

Beyond the Timescape

Chapter 1351: Zi Qing's Path

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Zi Qing, the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan, perished. But he did not perish at the hands of the countless species. Instead, he sacrificed himself, and was melted by the gaze of Eminent Desolation. Left behind was a skull, imbued with all the defiance of a lifetime, which did not crumble into ashes. It fell down to the battlefield.

Others departed with him.... They included all of the souls of the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan, including Bai Xiaozhuo. The day they departed... it started raining in Revered Ancient. And that rain lasted for an entire month. Brilliant Heaven filled with a churning haze that also lasted for a month.

In the imperial capital of humankind, Emperor Mirrorcloud did not hold court. He just sat for days looking south, his gaze vacant. Eventually he sent someone to the continent of South Phoenix to retrieve Zi Qing's skull. When he got it, he looked at it and let loose a complicated sigh filled with guilt. Then he erected a magnificent tomb for the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan, and also issued an edict stating that he would be buried alongside Zi Qing in the same tomb.

And thus, the glorious story of the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan ended. The Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan became a thing of the past. The countless species did their best to bury the story, to the point where it became nothing but a legend. And then... it disappeared entirely. Even remote palaces attached to the kingdom turned into nothing but ruins that eventually were buried in the sands of time.

There were scattered commoners who had departed much earlier, who spread out through the lands and continued the bloodline of the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan. As a matter of fact, one of those groups was in South Phoenix.

Time passed. Eventually, Emperor Mirrorcloud perished, and a new emperor took the throne....

As nonhuman species continued to rise to prominence, humankind faced increasing difficulties.

The commoners in South Phoenix became many, and they worked hard generation after generation. Eventually, they started a new Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan.

Unfortunately... there seemed to be a curse at play. After a number of years passed, the Kingdom of Violet and Cyan and the continent of South Phoenix was overthrown by eight of the major clans that made it up. It ceased to exist. That was when the Violet Lands became a major faction in South Phoenix.[1]

The Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan had perished on the Peerless Plains. As time passed, it seemed that, because of that, the fate of that location was connected to the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan.... A city sprang up there, but it was destroyed in war. A scavenger basecamp appeared in that location, but it didn't last very long.

Eventually, in the year 2871 of the Dark War calendar, a group of rogue cultivators established a simple settlement in the Peerless Plains. They used the place to work on their cultivation. At the same time, they felt pity for the commoners there who were ravaged by mutagen. That simple settlement began to grow until eventually it turned into a city.

When it came time to name it, they called it Peerless.

It was the year 2918 of the Dark War calendar, which was also the year 135 of Heavenly Wonder in the continent of South Phoenix. Doomsday approached.

Peerless City had been growing for decades and had earned a bit of a reputation. Of all the cities that filled the Peerless Plains, it was the biggest. It was an important day in Peerless City. People bustled about.

Zi Qing, clad in a rough spun robe, his hair tied into a ponytail, wandered the busy streets. He was holding a skewer of candied fruit, the glaze still hot from the oven. The sticky syrup covering the red hawthorn fruit glistened brightly in the noon light. Within the air swirled the smells of the candied fruit, sacrificial smote, human sweat, and freshly made onion flatbreads. All of it mixed together to create the unique aroma of the city called Peerless.

It was the day of the Prayer Festival. Because of the holiday, the city boiled like broth in a pot. Within the clamor of the crowd, Zi Qing's expression was tranquil. He looked at the people, and he sensed the familiar atmosphere.

The cry of a vendor pierced through the hubbub. "Fresh candied fruit skewers! Crispy and sweet!"

An old woman bent under a basket of goods murmured, "Hopefully next year will be a good year...."

One of the city guards tried to maintain order, but his shouts went unheeded. "Maintain order, everyone! No crowding and jostling!"

The owner of a paper shop waved his wares at the crowd. "Passersby and fellow villagers, please come take a look at my shop! The sacrificial paper here actually burns with three-colored smoke!"

A cacophony of voices and sounds reached Zi Qing's ears. He could feel the cold, rough surface of the bamboo skewer as he looked through the crowd at some familiar faces off in the distance. He saw his father and mother that he had in this life. And he saw his mother holding his lil' bro in her arms. The little boy huddled against his mother like an ignorant little animal.

As he looked at them, a flash of reminiscence passed through Zi Qing's eyes. However, that sensation was like smoke in the mortal world. As soon as it rose up, it was dispersed by the breeze.

“It’s almost time! We have to hurry!” A few kids jogged along shouldering a wooden statue together. They ran past Zi Qing toward the coffin-shaped altar in the middle of the city.

Zi Qing closed his eyes. When he opened them, it seemed that his parents had noticed his gaze upon them. His mother, arms still wrapped around Zi Qing’s lil’ bro, saw him through the crowd and noticed the skewer of candied fruit. Her expression was so calm it was almost eerie. Smiling warmly, she looked at Zi Qing and lifted her chin slightly.

The child in her arms looked over his shoulder. He was only seven, and his face was clean and pure. His eyes seemed to reflect the glistening candied fruit, but also glimmered with a bit of resentment. When he spotted his big brother and the candied fruit, his eyes lit up. But only a moment later, those eyes filled with tears, turning red. His lips tightened into a pout.

Grinning a bit helplessly, his father said, “Aww, kid, why are your eyes so red and puffy?”

Then his mother spoke. “You’re a tough guy, Qing’er! You can’t start crying the moment your big brother leaves! Come here... let mommy give you a hug. Look over there, the sacrifice is about to begin.”

When Zi Qing heard those words, his gaze took in his mother’s kindness and his father’s broad shoulders. He looked at the anticipation in his younger brother’s tear-stained face. Then he looked at the altar, and finally, the cold, broken face high in the sky.

“The time has come,” Zi Qing murmured softly.

Gripping the candied fruit skewer, he walked forward quietly like someone just there to watch the ceremony. He walked toward his family from this life, and he walked toward... the altar that he himself had chosen.

Atop the altar was a priest in a red robe, his arms outstretched as he cried out in a voice that could pierce the bones and marrow. It was like a trumpet call announcing the end of days as his voice drowned out the clamor of the crowds.

“It is the year 135 of Heavenly Wonder, a date aligned with South Phoenix, with the moon traversing the Ghost Constellation in the night sky! We lot are like ants, prostrating here in Peerless City, offering this gory gift to send a message to the god of the broken face!”

As Zi Qing calmly walked forward, he looked up. His gaze passed by the red-robed priest, the hundred prisoners awaiting death, and all the way to that massive face. That face... was as cold and brutal as ever.

But Zi Qing knew that an agreement had been made, and it was binding. When he sacrificed himself, he had agreed that, on the day he returned in the future, he would sacrifice everything to the broken face. All of the words being spoken seemed to thrum with karma.

“In ancient times, when azure jade fell to the lands, when the xuanwu turtle’s leg was broken, your eyes first opened, melting the crimson sun into iron slag, boiling the five lakes and shattering myriad stars into arrows that pierced the nine wilds.”

Under the influence of karma, the priest’s chant grew louder and more frantic.

Zi Qing's gaze fell upon his dad and mom, as well as his little brother.

His father seemed to have sensed something unusual, as he frowned and stepped protectively in front of his wife and child. He looked at his mother holding his little brother. The tender look she had given her son moments ago was now mixed with unease because of the priest's voice. His little brother looked scared, and was huddling deep in his mother's embrace.

Zi Qing looked at all that, but his heart was absolutely still and calm, without a ripple of emotion. All he felt was the cold reality that he was living up to his agreement. The heat in the candied skewer he held was slowly retreating, leaving it cold like his heart.

"Now the ruined walls flicker with ghostfire," howled the priest, "living beings devour the dirt of graves, and the blood congealed on your lashes reveal the remaining gasps of living things!

"Oh, god!

"We hereby pray that the faint breath escaping your lips might be the kindling that stokes our survival; we pray that the shadow cast by your brow be the shelter for the commoners to persist in life!"

The priest then slashed his arms down toward the prisoners, like a blade descending onto the executioner's block.

"Oh, god, may your eyes remain closed!

"Oh, god, may you sleep forever!

"Oh, god, we pray... that you not open your eyes!"

"Do not open your eyes!!!"

As his voice crashed like waves, Zi Qing looked up from within the crowd.

"I'm back," he said softly. "Take all that you see to fulfill the agreement made in that past life."

The moment he spoke those words... the eyes above which always remained closed... suddenly twitched! They... opened by a crack! There was no light or emotion in the eyes. There was only pure, cold indifference. The deal... was complete.

RUMBLE!!

A soundless voice of annihilation echoed within Zi Qing's soul. It was the voice from the agreement. The world in front of him had reached its foreordained conclusion.

It melted! Because of that gaze, the bricks, beams, and roads of Peerless City, as well as all other material objects... lost their foundation. Things began to crumble into endless bits of dust, which were then picked up as if by an invisible wind to be carried into the sky. It was as if a massive, unseen hand were erasing the entire city!

“Th-that... that...”

“The god’s eyes opened!”

“Nooo....”

Countless screams of grief broke the silence and filled Peerless City.

Living beings, even ones right next to Zi Qing, screamed as they transformed! A woman’s skin cracked open as her bones exploded! A child grew into a mountain of flesh covered with pus-filled pustules and sharp claws! An old man’s head split open to reveal a pair of compound eyes! A burly man’s skin became covered with scales, and he grew fangs!

The moment Zi Qing completed the deal, the peaceful Peerless City turned into a millstone of flesh and blood! Those who did not experience mutation had it even worse. They exploded into clouds of blood that rose into the air and then began to fall as a blood rain!

As had been agreed upon, life faded away.

Zi Qing looked coldly through the ash and blood to his parents and brother. He saw his father trying to protect his wife and child. But even as he tried to crouch over them, the mixture of astonishment and determination on his face froze... and starting from the tips of his fingers, he collapsed like dust in the wind! There was no scream. There was no long, drawn-out process. He turned into ashes that the wind swallowed up, and then he was gone.

His mother still held his brother. The kindness on her face had been replaced by astonishment and terror. Before she could even look at the spot where her husband had disappeared, she went still.... And then, like a candle thrown into an oven, she melted, starting from her head....

Zi Qing watched as the long black hair, fair skin, and tender eyes that were everything of his “mother” became viscous, red fluid that splashed all over his lil’ bro. He watched as his younger brother wailed in terror. He tumbled out of his melting mother’s arms, and then landed onto the sticky red ground. There, his tiny form lay trembling in the blood that was all that remained of his mother.

The ashy dust in the air became like ritual money burned for the dead, mixing with the blood rain that fell everywhere. Death had come. Even those who had mutated... began to explode. The blood rain fell harder.

Zi Qing walked through the hot, red blood, step by step, toward the huddled figure of his younger brother. He stopped right in front of him. He looked down at his lil’ bro.

His little shoulders trembled. His clothes were soaked in blood. He looked like an abandoned animal, filled only with raw terror and blankness.

When Zi Qing looked down, his brother slowly looked up. Blood and tears streaked his face. His eyes had glistened, but now they were full of terror. They looked like two pits of despair. Then he spoke in a fragile, whimpering voice.

“Brother... dad and mom, they....”

Zi Qing's lips quivered. The bamboo skewer that held the candied fruit had, at some point, stabbed into his flesh. Hot blood dripped down the skewer and splashed onto the ground, mixing with his mother's blood, and the blood of the rest of the city. He felt no pain. He only felt the cold thrum of the agreement having been fulfilled.

He offered no explanation. Any words spoken to explain the destruction he had wrought would be nothing more than profane. He had stuck to the deal. That was all.

In the end, he coldly extended his blood-soaked hand until it was right over his younger brother's head. He moved with grave purpose, as if it were an important ceremony. At the same time, he put the blood-soaked candied fruit down in front of his lil' bro. Then he spoke, his voice calm, as if he were reading the final portion of a sacrificial sutra.

Looking down into those terrified eyes, he said, "Lil' bro... don't cry."

His hand fell!

However, the moment his hand was about to strike his younger brother's head, a heaven-rending, earth-crushing sound filled the air! It was an intense sound, like time itself being ripped asunder! It shone through the canopy of heaven, covered all the lands, and illuminated the blood rain!

It was daybreak light! It covered everything, far and wide, like a sea, replacing and covering the whole world. Zi Qing was within it as well.

Within that stupefying, spectacular daybreak light was a hand.... The hand latched onto Zi Qing's wrist. It gripped hard! Then it jerked to the side.

Astonishing force sent Zi Qing flying off into the distance. His eyes shone brightly as he looked at the new arrival.

"You're finally here."

1. The story of the South Phoenix version of the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan was told in [chapter 207](#). In [chapter 262](#), we learned about the real version. ٧٤

Chapter 1352: Eminent Desolation Complete!

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Daybreak light descended from heaven, filling the ruins of Peerless City and covering that entire part of the human world. Within that light, the young version of Xu Qing remained motionless, as if time had stopped around him.

In front of him was the adult Xu Qing from the future, shimmering within the resplendent light of daybreak. His long black robe flapped in the wind. Flowing violet hair swayed behind him, each strand of it pulsing with the essence power of an entire star ring.

As he walked forth, the Revered Ancient mainland trembled. The lands shook, the sky heaved. It was as if Revered Ancient was waking up and offering a welcome. It wasn't just Revered Ancient. Down below, Brilliant Heaven... was doing the same thing! It seemed like... the figure walking out the light had personhood that was the embodiment of Revered Ancient's essence and Brilliant Heaven's origin!

Auspicious signs spread in all directions, all while scintillating daybreak formed. All were welcoming him! When the person in the light became clear, rumbling sounds filled heaven and earth!

Heaven-shaking, earth-shattering power erupted from him, and together with the resonance with Revered Ancient and Brilliant Heaven, it became an aura that surpassed that of a Summer Immortal....

It was... Immortal Lord! And this was no ordinary Immortal Lord, this level was the peak of Immortal Lord! Even more astonishing, behind Xu Qing there seemed to be another adult version of himself. It was just like the twin primeval motherworlds!

As he stood there, he looked at the youthful version of himself seemingly stuck within time. Then he looked at Zi Qing off in the distance, looking in his direction. He started walking toward Zi Qing. Step after step he took, surpassing stopped time, walking through the sticky gore and the light and the blood rain. He reached Zi Qing.

Looking at him, Xu Qing said, "Why didn't Eminent Desolation try to stop me from breaking through?"

Zi Qing was smiling. This version of himself had just awoken. He did not have the same cultivation base as he had in his past life, nor had he reached the same god cultivation level as he had in the Heaveneater Region. Right now, all he had in him was pure godliness. Facing Xu Qing in this way, he was very weak. But he didn't care. He smiled at Xu Qing, his eyes full of admiration and deep anticipation.

"Before I answer your question, lil' bro, let me ask you something. Do you know... who you really are?"

Xu Qing looked back coldly at Zi Qing, saying not a word.

Zi Qing's smile grew broader. "You don't know.... You couldn't possibly know!" His eyes shone brightly. "I searched for you for years... but even then I never admitted what you were....

"That was even the case after I traveled through the fate of this life many times, and saw things play out in many different ways. Even this day of sacrifice here in Peerless City.... In some fates, I ignored you. In others, I took you away. There are even some fates in which I destroyed you.

"That's why your memories of Peerless City are so fragmented! After doing all that work, I finally picked up on some clues.... And yet, I still wasn't sure. So I finally just let you walk your own path.... The first half of your life was clearly visible to me in fate. Your days of slaughter. Getting a Master. All of your different decisions and actions. All of them gave birth to different fates, and I saw it all. I studied each and every one of them.

“Originally, I planned to take you with me to the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan to be a sacrifice. Eventually, in the imperial capital of humankind, I saw that chair in the depths of your soul.... Did you have any idea, lil’ bro? On that very day, I saw your true fate, and I settled a suspicion that had long bothered me. At the same time, I saw the true linchpin in the destiny I had been plotting over....”

Zi Qing smiled as he explained everything! “And so, I naturally did everything within my power to influence the broken face of Eminent Desolation. I didn’t want hīm to interfere with you devouring the primeval motherworlds. I wanted you to succeed even more than you!”

Zi Qing laughed loudly, and his eyes shone with even more anticipation.

Xu Qing listened quietly to everything. Noting the anticipation in Zi Qing’s eyes, he said, “Who exactly are you?”

Zi Qing laughed even more loudly. “Who am I...?”

Though he smiled, his expression became far more complex. “I have many identities. I am the Crown Prince of Violet and Cyan. I am the salvation of the destiny aura of humankind. I am the hope of Revered Ancient. I am the reincarnation of some of the will of Brilliant Heaven! But I have another identity that I only understood after I sacrificed myself... I am the broken face of Eminent Desolation!”

Zi Qing’s voice echoed out and shook all heaven and earth.

Although Xu Qing had speculated that this could be, hearing it spoken aloud caused his eyes to harden.

And then Zi Qing kept talking. “To be precise, lil’ bro, I am a possibility that spilled out of Eminent Desolation after hē entered the Living God Umbilical Cord and became a half-Living God! Hē ejected that possibility from the umbilical cord to be born in the star ring in the primeval motherworld of Brilliant Heaven. Hē was creating hope for hīmself! It was a safety mechanism in case hē died when trying to become a Living God. If that happened, then the possibility could replace hīm and become the new version of hīm! And yet, that led to something unexpected happening....”

Zi Qing pointed up toward the dome of heaven. “After hē failed, hē didn’t actually die. Instead, hē came here looking for something! And I became the salvation of the primeval motherworld, born from a convergence of destiny aura! Therefore, hē could be me, but I could also be hīm!”

“He didn’t come here looking for you!” Xu Qing said suddenly.

Zi Qing looked at Xu Qing with his eyes glittering. “Of course hē wasn’t looking for me. Just like me, hē... was looking for you, lil’ bro! Of course, hē and I had different goals. Hē is barely conscious, and is acting mostly on instinct. Most of the time, all hē can manage to do is sleep. And so, I managed to find you first. Then, thanks to my influence, hē started to forget about you.

“That is why you were able to survive hīs gaze on multiple occasions. Now that I’ve cleared things up for you, lil’ bro... it’s your turn! Using the power of the twin primeval motherworlds that you

devoured, you must enter that tunnel in your soul, get to the third door on the right-hand side of the chair, and inscribe my name!

“By way of compensation... after I succeed, I’ll lead the broken face away from here, and will leave behind a Revered Ancient that is pure, clean, peaceful, and free of mutagen! At the same time, I will cleanse the Ninth Star Ring on your behalf. I’ll make sure there are no other gods around to threaten you!

“The Ninth Star Ring will be a world of cultivators. And it will be your star ring! In addition, after I succeed, I’ll tell you who you actually are!! I’m the only one who knows that most profound of secrets!! What’s more, after I succeed, I’ll take the sacrificed Peerless City, including your father and mother, out of fate! I will resurrect them so you can be reunited!

“It’s a good deal, lil’ bro. What do you say?”

By the time Zi Qing finished talking, the anticipation in his eyes had reached a peak level of intensity. From all of the varying fates, he had seen the finale, and knew that Xu Qing... would definitely agree! His voice was a godly pact, a part of the natural laws of the Ninth Star Ring. Xu Qing could sense that clearly, and understood that Zi Qing was not lying. He could really do as he said he would do.

Xu Qing looked at Zi Qing, and then he looked at the broken face above.

A moment passed, and he softly said, “Absolutely not! I refuse!”

As the words echoed out, he raised his right hand, then dropped it. To Zi Qing’s astonishment, a terrifying power erupted from Xu Qing’s palm. A force of extermination swept over everything, crushing all in its path as it poured into Zi Qing’s body. It wiped out all godliness there, and severed all karma. Zi Qing’s flesh and blood exploded in all directions.

“All those things you said you’d do,” Xu Qing continued, “are things I already plan to do myself. As far as your desire to possess Eminent Desolation... whether you succeed or fail is all up to your own good fortune.”

Xu Qing waved his hand, causing Zi Qing’s flesh and blood to rise into the sky toward the Broken face.

“Sacrifice!” he said, and heaven and earth trembled!

Zi Qing’s flesh and blood rose.

Xu Qing looked up as they floated ever toward the broken face. Zi Qing wanted to replace the broken face! Xu Qing was absolutely clear about that. Zi Qing wanted his name inscribed on the third door inside Xu Qing. Obviously, that was the most suitable way for him to achieve his goal. It would make his possession attempt easier, and reduce any risks.

And so, Xu Qing chose to refuse. Given Zi Qing’s skill in scheming, he had likely planned for the possibility of Xu Qing refusing. And yet... he did it anyway.

It was true. Zi Qing had planned for that. As Zi Qing's flesh and blood flew up, dramatic events unfolded! A pillar of black smoke some 500,000 kilometers wide shot up into the air. It headed straight toward the dome of heaven! It was pitch black and filled with a strong, gruish aura. Along with it came a sound like the wailing of ghosts and howling of wolves.

There wasn't just one such column.... In this space-time, all of Revered Ancient was rumbling. One after another, black pillars shot up in different locations and ascended skyward! There were many of them, completely filling Revered Ancient. In total, they numbered 99,999! Their arrival caused the canopy of heaven to shake violently.

The black smoke began to converge, and the sky over Revered Ancient... was stained!

Black smoke covered everything, inundated all things, and made the sky of Revered Ancient... become pure black smoke! As Xu Qing looked on with gleaming eyes, he recognized the power of the Grue World. Before his fight with Zi Qing, he had spoken to Yu Liuchen. During that talk, Yu Liuchen explained how hē had sensed the aura of the Grue World in the many stories hē had told.

Clearly, the Grue World was part of Zi Qing's plan!

All of a sudden, Zi Qing's voice echoed out in heaven and earth. "If I succeed, the world will once again have a Living Grue!"

It was a bizarre voice that caused black smoke to seethe more violently. And then... the smoke exploded, as if the Grue World was being opened! As that happened, countless shadows erupted from within the smoke. They converged on Peerless City!

And they rushed toward Zi Qing's flesh and blood! They covered the flesh and blood, causing it to corrode and melt, until the only thing left behind were innumerable shadows... that occupied the spot left behind. Then they spread, wriggling into the shape of... a broken face!! The broken face was huge, and it looked very similar to the broken face of Eminent Desolation.

Put precisely, it was the half of Eminent Desolation's face that had always been missing! The difference was that this face was not formed from flesh and blood, but rather, from black shadows. It was a broken face of shadows! Immeasurably dark, it both existed and didn't exist!

As Xu Qing looked on grimly, the eyes of the broken face of shadows opened. They glowed red.

Hē was Zi Qing! The moment hīs eyes opened, hē looked down at Xu Qing, hīs gaze complicated.

Xu Qing's choice had come as a surprise, and had forced hīm to rely on a backup plan. He had opened the Grue World and tapped into its power! It was an option he had prepared, but had hoped to avoid. But now it was happening. All hē could do was use the Grue World to produce the karma necessary for this face of shadows.

"That's fine. I did plot against you first.... As of now, our karma is settled."

With a final hard glance at Xu Qing, the face of shadows that was Zi Qing flashed a determined expression and then shot... toward the dome of heaven! Right toward the broken face of Eminent Desolation. Hē was going to fly up to that broken face and turn it into a complete face. This was an act of possession!

It was just like the saying from the Grue World.... *“Like a shadow that exists alongside the gods.”* [1]

At the same time as hē rose, the countless shadows from the black smoke of the Grue World continued to converge on the broken face made by Zi Qing. As a result, that broken face grew larger and larger. It grew far more majestic.

As Xu Qing watched, the face of shadows reached the highest point in the dome of heaven, right in front of the broken face of Eminent Desolation. And then... it began to fill in the pieces! Astonishingly, a complete face now existed above!

Unfortunately, half of the face was made of shadows, while the other half was made of flesh and blood. Zi Qing was the reincarnation of the broken face, but he wanted to take over as the dominant will. Normally speaking, that would have been almost impossible. That was why he wanted to put his name on the door inside Xu Qing. Considering that the first phase of his plan had failed, hē had been forced to use the Grue World, and use the identity of a grue to replace the broken face.

This was... something similar to a Living God. It was a Living Grue! However... it was an extremely dangerous undertaking. The pieced-together face of Eminent Desolation still contained remnants of the original will. And that will was waking up and trying to reject the power of the Grue World that Zi Qing had brought.

The face of Eminent Desolation in the canopy of heaven began to split apart, then stick back together. It descended into a state of chaos and collapse! It was the most critical of moments! The world was affected. Revered Ancient was affected. The Ninth Star Ring was affected. Fate was affected! At the same time... an unprecedented opportunity had arrived!

The lot of you are definitely going to show up! Xu Qing looked on from below, his eyes narrowed.

At almost exactly the same moment that the thought occurred to him... the starry sky beyond Revered Ancient filled with rumbling sounds!

Out there was a huge black pagoda that symbolized endless imprisonment and the destruction of souls. Piercing through the starry sky, it opened a path, shot through space-time, and entered Revered Ancient! And it appeared... right there in the dome of heaven!

At Eminent Desolation's most critical moment, the pagoda descended! There was more than just a black pagoda. At the same time, an incomparably terrifying aura appeared, like a beast made of undulating mountains, pulsing with a sensation of hunger. What was more, there was a paper person that seemed to be made of joss paper directly from the Yellow Springs.

The former looked cold and apathetic as it shot toward Eminent Desolation. The latter licked its lips, then expanded, turning into countless paper people that all pounced simultaneously!

Of the four gods of the Ninth Star Ring, three had arrived! All of their previous machinations had been attempts to seize the broken face. And they had been carefully waiting for a very long time. It just wasn't possible to pass up an opportunity like this. It made perfect sense to try to take advantage of the moment to seize an advantage!

But clearly, the four gods of the Ninth Star Ring weren't unified in this effort.... The mother river hadn't come, but was instead being a spectator.

An instant later, the black pagoda, the huge beast, and the bizarre army of paper people closed in on Eminent Desolation! Taking advantage of the chaos between Eminent Desolation and Zi Qing's Grue World, the three gods landed in precise locations on the broken face.

The black pagoda looked like an inverted gravestone that plunged right into Eminent Desolation's forehead! Netherworld light swirled, and sobbing that could cause the soul to run chill rang out. Along with them came a force of absorption full of extreme avarice! What it coveted was the ancient god soul of Eminent Desolation!

The huge beast settled into place behind the shadows, opening a maw that could devour universes. A rank odor erupted along with dripping saliva. Then disgusting chewing sounds could be heard. It was ravenously devouring the energy and blood of Eminent Desolation, which contained neverending life force.

The immense, soundless army of paper people filled the sky like maggots, spreading out to cover the face in general. Their delicate paper arms waved, sending out clouds of bacteria and an aura of decay that targeted specific spots in Eminent Desolation's fate. Guided by greed, they sought to absorb the profound and mysterious godly authority of fate!

The three gods weren't holding back any longer, and had fully unleashed their personhood!

The black pagoda was silent and cold. The huge beast was wild and ravenous. The paper person was bizarre and crafty. The three of them used different terrifying godly authorities, unleashing them like an epidemic as they sought to snatch benefits for their own! As they closed in and attacked viciously, Eminent Desolation was thus faced with difficulties internally and externally. Because of that, the attempt by the three gods was already going very smoothly!

However... Eminent Desolation was half a step into the terrifying Living God level. That, plus the invasion of the power of the Grue World, ensured that the three gods had to pay a price for what they were doing. As the three gods went on the offense, a terrifying corrosive power raged against them! The huge beast instantly began to writhe and distort, growing weak as if it was being erased away.

The black pagoda's impregnable form began to ripple, like a shadow on water that might vanish at any moment. The seemingly weak army of paper people erupted with bizarre pale flames, becoming like a stream of sparks dissipating into the silent starry sky.

Upon witnessing that, the divine will of the three gods trembled. That brief attempt at possession confirmed to them that Eminent Desolation really was like... an arrow that had reached the end of its flight. This was not some sort of carefully laid trap. Therefore, an instant later...

RUUUUMMMMBLLE!

The starry sky shook violently. The barrier of space-time shattered like polished glass, and two incomparably explosive bursts of power descended! Three embodiments of their will descended, along with three forms that pulsed with the power of terrifying destruction!

The forms resembled a huge beast, a black pagoda, and a paper person. Right now, thēy shone with blinding light that surpassed anything from before. Godly might caused Revered Ancient to groan and tremble, as if the entire starry sky were weighing down on it. This time, thēy had come in their true forms! Ignoring all obstacles, thēy emerged from the void, instantly piercing through all dimensions, and shot with extreme precision right into thēir shadowy clone forms. Thēy fused in an instant! What had already been a terrifying aura erupted like a volcano, and the possession attempts against the dying Eminent Desolation intensified!

As rumbling sounds echoed out, Eminent Desolation's enormous face trembled. Bone-deep crevices spread rapidly, creating a visual like shattering pottery.

Inside, the god soul's essence began to collapse thanks to the black pagoda, which started devouring it. The flesh and blood quintessence suffered a similar fate, as the enormous beast chewed and swallowed it.... The entire face began to visibly wither, dry up, lose its luster, and emanate an intense aura of decay and death!

Behind the face, the beast's eyes were red with greed, as if the beast had encountered the most amazing delicacy imaginable.

The horde of paper people acted similarly. The invisible threads of fate grew tighter, and the plundered godly authority of fate caused the pale paper people to wriggle in a bizarre manner, all while vague facial features and skin-like textures began to rise up. It was just barely visible to see inauspicious threads of fate, almost like snakes, coming into existence within the paper people. They were transforming from paper into living things!

From the look of it, thēy sensed that continuing on in this manner would be extremely risky. And so, the rifts between the shadows and the flesh in Eminent Desolation's face began to widen. Thēy were choosing to leave.

However, at that exact moment, deep in the void, a rumbling started up that could chill one down to the marrow! The stream of viscous, filthy fluid, golden in color, began to flow like a river from the starry sky and toward the battlefield.

It was the mother river. Shē had been holding back until shē was sure it was safe. And now, shē didn't hesitate to come forth! The sordid river water looked like a collection of millions upon millions of greedy tentacles, with godliness that could erode all things. And it quickly wrapped around the collapsing Eminent Desolation! The trend of collapse instantly stopped!

Next, the viscous mother river seethed as a bizarre face appeared, which was made of innumerable smaller faces, contorted in pain. The face had what appeared to be a mouth with a bottomless throat, which... began to devour Eminent Desolation! God blood, noxious and pulsing with bizarre godlight, began to flow out of Eminent Desolation's withered face, and then merged into the sordid water of the mother river.

Upon absorbing the god blood, the river began to surge with even greater intensity.

Eminent Desolation had already been weakened, but this fatal blow was like a blast of wind that hit a candle. The aura of death grew even stronger! The mother river was succeeding, and Eminent Desolation's weakness was on full display. And so, from within the black pagoda emerged a cold,

ancient, and emotionless godly will! Behind the pagoda, space-time was once again ripped apart by terrifying power!

Out of it came an ancient bronze pagoda, covered in rust and a host of silently moaning shrines! This was the true form of the black pagoda! Everything from before had been nothing but probing! The moment the true form emerged, the ripping force targeting the god soul increased by hundreds, if not thousands of times over! It seemed like it was capable of extracting all of the god souls that existed in the starry sky!

The huge beast's eyes shone with increased ferocity at the sight of this. After a short moment of waiting... it lifted its ferocious head and emitted a terrifying cry that could shatter planets!

Roar!

The void behind it collapsed, and a beast emerged, formed from countless wriggling planets, shattered planes of existence, and innumerable black substances! The beast was so enormous that it could easily devour an entire galaxy! Pulsing with an aura that could destroy anything and everything, it opened its mouth and lunged viciously toward Eminent Desolation!

Last was the paper person, who was clearly the most crafty and cautious. Despite the other three gods having appeared in true form, the paper person was still biding his time.

Until... when the three gods' efforts reached a fever pitch, and Eminent Desolation was so withered it seemed like the end was near....

Pale, eerie lights appeared within the cavernous eyes of the army of countless paper people! Then one of the paper people suddenly ripped open at the chest, and a dizzying and evil prismatic light shot out, within which was a very small paper person that pulsed with a very inauspicious aura!

Instantly, all space around the seven-colored paper person began to rot and collapse. Without any hesitation, he became a streak of evil, seven-colored light that shot forward with unstoppable force, and an eerie power that could snatch fate and tamper with all endings....

It was another fatal blow to the already collapsing Eminent Desolation!

The seven-colored paper person shot forth in a blast of evil light. The black pagoda sucked at the soul. The huge beast devoured the body. And the mother river was going crazy. At that exact moment, the eyes of Eminent Desolation, which had seemed like they would remain in slumber forever, suddenly snapped open!

Within one eye burned endless flames of karma, like scarlet magma from the depths of an abyss. The other eye devoured all streams of light, like a void that could annihilate all things! Then, a voice spoke, like a combination of countless voices, cold enough to freeze space-time. It was like millions upon millions of dying planets that slammed into the senses of all the God Paragons!

“You people... finally came.”

The moment the voice spoke, something very strange happened! It didn't come from the struggling part of Eminent Desolation's broken face. Rather, it came from the flesh and blood that fought against it, which was Zi Qing! It seemed that he had been waiting for this very moment!

When the four God Paragons showed up in person to seize the quintessence of Eminent Desolation, and were connected deeply to the body that was the battlefield... Zi Qing chose to unleash the Grue World! The inauspicious smoke of the Grue World suddenly expanded by millions upon millions of times!

It was no longer vague and ethereal. In an instant, it became rotting blood, as viscous as if it were millions upon millions of years old. Moving faster than thought itself, it spread through the dome of heaven! It began devouring everything!

The huge beast's head bore the brunt. Turbid smoke swept over it, causing its flesh and blood, which was made from planets and planes of existence, to emit deafening hissing noises. And then it began to crumble and melt!

The numerous planets that made up the composite form darkened and began to fall apart, spraying out a noxious liquid that the smoke greedily devoured! It was the same with the black pagoda. Its form, already covered by the howling shrines, was being absorbed by the smoke. The faces contorted, and areas of moldy corrosion spread out over it. The gobbling sounds that the tower emitted when absorbing souls changed, and became screams of terror!

And at the base, the seemingly impregnable pagoda showed signs of melting! The mother river was no more capable of evading disaster! The bizarre, agonized faces emitted soundless screams as the water seethed. And all were forcibly devoured like food by the smoke!

Most bizarre of all was that all the clones of the paper person were shredded apart and began to fall down to the ground. His seven-colored true form suddenly began to darken and dim as the corrosive smoke glittered. The intensity of the danger forced him to fall back and try to manipulate fate to escape. Unfortunately, the fate nodes connected to Eminent Desolation were like fatal fetters!

Smoke followed them backward and started madly infecting his essence! He started twitching and writhing madly as the color bled out, until it looked like an ordinary piece of paper soaked in dirty water.

"Nutrients... more... nutrients!" The deep voice which spoke contained a greedy sound like millions upon millions of bugs rubbing their carapaces together, and it slammed into the minds of the four God Paragons!

The predators had become the prey! They had to flee!

The beast howled with infinite terror, all while madly trying to escape from the vile fate. But the planets that made up the body just continued to flake off! The black pagoda rumbled loudly, the surface shining with deathly light that tried to break free from the corrosion! The mother river seethed, and the distorted faces that made up the river water fled as they consciously wanted to break free from the connection to the smoke!

Things were more direct when it came to the seven-colored paper person, who severed the fate nodes connected to Eminent Desolation, then turned into a tattered, gray figure that shot toward the starry sky!

Sadly, it was too late! The withered, black hair surrounding the face of Eminent Desolation like wriggling mountains, which had been in a passive position up to this point, began to dance madly within the smoke! The hair spread like mad, ignoring how much space needed to be traveled, shooting directly toward the four God Paragons!

They were wrapped up in an instant! The huge beast was tightly bound, and then the hair stabbed into it. A sucking sound rang out that could cause one's hair to stand on end! Hair covered the black pagoda like spiderwebs, wrapping up all the shrines, then stabbing into the screaming faces and absorbing the soul-sucking power! The waters of the mother river were thoroughly contaminated. The hair rapidly covered the distorted faces and turned into the pure power of godliness absorption! As for the fleeing paper person, the hair grabbed him and viciously dragged him back!

The four God Paragons were simultaneously dragged into the smoke! All were covered. And then an indescribable howl echoed out, only to be covered up by an even more hair-raising sound!

Crunch... chew... gurgle....

They were the sounds of godly bones being shattered! They were the sounds of godly bodies being torn apart! It was the godly essence being ravenously devoured! The sound continued for a time within the smoke.

Eventually, it grew softer and softer, until... everything went deathly silent. Only the smoke remained in the dome of heaven, as if using the plundered life force to spread out in all directions.

Xu Qing watched it all happen with a profound look in his eyes. He didn't believe that the God Paragons had truly perished. God Paragons were God Paragons, after all. Even if they really had come as their true forms, Xu Qing was convinced that they would have contingency plans in place!

That said, regardless of what they do going forward, they've definitely paid an immense price for this. And... who knows whether or not they'll be able to keep their God Paragon personhood.

Eyes narrowing, he looked from the corrosive smoke down toward his own palm. There was a piece of paper there! It was a piece from one of the many paper persons that had been ripped to shreds.

In the vast starry sea of the Seventh Star Ring, an inconspicuous yellow planet started trembling. The surface layers of the planet collapsed, until eventually the entire thing exploded. In the core of the planet... was an egg! The egg also shattered.

A tiny beast crawled out. The aura of a peak God Lord erupted from it, all as it turned to look in the direction of the Ninth Star Ring.

“So it was a trick. However... what I really wanted wasn't your flesh and blood. It was your memories about treading the Living God Umbilical Cord! As it turns out... *that's* what the Living God Umbilical Cord is like....”

In the Thirteenth Star Ring, a god rose up into the sky. As an Altar God, it had already reached the peak level possible on this particular planet, and it had been because of a precious treasure acquired years ago. It was a bronze, black pagoda! The pagoda had allowed it to improve with uncanny speed, and had enabled it to win every battle it fought.

Now, it had reached the peak, and was preparing to leave its current planet and strive toward having a god kingdom. It was confident that the black pagoda would take it all the way to the True God level.

However... even as it left the planet, the black pagoda inside of it suddenly shivered, then started absorbing all surrounding things. Before the Altar God could react, it trembled, and was absorbed until there was absolutely nothing left.

It happened in an instant. It didn't even realize what happened.

All that remained was the black pagoda, which quickly dropped down to the surface of the planet. Then the planet trembled as all the gods there withered and then collapsed into dust. All things were absorbed into the black pagoda.

A deep, godly voice echoed out from the pagoda. "The Living God Umbilical Cord...."

Similar things happened in two other mysterious locations.

The paper person hid in a special instance of space-time. It was a scroll painting, and there, the paper person was hoping to recover and get back to his previous level.

Even more mysterious was the location the mother river had set up as a contingency. It was a world in which the mother river could hide very carefully in the word 'water' itself. In terms of concealment, the mother river's contingency plan was the most unique.

Sadly... there was an entity in the Revered Ancient mainland that not even the mother river could hope to hide from. The smoke above Peerless City churned. The void rippled. And within that space-time appeared the Mask of Wishes, which Xu Qing had brought with him!

Its entire purpose was to plot against the mother river! It didn't matter how the mother river had fled into concealment. The mask's expression distorted into one of pure madness. It was not holding anything back, but instead, was unleashing its aura in a bright conflagration! And then it was able to utilize a mysterious connection to the mother river to be guided by Eminent Desolation!

The moment it happened, the conflagration around it rumbled, breaking open a passage in the void and revealing a dramatic scene. Astonishingly, that scene depicted the mother river's hiding place! Then, a strand of hair shot down from above, heading right toward the image and piercing into it! An agonized shriek rang out, and the hair retracted.

Within that world, the word ‘water’ had been erased. The moment it happened, the world hiding the mother river filled with ripples. Then a golden mask appeared that had been sealed in the mud of the mother river, as if aeons in the past. Now it was free.

“Mother river, it was years ago that, for the sake of a wish, you sealed me and stole my godly authority. You seized my godhood.... But now... the karma is resolved. This is the cost for that wish.”

In the space-time containing Peerless City in the Revered Ancient mainland, the smoke in the sky was so dense it wasn’t possible to see the face of Eminent Desolation within it. But this space-time... was already starting to fade away.

Xu Qing knew that his karma with Zi Qing had already ended. It was impossible to say whether or not Zi Qing could succeed. Xu Qing didn’t care anymore.

He looked down at the vanishing space-time flowing every which way.... A blood rain was starting to fall. Within the devastation, the story of this space-time was being laid out.

Xu Qing saw the young version of himself awakening within the blood rain. He saw him struggle to his feet and look around blankly. He saw the seven-year-old version of him being bullied and robbed in the wilderness. He saw himself feeling completely and utterly helpless.

Eventually, he saw the young version of himself find an iron skewer in the ruins. The skinny version of himself placed the skewer against his own throat. He closed his eyes, looking numb and ready to let go of everything.

Just when he was about to do it... a girl in a tattered robe walked over and gave him a skewer of candied fruit. Despite the corruption in the surrounding world, the girl’s eyes glittered brightly. The candied fruit caused memories to well up in the young version of himself.

Xu Qing felt bitterness in his heart. He would not forget any of this. The young version of himself looked at the candied fruit, then slowly dropped the iron skewer. He dropped down into a sitting position on the ground... and started crying. That was his youth.

Xu Qing sighed. As space-time vanished, the fragments of time disappeared, he looked around....

He watched himself getting stronger. He watched as something profoundly moving played out. The girl who gave him the candied fruit fell into a pool of blood. The young version of him took the iron skewer and plunged into the throat of a villain. When he pulled it out, blood sprayed all over him. The young version of Xu Qing walked over to the corpse of the girl and looked down at her for a long time.

Eventually, he stooped over and closed her eyes. “I’ll get revenge for you.”

As those words rang out, space-time collapsed. The time that Peerless City existed in shattered like a mirror. Fragments then spread through space-time and returned to the present.

Heaven and earth retreated into the fog of history. The dome of heaven went back to the current time. The lands returned to the Heaveneater Region.

Xu Qing stood once again in front of the imperial palace of the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan. Zi Qing was not inside.

Xu Qing looked up. He saw the dome of heaven. And... there was no smoke there. Eminent Desolation was there just like before. But the face was not broken. The face of Eminent Desolation was complete. One part was black shadow. The other part was flesh and blood. Looking closely, it appeared to be... Zi Qing's face.

There's one more thing that must be done....

Xu Qing looked down at the palm of his hand. The piece of paper had brought him back to the present. The scrap of paper caused killing intent to bubble in his eyes. He closed his hand into a fist, and the power of canon and statute surged.... it locked onto a spot in the starry sky.

“Master Righteous Veil. I'm coming to you to exact vengeance for Grand Emperor Swordsage! I don't care how many clones you have, or what planes or space-times you hid in. You... cannot escape!” [2]

Xu Qing then stepped out into the starry sky.

1. This saying was originally mentioned in [chapter 1341](#). ❹

2. Master Righteous Veil references: [chapters 927](#), [962.1](#), [1040](#), [1064](#). ❹

Chapter 1353: My Name is Xu!

Chapter 1353: My Name is Xu!

The void was boundless and as silent as a tomb.

This was the same Ninth Star Ring as ever. But nowadays, the Ninth Star Ring had no God Paragons other than Eminent Desolation. The places which had once belonged to the black pagoda, the huge beast, the paper person, and the mother river, were now empty.

Sensing that, Xu Qing strode through the starry sky, and through time itself, passing in between the spaces within the shattered ontology. Using the shattered fragment within his palm, he proceeded forward one step at a time. Each footfall of his caused countless worlds to fill with daybreak.

A pulsing sense of somberness became an endless frigid coldness that accompanied his forward progress. It dribbled out through space-time, such that wherever his foot touched, space rippled and then froze.

His tranquil gaze seemed to contain a darkness and a light that could pulverize millions upon millions of heavenly bodies. Onward he advanced, piercing through countless layers of the chaotic

flow of space-time.... Eventually, he spotted a vague location that seemed to have been assimilated by the void itself.

“Found you,” he said softly, his gaze coming to rest on that specific spot.

It was a mortal world. Somewhere in that world was a city, and inside the city was a school. Scrolls were piled everywhere there.

Xu Qing’s gaze pierced through space-time to fall upon one of the scrolls there! It was an ancient scroll made of mundane materials. It looked completely ordinary. It really seemed like any old object from the mortal world, such that it fit in perfectly with its surroundings. In fact, if Xu Qing didn’t have the scrap of paper in his hand, as well as extraordinary canon and statute, he would never have noticed it.

“You hid very well, Master Righteous Veil.”

Xu Qing’s voice contained no hint of emotion. Stepping forward, he pierced through myriad worlds until he was inside that one specific one. There he appeared, inside the school, right in front of the scroll. Without even an instant of hesitation, he reached out with his right hand to grab the scroll!

It was not an ordinary action. Rather, he directly tapped into the will of the world that the scroll sustained. A terrifying rumbling echoed out, as if the membrane that connected heaven and earth were being ripped apart. The ground heaved, causing all living beings to lose their senses.

The scroll opened! A painting was revealed!

It was a painting of a sprawling, luxurious immortal palace complex! Bejeweled structures hovered above a sea of clouds. Daybreak shone endlessly. Auspicious energy swirled about, all while immortal cranes soared and goddesses danced. It was a magnificent image of pure joy.

However, that amazing scene was enveloped in a deathly gray gaze. That color infected everything. All colors became bizarrely empty, as if they had been washed away by the timescape. The immortal cranes seemed to have empty eyes, the dancing goddesses seemed like marionettes, all of them full of a stifling sense of deathly emptiness. It was as if this world had been intentionally and meticulously filled with an aura that could corrode the bones and marrow.

Astonishingly, in the very middle of the painting, above the magnificent sea of clouds, a huge figure sat cross-legged! It was a paper person! It was none other than Master Righteous Veil!

Hē was no longer made of thin paper, but rather, had a three-dimensional form. Hē wore a magnificent imperial robe that pulsed with an aura of death, as well as a crown of pearls. Hē looked both comical and terrifying, like an emperor made of paper mache. Countless semitransparent threads of fate spread out from all the living things in the painting, and they pierced through the shining clouds to connect to hīm. In that manner, hē created a resonance with the surrounding world to gain nutrients.

Almost as soon as Xu Qing’s gaze landed on the huge paper person, hīs eyes opened. Those eyes glittered with crimson light as they focused on Xu Qing’s gaze.

“Xu Qing!”

Master Righteous Veil's spirits sank, and his heart started pounding. He knew he had karma with Xu Qing. However, based on his omniscience, he had believed there was no way Xu Qing could find him. He was hiding so well that, unless Eminent Desolation woke up, nobody could ever detect him. That was also why he had not been able to detect the scrap of paper on the outside. He had long since severed karma with all of his clones.

Something's not right here!

Master Righteous Veil's mind and heart were in chaos as a deep sense of unease built within him. The timing here couldn't have been worse!

As long as he had enough time, he was confident that he could once again become a God Paragon. With the memories of the Living God Umbilical Cord that he had acquired, he would eventually be able to tread his own future Living God Umbilical Cord, and with a lot more confidence. Except... everything got turned upside-down the moment Xu Qing arrived.

"So," Xu Qing said, "your personhood dropped. You're not a God Paragon anymore."

He entered the painting. When he did, the fake world reacted like a tranquil, dead pond that had been hit by a boulder! The gray membrane of light stirred wildly and tried to reject Xu Qing. Countless goddesses, immortal cranes, and spirit creatures reacted like puppets that had just been activated. Stiff, bizarre smiles appeared on their faces as they surged as one toward Xu Qing! They were not corporeal. They were curses and rancorous wills made from the natural laws in the painting itself, and they had the ability to invade souls and taint essence.

Xu Qing's face remained completely expressionless. His canon and statute of ontology turned into threads of black and white, which spread out around him in all directions. It was like a tide that could destroy entire worlds. It swept out everywhere, and when it hit the puppets, they were shredded into scraps of paper before they could even scream!

The gray membrane emitted a soul-piercing wail as the black-and-white tempest assailed it. It rippled violently as it was infected, which resulted in all of the color in the world to rapidly retreat!

Xu Qing disregarded all obstacles. Taking a step forward in astonishing fashion, he spanned the sea of clouds and appeared directly in front of the paper emperor, Master Righteous Veil. He launched a punch with his right fist! The black-and-white tempest swirled, smashing through all obstructions toward the rippling imperial robe that covered Master Righteous Veil's chest! This was a tempest that did not rip apart space, but rather, annihilated entire concepts!

Time. Color. Shape. Natural law.... All elements that made up the fake world were smashed by the tempest and reduced to ruins!

And then, the tempest smashed into the imperial robe of Master Righteous Veil! There was no heaven-shaking, earth-shattering explosion. There was just a wave of annihilation that caused everything to go silent!

As if starting from Xu Qing's fist, the imperial robe collapsed like a sandcastle falling into a black hole. The magnificent imperial robe turned into ashes. The crown collapsed, releasing the godly

might that it held. His body fell into pieces, becoming innumerable pieces of paper ritual money that flew out everywhere.

And yet, his counterattack was now made manifest. The innumerable scraps of paper that had made up his body reconverged, turning into the enormous head of a paper person, whose mouth opened wide and lunged toward Xu Qing. There were also countless threads of fate that spread from the paper head, becoming a river of fate that encircled Xu Qing. The peak level of God Lord power erupted.

Xu Qing's face still remained expressionless. He did not retract his fist. And then ripples spread out from behind him as a second version of himself stepped out. After devouring the primeval motherworld, Xu Qing's cultivation base reached the level of a peak God Lord. However... he also had two true forms!

He was like a binary planetary system! His second true form came from the black planet, and it was here, also launching a fist strike!

The blow slammed into the head of the paper person. A destructive shockwave exploded out! Rumbling echoed out as destructive power spread everywhere.

The entire world started collapsing. The beautiful immortal palace complex turned into white dust that billowed out. The sea of clouds evaporated. The goddesses and immortal cranes, now lacking any color in the painting, fell one after another. Deathly silence spread out, turning everything into emptiness.

Master Righteous Veil trembled and yet again collapsed into scraps of paper that spun away in all directions. As for the millions upon millions of threads of fate that surrounded Xu Qing, the fist blow from just now wiped them out like a destroyed spider web.

Then, the white planet version of Xu Qing replaced the black planet, taking a step forward and unhesitatingly launching another fist strike! However, this time, something very unusual happened! The moment the painted world collapsed completely, it turned into a drop of indissolvable, corrosive ink full of rancorous will!

The ink did not attack Xu Qing. Seemingly possessed of a life of its own, it quickly wrapped up one of the scraps of paper of Master Righteous Veil that were spreading out! Taking advantage of the gaps of chaos created by the destruction of the world and the collapse of the natural laws, it used pure essence, paying a heavy price to enact a bizarre escape magic to pierce through the void! The speed involved surpassed all senses!

Xu Qing's fist hit nothing. His eyes narrowed. As he stood there in the wreckage of the painted world, his gaze turned cold as he looked at the spot where the ink had just disappeared. The only thing left behind was a rotten bit of paper pulp mixed with some noxious, toxic ink. He slowly retracted his fist. And yet, the killing intent in his pupils only grew stronger.

"Running away again?" he said calmly, his voice echoing out with bone-chilling coldness into the void.

Stepping forward through the annihilated world, he entered the vast void again, where he pursued the silent scraps of corrosive, rancorous will. He was not going to give up on this pursuit. Ever.

Time did not have any meaning as Xu Qing pursued Master Righteous Veil with killing intent.

Both Xu Qing and Master Righteous Veil had the ability to slip through time, to enter different times and planes of existence. The chase was not limited to the higher star rings. They went to the lower ones as well.

At a certain point, after Xu Qing caught up over and over again, Master Righteous Veil finally took a dangerous risk. Hē split apart! Hē created a million or possibly even more clones that entered different space-times and different instances of time. This was hīs life-saving magic.

Hē had so many clones they were almost impossible to count. And any of them could become the true form. So as long as just one of them survived, hē wouldn't die. As long as hē had enough time, any of those clones could eventually recover God Paragon personhood. If that happened, all the other clones would crumble into ash, while the remaining one became the only version of hīm.

There were some downsides. Although hē had an advantage with so many clones, in the end, none of them were as strong as hīs true form. Because of unleashing this technique at hīs current level, the clones weren't God Lords. All were at the lower True God level. And yet, that was the only way that Master Righteous Veil could buy time!

To deal with this god magic, Xu Qing used a corresponding dao. He also made clones! His canon and statute of ontology was fundamentally about unification, so all he had to do was just split apart. Unfortunately, he had to deal with the same flaw as Master Righteous Veil. His scattered clones could not maintain the same level as his true form. And so, all of them... were Summer Immortals!

And thus, the chase continued. But this time, instead of one pursuing the other through various space-times and planes of existence, it was a case.... of endless versions chasing endless versions!

The nation trembled. Everything smelled like rust, soot, and oil. In the distance, huge steam pipelines coiled like serpents, feeding steam into the huge buildings that climbed up into the clouds. The sound of gears was deafening, a never-ending roar like a dirge of death. This was a small world, and it had no cultivators on it.

A shadowy figure appeared in this city of metal, high on a bridge of iron. He wore a long black robe and had violet hair; he didn't seem to fit into this world of oil and machinery. He was none other than Xu Qing.

His gaze pierced through the steam and spinning flywheels to a massive differentiator off in the distance. In that spot, billions of tiny gears whirred constantly as they calculated each breath of this metallic city. There was one gear among them that was covered with a network of white marks that looked like dust. It spun very smoothly, with an efficiency that was strangely superior to the surrounding machinery.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered coldly as he looked at the white marks. Then, like a weightless specter, he made his way across the iron bridge using a method that made him completely undetectable to the patrolling guards.

He landed on the surface of the finely crafted differentiator, and then used a delicate finger to poke a small hole. With that, he produced a drop of black oil that was pure canon and statute, he let it drop through the hole.

SIZZLE!

A faint, piercing sound cut through the din. The gear covered with the white marks suddenly slowed down! And then the 'dust' covering it stirred as if trying to escape. But the black oil quickly covered it and seeped into it.

The white marks writhed like a bug caught in tree sap. The blackness slowly covered it, and the gear moved slower and slower. It even started to let loose sounds like gurgles of pain. In the end, the struggles turned into calm. The gear stopped moving, and there were no white marks on it. There was only a faint moan of godliness that was wiped away by the oil and the steam.

Outside, Xu Qing retracted his finger, and the metal exterior of the differentiator repaired itself. He turned and disappeared into the steam. The only thing left behind was the whir and rumble of machinery.

The depths of the abyss were as silent as a graveyard. The darkness and gloom was absolute, and endless seawater covered everything. This was an abandoned abyss that existed between the lower and higher star rings.

Xu Qing was suspended in the bone-chilling water, a short distance above the decaying wreckage of an enormous sea cruiser. It looked like the skeleton of some enormous beast, slowly sinking down into the seafloor.

Time seemed to be frozen here. The only light came from the phosphorescent sea creatures that occupied these depths. It cast a pale blue glow onto the designs carved into the wood of the ship, as well as the tools and utensils that had scattered when the ship sank.

Xu Qing scanned the wreckage visually, then entered. He moved toward the captain's cabin.

Sitting on the corner of the captain's wooden table was a parchment map. The parchment was yellow with age, and a bit tattered. At a glance, it was obviously as old as the shipwreck itself. But in the dim light that filtered into the cabin, the lines of the parchment which represented reefs and navigation routes... suddenly started to wriggle, almost like the blood vessels in a living being.

As soon as Xu Qing arrived, the parchment suddenly moved. Then it suddenly started melting, as if it were attempting to flee! It was too late. Xu Qing's right hand shot out! An iron skewer flew forth, slamming into the wood with thousands of pounds of force. It pierced through the parchment map, impaling it into the wooden planks of the hull!

Ink flowed into the shape of a distorted face, which bulged from the parchment, mouth gaping unnaturally wide in an expression of pain and terror.

Thanks to Xu Qing's unique canon and statute, seawater was able to pour into the parchment through the gap torn open by the iron skewer.

The face made of ink writhed. The islands made of ink blurred, and the navigation routes distorted. Eventually, all that remained was a chaotic blur of ink. And as the icy seawater continued its work, the ink became an eternal part of the surrounding darkness.

Xu Qing's face was completely expressionless as he turned and left this silent coffin and disappeared into the stillness of the sea.

Spirit energy swirled around Immortal Mount Skycloud. A peak towered above the never-ending sea of clouds, and it was constantly covered with a hazy mist filled with spirit energy. The song of immortal cranes echoed out. Fantastic flowers bloomed everywhere. Jade palaces could be seen within the mists. The daoist rite center there was the very center of this lower star ring. It was a grotto-heaven, a blessed land that countless cultivators dreamed of finding.

Xu Qing stood atop the windy peak of the mountain underneath a clear sky. His long black robe flapped in the wind, and his violet hair danced behind him. It was an image that seemed incongruous with the sunny environment full of immortal energy. He looked more like a devil.

His gaze pierced the cloud cover below until it reached a daoist temple in the grotto-heaven. In the depths of the daoist temple was a secret chamber protected with warding spells. In that chamber were three darkheaven dharma protection amulets, covered with dense magical symbols and flowing light.

The talismans were made from neither gold nor jade, and they seemed full of spirit light. In the corner of one of the amulets was a tiny magical symbol that had a bit of gray color on the edge of one of the brush strokes. Xu Qing was looking for that specific amulet.

"Your hiding spots are getting better. This time you're hiding in the actual natural laws. In other words, you can't be destroyed unless this entire world is destroyed."

Xu Qing stepped off the lonely peak, and the sea of clouds stirred, becoming like a solid path for him to walk. In the blink of an eye, he reached the jade door that led into the secret chamber in the daoist temple. He ignored the complicated warding spells protecting the chamber, walking through them like stepping through a tranquil waterfall.

Incense smoke filled the chamber, and the spirit energy was so dense it was almost liquid. Xu Qing didn't hesitate for an instant. He waved his index finger, and light leapt from the tip. It was like a tiny needle, pulsing with an energy of destruction that threw the spirit energy in the chamber into chaos.

The attack didn't target the talisman itself. It disturbed the spirit power itself, like a stone thrown into a still lake.

KABANG!

Nobody fled!

A blazing white lightning bolt, like a pillar from heaven, destroyed the domed roof of the daoist temple. Ignoring all protective warding spells, it brought the wrath of heaven to strike the dharmic protection amulet with incredible precision! To be precise, it struck the magical symbol with a bit of gray color on the edge.

Time seemed to solidify.

The talisman suddenly erupted with blinding white light! In an instant, the talisman turned into a carbonized black color, then collapsed! Countless scraps of paper drifted out like fiery moths! They fluttered desperately in the cramped chamber as they attempted to avoid the fiery, destructive lightning.

In the haze, Master Righteous Veil's face appeared, distorted in a glare of pain.

"I curse you, Xu Qing!"

Xu Qing looked on coldly as the face disappeared. The magical symbols all turned into black ash that fell onto the cold floor. The smell of incense had been replaced with the odor of burned paper and the aftermath of a lightning strike.

Xu Qing retracted his finger, and the glow from the tip went away. After glancing at the ash on the floor, he turned and vanished from the chamber. The lightning strike that had devastated the daoist temple's spell formations had completely shattered the peace on the immortal mountain.

Over and over again, scenes of destruction and eradication played out. In some worlds, dramatic events unfolded. In other worlds, things remained peaceful. The only common point among them all was... death.

Master Righteous Veil's clones didn't end up buying time for him. Instead, they became the end of his final destiny. It had something to do with him being caught at the most disadvantageous moment possible, as well as Xu Qing's canon and statute. To a certain extent, Xu Qing's canon and statute... was the perfect counter to Master Righteous Veil's godly authority!

Three months passed from the perspective of where things had started. Out in the vast starry sky was a desolate little world where the last scrap of paper lay hidden in the cold shadow of a rocky crag. Xu Qing flicked his finger, causing black-and-white fire to sweep over it. The paper burned, curling up and turning black, until it became an insignificant wisp of smoke....

In all the many heavens and all the countless worlds, places that had previously been infected by white scraps of paper filled with something like an overlapping of millions of screams originating from the same soul! The screams contained pain that could shake kingdoms, despair that could penetrate the deepest depths of the sea, and terror that could destroy all grotto-heavens and blessed lands.... They contained all the various pains and horrors that had been experienced in all those many worlds. It became a grand-scale death by horrifying torture!

Xu Qing stood in the void, in the spot where the final execution had occurred. Underfoot was that desolate crag, and surrounding him were nine burning lamps of violet.

The lamps were not connected to his earlier lamp made from the eye of a God Paragon. Rather, during his pursuit of Master Righteous Veil, he made the lamps from the essence fire of his enemy's clones. Within the light of the fire, Xu Qing's face didn't show any expression whatsoever. It was as if he had merely reached out to wipe some dust off the edge of his sleeve.

However, in the depths of his eyes, in the abyss of his violet pupils, the cold killing intent had not dissipated. In fact, it was growing stronger. He could clearly 'see' the source of the combined scream within the depths of the endless ontological flows.... Because all the clones had been destroyed, inflicting a serious mental blow, a tunnel that had been hidden before was now revealed.

"How interesting..."

Xu Qing murmured. Waving his hand, he summoned a bronze lamp and stepped forward.

It was a hidden tunnel. Within it fled a desperate Master Righteous Veil, who was now incredibly weak and had become nothing more than a face. Hē was scared. Not only had his cultivation level dropped, but also, hē could sense death looming over him.

I still have a chance! I originally built this tunnel as part of my plan to deal with Revered Ancient. At the end of the tunnel is the future of the Deep Earth star ring. If I can just get there, I can buy some time to work with!

Master Righteous Veil sped up. Hē was currently a True God, so it only took an instant to reach the end of the tunnel.

At that spot was a sealing mark that resembled the surface of a mirror. Through that sealing mark, hē could see the outside world, as well as the terrified face of a pudgy young man.

Ignoring that, Master Righteous Veil's eyes shone with golden light. The huge face shot directly toward the sealing mark. The mirror-like sealing mark didn't seem like it could sustain the force, and cracks started to spread out over it. From the other side, the mirror-like sealing mark seemed to have a huge face bulging out from beneath! The mirror was like a membrane, and the face seemed to be pure evil as it tried to break out.

"This is my chance, right now!" Master Righteous Veil howled, surging forward with all the strength possible. To him, the sealing mark was like paper mache that could easily be burst through. His plan was simply to gather all of his strength to break free in one moment.

However, just when hē was about to hit the sealing mark... a vortex of starlight appeared in front of the terrified, pudgy youth outside. A finger made of starlight emerged from within it! It touched the sealing mark. The aura of a Summer Immortal seemed to surpass the will of heaven in that world. The finger landed on the forehead of the face!

Master Righteous Veil shivered and screamed as his aura collapsed.

Summer Immortal?? How could there be a Summer Immortal there? And this person is not an ordinary immortal....

Blood sprayed out of Master Righteous Veil's mouth. The face withered, and though hē wanted to struggle, given hīs current level, all such efforts against this finger were completely futile! Hē held out for three breaths of time. After that, hē was sent tumbling back, having failed to get through the sealing mark. Hē was preparing for one final desperate attempt when... an icy will swept over hīm, so cold that it could freeze hīs soul.

It became a hand... that grabbed hīm by the head!

“Found you.”

Master Righteous Veil's soul trembled as the canon and statute of ontology swept through hīm and sealed hīm.

Xu Qing appeared in the tunnel. He held Master Righteous Veil tightly in one hand, and had nine violet lamps swirling around him. He looked at the mirror-like sealing mark that Master Righteous Veil had nearly escaped through. The cracks in the mirror were already being repaired by the power of the starlight on the other side.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed as he stepped closer to the sealing mark. As he did, the sealing mark trembled, and powerful fluctuations rolled across its surface. It seemed that all Xu Qing had to do was walk closer, and the sealing mark would reach its limit.

On the other side of the sealing mark, a finger had stretched out of a vortex, but it was now fading away. Just before it did, the starlight suddenly stopped fading. In fact, it reformed and turned into a pair of cold eyes.

“Stop right there!” a cold voice said, drifting from the vortex and into the sealing mark.

Xu Qing stopped where he was and looked through the sealing mark to the world beyond. He looked at the pudgy young man, then looked into the eyes of starlight within the vortex. He saw a cultivator with white hair who emanated a will of slaughter. His cultivation base was at the Summer Immortal level!

“Interesting,” Xu Qing said calmly. “I chased Master Righteous Veil for three months and cut down a million of his clones. It's hard to believe that he actually set up a secret tunnel that his true form could use to escape! Even more interesting... is that I actually ran into someone here who seems like a fellow daoist very similar to me!”

With that, he turned and dragged Master Righteous Veil away. After all, this other world was not his world. That said, after taking a few steps, he spoke.

“Xu is my name.”

“Wang is mine,” came the reply from the vortex beyond the sealing mark.[1]

1. This is the exact scene that played out in chapter 955 of *A World Worth Protecting*. The ‘pudgy young man’ is Wang Baole and the white-haired cultivator is Wang Lin. ❹

Chapter 1354: Beyond the Timescape

Chapter 1354: Beyond the Timescape

Ancient time flowed. Three hundred years passed in Revered Ancient.

During that time, things were peaceful. There was no mutagen in heaven and earth. When Xu Qing had returned three hundred years ago, most of the gods in Revered Ancient chose to leave. Only a few stayed behind. After the God Paragons disappeared from the Ninth Star Ring, the god cultivation system collapsed.

Only Eminent Desolation remained. Hē continued to loom over Revered Ancient, hīs face complete but hīs eyes closed.

In the three hundred years that passed, Xu Qing’s old friends had their own strokes of luck and good fortune. As for Master Seventh, because he practiced a unique type of cultivation, he eventually reached the end of his cultivation path, and made the same choice as always.... He entered the cycle of reincarnation. However, this time, he didn’t choose to be reincarnated in Revered Ancient. He went to Deep Earth to be reborn. That was his dao.

After making his decision, he explained it to Xu Qing. “We won’t meet again in the future.”

Of course, Xu Qing made no attempt to change his mind. He nodded quietly, then sent Master Seventh on his way to Deep Earth. As Master Seventh disappeared into Deep Earth, Xu Qing clasped hands and bowed deeply.

After, Xu Qing went to Brilliant Heaven. His Eldest Brother was still there, slumbering just as before. Given Xu Qing’s current cultivation base and experiences, he now had a fairly good idea of his Eldest Brother’s background.

Eldest Brother has no connection to the primeval motherworld. Instead... he’s connected to the Living God Umbilical Cord.

Eventually, he left Brilliant Heaven and went to Mount Daybreak. There, he continued to work on the cultivation progress he had been engaged in for the last 300 years. He had already reached the point of grasping at the Immortal Paragon level. His path to Immortal Paragon lay in fusing the binary planets. However, it was going to take a long time.

Xu Qing wasn’t anxious. In fact, he didn’t immerse himself completely in cultivation. His heart was calm as he experienced life. He spent time with Plumdark. Seasons passed. Years went by.

One day on Mount Daybreak, Xu Qing grinned as Plumdark talked about how they had met years ago. But then, something inside of him twitched, and he looked up at the dome of heaven.

An instant later, he remained on Mount Daybreak while another version of himself appeared in the sky, right in front of the looming face of Eminent Desolation. Looking at the closed eyes, he settled in place cross-legged and waited. After a few dozen breaths of time passed....

The eyes of Eminent Desolation, which had not even twitched for the last thousand years... slowly opened! They were no longer like they had been in the past, with one being crimson and the other empty. The eyes were clear as they looked at Xu Qing.

“You’re awake,” Xu Qing said calmly.

Eminent Desolation was quiet for a moment. And then, all of Revered Ancient filled with intense rumbling. If you could look at Revered Ancient from out in the starry sky, you would see Eminent Desolation’s spine, which looked like a giant centipede wrapping up Revered Ancient. But now, it was unwrapping! In an instant, it unfurled, and then began to shrink down.

So did Eminent Desolation’s complete face! In the briefest of moments, they both disappeared! All people in Revered Ancient felt their hearts racing. From generation to generation, that broken face had always hung above them, but now it was gone!

A figure appeared in front of Xu Qing. He wore a black robe and had black hair. He sat cross-legged in front of Xu Qing, then looked up. His face resembled Xu Qing’s.

“I showed up,” he said softly, “and for years, I caused a lot of trouble for you and your world. It was the flame of karma in my fate, and it will always exist like that. The day I achieved godly ascension, I swore a godly oath... that I would bring back all the people who died because of me, and make sure they share in my glory!”

Xu Qing looked long and hard at the person in front of him. “Should I call you Zi Qing? Or Eminent Desolation?”

“I don’t even know who I am. Maybe I’m Eminent Desolation, or maybe I’m Zi Qing. Maybe I’m a combination of them. But I do prefer the name Zi Qing.” Zi Qing looked at Xu Qing and smiled.

“So, are you finally going to tell me who I am?” Xu Qing asked calmly.

Zi Qing’s eyes flashed with a profound gleam. “Do you really want to know?”

Xu Qing nodded.

Zi Qing quietly looked off into the distance. When he spoke, it was as if his voice resounded from ancient times into Xu Qing’s ears.

“Your fusion is almost complete. You’re almost at the point of completing the final step possible in the higher star rings. Whether it’s God Paragon, or the path you chose, that of the Immortal Paragon, the reality is that there is no difference between previous and subsequent realms. It comes down to the strength of your enlightenment of authority. In fact, to some degree... once you’ve reached that level, you’ve reached it. That’s it. Those are the limitations of the higher star rings.

“But that’s not the limit for you and me, or the people who came before us. Given the earliest records of the Grue World, there is a higher level after that. In the Grue World, it’s called... the Living Grue. And in the higher star rings, it’s called Living God. In the future, you cultivators will come up with your own name for it. You’ll call it Ethereal Apex. It’s the true form of the dao itself.”[1]

With that, Zi Qing looked back at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing thought for a moment, then said, “Presumably, the only way to reach that level is to leave the higher star rings and walk the Living God Umbilical Cord!”

Zi Qing nodded. “The term Living God Umbilical Cord itself comes from the Grue World. Back when the Grue World ruled, they called it the Xeno-Grue Umbilical Cord. It’s the only way to leave the higher star rings. Walk that path, and you can pursue a higher level of cultivation.

“Years ago, I reached the depths of the Living God Umbilical Cord.... During the process, I got stronger. I guess you could say that anyone who walks the Living God Umbilical Cord will, the moment they enter it, begin to get stronger. Anyone who walks the entire length of it will become a Living God. Unfortunately, I failed to take the final step.” Zi Qing sighed.

“And that has something to do with me?” Xu Qing suddenly said.

The look in Zi Qing’s eyes grew more profound. He nodded slowly. “In the depths of the Living God Umbilical Cord I saw a tunnel full of doors. And every door represented a Living God or a Living Grue! Whenever a new one appears, a new door will show up in that tunnel.”

When Xu Qing heard that, his gaze hardened.

“Inscribe your name above that door,” Zi Qing continued softly, “then open it and walk through... and your breakthrough is complete. At the end of the tunnel is a chair. And on it... is a person. In his hand is a violet crystal. Next to him is the skeleton of a woman, as well as a shriveled blue worm. All have been dead for a very long time.

“He sat there alone, pulsing with ancientness. It seemed as if he was trying to find the Grue World.... I don’t know who he was, but the moment I saw him, a name appeared in my mind. Si Yu! He was nearing death. And to prevent me from reaching my peak, he stopped me from inscribing my name above the door. And then we fought a battle to the death![2]

“I lost. With my body mangled, I fled. However, he didn’t achieve a full victory.... And that is because he passed away into meditation there in the depths of the Living God Umbilical cord.

“But before he passed away, he borrowed the power of my escape to create a possibility. Thinking back now, I realize that he might have stopped me because, before I arrived, he had reached the end of the line. But then I showed up, and he suddenly had hope. That’s why he didn’t kill me when he won. He let me go on purpose... to make room for that possibility.

“That possibility, plus the possibility I created for myself, intersected. Both came to the primeval motherworld of Brilliant Heaven. And that led to you.”

Zi Qing looked at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing said nothing, though his heart was pounding. He thought about his violet crystal, and he thought about the tunnel in his soul, and the chair... Most importantly, he thought about the skeleton of the woman that Zi Qing had mentioned, and the blue worm....

Time passed....

Zi Qing rose. “Now that I’m awake, I’m going to walk the Living God Umbilical Cord again. This time, I don’t think someone will oppose me. And you... are going to let me go, right?”

Zi Qing smiled.

Xu Qing nodded.

The Living God Umbilical Cord existed everywhere in the higher star rings. However, opening it required the will of one of the higher star rings. Most of the time, such wills wouldn’t casually open the way.

For Zi Qing, though, that wasn’t a problem. Hē chose to walk the Living God Umbilical Cord in the Eighth Star Ring, and the will of that star ring opened the way without even being asked. A huge vortex appeared. It was the entrance to the Living God Umbilical Cord.

Zi Qing did not leave in secret. On the day of hīs departure... all of the God Paragons in all of the higher star rings came to bear witness. That included the giant beast and the black pagoda. Thēy knew that if Eminent Desolation wanted to kill thēm, it would happen whether thēy showed up or not. Therefore... it made more sense to show up calmly.

Also present was the Immortal Paragon of the Fifth Star Ring, and standing next to him was Grandmaster Bai. Just like all the God Paragons, they looked on attentively at Zi Qing and Xu Qing.

Zi Qing stood at the entrance of the Living God Umbilical Cord and looked back at all of

“Are any among you willing to travel with me?” hē asked.

Hīs word struck all of the God Paragons to the core. All of thēm knew exactly how dangerous the Living God Umbilical Cord was. But thēy also knew that it was the only way to reach a higher level. Anyone who could reach the level of God Paragon was obviously a person of daring who was capable of pursuing difficult goals. As long as there was a possibility of advancement, thēy wouldn’t just stop at thēir current level. And this was an opportunity!

In the end... some of the God Paragons made the decision to go with Zi Qing. Most did not. Like Xu Qing, thēy chose to simply see the others off.

It wasn’t until the Living God Umbilical Cord faded away that Xu Qing looked away from that spot. He did not see the tunnel Zi Qing had talked about.

The other paragons chose to leave. People who reached the level of a God Paragon or an Immortal Paragon didn’t casually go around fighting each other. Gods and immortals walked different paths, but compared to the Living God Umbilical Cord, they counted for little.

Before leaving, Grandmaster Bai and the Immortal Paragon of the Fifth Star Ring talked about old times. Then they went back to their respective star rings.

Xu Qing returned to Mount Daybreak, where he smiled as Plumdark continued to talk about how they had met.

Time flowed by ceaselessly. The story of the timescape went on. One story after another. One event after another. New cultivators rose to prominence. Old cultivators nursed lingering grudges. It was the same with the gods. Cycles returned to the beginning. It was as if nothing had ever changed, not for aeons.

As time passed, the Living God Umbilical Cord appeared on a few instances. Every time it did, God Paragons chose to leave and try to become Living Gods!

Nobody knew whether or not Zi Qing and those who left with him succeeded or not. Nobody knew whether subsequent God Paragons who left to follow them survived. It was as if it was impossible to look into what lay beyond the higher star rings, or beyond the timescape.

One year, in the third month, during Awakening of Insects, Erniu woke up. When he did, all of Brilliant Heaven shook as proud laughter echoed into Revered Ancient.

“Little Ah Qing! Your Eldest Brother is awake! And now, I’m even more amazing than before! I can finally help you take care of that, what’s his name? Zi Qing! And that broken face, well I’ll—”

Looking very haughty, Erniu strode out of Brilliant Heaven and into Revered Ancient. And when he looked up into the dome of heaven... he realized the broken face wasn’t there. His eyes widened, and his voice trailed off. He stared mutely up into the sky. Spinning around, he scanned the sky a few times....

“Uh... what’s going on? Where’s the broken face?”

“Eldest Brother....” Xu Qing said. Ripples flowed through the air as Xu Qing appeared. He was holding hands with Plumdark and smiling at Erniu.

Erniu stared at Xu Qing for a moment before inhaling sharply. He had just sensed an aura on Xu Qing that surpassed that of a God Lord. It was the aura of....

“God Paragon? Immortal Paragon? Wh-what... what’s going on here? I just went to sleep for a bit and everything changed.... The broken face is gone? Zi Qing is gone? Little Ah Qing somehow became a paragon?” Erniu was visibly stunned.

Xu Qing smiled warmly. “I’ve been waiting for you for a long time, Eldest Brother. I’m going to walk the Living God Umbilical Cord. Do you... want to join me?”

It was the seventh time that the Living God Umbilical Cord opened since Zi Qing left. This time, it opened in the Ninth Star Ring. The Immortal Paragon and Grandmaster Bai came to see them off, not join them. They would stay behind in their higher star ring.

When the vortex opened, Xu Qing stood in front of it with Plumdark and Erniu. He looked at the Immortal Paragon and Grandmaster Bai.

Grandmaster Bai nodded. “Remember what I told you back then. The world is a tavern for living beings. And the timescape is an old guest.... Back then, you saw me off. Now, I’ll see you off. As long as we don’t die, we’ll meet again.”

Xu Qing clasped hands and bowed deeply to Grandmaster Bai.

Then he turned to look at Revered Ancient. With the wave of his hand, he gathered up the spirits of all the people he cared about from his memories, including his father and mother.

Eyes filling with determination, he looked at Plumdark and Erniu. Plumdark nodded, and entered Xu Qing’s protection.

Erniu turned into a blue worm that hopped onto Xu Qing’s shoulder.

“Let’s go!” he barked. “It’s just some umbilical cord, right? Let’s go in and see what yummy stuff is inside!”

Xu Qing smiled. Then, without any hesitation, he approached the vortex and stepped inside. He began to walk the Living God Umbilical Cord. He was pursuing a higher level. The level of... the Ethereal Apex!

“I’m not sure how many times I’ve done this before, but this time, I’m definitely going to succeed!”

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The End.

1. The two characters here come from the Daodejing, where they are used to describe the dao as being formless and boundless. Combining them to make a cultivation level seems to convey a sense of infinite transcendence, ultimate enlightenment, etc. ㊦

2. There does not seem to be any linguistic connection between the name Si Yu and Xu Qing. What’s more, Si Yu does not appear in any of the author’s other works, as far as I can tell. It seems to me that it’s only relevant to this chapter, possibly as a hook or mystery box for a future novel. Or it might never be mentioned again. Also, it’s always possible that I missed some connection. If you thought of something, feel free to explain in the comments section. ㊦