

Beyond the Timescape

Chapter 1081: It's Hard To Let Go of the Obsession to Live

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In the spot where the eastern Devilbirds' dao altar had once stood, there was now pure pandemonium. To countless Devilbird cultivators, that dao altar was something of immense significance. And now it had collapsed as a huge branch snaked up, with a fruit on its end. All onlookers were shaken to the core.

That was especially true when... Grand Emperor Devilbird, who had been seated atop the dao altar, suddenly blurred away into nothing. As it turned out, he had been nothing but an illusory projection. And because of its Grand Emperor personhood, no one in the crowd had picked up on any clues otherwise. It was only when the dao altar collapsed and the aura of a dao fruit erupted into the open that people could see the truth.

An illusory tempest spun into being, and everyone in the area felt a sensation of extreme uneasiness, something instinctive that came from within their life force itself. One reason for the uneasiness was the dramatic turn of events. The other reason... was the sound of tolling bells that filled the Devilbird holy land.

It was an ancient sound that shook heaven and earth. They were bells of war. The collapse of the dao altar was apparently some sort of signal. At that moment, the humans and the Firemoon Darkheavens rose up from the Revered Ancient mainland and unleashed the full fury of war onto the two holy lands that floated above them.

In an instant, heaven and earth devolved into great chaos. As chaos reigned outside, disorder was also raging inside of the dao fruit.

As Netherflame howled from within the bone cauldron, a deafening rumbling sound echoed out, resulting in intense vibrations. Erniu, incarnated in countless worms, was hit by the force coming from the cauldron. One by one, the worms started exploding.

Inside the cauldron, Netherflame seemed to react to the might of the dao fruit, and once again reached a state of balance. Power began to rise explosively within him. The rumbling got so intense that it seemed like the lid of the cauldron was about to be blasted open. The cauldron lid vibrated, then cracks started to appear in it. Golden light shone out from within the cracks. Grand Emperor Netherflame was just about to break free.

At that critical moment, the world fragment that contained the empress surged with force.

Simultaneously, the remaining blue worms outside the cauldron madly absorbed the rest of the crystals Xu Qing had sent over. Then, they shouted, “I’m not afraid of you, bitch! Third life!”

The transparent sea below seethed. The boundless water was covered with huge waves as the entire sea turned into a whirlpool. An ancient aura then began to rise up from within the whirlpool.

Before, his body had exploded and dropped down into the water. But the reality was that Erniu had just been looking for pieces of his third-life body there. The downsides had been that he had very limited time, and also wasn’t actually strong enough at the moment. Because of that, he couldn’t quickly put all the pieces together.

But then Xu Qing gave him the last of the essence crystals.... Xu Qing was able to use that essence to craft an immortal body. But it was something equally precious to Erniu. It could nourish him and help him to release more of his sealing marks, and it enabled him to rapidly absorb memories from his third life. As he absorbed the essence, he gained the power to make the initial call to his third life.

An instant later, frigid flames erupted from the whirlpool of the transparent sea. Then, a huge black hand suddenly reached out from the whirlpool. It was not true and real. Rather, it was illusory. But it emanated an aura that was extremely ancient, and at the same time, pulsed with unparalleled ferocity.

It looked extremely gruish. It resembled a hand, except that the middle finger had a head on it. The ring and index fingers were bent like arms, while the pinky and thumb were like legs. In the palm was a gaping, blood-red mouth. What was more, the hand was actually covered with innumerable black hairs. It looked incredibly fierce, even horrendous.

This was a projection of Erniu’s third life. It was the very same megavillain that Grand Emperor Immortal Skill had refined. In response to Erniu’s summons, it rose up into the sky. In the blink of an eye, it reached the bone cauldron and made contact with it.

“Be refined!” Erniu howled.

The cauldron trembled, then went still. Then, before Erniu even had a chance to start preening, an intense force burst out from the interior of the cauldron. Deafening rumbling rocked the surroundings.

Erniu’s third-life projection blurred as if it might collapse. After all, this wasn’t truly his third life, but just a projection of it. Using it to suppress the power of the terrifying Netherflame wasn’t going to be easy.

Just when it looked like Erniu’s third-life projection was going to collapse.... Xu Qing finished fusing with all seven of his major worlds. Without any hesitation, he burst into motion. He appeared right next to Erniu’s third-life projection, his eyes gleaming. Extending his right hand, he pushed down onto the trembling bone cauldron.

Then he spoke in a booming voice. “Extreme metal. Extreme wood. Extreme water. Extreme fire. Extreme earth!”

Five of the seven worlds hovering behind him erupted, and it looked as if five crystal fragments suddenly let loose the power of the five elements, which crushed down onto the cauldron. Next, the remaining two worlds were unleashed. Extreme space. Extreme time!

A piercing cry echoed out from inside the cauldron. But then, Xu Qing and Erniu both reacted with surprise as a supremely terrifying force erupted from within the cauldron. It was a force that seemed capable of smashing through anything and everything. It was as if all obstacles were meaningless compared to it.

The lid of the cauldron blasted open, and Xu Qing and Erniu were sent tumbling backward. Then, Netherflame floated up inside as he prepared to emerge. No matter how strong the two of them were, it was insignificant compared to Netherflame.

Voice hoarse, he said, “All of you—”

But right then, the world fragment containing the empress exploded. It pulsed with the explosive aura of a god. It turned into a massive shockwave that swept through the world. At the same time, the empress stepped out, reaching the cauldron in an instant and shoving it down with great force.

Ripples and distortions spread. Peak Altar God power was released without any restraint.

Xu Qing and Erniu didn’t hesitate to shoot backward to get away from the field of battle. They knew that the forces which were about to be unleashed surpassed them by far.

The empress’ action caused Netherflame’s eyes to become bloodshot as he waved his hand in response, dispelling the attack power.

An instant later, a shocking, ancient planet appeared behind the empress. The planet’s mere presence caused wild winds to scream, and filled the area with a sky-obfuscating, land-enshrouding will.

Five figures were seated cross-legged on the surface of the planet. Those five figures were gods, as well as past emperors of humankind.

Eastglory. Sageheaven. Mirrorcloud. Dao Life. Dark War.

They unleashed the full force of their god power into the ancient planet beneath.

Meanwhile, the shattered world fragment in the distance was no longer blurry. It was now possible to see how damaged it had become during the fighting. Also visible was the beheaded corpse of Netherflame’s clone.

Also present was Grand Emperor Devilbird, coughing up blood and badly injured. Devilbird looked at the empress, then at the surrounding world. His face was as pale as death.

This grotto-heaven is actually made from a manywonders smolderlife dao fruit! Manywonders smolderlife dao fruits are able to resurrect anything under the level of a True God. One such dao fruit can be used three times. However, it can only be used once in a lifetime by any given person.

Considering how withered the fruit looks, Netherflame must have already used it. It looks like after being used another time, it will disappear forever. So that's how Netherflame managed to come back to life! And that's also what the empress is here for!

Blood sprayed out of Devilbird's mouth as he staggered backward. Meanwhile, the empress hovered above the bone cauldron, looking down at Netherflame. Netherflame's body was currently fifty percent violet, thirty percent gold, and twenty percent green.

Shē couldn't tell where the violet was coming from. But the gold was from a drop of water, and the green... came from a dao fruit. The empress' gaze hardened. Shē had been holding back this entire time. Shē had not gone all out.

One reason was that hēr opponent had a spectacularly powerful cultivation base. The other reason was that shē knew shē would only have one chance to achieve hēr true objective here. And shē would not accept failure.

Her original plan had not accounted for the variables presented by Xu Qing and Erniu. Originally, Netherflame was supposed to try to possess Devilbird, whereupon shē would join forces with Devilbird to achieve hēr objective. Although Netherflame was strong, shē knew shē could handle him.

But things didn't go according to plan. Xu Qing and Erniu did present new variables, and then circumstances shifted. Netherflame changed his mind, and instead of trying to possess Devilbird, had decided to cooperate with him. And he had decided to try to possess Xu Qing.

Therefore, the empress had just waited and watched for the opportunity to come. The empress didn't believe the new variables to be negatives. Whether it was Erniu's third life or Xu Qing's strange fleshly body, they actually just made hēr more confident that hēr plan would succeed. That was why shē had just waited patiently.

It was only when Netherflame broke free and revealed the power of the manywonders smolderlife dao fruit... that the opportunity the empress had been waiting for finally arrived.

Shē actually wanted Netherflame to take this action. To reveal the dao fruit. Thus, the empress' action just now was actually hēr unhesitatingly revealing the contingency measures she'd had in place the entire time.

Hēr contingency plan was humankind's Planet Ancient Emperor. In terms of personhood, it was the most precious treasure humankind possessed. And with the blessing of the five human gods, the precious treasure was unleashing astonishing power. Rumbling sounds echoed out as Planet Ancient Emperor exerted crushing force.

Netherflame's howl echoed back and forth. He wanted to break free, but before he could, the empress bit down on the tip of hēr tongue and spat out some god blood. Shē also unhesitatingly unleashed all the power of hēr god altar to prevent Netherflame from breaking free.

Next, a vortex appeared within Planet Ancient Emperor. The power of the planet, as well as the power of the five human emperors, along with the might of the empress' god altar, caused Netherflame to be devoured by the planet!

Netherflame was sealed.

Having accomplished that, a gleam of human nature appeared in the empress's eyes.

Shē had become she. For this entire time, hēr goal had not been to go all out to kill Netherflame. Nor had hēr goal been Netherflame's soul. Shē had been waiting for hēr opponent to take out the dao fruit. And then, by means of Planet Ancient Emperor, shē would isolate him from the outside world. And that, in turn, would cut away his connection to the manywonders smolderlife dao fruit. At least temporarily, the dao fruit would have no karmic connections to anything.

In that way, shē would finally have the chance to reach her true goal.

“Grand Emperor...” she murmured. She waved her hand, and a majestic statue flew out from inside her body. It grew larger and larger above the surface of the sea. The sea water seethed. It was a statue of Grand Emperor Swordsage!

Xu Qing looked at it, his heart pounding with both anxiety and excitement. He could now guess what the empress was trying to do.

Ever since the empress reached godly ascension, hēr eyes had been calm and placid. Now, those eyes looked at the statue with longing like that of a child to a parent.

“Come back...” she said softly. She was attempting to resurrect Grand Emperor Swordsage!

Chapter 1082: Mountains Tremble, Memories Remain

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She had started out as a mortal, without even the ability to practice cultivation. However, it was her strengths and talents that allowed humankind to finally complete their Dawning Suns project, which gave them the precious treasure they needed to stand tall as a species. That alone made her an outstanding person.

But she was relatively unknown among humankind. Few people were aware of her existence, and all of the glory for the Dawning Suns went to her husband.

After becoming the empress, she had two sons. She lived for her husband, sharing his worries and supporting him through his woes. She didn't think twice about living solely for her husband and sons. But in the end, she was ripped away from her sons and brutally killed by her own husband. Her husband had mercilessly done whatever he could to try to reach godly ascension.

She didn't realize where she had gone wrong. Nor did she understand why things ended up that way for her. And the grief and helplessness she felt about her life up to that point became a part of her soul.

In the past, she had knelt and prayed to the holy lands. The holy lands had never answered. She had prostrated to the nobility to beg for help. The nobility had ignored her.

She had wept. She had gnashed her teeth. She wallowed in sorrow. She had remained silent.

Eventually, on the evening when she reached the end of her life in the imperial palace, she had collapsed in front of the statue of Grand Emperor Swordsage, and there she shed her last tear. The tear rolled down her cheek and landed on the ground. She heard the sound of it splashing. And then she heard a sigh that echoed with fate.

"Humankind shouldn't be like this.... Child, humanity has let you down...."

Then she saw someone walking toward her. It was someone she would never be able to forget.

Behind her, the source of her sorrow was cut down by a sword. It was a sword that could sever fate, and a sword that could change everything.

"The Grand Emperor," she murmured. "Like a father."

At the darkest moment in her life, Grand Emperor Swordsage saved her. In the most sorrowful time in her life, Grand Emperor Swordsage gave her hope. When she seemed most confused about the meaning of life, it was Grand Emperor Swordsage who gave her a cultivation base. He gave humankind to her.

That was when *she* became Dark War. She led humankind to prominence. And then, with the Grand Emperor backing her up, she removed her mask and became a god, and the only empress to ever reign over humankind.

It was not my desire to safeguard humankind. That was your wish, Grand Emperor. But it became my desire.

As the empress looked at the statue, the longing in her heart grew stronger. And along with it came determination. She wanted to resurrect the Grand Emperor who had been like a father to her!

It was you, sir, who brought me out of despair. Today, I will help you return from death.

The empress' eyes shone with bright light. As Devilbird trembled, as Planet Ancient Emperor rumbled, as Erniu looked on incredulously, and as Xu Qing watched excitedly.... She took a step forward and hovered in midair.

"I am the empress of humankind! I have gathered the destiny of all humans in Revered Ancient. And today...."

The empress' gaze seemed to pass out of the world and into Revered Ancient to look at all humankind.

“I hereby call to all humans to remember Grand Emperor Swordsage, and turn those memories into his human spiritual soul!”

The words cracked like thunder, spreading to all human lands to enter the minds of all humans.

That included the Imperial Region and everything around it. All humans felt their memories stirring wildly as thoughts of Grand Emperor Swordsage rose within them. As long as people remembered him, it was possible that he could return.

And who could possibly forget about Grand Emperor Swordsage...? After Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity left, he chose to stay behind to safeguard humankind. He was the one who spared humanity from being devoured by nonhumans. He was the one who had protected humankind countless times in battle. His true form eventually fell in battle, but his clone remained behind. And even it had beheaded gods to keep humanity in peace.

Stories of his countless deadly battles spread far and wide. Even in his last days, he had used the power of his sword to strike fear into the hearts of nonhumans. There was no doubt about it. Without him, humankind would have been destroyed.

His life had been soaked in blood, but at the same time, he was the history of humankind after the departure of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity.

Who could forget this Grand Emperor? And thus, memories of him became shimmering motes of light that rose from within all humans. The motes flew up to the Devilbird holy land and began to gather at the dao fruit. Motes of light even emerged from Xu Qing’s mind as he remembered Grand Emperor Swordsage. And those countless motes of light began to form into the human spiritual soul of Grand Emperor Swordsage, which entered the statue.

“The Grand Emperor spent his life protecting our species and our lands,” the empress said. “And today, I call on the spirits in all human lands to become the earthly spiritual soul of the Grand Emperor!”

The empress’s voice rang with a note of command, causing human lands throughout Revered Ancient to react. Mountains, rivers, soil, and buildings all began to tremble.

Heaven had spirits. Naturally speaking, so did earth. The spirits responded to the call, becoming motes of light that shot up in marvelous fashion from Revered Ancient. As countless cultivators in the Devilbird holy land looked on in shock, and as innumerable human cultivators trembled excitedly, they entered the dao fruit and the statue of the Grand Emperor.

“The spiritual soul is made of three parts. Heavenly. Earthly. Human. I hereby summon the destiny aura of humankind that has struggled defiantly from the time of Eastglory onward. And it will be the heavenly spiritual soul of the Grand Emperor!”

Heaven and earth in human lands throughout Revered Ancient trembled as the destiny aura of humankind rose up into the clouds. Ignoring any attempts of Devilbird cultivators to stop it, it bypassed all obstacles in decisive and domineering fashion....

And it entered the dao fruit and the statue of Grand Emperor Swordsage. The statue trembled.

As of now, the memories of the species had formed the human spiritual soul. The lands and rivers and mountains had formed the earthly spiritual soul. And the boundless destiny aura had formed the heavenly spiritual soul. Three spiritual souls had combined. This act of resurrection was meaningful to the empress, but it was also meaningful to humankind as a whole!

Beyond that, it was also meaningful to the human emperors!

“There are three spiritual souls. There are seven physical souls!”

The empress turned to look at Planet Ancient Emperor, and the five past emperors seated cross-legged there. The moment she did so, the five emperors opened their eyes and looked back at her.

“Ordinarily, it would be difficult to find a physical soul for the Grand Emperor. He lived his life for humankind. Therefore, since the memories, land, and destiny aura of humankind formed the three spiritual souls, then the successive emperors will make the physical souls! The first physical soul is the heavenly hub. Let my past become the first physical soul!”

The empress lifted her right hand and viciously chopped it down on herself. That action resulted in her body becoming somewhat illusory. She was severing her past to make the first physical soul, which then entered the statue of the Grand Emperor.

“The second physical soul provides rationality and intelligence. Emperor Mirrorcloud!”

On Planet Ancient Emperor, Emperor Mirrorcloud flew up, becoming a mysterious glow that entered the statue.

“The third physical soul acts as energy. Emperor Dao Life!”

Dao Life rose, took a step forward, and entered the statue.

“The fourth physical gives power. Emperor Eastglory!”

Eastglory shot up into the sky and turned into a physical soul.

“The fifth physical soul is the backbone. Let it be formed by my future!”

Looking more decisive than ever, the empress severed her future to form the backbone of the Grand Emperor’s physical souls.

“The sixth physical soul makes the quintessence. Emperor Sageheaven!”

Sageheaven closed his eyes and turned into a white beam of light that made the Grand Emperor’s physical soul origin.

“The seventh physical soul stands for heroism. Emperor Dark War!”

Dark War looked up, his eyes glimmering with shame and guilt. He stood. He was willing to become the seventh physical soul.

As of this moment, the three spiritual souls had united, and the seven physical souls were complete. The Grand Emperor's statue trembled, the surrounding world shook, and the Devilbird holy land quaked.

Some distance away, Grand Emperor Devilbird could guess what was coming next. His expression flickered, revealing sorrow. But in the end, he chose to retreat. He would leave the world of the dao fruit. Once outside, he sighed deeply. He knew that he was powerless to turn things around, and thus, his best option was to get away as quickly as possible and take as many of his direct bloodline as possible away from the holy land.

As he left, the empress within the world of the dao fruit turned a cold expression to the outside. Taking in the entire Devilbird holy land, she lifted her right hand.

"I will not allow myself to fail. This dao fruit is already withered, therefore... I hereby sacrifice all living beings in the Devilbird holy land! Let them become nutrients for the manywonders smolderlife dao fruit!"

The empress' words echoed from within the world of the dao fruit to the entirety of the Devilbird holy land. They spread out, reaching even the tenth Imperial Sovereign mountain that the empress had once occupied.

And that caused some concealment magics she had left behind on the mountain to vanish. At that point, it turned into a god mountain, and a god magic that the empress had left in the works there was suddenly activated!

It was a god magic that could strip away the concept of night and replace it with light. It was as if a sun were dawning over the Devilbird holy land. Wherever the light passed, the air rippled and distorted. Howls of anguish echoed out. Everything was being turned into a god domain.

With Grand Emperor Devilbird on the run, there was nothing the inhabitants of the Devilbird holy land could do to stop the impending catastrophe. In the face of an Altar God, anyone under the Grand Emperor level was like an ant.

The light shining in the Devilbird holy land made it almost like a new star that caught the attention of everyone in Revered Ancient.

The empress was not holding back any of her peak Altar God power. It poured into the dao fruit, filling its veins, filling its natural cycles, and creating a force of attraction that exploded out to cover the Devilbird holy land.

All life force would be sucked in. All souls. All flesh and blood.

Numerous Devilbird cultivators that Grand Emperor Devilbird had left behind were hit by the light and the force of attraction. They were instantly killed in body and soul, transformed into a bloody paste that was sucked into the dao fruit. As more flesh and blood converged, and as catastrophe filled the Devilbird holy land, the previously withered dao fruit began to become plump and glistening once again.

This made it clearer than ever that the empress had veins of steel! Without even the slightest hesitation, she waved her finger to connect the dao fruit to the Grand Emperor.

Then she spoke in a low voice.

“Manywonders smolderlife!”

The dao fruit, which has absorbed countless bits of flesh and blood, shivered. Then magical symbols became visible on its surface, and they began spinning. The gate of reincarnation was being opened. It was as if a path of life were being forged.

Wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. The void rumbled loudly.

Then, the dao fruit once again withered visibly as all of the nutrients inside were swept into the statue of the Grand Emperor.

The statue now had three spiritual souls and seven physical souls. It had life force brewing in it. And when the nutrients reached a certain level, it would undergo a mysterious transformation. The clay that made the statue was now glittering brightly as if it was about to turn into flesh and blood. A sense of reanimation erupted within it, and Grand Emperor Swordsage’s familiar aura... became manifest! The aura grew stronger and stronger!

It burst out of the world of the dao fruit, piercing into the Devilbird holy land, and shaking the entire Revered Ancient mainland. It attracted the attention of countless eyes.

The empress looked very excited, as did Xu Qing.

However... even as everyone looked on, the statue trembled, and that seemingly indomitable aura suddenly destabilized and started collapsing.

“NO!!” screamed the empress, her eyes turning red.

Chapter 1083: The Willingness to Let Go Leads to True Rebirth

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Many times in life, it can be difficult to give up on something just because it’s hard. That refusal to give up could even be called obsession. That was especially true of matters of life or death. That of others. That of oneself. Obsession with life or death. The inability to let it go. In such instances, there is always hope.

However... there are many times in which there is no hope. Only despair. Sadly, in many instances, despair becomes the main theme. The world is a cold place. Heaven and earth are indifferent.

For example, just as the flame of his life force flickered within the statue of Grand Emperor Swordsage, the statue started crumbling. It was like a lamp that had run out of oil. There just wasn’t a way to light it. It didn’t matter that the Devilbird holy land had been sacrificed. It didn’t matter that the manywonders smolderlife dao fruit had been awoken. Those things changed nothing.

And yet, the empress' pure obsession could be heard in the words echoing in heaven and earth, turning into a reverberation of defiance like that cry of a thousand mountains. The empress was a god. But gods... were clearly not omnipotent. She even bit her tongue, causing god blood to spray out and soak her body. God blood became life force. An incantation gesture ignited it, and it poured into the statue of the Grand Emperor.

Xu Qing didn't hesitate for an instant to do the same. He sent out his own life force, contained in his blood. He used his strength, his dao, and everything about himself to help the Grand Emperor.

Even Erniu sighed and lent his strength as well.

Unfortunately... none of that made much of a difference in the end. It was as if there was a massive ravine separating life and death.

The statue's aura continued to collapse. As of this moment, there was no way to stop the resurrection ceremony from failing. Pain and bitterness filled the world.

How can this be happening...

The empress, however, was not ready to give up. It didn't matter that all signs pointed to impending failure. She still unleashed the full power of her god altar. She did everything she possibly could to turn things around. At almost the exact same instant that she was about to harm herself by tapping too deeply into her own strength, an ancient voice echoed within the world of the dao fruit.

"Silly child."

The familiar voice caused a tremor to pass through Xu Qing. Countless memories flashed through his mind. At the same time, the empress struggled to control her breathing. That voice was the source of her human nature. Xu Qing and the Empress looked at the statue simultaneously.

As the statue's energy crumbled, the three spiritual souls and seven physical souls ceased moving for a moment. Then their momentum surged again.

This time, there was no obstacle. They returned to their peak, and Swordsage's aura erupted into the world, an aura that belonged to a peak Grand Emperor.

Wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. Winds screamed. The world trembled. The holy land shook. The full Revered Ancient mainland was affected.

Even to the naked eye it was possible to see the statue transforming into flesh and blood, until a figure was visible. He opened his eyes.

Grand Emperor Swordsage. He stood on the surface of the transparent sea looking very, very old. An aura of death surrounded him, but he stood tall and straight. His gaze was soft as he looked at the world around him. Then he looked out of the Devilbird holy land and toward... humankind.

He saw all of the places where humans lived. He saw the people standing there. He gazed at the mountains and rivers, at the destiny aura. At everything. Everything that had happened in Revered Ancient since he perished was now pouring into his mind by means of the heavenly daos and all the

living beings. He came to know that the holy lands had arrived after his death. He came to know that war had broken out. He came to know it all. Something fierce arose within him as he came to understand everything. It swirled out of him, affecting all heaven and earth.

And yet... off in the distance, Xu Qing and Empress Summer Departure simply couldn't control the grief in their hearts as they looked at the Grand Emperor. That was because... the Grand Emperor was inundated with an intense aura of death.

Tears flowed down the empress' face. She knew... that in the end, she was still going to fail. The Grand Emperor had not been fully resurrected. The power of the manywonders smolderlife dao fruit, and the strength of the three spiritual souls and seven physical souls, was only enough to bring him back to life temporarily.

Xu Qing felt like someone was squeezing down on his heart. Indescribable emotions filled him, including bitterness and emptiness.

"Oh, you two..." the Grand Emperor said with a sigh as he looked away from the outside world and focused tenderly on Xu Qing and the empress. "My Summer." [1]

The empress looked up. At that moment, she wasn't a god. She wasn't an empress. She was the fragile young woman of years past that had just been rescued by the Grand Emperor. The tears flowing down her face made it difficult to see the fatherly figure in front of her.

"You've done very well," the Grand Emperor said hoarsely. "You've done more than enough." He strode over to the empress and tousled her hair, his eyes full of warmth, as if she were his own daughter. "It's just that... your omniscience can't tell you everything about me.

"The history books only talk about how my true form perished and my clone toiled to safeguard humankind. The truth about why it all happened was erased. By me.

"The reality is that back when I waged war against the god species from the central part of Revered Ancient, I did succeed in preventing humankind from being enslaved. But the price to pay was immense. It wasn't just my true form that perished. My clone... also died in the fighting.

"After I perished, an old friend of mine used the manywonders smolderlife to resurrect me after the battle was over. That act of resurrection both failed and succeeded. It failed because the dao fruit only gives a *chance* at a resurrection. It can't guarantee it. And thus, my true form did not return.

"You can say it succeeded, though, because my perished clone was resurrected. The point is that my clone already used the manywonders smolderlife dao fruit to come back to life. I can't use it a second time. The failure of this resurrection attempt is no fault of yours, my Summer."

The Grand Emperor spoke slowly and softly as he attempted to soothe Summer Departure's emotions. He didn't want the child whose life he had saved to end up regretting a failure for the rest of her days. He needed her to understand that the failure wasn't due to her or her lack of effort.

The empress bit her lip as she listened to the explanation.

Finally, the Grand Emperor sighed and tousled her hair again. Then he looked at Xu Qing, whose face was tinged with bitterness.

“Xu Qing, you haven’t disappointed me.”

Xu Qing bowed his head. Heart filled with grief, he clasped hands and bowed deeply.

The Grand Emperor smiled as he looked at the empress and Xu Qing. They were his successors. One had inherited his cultivation base, while the other had inherited The Emperor’s Sword. He was very pleased with both of them, and didn’t feel an ounce of regret in picking them.

And yet... he still had some concerns about humankind. He was concerned about the people he had spent his life protecting.

“I understand everything now. The dao fruit can’t fully resurrect me. But it has brought me back temporarily. And the body I’ve returned in is not limited by the shackles of the star ring. I’ve returned to my peak. And that will do very nicely.”

The Grand Emperor smiled. It had been a very, very long time since he had felt this free. In fact, it was a sensation that he didn’t remember experiencing since the time his true form had been alive. In his waning years, he had always been struggling with lingering injuries, and had spent most of his time in slumber.

And even when he did wake up to do something, he felt exhaustion deep in his soul. Because of that he could never wield his sword to his heart’s content. He always had to be careful and maintain absolute control, always holding back his final sword move. It had all been extremely exhausting. Even in his final battle when he had longed to hold nothing back, he had been unable to.

The responsibility of safeguarding humankind was a weight like that of a mountain, and he had borne it for a lifetime. He had always wanted to let everything go and fight like he had when he was young.

“I suppose I don’t have much time left...”

The Grand Emperor grinned and reached his right hand toward Planet Ancient Emperor up above. He waved his finger, and the planet started rumbling and shaking. Then it began to spin, causing the sealed bone cauldron to appear.

The lid of the cauldron opened. A distorted figure shot out. It was none other than Netherflame.

His expression was ferocious as he opened his mouth. But then his face fell as he spotted Grand Emperor Swordsage. His pupils constricted, and all the hair on his body stood on end. Given the current state of his battle prowess, he could sense that Grand Emperor Swordsage was an extremely dangerous threat to him.

This clearly isn’t a Summer Immortal. But the sense I’m getting... is that this person is incredibly terrifying!

Scalp tingling, Netherflame shot backward to flee. He was too slow.

The Grand Emperor's gaze fell upon him. A screaming sound filled the world as the most spectacular stream of sword energy imaginable erupted from within Netherflame's fleshly body. Netherflame couldn't stop it. Sword energy towered into the sky, shattering the clouds.

It was... The Emperor's Sword!

The sword glittered with might that stunned Netherflame to the core. It did not slice through him. It hovered above the top of his head before lowering to touch him.

Netherflame shivered from head to toe. A terrifying power surged out of the sword like a wave. It smashed into his fleshly body with mountain-toppling, sea-draining force, slamming right into his soul.

This is as strong as a Summer Immortal!

That was the last thing Netherflame thought before his soul shattered. His soul did not form anew. Swordsage grabbed it, and Netherflame's senses turned dark. The Grand Emperor waved a hand to send the soul flying toward the empress.

"It's a good soul. It absorbed a lot of the karma from Xu Qing's fleshly body. You can sacrifice it in the future." The Grand Emperor smiled as he flicked his sleeve, sending the fleshly body to Xu Qing. "Xu Qing, your current body has immortal troves. This body has god troves. Going forward, you can advance on both the path of gods and the path of immortals. Though I never walked that path myself, from what I can tell, it is infinite.

"But that's a good thing. There are two different paths, one of the extreme immortal, the other of the extreme god. In the case of the latter, as long as you successfully gain enlightenment of godly authority, then you can ignite godfire and become a god. And most likely, a very powerful god."

Xu Qing took hold of his god body. He looked at the Grand Emperor, his heart full of sorrow. He owed too much to the Grand Emperor.

The Grand Emperor smiled. "Don't look like that, you two. I'm very happy. My Summer. Xu Qing. Are the two of you willing to help an old man wield his sword one last time?"

The empress took a deep breath and then forced a nod. Xu Qing steeled his gaze and bowed.

"We're willing, Senior!"

Laughing heartily, the Grand Emperor waved his hand. The sky opened and the Devilbird holy land trembled.

And then he took his two successors away with him. He left the Devilbird holy land, piercing through the air with astonishing speed as he went into the direction of the three holy lands hovering above the Firemoon Darkheaven people.

"I have a sword that can sever heaven and break open the earth!"

The Grand Emperor's proud words echoed in Revered Ancient. In different parts of the Revered Ancient mainland, various ancient gods opened their eyes from slumber and looked at the figure in

the sky that was familiar to all of them. That included Yu Liuchen. For a brief moment, all of them felt like they were tens of thousands of years in the past, when a young man with a sword in his hand had traveled the world fighting the gods.

“Swordsage....”

1. Swordsage actually takes one of the characters of her name and adds ‘er’ to it, which creates a sort of cute, tender, and intimate form of address. But since her imperial name is translated, adding the ‘er’ doesn’t really work. Summer’er or Departure’er would be ridiculous. So I’m going to have him address her as ‘my Summer’ in order to convey that intimacy that the Chinese has. I know it’s not perfect, but I feel that leaving out that little touch would be a shame. ٩(̀)

Chapter 1084: No Remorse. No Guilt. No Regrets.

Chapter 1084: No Remorse. No Guilt. No Regrets.

Few people can easily predict how long they will live. That’s especially true when life is brutal. One slipup or one deadly fight can end everything. Even powerful gods could perish. Even Grand Emperor Swordsage had eventually reached the end of the line.

However... the length of one’s life wasn’t the most important factor in determining how amazing that life was. As was said, the world is a tavern for living beings, and the timescape is an old guest.[1]

The most important thing was to examine what one had experienced in life. Each person had their own path to walk. It was the only freedom that all living beings controlled.

Grand Emperor Swordsage had safeguarded humankind for ages and ages. Though he couldn’t change how things would end for him, his life experience was something that all humans would remember.

That was glory. That was greatness.

Today, as the flame of his life force flickered one last time, he let go of everything. It was like a rebirth in which he felt completely unrestrained and unfettered. The spark of life force within him glittered even more brightly. It was now possible to catch a glimpse of how high-spirited and full of mettle he had been years ago.

“My Summer. Xu Qing. I don’t want your futures to be like this.... But given that I’ve lived this way, I want to share with you something that I’ve learned.” As Grand Emperor Swordsage led the way through the Revered Ancient mainland with Xu Qing and the empress in tow, he softly said, “No remorse. No guilt. No regrets.

“Work as hard as you possibly can in life. If you do, then no matter how things end, you will have no remorse about your obsessions.

“Listen to your heart. If you do, then no matter how you advance on your path, you will have light in your life. And that means you’ll have no guilt.

“If you succeed in those two things, then regardless of the people you encounter or the decisions you make, you’ll have no regrets. If you can live by those six words, then your life will be meaningful. You will not have lived in vain.”

As Grand Emperor Swordsage’s words echoed out into heaven and earth, the Empress and Xu Qing heard them and were deeply affected.

The Grand Emperor really had lived by those six words. He had safeguarded humankind for years on end. He had worked hard. And he had no regrets, no matter what happened. He had listened to his heart, and the light within him had never been tarnished. It spilled onto the path forward, becoming radiance free of any guilt. That was how he had chosen to live, and he was now explaining it to Xu Qing and the empress. He had no regrets.

He laughed, and the sound echoed through heaven and earth, even reaching the three holy lands that were fighting the countless members of the Firemoon Darkheaven people and their three gods.

A total of sixteen celestial-level holy lands had come to Revered Ancient. And they had split up into four groups of four, which aligned with the four cardinal directions.

As for the east of Revered Ancient, one of the four holy lands had gone to deal with humankind, while the other three... went to the Firemoon Darkheavens. At the moment, those three holy lands were trembling.

The three gods of the Firemoons were visibly moved. Without any hesitation, they led their people into retreat, opening a path that led directly to the three holy lands.

The Grand Emperors of the three holy lands were shaking inside, and their expressions were unprecedentedly grave. All of them looked out and saw the same thing.... They saw Empress Summer Departure. They saw Xu Qing. And they saw the person in front of those two. He held a long sword and wore a voluminous robe, and despite being old, he stood tall and straight. The old man pulsed with a strong aura of death, but his soul emanated radiance that the death aura couldn’t cover up. In fact, it illuminated the entire sky over Revered Ancient.

Summer Immortal!!

That was what all of the Grand Emperors in the three holy lands were thinking. It caused their hearts to pound and their faces to turn ashen.

They weren’t the only ones who were astonished. The holy lands actually shook. Countless holy lands cultivators felt like their minds would explode as Grand Emperor Swordsage hefted his sword.

When he had been young, Swordsage’s dream had been to simply travel the world and expunge it of evil. He had still been a young man when he became a Grand Emperor. And thus, he had traveled far and wide cutting down gods and exterminating wickedness. He and his sword had left a lasting mark on heaven and earth. In his later years, when he thought back on his life, he spent most of his

time thinking about those days. Right now, such concepts seemed to overlap with his current self, as if his memories and the present had become fused into one.

And therefore, he hefted his sword in a way that looked comfortable, carefree, and at ease. His sword shone with sword light that illuminated the dome of heaven. It filled the void and became like the will of heaven. It brought an incomparably domineering momentum that could shatter the sky, crush the earth, and devastate all enemies!

It landed on the nearest holy land.

That particular holy land looked like a planet. A deafening rumbling sound echoed out, as if an unstoppable tempest had arrived. The three gods looked on, as well as all of the Firemoon Darkheaven people, along with Xu Qing and the empress..... The holy land that resembled a planet rumbled as a huge rift opened up in it. The rift sank down, and within the space of a few breaths of time, the entire planet was cut through.

It started falling apart! It had been cut in half! The sword light wiped out all life in that holy land! An entire holy land had perished!

Countless streams of life force were swept up by the will of the sword, and rushed toward Grand Emperor Swordsage, to be absorbed by him.... He didn't use it to stamp out the aura of death, but rather, to bolster his battle prowess.

Without the shackles of the star ring holding him back, Grand Emperor Swordsage wasn't just back at his peak level of battle prowess. He was actually rising explosively to an even higher level. It didn't matter that his rise to strength would only last for a short time. After all, there is a saying... once enlightened, one can die happy.[2]

Everyone gasped. All sound seemed to cease. The three Grand Emperors, looking as pale as death, didn't hesitate to flee. They dropped everything and ran. They might be Grand Emperors, but there was absolutely no way that they could fight back against mightiness akin to that of a Summer Immortal.

Swordsage didn't even look at them. He just calmly said, "My Summer. Xu Qing. You are my successors, and I gave you my cultivation base and sword. But I never passed on my most powerful sword techniques. Today, I'll pass them on to both of you.

"My dao is that of the sword. During different parts of my life, I created different sword techniques. There are a total of five.

"The first stance is called... Earth Treasury."[3]

Grand Emperor Swordsage pushed his right hand in the direction of the remaining two holy lands. Those holy lands trembled and started shaking. The sky dimmed, and the lands quaked, emitting muffled rumbling sounds. They were rumbling sounds that could shake the mind and heart.

Then Swordsage's voice again echoed through the lands.

"I used Earth Treasury years ago to cut down a vicious killer who was proficient in the dao of earth. The sword move focused on the releasing of earth energy to replace the will of the earth

with the will of the sword. It takes earth energy and turns it into sword energy. Then it converges to make an earth sword!”

As he explained, and as Xu Qing and the empress watched, the two holy lands trembled so violently that something like streams of smoke rose up from them. Those streams of smoke were the earth energy that Swordsage had just mentioned. More and more came out. In the shortest of moments, the lands of the two holy lands cracked as if all the nutrients were being sucked out of them. It turned into smoke, which rose up, converged... and turned into an astonishing sword! The sword didn't just cause the holy lands to shake. The lands of the Firemoon Darkheavens were rippling as if they were the surface of the sea.

And then... the huge sword of earth energy chopped down!

Nothing could stop it! Everyone watched as the two holy lands crumbled into ashes. None of the people in the holy lands could escape or do anything to stop it from happening. They were killed in body and soul. The physical structures of the holy lands were similarly wiped out of existence.

Countless streams of life force swept into Swordsage, causing his aura to rise again. He waved a finger, and Earth Treasury was once again unleashed. Countless streams of fierce sword energy sucked in the aura of the surrounding lands and shot toward the three fleeing Grand Emperors.

It didn't matter how they fought back. It did no good. The massive disparity made their deaths a foregone conclusion. As the sword energy passed, the three Grand Emperors shattered! Everything about them became nutrients for Swordsage, to be absorbed by him, causing his battle prowess to erupt.

Winds screamed, and the clouds roiled. The Firemoons said nothing. The three gods' heads were bowed. Seeing Grand Emperor Swordsage like this made them think about the past. The time period when the broken face came and Dark Serenity left was the most blood-soaked, most brutal, and most dark period of time imaginable. The common state of affairs was for gods to walk the lands either enslaving or slaughtering the populace. It didn't matter what the species was. They either bent the knee or were wiped out.

Back then, Grand Emperor Swordsage was the only Grand Emperor among humans. And back then, humans were still the number one species. Because of that, they attracted the attention of more gods than most. During that time, Grand Emperor Swordsage fought many gods who wanted to enslave humankind. As a result, he was the focus of attention of many species.

It culminated in the battle in the central region of Revered Ancient. That was when his true form perished, and his clone was left behind. That said, all the battles he had fought dispelled any notions in the central part of Revered Ancient that humans could be enslaved. The gods there abandoned such plans. As long as the Grand Emperor was around, they would never again think to do that.

That was how humankind got through that period of darkness and gloom. It was after that time that the three gods took control of the Firemoon Darkheaven people. By then, Grand Emperor Swordsage's true form had perished, leaving behind only a clone to safeguard humankind with the threat of his sword.

Seeing Grand Emperor Swordsage right now caused complex thoughts to fill the three gods.

They weren't the only ones. All of the gods in Revered Ancient looked at Swordsage in action and thought back to that period of darkness. That was especially true in the central part of Revered Ancient. That was the only place where no holy lands had gone, and right now, a gaze from there was focused on the east.

In the outer sea, Yu Liuchen sat on a boat looking off into the distance. He seemed to be deeply moved.

Though it's not common knowledge, based on what I know from my stories, this guy almost certainly stayed behind in Revered Ancient because he's always loved to show off. He's a freaking showboater! He was like that back then, and now that he's about to die, he just can't resist the urge to showboat more than he ever did!

Yu Liuchen felt angry and jealous. And then... he sighed softly.

1. The "world is a tavern" saying came up previously in the following chapters: [29](#), [205](#), [546.1](#), [558.2](#). ☞

2. The line "once enlightened, one can die happy" also appears in *I Shall Seal the Heavens* in [chapter 516](#) during the explanation for the Dao Seeking stage of that novel. And thanks to our proofreader UnifiedDivide for pointing out the other Xu Qing (the female one) is mentioned in that chapter. Lol.

☞

3. The Chinese characters for Earth Treasury are the same characters as the bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha. Those of you who read *I Shall Seal the Heavens* might remember that there's a supporting character in the novel with that name. As is made obvious in the text of this chapter, the interpretation of the characters doesn't relate to the bodhisattva as a person, or the person from ISSTH, but rather, the literal meaning of the two Chinese characters as rendered in my translation choice. ☞

Chapter 1085: A Great Distance

Chapter 1085: A Great Distance

Yu Liuchen's sigh contained a mixture of regret, sorrow, and envy. However, it took only a moment for him to notice that there was something off about his thinking. After all... this was an old enemy. There was no way he could feel envious about an enemy.

People should stay dead when they die. Who goes out and dies twice? Snorting coldly, Yu Liuchen looked away from the horizon. *That said, True Gods are rare nowadays, and the God Lords are sleeping. Your story is about to end, but my story... is just starting.*

The sky over the east of Revered Ancient was empty. Four celestial-level holy lands had been floating there before, but Grand Emperor Swordsage's sword had destroyed three of them. Only the

Devilbird holy land was left. Swordsage waved his hand to bring its downfall, and then he gave it to the empress. Grand Emperor Devilbird had escaped, and there was no sign of him.

Next, Swordsage looked to the south and started moving. The empress and Xu Qing followed. It was a distance almost too vast to cross, but with Swordsage's towering aura, that distance seemed to contract. In the time it takes an incense stick to burn, he took Xu Qing and the empress across many regions, all the way to the south of Revered Ancient.

Soon, it was possible to see three holy lands glittering in the distance. The battlefield in the south did not look like that in the east, where spell formations had kept the lands safe.

The south belonged to the Redland Nobleplexuses, and the lands resembled a sea of flames. Fire was the most suitable environment for them. When the flames became a sea, the Redland Nobleplexuses could release the full battle prowess of their species. The fighting between them and the holy lands had been growing in intensity.

From high in the sky, Xu Qing could see that the sea of flames was full of charred corpses, collapsed buildings, and shattered magical treasures. Some belonged to the various local species, but others... belonged to one of the holy lands that had collapsed.

The south had destroyed one of the holy lands and killed one of the Grand Emperors. There had been four holy lands here, but now there were only three.

Swordsage's arrival attracted the attention of both sides. The cultivators of the Redland Nobleplexuses looked on in shock, and then their gods ordered them to retreat. They fell back. The holy lands had their defensive spell formations activated, and their three Grand Emperors didn't dare to come out. They had already sensed what happened in the east.

It was clear that in the face of someone with battle prowess akin to that of a Summer Immortal, both the holy lands and the Redland Nobleplexus were on guard.

Swordsage wasn't concerned about the reaction of the Redland Nobleplexuses. His goal here was to pass on his sword techniques. And thus, he looked at the three holy lands and then spoke directly into the minds of Xu Qing and the empress.

"The second sword stance in my enlightenment of the sword is called... Rending the Void!"

Grand Emperor Swordsage lifted his right hand and pushed it toward the three holy lands with their defenses raised. The Redland Nobleplexuses reeled, the sky went dark, and the sea of flames went out.... The three holy lands floating in the air, as well as everything surrounding them, suddenly blurred.

A terrifying power seemed to come out of nowhere, filling the area and cutting it off from the outside. Then, that power erupted, as if it had extracted all the energy from that area!

Grand Emperor Swordsage succinctly explained the sword move.

"I created this sword move back when I was working with the Ancient Emperor to wage war on the other species of Revered Ancient. It's designed to kill all enemies within a certain area. In order to

maintain lethality within a large area... it's designed to extract all of the energy within range. It turns that area into a true void.

"The force of contraction created by the void shatters everything within that range. The shattered remnants are actually sword lineaments. The infinite sword lineaments then converge into a sword that creates the sword move Rending the Void!"

As the Grand Emperor spoke, the three holy lands and everything surrounding them began to tremble. As the energy was sucked out, pressure mounted. When combined with the blessing provided by Grand Emperor Swordsage's will, all living beings in the area were visibly astonished.

The first place where rifts appeared were in the defensive spell formations of the three holy lands. The pressure of the void caused the spell formations to shake harder and harder. More cracks appeared, until the spell formations finally couldn't take it, and they shattered. Then the pressure of the void erupted inside the holy lands. In an instant, howls of agony rang out.

However, they couldn't pass outside of that specific area.

Only the strongest experts in the holy lands, for instance the Grand Emperors and Imperial Sovereigns, were able to stand firm, their eyes bloodshot as they tapped into their trump cards. Unfortunately for them... there was no point.

The crumbling continued, and the rifts proliferated. Soon, those rifts started to look like sword lineaments. In the end, countless sword lineaments combined, turning into an astonishing sword. Then, in that area of true void, sword light shone, sword energy proliferated, and a sword will crushed heaven and earth.

Sometime later, the barriers dissipated, and the rubble that remained of the holy lands fell to the ground. There was no flesh and blood. The only thing that remained of the living things was dust. All life force had been taken as nutrients by Grand Emperor Swordsage, causing his battle prowess to rise again. His energy swept the area, causing the gods of the Redland Nobleplexus to back away. They weren't willing to get into a fight.

Only after Grand Emperor Swordsage had taken Xu Qing and the empress away did a calm voice drift within the lands of the Redland Nobleplexuses. "Without a True God... it would be difficult for us to deal with a Summer Immortal."

In a brief moment, multiple holy lands had been destroyed, and multiple Grand Emperors had perished. It was a monumental story that was already shaking Revered Ancient. Countless species were reeling in shock, and numerous gods sank into silence. The past glory of humankind was now something innumerable species were thinking about.

The tempestuous news had already reached the celestial-level holy lands that had come to the west and north of Revered Ancient. They were both terrified and astonished. The holy lands there quickly joined forces, both to activate their defenses and also issued calls for help into the starry sky beyond Revered Ancient.

At the same time, they didn't hesitate to leave the spots they had previously occupied and group together. Having come to Revered Ancient, they couldn't leave it. Therefore, the best path forward

seemed to be to join forces. They were going to rely on their joint strength to hold fast until the earthly-level holy lands and the one and only heavenly-level holy land arrived from the starry sky.

Sadly, there was no way their plan would work without a hitch. The west of Revered Ancient was controlled by the Netherworld Chasmcorpses. The north was in the hands of the Northfate Kings. And those two species would naturally do everything possible to take advantage of the situation.

As a result, the fighting in the west and north instantly became more intense. The cultivators of the two major species held nothing back as they tried to prevent the holy lands from retreating.

As chaos reigned and the sound of slaughter grew loud, Grand Emperor Swordsage appeared in the sky in the west.

“The third sword stance I gained enlightenment of... is called Heavenly Palaces. I created this stance in the war against the other species, before Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity managed to conquer Revered Ancient. However, the slaughter it can unleash is too brutal. It can only be used to target cultivators, and damages the heavenly balance.... After the gods came, I never used it.”

Grand Emperor Swordsage looked at the holy lands up ahead. He waved his hand.

The resulting scene caused Xu Qing’s pupils to constrict. It had been shocking to see the holy lands in the east and south collapse. But that was nothing like this.

The truth was that... the Heavenly Palaces sword technique was exactly as Grand Emperor Swordsage had said. It only targeted cultivators, and it damaged the heavenly balance. And that was because... the heavenly palaces mentioned in the name of the technique were not actual palaces that existed in the heavens. Rather, they were the heavenly palaces that Core Formation cultivators created inside their own cultivation base.

Their heavenly palaces all collapsed, as if something on the outside had taken control of them. They turned into illusory swords which then blasted out from inside their bodies. It was a brutal scene. There were unending howls of agony. Fatalities occurred nonstop. Seas of swords screamed through heaven and earth, filling the holy lands in the west. It was a pure catastrophe for all cultivators who were in the Core Formation level or higher.

Those under Core Formation had no hope of surviving either, as the sea of swords wiped them all out. The holy lands themselves were also devastated by the swords. Everything was suffering destruction and extermination.

In the quiet that resulted afterward, Grand Emperor Swordsage again spoke to Xu Qing and the empress.

“It turns the enemy’s heavenly palaces into swords. Thus the name of the technique. Next comes the fourth sword technique.... Its name is Star Splendor.”

As the words left his mouth, the dome of heaven rumbled, as if heaven were being opened. The light of day then vanished and was replaced by the darkness of night. Within that darkness were innumerable twinkling stars. It was an infinitude of starlight that filled heaven and earth, becoming beam after beam of sword light.

As swords filled the world, Grand Emperor Swordsage stepped forward onto a beam of starlight. Taking Xu Qing and the empress with him, he used that starlight to go to the frozen plains in the north of Revered Ancient. In that land of pure white, starlight radiated, reflecting on the snow to create brilliance that covered all of the holy lands. From a distance, it looked like a vortex of starlight consuming everything.

Everyone in Revered Ancient was struck speechless. Countless species sank into silence. The gods simply looked on.

Grand Emperor Swordsage was the most brightly shining star there was in Revered Ancient, and he was growing stronger thanks to the vortex of starlight. Endless life force streamed into him, causing his aura to climb higher, and pushing his battle prowess toward the peak level of that of a Summer Immortal. Heaven trembled. The earth shook.

And yet, his aura of death was stronger than ever. When he spoke, his voice was hoarse. “As for the last sword stance... I’m going to use it there.”

He looked up, his gaze piercing through the canopy of heaven and into the starry sky. In the starry sky outside of the Revered Ancient mainland, five holy lands had appeared.

Four were in the lead. It didn’t matter their size or speed. They were all beyond the celestial level. They were earthly-level holy lands.

Behind them... was something that resembled an enormous heart, pulsing and emanating an incomparably terrible mightiness. That was... the sole heavenly-level holy land!

There was a tower on that heavenly-level holy land, and standing atop it was an old man in a black robe. His hands were clasped behind his back, and his face was full of wrinkles. His expression itself seemed ancient, as if he was someone who had stepped through countless years of time and had witnessed all history play out.

He was looking at Revered Ancient. Despite the great distance between the two of them, he had locked gazes with Swordsage.

Chapter 1086: Sword Left in the Mortal World

Chapter 1086: Sword Left in the Mortal World

High in the sky was an ancient Summer Immortal. He had existed at the apex of Deep Earth and had walked his own path. He was a hero to Deep Earth, as he had led the cultivators from there to open up new horizons in Revered Ancient. He had crushed the Brilliant Heaven Godfolk, given rise to heavenly daos in Revered Ancient, and ensured that countless Deep Earth cultivators also had the chance to reach the apex.

For the purpose of protecting Deep Earth, of advancing the path of immortals, and of advancing the limits of the cultivation system, he and his companions had ventured out into the unfamiliar starry

sky. They had sought enlightenment and destined opportunities. It had been a journey that lasted untold years. Now, one of them had returned.

Underneath that same sky was a new Summer Immortal. Though he could not quite compare to the Summer Immortals of the past, he had walked his own path, and was also a hero to humankind. After Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity left, he had killed gods, he had conquered other species, and he had waged war for the sake of keeping humankind safe. He had sacrificed everything for the sake of humans. To him, Deep Earth wasn't important. The countless other species weren't important. The only thing that mattered to him was humankind!

As of this moment, an old Summer Immortal and a new Summer Immortal locked eyes. When they did...

Heaven collapsed. Intense rumbling sounds echoed out as ripples filled the sky, making it look like undulated fish scales. They rippled so dramatically that spots started to appear. Then, accompanied by deafening booms, the spots shattered. The entire sky was affected. It almost looked as if a host of enormous devil's trumpet flowers were blooming.[1]

As those flowers bloomed, an ancient voice spoke from beyond the heavens, a voice that filled Revered Ancient. The sea of Revered Ancient seethed. Countless species trembled. Every god that was under the level of a True God, including countless Godfire Gods and even Altar Gods, were all shaking. Even the extremely rare True Gods in their resting places... shivered inwardly.

That was because... the pressure in this voice surpassed the level of a peak Summer Immortal, and was infinitesimally close to that level which was equivalent to a God Lord. An Immortal Lord.

"It's not impossible for you to be resurrected."

Xu Qing inhaled sharply. The empress looked up, her heart, which had been full of desolation, suddenly stirring with hope.

"Submit to me. Take me into Revered Ancient to acquire what I seek. Once I dispel the fog in front of me and seize Immortal Lord personhood, then I can truly resurrect you."

Silence reigned for a short time.

Then Swordsage spoke in a soft voice. "I grew up hearing stories about the nine of you Seniors. Your names are etched deeply in my memory. Your deeds brought light to my heart. I have great respect for all of you, even right now, oh exalted Ji Zun."[2]

Swordsage bowed deeply. When he straightened up, his eyes glinted sharply. And when he spoke, his voice was more aggressive than before.

"But... are you really the exalted Ji Zun's true form? I find it hard to believe that the nine Seniors who left Deep Earth, conquered the Brilliant Heaven Godfolk, and founded Revered Ancient, they with such pure emotions, would end up falling into this level of disgrace. I find it hard to believe that they would raise the butcher knife over their own descendants, all for personal gain. In fact, I refuse to believe it."

Grand Emperor Swordsage spoke with decisiveness that could *sever nails and chop iron*.

Up in the sky, the black-robed old man on the high tower in the heavenly-level holy land looked down expressionlessly at Revered Ancient. With eyes locked onto Grand Emperor Swordsage, he coolly said, "Considering how difficult it must have been for you to push your cultivation to this level, I'm going to explain a few things to you."

"When it comes to Revered Ancient and Deep Earth, you could say that the entire cultivation system was created specifically for me to attain Immortal Lord personhood. It's a profoundly meaningful thing. And all of the hard work that led to this point is for the purpose of creating a bright future."

"And thus, Junior, you are being too narrow-minded in your heart, mind, and will. Great daos are emotionless. If you want to continue making advancement, you need to keep your eyes fixed on what's ahead."

His voice boomed like thunder in Revered Ancient. Everyone heard him. Everyone understood what he meant. Some people agreed with what he said, others didn't. But in the final analysis... everyone now knew why this holy land had suddenly shown up.

Unfortunately, it was easy to guess what this Summer Immortal sought, and the reason why the war had played out as it did. What he needed... was not some physical object. It seemed most likely that he needed life force. A blood sacrifice. Death.... It was hard to say the specifics. But everyone knew that it had nothing to do with the gods.

And this person was not planning to settle down in Revered Ancient. The broken face was not something he could fight against. Therefore... the arrival of this holy land, as well as the actions taken by the terrestrial- and celestial-level holy lands, just made things more obvious.

Swordsage shook his head. He looked away from the sky and to the surrounding lands. Gazing at humankind, he softly said, "I'm too narrow-minded in heart because all I care about is humankind."

He lifted his hand and pointed The Emperor's Sword toward the sky. "I'm too simplistic in mind because all I care about is humankind."

Winds screamed across the lands, creating a tempest with Grand Emperor Swordsage in the middle. It spread dramatically. "I'm too immature in will because, yet again, all I care about is humankind."

Grand Emperor Swordsage's eyes gleamed with mysterious light that was a mixture of determination and decisiveness. His hand tightened on The Emperor's Sword. And his aura was rising explosively. Wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. Thunderous rumbling sounds filled Revered Ancient.

"Great daos might be emotionless. But that doesn't mean emotions don't exist. As we tread onward, we don't just keep our eyes fixed on the path ahead of us... we also enjoy the scenery around us, as well as the company of our loved ones. If walking this path means trampling on the corpses of my own people and drinking their blood... well... I'm not willing to do that!"

As those last words left Grand Emperor Swordsage's mouth, his eyes blazed with brilliant light, and he looked up, his gaze passing into what lay beyond the heavens. His aura raged to the highest

heights. The power and life force he had absorbed from all of his enemies, including the Grand Emperors, burned with great intensity, all despite the increasing strength of his aura of death.

All of a sudden, the vortex surrounding Swordsage swelled, filling region after region. At the same time, Swordsage himself grew dramatically taller until he was an enormous giant. The Emperor's Sword in his hand became massive. Hefting it, he said, "My sword skills evolved during different stages of my life. In total, I created five techniques. The first four are Earth Treasury, Rending the Void, Heavenly Palaces, and Star Splendor....

"In the battle in which I defended my Summer, my life force was clearly sputtering out, so I had no opportunity to use the fifth one. But today, that sword will finally make its appearance in Revered Ancient.

"It's called... The Human World!"

As Swordsage murmured those words, ancient memories welled up in his mind. Within those memories, he saw a glorious world. There was no war. There were no gods. Countless species rose to great heights under the leadership of the Ancient Emperor.

This was the flourishing human world before the broken face came.

Sighing, Swordsage hefted his sword and then slashed it toward the sky. A sword that contained all of the majesty and life of the human world shot upward. Next, Swordsage envisioned what happened after the broken face arrived and Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity left. It was a dark age. Corpses littered the earth, and howls of grief and anguish filled the sky everywhere. The sky went dark, and humankind descended into despair.

That was... the anguish of the human world.

Swordsage bitterly swept his sword out again, sending forth a sword move that contained the despair of all living beings. It shot toward the sky!

Next came the difficulties of the human world after Emperor Eastglory was defeated.

Then the struggles of the human world in the era of Sageheaven.

After that, the revival of the human world under Mirrorcloud's control.

And then the tenacity of the human world when Dao Life reigned.

It was followed by the struggles of the human world for the thousands of years that Dark War ruled.

As the memories of the different time periods of the human world flitted through Grand Emperor Swordsage's mind, they caused glittering swords to appear in the canopy of heaven.[3]

Finally, the image of Empress Summer Departure appeared in Swordsage's memories. After she ascended the throne, the human world rose to prominence!

Swordsage smiled. “This is the human world that I have safeguarded.”

His body blurred as the aura of death covered him completely. As that happened, a sword shot forth that was filled with the glory of the human world, risen to prominence.

Up in the dome of heaven was the history of humankind that Swordsage had experienced. It was embodied in a host of swords that merged together into one massive sword that was The Human World. As Grand Emperor Swordsage called on all of his remaining strength, he slashed that sword at the dome of heaven, at the area beyond the heavens, at... the holy lands!

The sword split the sky, crushing everything in its path with impunity. Spectacular force glittered, the likes of which couldn't be surpassed.

If that ancient immortal represented the will of heaven, then this sword represented the will of humankind, ready to battle with heaven! In the blink of an eye, it broke out from Revered Ancient and smashed into the four earthly-level holy lands that posed the first obstacle.

Outside of Revered Ancient, sound was consumed by the void. But all living beings could see what was happening, and it was a sight that shook them to the core and created an unforgettable memory. Four earthly-level holy lands... trembled violently. The momentum of their descent was halted, and they were sent tumbling away. They had been defeated with one attack!

Regret appeared in the eyes of the ancient immortal.

“That’s an outstanding sword move. If you weren’t in your current state, and were an actual Summer Immortal, then that sword would strike fear into my heart. But right now....”

The ancient immortal extended his hand toward the sword. He was going to destroy it. But then, his gaze hardened as his hand closed onto nothing. It was because....

The sword wasn't actually targeting him! Instead, it was targeting the sealing mark up above that prevented all living beings from leaving Revered Ancient!

Sword light glittered, carrying with it the will of the human world and the will of Swordsage, which pierced into the sealing mark. Then it shifted to point toward the broken face of Eminent Desolation, the eyes of which were closed. If the sword shot forth, then the broken face would be struck, and the eyes would definitely open. As for what would happen after that, nobody knew. Whatever happened, nobody would be able to control or stop it.

The immortal's face fell. He could see that The Human World had been set up with him in mind. It wouldn't do much to anyone else, but if he got close to the sword, it would explode. His eyes shifted from the sealing mark to Grand Emperor Swordsage.

“Well done, youngster. There was still a chance you could have been truly resurrected, but you gave that up to delay my arrival. Well, that’s fine. The will of your sword will only last for half of a sixty-year-cycle.... I don't mind letting you wait that much longer. I'll be waiting out here for the sword will to vanish.”

The immortal slowly faded from sight. The heavenly-level holy land and the four earthly-level holy lands retreated.

1. The flower mentioned here is *Datura stramonium*, a poisonous flowering plant. The flowers sort of look like trumpets. Here's the [wiki page](#) for the flower, which includes a picture. In Chinese, the name of the flower is a transliteration of a sanskrit word, so the specific characters aren't really important per se. ㊦

2. Ji Zun: This is an odd name. Ji is a surname which also means "to draw/suck up water." Since there is another surname Ji that's important in *I Shall Seal the Heavens* (that clan was even mentioned in the ISSTH reference I linked to a few chapters ago), I should probably point out that this is NOT the same Ji from that novel. It's a different Ji entirely. Zun is a complicated character that is often used as a title. In other words, this name could be interpreted as a daoist name. In the comments in Chinese, the top comment was someone speculating that the name means "a respected person who sucks the life out of all people." There were many other comments that were essentially making jokes about the "sucking" aspect of this character. Madam Deathblade had the same reaction. Given how unusual this name is, there's a possibility it's a daoist name. Similar to how I've handled other names, I am going to put a mental bookmark here and reserve the right to come back and change it to a translated daoist name later on if that makes sense. At the moment, there isn't enough evidence to say definitively how it should be handled, and I don't want to bother the author about it. ㊦

3. The stories of the various emperors were first recounted in [chapter 401](#). They were all mentioned in many contexts in other chapters, but probably the most important were the revelations in [chapters 950](#) and [951](#). ㊦

Chapter 1087: An Agreement Made Within Wind and Rain

Chapter 1087: An Agreement Made Within Wind and Rain

Something hazy filled the dome of heaven over Revered Ancient. It was haze from the human world. The human world of humankind. It was the will of Grand Emperor Swordsage's sword, which had been added to the world. All living beings in Revered Ancient now had half of a sixty-year-cycle of time added to them.

Of course, it only applied to the mortal living beings and cultivators. As far as the gods were concerned, this was a conflict between cultivators, and it had nothing to do with them.

The only reason some would consider interfering was that it could theoretically reduce the joss flame they had access to. The three gods of the Firemoons fell into that camp. There were no other gods similar to the empress. Shē was the only one.

And taking in Revered Ancient as a whole, the gods who accepted the joss flame of local species were actually in the minority. Most of the gods there were just sleeping. None of them made a single move. In the final analysis, this war between cultivators was like a game to the gods. Ultimately, it didn't really matter to them how it played out.

As for Grand Emperor Swordsage, he didn't care what the gods thought. His entire will was focused on that one sword. At the moment, a rain of blood was falling from heaven. It was the rain that fell when a Summer Immortal perished.

Within that rain, hovered Grand Emperor Swordsage. Looking over his shoulder at the human world... he smiled.

"It's hard to let go of the obsession to live. The willingness to let go leads to true rebirth." [1]

His smile would last for all eternity. He was now completely inundated with an aura of death. His flesh and blood were now shrinking into nothing, and he was turning back into stone.

His three spiritual souls emerged from eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. The human soul returned to the memories of humankind. The earthly soul returned to the lands of humankind. The heavenly soul returned to the destiny aura.

Then came the seven physical souls. The physical souls made from the five emperors retreated, slowly regaining consciousness in the process. The past and future the empress had offered returned through Grand Emperor Swordsage's smile.

Then there was The Emperor's Sword he held. He loosened his grip, and the sword became a glinting arc that flashed in front of Xu Qing's eyes.

The rain fell harder.

Xu Qing and the empress hovered in the rain, their hearts filled with grief at the sight of it. It was a grief that would not soon fade away. The wind blew, sweeping through the countless mountains, mixing with the rain of blood, and becoming something unforgettable that echoed in their hearts. Ultimately, it turned into a sigh.

Xu Qing bowed his head. Looking at the statue of the Grand Emperor, he clasped hands and bowed deeply. The empress bid farewell in her own silent way.

The image was something burned into the hearts of all cultivators.

A month passed.

After all the celestial-level holy lands collapsed, the war in the Revered Ancient mainland ended. The ancient Summer Immortal could not come down into Revered Ancient. And he didn't demand that the four earthly-level holy lands do so in his stead. There was no point in that.

As for the terrestrial-level holy lands that were left behind in Revered Ancient, they were ignored, just as their own ancestors had ignored those they left behind on the mainland all those years ago.

And when the local people rose up, the terrestrial-level holy lands didn't even have the option of surrendering. The only thing that awaited them was death. Fighting back only delayed the inevitable. And no matter how they delayed things, they couldn't do anything about the deadline of half of a sixty-year-cycle.

As for humans... they rose to complete prominence. Whether it was the empress' actions or Grand Emperor Swordsage's heroic feats, the result was that humankind was once again at the peak of glory among the countless species in Revered Ancient. They had become a light in the darkness.

At the end of that month, as the rain continued to fall, the doors of an ancient temple opened in the Imperial Region of humankind.

Two figures strode out from within. One of them was Xu Qing. The other was Erniu.

Xu Qing's eyes shone with confusion. Erniu's face was clouded, and he seemed anxious.

A sigh echoed out in the temple behind them. Then the palace lord of the Summer Immortal Palace spoke. "I've explained everything to you. Going forward, all of the Summer Immortal Palace locations in the Revered Ancient mainland will be closed.

"Whenever Revered Ancient faces an impending catastrophe, the Summer Immortal Palace takes precautions. And we invite various powerful experts and chosen to slumber with us in the immortal essence.

"Those powerful experts and chosen are the seeds of civilization for the countless species. After the catastrophe is over, they'll be woken up. If the world has changed, then their mission will be to establish a new civilization of cultivators. This is how things played out in previous catastrophes.

"The others have already been sent on their way. Xu Qing. Chen Erniu. Your choice is yours to make. Please, inform me of your decisions as quickly as possible."

The door of the temple slowly closed, and then the temple slowly began to fade from sight within the rain. When it disappeared, it would indicate that the period of slumber had begun. There wasn't much time left.

Xu Qing and Erniu stood silently in the rain. Half a month ago, when the war in the east wound to an end, they had been summoned by the palace lord of the Summer Immortal Palace. In the half month that followed, the palace lord gave both of them destined opportunities and good fortune.

Xu Qing's immortal body had been stabilized even further. And with the help of the palace lord, his consciousness had been inserted into his god body, making it a completely functioning clone.

As for Erniu, his good fortune had involved awakening the memories from the bones of his third life. And by the means of various unknown techniques employed by the palace lord, Erniu had awakened even more memories. Unfortunately, that process had left him confused and somewhat blank.

That was why they had such strange expressions on their faces. That, and all of the information the palace lord had imparted to them over the past few days.

"Xu Qing, the reason I chose to help you walk the path of the extreme immortal and form your immortal body is that... your Master visited me. He paid handsomely to gain my assistance. I

summoned you, helped you stabilize your immortal body and revive your god clone, because your Master... your Master... paid a very heavy price.

“It’s the same with you, Erniu. You have a very mysterious background. When your Master came to the Summer Immortal Palace, he paid a similarly high price to look into all the histories. Unfortunately, the records of the Summer Immortal Palace only contained information from after your third life. As for your second life, and your first life, we simply don’t have any information in our records. Perhaps you are the only one who can know the details. As for your third life, we don’t know much about it. It seems that some powerful force erased all of that information, and the Summer Immortal Palace is incapable of releasing it.

“But your Master gave up some of his essence. He sacrificed some of his own power to drag out an opportunity for you from within the immortal essence. He wanted to absorb the histories of the Summer Immortal Palace, and he wanted you to have more memories about... who you are.

“The two of you have a really good Master.”

Xu Qing looked up, peering into the rain in the direction of the continent of South Phoenix.

“Eldest Brother,” he murmured, “it seems like Master... is making arrangements for when he’s no longer with us.”

Erniu was quiet for a long moment. “Let’s go back. We can just ask the old man to explain what’s going on.”

Erniu headed in the direction of the teleportation portals in the imperial capital. Xu Qing nodded and followed him.

For now, they weren’t thinking about any other matters. The most important thing on both of their minds was to get back to South Phoenix to see their Master. They wanted an explanation for everything.

Not long after, a teleportation portal rumbled to life in the capital, and Xu Qing and Erniu vanished.

A few days later, a pagoda could be seen screaming at top speed through the air above the Forbidden Sea between Emperor-Receiving Prefecture and South Phoenix. Around evening, it arrived at Seven Blood Eyes. The pagoda vanished, and then Xu Qing and Erniu appeared on the summit of the Seventh Peak, outside the closed door of Master Seventh’s mansion grotto. Both of them kowtowed.

Time passed. Finally, a sigh echoed from within the mansion grotto.

“The two of you didn’t go into slumber in the immortal essence along with the Summer Immortal Palace, huh. What are you doing here?”

“Master,” they said.

Xu Qing looked up at the mansion grotto, his heart filled with conflicted concerns and worries.

Erniu's face had remained grim these past few days. Looking up, he said, "What's going on here, old man??"

The mansion grotto's door slammed open and Master Seventh walked out and glared at Erniu. "You're really asking for it, aren't you??"

Upon seeing Master Seventh act like he normally did, Erniu breathed a visible sigh of relief. Putting a fawning expression onto his face, he chuckled.

Master Seventh snorted coldly. Then he looked at Xu Qing and gave a slight nod.

"You did well working on that immortal body." Looking up at the dome of heaven, he started talking before Xu Qing or Erniu could ask any questions. "I know what the two of you want to ask about. You want to know what to do after I'm gone."

Xu Qing and Erniu were both shaken to the core.

"It's true the Summer Immortal Palace helped the two of you because of the price I paid. However, I'm your Master. So I was just doing what I ought to do. It wasn't just the two of you. There are others from Seven Blood Eyes that I sent to slumber, including that good-for-nothing Third Sib. Second Sib can make her own decisions, and I won't do anything to interfere.

"The reason I did this is to play things safe. There's karma between me and that ancient immortal from the heavenly-level holy land. Of course, it's not like I lack confidence. Swordsage used that final sword move to buy time for me. Therefore, you two can kindly get the hell out of here and stop interrupting my cultivation!"

Master Seventh glared at Erniu, then turned and gave Xu Qing another nod. Before the two of them could say anything, Master Seventh flicked his sleeve to send the two of them flying away. Then he stalked back into his mansion grotto and slammed the door.

On the inside, he stood for a long moment in silence. Then he sighed.

A storm is coming. Can my umbrella... offer enough protection?[2]

Master Seventh sat down and closed his eyes. It didn't matter if it could or not. He would fight to make sure his umbrella could protect his apprentices from the coming tempest.

Outside of Seven Blood Eyes, the wind blew loudly in the spot where Xu Qing and Erniu had been ejected to. Neither of them spoke. They just struggled to stabilize their hearts. Although Master Seventh had seemed calm and relaxed, the truth was that Xu Qing and Erniu weren't children. They could guess at what was really going on.

"The old man... is really getting old. And yet even in his old age, he's still willing to put everything on the line...." Erniu looked at Xu Qing. "Little Ah Qing, I think you should go slumber with the

Summer Immortal Palace. You don't need to worry about what's going on out here. I can deal with the old man.

"I mean, he's just an immortal, right? Like I have any reason to be scared of a wimp like that. Thanks to my third-life memories, I now have some clues about my second life. And I know it has something to do with the Brilliant Heaven Godfolk.

"That's why I'm planning to take a trip to where the Brilliant Heaven Godfolk are sealed. I should be able to find my second life there. And then... as the Eldest Brother, I will personally save the world!"

Erniu proudly clasped Xu Qing's shoulder. "Things would be too dangerous for you there. After all, if you die, you'll actually end up dead. Really dead. Not like me. That's why you won't be coming with me. Be a good boy now, little Ah Qing. Go to the Summer Immortal Palace. Believe me, in thirty years, your Eldest Brother and your Master will wake you up together."

Erniu looked Xu Qing in the eyes and earnestly said, "If you don't go, I won't be able to rest at ease."

Xu Qing thought for a moment and then nodded. "Let me at least send you on your way. After all, we're going in the same direction, right?"

Erniu thought for a moment. Not wanting to give Xu Qing any spare time to think about things, he hauled him over to the teleportation portal, and activated it, sending both of them back to the imperial capital. After all, the entrance leading to the Brilliant Heaven Godfolk was beneath the imperial capital.

Xu Qing said nothing as Erniu escorted him all the way to the Summer Immortal Palace. After they bowed in greeting, the door opened, and the palace lord appeared. Erniu cleared his throat.

"I'm not going, Senior. But my Junior Brother will be going."

With that, he pushed Xu Qing forward.

Xu Qing looked back at him through the door.

Erniu laughed heartily. "Alright, little Junior Brother. See you in thirty years!"

With that, Erniu vanished without a trace. The door closed quietly, and the temple disappeared.

A few days later, after the temple was definitely gone, Erniu stepped out of the concealment of invisibility. He finally felt very calm.

"He finally did as told. And I can rest at ease."

Erniu took a deep breath. Eyes flashing with a crazy look, he shot toward the entrance leading to the sealed resting place of the Brilliant Heaven Godfolk. He had a way to get inside.

After Erniu was on his way, the temple appeared again in the rain. However, it was very blurry, as if it would disappear only a moment later.

The door opened and Xu Qing stepped out.

Behind him, the palace lord said, “Are you sure you aren’t going to slumber in the immortal essence?”

“I’m not,” Xu Qing whispered.

The palace lord declined to try to persuade him otherwise. The door closed and the temple vanished.

Xu Qing was left standing alone in the rain. He knew that everyone would be making preparations in the half-sixty-year-cycle that Grand Emperor Swordsage had bought for them.

His Master was currently in secluded cultivation. His Eldest Brother was going to go all out with the Brilliant Heaven Godfolk. A month after getting back to the capital, the empress had gone to the ghaſt hollow in Emperor-Receiving Prefecture.

It wasn’t juſt humans who were getting ready. Other ſpecies were doing the ſame. Everyone with a bit of ſkill or ſtrength was preparing.

“Half a ſixty-year-cycle....” Xu Qing looked off in the direction of the outer ſea. His eyes gleamed with deciſiveness and determination.

1. Grand Emperor Swordsage’s words combine the chapter titles of [chapter 1081](#) and [1083](#). ￼

2. As I mentioned in the footnote of [chapter 1078](#), this ‘ſtorm is coming’ is usually a metaphor deſcribing dramatic changes. ￼

Chapter 1088: Xu Qing’s Deſtination

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Grand Emperor Swordsage had perished. His Maſter was in ſeclusion. The empreſs was working on cultivation. Erniu had gone away. It was almoſt like the ſpinning of a gnomon on a gigantic ſundial. In half of a ſixty-year-cycle, a huge ſtorm would hit.

The ancient immortal waiting outside of Revered Ancient was now a ſharp blade hanging over the heads of all living beings. He was a mortal threat. It was eaſy to imagine how intense the ſenſation of danger would become as time paſſed.

Even to mortals, half of a ſixty-year-cycle waſn’t very long. And that was even more the caſe with cultivators. If one went into ſecluded meditation, that time could paſs very quickly.

The ſenſe of danger would turn into preſſure that would weigh down on the world. All ſpecies were going to be making their final preparations. In fact, it ſeemed like the only option they had

was to beg for protection from the gods. And thus, some places became even more peaceful than before. Others, in contrast, descended into chaos.

Meanwhile, the apathetic gods just watched everything play out. To them, this delay was just an amusing twist in all the drama.

As for the misery of the people.... The Revered Ancient mainland had been a place of misery ever since the broken face arrived. The main difference was that in the past, the misery had mostly affected mortals. Now, it affected everyone.

In the desert in the Moonrite Region, Nethersprite was boiling water in the Green Spirit Pharmacy.

The Heir Apparent took a sip of tea then put the cup down. "It's actually fair when you think about it."

Princess Brightblossom shook her head slightly as she looked at Xu Qing as he refilled the Heir Apparent's cup.

"Did you think things through yet?" she asked.

Xu Qing put the teapot down, sat down in front of the two of them, and nodded.

After leaving the Imperial Region, his first stop had been here, the Moonrite Region. Before departing, he wanted to see Ling'er as well as the Heir Apparent and his siblings. Unfortunately, Ling'er was still in seclusion, with Grandpa Ninth standing guard. Xu Qing chose not to disturb them. And thus, he was here saying his farewells to the Heir Apparent and Princess Brightblossom.

"It's good for kids to go out and get some practical experience," the Heir Apparent said. "But the outer sea is a very chaotic place. Given your current cultivation base and battle prowess, you shouldn't run into too much trouble. Just remember... don't go in too deep."

He put his tea down, looked at Xu Qing, and thought for a moment. Then he suddenly lifted his right hand. An instant later, a dao lineament swirled out, forming a sealing mark in front of him.

"This is a manifestation of my perception-altering authority. You can use it three times. Take it to defend yourself."

Xu Qing had not told the Heir Apparent what his true destination was. But the sealing mark made it clear that the Heir Apparent was concerned for his safety. Xu Qing accepted it.

Princess Brightblossom looked at him deeply, then sighed. Waving her hand, she sent out an illusory river into a jade bottle. She gave the bottle to Xu Qing.

"That's a bit of the River of Time that I assimilated."

Xu Qing took it. Then he stood and bowed very deeply to the two of them. "I'll take my leave now, Seniors. Grandpa Heir Apparent. Grandma Brightblossom. Please... take care of yourselves."

He turned and walked away. He left the Green Spirit Pharmacy. He left the mountains. He vanished from the desert.

After he was gone, Princess Brightblossom sighed. “The kid isn’t going to the outer sea.”

The Heir Apparent said nothing for a moment. Then he also sighed. “It’s been many years since I first heard the legends about the outer sea. Those legends also mention the place he’s going.

“Thirty years.... Father is already on his way back. Based on my calculations, he isn’t very far away. I hope that by the time he gets back, he’s still our father. I guess it’s good that the kid is going away.”

Princess Brightblossom looked up into the sky and out into what lay beyond. She said nothing.

Xu Qing was making his way quietly through the Moonrite Region. Before departing, he wanted to go to Sea-Sealing County to see Plumdark. After that, he needed to remove all hindrances before starting on the journey of his own choosing.

Thirty years.... As he sped through the sky, ripples suddenly spread through the sky, and a huge mirror appeared.

In the middle of the mirror was a huge mountain covered with temples. An old woman appeared on the summit of the mountain. Next to her was an old man with a huge white beard covering his face.

Upon seeing the two of them, Xu Qing stopped in place and bowed respectfully.

“Grandma Fifth. Grandpa Eighth.”

Looking kindly at Xu Qing, Grandma Fifth nodded. Without saying a word she extended her hand, giving him a flower petal made from her own authority. When the flower petal formed, Grandma Fifth looked visibly older.

“Take it. As long as you have even one breath of life within you, that flower petal can restore you.”

Xu Qing knew that Grandma Fifth’s authority took away some of her life force every time she used it. He hesitated.

“She’s giving it to you. Take it!” said Grandpa Eighth, glaring. Then he waved his hand, and sent out a sealing mark made of his own authority of rage. “That can boost your battle prowess. Just remember that you’ll be temporarily weakened after the boost ends.”

These gifts from his elders filled Xu Qing’s heart with warmth. He accepted them and was about to say something when a beam of sword light suddenly shot toward him from above. Wild colors flashed in heaven and earth as five streams of sword energy turned into a sealing mark in front of him.

Then Grandpa Ninth's voice echoed out in heaven and earth.

"That's the will of my sword. If you use it all at once, it can slaughter an Imperial Sovereign!"

Xu Qing was visibly moved. After accepting everything, he took a deep breath and bowed to Grandma Fifth, Grandpa Eight, and in the direction the sword light had come from.

As the three venerable siblings looked on, he left the Moonrite Region.

A day later, a pagoda that glittered with starlight appeared in the clouds over Sea-Sealing County. Xu Qing stepped out of it. A moment later he was deep underground.

This had once been a palace of operations of an Ancient Emperor. And now, Xu Qing was standing outside of a hall in Plumdark's phoenix palace. Everything was quiet. There were no signs that anyone had disturbed this place.

It had been years since Xu Qing ordered this place to be sealed tight. There was a spell formation constantly active to ensure that Plumdark wasn't disturbed.

When Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior sensed Xu Qing's arrival, he appeared outside the grand hall. He bowed excitedly.

"Greetings, milord!" he said in a loud voice. "Milord, I've missed you so much! Don't worry. Little Freespirit has been cautious and conscientious this entire time. I've been standing guard and can tell you that no slip-ups have occurred. With me on guard here, not even a speck of dust has dared to show up!"

He was attempting to convey how useful he was. Though he had been a bit bored in this place, he was more than happy to be here. After all, the outside was a dangerous place, and following Xu Qing around made things even more dangerous. He was still constantly worried about being turned into cannon fodder....

Considering how strong he had become, he knew that if he left this place, he would probably be put to use in nine battles out of ten.... As far as Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was concerned, that was just too dangerous.

In all of the novels he had read, being the bodyguard of the protagonist's love interest always brought big rewards as long as you didn't mess up. That was why he was working so hard to paint himself as being very useful.

Xu Qing nodded and then looked at the phoenix temple. Plumdark had been seeking enlightenment for a lot longer than Xu Qing had expected.

Eventually he looked away and studied the surroundings. As Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior cautiously looked on, Xu Qing suddenly waved his hand.

The will of a god erupted out. Ripples spread to fill a 30-meter area, making everything within it distorted and difficult to see. However, it was possible to see a figure forming. It was a figure that settled cross-legged and then sank down into the ground.

Given that Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior wasn't up to date on everything that had happened, his eyes went wide. He was almost certain he had just seen another version of Xu Qing.... And that version of Xu Qing seemed cold, apathetic, and incredibly terrifying.

Shivering, the patriarch said, "Milord, was that...?"

"My god clone," Xu Qing replied calmly.

Considering that Ling'er was in the care of the Heir Apparent and his siblings, Xu Qing wasn't worried about her being kept safe in the thirty years to come. But he was worried about Plumdark. Therefore, he was going to leave his god clone behind, both to seek enlightenment of godly authority, and also, to stand guard over Plumdark. He had no intention of bringing his god clone with him on his journey. That was because in the place he was going... gods were not welcome.

Unfortunately, even though he was leaving his god clone behind in Revered Ancient, his immortal true self couldn't use his godly authority magics. That included his authority of sound, the carving knife formed from his godly authority of fate, and his taboo poison. All of those could only be used by his god clone.

That said, given I have my extreme immortal cultivation base, my battle prowess isn't any lower because of that.

Xu Qing reached up and rubbed his chest. The violet crystal was there. When he got his god clone back earlier, he had moved the violet crystal into his immortal body.

Looking one last time at the phoenix hall, he took a deep breath. As Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior offered respectful farewells, Xu Qing took a step forward and vanished. When he reappeared, he was outside the Sageheaven Pagoda high in the sky. The god vine swirled. The golden rat bowed its head. As Xu Qing landed on the pagoda, he looked down at Sea-Sealing County....

A few breaths of time passed. Eyes flashing with decisiveness, he stepped into the pagoda. It rumbled loudly then turned into a beam of light that shot over the horizon and toward... the outer sea!

"Back when we met that old man in the outer sea, he said that the place had a name. The Primeval Sea. It's a fantastic thing. Any location where it exists is a strategic spot and a prosperous place. And that's because the Primeval Sea connects all of the star rings in the universe.

"In other words, the outer sea is actually a passageway leading to other star rings. The part of the Primeval Sea in which the Ninth Star Ring lays is special. It's been sealed. And you can only get out of it through special rifts. He also said that you need the cultivation base of a Summer Immortal to make the journey."

As the pagoda sped toward the outer sea, Xu Qing sat cross-legged inside. He pulled out a white scale. It was actually a command medallion. Back when he left the Summer Immortal Palace, he had given up his spot in exchange for this travel medallion, which would allow him to travel the

Primeval Sea. With it, he could go to other star rings even though he wasn't a Summer Immortal. The process would still be very dangerous. It was a very special medallion. It was so special, in fact, that the palace lord only had three of them.

Xu Qing looked at it, then looked up. In his mind's eye, he could see that old man, and could hear the last words he had spoken.

"That's a world controlled by humans, and it's also a world of immortals."

It was the Fifth Star Ring, and it was also called... the Immortal Capital. Xu Qing took a deep breath. Putting the medallion away, he closed his eyes and started meditating.

In that manner, time passed.

Four hours later, the Sageheaven pagoda sped through the sky over the Forbidden Sea. The border between the inner sea and the outer sea... was getting closer and closer. Even as the pagoda sped along at top speed, a flirtatious peal of laughter reached his ears from outside.

"So, your primal yang is back, you naughty little boy."

Chapter 1089: You Know How to Thank Me, Naughty Boy, Don't You

In a location not very far from the border of the inner sea, the Sageheaven Pagoda had lurched to a halt as it flew through the sky.

Huge waves were surging out from one specific point, like a tsunami, as a statue that seemed as tall as the sky itself rose up from the water. The statue shone with dazzling golden light.

This was an actual god. The god towered over the ocean with such immense height that Xu Qing's pagoda looked like a tiny toy in comparison. Astonishingly, the statue looked like a fox. It was not made of clay, but rather, hard stone that was as red as flame. The fox actually looked very realistic. What was more, shē didn't pulse with the godfire of a Flawless God like before. No, this was the power of... an Altar God!!

To be precise, shē was halfway into the Altar God level, but was so strong that shē had the battle prowess of an Altar God. In response to the mere presence of an Altar God, brightly colored light flashed in heaven and earth. Terrifying godly might caused the dome of heaven above the sea to spin, creating a huge vortex. The vortex in the sky spun clockwise, while the sea churned counter-clockwise. As a result, everything in between the two vortexes rippled and distorted.

The fox started laughing.

Inside the pagoda, Xu Qing opened his eyes. He sighed in his heart. He had long been avoiding High God Starfire. And he definitely had not intended to run into hēr here. But there was no way of getting out of the situation now. So he stepped out of the pagoda. Hovering in the air, he looked at the majestic statue, clasped hands, and bowed.

“Well met, High God.”

It was no surprise to him that Starfire was just on the cusp of being an Altar God. After the ceremony the three gods had accomplished, it was a given that thēy would eventually become Altar Gods. What was more, they had fought many battles after the holy lands came. Though Grand Emperor Swordsage had ultimately absorbed the people of the holy lands when using his sword against them, they released power from the starry sky that the three gods could use to get stronger.

“What’s wrong, you charming rogue? You don’t seem too happy to see me. I’ve been really worried about you lately. In fact, I’ve been thinking about you all the time.”

Starfire’s flirtatious voice seemed to caress his ears and stroke his heart. As shē spoke, the statue shrank down to the size of an ordinary person. The stone turned into flesh, and within moments, shē was a bewitchingly charming woman, looking through the bubble that surrounded the pagoda and smiling enigmatically at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing wasn’t sure how to respond, so he chose not to say anything.

Seeing him like that caused High God Starfire to lick hēr lips. It was almost as if shē could see through his clothing as shē looked him up and down. Hēr eyes glittered charmingly and shē took a deep breath.

“Ah, whatever, you heartless rogue,” shē said in a tender voice. “Who out there went and made your primal yang so fragrant and sweet? Even when I’m angry at you, just looking at you... takes all the anger away. Now, tell me, are you really going to the outer sea?”

Xu Qing was used to the looks Starfire gave him, so it didn’t affect him. He nodded.

“What a coincidence,” Starfire said, blinking a few times. “I just so happen to be taking a trip to the outer sea as well. Why don’t we go together? Incidentally, why do you seem so leery? You won’t open that bubble, and you won’t come out either? What, you think I’m going to eat you or something? I’ve helped you a lot over the years, yet you’re treating me like a stranger!”

Anger flashed in Starfire’s eyes.

Xu Qing knew that he didn’t have any choice here. Starfire really had helped him a lot over the years, and what was more, shē was an ally to humankind. Sighing inwardly again, he waved his hand to dispel the bubble. Putting the Sageheaven Pagoda away, he approached Starfire.

“That’s better!” Then shē extended hēr hand so quickly that he couldn’t avoid it. Shē pinched his cheek and laughed happily. Then, looking much more pleased than before, shē took Xu Qing in the direction of the border.

It wasn’t very far away. In the blink of an eye, they were at the spot where the inner sea became the outer sea.

The color of the water was clearly different between the two. On one side it was violet. On the other side it was black. And in that spot where the violet and black met, there was a boat.

Seated cross-legged in the boat was a scholarly, middle-aged man, who was currently fishing. It was none other than Yu Liuchen. Hē didn't look up at Xu Qing and Starfire when they arrived. In contrast, a serious expression appeared on Starfire's face upon seeing hīm. Thēy were both gods, but the difference between the two was like the difference between heaven and earth.

After all, Yu Liuchen was getting close to being a True God.

Starfire realized that instantly. Taking a step forward so shē was in front of Xu Qing, shē bowed to Yu Liuchen.

Yu Liuchen's expression remained placid. "You're blocking my line of sight."

Saying nothing, Starfire stepped to the side.

Yu Liuchen slowly looked up at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing stepped forward and bowed respectfully. "Well met, Senior."

Yu Liuchen didn't say anything at first. Hē studied Xu Qing for a moment, then looked up at the dome of heaven.

"Did he smile in his final moments?" Yu Liuchen asked.

Xu Qing knew that the 'he' Yu Liuchen had just mentioned was obviously Grand Emperor Swordsage. Xu Qing didn't know the whole story about the history between Grand Emperor Swordsage and Yu Liuchen. But he had witnessed their interaction back in the battle in the imperial capital, and knew that Yu Liuchen had come to deliver a final sword to Swordsage. Based on everything that had played out, it was clear that Swordsage and Yu Liuchen were friends.

Originally, Xu Qing had assumed that it was virtually impossible for an immortal to be friends with a god. But the empress had become a god. And just now, Starfire had stood protectively in front of him. Because of things like that... Xu Qing had his own understanding of gods.

"He did," Xu Qing replied softly. "He smiled with happiness and contentment."

Yu Liuchen just sat there quietly for a moment. Then hīs gaze shifted from the sky and back to Xu Qing. Hē snorted coldly. "For the sake of that showboating attention-seeker...."

Yu Liuchen tugged on hīs fishing pole, causing a three-headed, nine-colored fish to fly up into the air. The freakish fish instantly exploded, and its blood then swirled into a sphere.

"There was a little showboater named Xu Qing who went out for training. A few years later, the showboater came back safely."

That was Yu Liuchen's story. And it was a blessing. When hē finished telling the story, it entered the sphere of blood, which wriggled and briefly shone with nine-colored light. Then the sphere collapsed, turning into dust that dissipated into heaven and earth.

Xu Qing felt something warm flowing through him. With a grateful look in his eye, he bowed at the waist.

Yu Liuchen looked away and continued fishing.

Shortly after, Starfire indicated that they should continue on their way. Passing Yu Liuchen, they left the inner sea. The moment they entered that other heaven and earth, Xu Qing sensed chaos and violence in the wind. They had arrived at the outer sea.

“I almost can’t believe hē gave you a blessing, you little rogue,” Starfire said. “That blessing is nothing short of profound. After all, hē’s going to become a True God any day now. Keep that blessing close to you at all times. When hē eventually does become a True God, you’ll essentially have the protection of a True God with you.”

From the frown on Starfire’s face, shē didn’t seem very happy. However, that didn’t stop hēr from explaining to Xu Qing how valuable the blessing was. Of course, the reason shē wasn’t happy was that, now that he had that blessing, shē couldn’t see his body like she had been able to before....

“Alright, where are you really planning to go?” shē asked. “I might not know the details, but your final destination obviously isn’t the outer sea. And I can sense that you have a travel medallion on you. Very few people know the truth about the outer sea. But it’s a given that we gods know the details.

“That said, using the outer sea to get to another star ring isn’t exactly easy. Maybe you do have a travel medallion, so you can bypass the cultivation base restriction. Unfortunately... just having a travel medallion doesn’t inherently mean your journey will go smoothly.”

Starfire looked meaningfully at Xu Qing.

He thought for a moment and opened his mouth to speak.

But Starfire interrupted him with a laugh. Not giving him the opportunity to say anything, shē licked hēr lips and said, “With me around, things are a bit different. If you want to use the outer sea to get to another star ring, you first have to open a passage. There are two ways to do that.

“One is by means of a special ceremony that requires the cooperation of at least three Altar Gods. You would also need a lot of godly entities to serve as nutrients. I could help you do that. Obviously, I’m half a step into the Altar God level, and my two sisters are the same. It would be difficult, but we should be able to open a passage for you. Unfortunately, that would be very draining, so you would need to think of a way to pay me back, right?”

Starfire seemed even more flirtatious than before.

Xu Qing, meanwhile, kept his expression the same as before. “What’s the second option?”

Starfire’s eyebrows shot up. “The second way? You can burn some star ring hemp to open a passage. Star ring hemp is cultivated for the specific purpose of opening passageways! On the outside, it looks like an ordinary plant. But it actually contains starlight. Unfortunately, star ring hemp is just about extinct, and there definitely isn’t any in Revered Ancient. The only way to get

even a tiny bit of it would be to trade with other star rings. And that's why you're going to have to go with the first option."

Xu Qing quietly pulled a piece of hemp out from his bag of holding. Starfire's eyes went wide. That hemp had come from the sandal of the old man he had met in the outer sea, and was the same hemp Xu Qing had first seen in the mouth of that golden rat.[1]

Back when he got the travel medallion at the Summer Immortal Palace, he had asked how to use it. The explanation had been the same as Starfire's just now. He had shown the palace lord the hemp, and she had confirmed that it really was star ring hemp. He had been about to explain that moments ago when Starfire interrupted him.

As Starfire stared blankly at the hemp, Xu Qing ignited it. A moment later... smoke rose up into the sky.

Despite how tiny the flame was, it let off massive amounts of smoke, which filled the sky and then settled down on the surface of the water. The water seethed. As it did, thirty-five vortexes appeared, all of them spinning and letting off ancient auras that shook everything dramatically.

1. Xu Qing saw the sandal and got the hemp in chapters 1003 and . ❸

Chapter 1090: Departing Revered Ancient, Striding Toward the Immortal Capital

Chapter 1090: Departing Revered Ancient, Striding Toward the Immortal Capital

The vortexes caused crackling, electric light to fill the sky of Revered Ancient's outer sea. Red lightning bolts danced about like writhing red snakes. It looked almost as if the canopy of heaven had been filled with innumerable red rifts, and was now hovering on the verge of collapse. The rifts eventually seemed to organize into something like an ancient sealing mark that constantly transformed and shifted. It was almost like some unimaginable entity performing an incantation gesture.

Thunderous booms shook the world, as if the fabric of heaven and earth were being sundered.

Boom. Boom! BOOM!

An immense wind blew, endless and chaotic. In addition to all that, the waters of the Primeval Sea began to churn wildly. Water sprayed everywhere as huge waves rolled out in all directions. The deafening sound made it seem like the entire sea itself was howling.

In many places in the outer sea, gods stirred in their dwelling places, eventually opening their eyes. None did anything to stop what was happening. In fact, they instinctively retracted their auras. As far as they were concerned, the majesty of the outer sea surpassed all other levels of life. And what was happening right now was the paramount godly authority of the Primeval Sea. Any who interfered would be hit by the power of a star ring.

The dramatic event wasn't just affecting the outer sea. The inner sea, and in fact, all of Revered Ancient, was trembling. And if one could look down at Revered Ancient as a whole, they would clearly see... lands quaking, mountains shaking, and rivers seething. Countless living beings from innumerable species were shaken to the core. It had been far too many years since a passageway in the Primeval Sea was opened.

The first method Starfire had mentioned wouldn't result in something like this. Only the burning of star ring hemp would cause the godly authority of the Primeval Sea to erupt. Star ring hemp was exceedingly rare, and as a result, Starfire could only look on, eyes wide with shock and heart pounding in astonishment.

Xu Qing himself had not been aware that something like this would happen. However, his attention was not focused on all of the side effects. He was looking closely at the thirty-five huge vortexes. His heart was racing.

Each and every vortex was the size of an entire city. They all looked exactly the same, be it in size, aura, or the speed with which they spun. In other words, there was no way to tell which vortex led to which star ring.

As Xu Qing's heart raced, the thirty-five vortexes all surged with the power of both time and space. Other ordinary cultivators wouldn't pick up on such nuance. But Xu Qing was not ordinary.

He had an immortal body and cultivated the Ten Extreme Daos. The first five of the extremes were the five elements. The sixth extreme was the substructure power of Fishing the Moon in the Well. And that was space. The seventh extreme came from the sundial of time.

Because of that, Xu Qing was sensitive to both space and time, in a way that surpassed ordinary people by a large margin. And thus, he could clearly sense that space and time were surging within the thirty-five vortexes. Slowly but surely, a resonance was forming with the sixth and seventh extremes. Because of that resonance, the time and space within Xu Qing began to pulse in response to the vortexes.

Xu Qing struggled to control his breathing. He was now getting the feeling that these thirty-five vortexes all contained secrets of time and space. As he stood there lost in thought, Starfire took a deep breath and looked at him.

"Not bad, you little rogue. You even have some star ring hemp up your sleeve. That's definitely not something I could have predicted. That said, star ring hemp can only *open* the passageways, and your travel medallion will only provide you some direction so you don't get lost.

"Sadly, once you enter a passageway, you have to worry about more than just getting lost. You also have to deal with the ripping force you experience when entering a new star ring. If you truly want safe passage, you need some sort of treasure from the starry sky. Maybe you have that godvine, but—"

Before Starfire could finish speaking, Xu Qing produced his Sageheaven Pagoda. As soon as it appeared he waved his finger at it. The pagoda trembled and then pulsed with a starry sky aura.

Starfire's eyes went wide. "That's a very interesting pagoda. It actually prevented me from sensing what's inside of it... that thing... has an extraordinary origin."

Starfire was shocked. However, all shē did was blink a few times as shē studied the pagoda. Then shē looked cool and apathetic as she continued, “Forget about what I said earlier. The most important thing about using the Primeval Sea to get to another star ring is making the right choice of passageway. I doubt you’re just planning to go somewhere randomly. You surely had a destination star ring in mind.

“Unfortunately, the thirty-five passageways are all random. They aren’t lined up in a specific sequence. If you want to pick one in particular, you have to make a deduction based on a host of clues. It can be very taxing on the mind and heart. Now, I can help you, you little rogue, on one condition....”

Starfire licked hēr lips and somehow looked even more flirtatious than before.

Looking back at hēr, Xu Qing pulled a golden rat out of his bag of holding. “I happen to have this very rare creature, and the place I’m going has others of its kind.”

Xu Qing sent out some divine will to the golden rat, which immediately looked at the thirty-five vortexes. Its nose twitched, and then it became a golden beam of light that shot toward the vortexes. It stopped at the first one, checked it, then looked back at Xu Qing in confusion.

Starfire chuckled. “Doesn’t seem very smart.”

Xu Qing sent it another message via divine will.

The golden hair on the rat all stood on end, and the power of its bloodline surged. As a result, the area around it rippled and distorted, as if both space and time were changing.

Starfire’s gaze hardened.

After a moment of thought, Xu Qing sent out the dao of extreme space and the dao of extreme time to help. The golden rat shivered, and its eyes shone with unprecedented amounts of golden light as it peered at the other vortexes. It burst into motion.

It stopped briefly at the third, fifth, twenty-third, and thirtieth vortex. Then it squeaked excitedly at Xu Qing. After that, it hurried back into Xu Qing’s arms, where it sagged in exhaustion

“Which was the strongest?” he asked.

The golden rat thought, looked at the thirty-five vortexes, and then pointed its paw at the twenty-third vortex. It issued a few more squeaks.

Starfire’s eyes shone coldly as shē looked at the golden rat.

The golden rat shivered and then burrowed back into the bag of holding.

Xu Qing, meanwhile, looked at the twenty-third vortex with a gaze of determination. He had met all the requirements. Although he couldn’t be absolutely confident that the twenty-third vortex would take him to the Fifth Star Ring, at the very least... it was the most likely option. After all, that old man’s golden rat had been extremely powerful.

Xu Qing took a deep breath and prepared to say farewell to Starfire.

However, that was when Starfire chuckled again. “Aiya, you cute little whore. Ah, fine, whatever....”

Continuing to chuckle, shē softly exhaled, all while emanating golden light. Hēr breath swirled out in front of hēr, ultimately turning into a hand-sized little fox. It was a clone of hēr.

Before Xu Qing could object, it shot over and landed on his shoulder, where it stuck out its little tongue and licked his neck. Looking intoxicated, it flirtatiously said, “What are you staring at, you little devil? Let’s go!”

But Xu Qing was as stiff as a board. He turned to look at the fox on his shoulder. “Senior....”

“Senior? Don’t call me Senior. Call me Big Sis.” The little fox once again licked his neck, then laughed coquettishly. “I wasn’t planning to come along, but since you wanted to keep me away, I made the decision to stay in Revered Ancient with my true form and send a clone with you.

“I guarantee that at some point on this trip, little buddy, I’ll figure out a way to get your primal yang with no objections. What are you still staring for? Let’s go!”

Xu Qing frowned. “Senior,” he said quietly, “the place I’m going isn’t very friendly toward gods.”

The little fox chuckled. “Are you trying to tell me the species of Revered Ancient are friendly toward gods? I don’t care. As long as you come with friendly intentions, and given that I’m just a clone, it won’t matter.”

Xu Qing considered the situation for a few breaths of time before sighing again inside. He knew he wasn’t going to be able to get out of this situation. The only thing he wasn’t sure about was how the people in the Fifth Star Ring would treat a god. But now wasn’t the time to sit around contemplating things. Besides, having Starfire’s clone along on the journey might make things easier.

With that thought in mind, Xu Qing stepped into the Sageheaven Pagoda and had the god vine send glittering starlight out to bolster it. The pagoda rumbled loudly and shot toward the twenty-third vortex. It flew inside.

The power of time erupted. The tearing sensation inside the vortex grew intense. Time also flowed chaotically inside the spinning vortex. Both space and time felt like they were being stretched out.

Then a voice spoke from outside, burrowing into space and flowing through time. It avoided all outside senses and entered directly into Xu Qing’s mind.

“You owe me the price of a wish.... The price you have to pay... is one specific thing, and nothing else. I want the statue of Eminent Desolation held in the imperial capital of the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan.... At some point in the future, you will give it to me. Consider it karma between us.”[1]

1. It wasn’t very long ago, but it seems like a lot has happened since the mask was cut off in the middle of stating its price for the wish in [chapter 1078](#). ⁶¹

