

Beyond the Timescape

Chapter 1151: Three Incenses, Three Karmas

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Peak Imperial Sovereign! Xu Qing's expression did not change. It remained completely and utterly as normal. That was how the young lord would act. He might be a lecher who numerous cultivators despised, but there was one thing that everyone had to admit.

He had a superior cultivation base, superior battle prowess, superior talent, and had not failed to perform the way everyone expected Aurora's son to perform. His cultivation base was only half a step away from Quasi-Immortal, and as for his battle prowess... it was astonishing. In fact, some years ago he had actually fought with a Quasi-Immortal.

The only negative was that he had faltered a bit in staying focused, and thus his cultivation advancement had stalled.

But Xu Qing knew that his insights into the young lord surpassed what most observers knew.

Although other people believed the young lord to be lazy, the reality was that he had been working very hard in secret. The blood, sweat, and tears he had shed surpassed what most cultivators were aware of.

For some unknown reason, however, he had failed to make any cultivation advancement recently. It was only after some time that the image he presented to people became the reality.

But regardless of anything, he was still Young Lord Aurora. Therefore, though his progress had stalled, his battle prowess was not something to look down on. And as he walked forward in the arena, the sky trembled and the ground quaked. The thumping of the war drums in the arena went silent. Terrifying fluctuations rolled out from Xu Qing, becoming mountain-toppling, sea-draining waves of black fire that could consume anything and everything.

That fire was substructurally different from ordinary fire. In fact, it was similarly different even from immortal fire. To be most precise, this fire fundamentally wasn't even fire. It just borrowed the concept of fire so that people could perceive it.

It had a name: karma fire!

Karma fire spread, filling the area around Li the Chosen, and it looked like it was just about to engulf and incinerate him. All eyes were locked onto the spot.

As everyone stared, Li the Chosen's eyes glittered, and he lifted his hand and pointed to the sky. That movement caused the dome of heaven to dim. Heaven and earth turned pitch black. Within that utter darkness appeared an enormous rising sun. With it came the power of the morning, sending fiery, heavenly light exploding out in all directions.

Especially noteworthy was the fact that the huge rising sun was so majestic that it crushed down on the karma fire. It was a very astonishing sight.

Young Lord Aurora's karma fire and Li the Chosen's huge sun were both shocking to the extreme. If it weren't for the fact that everyone knew what cultivation base these two had, they would assume... that they were Quasi-Immortals.

Then, a deafening rumbling sound spread, like heavenly thunder. The karma fire and the huge sun connected, creating an interchange of the power of karma with the light of heaven. As dazzling light turned into an endless tempest, Li the Chosen laughed, and as a result, all sound in the area was suppressed.

"Very interesting. I guess all the drinking and womanizing hasn't fully drained you yet. Look, there's no need for us to waste time testing each other out. Why not... just end this fight right away!"

Li the Chosen strode forward, crossing through the karma flame and rising into the air. Looking down, he performed an incantation gesture with his right hand, then touched his forehead. Instantly, his forehead became the surface of a rippling lake, the fluctuations of which affected the air behind him.

A huge lake formed behind him, which rapidly turned into a sea. Waves crashed on the surface of the sea as thirteen altars rose up from its depths. Each altar bore the ravages of time, and exuded an ancient aura and shone with golden light. Their design had a primitive simplicity; clearly they had been constructed in a cultivation era when things were very different from modern times.

It hardly took a moment for people to recognize where they were from. Even Xu Qing was familiar with the style and aura of the altars. They were... altars from gods.

The thirteen altars began to vibrate, sending golden light shining out accompanied by the aura of the gods. Mutagen spread everywhere, distorting the sky and causing the land to ripple. Gods stepped out of the altars, and images filled the dome of heaven. Everyone was terrified.

were Flawless Gods! It defied description!

After arriving, the gods turned to face Li the Chosen and... bowed to him! Thirteen gods were bowing to him! These were gods that Li the Chosen had slaughtered over the years, all of whom had major karmic connections to him.

Gods existed to be worshiped by the world, but here the gods were worshiping a person. Whoever worshiped would then have a foundation to rise to a higher level and become someone worshiped by gods. If gods worshiped a person, then that person obviously surpassed the gods.

And then, to the astonishment of all, the worship of the thirteen gods caused a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering power to build within Li the Chosen.

This was Li the Chosen's canon! The worship of gods would push him to a higher level. After all, these gods had effectively become believers in him, and were offering him own joss flame.

Li the Chosen's canon was about making gods into believers, and thus gathering the joss flame of gods! Theoretically speaking, the more gods he killed, the more gods would worship him. And as a result, his canon would become increasingly powerful. Having gained enlightenment of this canon... was enough for him to truly be called the top 'chosen' in this generation.

What was more, everything so far was simply the foundation of this canon. Li the Chosen had much more he could do, and he wasn't about to stop now. He had already created a personal... canon technique!

"Canon presents the chart of twenty-four incenses, used to distinguish good and bad luck!

"First incense: incense of compelling death! He whose life is at an end stands just ahead!"

Li the Chosen's voice sounded like a dao resonance, echoing out with the power of canon. As it did, the joss flame around him converged into three sticks of joss incense! Two were long, one was short! They ignited to compel death![1]

Everything in the area seemed to spin as a gruish curse suddenly built up on Xu Qing. His physical features began to decay. His face became old, which was the sign in all living things that a full life was reaching an end. His sense of smell decayed. All the lures of life, and all its joy, faded away. His sense of taste decayed. All of the sundry experiences of life became meaningless. Next, his sense of touch decayed. His ability to perceive the world weakened, just as the fingertips in wintertime find it hard to experience the warmth of a spring breeze. Finally, his sense of hearing decayed. It wasn't just the sound he could hear with his ears, but also the sound of his soul. Both became silent.

The five signs of decay arrived, and death was being compelled. His life hung on a thread.[2]

Everyone in the arena was shaken to the core. That was especially true of Li Mengtu, who stood there in the guise of Zhong Chi.

That canon is extraordinary. What a pity that... historically speaking, this guy perishes when catastrophe strikes the immortal palace in a month. After that, the joss flame canon that he created was lost forever. I wonder... if I could create a chance to study that canon while I'm here.

Li Mengtu was starting to get a bit excited.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing was also getting excited. The number of canons you possessed wouldn't affect your cultivation level. But Li the Chosen's canon seemed unusually suitable for the environment of the Revered Ancient mainland.

However, now was not the time to study it closely. The moment he sensed death being compelled on him, Xu Qing reached up and wiped his fingers on his lips.

That motion... activated his canon! The external manifestation was rumbling in the sky as countless lightning bolts formed into a hand.

It looked like the hand of an old man. And it was performing an incantation gesture. The hand caused heaven and earth to rumble in unison. Innumerable magics trembled, and the natural and magical laws of the world all reacted. The incantation provoked shocked reactions from all cultivators, and stunned all the immortals. All living beings reeled.

Li the Chosen's canon was extraordinary, but Xu Qing's host was Aurora's son, and his was even more spectacular.

Three-Karmas Ten-Evils Seal!

Karma fire was only the foundation. There were other fantastic uses for the canon that had yet to be unleashed. The so-called three karmas were that of the mouth, body, and thought.[3]

Upon facing the incense of compelling death, Xu Qing first chose... to seal the karma of the mouth!

When the mouth could not speak, the karma of the mouth was pure! When the karma of the mouth was pure, the body could be at peace. When the body was at peace, one could be fully without concern! When one was fully without concern, ten thousand thoughts could flourish! Sealing one's own mouth would seal one away from death!

The incense of compelling death was gruish, and actually couldn't be dealt with directly. But when the act of compelling death failed... it inevitably led to a huge backlash. Li the Chosen's face fell. Shivering, he coughed up a huge mouthful of black blood, and his aura decayed significantly. However, the fight wasn't over.

The next instant, his eyes flashed with cold light, and he pointed his finger up into the sky again.

Instantly, the joss flame returned, forming a second type of incense!

It was often said that fortune and misfortune are brought on oneself, and that there was always the cause and effect of karma to explain it.[4]

The cause of karma was on the left, the effect of karma was on the right. And the left was higher than the right. In the middle was calamity, which was lower than either, and suffered the most. In this way, the incense of evil deeds could focus on slaughter![5]

It was also known as the three incenses of left, right, and middle, which can exterminate a billion kalpas![6]

The burning of the incense influenced the evil of heaven, the evil of earth, and the evil of man, as well as the evil of all thought, and sent that evil toward Xu Qing. Dense evil became a nightmare that raged in all directions. Wild colors flashed in heaven and earth. Winds screamed. And the power of countless evils converged... and descended. A sensation of death proliferated.

Without any hesitation, Xu Qing tapped into his own canon. The hand of lightning switched to a different gesture.

The second of the three karmas swept over him. It was sealing the karma of the body! The body could not tread a vile path, could not harm life, could not kill, steal, or be obscene. The karma of

the body was absolutely pure. When the body was pure, nothing in existence could defile it. No wickedness could stain it.

It was as if it did not exist in the cause and effect of karma, and thus, the evil incense had nothing to lock onto. It had no place in the world, giving the evil incense nothing to grip. Since the evil had nothing to lock onto and nothing to grip, after it arrived, it could only... backfire!

Li the Chosen's face fell dramatically. His face twitched. His heart lurched. A sensation of death swept toward him, and thus, he didn't hesitate to unleash a third type of incense.

In this case, all three sticks of incense were level with each other. This type of incense didn't compel death, it was not about evil deeds. Instead, it protected peace and security![7]

The three types of incense he had used were the limit of what he could reveal publicly. Thus, he was already backing up at top speed. And that was because he could sense terrifying fluctuations coming from Young Lord Aurora.

Those fluctuations came from the last of the three karmas.

It was the karma of thought! The hand of lightning transformed again, as the will of karma descended.

Thoughts and actions can be righteous or evil. Good karma could include refraining from greed, anger, or unorthodox opinions. It could bless the body, become boundless benevolence, and illuminate anything and everything with great auspiciousness. Bad karma could include embracing greed, anger, or unorthodox opinion. It could lead one to worshipping false deities, make one as dark as a wretched devil, take away light, and bring misfortune.

This seal did not lock down the body or bind the mouth. It put fetters on canon! An instant later, Li the Chosen's incense of peace and security crumbled into ashes. Peace and security had failed!

Blood sprayed. Life hung on a thread.

As the moment of crisis built, Li the Chosen desperately called out, "Young Lord, your humble servant admits defeat! Please accept the fox maiden. I'm willing to submit to you and become your study partner for a hundred years!"

1. The chart of twenty-four incenses is a real thing from ancient Chinese divination. What's more, the "incense of compelling death" is on that chart, and just as described in the narrative here, it features two long sticks of incense and one short one. To see for yourself, [check this picture](#). The "compelling death" incense is on the very bottom left. Just to be clear, I'm not an expert about these things in any sense. I hadn't heard about this chart of 24 incenses until I read this chapter. I did some searching in the hopes of finding information in English, or perhaps a version of the chart translated into English, but didn't find anything. ❸

2. The 'five signs of decay' are a real thing from Buddhism, and they're supposedly an indication of approaching death. The descriptions of the five signs that I could find do not match those described by the author here. However, the definitions I found tend to mention that the signs vary. ❹

3. As I mentioned previously, the three karmas are a real thing from Buddhism. There can be different groups of three. But in this case, the karmas of mouth, body, and thought are actually the most common versions, at least in the definitions I found when I looked this stuff up. ㊦

4. Now we have the karma from the three karmas being used side-by-side with the term I ordinarily render as karma. For the duration of this scene, I will make the difference obvious by using “cause and effect” to identify the more common version of karma. ㊦

5. The description of left, right, and center describes the three incense sticks from the ‘incense of evil deeds’ from the twenty-four incenses. If you look at [the picture](#), you can find that depiction in the right-most column, in picture number 4 (counting down from the top). ㊦

6. I really hate the character for ‘kalpa,’ the reason being that in xianxia, or at least in the works of Er Gen, it more often means ‘tribulation.’ In this context, I believe kalpa is the correct interpretation. A kalpa is a long period of time, generally between the creation and recreation of a world or universe. I believe this passage is intended to be hyperbole and cool-sounding. It’s not supposed to literally be talking about kalpas. ㊦

7. On [the chart](#) of twenty-four incenses, this is the very first one on the top left. ㊦

Chapter 1152: A Different Path

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Li Mengtu’s heart was pounding, and his eyes were narrowed as he looked up into the air at Li the Chosen, who had just shouted out his surrender.

This was not what happened historically speaking! In real life, Young Lord Aurora did win, and did win the fox maiden. But Li the Chosen didn’t bend the knee. Instead, he returned to the university and went into seclusion, hoping to use what he had learned in the fight to achieve a cultivation breakthrough. Unfortunately, he never succeeded, because he died with everyone else a month later.

But in this version of history, something different happened. At least, that was what Li Mengtu initially thought. He couldn’t be completely sure. Maybe this did happen, but the historical record was altered later. That said, there was one thing he knew with certainty.

Young Lord Aurora only had one study partner. And that meant that the most salient aspect of the situation now was how the young lord responded. If he agreed to the offer, it would mean history had changed. If he refused, then things would continue on as they had in real life.

Li Mengtu’s thoughts were completely astir.

I bet this Li the Chosen is actually like me. An outsider. It doesn’t really matter who it is. The important thing is that this is a good opportunity to see how this person leverages history. It’ll give me a good point of reference!

Li Mengtu quickly looked over at Young Lord Aurora. He wasn't the only one. Everyone in the arena was doing the same thing. For one thing, each of the fighters had used some very gruishing techniques, and were astonishingly powerful. Beyond that, it was unusual that the arrogant Li the Chosen was choosing to submit to his opponent.

Thus, everyone was waiting to see what decision Young Lord Aurora would make.

Xu Qing didn't answer immediately. Instead, he studied Li the Chosen, his eyes narrowed as he analyzed the situation.

If changing history was this simple, there would be no point to this whole thing. My guess is that this is actually a mere reflection of real history. But... even just being a reflection, we're talking about an Immortal Lord here. Changing things should be extremely difficult. So, where exactly does that difficulty lie?

Xu Qing looked Li the Chosen up and down. Whether it was his physical presence or his actions, he seemed like the perfect test subject to use to find out if there would be resistance to a historical change.

Li the Chosen could tell that he was being observed closely, and he was starting to get nervous. The reason was that, as Li Mengtu had guessed, he was an outsider occupying Li the Chosen as his host.

It was no accident that he had mentioned becoming the young lord's study partner before they started fighting. He knew that it didn't conform to history. But it was related to his canon, which was an obscuring mist.

It was no ordinary mist. It came from nowhere, from somewhere mysterious, from ancient time. Put precisely, it came from history. The obscuring mist of history was the source of his canon. Therefore, the way to develop his canon was to perceive history.

The more comprehensive his perception, the more he was able to part the obscuring mist. As the mist parted, he was able to control, and push his canon further toward completion. He knew full well that this path would end in full omniscience related to true history.

Therefore, this fight with Young Lord Aurora was partly real, but also partly staged. He had taken advantage of the situation to intentionally surrender!

The entire point was to get close to Young Lord Aurora! In order to guarantee success, he made his actions completely logical, and also brought a large number of cultivators to bear witness. He did everything so that it would seem completely reasonable for him to surrender. After all, his host was a person who valued commitments.

And this was the only historical instance in which his host had actually interacted with Young Lord Aurora. In other words, this was a very important moment.

This part of history features two important people. The first is Immortal Lord Aurora himself. The other is the young lord. It's only by getting close to them that I can completely understand everything that happened, including the things that were kept secret later on.

This whole thing relates to the Immortal Paragon. Years later, it was said that he was putting down a rebellion when he crushed the Aurora Immortal Palace. But I'm already seeing clues pointing to something else!

Otherwise, why would the Aurora Immortal Palace's fourth world suddenly lead to this very specific point in history? It seems obvious that the purpose is to reveal some secret.... I just wonder if I can figure out what it is. If I want to understand all history, if I want to get a sufficient perspective, then I need to get close to one of the two most important people.

And thus, he looked at Young Lord Aurora and waited for an answer.

Before Xu Qing could respond, a bright beam of light shot out of the sky. It looked like a magnificent brushstroke, painting a line of color that could never fade. It came with a boundless majesty and power, like the most primordial howl of a heavenly dao. It also seemed to contain a deep sigh. It got closer and closer, causing all things to tremble. Inside the immortal palace, rivers and lakes lost their color.

Eventually, the beam of light disappeared, leaving a person on the dueling stage, standing there tall and straight. As soon as the crowd saw who it was, they got to their feet and bowed respectfully.

“Well met, True Monarch!”

He was none other than Immortal Lord Aurora's fourth apprentice. Fourth True Monarch was very famous. He had lived a very colorful life in his youth, being extremely intelligent and very capable at playing Go.

On one random occasion, he caught the attention of Immortal Lord Aurora. The two of them played five games of Go, and while the Immortal Lord won four times, he lost once. Recognizing how incredible the youngster was, he took him as a successor apprentice.

Fourth True Monarch had not disappointed the Immortal Lord. As he advanced his cultivation, he showed incredible wisdom and capability. His talents surpassed that of ordinary people, and he was a very hard worker. Everyone in the immortal palace knew that he was keenly insightful, as well as creative. At the same time, he had a kindly disposition and was always warm and welcoming. It didn't take long before everyone in the immortal palace liked him.

Everyone present was offering respectful greetings.

Xu Qing made sure to smile. According to his host's memories, he had a very good relationship with Fourth True Monarch. In many cases, Fourth True Monarch was like a big brother to him, and even spoiled him sometimes.

Keeping the smile on his face, he said, “I didn't realize you had so much free time that you would show up here, Elder Brother Fourth.”

Fourth True Monarch gave a faint nod to the crowd, then turned to look at Xu Qing, his expression that of a kindly big brother.

“Little Junior Brother, just now, Master left to acquire some betrothal gifts on your behalf. Before leaving, he told me to keep an eye on you and make sure you don’t get into any further trouble.” Fourth True Monarch grinned and shook his head helplessly. “The way I see it, no matter what trouble you get into, I can help you smooth things over. So the real message I want to pass to you is to avoid letting people get close to you who have ulterior motives or malicious intentions. For example... Li the Chosen.”

When Fourth True Monarch spoke that last sentence, his tone became as cold as ice. And then he glanced at Li the Chosen, his gaze suddenly incredibly fierce.

One look was all it took.

Li the Chosen shivered from head to toe and he backed up a few paces. He suddenly felt like his soul was vibrating, to the point where he might lose consciousness. Li the Chosen was visibly taken aback. He could clearly sense that Fourth True Monarch had the ability to strip him of all strength.

“Little Junior Brother, you were already assigned a study partner by Master. There’s no need for another.” Fourth True Monarch looked back at Xu Qing, and his expression was once again kind. “Especially one with such unclear intentions. In a month, Master will be taking over the star ring, so there will no doubt be people trying to cozy up to you for unknown reasons.

“You’ve really got some guts, Li the Chosen! Get the hell back to the university. And you’ll stay there for thirty years! Let your punishment be a warning to others!”

His gaze and words caused great pressure to weigh down on Li the Chosen, and he couldn’t stop himself from taking a few steps back. He wanted to say something, but the stifling pressure made it impossible.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing smiled in response to Fourth True Monarch, and did nothing to interfere. For one thing, it seemed to him that messing with history here wouldn’t do anything real to space-time. A second reason was that he had already benefited quite a bit. By reading between the lines, it became obvious what Fourth True Monarch was up to.

A third factor in his decision was that Li the Chosen was clearly scared and didn’t want to keep fighting. There would be no point in trying to continue the duel.

Xu Qing nodded. “That makes a lot of sense, Elder Brother Fourth. I didn’t think about that.”

Fourth True Monarch’s smile grew warmer, and he took out a jug of alcohol that he gave to Xu Qing. “I sent someone out to Skyblack City yesterday to get a jug of Heavendew from your favorite tavern. They only make one jug of it per month. I didn’t want you to miss your chance to get your hands on it while you were stuck being punished by Master. So I got it for you.”

Xu Qing’s face lit up. Accepting the alcohol, he smiled and offered thanks.

Fourth True Monarch smiled in return and was about to say something further.

Off to the side, Li Mengtu in the guise of Zhong Chi was feeling a bit disgruntled. He had been interested to see what would happen if someone altered history, and had even been wondering about getting Li the Chosen's canon. But if Li the Chosen went into seclusion now, there would be no chance of that happening. After weighing things over, he made a snap decision.

If Fourth True Monarch isn't an outsider, then nothing I say will do anything. But if he is an outsider, then we'll eventually run into each other again at some point. In fact, I bet it's possible he already knows my true identity.

Having reached this point in his train of thought, he leaned over to Xu Qing and quietly said, "Young Lord, this Li the Chosen is an interesting fellow. Before the fight he was acting all arrogant, and even said that if he lost he would be your study partner for a hundred years. But now he's not making a peep. He looks crestfallen. He has a reputation for honoring commitments, but it seems to me that's complete nonsense.

"In short order, I'll make sure to spread this news through the whole palace. Before long, Li the Chosen is going to be a complete laughing stock!"

As Zhong Chi spoke those words, Xu Qing sensed ripples in space-time.

Fourth True Monarch suddenly looked over at Zhong Chi, his gaze icy.

Meanwhile, Li the Chosen also heard what had just been said, and he seemed to be struggling inwardly. In the end, he threw caution to the wind. Striding forward quickly, he dropped to his knees in front of Xu Qing.

"Young Lord, please allow me to preserve my reputation. I admitted defeat already. I couldn't possibly just leave the arena now!"

The space-time fluctuations that no one but Xu Qing could feel were getting stronger.

Of course, Fourth True Monarch was really Sir Star Ring. At the moment, his heart was sinking, and he was preparing to open his mouth and speak.

Before he could, Xu Qing smiled and casually said, "Well, that makes sense too. But you can't be my study partner. If you want to live up to your word, you can head over to my beast ranch and take care of my spirit beasts for a hundred years."

Xu Qing looked at Fourth True Monarch. "What do you say, Elder Brother Fourth?"

Fourth True Monarch seemed to be somewhat at a loss for words. Smiling, he shook his head. "I guess that's fine. In any case, I have other matters to attend to now. So... I'll leave everything in your hands."

After glancing at Zhong Chi, he turned and vanished into thin air.

Xu Qing kept the same smile on his face the whole time. But by the time Fourth True Monarch had left, he had reached a clear conclusion.

That guy is definitely an outsider. And he made some interesting choices.... So, he doesn't want people changing history here. But why?

Chapter 1153: A Reflection on a Lake

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In the east of the Aurora Immortal Palace, behind the university, was the Young Aurora Hall. The hall wasn't small by any means. It was shielded from divine will by a spell formation that operated year round. From the outside, the architecture looked utilitarian, with the only unusual aspect being the sea of flowers that surrounded it.

Occasionally, it was referred to by the name Hundred Flowers Hall or Hundred Flowers Palace.

The reality was... the real Hundred Flowers Palace was inside. It was located in the south part of Young Aurora Hall, and at night, it was illuminated by countless bright lanterns that radiated dazzlingly, making it seem like daytime inside.

The exterior walls were made from countless exotic flowers and vines. It was very colorful and exuded a fragrant aroma. Whenever the wind blew, the flowers would rustle and release more of their perfume. The interior was decorated like an immortal paradise. It featured jewels, jade, and gold, all dazzlingly spectacular.

There were flowers everywhere, all vying with each other in terms of glamor and beauty. Some were tender and pure. Some were noble and refined. Some were alluring and enchanting. It was as if every aspect of beauty was gathered here.[1]

In the middle of the hall was an enormous pond. There were rare flowers within it, and their frolicking caused ripples to flow out over the surface of the water.

Most eye-catching of all was a peony that had been brought in from the outside. She was a brightly colored peerless beauty, like the queen of all flowers, and she radiated glamor and charm. Her gauzy clothing swished as she shyly stuck close to Xu Qing.... At a certain point, she gently placed a peeled lychee into his mouth.

Xu Qing ate it as he quietly looked around at the sea of flowers.

The lotuses were pure. The roses were passionate. Every single one of them was so beautiful she could cause the downfall of a city or nation. Their skin was as fair as snow, and their faces as gorgeous as paintings. Some were not just beautiful, but also, exceedingly capable. Some played musical instruments, or danced, or sang for Xu Qing.

In a lovely place like this, it would be easy to forget the time and date. One would quickly fall into something like a trance.

It was just like the poem:

"Beautiful women like flowers in the clouds.

“Up above was a vast blue sky.

“Down below were rippling green waters.”[2]

Xu Qing sighed deep in his heart. *No wonder the Immortal Lord wants me to tear down the Hundred Flowers Palace....*

Considering he was trying to maintain the image of being Young Lord Aurora, he had come here to the Hundred Flowers Palace to understand what the young lord’s life was like. What was causing Xu Qing the biggest headache though... weren’t the ‘hundred flowers’ here. It was the peony from the outside who kept feeding him lychees.

That peony was, of course, the fox maiden. Xu Qing had won the competition, and thus, the fox maiden had been sticking by his side ever since.

Biting her lip bashfully, the fox maiden spoke in a voice so entrancing it could wrest one’s soul out into the open. “Young Lord, what do you think of your humble slave girl’s lychees? They’re delicious, wouldn’t you say?”

Xu Qing sighed inwardly, and shifted his gaze to look at the woman who seemed like a peony one moment and a devil’s trumpet the other.[3]

“Aren’t you worried someone will realize who you really are?” Xu Qing asked with a frown.

By now, his battle prowess was on a completely different level than it had been in Revered Ancient. It had risen to such a high level that the difference compared to before was like that between heaven and earth. Nowadays, he could fight any god that was not at the Altar God level, and when it came to cultivators, he could fight with any under the Quasi-Immortal level.

Starfire was extremely close to being an Altar God, in other words, equivalent to a peak Imperial Sovereign in the great circle. That meant was strong, but not strong enough that he couldn’t fight if necessary. Of course, that didn’t mean he would be guaranteed to win.

“What are you looking at me like that for?” Starfire said, blushing all the way down to neck. “You look like you want to spank me.” shifted body and lifted rear end toward him. “Do you want to? Spank me a bit?”

Xu Qing looked at coldly.

laughed softly. “I love it when you’re all cold like that. Alright, fine. I get it. You’re worried about me, right? It’s just that I have to get out sometimes, otherwise I’ll get bored to death. I was also worried that you would forget about me, Young Lord.”

Xu Qing did not seem to be affected by words. “It is what it is. But what are you really after? Don’t try to keep it a secret. You haven’t forgotten what I told you when you demanded to come with me, have you?”

blinked a few times. “You told me something? Really? I can’t remember.”

“Then I’ll explain again,” he went on calmly. “This place is forbidden to gods unless they’re slaves. It’s up to you to stay alive.”

Starfire smiled charmingly. “Oh, slaves? That’s it? Not a big deal. Didn’t I call myself your slave girl? I’m perfectly happy being enslaved by you.”

Xu Qing ignored and turned to leave. He had come to the Hundred Flowers Palace to further the act, and now he had other things to do.

Seeing that he was leaving, Starfire’s beautiful eyes glittered. “Okay, okay. Your humble slave girl will tell the truth. Happy? The reason I came here is that I’m confident I won’t be noticed. After all, this isn’t real history. It’s a foundation built on memories of the immortal palace, reflected as if on a mirror. That’s all.

“That said, if you can stay in control, you can achieve outstanding results. For example, if you alter the history in the mirror, it will cause space-time fluctuations that will increase your own level of mastery and enlightenment.

“I just wanted to get an identity in here so that if you succeed with the space-time ripples, then I could possibly have that identity permanently bestowed on me. That way, the will of the Fifth Star Ring won’t be constantly trying to reject me.

“Of course, it’s more than your own power that will determine your success. We’ll have to see if the Immortal Paragon will permit you to alter the history in this reflection. Well, that’s everything. Now you can go handle your business. Don’t worry about me, okay?” flashed a smile.

Xu Qing looked over his shoulder at then left the Hundred Flowers Palace. As he walked through Young Aurora Hall, he thought about everything.

I’d say there’s an eighty to ninety percent chance that Fourth True Monarch was possessed by an outsider. He showed up right in the moment when history was about to be changed. And that means that his dao is in opposition to mine.

The Shining Stars all have their own goals in this place. Based on what Li Mengtu and Li the Chosen did, I can tell that they want to change history. That indicates that there must be two camps here. One camp wants to preserve historicity, while the others want to create ripples in the history of time. I can’t be sure of the details though. I need to do some more investigation before I can make a final determination.

If my speculations are correct, then I should be secretly helping the camp that wants to create ripples in history. I should make sure that they succeed in whatever they’re trying to do. The end result will be the massive fluctuations that I seek! I suppose that my next task should be to figure out which roles the Shining Stars are playing.

The sky was changing color. It was still dark, but dawn was coming. The moon illuminated the sky at this, its coldest point.

Sensing something, Xu Qing looked up at the canopy of heaven.

At this point in history, the blood-red aurora did not yet exist in the sky. There was still a moon and a sun. Similar to the suns and moons of Revered Ancient, the sun and moon here were not simple heavenly bodies. Both of them were living things that contain spectacular power.

Based on his host's memories, he knew that the moon was named Clearbright. It was delicate and covered with shimmering silver light that filled the world with peace and harmony.

In a month, the moonlight will go away forever. Same with the sun.

As Xu Qing pondered such things, dawn came. The moon gradually disappeared, and the shining rays of the morning sun stretched out from the dark horizon.

In the Fifth Star Ring, the sun was named Fyreblaze. Its exterior was that of scorching fire and dazzling heat. It was so strong and warm that it could bring light and heat to all living beings in the star ring.

Xu Qing watched it rise.

It was daytime. As the morning sun delivered light, it also delivered... a person.

He was a middle-aged man dressed in a utilitarian white robe. The robe was embroidered with elegant cloud patterns, so as he neared, it seemed like a wind was blowing. His features were both ordinary and extraordinary. He had a prominent nose, as well as tight lips that seemed incapable of ever smiling. His expression was as cold as a snowy mountain peak, filled with unfathomable dignity. His bright eyes were like seas, glittering sharply as if they could pierce through to the reality of anything and everything.

Upon entering, his every step imparted a sense of mystery and wonder. Soon, he was standing right in front of Xu Qing.

"Father," Xu Qing said, bowing his head.

This person was none other than Immortal Lord Aurora! As he stood there, he kept his aura reined inside, making him seem like a dormant volcano that might erupt at any moment. His coldness and apathy came because he had long since come to see through the luxury and vanity of the mortal world. As a result, he was no longer so deeply attached to ordinary things.

Voice cold, he said, "I'm taking you somewhere."

The moment his voice rang out, heaven and earth spun, and everything blurred. They were no longer in the immortal palace. They were on a frozen lake.

"Follow me. This is the last thing I'm going to do for you as your father." He started walking.

Xu Qing's mind was starting to race, but he forced himself to remain clear-headed as he followed.

It was a very special lake. It was like a mirror that reflected the light in the sky, as well as the condition of the heart. When one walked on it, the reflection below would be unique and different.

As Xu Qing looked down, he realized that the reflection was that of his true form! He was stunned, yet the Immortal Lord in front of him didn't seem to notice or care.

Xu Qing hesitated for a moment before looking at Immortal Lord Aurora's reflection. His pupils constricted. The reflection looked like Aurora, but his clothes were different. They were black. And his expression... was somber and wicked. Xu Qing looked away, a thousand thoughts running through his head. As they continued, the Immortal Lord remained silent.

Time passed.

Above the lake, a white-robed Aurora and his son walked, one following the other. Beneath the lake, a black-robed Aurora walked with Xu Qing, one after the other.

1. Within this paragraph, it uses the plural female pronoun to refer to the flowers, which obviously implies that the description is not about flowers, but about women. ☞

2. The poetry is an excerpt from the poem "Endlessly Yearning" by [Li Bai](#), who is probably the most famous Chinese poet in all history. Frankly speaking, most of the translations I found suck so much that I don't want to link them. ☞

3. The flower mentioned here is the same one mentioned about a hundred chapters ago. It's *Datura stramonium*, a poisonous flowering plant. The flowers sort of look like trumpets. In Chinese, the name of the flower is a transliteration of a Sanskrit word, so the specific characters aren't really important per se. It seems to me the significance is that the flower is poisonous. In contrast, peonies in Chinese culture are considered one of the top flowers, and also a symbolic representation of many things, particularly feminine beauty. By the way, I'm not sure if I've mentioned it before but Er Gen comes from a prefecture-level city in China called Mudanjiang which literally translates as Peony River. The first time I met him in person was when RWX and I flew to Mudanjiang and hung out with him for a couple days. ☞

Chapter 1154: That Which Separated the Two... Was Time

Chapter 1154: That Which Separated the Two... Was Time

There were two different worlds, one beneath the lake, one above it.

The figures were still on the move. There was no sound. Everything seemed like black and white. It was hard to describe. Hard to explain.

There was a fearless wind that came from somewhere, perhaps heaven or perhaps earth, blowing across the water. It stirred the hair of the 'four' people. The hair danced. The water rippled. No one spoke. The Immortal Lord said nothing. Xu Qing said nothing.

Eventually, when the sun's brightness filled the sky, illuminating everything and causing the frost to shimmer.... Atop the water, a father and son reached the middle of the lake.

Immortal Lord Aurora stopped there. “Here we are. Presumably you recognize this place?”

Actually, Xu Qing did not recognize it. But the memories of Young Lord Aurora did. Images immediately popped up in his mind. This was the Nineshores Grotto-Heaven! It was the location of Immortal Lord Nineshores’ immortal palace.... He was the Immortal Lord of the current epoch, which was going to end in a month!

Of course, it was very different from the Aurora Immortal Palace. To mortals, the Nineshores Immortal Palace looked like a frozen lake. It lay quietly up in the mountains, like an exquisite jewel nestled amongst silver cloth. The mirror-like surface of the lake reflected the surrounding snow and the clouds. And it reflected the heart.

Beneath the surface of the lake, the currents flowed, and as multicolored light shone from heaven, dream-like illusions would appear, sinking into the heart to transform into numerous secrets.

It was like Immortal Lord Nineshores’ dao.

Secrets!

All people bear secrets. And every bit of history also had secrets hidden in it. Even a mountain or a river will contain unknown things. All secrets within the Fifth Star Ring had a source that could be controlled.

And that was... a canon of secrets, which was how Immortal Lord Nineshores had achieved his dao! Therefore, when people walked on the icy surface of the lake, their secrets would be reflected beneath them.

Occasionally, unusual bubbles would appear in the lake. They would rise up, but when they hit the ice, they would pop, leaving behind beautiful little circles. They could not get past the ice. It was as if the ice protected secrets.

“On your knees!” Immortal Lord Aurora said quietly.

Xu Qing bowed his head. It was as if this body actually wasn’t under his control, because as soon as the Immortal Lord spoke, he found himself on his knees on the ice.

The moment that happened, a sigh drifted out, though whether it came from high in the sky or deep below the ice, it was impossible to tell.

Aurora’s expression was the same as ever as he softly said, “Daoist Brother Nineshores, I’ve brought my unfilial son here.”

The ancient voice which responded came from beneath the lake. “Aurora, there’s no need to worry so much about the affairs of the younger generation.”

The voice was hoarse, and seemed to contain an indescribable melancholy. As the voice spoke, the water beneath the ice rippled, and Xu Qing could see a majestic figure like a god. He was enormous, taking up the greater part of the lake, with indistinguishable facial features, as if a veil obscured them. As for the eyes in that face, they were like suns casting silver light.

Looking down at the figure in the lake, Immortal Lord Aurora shook his head somberly. “He’s responsible for everything that happened, from beginning to end. Half a year ago, I simply asked him to come here to work on his cultivation. I had no idea what my unfilial son was really thinking. He wasn’t interested in cultivation at all, Daoist Brother. Instead, he was interested in your lovely daughter.

“Thankfully, the interest seemed to be mutual, and there was no force involved. But despite how they got along, eventually they had a misunderstanding. Of course, it’s not good for us elders to interfere blithely. Furthermore, though my unfilial son has made mistakes, he does have a sense of responsibility. Therefore, Daoist Brother Nineshores, I’ve brought him here today to formally propose marriage.

“I hope that these two young ones can journey forward together as daoist partners and close companions. Since they both pursue the dao, I think both you and I can agree that they will eventually become immortals together. I think that would be a good ending to the story.”

Before Immortal Lord Aurora’s words finished echoing in the area, he waved his right hand. Four items appeared out of nowhere.

“Here are four betrothal gifts,” Immortal Lord Aurora said calmly. “First is the collected blood and marrow left behind when the two gods Lohn and Menghin perished here in the Fifth Star Ring. It includes a bit of future discarnate wills, as well as secrets. I know that you’ve longed for this item for a very long time, and I managed to secure it for you only a few days ago.”

His words were very humble, and they downplayed his own importance. It could only be imagined the astonishing price that would have to be paid for an item that an Immortal Lord longed for. When the item was produced, the silver eyes of the face behind the veil glittered.

“Second is a pair of empty jade slips formed from my own soul blood. The first one is waiting to be filled out by you next month, Daoist Brother Nineshores. Inscribe it however you wish, and it will be considered an order from me.

“As for the other jade slip, Daoist Brother Nineshores, you can inscribe it with any item in my immortal palace. As soon as you do, all karma on that item will be erased, and ownership of it will be transferred to you.”

Xu Qing was visibly moved. The first item surpassed his comprehension. But the set of jade slips were incredible. The one which could be inscribed with orders was essentially like an imperial edict. After all, in a month, Aurora would be succeeding Nineshores and taking over the throne. The future era would be that of Aurora, so to leave behind a blank imperial edict was profoundly significant. The same held for items in the immortal palace. And what was even more significant was that there was no time limit attached to either item.

These gifts showed an immense amount of sincerity! At the bottom of the lake, Nineshores opened his mouth as if to speak.

Before he could, Immortal Lord Aurora kept talking. “The fourth gift is of little value. It is my son’s birthdate characters.”[1]

Immortal Lord Aurora waved his hand, and a red piece of paper flew out, upon which was written eight characters. Xu Qing looked over and confirmed that it was the birthdate of his host. All of these things combined suddenly filled him with a deep sense of paternal love.

Having accomplished these things, Immortal Lord Aurora clasped hands and bowed deeply to the lake.

Considering the gifts, the status of the person involved, and the bow, Nineshores felt compelled to speak, and could not remain at the bottom of the lake. A sigh echoed out, which turned into innumerable threads that rose up through the water.

They were made of the secrets of the world, intangible as they pierced through the layer of ice. After coming through the ice... they transformed from incorporeal to corporeal. A middle-aged cultivator stood there now, clad in a blue daoist robe, pulsing with the demeanor of a transcendent being.

He stood right in front of Aurora and looked him in the eyes. He nodded. Then he extended his right hand. The blood, the jade slip that was the imperial order, and the piece of paper with the birthdate all flew up to him. He put them away. As for the jade slip that could be filled in with an item from the immortal palace, he flicked it to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing caught it.

“In a month, you’ll marry my daughter. Going forward, you will no longer be the son of Aurora. You’ll be the son-in-law of Nineshores.”

Xu Qing inclined his head, clasped his hands, and bowed deeply.

Immortal Lord Aurora smiled as if an immense weight had been lifted off his shoulders. A rare smile appeared on his face. He looked at Nineshores, who was in fact his lifelong friend. They had grown up together, furthered their cultivation together, fought enemies together, and faced death on numerous occasions. The mixture of steel and blood had caused a deep friendship to form....

Each would have died for the other. And the truth was that when they were young, they had laughed about what it would be like when they had children in the future. Maybe those children would be like brothers. Or maybe they would become daoist partners.

Mind filled with such thoughts, Aurora quietly clasped hands, then turned to leave.

Xu Qing got to his feet, bowed, and left, a complicated expression on his face.

Nineshores stood there quietly as he watched the two of them walk away into the distance. Eventually, he sighed in his heart. *I know you’re going to do something that will shake heaven and earth.... Aurora. Oh, Aurora. You can truly be called a filial son to the Immortal Paragon. And to that child, you are a compassionate father!*

But for you to be stuck in the middle must be pure bitterness. Perhaps from the moment Lanxi perished, you no longer wished to linger in this world.[2]

Nineshores sighed softly, then blurred, turning again into countless threads that passed back through the ice and sank to the bottom of the lake.

After leaving the Nineshores Grotto-Heaven, father and son continued on through heaven and earth. A gentle breeze stirred Immortal Lord Aurora's hair, and did the same to Xu Qing's host. Neither of them spoke.

Xu Qing wasn't sure if it was a misperception or not, but it seemed to him that the wind was taking away some of Immortal Lord Aurora's coldness. His apathy seemed to be slowly fading away. And it had all started... when Immortal Lord Nineshores nodded. The weight which had lifted off him at that moment must have been immense.

Xu Qing soon realized they weren't going back to the immortal palace. Instead, they were getting closer and closer to a location familiar to Xu Qing.

Eventually, a vast sea of golden sand appeared ahead. It looked like an actual sea, full of dazzling waves, shining gloriously in the sun. It seemed like a dream or an illusion.

Xu Qing had been to this desert before. However, he had seen a version that existed countless years later. This version was from much earlier in the timescape.

That which separated the two was the name of the desert itself.

Time.

"When you were little," Immortal Lord Aurora said softly, "you always asked me about your mother."

As they walked out over the desert, the Immortal Lord didn't seem like an immortal anymore. Apparently, this desert was profoundly significant to him. Now that he was back, he suddenly seemed a lot older.

"I never told you much. But you've grown up and are about to get married. Soon you'll have your own wife. Therefore... I brought you here. This is the spot where your mother's soul faded away. This is the only place that has anything of her left."

1. Birthdate characters are a combination of the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches that describe the time, date, month, and year of a person's birth, primarily used in fortune-telling. And since I'm sure some of you will want to go back and check, we did recently come to find out about a set of eight characters that clearly described a specific date and time. That was in [chapter 1146](#), with a detailed explanation of calendar-related stuff in [1147](#). As of now, we don't have enough information to determine if the date mentioned back there is the same as the one here, but it seems highly likely. ❸

2. Lanxi: This is a given name without a surname. Lan means "orchid" and Xi means "evening tide." ❹

Chapter 1155: That Sea of Flowers

Chapter 1155: That Sea of Flowers

Mother...? As Xu Qing walked along behind Immortal Lord Aurora, he looked at the desert and listened to the story.

Perhaps it was some sort of resonance with his host's body, or perhaps it was the word 'mother' itself. Either way, he suddenly found himself thinking about his own past.

In his mind's eye, he saw Peerless City in the Revered Ancient mainland. He remembered his dad and mom there in the city. Those were good times. But then the blood rain fell.

He thought back to his father and mother. Perhaps he had traveled too far and experienced too many things, because all of a sudden he realized that all that remained of his parents in his memory was an outline. However, that outline exuded warmth. It didn't matter how far he traveled or what he experienced, that impression would never go away. It would always be there in his mind.

People can't determine who it is that they will see last in life. But the first people to accompany them are always the parents.

Mother....

At the same time, his host was also wrapped in such thoughts. In the memories of his host, he could see only the vague outline of a mother.... It was just like Xu Qing thinking about his past.

As of this moment, the two of them were in complete resonance. The resonance turned into ripples, flowing through the sea of the heart, stirring time and spreading out into the desert. It became part of the desert.

Immortal Lord Aurora's voice drifted across the Desert of Time.

"Your mother and I got to know each other back in our hometown. She was my Junior Sister, in other words, the seventh apprentice of your grandfather. Back in those days, there was a sun and moon, but they looked different than they do now." [1]

Immortal Lord Aurora was talking to Xu Qing, but also seemed to be simply recalling the past. As he spoke, he seemed to get older, and to sink further into reminiscence. "Back then, our hometown was just one of many captive minor worlds in the Fifth Star Ring that belonged to the gods. It was a life in which you worshiped gods, were enslaved by them, and had nothing to look forward to except death.

"Naturally speaking, the sun and moon overhead were both gods. I guess it's most accurate to say that the light of the sun and moon came into our minor world. Their names were the most paramount godly names in the entire minor world. Clearbright and Fyreblaze. Those times were full of pain and bitterness. But with your mother there, I was happy."

Immortal Lord Aurora spoke softly, and Xu Qing followed, listening quietly. He knew that now was a moment in which he should pay attention respectfully.

“We furthered our cultivation together. We grew up together. And eventually we ran into Nineshores.”

Immortal Lord Aurora shook his head as he sank further into memory. “His personality back then was much the same as it is now. He was quiet. He liked to observe things and keep records. Your mother called him the Great Scribe. He actually liked that, and it’s what we called him for many years. So stupid.” Aurora smiled.

“And so, time passed.... What happened later is there in the history books. You know all about that. In Dao Finale of the God Epoch, your grandfather led our minor world in a great war against the gods. It was a desperate war. More desperate than you can imagine....

“You were born during that time. But your mom didn’t want you to see all the chaos, so she sealed you away. We agreed that we would wait until the war was over and the world had become magnificent before we unsealed you. Then you would be able to see lands full of beauty and peace. With no gods. We wanted you to have the most wonderful life possible.”

Aurora’s voice continued to echo in the Desert of Time, full of both reminiscence and grief. “The war lasted for many years. But eventually it ended, and we cultivators had fully risen to prominence. We crushed all of those high and mighty gods. The sun and the moon in the sky perished, and we replaced them with our own versions.

“Unfortunately... I lost someone forever during that time. Your mother died.”

Xu Qing listened quietly. This was someone else’s story, yet for whatever reason, perhaps the resonance that had sprung up, Xu Qing could feel his host’s sorrow, as well as Aurora’s grief.

“For certain reasons, I fell into a deep slumber that lasted for 10,000 years. By the time I woke up, it was impossible to change what had happened. The canon of space-time had reached its limit.... 3,333 years. That’s the ultimate limit of space-time in this star ring. When you were sealed away, your mother and I were both there. But when it came time to unseal you, only I was left.”

Aurora suddenly stopped walking.

Xu Qing saw a sea of flowers. It was an illusory sea, filled with endless gorgeous orchids blooming in the middle of the desert. It was consummately beautiful. It was hard to imagine how there could be a sea of orchids in the middle of a desert. At the very least, Xu Qing knew that when he visited this desert far in the future, there had been nothing like it. Apparently, this was a secret buried in the depths of the desert.

The exquisite orchids were of different shapes and sizes. Some looked like fluttering butterflies. Others resembled soaring immortal cranes. All of them had unique fragrances.

As Xu Qing and Immortal Lord Aurora arrived, the sun shone through the scattered clouds onto the sea of orchids, and the golden beams of light added a further sense of mystery and romance.

A faint breeze stirred the flowers. It all seemed like a dream. And then it almost seemed like an immortal fairy had appeared in the flowers, and was looking at the two of them. A faint murmuring sound could be heard, like gentle laughter.

Immortal Lord Aurora looked at the sea of flowers, and the immortal fairy from his memories. He also laughed softly. Striding to the edge of the sea of flowers, he knelt down and produced a handful of seeds from within the fold of his robe. As of this moment, he wasn't the soon-to-be most respected person in the Fifth Star Ring. He was not a ruler of countless immortals, with an astonishing cultivation base. He was just an ordinary person thinking about his deceased wife.

He was now planting the seeds in the desert. They would definitely bloom eventually. "Your mother's name had the character 'orchid' in it, and her favorite flower was always the immortal orchid. It's a flower that cannot be tainted with the aura of gods, otherwise it withers.... And yet, that type of flower never disappeared from our minor world, despite the proliferation of mutagen. Because after it withers, it can bloom again.

"We had always hoped that, after the war was over and everything was beautiful, we could find a place to plant some immortal orchids, and turn them into a sea that bloomed year round. Over the years, I've always made sure to plant some more when I come here. Gradually, they've turned into a sea."

Smiling, Immortal Lord Aurora patted the soil over the seeds he had just planted. Then he sat down and looked out at the flowers. He said nothing, yet the warm smile remained on his face.

Xu Qing quietly walked over, sat down next to Immortal Lord Aurora, and joined him in looking out at the flowers.

Time passed.

When evening approached, Immortal Lord Aurora spoke again.

"You've grown up," he said softly. "And you're about to get married. In the future, I'll be very busy, so remember to come back here every year and plant some more orchids for your mother. Let's make sure there's always a sea of flowers here."

Mixed emotions filled Xu Qing. He was fully aware that in a month, Immortal Lord Aurora was going to die, as was his host body.

Years in the future, there would no longer be a sea of orchids here. Perhaps that was why he had not seen any flowers when he passed through this desert. The sea of flowers had long since withered up as time passed.

But he still nodded.

Aurora smiled, and in uncharacteristic fashion, reached out and tousled his son's hair. "I want you to remember something. Your mother wasn't able to accompany you through life, nor will your own children be able to stay with you all the time. Only your daoist partner... will keep you company forever. You have to take care of her. Don't be like me.... Don't lose the person you love."

With that, Aurora stood up and looked at Xu Qing. “Do you remember that story I used to tell you when you were young? About the night?”

Xu Qing nodded and quietly said, “When night falls, don’t go to see you.”

That saying was implanted firmly in the memories of Young Lord Aurora. It was something that Immortal Lord Aurora had told him many times. It made Xu Qing think about the reflection beneath the ice lake.... Based on his memories, Immortal Lord Aurora always came to him during the day....

Aurora smiled and nodded, then looked at the deepening evening. “It’s about to get dark. Let’s go back.”

With that, Aurora took a step forward. Everything blurred. A moment later, the desert was gone, and so was the sea of flowers.

Xu Qing was back in Young Aurora Hall, in the exact spot where he had left it. It was almost as if everything that had just happened was an illusion. Immortal Lord Aurora was nowhere to be seen.

As for the sky... when Xu Qing left, it was bright. Right now, night was falling. Darkness covered the lands.

The moon rose.

Deep beneath the immortal palace was a secret chamber, brightly lit with lamps. Immortal Lord Aurora was there, striding forward. As he passed, the lamps behind him went out.

Night fell outside and his white clothing began to turn dark. Before long, his robe was pitch black. The kind look on his face became replaced with something vicious and wicked. He started trembling, and his pace faltered. However, he managed to walk all the way to the end of the cave. There, he entered a prison cell.

The moment he was inside, countless magical symbols formed chains that wrapped around him, both blessing him and sealing him. All of the light went out, and everything became pitch black.

Within that darkness, groans echoed out, along with the clink of chains.

1. Specifically this is the paternal grandfather, so that would be Immortal Lord Aurora’s father, who we know is the Immortal Paragon. ❸

Chapter 1156: The Way of the Shyster

Chapter 1156: The Way of the Shyster

It was night at Young Aurora Hall, and the lanterns shone brightly.

Inside, Xu Qing was thinking about everything that just happened with Immortal Lord Aurora. On the road, Aurora was an Immortal Lord. Outside the Nineshores Grotto-Heaven, he was a father. And in the Desert of Time, he was a lonely man who had lost the love of his life. By the time night fell and he was back in the immortal palace, he was back to being an Immortal Lord.

Before this event, Xu Qing had considered Immortal Lord Aurora to be little more than a symbol. Granted, the imp in the second world had called himself a scrap of discarnate will from Immortal Lord Aurora. But whether or not that was true would require further investigation. From the very beginning until now, Xu Qing had had his doubts. That was why, to him, the words 'Immortal Lord Aurora' had been just that: words.

But everything he had experienced just now, and the different versions of Aurora that he had seen, all painted a very different picture. Without even realizing, he had come to view Aurora as a real and complex person.

And now I'm getting an inkling of what's going to happen in a month....

Otherwise, how was it possible to explain how Aurora had essentially entrusted his son to another like an orphan? And what explanation was there for what he had said in the desert? However, even as some of the puzzle pieces clicked into place in his mind, more questions and suspicions proliferated.

Immortal Lord Aurora already had space-time canon, and has pushed it much closer to completion than I have. He has to know what's coming in the future. It's not going to come as a surprise to him.

So what's going to happen in a month that will cause the Immortal Paragon to interfere? Why does the historical record call it a rebellion? And why am I instructed not to go see him at nighttime? Does it have something to do with that sinister, black-garbed version of him I saw under the lake?

Furthermore, he's made all sorts of arrangements, including entrusting his son to someone else. So why does his son die in a month? What's more, why does everyone else in the immortal palace die as well? Why does the Immortal Paragon wipe out every living being here?

Even stranger, why does the palace get left behind to exist for such a long time afterward....

There were too many questions swirling in Xu Qing's mind. Even after much analysis, he didn't come up with any good answers.

I'll see it all play out in a month!

Xu Qing looked up at the moon in the night sky, then entered the main hall and sat down cross-legged. For the time being, he put Immortal Lord Aurora out of mind, and instead focused his attention on how to create waves in space-time.

For most people, the space-time of the fourth world was about the people and the scenery. But to someone like Xu Qing with his space-time canon, things were completely different. To his senses, the space-time here was fixed, like a pool of stagnant or even frozen water. It was still, with no fluctuations or ripples much less waves. Directly tampering with it wasn't possible, even with Xu Qing's space-time canon.

I need more elements at play. They need to be like rocks, thrown one after another to disturb the stagnant water....

Time passed.

The sound of music and soft laughter drifted out from the Hundred Flowers Palace. The melodious sounds fused with the darkness. Even Xu Qing, who was still seated cross-legged in the main hall, could hear.

The laughter of the fox maiden was particularly clear. Clearly, the fox maiden was having a good time regardless of whether Xu Qing was there or not.

Eventually, dawn arrived. The shining sun rose, casting its light out everywhere.

The melodious sounds faded away, and soon, a voice spoke outside of the hall.

“Greetings, Young Lord, and welcome back to the palace!”

It was none other than Li Mengtu, who was playing the role of Young Lord Aurora’s study partner, Zhong Chi. Hurrying forward, he entered the hall and bowed. Of course, he had a lot of speculations about what was going on, considering that he hadn’t seen Young Lord Aurora for an entire day. He had searched Young Aurora Hall high and low, all to no avail. He couldn’t help but be very curious about where the young lord had gone off to. Though he had a general idea of what happened in this time period, there was no way that he could know the details of what happened every hour of every day.

Xu Qing looked up at Li Mengtu and said, “You’re late. I actually came back last night.”

Li Mengtu carefully replied, “Young Lord, might I ask how yesterday fared for you...?”

Xu Qing’s expression remained placid as, instead of answering the question, he simply stood and casually said, “Come with me to the Magic Legacy Pavilion.”

And with that, he walked out. Given that he had the opportunity in this place, he was not going to miss out on the chance to go to the immortal palace’s Magic Legacy Pavilion and see what kind of magical techniques were available in this time period.

Li Mengtu, of course, hurried to follow.

The sun was still rising as Xu Qing made his way through the immortal palace. The cultivators he encountered along the way didn’t think much of Young Lord Aurora. But given his important status, all of them bowed in greeting.

Li Mengtu hurried along, looking like he wanted to say something, but ultimately biting his tongue.

As the Magic Legacy Pavilion appeared off in the distance, Xu Qing calmly said, “Zhong Chi, you’ve been acting differently lately.”

Li Mengtu's guard instantly went up, but he didn't show it. Smiling wryly, he said, "You're very observant, Young Lord. There's something that's been bothering me lately, and though I tried to keep it inside, I guess you noticed the clues."

"What is it?" Xu Qing asked calmly.

Li Mengtu hesitated. "It's Li the Chosen! Young Lord, please don't accuse me of tattling, but I just have to say that he's really a disgrace! Didn't you say that he should work at your beast ranch? Well he didn't go there at all! In fact, he just disappeared altogether. He hasn't even been seen at the university anymore!"

Xu Qing's facial expression didn't change in response to this information. He just turned to look at Li Mengtu. "Presumably you know what's going on?"

The look in Xu Qing's eyes caused Li Mengtu to shiver inwardly. The truth was that he had already gotten to the bottom of the situation. The reason he hadn't mentioned something sooner was that he wasn't entirely sure how the young lord would react. But given how terrifying Xu Qing's gaze was, Li Mengtu didn't dare to hide any of the details.

"I heard that after he returned to the university that day, he got into an argument with one of the teachers. The end result was that the teacher punished him by sending him into seclusion for three months."

The real reason Li Mengtu was revealing this information was self-interest. He had come to the conclusion there was an eighty to ninety percent chance that Li the Chosen was also an outsider. Though he didn't know who it was, he was certain that they were trying to alter history. That, of course, aligned with his own goal. Fundamentally speaking, he wanted Li the Chosen to succeed. That would give him the perfect point of reference to learn from and imitate.

Li the Chosen had lived up to expectations to an extent. Historically speaking, he had gone into seclusion after being defeated in the duel. But that had changed when Young Lord Aurora appointed him to serve at his beast ranch.

Obviously, someone else had interfered to maintain historical accuracy. Although there had been a slight deviation, in the end, things worked out the same.

As for who had interfered, Li Mengtu's initial guess was that it was Fourth True Monarch! Unfortunately, whoever had taken that identity obviously had a major advantage. And if he could make sure Li the Chosen failed to alter history, then he would surely do the same to Li Mengtu. Therefore, Li Mengtu was hoping that Young Lord Aurora could do something about the situation.

If this was the real Young Lord Aurora, then he obviously wouldn't have had any idea what was going on. But it was Xu Qing, who knew exactly what was happening.

Li Mengtu is trying to make use of my power. Although Li the Chosen's story hasn't played out exactly the way it did in history, the fact remains that someone corrected things so they got back on track. Whoever took the identity of Fourth True Monarch is obviously quite skilled.

Xu Qing thought about it for a moment. Whoever it was, they were using Li the Chosen as a tool to vie with Xu Qing. So far, both sides had succeeded and failed to varying degrees.

I don't want to interfere any further. When it comes to Li the Chosen, I already made my move and lost. There's no need to rile things up further. After all, keeping my true identity hidden is the best way to acquire good fortune here.

Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing continued onward toward the Magic Legacy Pavilion. Once inside, he started skimming through the various magical techniques, all the while continuing to analyze the situation.

Protecting my identity is the most important thing. As far as I can tell, no one suspects me at all, including the people playing the roles of Zhong Chi, Li the Chosen, Nineshores' daughter Zhou Linshan, and Fourth True Monarch.

As far as they're concerned, it's not even possible for someone to have taken the identity of Young Lord Aurora. The only people who can come to the fourth world are either Quasi-Immortals or people who have canon or canon treasures.

Forgetting the ones I've already identified as outsiders, there should be at least four or five others here in the immortal palace. And there should be a few of them who are also trying to make waves in space-time. They are the rocks I need!

Xu Qing put down the jade slip he had been looking at and picked up a new one. As he scanned it, he continued thinking.

This entire thing is like one big game of Go. Fourth True Monarch wants to stop the ones breaking the rules. The rocks. And I... want to secretly help and protect them. Of course, they're also going to be focused on taking care of themselves.

Li the Chosen already lost, the reason being that he got too anxious. Of course, part of that was because of the identity he acquired. He only had one shot on that specific day. If he didn't take that opportunity, he wouldn't have had another.

Unfortunately, everyone else has remained hidden too well. If I can't figure out who they are, I have no way to help or protect them. So how is Fourth True Monarch finding them?

Time passed quickly as he pondered matters and simultaneously looked through the techniques. Around the time the sun was setting, he left the Magic Legacy Pavilion and returned to Young Aurora Hall. By that time, he had come up with a plan.

I don't need to find all of the rocks. I just need to make sure they're all staying cautious and on guard. I guess making them feel threatened would do the trick. As for Fourth True Monarch.... I'm still hidden, while he's out in the open, although not completely. If I could unmask him completely, and force him to break his own rules, that would be perfect!

As Xu Qing sat down in the main hall, he closed his eyes and sent his divine will to the Hundred Flowers Palace. There, the fox maiden was lounging lazily and chatting with the other beautiful women. Suddenly, her eyebrows shot up, and she groaned inwardly. *That naughty man has really grown a spine. I almost can't believe he's giving me orders.... That said, seeing him so domineering just makes me like him more.*

The fox maiden licked her lips and laughed softly.

For a few days, things were quiet in the Aurora Immortal Palace. But then two rumors spread like wildfire.

According to the first rumor, outsiders had possessed certain cultivators in the immortal palace. They were currently under cover plotting and scheming, and there were quite a few of them!

The second rumor was about Fourth True Monarch. Supposedly....

“Fourth True Monarch was possessed by the leader of the outsiders!”

Beyond the Timescape

Chapter 1157: Fishing!

Xu Qing’s goal was very simple. The outsiders he had not yet identified were extraordinary individuals. Not one of them could be considered a simpleton. Unless it was absolutely necessary, they weren’t going to risk revealing themselves the way Li the Chosen had. And unless they did reveal themselves, finding them would be as difficult *as fishing a needle from the sea*. Each of them had their own unique goals and plans, making it that much more difficult to identify them. And if they knew someone was coming after them, they would work even harder to maintain their cover.

It was less of an issue for those who wanted to create waves in space-time. Xu Qing was fairly confident that he would be able to find them eventually. After all, they would eventually be like flames in the night, easy to spot. Good examples were Li the Chosen, Li Mengtu as Zhong Chi, and Zhou Linshan, who was the daughter of Nineshores, commonly referred to as Immortal Fairy Spirit Phoenix. All of them were using him as an anchor point.

Unfortunately, the whole process would take time. What was more, it was hard to say how many of the outsiders wanted to cause waves in space-time, and how many of them wanted to protect the status quo and just watch things play out as they did historically speaking. If they truly just played the role of spectators, it was going to be difficult to identify them.

All he could do was keep looking. Otherwise....

Since I have no way to immediately locate the hidden outsiders, then the first rumor I spread will at least tell them they need to exercise greater cautions. That way, even if I don’t find them, at least Fourth True Monarch will have to work a lot harder to do the same. As for the second rumor....

Inside Young Aurora Hall, Xu Qing was looking out at the sky.

It will force him even more into the open. The rumors could directly blow his cover.

Xu Qing’s eyes glittered. It didn’t matter whether or not the inhabitants of this time period believed the rumors. The important thing was that other outsiders be given some serious food for thought. They were being sent a message. At the same time, he was already creating a wave in history.

In the situation with Li the Chosen, I won the first half of the round, but lost to Fourth True Monarch in the second half. As for the current situation, I don't yet know how Fourth True Monarch is going to react. If he gets bogged down trying to prove he's not an outsider, all the better for me.

Right now, the most important thing for him to do was stay hidden and keep his eyes open. He wanted to see how the immortal palace would react to the tempest caused by the rumors, and what the ramifications might be.

In addition to the advantage I have because I'm still in hiding, there's a second upside I have in this game of history....

He looked in the direction of the Hundred Flowers Palace. Nobody had any idea that Starfire was here! Everyone else who had entered the fourth world was leaving clues behind that astute observers would eventually be able to notice. But not Starfire. had not left any clues at all, and thus, was going to be a huge asset to Xu Qing.

A few days later....

The rumors brought mixed results. Though they spread far and wide in the immortal palace, in the end, the inhabitants of the time period found the rumors to be laughable. After all, this was the Aurora Immortal Palace!

It was true that the different Immortal Lords in the Fifth Star Ring had all come from different minor worlds, and didn't always get along perfectly. There were occasional conflicts. But... in a general sense, they were all unified around common ideals.

Even more important, the Immortal Paragon was always there, mighty above all else. And he wouldn't possibly allow significant conflicts to arise between the Immortal Lords. Because of that, most people felt that it didn't matter one way or another if there were outsiders possessing certain individuals in the immortal palace.

Beyond that, astute individuals could tell that the rumors had obviously been spread for a specific reason. And that was especially true considering that they directly called out Fourth True Monarch. Most of the cultivators in the palace chose to just wait and see what happened.

In contrast, the outsiders in hiding were exceptionally vigilant. Although they had different perspectives, all of them were able to come up with valid speculations about what was really going on.

At the moment, Li Mengtu in the guise of Zhong Chi was listening in on a group of immortal palace cultivators conversing about the subject. Of course, he was as on guard as ever. *This feels like an actual war.... Just as I suspected, Fourth True Monarch is an outsider. The real question now is who started spreading the rumors. Who warned everybody? I wonder if that Diling fellow managed to get my message to Xu Qing. Did he make it here to the fourth world?*

In a guest hall in the south of the immortal palace, Immortal Fairy Spirit Phoenix sat cross-legged, listening to a handmaiden deliver a report. Though she looked like she was bored, she was actually paying very close attention. *Fourth True Monarch? No wonder he suddenly showed up to that duel*

between Li the Chosen and Young Lord Aurora. Li the Chosen was completely exposed at that point. However, it seems like Fourth True Monarch wants to prevent any changes to history, which means the two of us don't have any conflict with each other. I do need to stay careful, though.

There were people thinking similar thoughts all throughout the immortal palace.

It was the same in the sword furnace. Hordeslayer and Rampart were so perfectly hidden it didn't seem anyone could find them. However, after Fourth True Monarch had come to them, the brothers had been trying to figure out where they went wrong. Unfortunately, they lacked clues to work with. And then the rumors reached them....

"Someone's targeting him," Rampart said via divine will.

"Let them fight," replied Hordeslayer with a cold snort. *"It has nothing to do with us. We can just patiently wait for time to pass until the sword embryo is at its peak state. The main thing I'm wondering about now is who started the rumors."*

Zhou Zhengli was in True Monarch Hall, looking at Sir Star Ring, who was seated a short distance away. Keeping his voice low, he said, "There's a distinct possibility that this is the work of Li the Chosen. But it's also possible that Sir Vilespirit is responsible! Either way, the result is that we're in a passive position now."

"There's no need for alarm," Sir Star Ring replied calmly. "You're falling right into the trap of whoever's orchestrating this. What's more... you're still forgetting someone. No one we know would do this. *He* has to be the one behind it all."

Zhou Zhengli thought back to that person he'd seen with Li Mengtu before they'd all entered the immortal palace. "You're talking about that guy we saw at the entrance? The one who has canon but isn't one of the Shining Stars?"

"Exactly," Sir Star Ring said. He looked out the door of the hall and into the sky, his eyes glittering menacingly. "If I just ignore the rumors, I won't have to waste time trying to prove who I am. A person with an identity like mine wouldn't pay attention to such rumors anyway."

"The rumors don't matter. What matters is finding the rumor monger! Thankfully, the act of spreading these rumors has revealed a bit about who this person is. I already have a theory." Sir Star Ring's gaze shifted... to the east, toward Young Aurora Hall! "I truly hope it's the person who I suspect. If it is, things are going to get interesting."

With that, Sir Star Ring stood and began walking away.

When Zhou Zhengli realized he was planning to leave, he said, "Exalted one, how are you going to respond to all this?"

Sir Star Ring didn't bother looking back. As he walked out of the hall, he said, "I'd originally been planning to throw some threats around to certain people. This just gives me the perfect reason to do so. By the way, you don't need to constantly try to feign weakness. You know full well what you

should be doing in this situation. It's time for you to go handle the matter I assigned to you before.”[1]

With that, Sir Star Ring vanished.

Zhou Zhengli's only reaction was a very faint smile. *Rumors amount to covert plotting. And the only way to deal with covert plotting is with overt plotting. Unfortunately, considering I'm working with someone so outstanding, I have no choice but to feign weakness, do I?*[2]

It was midday.

Sir Star Ring materialized outside of the sword furnace and coolly said, “Someone got antsy, so tonight, I'm expelling them as an example.”

He spoke with calm confidence, and didn't even bother waiting to see how Hordeslayer and Rampart would react before leaving.

When he reappeared, he was in the university's secluded meditation facilities, where Li the Chosen was located. He said exactly the same thing in exactly the same tone.

Next, he arrived at the guest hall. He and Immortal Fairy Spirit Phoenix did not meet in person. He just stood outside and said the same thing. He did not speak the words out loud, but instead, said them directly into her mind. Even as she stirred in shock, Fourth True Monarch disappeared.

He didn't just visit them. An instant later, he materialized in front of Li Mengtu, who was on his way to Young Aurora Hall in the guise of Zhong Chi.

Li Mengtu's heart sank, but he made sure to keep a respectful expression on his face. As he bowed in greeting, Fourth True Monarch said the same words as before. Then he continued on to other locations.

It didn't take long for him to visit all of the people he was certain were outsiders. All of them could sense the somber nature of the words he spoke to them. He was telling them very clearly what he was going to do. And it would happen that very night!

Midday passed and the sun set. Everything seemed peaceful and calm, but there were undercurrents. Eventually, night fell. Stars twinkled in the sky as the moon slowly rose and cast out gentle, silvery light. It was like gauze that covered the entire immortal palace. The darkness of night added something mysterious to the palace, making the people seem like mirages in a dream. In those mirages, immortal music drifted and immortal fairies danced gracefully.

Hordeslayer and Rampart were completely on guard in the sword furnace. Immortal Fairy Spirit Phoenix waited in combat readiness in the guest hall. Li Mengtu had not yet gone back into Young Aurora Hall. He was waiting outside.

The night became deep. The bright moonlight glittered on the lavish decorations in the palace, making them glitter like stars....

In an office in the Scourgebolt Palace, which managed the Scourgebolt Cliffs, one of the corrections officers opened his eyes.

He was a middle-age man with a resolute expression on his face. He was currently standing and fiddling with a jade slip. The jade slip contained an operations diagram of the immortal palace. It explained all the deployments and duty shifts, information from the spell formations, and most importantly, it explained what the highest ranking true monarchs were doing. The corrections officer looked at the jade slip, and his eyes glittered.

Selling this information will constitute a betrayal of the immortal palace, and it will definitely create waves. And the waves from a betrayal like that will be more than enough to satisfy the broken sword within me.

1. What I'm rendering as 'feign weakness' actually has a slightly different dictionary definition. It took me a while, but I eventually realized that the author is not using it in the way it's defined in the dictionary. It really caused a lot of trouble for me as I struggled to justify the dictionary definition with the way it's used with Zhou Zhengli. In the end, I talked it over with Madam Deathblade and decided to render the term as 'feign weakness.' The reason, as you can see here and as will become more obvious in coming chapters, Zhou Zhengli is putting on a show of humility and ineptitude as a tactic to get what he wants. Unfortunately, this is actually the exact opposite of the dictionary definition of the term. In dictionaries (both in English and Chinese), the definition term is defined as: "to hide your incompetence by remaining silent." He is actually intentionally acting incompetent to try to hide his true strength/skill/intentions. Much later on, the author uses a different word to describe Zhou Zhengli, and it's basically the same word used to describe Seventh Peak traditions back in the day, i.e. deceptive, or "hiding/concealing (the truth about oneself)". This kind of thing is not important enough to talk with the author about. He is either intentionally or unintentionally using the word in a different way than its dictionary definition. He does this thing occasionally with other words, idioms, etc. By the way, the reason I'm putting this explanation here is A) because I think it's interesting and B) I know there are people who occasionally check the Chinese or perhaps have read in Chinese, and might be curious about why I make the translation choices I do. I'm not including it as a way to solicit input or advice about other ways I could have translated the term. ❹

2. Although my translation is accurate, it lacks some of the nuance of the original Chinese. The term for plot/conspiracy in Chinese takes the character for stratagem/plan/scheme and adds the yin character to the front (from yin and yang). As I'm sure many of you know, when it comes to yin and yang, the yin side generally refers to things that are feminine, dark, soft, and hidden. So in Chinese, a plot/conspiracy is a "yin stratagem" or perhaps you could say a "hidden stratagem." Well, there's also a common term that adds the yang character instead of the yin one. So in that case, it's a "yang stratagem" or perhaps you could say an "open/overt stratagem." Both terms are used here, and I'm rendering them as covert plotting and overt plotting to try to maintain a little bit of the wordplay element that you have in Chinese. ❺

Chapter 1158: Who's the Game Piece?

Chapter 1158: Who's the Game Piece?

Who was manipulating things from behind the scenes?

Silver light flowed through the night, enveloping the immortal palace. But it didn't obscure the immortal music and twittering chatting and laughter coming from the Hundred Flowers Palace. It drifted into the ears of Li Mengtu, who was waiting outside of Young Aurora Hall in his role as Zhong Chi.

Inside the main hall, Xu Qing also heard it. Xu Qing looked up at the person standing outside. *Li Mengtu is acting strangely today....*

Xu Qing's eyes glittered. Normally speaking, his study partner would leave at night, unless otherwise ordered to stay. It was rare to see him around at this hour. With such thoughts on his mind, Xu Qing waved his hand to produce a Go board.

"Zhong Chi," he said.

His study partner hurried into the hall, saying, "Your humble servant is here, Young Lord."

"Play Go with me." Xu Qing looked down at the Go board.

"Sure thing." Nodding, Li Mengtu hurried over.

Xu Qing took a game piece and put it on the board. Game pieces descended. The sound of the wind grew stronger.

The wind that night was cold as it screamed through the Scourgebolt Palace. Sir Vilespirit was hurrying through it in the guise of the middle-aged corrections officer whose identity he had taken.

Someone must have figured out who I really am. That's why everything happening in the Scourgebolt Palace today has me so on edge. And that's why it took until today to get all the details about the other three true monarchs.

As he walked along, his mind was filled with thoughts of the current situation. *I'm getting the feeling that if I don't act tonight, I'll never get the chance. This whole thing is very strange....*

His narrowed eyes glittered with a strange light. *Someone is using me as bait. They're trying to force me to take action tonight. But there's no doubt that the information I just got is time-sensitive. If I don't act quickly enough, it won't count as a betrayal of the immortal palace. And the waves won't be suitable for my needs.*

So no matter how I look at it, tonight is my last chance to do anything. And when you add in those rumors that have been spreading lately....

Sir Vilespirit looked thoughtful. *Is the person using me as bait the person who spread the rumors? Or is it the subject of the rumors? If Fourth True Monarch is the fisherman, then his goal is obviously to lure out whoever spread the rumors.*

Of course, there's always the possibility that Fourth True Monarch himself is the source of the rumors. Maybe he's just trying to sow confusion, and trick everyone into thinking there's some other mastermind working in opposition to him. That could theoretically lead the rest of us into making some big mistakes.

His eyes glittered as he pondered this possibility. *In the end, it doesn't matter. Given that they've targeted me in their plot, I suppose I'll have to—.*

His expression flickered as his train of thought was interrupted. He stopped in place. Expression somber, he clasped hands and bowed.

“Master.”

A person walked out of the night. It was a dignified old man wearing the daoist robes of the Scourgebolt Palace. As his eyes fell on Sir Vilespirit, he frowned slightly. “What are you doing scurrying around so late at night?”

Sir Vilespirit tensed inwardly. This person was his host's Master, and he was also an honor guard in the Scourgebolt Palace. He had a lot of power and authority, and normally treated his apprentice coldly. At the same time, the host's memories were telling him that the man was nothing short of awe-inspiring. In fact, he had already second-guessed his choice of identity a few times because of it. He knew he had to be extremely careful.

“Master,” Sir Vilespirit said, “my thunderlight has recently developed an excess of yang energy. I'm planning to take a trip to the lightning pond and extract some gloomthunder serum to stabilize it.”[1]

The old man's eyes glittered like electricity as he looked his apprentice up and down. As his gaze pierced into the depths of his apprentice, he confirmed that there was indeed an excess of yang energy present. He nodded slightly.

“There have been some rumors going around the immortal palace lately,” the old man said. “However, the Immortal Lord, the palace lords, and the elders haven't put much stock into them. As a result, I haven't been looking too deeply into the matter. That said, if you hear anything actionable, bring it to me immediately.”

“Yes, sir,” said Sir Vilespirit.

With that, the old man turned and vanished into the night.

Sir Vilespirit waited a moment, then hurried on his way.

After he was gone, the old honor guard appeared again. He looked at the disappearing form of the corrections officer, and seemed to be lost in thought.

That gaze caused Sir Vilespirit to feel as if great weight was bearing down on him from behind. Thankfully, it didn't last for long. When it was gone, he breathed a sigh of relief and hurried away a bit faster.

His true destination was actually a long-distance teleportation portal located next to the lightning pond. He currently had everything he needed to activate the portal. As long as he got into the portal and left, then he could send the information to the buyer. That action would be the betrayal he required.

That was his dao. He needed to betray the palace, regardless if that was not how things played out historically. After all, this was just a reflection of history, so what did it matter? His canon treasure, the broken sword within him, would get the nourishment it needed for a major transformation.

Of course, I have to make it out alive first!

He was wrapped up in such thoughts as he neared the lightning pond.

As he did, fluctuations began to roll out that could only be sensed by someone with space-time canon. And they were getting increasingly intense, making them like torches on a bright night.

Xu Qing sensed the fluctuations but didn't react visibly. He placed a game piece onto the board. He had no idea what Fourth True Monarch was up to this night, but Li Mengtu's unusual behavior had got him thinking. Besides, he had been waiting for days now to see what would happen because of the rumors he had spread. Now, the space-time fluctuations he had been waiting for had finally appeared....

"Zhong Chi," he suddenly said, "I can tell something's on your mind. You're not focusing on the game. What's going on?"

Li Mengtu hesitated briefly, but seeing that Young Lord Aurora was looking at him, he smiled wryly.

"I guess I can't keep anything hidden from you, Young Lord. Ai.... Yesterday I confessed my love to Little Hui over at the Spiritguiding Palace. She didn't exactly reject me, but she did say she needed to think about it. So... I guess I just can't stop thinking about that whole situation."

Xu Qing smiled and waved his hand dismissively. "Since you have something like that on your mind, there's no need to keep this game going. Please go find Fourth True Monarch and invite him to come play with me. A game with Elder Brother Fourth right now would be much more meaningful."

Something seemed odd to Li Mengtu, but he didn't put too much thought into it. After all, his memories were telling him that Young Lord Aurora and Fourth True Monarch had a good relationship and were known to play Go together regularly. It was only because of the imminent inauguration of Immortal Lord Aurora that the immortal palace was so busy. Considering there was only one true monarch left behind, he and the young lord hadn't had many opportunities to play Go like they had before.

Maybe this is an opportunity.... Wouldn't it be ironic if I could get the young lord to help deal with Fourth True Monarch?

As that thought occurred to him, he made sure to look suddenly hesitant.

Xu Qing frowned slightly. “What’s wrong?”

“Young Lord, I doubt the true monarch has free time today...” Li Mengtu said.

Xu Qing looked up at him.

Mind racing, Li Mengtu continued, “Young Lord, I heard that the true monarch is doing something very important tonight.”

Xu Qing’s jaw nearly dropped. “Oh? Who told you that? And what important thing is he up to?”

“That’s just what people are saying. You heard about those recent rumors, right? Well, word has spread from True Monarch Hall that Fourth True Monarch went out to arrest someone tonight.” Li Mengtu was picking his words very carefully.

Xu Qing’s smile faded away, and his eyes glinted aggressively. “Rumors are nothing but fabrications. How could anyone believe such hearsay? And the people who benefit the most are the people who start them! That’s especially true of these rumors about Elder Brother Fourth.

“Considering he has such a high position in the immortal palace, it’s no wonder there are people who don’t like him. They just want to hurt him! I thought people would just have a good laugh and then move on. I never imagined the rumors were still circulating!

“Tomorrow I want you to send out orders from me forbidding anyone from spreading rumors. And that counts even more for you! I don’t want you running your mouth!”

Li Mengtu sighed inwardly. Given his observations and insight, he was convinced that Young Lord Aurora was being very serious. And now it was obvious that it would probably be impossible to get the young lord to help deal with Fourth True Monarch.

“Yes, sir,” he said, nodding fervently.

Xu Qing’s expression softened a bit. “That said, Zhong Chi, it seems like you’re really on top of the latest news. I suppose you’re good at digging up information?”

Li Mengtu only hesitated for a moment. “I can get information very quickly if it’s for you, Young Lord!”

Xu Qing smiled. “Alright, I’ll keep that in mind. You know, you’ve been at my side for years now, and I feel like I really know you. You’ve had it rough recently. Look how pale your complexion has been getting! Why don’t you go and rest up. Tomorrow I can help you out with Little Hui.”

Li Mengtu plastered a grateful look onto his face, bowed deeply, then left, all the while sighing inwardly.

Xu Qing watched Li Mengtu leave, then shifted his gaze in the direction of the lightning pond. That was where the space-time fluctuations were coming from. To Xu Qing's eyes, those fluctuations looked like a sea of fire.

It looks like this is the response from Fourth True Monarch that I've been waiting for. Someone is changing history over there. So, should I go over there, or should I stay here...? If I stay, and Fourth True Monarch gets history back on track, then I'll have lost one of my rocks.

Xu Qing looked down at the game board. The pieces were already in endgame formation. He put another piece onto the board.

Outside, the night wind grew louder. A game was underway, and someone... was playing a piece.

Sir Vilespirit raced along through the wind. Faster and faster he moved, passing the lightning pond and moving right toward the teleportation portal. He was almost there.

But just when he was about to enter the portal, everything shook violently as an invisible sealing enveloped the area. Something very cold came with it. In the blink of an eye, it became raw killing intent that locked down on the heart and mind.

Then a calm voice spoke. "I've been waiting for you a while now, Sir Vilespirit."

Out of nowhere appeared a host of chains that represented law and order. In the middle of them was Sir Star Ring in the guise of Fourth True Monarch. With every step he took, terrifying pressure mounted. The countless chains vibrated and clanked. The sounds were like words of order that caused space-time to thrum, and brought everything out of a state of chaos.

"Sir Star Ring!" growled Sir Vilespirit. "So what if your canon and Fourth True Monarch's canon are the same?"

Even as the words left his mouth, a fierce sword energy erupted from within him, causing a broken iron sword to appear behind him. In an instant, a devastating killing intent surged.

In the Scourgebolt Palace, the honor guard who was the Master of Sir Vilespirit's host... suddenly looked in the direction of the teleportation portal, his eyes glittering.

Mouth curving into a cold smile, he murmured, "You were on a fishing expedition, Sir Star Ring. But did you know that, all the while, I was fishing for you?"

1. I think because of the author's health and the slower release rate, he has been making more mistakes than usual lately. Or maybe mistakes isn't the right word. Inconsistencies. He very frequently will introduce things (names of characters, skills, items), only to bring them up later with a different name. I am striving to maintain continuity as I edit so that everything flows well and makes sense. This paragraph is one such instance. Some of the terms here are called something else later. This was a particularly egregious instance, so my translation of this paragraph wouldn't match the Chinese if you checked it, but it does match the story as a whole. Hopefully that makes

sense. In some cases going forward, I'll include footnotes to explain such edits, but in most cases I'll just make the edits without explanations, otherwise there would be way too many footnotes clogging up the chapters. 🙏

Chapter 1159: So, You Actually Showed Up

Chapter 1159: So, You Actually Showed Up

All of the important players' focus was now gathered at that teleportation portal. Viewed from afar, nothing seemed out of the ordinary. The teleportation portal stood there just like always, and it wasn't possible to see the corrections officer or Fourth True Monarch.

In the guise of Fourth True Monarch, Sir Star Ring was using a special spell formation as well as space-time fluctuations to cut off the area from outside view. Only very unusual and special people could detect what was going on, and Sir Star Ring had notified all of them in advance of what was to come. The peace and calm visible from the outside was an illusion. If you stepped past that, you would immediately hear the sound of order, which was like heavenly thunder.

Sir Star Ring stood there, overflowing with power and majesty; his mere gaze seemed able to latch onto any deviant behavior and force it to revert to normalcy. When he spoke, his voice seemingly became substantive. It transformed into countless glittering magical symbols that swirled around to form a majestic spell formation.

Silver light seemed to inundate heaven and earth in the area. It was as if daytime had come. This was... a dao voice turning into order itself!

The spell formation sent dazzling light out as Fourth True Monarch's canon erupted, weighing down on everything with crushing might. It was like a sea in the sky, weighing down on everything below.

And it was all focused on... Sir Vilespirit.

Mountain-toppling, sea-draining energy made Sir Vilespirit like a lone rowboat in an angry sea, tossed about by tsunami waves. But his eyes didn't show even a hint of surrender. Rather, his battle spirit spiked, and the huge broken sword behind him emanated a very aggressive aura. The moment the shocking silver spell formation appeared, veins had bulged on his face, and they quickly made the shape of a ghost face, malevolent and infinitely gruish.

He reached out and touched the spell formation. In the blink of an eye, the spectacular broken sword began emanating heaven-shaking, earth-shattering sword reverberations. Shimmering light then flowed out across the sword, filling in the missing pieces.

In the blink of an eye, it was whole. Sir Vilespirit took the hilt, and then... slashed it toward the spell formation that represented order.

The sword and the spell formation hit each other. A deafening boom rang out. The formation was powerful, but the broken sword was stronger. It was like a violent criminal who would allow order to be imposed only to slash it apart with a sword! The spell formation crumbled into fragments.

Sir Vilespirit shivered from head to toe, all while coughing up gobs of blood. As he staggered backward, it seemed as if much of his life force and soul had been absorbed by the broken sword. That was the price he had to pay to use it.

But he obviously couldn't worry too much about that now. Taking advantage of the time the sword had bought, he shot closer to the teleportation portal. He was nearly there.

Of course, there was no way Sir Star Ring had run out of options. He had hardly put any thought to what he did moments ago. In fact, his expression remained completely calm as he waved his hand. That movement caused the chains to writhe like silver snakes, swirling through heaven and earth to form an even more astonishing spell formation. Whether it was in terms of aura, momentum, pressure, or complexity, it was far superior to the previous ones. These chains had become pure order.

The formation immediately shot toward Sir Vilespirit.

Sir Vilespirit's face fell. Although he had never fought Sir Star Ring before, he knew that Sir Star Ring was strong. After all, he was known as the number one chosen in the eastern planetary system. And yet, finding out firsthand how strong he was still came as a surprise.

Of course, he still had more cards to play. His eyes glinted ferociously, and veins bulged on his face as the ghost face completely overtook his facial features. It was like he had become a different person, and he was now pulsing with a terrifying aura.

Even as the spell formation descended, he reached back and grabbed the sword. Allowing it to draw deeply on his life force, he stabbed it toward the spell formation. The dome of heaven went dark. The broken sword hit the spell formation with unstoppable momentum, but as they made contact, both ceased to move.

An instant later, the tip of the sword pierced through the formation. However... it stopped at the tip! It wasn't that the sword wasn't up to the task. Rather, the wielder couldn't sustain its use. Blood sprayed out of his mouth as his body withered significantly.

Sir Star Ring was on the other side of the spell formation, looking as calm as ever. Looking coldly at Sir Vilespirit, he waved his hand. A boundless power surged from the spell formation.

Sir Vilespirit spasmed as he tumbled backward before flopping onto the ground, blood oozing out of his eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. He couldn't even hold the broken sword. It spun off to the side, where it stabbed into the ground emanating a regretful thrumming sound. Everything was over.

"With battle prowess like that, the fact that you've been at odds with Zhou Zhengli for so many years indicates that Zhou Zhengli really has been feigning weakness. He's clearly pushed that ability to the highest level of perfection."

Sir Star Ring reached out toward Sir Vilespirit. No amount of struggling did any good on the part of Sir Vilespirit. He was hoisted up to dangle in midair. Chains swept forth and surrounded him. The canon symbols formed from sound swept forth like sealing marks.

"Considering how you've misbehaved, I'm going to strip your consciousness out of this world and send you back."

The canon of order surged. He had a unique canon. But after he came to the fourth world, it changed. Perhaps it had been blessed by order itself, or perhaps it was because his canon was the same as that of his host. But either way, it gained the power to destroy! His canon of order could destroy the consciousness of an opponent. It was like an explosive purification.

The body of the corrections officer began to shake violently and let loose shaky screams. The canon of order swept through him, destroying all remnants of Sir Vilespirit. The process didn't take long. Soon, the purification was complete. The consciousness had been destroyed.

The dead corrections officer flopped to the ground, and the sword off to the side disappeared.

During the entire fight, Sir Star Ring's expression hadn't changed at all. But now he reacted with surprise.

My order isn't something deadly. Normally speaking, after driving out Sir Vilespirit's consciousness and destroying it, the host should have gone back to normal. Instead... he actually died?[1]

Sir Star Ring looked off into the distance, his eyes gleaming coldly.

There can be only one explanation. This person was Sir Vilespirit. But at the same time, he wasn't Sir Vilespirit!

Put precisely, he deeply believed himself to be Sir Vilespirit. Combined with the fact that the sword within him was real, it obscured his own senses. Even when dying, he believed himself to be Sir Vilespirit. Therefore, after driving the will out, Sir Vilespirit died, and he died. And that was because the traces of Sir Vilespirit within him were part of who he truly was.

The actual Sir Vilespirit is still alive!

Sir Star Ring scowled. There were a lot of people putting game pieces into play. There was more than one person fishing in the pond.

There was one game board, but pieces were being played onto it by Xu Qing, Sir Star Ring, and others.

It was virtually impossible for someone to reach this level of cultivation without being able to plot and scheme. And even people who came across as being simple-minded only used that as camouflage. What people could see on the outside meant nothing. Any who trusted what they saw at first sight were only moments away from disappearing forever. Whether it was covert plotting or overt plotting, whether it was playing Go or fishing, there are always ways to deal with any situation.

Sir Star Ring's eyes glittered. Though he wasn't dealing with simpletons, he would still crush them all. And even if he slipped up somehow, he had the ability to set things back on course.

With that, he reached out toward the spot where the sword had disappeared. Instantly, an energy appeared that had nothing to do with order. It was the aura of the broken sword, and by using it, Sir Star Ring planned to track down the real Sir Vilespirit. Unfortunately, the aura wouldn't stick around for much longer. It was already fading.

That'll be enough time. I want one more kill!

Sir Star Ring's eyes glittered with killing intent as he prepared to shoot off in the direction indicated by the sword. However, that was when something very dramatic happened.

Colors suddenly flashed in the sky. Then a tempest raged into being around the teleportation portal. Grains of sand shot up from the ground, joining the tempest to create... a sandstorm.

In the blink of an eye, Sir Star Ring... was prevented from leaving. As intense rumbling sounds filled the area, Sir Star Ring floated up into the air, his hair and robes whipping around him, his eyes glinting aggressively. He was currently looking at a figure emerging within the vast sandstorm.

It was a woman dressed in a voluminous black robe, whose face was hidden behind a mask. Of course, physical appearances could be faked, so that in itself meant nothing.[2]

"So, you actually showed up," Sir Star Ring said, his eyes glittering as he sensed the unfamiliar aura.

His plan had involved two major goals. The first was to crush Sir Vilespirit and thus quell chaos and restore order. The other... was to fish out the person who had been spreading rumors behind the scenes. Because that person had targeted him, it seemed most likely that they had differing goals. That person was not interested in maintaining order, which meant... that if they didn't show up after what happened with Sir Vilespirit, it would count as a win. And if they did show up... then Sir Star Ring would get the clues he needed to determine their identity.

He had put his opponent in a no-win situation. That said, this person had come at a very inopportune time, just when Sir Star Ring needed to go track down Sir Vilespirit.

Therefore, Sir Star Ring simply turned to leave. After all, the sword aura was disappearing. And most importantly, Sir Vilespirit had obviously been doing some fishing of his own, using the fake version of himself as bait. He was clearly trying to make an opportunity to betray the palace without allowing Sir Star Ring to make things right. There was no time to waste.

Unfortunately, it was obvious that this black-garbed woman wasn't going to back down from a fight just because Sir Star Ring wanted to leave.

The moment Sir Star Ring started moving, the black-garbed woman waved a hand, and the sandstorm issued intense rumbling sounds as a huge pair of eyes appeared. The eyes were gray. They seemed apathetic and emotionless as they stared at Sir Star Ring....

He couldn't move. He got the sense that, as soon as the eyes looked at him, he had no body, and his consciousness was being separated and turned into countless grains of sand. And within each grain of sand was an individual consciousness.

"How interesting...."

Eyes flashing, Sir Star Ring waved his hand, causing numerous chains to fly out. They quickly formed a vortex in front of him, out of which emerged thirteen silver coffins. The coffins were of varying sizes and shapes, and all of them pulsed with an aura of order.

They did not open. It was as if it didn't matter whether or not Sir Star Ring occupied the body of Fourth True Monarch, his will alone could not do this. This was an ability that came from the real Fourth True Monarch!

1. This is an important point which is said almost in passing, so I'm putting this footnote here to make sure readers notice it. Normally speaking, killing one of the possessed people will result in the consciousness of the outsider being expelled. Then the possessed person will go back to normal and continue along the normal track of history. This is one of the main explanations why everyone is trying to achieve their goals via intrigue as opposed to overt action. ㄟ

2. In reality, the gender of this person is not revealed until later. That's easy to do in Chinese. Unfortunately, when you have extended scenes, it becomes almost impossible to keep the gender hidden in English. I mean, it's possible, but at a certain point it becomes extremely awkward, and also obvious. So rather than bend over backward to hide the gender, I'm just revealing it a bit early. ㄟ

Chapter 1160: This Game Is Unwinnable!

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Fourth True Monarch cultivated the canon of order. And thus, over the years, he had tracked down everyone who competed with him by cultivating the same canon, and killed them. Thus, the canon became his own. His dao of order became completely and utterly unique.

Unless he died, it would be impossible for anyone else in existence to take the canon of order. As of this moment, thirteen canons had appeared, yet only three canonical orders emerged from within the coffins.

“Wind cannot exist here!”

The moment the words drifted out, all wind in heaven and earth vanished. Countless grains of sand began to fall to the ground.

“Sand cannot exist here!”

The grains of sand stopped moving, then turned into absolutely nothing.

Up in midair, the black-garbed woman looked on, eyes narrowed.

Then came the third and last canonical order. “Other than me, no one from outside this space-time can exist here!”

A terrifying force descended as if to purify the area and drive everything away. When it hit the black-garbed woman, who shivered from head to toe, her consciousness started peeling away. Then, the eyes behind the mask turned crimson. Laughter rang out. It was a sinister, disdainful laughter.

“You’re not the real Fourth True Monarch, nor the Immortal Lord. So you order things not to happen, and you think they just won’t?”

There was a sudden boom as the black-garbed woman exploded, turning into a host of sand grains that weren’t permitted to exist. Then the woman forcefully reappeared, whereupon everything in the area was different.

Simultaneously, back in Young Aurora Hall, Xu Qing tilted the game board, causing all the pieces to slide off onto the ground. A clattering sound filled the hall. It was as if heaven and earth were transforming completely.

The independent dimension surrounding the teleportation portal had turned into a desert! Sand spread out infinitely in all directions. Within that desert was an invisible hand, drawing the outlines of various images.

An eagle spread its wings, letting loose a piercing cry as it shot toward Sir Star Ring. A rhino stepped out, threw its head back, and bellowed as it rushed in the same direction. A shapeless mass, like the outline of heavenly soldiers and commanders, formed and charged forth.

It was like a mural made from sand. The images came one after another!

Next, a blazing sun appeared in the mural of the desert, drawn by the invisible hand. Within it was a sun god. A bright moon rose, and a moon god was in it, looking down at all heaven and earth. Words appeared that turned into a story, which became a thread that formed the outline of another figure. The mural of the desert was transforming.

A figure bearing a sword materialized, surrounded by raging sword energy. He wore an imperial robe and crown, and was none other than the past life origin of the three souls Sunfire, Starfire, and Moonfire. This was the human emperor of that world that existed outside of the Revered Ancient mainland! [1]

The desert rumbled as Sir Star Ring tumbled backward. At the same time, the desert world began to collapse and disperse. It was turning back into a teleportation portal!

Sir Star Ring’s face was still very grim, but as everything from before faded away, he realized that he still had a bit of the aura from Sir Vilespirit’s broken sword!

Time was up.

Up in midair, the black-garbed woman’s aura was weak. She backed up, and was on the verge of fading into nothing.

Eyes glittering coldly, Sir Star Ring said, “Well, you came here intending to throw my order into chaos. In that case....”

He reached out toward the black-garbed woman in a clutching motion. The sound of his voice transformed into a majestic spell formation. Chains whipped out, becoming a formation of order. And then, both formations glittered with silver light as they connected. As they spun, the power of order turned into a purifying force that swept over the black-garbed woman. In the blink of an eye,

chains flew out of the spell formation to wrap up the figure in black. Then the sounds of order became magical symbols that flowed over the black robes.

As they poured into her, her consciousness started to be peeled away. Yet this black-garbed woman was no ordinary individual. Though she was in a weak state and in a bad situation, she still had a trump card to play.

All of a sudden, golden light surged out from the woman in black. Then the world changed again. It became nothing but sea and sky. The unusual thing was that the sky was below, the sea was overhead. Strangely, fish were swimming in the sky and birds were flying in the water. Everything was inverted. An enormous clay figure sat cross-legged in the sea, and was reflected in the sky. The clay figure's eyes opened. One was real. One was false. It was a case of something true and something bogus. This was the godly authority of Starfire, which could invert the real and false![2]

An instant later, everything vanished, including the black-garbed woman. Only the chains remained, except they had nothing to latch onto, and could only clank around aimlessly. The peeling away had succeeded, but had also failed.

It was a success because the peeling method actually worked. But it was a failure because what it peeled away was false. An illusion.

Unfortunately, after such an interchange, the true identity of the black-garbed figure couldn't be hidden from Sir Star Ring.

The fox maiden!

Sir Star Ring turned to look in the direction of Young Aurora Hall, his expression profoundly forbidding. Then he looked away. He had a more troublesome issue to deal with at the moment, thanks to the interference of the fox maiden. And there was nothing he could do about it.

An enraged figure had just appeared in the canopy of heaven, surrounded by boundless waves of lightning. It was none other than the Master of the middle-aged corrections officer who had just died. He was an honor guard in Scourgebolt Palace! He was glowering viciously, although inside he was actually laughing coldly.

That was because he was actually the real Sir Vilespirit! Because he had arrived in the fourth world a bit late, he had worked very hard to stay hidden. Using a secret magic known only to him, he had altered the perceptions of his apprentice, forcing the apprentice to believe himself to be Sir Vilespirit. He had even secretly put his canon treasure, the sword, into the apprentice to make him the perfect double, and also the perfect bait.

Then he had stayed hidden in the shadows to wait for his apprentice to foster the proper karma. That was why the apprentice, believing himself to be the real Sir Vilespirit, had done the things that Sir Vilespirit would have done. For example, betray the palace.

The real Sir Vilespirit had planned all along to operate from within the shadows and within the light at the same time. In that manner, he pinned down Fourth True Monarch while simultaneously making it possible for him to actually betray the palace. That had been his plan from the beginning.

However, based on how things played out, he eventually changed his mind. He came up with an even more ingenious plan.

As the lightning crackled, he rushed forward loudly and with great purpose so that he attracted a lot of attention. Moving at top speed, he shot toward the area protected by the spell formation, within which was the teleportation portal. He slammed into the formation. A huge boom rang out that filled the immortal palace.

“Exalted True Monarch, why did you murder my apprentice??” he shouted. Instantly, the immortal palace was thrown into an uproar.

Countless streams of divine will converged on the teleportation portal. The spell formation shattered, revealing Fourth True Monarch as well as the furious old honor guard from the Scourgebolt Palace. In addition, there on the ground was... the corpse of the corrections officer.

Sounding completely furious, Sir Vilespirit said, “My apprentice went out to collect some gloomthunder serum, only to be brutally executed right here. Look, he has lineaments of order on him! That’s obviously evidence that you killed him, True Monarch!

“You need to tell me right now what crime my apprentice committed that gave you the right to cut him down in cold blood! Don’t tell me he perpetrated some heinous act against the immortal palace! If that’s the case, then I’ll accept the matter without objection!

“But if you can’t provide a good explanation, then that means you murdered an innocent person. Not even you, True Monarch, can do something like that without providing compensation and accepting punishment. At the very least, you’ll be locked up, and depending on the severity, you could face the death penalty.”

Sir Star Ring said nothing in response. He knew that he had been boxed into a corner. Even if he had thought to get rid of the corpse sooner, it wouldn’t have done any good. It would be a simple matter to look back through time to see what happened. He really had killed the apprentice. Besides, there were other things that happened that he didn’t want anyone to see.

There were basically two options here. One would be to claim that the apprentice committed a crime worthy of death. The other option would be to say that he didn’t commit a crime.

If he had committed such a crime, then the killing could be justified. However, whatever crime he claimed had been committed, it needed to count as a betrayal in order to satisfy the honor guard. If that happened, then it would validate Sir Vilespirit’s betrayal, and it would cause significant waves in space-time. That, in turn, would mean that Sir Star Ring had failed to maintain order.

If the apprentice did not commit a crime, then Sir Star Ring would have no way to explain the killing!

Personal grudges or other enmities couldn’t be a good explanation. If Sir Star Ring admitted to killing for that reason, then it would raise the ire of the masses, and he would definitely be jailed. If that happened, then he would be trapped for the next half-month, and would have no way to prevent other outsiders from creating waves in space-time. That would amount to him losing the entire game of Go.

If you considered which of the two options was worse, it meant that there was really only one choice to make. And that was to claim that the apprentice had committed some crime that harmed the interests of the immortal palace.

How ruthless!

Sir Star Ring sighed inwardly. All of this was happening thanks to the interference of the fox maiden. If that hadn't happened, he would have had time to deal with Sir Vilespirit, and would not be facing such a dilemma.

He could claim that the apprentice had been possessed. Unfortunately, Sir Vilespirit had already made a very persuasive argument, and unless he got what he wanted, it was obvious that he would demand hard evidence to prove any claim true or false.

Besides, claiming the apprentice had been possessed wouldn't necessarily justify killing him. If anything, it would make people suspect that he had been killed to keep him quiet. After all, interrogation was the best option in a case like that, not execution.

If it wasn't for the recent rumors, this situation might not be so serious. But the rumors were still circulating, and Fourth True Monarch was at the center of them all. People were saying that *he* had been possessed. That made things all the more dangerous. It was easy to imagine a scenario in which he tried to explain things away only to end up implicating himself.

Finally, Sir Star Ring looked up, first at Sir Vilespirit hovering in midair, and then at the distant Young Aurora Hall. Finally, he floated up into the air, his face completely expressionless.

"This person betrayed the palace! He has a classified jade slip on him with all the proof. That's why I had no choice but to kill him!"

Sir Vilespirit trembled, and was visibly struggling to breathe steadily. He could sense the broken sword calling out excitedly to him. The connection between him and the sword was now closer than ever. Space-time was whipping up into a tempest. It was becoming a timescape vortex that no one else could see or even sense. Unheard-of waves were rolling out.

Over in Young Aurora Hall, Xu Qing was in the middle of picking up all the game pieces that had fallen down. He suddenly looked up and smiled faintly.

He was holding a handful of sand. It was time sand, and each grain represented a law of time. Every grain that entered into him could significantly bolster his space-time canon! That was how he had benefited from Sir Vilespirit stirring up waves in space-time.[3]

1. The story of this emperor was told in [chapter 897](#). 📖

2. This reflects what we saw in [chapter 663](#) and [706](#). 📖

3. The relation between time and sand seems to echo what happened in [chapter 1117](#). 📖

Chapter 1161: Your Slave Girl Needs a Reward

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It was a momentous night in the immortal palace. A member of the Scourgebolt Palace tried to betray the immortal palace but failed. Fourth True Monarch killed him at the teleportation portal, arousing the suspicions of that person's Master, Gongsun Qingmu. Then, when it was revealed that there really was a classified jade slip on the victim, the matter was settled.[1]

That said, some people found it very suspicious that Fourth True Monarch proclaimed that the matter was resolved.

Young Lord Aurora's wedding was quickly approaching, and the Immortal Lord would soon be inaugurated. As a result, some important things became unimportant, while certain unimportant things became extremely important. Everyone understood how that worked. At the moment, there was nothing that could compare to those two approaching events.

Even if there were some suspicious things going on, they would have to wait until later to be resolved. They couldn't be allowed to interfere with what was slated to happen in half a month.

An hour passed. Dawn had not yet come, and yet the immortal palace had already calmed back down.

However, the events that had just played out were like a tempest in the minds of the outsiders. All were complicated and intelligent people who were adept at analyzing situations and hatching schemes. What was more, they had the memories of their hosts, and thus, it was easy for them to figure out what was going on.

There's no definitive proof that the honor guard from the Scourgebolt Palace is Sir Vilespirit. But that's highly likely to be the case. If it really is Sir Vilespirit, then the other guy was probably Sir Star Ring! And the third person is probably the one who started those rumors. All three were fighting! Obviously, Sir Star Ring made out very badly! Not only did he not kill Sir Vilespirit, but he was forced to confirm that the palace was betrayed. Sir Vilespirit is a genius! And so is that mysterious person who started the rumors! Now it begs the question of what Sir Star Ring is going to do going forward....[2]

As undercurrents bubbled, Fourth True Monarch appeared in True Monarch Hall, face expressionless as he strode up to the top of the highest tower in the complex. There, the night air blew strongly as he looked at the distant Young Aurora Hall. A thin moon cast its glow down, but the dark clouds seem to swallow up the light. Everything was gloomy and visibility was almost nonexistent.

Just like Sir Star Ring's mood. He had suffered a big defeat this night, and he wasn't used to losing. In fact, as far as he could remember, he had never lost this badly before. As he stood looking at Young Aurora Hall, his eyes glittered mysteriously.

Time passed. Perhaps because of the heavy clouds, dawn seemed to arrive a bit later than usual. That was when Zhou Zhengli arrived behind Sir Star Ring. He bowed deeply.

"For the first half of the night," Zhou Zhengli said quietly, "Zhong Chi was in Young Aurora Hall. When he left, he went straight to his residence and didn't come out again. Young Lord Aurora was inside Young Aurora Hall the entire time. He never came out. The music in the Hundred Flowers Palace never stopped. Unless there were others there who I had no means to detect, it seems... that nobody left Young Aurora Hall at all."

He was obviously aware of Sir Star Ring's big loss, as well as the fact that his own nemesis had been part of the clash. Originally, he had been planning to take action along with Sir Star Ring. However, Sir Star Ring had been so confident that he could resolve the situation that he forbade him from coming along. Instead, he sent Zhou Zhengli to Young Aurora Hall to stake it out.

Inside, Zhou Zhengli was laughing coldly. *Was it self-confidence? Or was it arrogance? Does he really look down on the other Shining Stars that much...?*^[3]

The people who ended up among the Shining Stars weren't nobodies.

"I clearly underestimated them," Sir Star Ring said.

His words caused Zhou Zhengli's pupils to constrict. He was fully aware of how proud and conceited Sir Star Ring was. It wasn't an easy thing for arrogant people to admit when they were wrong. Because of that, he suddenly realized that these hidden enemies must be a lot more complicated than he had assumed.

"That said," Sir Star Ring continued, "I already know who one of them is."

Up in the dome of heaven, the clouds clashed, causing lighting to flash and thunder to rumble. All of a sudden, Sir Star Ring's eyes were clearly visible.

"Unfortunately, although many signs point to the identity of the hidden conspirator, I'm not going to make the same mistake again. I'm not going to look down on them like before. Therefore... I have to assume it's possible that the enemy is using multiple identities, and the one I dealt with earlier is only the first layer of many. The true mastermind is likely still hiding out there in the night."

More lightning flashed, illuminating the darkness.

Zhou Zhengli didn't offer a response. He could tell that Sir Star Ring was really just thinking out loud. After some thought, he decided to go into more detail about what he had learned earlier that night.

"Exalted one, based on my observations of Zhong Chi tonight, combined with your earlier analysis of his goals, I'd say that your previous speculation about him is correct. He's definitely Li Mengtu. And he's most likely trying to place his poison canon into the space-time here.

“That said, he’s not attempting to immediately change history. He wants to take advantage of the time here to add the depth of time into his poison. Ultimately, he’s probably planning to poison his host body to death right before the historical calamity. In doing so, his poison canon will gain both karma and a more complex function.

“Regardless of whether waves in this version of history will affect reality, he’ll have a foundation for his canon. And that foundation... will be clearly visible to his Master in history.”

“All that matters is that we stop him at the right time,” Sir Star Ring said calmly.

Zhou Zhengli nodded and said nothing further. As dawn broke, he left quietly, all in line with his usual strategy of feigning weakness.

Finally, dawn light seeped through the dark clouds, spreading through the lands. It was daytime.

As the light spread, Sir Star Ring murmured, “There aren’t many game pieces left on the side of order....”

In Young Aurora Hall, Xu Qing had long since picked up all the fallen game pieces and was now putting them back on the board. He was carefully recreating the same game layout from before. In fact, he was just now placing the last piece down on the board. As he did, he heard soft laughter from behind him.

“Brilliantly played, Young Lord!”

A very charming and seductive voice reached Xu Qing’s ears. Starfire strolled in, clad in a sheer garment that perfectly accentuated curves. sat down opposite Xu Qing.

Skin as fair as snow formed a perfect contrast to garment, making seem even more attractive. reached down with her fair hand, picked up a game piece with two fingers, and put it down on the board. looked up seductively and licked lips.

“Fourth True Monarch tricked me. Your humble slave girl got hurt. In fact, I almost didn’t make it back here. What’s more, someone was staking out Young Aurora Hall. It wasn’t easy to come and go without being noticed. And that means... your humble slave girl needs a reward!”

Placing one hand on the game board, leaned forward, placing astoundingly beautiful face much closer to Xu Qing. She exhaled softly.

“Oh, Young Lord, please reward your humble slave girl. Pretty please?”

Xu Qing looked up from the game board and into eyes. “You’ve taken a liking to my host? If you’re not worried about the possibility of being killed by the Immortal Lord, I can take my consciousness out for a day and give you a chance.”

Starfire was temporarily struck speechless. had assumed that Xu Qing would respond the way he usually did. Never could have guessed that he would offer such a crafty retort. was so surprised

jaw nearly dropped. Cursing him silently for being such a blockhead, leaned back and tucked a stray hair behind ear.

“You blew your cover tonight,” Xu Qing said calmly. “Are you ready to deal with the ramifications?”

“No, I’m not!” snapped in irritation. snorted coldly.

Xu Qing began picking up the pieces from the board one by one. “I know full well you’ve already thought things through,” he said coolly. “The task I want you to accomplish tonight falls in line with your own plan. I don’t care how you do it. But let me remind you that Sir Star Ring will be targeting you for the next step of his plan!”

Starfire blinked beautiful eyes a few times. “Ooh, are you worried about your humble slave girl, Young Lord? Have any advice for me?”

Xu Qing put the game board away. “Today isn’t the appropriate time to go see Sir Vilespirit. Go tomorrow. As for whether or not you get that identity you want, well, that’ll be up to you.”

Starfire covered mouth as laughed softly. “You know what I like most about you, Xu Qing? Your intelligence.”

Xu Qing closed his eyes and said nothing further.

Smiling just as before, Starfire stretched, revealing more of beautiful curves. Then turned and left.

The day passed uneventfully.

Xu Qing never left Young Aurora Hall. He spent all his time studying the sand of time. It was marvelous. The only downside was that he didn’t have much of it. He currently had two options. One was to absorb all of it immediately. The other option....

I could use this sand to create even bigger waves in space-time. And then I could ultimately get a lot more of it!

It didn’t take long for him to make a decision.

By the time night fell, nothing noteworthy had played out. It was almost as if nothing had happened the previous night. People went about their business. Apparently, that event was a much more sensitive topic than the rumors from before. Hardly anyone was even talking about it. There was an unspoken agreement among everyone to simply not mention it.

Night came and went.

Around dawn, a knock could be heard on the door of the residence of the honor guard Gongsun Qingmu, who had just lost his dear apprentice.

The door quietly opened, whereupon a black-garbed and masked figure entered.

Gongsun Qingmu looked coldly at the visitor. He said nothing.

The figure in black looked around, then laughed softly. “You weren’t pleased with my gift from last night, Sir Vilespirit?”

Sir Vilespirit’s expression remained the same as ever. Voice raspy, he said, “What do you want?”

“You lost an apprentice. But you gained one too.” The figure in black laughed.

Sir Vilespirit’s heart started pounding. How could he have ever guessed that this person wanted this? An identity?

A moment passed, whereupon Sir Vilespirit said, “Just who exactly are you?”

The figure in black didn’t answer the question. “It’s not important who I am. What’s important is that, going forward, you have an ally. And we... can work together. By doing so, you can betray the palace even more dramatically than before.”

Sir Vilespirit said nothing for a long moment. When he finally spoke, he said, “I need to think about it.”

The figure in black laughed, then departed.

A similar scene was playing out in a guest hall in the south of the immortal palace.

“I need to think a bit about your offer, True Monarch,” Immortal Fairy Spirit Phoenix said softly.

Sir Star Ring in the guise of Fourth True Monarch nodded expressionlessly. “It wasn’t easy for you to get that identity, was it? You paid a high price. And you want to use it to see history play out as intended. You want to marry the Young Lord, whereupon the karma created with the immortal palace will put you halfway to becoming its owner. Of course you have more complicated plans than that. But it doesn’t matter. That doesn’t conflict with me.”

He turned and walked to the entrance, where he stopped and looked back at her. “Your host is the only one who can really drive all the courtesans out of the Hundred Flowers Palace. Including that fox maiden. Once you do, I’ll make sure you reach your goal!”

1. Gongsun Qingmu: Gongsun is a compound surname. Compound surnames are not very common nowadays. They were more common in ancient times. That said, among compound surnames, Gongsun is pretty common, at least in the works of Er Gen. It gives a person’s name an old-timey feel, and in the case of this one, it sounds like someone associated with the government. Qingmu is made of Qing which means “blue/green/cyan” and is the same character from Xu Qing’s name. Mu means “wood/tree.” This is the same set of characters that I translated as Greenwood earlier in the novel. It first came up in chapter 888, where I also mentioned that the term came up in ISSTH. There is no indication that Gongsun Qingmu is connected to any of those things. “

2. This bit of thought dialogue has no attribution. Based on the context, it's obviously one contiguous thought, not a conversation. But it's never attributed to a specific person. I think it's supposed to represent the general thoughts of the various outsiders. ㄟ

3. Linguistic note here that has no relevance but is cool. In Chinese, the terms for self-confidence and arrogance are very similar, so it makes for a much better contrast. Self-confidence is a fairly direct correlation to the English term, as it combines the characters for “self” and “belief/faith/confidence.” Meanwhile, arrogance also starts with the “self” character, to be followed by the “big” character. Because both of them start with “self,” it makes for a little bit of wordplay that doesn't come across in English. ㄟ