door of possession within Netherflame. It took one step for him to leave his fleshly body behind.

Once he was through that door... he entered the fleshly body that Netherflame had abandoned! He stepped right through the door Netherflame himself had opened! He became the greedy dog from Five Dogs Cleave Immortals.

He entered the place and became an external evil! He became the white eye in the opened door inside Netherflame. He was switching bodies with Netherflame!

At any other time, this would have been impossible for Xu Qing. But right now, possessing his enemy was the best path to walk. And it was all because his enemy was trying to possess him.

Xu Qing's Five Dogs became the pulling force. The expulsion of his fleshly body became the pushing force. And thus, something which normally would have been very difficult to pull off... became a reality.

Most importantly was that, just before leaving, Xu Qing put certain things in place! For the first time, Netherflame was caught by surprise by Xu Qing's actions. However, he was still confident in being able to stop him.

But then the fleshly body warding spells activated. At the same time, a malicious will erupted from the back of the fleshly body. That was when the first instability surfaced in the possession attempt, and it forced Netherflame to consider the situation.

Killing Xu Qing wasn't the point. Netherflame wanted to push Five Dogs Cleave Immortals to the point of completion and gain complete control over this fleshly body. That was what he had chosen to do. Compared to that, everything else was secondary.

As for abandoning his old body....

That body isn't even complete. It's missing the Devilbird part. It was only my soul that managed to force it into a state of balance. Now that my soul is gone from it, it's like a candle flickering in the wind. It won't be long before it just crumbles.

Laughing coldly, Netherflame ignored what was happening there. Going all out with his own soul, he focused on the fifth will of Five Dogs Cleave Immortals.

It was a white face. With it, the Five Dogs immortal skill was complete, and it formed a complete face. White hair fluttered, and it grinned enigmatically, as if it were crying and laughing at the same time. It was very gruish. Its might became a restrictive warding spell, and its power covered the back of the fleshly body. It formed a balance.

Within the tumor, the 'Xu Qing' seated cross-legged started chanting, "Renouncing the three paths of hell before attaining lifelessness. That is called austerity. The austere dog cleaves to a place and forever loses the body."

Smiling faintly, he opened his eyes. Though he still looked like Xu Qing on the outside, his eyes were profoundly ancient, and he contained a terrifying energy that made him seem completely and utterly different compared to before. And his fleshly body power was rising.

The might of an Imperial Sovereign pulsed out, and it was getting closer to the level of a Grand Emperor. The sense of perfection caused Netherflame's eyes to gleam with praise.

"This body was wasted on you, boy. Your soul couldn't sustain the full majesty of its mightiness."

Outside of the tumor, his abandoned body suddenly shivered and staggered backward a few paces. All the while, it was withering, with chunks of flesh falling off it. It was as if the force inside couldn't sustain a balance with the body itself. The eyes struggled to open, and it was Xu Qing's gaze that appeared. But that was all.

Netherflame shook his head as if he was looking at an ant. He prepared to lift his right hand. But then, all of a sudden....

Within the body he had just possessed, the warding spell power that he had suppressed with Five Dogs Cleave Immortals suddenly erupted as the fleshly body power reached a tipping point thanks to the new soul.

The balance was broken. There was another explosion!

Master Seventh had actually put two warding spells in place. One was a limitation on the Imperial Sovereign level. The other was a limitation on the Grand Emperor level.

The former had been in balance because of Netherflame's Five Dogs Cleave Immortals. But now... the second warding spell seal had been removed. In the blink of an eye, a host of silver threads appeared on the fleshly body, which turned into innumerable sealing marks. They were so densely packed they were like flowing water that swept back and forth. It took only a moment for it to create a huge net that covered the entire body, flickering with silver light that surpassed natural laws.

As soon as it appeared, it suppressed the rising power of the fleshly body. It had been put in place by Master Seventh to protect Xu Qing.

Seeing that, Netherflame's eyes flickered with mysterious light, and he frowned slightly. However, he wasn't very surprised. After all, there was no way this fleshly body had been prepared by some member of the Junior generation. It was obviously the work of some almighty being. Therefore, it made perfect sense that he would leave some contingency plans in place on it.

Whoever left behind this warding spell is no simpleton.

Netherflame's eyes narrowed. Reaching up, he placed his right hand atop his head. Next, the black lotus beneath him began spinning, allowing him to suck up all the remaining quintessence in the tumor. The black lotus bloomed, and chains like stamens whipped about. Under his control, they wrapped around the body. They became a suppressing force.

"Although the warding spell can't be wiped out right away," Netherflame said coolly, "I can at least force a state of balance. That will work. In the future, I'll just need some time, and I can wipe it out! So, boy, what else did you leave behind in this body? The candle on the back?"

Rumbling sounds echoed out from behind him as the fire of the candle erupted, illuminating the world around Netherflame.

"I studied that candle for a lot longer than you ever did." Netherflame waved his hand, severing a portion of his own soul and sending it over to the candle tattoo to create a lampshade. "Look, that's all it takes to control it. And then you can tap into some of its power. So, boy, what else did you leave behind?"

Netherflame smiled faintly. However, even as his words were still ringing out, and before Xu Qing could even answer, a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering roar of rage echoed out from the depths of the transparent sea below.

"You want to hurt my little Junior Brother, you old codger? You'd better check in with me first!"

The transparent sea started seething. A huge tsunami wave rolled out in all directions. And then the sea started changing color. It was turning blue! Innumerable blue worms could be seen in the huge tsunami wave. As they converged, they turned into a gigantic blue hand holding a bone cauldron. And it was heading straight toward Netherflame!

1. In chapter 1049 I went into a bit of detail about the wordplay behind the Chinese version of Five Dogs Cleave Immortals, I mentioned that one of the characters in the technique name is also used in the word in xianxia that refers to magical “possession” of other people. 魔

2. Also in chapter 1049 we saw how the color white related the possession aspect of the skill, as well as the creation of the door. 门

Chapter 1077: My Wish Is....

Chapter 1077: My Wish Is....

The bone cauldron was made from Erniu’s third life by Grand Emperor Immortal Skill from that time. It was terrifyingly mighty and could use a will of greed to refine the dome of heaven. As the huge hand made of blue worms broke out of the sea, spraying water everywhere, it closed in on the tumor that contained Netherflame.

Netherflame sat cross-legged within it looking calm. However, the truth was that he knew how amazing this body was, and also how difficult it was going to be to fully control it.

The source of difficulty was the karma, but also... Master Seventh’s warding spells! Although he had suppressed the warding spells, the truth was that all he had done was barely manage to reach a level of balance. At the moment, he could not fully control the body.

All he could do was look on with a cold gleam in his eyes as the huge bone cauldron raced toward him. The cauldron’s top then opened, scooped the tumor inside, then slammed shut.

“Be refined!!” countless blue worms howled simultaneously.

The huge hand collapsed, turning into a writhing sea of worms that started swarming around the cauldron. Their momentum increased exponentially, causing heaven and earth to shake violently, and turning the sky into a blue vortex. As it spun madly, the blue worms spat out intense frigid energy. The frigid energy poured into the cauldron, but it didn’t turn into ice. Instead, it became a blue fire that started refining the tumor inside of it. Intense rumbling sounds grew louder and louder.

Erniu didn’t dare to get careless. He poured all of his effort into controlling and bolstering the bone cauldron. He held nothing back to refine the tumor. In the end, he knew that he didn’t even have a good shot of succeeding. This was Grand Emperor Netherflame he was dealing with, after all.

However, this was a critical moment, and time was of the essence, so this was the best option. He needed to buy as much time as possible for the empress and Xu Qing.

Hopefully that would enable the empress to come help as quickly as possible, and also give Xu Qing the opportunity to do whatever else he had planned. And thus, Erniu was going all out. Rumbling sounds echoed out constantly as the vortex of blue worms spun faster and faster.

Off in the distance, the empress could see what was happening, and had a grim expression on hēr face. Then golden light flickered around hēr, blurring everything; apparently, shē was trying to break free.

Hēr opponent, Grand Emperor Devilbird, looked surprised. Seeing that the empress was tapping into godly might, he had no choice but to back away. However, on the other side of the empress was Netherflame's clone. His eyes shone with determination as he shot forward and turned into a black lotus. Black fire surged, sweeping out everywhere, and completely sealing the fragment of space. Everything in that area blurred, making it impossible to see inside. However, the rumbling from inside quickly formed a resonance with the rumbling from the bone cauldron.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing took advantage of the moment to finish possessing the Grand Emperor's fleshly body. The world around him was being slowly refined inside of Erniu's cauldron. The tumor was on fire, and the Imperial Sovereigns' quintessence was bubbling and boiling.

As for Netherflame, he remained seated in a cross-legged position as he opened his eyes. They glittered grimly.

Erniu was his first slip-up. He had previously overlooked this seemingly inconsequential cultivator, only for that cultivator to pull off a completely unexpected move at a critical moment.

It's a bit of a surprise that I failed to predict this person's interference or even existence. How could I not tell what sort of reserve powers he had in place, nor sense the existence of this bone cauldron...? Either someone is interfering, or... there is something seriously suspicious about this person. Very interesting. Both the Elder and Junior Brother are very unusual. In that case, what about their Master...?

Grand Emperor Netherflame's eyes narrowed as he gave a cold harrumph. Although there had been some unexpected twists, he was still confident that he could come out on top.

I've been preparing for this rebirth for a long time. And that's especially true of my secluded meditation facilities, this grotto-heaven that isn't part of Revered Ancient. As long as this grotto-heaven exists, then no one from the outside can interfere with me. Though I did change my plans upon seeing this particular fleshly body, in the end... everything is under control. My control.

Netherflame remained calm in the face of the refining power. He took a deep breath, which immediately resulted in him absorbing more than thirty percent of the liquid.

A second black lotus appeared over his head. It pulsed with terrifying black flames, and it sent out a host of chains that connected it with the flower beneath his feet. As they spun, the chain pierced out of the tumor and rocketed toward the bone cauldron. And the boundless black fire suppressed the other fire within the cauldron.

The two lotuses caused Netherflame's aura to surge, and as the refining fires were suppressed, he fought Master Seventh's warding spells and also began to extinguish the candle on his back. The balance that had been lost was now regained.

There are some upsides to being in this cauldron. It's helping to screen me away from the outside. And that buys me time to get control over this fleshly body. I'd say it'll be an hour at the most before I'm strong enough to exercise control. And when that happens...

Netherflame opened his eyes, and deep inside there was a gleam of violet. His pupils suddenly constricted.

My eyes have violet light in them?

For an almighty individual like Netherflame, the unknown was always a surprise, and was an indication of many possible variables. The violet light in his eyes was the second unexpected twist. Even as Netherflame trembled inside, more violet light erupted. He couldn't control it. And as it filled him head to toe, he realized where it was coming from.

It was coming from the flesh in his chest. Right there in the chest was some object that Grand Emperor Netherflame hadn't noticed up to this point. It was a violet-colored crystal! [1]

Upon noticing it, his face flickered with dramatic emotion, the reason being that this object existed outside of his perception! None of his previous deductions had revealed its existence. And even after the possession was complete, he had been completely unaware of it until it emitted violet light. It was almost as if it had an unimaginably high personhood. If it didn't want him to sense it, then he would never possibly notice it.

This was an unexpected twist that shook him far deeper than what just happened with Erniu.

What was more, within the depths of the violet crystal was a figure with no facial features, seated cross-legged. It looked like little more than a shadow. At almost exactly the same moment that he looked at the shadow, it opened its eyes. Then, it was almost as if the violet crystal had been activated. It erupted with dazzling brightness, like a sea of light that enveloped the entire fleshly body, as well as Netherflame's soul.

In the thousand years that Netherflame had been in seclusion, he had never felt like he had lost control. But right now, that was how he felt, and it filled him with an intense sensation of deadly crisis. He was actually struggling to control his breathing.

This thing is completely beyond me! What is it??

A deep sense of unease erupted within Netherflame. However, it was a critical moment, so he didn't hesitate at all to try to seal the crystal with every ounce of strength he possessed. But the spread of the violet light had a widespread influence. It also affected... Master Seventh's warding spells. Netherflame's control over the warding spells collapsed. And then the candle on his back erupted into flame.

Thanks to the violet light, Erniu's bone cauldron erupted with greater force.

Astonished, Netherflame opened his mouth and inhaled as deeply as possible. All of the remaining seventy percent of the quintessence in the tumor surged into him, and he borrowed its power to fight back. He gritted his teeth, and fluctuations rolled out of his soul, revealing something that had been concealed within, something that he considered as valuable as his own life.

This item was his greatest secret. Golden light glittered in his soul. It was a drop of water. A drop of golden water. Put most precisely, it was a golden drop of river water.

The moment the water drop appeared, a majestic golden river materialized in Netherflame's soul.

“Mother River...” called Netherflame.

Deep rumbling sounds echoed out as a boundless golden river flowed, not in the Devilbird holy land, not in the Revered Ancient mainland, but in the north of the Ninth Star Ring in the boundless starry sky.... Within that river were countless heavenly bodies as well as innumerable living things. And there were lotuses.

Seated cross-legged on the lotuses were innumerable figures, including humans, nonhumans, cultivators, and gods.... On one lotus was a cultivator who looked like a human. Suddenly, his eyes opened, and they shone sharply as he looked out into the starry sky. Rising to his feet, he clasped hands and bowed to the river.

“Mother River, a game piece deployed to Eminent Desolation’s location has sent a distress signal.”

The river water rippled. A moment passed, and a tiny fragment of a terrifying, indescribable will awoke.

It was only a fragment, but it was enough to affect millions upon millions of heavenly bodies in the river. The hearts of countless living beings trembled.

“It’s not time yet....”

Upon hearing that, the cultivator bowed his head and sat back down. “In that case, he will either live or die based on that single drop of Mother River water.”

No one in the secluded meditation facilities had any idea what was happening inside the cauldron.

No one but Xu Qing, that is. When the violet crystal erupted, his connection with it allowed him to sense what was happening. And that was exactly how Xu Qing had planned it! He had left his body to activate Master Seventh’s first warding spell. He had also unsealed the candle to ensure that, when the warding spell activated, the candle would ignite. He knew that it would affect Netherflame.

At the same time, he had left the violet crystal behind! He had left it in his fleshly body. What was more, he had left Little Shadow inside of it, with instructions to unleash the power of the violet crystal when the critical moment arrived. He wasn’t really sure how it would turn out.

But over the years, he had come to realize something. And that was... that no one knew about the violet crystal except him. Not Master Seventh. Not the empress. Not even that old man from the Fifth Star Ring he had encountered in the outer sea had noticed it. Therefore, in this most desperate of situations, he had chosen a path of no return.

To be honest, he didn’t care what the violet crystal did. The reason was that the eruption of the violet crystal was just a cover for the last part of his overarching plan.

If Netherflame noticed what he was really doing, he would stop him. And Xu Qing couldn't afford to be interrupted.

That was the real purpose of the violet crystal eruption. It was to be a delay and a distraction to Netherflame.

Xu Qing took a moment to check his current fleshly body. Based on what he could sense, this body contained a terrifying essence. Unfortunately, he was currently like a child trapped in a thousand-pound suit of armor. He couldn't control it. There was something wrong with this body, as if it had previously existed in a state of balance, which had since been broken....

It wasn't going to last for much longer. It was already crumbling and withering.

But this is enough....

Eyes shining with determination, he spoke in a raspy voice. "I wish for...."

A gruish mask appeared out of nowhere. It pierced through all obstacles, even the void itself, and even space-time, to appear in front of Xu Qing. It was as if it had been waiting. It looked at Xu Qing.

He looked back. "I wish that I could use this body as nutrients to reconstruct my original body!"

1. The violet crystal was first mentioned in [chapter 2](#). Okay did I really need to include this as a footnote? Nope. Just thought it would be funny. ☹

Chapter 1078: The Path of the Extreme Immortal

Chapter 1078: The Path of the Extreme Immortal

At almost the exact same instant that Xu Qing's mask appeared.... In another spatial fragment, Grand Emperor Devilbird was working with Netherflame's clone to keep the empress under control. Apparently, Grand Emperor Devilbird sensed what had just happened, as his expression flickered, and he turned to look in the direction of Xu Qing. All of a sudden, rumbling sounds seemed to fill his heart and mind.

He knew exactly what that mask was! He had searched the Devilbird holy land for years looking for it. However, just as that black-robed man had said, the mask... didn't want to be found. In fact, the more you looked for it, the less likely you would be to find it.

"I can't believe *he* has it!" Grand Emperor Devilbird said, inhaling sharply. He turned, planning to break free from the fighting to go after the mask.

But then... the empress' eyes glittered coldly despite being locked down by the Grand Emperor and Netherflame's clone. Shē took a step forward, breaking free from all obstacles and bindings.

Grand Emperor Devilbird could not possibly break free.

The moment Xu Qing gave voice to his wish, the mask smiled broadly and gruishly. At the same time, a voice drifted out to fill the surrounding world.

“Granted. As for the price—”

The masks’ smile grew even more gruish as it spoke, but before the words were completely spoken, it crumbled into ashes.

As it disappeared, Xu Qing’s fleshly body rumbled loudly, and a force filled him, so powerful it was difficult to put into words. It surpassed the power of gods or cultivators or heavenly bodies or even the universe. It became a stream of energy that swept over Xu Qing’s current fleshly body. The void crumbled, separating from all things. Nothing could stop this force. Nothing could block it.

Xu Qing shivered from head to toe as his fleshly body started crumbling to pieces. It started with the face. Then the flesh seemed to lose its capacity to stick to the body and began peeling off. As it did, it turned into crystalline light.

Next, the half of the body covered with veins also collapsed, and also turned into crystalline light. Ultimately, both halves of the body crumbled because of the unimaginable wish power.....

The incredible life force within the body scattered. All elements that could sustain life were extracted. The flesh couldn’t remain as a whole, and the shocking power reverted it to its most primitive state.

The crystalline light actually came from countless transparent crystals that normally weren’t visible, which bound the flesh together.

Those crystals had no color. They simply reflected the color of the world around them. Because all impurities had been removed from them, any consciousness that had remained in them was wiped out. And as that happened, they became the ultimate origin of life force. They became primeval essence!

Xu Qing’s soul hovered within the light. And as his divine will spread out, the countless crystals began to swirl around and collide with each other....

As they absorbed Xu Qing’s color, and as they sucked in his energy, they began to form life force sparks that belonged to Xu Qing. They contained Xu Qing’s memories. They contained reversals of time and transpositions of space. They contained the intersections of daoist magics. In other words... they relied on Xu Qing’s soul to pulse with the soul essence of Xu Qing’s life force.

It was like a guidepost. Xu Qing’s soul essence guided the crystals to reverse engineer his body. It was a process that would normally take a long time, as it was essentially creating something from nothing.

Xu Qing opened his eyes in soul form. He looked at the huge cauldron and everything around it, including the countless blue worms.

“Eldest Brother, give me my remains.”

The moment he spoke via divine will, the blue worms started shining with blue light, and from within the forehead of each flew a gray light. The light converged to form a golden bone fragment. That fragment was what had been left behind when Xu Qing self-detonated. It was a physical manifestation of his essence!

It merged into Xu Qing’s soul, and the power of the wish began making his body anew. And this time, it was more perfect.

In an instant, the guidance of his soul caused the innumerable crystals to rush to the golden bone fragment. They became nutrients. They became the power of life force essence that caused the bone... to start growing! Gradually, it turned into a complete bone.

More bones began to grow. Then veins spread out, along with flesh. Then skin.... And then, as Erniu watched on excitedly, and as the surrounding world bore witness... Xu Qing’s familiar old body formed!

He was tall, with flowing violet hair, and a perfect face that could only be described as incomparably perfect. His aura was not that of an immortal. It was not that of a god. It was that of a mortal! He was back in his original mortal form! He was like a newborn infant. A sense of purity filled him. A sense of cleanliness inundated him.

Xu Qing’s soul was perfectly fused, and it was telling him... that this really was his own body. His soul was telling him... that this was the most suitable form for him.

Xu Qing opened his eyes. He felt as if he had been reborn. It was as if he had gone back to the very beginning.

“This is my true self,” he murmured. “The fleshly body made from Eminent Desolation is now a god clone of mine.”

He looked up. He wasn’t looking at the refinement going on in the cauldron. He didn’t look at the empress. Instead, he fixed his gaze on the crystalline light. Remolding his own body had only taken part of the life force essence from Netherflame’s body. And his new fleshly body didn’t even have a cultivation base. Now, an idea that had been percolating in the back of his mind for years was suddenly a real possibility.

I’ve walked the path of gods, and the limitations I faced made progress slow. Every step involved breaking through powerful shackles. In the end, I don’t think it’s the right path for me to walk. Maybe my god clone could walk it. I need to get that clone back... and let it walk the pure path of the gods. As for my true self, I need to walk... the pure way of immortals! That is the appropriate path for me!

Eyes shining with determination, he unhesitatingly inhaled. Instantly, the essence crystals shot toward him, entered his body, and turned into pure spirit energy. It flowed through his meridians, instantly giving a cultivation base to his mortal body.

First level of Qi Condensation! In the blink of an eye, the essence poured into him, causing his cultivation base to advance at freakishly indescribable speed. He went right to the tenth level of Qi

Condensation. For most cultivators, the tenth level was the limit of Qi Condensation. But Xu Qing's fleshly body had been made anew with primeval essence. Because of that, his limitations were beyond ordinary. He quickly jumped to the nineteenth level of Qi Condensation!

Only then did he break through to Foundation Establishment. 121 dharma apertures opened in an instant. But then, an additional 26 hidden apertures were blown open by the essence power. This was absolutely unprecedented! Rumbling sounds echoed out as 147 dharma apertures shone dazzlingly as they turned into life flames.

They didn't become five flames. They became nine! And then, Xu Qing's life lamps appeared beneath the nine flames. Life lamps were made from one's blood. And Xu Qing's life lamps looked like sundials. As they appeared one by one, his life lamps raged high.

Watching this happen left Erniu feeling deeply shaken. He had lived many lives, yet had never seen anything like this before.

However, I do remember hearing about... the legendary path of the extreme immortal in the Deep Earth star ring....

Meanwhile, Xu Qing's cultivation base continued to climb. Nine flames erupted, giving rise to heavenly palaces.

Legend had it that in Deep Earth, there were a total of thirty-three heavens. That legend was now becoming a reality in Xu Qing's sea of consciousness. Thirty-three heavenly palaces rumbled into being, becoming completely true and real. And within each of the heavenly palaces was a nascent soul, seated cross-legged and glittering with silvery light.

Each looked like an immortal. Every step Xu Qing took reached an extreme ultimate limit. This was the pure path of the immortal that Xu Qing wanted to walk. It was also the 'extreme path of the immortal' that Erniu had mentioned.

After Nascent Soul was Spirit Trove, and thanks to the stimulation of the primeval essence crystals, he reached the peak of that level as well. Nine huge troves erupted like nine staggering volcanoes. Rumbling sounds echoed out from within Xu Qing, spreading far and wide. If you looked closely, you would see that the nine secret troves were like erupting furnaces. However, they were empty inside. They had no divine abilities or daoist magics.

Xu Qing thought about all his divine abilities. And then, astonishingly, a dandelion seed appeared in one of his secret troves. That dandelion seed contained an imprint of the original divine ability that Xu Qing had fully mastered.

It was... Fishing the Moon in the Well!

Fishing the Moon in the Well's substructure... is formed from the void. It's about creating something from nothing. It is a dao related to space. And now, I make it one of my Spirit Trove secret magics. As for the second....

Xu Qing stared at the dandelion seed with Fishing the Moon in the Well in it, all while putting more thought into the subject. Suddenly, the dandelion seed superimposed on itself. Then, it split,

becoming a host of dandelion seeds that spread through his sea of consciousness. Xu Qing's heart sank at the sight of it.

At the same time, the profoundly ancient voice of a woman spoke by means of the dandelion seeds, her voice echoing in his sea of consciousness.

“There’s no need for such confusion. I’m using a secret magic to transmit my divine will to you. You’ve finally stepped onto the extreme path of immortals in Deep Earth. Last time, I gave you ten breaths of time to gain enlightenment of the immortal essence of Deep Earth. Today, based on the ancient agreement, you step onto the extreme path of immortals as a mortal, and therefore I’m giving you thirty breaths of time.”^[1]

“Deep Earth has a daoist magic called the Eight Extreme Daos. If you are connected to this daoist magic by destiny, you can obtain it. I have nothing more to say.” ^[2]

The voice faded away.

Outside of the Devilbird holy land, in the imperial capital of humankind in the Revered Ancient mainland, there was a bustling area within which was an ancient temple. Despite being in such a busy location, no passersby realized it was there. It was almost as if it didn't exist within reality.

An old man was just on his way out of the temple. He looked bleak.

The very same palace lord that Xu Qing had met in the Summer Immortal Palace years ago was seated there cross-legged, looking sorrowfully at the departing figure.

Next to the palace lord was a little butterfly, who said, “Master, who was that old fellow? And why are you helping that other guy I hate? And also, why do you look so sad?”

The palace lord of the Summer Immortal Palace sighed softly. “He’s an old friend of mine. Unfortunately, a storm is coming, and I’m not sure if his umbrella can hold up to it.”^[3]

1. Reference for “ten breaths of time” is [chapter 808](#). [📖]

2. Most readers in Chinese seemed to agree that these Eight Extreme Daos are the same as the Celestial Ancestor's Eight Extreme Dao(s) that were first mentioned in *Renegade Immortal* [chapter 1917](#), and were elaborated on in [chapter 1957](#) and subsequent chapters of that novel. [📖]

3. The ‘storm is coming’ here is literally a ‘transformation to sky/heaven’ and is also a common metaphor referring to a change in rulership, regime, or the general situation of a land/nation. I’m opting for the ‘storm is coming’ translation because of the way it flows here and in other places. The vast majority of readers in the comments section in Chinese seemed to take the umbrella to be a metaphor, although there were a couple comments mentioning actual umbrellas or parasols that existed in other novels in the Er Gen universe. [📖]

Chapter 1079: Who Was That Person?

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A sigh echoed through the lonely time within the Summer Immortal Palace. Only the butterfly in the temple could hear it. And yet, she didn't actually understand what the sigh meant. She was still obsessed with finding out why her Master called her naive, and why her Master was helping that annoying guy she hated. Because of that, she didn't notice the gleam of determination in her Master's eyes.

Of course, Xu Qing did not hear that sigh. He was still in Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities, looking at the dandelion seeds. A few breaths of time passed.

"Eight Extreme Daos..." he murmured. With that, he sent his divine will into the dandelion seeds.

Rumbling sounds filled Xu Qing's mind, like the explosive sound that echoed out upon the creation of heaven and earth. The sound shattered time, becoming a force of attraction that dragged Xu Qing into the location that held the immortal essence of Deep Earth.

The ground was made of flesh and blood that seemed to go on forever. Growing out of that sludge was the same gigantic dandelion he had seen before. The stalk of the dandelion was covered with innumerable symbols, each of which emanated terrifying might. All of it combined to make the dandelion miraculous and one-of-a-kind.

As for the ground, it was actually formed from the corpses of countless gods. They had been turned into a dandelion that provided eternal power. The god souls of these gods were trapped, forced to bow, with no choice but to howl in terror and agony. Their godly voices just helped the dandelion to grow.

This was the land of the immortal essence. Nine Summer Immortals had buried a god world to create it.

Immortal essence!

Xu Qing had been here once, which meant that this was his second time. Yet it was still just as shocking to behold the dandelion. It was in full flower, sending countless wispy seeds out into the distance. At the same time, some seeds returned from afar, to be absorbed by the dandelion before being sent out again. It was an endless cycle.

Xu Qing sent out his divine will, which split into millions, tens of millions, or even hundreds of millions of strands that swept after the seeds, filling the void, filling the starry sky, and filling all the legacies.

Countless daoist magics appeared in front of him. Countless blurry figures stepped into his senses. They were training. They were practicing cultivation. Time seemed to lose purpose. Space seemed to lose meaning. The only thing in existence were the never-ending legacies. It was like being in a majestic library.

As Xu Qing studied such things, he was repeating 'Eight Extreme Daos' in his soul. Even as he did, within the boundless legacies within the immortal essence, three seeds became clear and floated toward him.

At the same moment that Xu Qing noticed the three seeds, the palace lord's ancient voice echoed within the land of the immortal essence. *"Those are three of the Eight Extreme Daos that make up the legacy. You only have time to gain enlightenment of two. Make your decision. I can't help."*

Xu Qing looked quietly at the three seeds.

Within the first he saw a figure seated in meditation, seeking enlightenment.

In the second, he saw two figures looking at each other. He couldn't make out their facial features.

Within the third, he saw three figures, apparently in the middle of passing on a legacy.

He would have two chances. What would he choose?

Xu Qing looked them over before focusing on the second. His eyes shone with determination. The reason he decided to pick the second was that he got the vague sense that the two figures inside actually had the same origin.

A clone and a true self?

He sent his divine will into the second of the dandelion seeds. Heaven and earth trembled.

At the same time, a scene from the history of Deep Earth played out for Xu Qing to see. He saw an unfamiliar continent that couldn't possibly compare to Revered Ancient. But there was something special about it. There were a lot of fierce beasts in it. Apparently, those beasts provided the operational force of the continent. [1]

But what caught Xu Qing's attention was a palace atop the continent. The canopy of heaven was over it, which seemed to have been ripped out to be an independent entity. Night and day were currently switching!

As Xu Qing looked down at it all, a sigh drifted out from the palace. The sigh was extraordinary. It ripped apart heaven and earth, causing a host of magical symbols to be born. Upon looking at the magical symbols, Xu Qing determined that they contained essence power.

They're warding spells.

Things were starting to get interesting. He wanted to look at the person practicing cultivation in the palace, but something was preventing him. It wasn't the person inside, but rather, the power of the dandelion.

After some thought, Xu Qing came to the conclusion that he could only act as an observer. He could only see what was happening, not interfere or participate. Time passed. More and more warding spells appeared in the sky above the palace. However, they seemed blurry as if they were beginning to scatter.

But then a shocking whistling sound emerged from the palace as five beams of light appeared. Though Xu Qing couldn't see them clearly, there were clearly five people inside of them. And Xu Qing could also sense... the power of the five elements.

Metal. Wood. Water. Fire. Earth. Xu Qing looked closely at them. He watched as the five beams of light pulsed with the sensation of the five elements, until... they combined to create a five elements body.

The body stood tall amidst heaven and earth, a giant that was fully 3,000 meters tall! The presence of the body also started to stabilize the vanishing warding spells created by the magical symbols of essence.

But then, a ragged howl echoed out from the depths of the lands below. A fierce soul body appeared along with the howl. It was a sphere of flesh with a huge, brutal, insane eye in the middle of it. [2]

The moment the beast appeared, Xu Qing's eyes glittered. It actually reminded Xu Qing a lot of Hellfei. And the biggest similarity between the two was the raging ferocity they both had.[3]

The fierce soul looked at the five elements true body in the sky above the palace, and its lone eye glittered with greed. It charged forward. As it neared, it shrieked piercingly. Before it could arrive, though, a tranquil voice echoed through heaven and earth.

"Calm."

That word caused everything to go still. The howling soul went completely still, and even the ferocity in its lone eye seemed frozen.

Xu Qing looked on with curiosity glittering in his eyes.

When the fierce soul froze in place, the surrounding magical symbols seemed to pulse with a hunger that had been building for countless years. And then, upon seeing some food, they madly rushed toward the soul. One after another, they burrowed into it. The soul shivered, and as it was devoured, it began shining with a mysterious light.

The ferocity in the eye disappeared, to be replaced by an illusory figure. That figure stepped out from within the eye to stand in the open, emanating a majestic power of an essence warding spell.

Xu Qing was shaken. *This is the true body formed by the essence warding spells? The five elements true body drew out the fierce soul, and then the fierce soul was used as nutrients to complete the creation process!*

Xu Qing continued to watch as the scene played out to the end.

As night and day shifted in the sky, the daylight became a rising sun, and the flowing light entered into the still body of the soul. The fierce soul trembled and shrank down again as a second figure emerged from its eye. The figure shone with bright light that made it seem like a sun. And as it emerged from the eye of the beast, it stood next to the true body made from the warding spell essence.

Next, the remaining darkness of night also entered the body of the soul. The soul shivered, and then its eye collapsed as a third true body emerged. When this figure emerged, the ultimate killing intent exploded out along with it. Everything trembled.

Xu Qing stared at the third essence body, and his heart raced. Next, the five elements true body began to absorb the power of the fierce soul. Xu Qing was now starting to understand what was going on.

When the soul was ripped apart, the parts instinctively wanted to come together again. That instinct became a guiding force that surpassed the fierce soul. It became a medium by which the true bodies could bridge together and fuse!

As Xu Qing came to those conclusions, a black bolt of lightning exploded from within the palace. Along with it came a very cold voice.

“Combine!”

At almost the same time that the voice echoed out, a majestic divine will enveloped heaven and earth.

The bodies combined! They turned into a fiendish figure with black hair! An extreme aura erupted from the figure, something that wished to destroy all living things, to eradicate heaven and earth. It was an essence power that represented slaughter!

A sonorous voice echoed out from the palace. “From now on, you will replace me in hunting down my enemies! You will spread my destructive intent and kill those that seek to harm me! Your name is Slaughter and your dao name is Punishment!”

The scene ended there. [4]

The world in front of Xu Qing’s eyes collapsed, and as it did, his divine will returned to the lands of the immortal essence. The second of the dandelion seeds dissipated.

Then the palace lord’s voice echoed out again. “You just witnessed the integration and unification, one of the precious aspects of the Eight Extreme Daos. Whether or not you master it will be up to your own good fortune.”

Xu Qing thought back to what he had just witnessed. A moment passed. “Senior... who was that person?”

The palace lord didn’t answer the question. After remaining silent for a moment, she said, “Perhaps you’ll encounter him in the timescape. The two of you are the same type of person.”

Xu Qing looked at the spot where the second dandelion seed had been moments ago. Then he looked at the first dandelion seed and sent his divine will inside. An instant later, an ancient scene played out for him.

He saw a person that appeared to be a middle-aged cultivator in an imperial robe. He seemed to be the ancestor of a species, as countless people were offering him worship and calling him ‘Celestial

Ancestor.’ He was currently bowing to a broken stone, upon which was carved a symbol that was difficult to make out clearly. [5]

The symbol depicted a crystal that had been broken into ten irregularly shaped parts. Among them, five represented metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. One of them contained space, while another contained time. It was impossible to say what the other three were. The crystal was surrounded by the images of infants and stars. It seemed to depict the creation of worlds.

As the Celestial Ancestor bowed, he seemed to gain enlightenment of a technique from within the broken crystal. Then the symbol blurred away and didn’t return.

Xu Qing was shaken. He wasn’t sure what the Celestial Ancestor had seen, but it seemed like he had been looking at the birth of a star ring. As for the ten shattered pieces of the crystal, the power within was clearly that of... the Eight Extreme Daos.

“Origin...” he murmured.

He was back in the land of immortal essence. After a moment, he closed his eyes to analyze and seek enlightenment of everything he had seen.

Time passed. It was hard to say how much time went by within the dandelion. It might have seemed to be thousands of years, but in reality, it was only thirty breaths of time.

“Time’s up,” said the palace lord.

Xu Qing opened his eyes. Within them were the five elements. He stood and bowed.

1. Many Chinese readers seemed to think that this place is a version (perhaps an early version) of the Immortal Astral Continent from *Renegade Immortal*, which was described initially in [chapter 1617](#) of that novel, although it was mentioned a few times before that. ❸

2. Chinese readers came to the conclusion that this beast was the same beast (or type of beast?) that the translator of *Renegade Immortal* rendered as “Luo Hou” in [chapter 2046](#). ❹

3. Hellfei first appeared in [chapter 888](#) of this novel. ❺

4. The scene in this chapter is obviously a reflection of what happened in [chapter 2046](#) of *Renegade Immortal*. Many lines were exact copies, but many lines were not exact copies, although obviously intended to carry a similar meaning. The character Slaughter also appeared a number of times in *I Shall Seal the Heavens*, the first time being in [chapter 1122](#). ❻

5. The term ‘Celestial Ancestor’ comes up a lot in *Renegade Immortal*. I think the first true explanation or mention comes in [chapter 1800](#). In [chapter 1825](#) there is a mistranslation in English, or at least a lack of continuity. The chapter is titled “Eight Signs” where in reality it’s the “Eight Extreme(s)” that are the same characters from the “Eight Extreme Daos.” The chapter title of 1825 should really be “The Celestial Ancestor’s Eight Extremes” or perhaps “The Celestial Ancestor’s Eight Extreme Daos.” Incidentally, the Chinese character being rendered as celestial here could also be rendered as immortal. If ever one day I did a master edit of all of Er Gen’s works to try to create continuity between everything, I would probably change Celestial Ancestor to

Immortal Ancestor. It is what it is. There are many instances in my past translations of Er Gen works where I used celestial instead of immortal for that character. ❹❺

Chapter 1080: Smoldering Immortal

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It was a bow to offer thanks for the guidance given. The moment he formed the immortal body, the guidance given had provided incredible help to Xu Qing in walking the path of the pure immortal. It aided him in walking a more correct way.

After bowing, the immortal essence faded away, becoming a dandelion seed. The dandelion seed then faded away, disappearing completely from Xu Qing's sea of consciousness.

The nine secret trove furnaces continued to erupt, and in one of them, Fishing the Moon in the Well swirled, emanating the power of the void and the will of space.

Xu Qing's soul was waking up. When he opened his eyes, the five elements erupted from within them. He knew how to walk the path going forward.

The so-called Eight Extreme Daos.... That is the earliest natural law required for the birth of a star ring. The first five extremes are rather simple. The latter three... well, that cultivator called the Celestial Ancestor lacked the perception and ability to go back through space and time, and thus, had to fill in the empty spots after the first five. That was what got passed down.

The end result was a different version of the Eight Extreme Daos. The reality is that the true Eight Extreme Daos include metal, wood, water, fire, and earth... and after that... time and space.

Those are the seven in total. But there are still three more extremes....

Xu Qing thought back to the symbol of the crystal broken into ten parts. The last three of them had been blurry.

Is it possible that the complete technique should have a different name? Is it the Ten Extreme Daos?

The irregularly shaped pieces of broken crystal were the strongest evidence to support that conclusion as far as he was concerned.

If you put them all together, they would form a complete crystal.

Xu Qing's soul shivered as he realized something. That completed shape was completely and utterly the same as his own violet crystal! That being said, Xu Qing was well aware that now wasn't the time to sit around pondering his violet crystal.

What was most important right now was to complete the formation of his fleshly body. He had no time to waste. Though it had seemed like he spent a lot of time gaining enlightenment from ancient times, the reality was that he had only spent thirty breaths of time with the immortal essence. And in the real world, only an instant had passed.

Xu Qing's soul surged, and his divine will became a voice that spoke, drifting out through his nostrils like a command that could not be ignored.

“Metal!”

This place was not the Revered Ancient mainland. Netherflame's secluded meditation facilities were isolated from the outside world. They were a standalone location, and they were completely sealed. Therefore, the five elements affected acted a bit differently here than they would outside.

If he used the energy of heaven and earth in this specific location to complete his five elements body to perfection, without any flaws, if he achieved his dao in this grotto-heaven... then he would be restrained here.

That was not what he wanted. He wanted to use his own five yin organs as the five elements!

If his five yin organs became the source of the five elements, then it didn't matter if he was in this grotto-heaven or in Revered Ancient, or in the starry sky. It wouldn't matter where he was. It wouldn't matter what heaven he was in. He would not be bound. By cultivating his own body, he would be free. That was the pure path of the immortal. That was the dao of the extreme immortal.

Metal corresponded to the lungs, and the lungs related to the qualities of purification and restraint. It was a perfect complement to metal. Lungs related primarily to air, and they regulated breathing. They were also associated with the emotion of grief, and they opened into the nose.[1]

All of a sudden, his seven emotions and six sensory pleasures stirred, becoming an attracting force. Then, the lungs in his fleshly body emanated the pure power of metal, which merged into one of the secret trove furnaces. It melted within him, and in the blink of an eye, it made the dao of metal! The secret trove raged.

Next, Xu Qing felt the emotion of rage within him. Intentionally unleashing the anger, he used it as a bridge, and used his divine will to speak again.

“Wood!”

Wood corresponded to the liver, and the liver related to the qualities of growth, development, order, and happiness. It was a perfect complement to wood. The liver related primarily to unclogging and deflating, as well as the regulation of energy fluctuations. It was also associated with the emotion of rage.[2]

His liver vibrated as a sensation of growth surged out and returned to the secret trove furnace. It became the dao of wood. After that...

“Water!”

Water corresponded to the kidneys, and the kidneys related to the qualities of nourishment, descension, freezing, and obstruction. It was a perfect complement to water. The kidneys related primarily to fluid metabolism and the storage of vital essence. It was also associated with the emotion of fear, and opened into the ears.[3]

All of a sudden, a deafening sound erupted within his secret trove as the dao of water formed. At the moment, three of the five elements had been completed. Eyes shining, Xu Qing gave voice to the fourth of the five.

“Fire!”

Xu Qing’s tongue touched the roof of his mouth as he uttered the word. His heart suddenly thumped with thunderous loudness.

Fire corresponded to the heart, and the heart related to the qualities of actuation, warmth, and ascension. It was a perfect complement to fire. The heart was like the monarch governing the other organs. It was also associated with the emotion of joy, and opened into the tongue.[4]

Inside his secret trove, the dao of fire formed.

“Earth!”

Earth corresponded to the spleen, and the spleen related to the qualities of transformation, sustainment, and acceptance. It was a perfect complement to earth. The spleen was the source of all transportation and transformation in a body, could move and alter grain and liquid throughout the body. It was also associated with the emotion of thoughtfulness, and opened into the mouth.[5]

The dao of earth was complete. As of this moment, all of the five elements were there. Correspondingly, the five apertures of Xu Qing’s nose, eyes, ears, tongue, and mouth opened in unison. They were like five immortals standing guard to prevent any outside evils from invading.

Those five immortals had names. Grief. Rage. Fear. Joy. Thoughtfulness. But right now, there were only five elements. And that could not be described as extreme!

Xu Qing took a deep breath.

And then, all of the essence crystals that the wish had caused to form from the fleshly body of the Grand Emperor’s fleshly body turned into the highest quality nutrients possible. Sweeping together, they entered Xu Qing’s body and began to nourish his five yin organs.

As a result, the power of the five organs began to climb higher. So did the five elements, which began to burn with great intensity in the secret troves. In an instant, the crystals on the outside declined in number. They poured into Xu Qing, becoming boundless nutrients that made the five elements stronger, and at the same time, more extreme. Finally, that powerful refinement within the secret troves caused... An explosion of heavenly lightning!

Metal became extreme metal. Wood became extreme wood. Water became extreme water. Fire became extreme fire. Earth became extreme earth! Five elements. Five extremes. The dao was complete!

An astonishing aura surged from within Xu Qing, causing winds to scream around him as the world trembled. Inside his sea of consciousness, six of the nine secret troves were burning.

Metal, wood, water, fire, earth. They are five extremes. And then, in the space formed from Fishing the Moon in the Well comes the sixth extreme. The dao of extreme space. As for the seventh extreme....

Xu Qing's eyes glittered brightly as the gnomons on his sundial life lamps began to spin. In an instant, all nine gnomons unified, spinning in time within the seventh secret trove. They became time itself! This was the dao of extreme time!

That makes seven extremes!

His soul form rose in his sea of consciousness, standing above the secret troves. As of now, there were still two secret troves that were empty.

I'll complete them sometime in the future. For now, it's enough to have seven extremes burning. That will be enough to break through from Spirit Trove into Void Returning.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed. Not bothering to worry about the two empty secret troves, he focused his attention on the second dandelion seed from the immortal essence. It was the one that had an image of a true body being unified.

The true body part won't be hard. But the unification part. Well, that person's technique was ingenious. It required a fierce soul. And though I have access to fierce souls, none of them are inside this current body. That said, with my five yin organs as the five elements, my organs and my body are the same. So why would I need outside souls to attract the power?

Xu Qing looked up.

"In that case... unify!"

The moment the words left his mouth, all of his secret troves burned with the greatest intensity imaginable. Unprecedented rumbling sounds echoed out as they erupted like volcanoes.

They turned into trove gates. And the trove gates were all open!

What came out wasn't pure fire. Rather, it was five elements power, time power, and space power. Seven extremes, unified!

They became a single beam of silver light that, backed by the secret troves, smashed out of Xu Qing's sea of consciousness, stirring his fleshly body and causing his mind and soul to rumble.

Ultimately, the same scene played out that Xu Qing had witnessed in the first dandelion seed. It was a scene of world creation. It was the formation of a star ring.

It was... opening heaven and establishing earth! The returning heaven was opened, and the spirit void land was established! The illusory was turned into a void! It was as if mortal remains which had been buried in a grand necropolis were smoldering as they slowly turned into an immortal! The silver light made of seven extremes streaked through this Void Returning. Will surged, and they turned into immeasurable magical and natural laws as they swept through all of the levels of Void Returning.

It all happened very naturally. It was like the idiom: *where water flows, a canal is formed*. When walking the correct path, it seemed only logical that things would play out like this.

Finally... Xu Qing decisively tapped into the remaining essence crystals to start his final breakthrough. Heaven had been opened within him. The earth had been established.

The mortal remains in the necropolis were smoldering as they turned into an immortal. That meant that next... he needed to blast apart the earth within him, and shatter the heaven, all to break through the shackles of life. All smoldering aspects of an immortal needed to be awakened and turned into major worlds!

The necropolis erupted. The void soil surged. And they turned into a blast of force that caused the heaven within him to tremble.

Heaven... collapsed! Rumbling sounds filled him as the area that corresponded to lungs filled with a vortex that contained a majestic major world.

He was finally reaching Smoldering God! Put most precisely, the level Xu Qing was actually entering was called Smoldering Immortal!

As for this first major world, it was an extreme world. It was the most extreme form of metal. In fact, it could be called an extreme metal world!

After that first major world appeared, Xu Qing's breakthrough continued. A world centered around an extreme world appeared in the location of his liver. It was an extreme wood world!

Things weren't over yet. Next came the extreme water world, extreme fire world, and extreme earth world....

Five worlds had been established in the locations of his five yin organs!

As for the sixth world, the extreme space world, it was on his left shoulder! The seventh world, the extreme time world, rested on his right shoulder!

Seven worlds all rumbled loudly as a powerful aura erupted from them, filling Xu Qing's body and stirring his will.

Atop the transparent sea, Xu Qing's eyes snapped open! Immortal energy surged within him, and combined with his astoundingly good looks, it really was a perfect representation of the word 'immortal.' As he looked around, he felt like an entire lifetime had just passed.

He sensed his body. He sensed his cultivation base. And though he felt dazed for a moment, an instant later, his eyes gleamed with a desire to do battle.

He had just experienced a truly dangerous situation. He had lost his god clone, but as often happens, a great danger will often bring with it a destined opportunity. And if you grasp it, you can fly to the highest heights.

He had grasped the opportunity. He has stepped past the limitations of his god body and begun to walk his own path. He had taken the seven extremes and pushed them to an unheard-of peak level.

There were still some essence crystals around him, so he waved his hand and sent them flying toward the countless worms that surrounded the bone cauldron.

“Eldest Brother,” Xu Qing said calmly.

The innumerable worms seemed to all start laughing as they brashly absorbed all of the crystals.

Meanwhile, it seemed that the fight between the empress and the others was about to conclude.

At the same time, inside the bone cauldron, Netherflame could sense that things were happening outside. The cauldron started rumbling, and then a monstrous voice rang out from within.

“Manywonders smolderlife grotto-heaven! Activate!”

Land-shaking, mountain-rocking force shook all of the worlds in the secluded meditation facilities. At the same time, something even more dramatic was happening at the dao altar in the lands of the eastern Devilbirds. As countless Devilbird cultivators looked on, the dao altar filled with more and more cracks, before ultimately crumbling into ash.

Then a massive withered tree branch shot up from the rubble. As everyone looked on in shock, a withered fruit appeared at the end of the huge branch. It pulsed with a majestic sense of an accumulated dao. Inside of the fruit were blurry images of Xu Qing and everyone else. That fruit was the grotto-heaven where Netherflame had been waiting in seclusion!

1. In traditional Chinese medicine, lungs and metal are indeed connected. For more info, you can check out the wikipedia pages for the Five Elements and the Lungs in TCM. Subsequent organs have their own TCM reference link, but all of them are mentioned in the Five Elements article as well. ❹

2. TCM liver reference. ❹

3. TCM kidneys reference. ❹

4. TCM heart reference. ❹

5. TCM spleen reference. ❹

Deathblade's Thoughts

This was one of those chapters that was excruciating to translate. I think I spent three times as much time on it as an average chapter.

*Many thanks to **Whiskas**, **wuyxi**, **Lassey**, **SweGhostie**, **Tangedenor**, **spols**, **AzureZeph**, **Onideus**, and **Nukemega** for the reviews. Wow, a lot of reviews came in during the past week!*