

MO XIANG TONG XIU



Heaven Official's
Blessings

TIAN GUAN CI FU

6

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Heaven Official's Blessings

TIAN GUAN CI FU

6

墨香铜臭





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Seven Seas

Seven Seas Entertainment

HEAVEN OFFICIAL'S BLESSING: TIAN GUAN CI FU VOL. 6

Published originally under the title of 《天官赐福》

(Heaven Official's Blessing)

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Interior Illustrations by ZeldaCW

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COPY EDITOR: Jade Gardner

BRAND MANAGER: Lissa Pattillo

PREPRESS TECHNICIAN: Melanie Ujimori, Jules Valera

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Julie Davis

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER: Adam Arnold

PUBLISHER: Jason DeAngelis

ISBN: 978-1-63858-551-0

Printed in Canada

First Printing: May 2023

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1





HEAVEN OFFICIAL'S BLESSING
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Contents based on the Pinsic Publishing print edition originally released 2021

Chapter 92: Cave of Ten Thousand Gods—Faces of the Ten Thousand Gods Hidden

HUA CHENG'S BREATH was warm, but his words made Xie Lian's blood run cold.

Could there really be someone hiding in the grand hall?

A thought flashed through Xie Lian's mind, and he quickly returned Hua Cheng's embrace.

He wasn't hugging him because he was afraid, of course. If there truly was someone hiding in the temple whom they hadn't noticed, then they must be a formidable character—and if that person sensed anything off, they might be forced to make a move. It would arouse suspicion if Hua Cheng was the only one hugging him and being so intimate. If the embrace was mutual, it might appear more natural.

Xie Lian began to inconspicuously analyze their surroundings. "Where do you think they're hiding?" he whispered.

There was only one entrance to the grand hall, which was the huge door they'd come through. The hall itself was completely empty; the whole room could be taken in at a glance, and there wasn't even a table or a chest that would provide a spot for someone to hide. Aside from the two of them, there were only the empty stone shells of the temple's attendants.

"The shells," Xie Lian and Hua Cheng whispered in unison.

Those stone people were hollow inside, which meant they could serve as a hiding spot. A human couldn't get inside, but a ghost certainly could!

When Xie Lian was sure they were both in agreement, he started to speak, but then he inadvertently looked up—and his pupils shrank. There was someone standing six meters behind Hua Cheng.

This person seemed to have been a young man of higher status. These statues each documented a Wuyong citizen's death, so most were curled into balls or hugging their heads and wailing—this statue was one of the very few that was standing.

But what made Xie Lian notice him wasn't his pose—it was his face.

Although the stone person's face was barely distinguishable, Xie Lian could still make out some details. The left side was smiling, and the right side was crying!

"It's that one!" Xie Lian blurted.

He drew his sword and struck just as Hua Cheng called out, “Gege?”

The stone person shattered, and broken fragments of the shell scattered across the floor. Although there was nothing inside, Xie Lian didn’t dare drop his guard, and he began turning over every single shard until Hua Cheng caught his hand.

“Gege! What did you see just now?”

Xie Lian gathered a few fragments to show him. “San Lang, that stone person...his face... it was White No-Face’s mask.”

Hua Cheng’s expression changed slightly, but still he said, “Wait a moment.”

He gathered and pieced together the shards. When the face was reconstructed, the two fell silent.

Xie Lian had clearly seen a half-crying, half-smiling ghost face. But the face that Hua Cheng had reconstructed had indistinct features, no different from the other stone statues.

Was it a hallucination? Had he been bewitched by an illusion spell?

Sitting around wouldn’t get them answers, so they searched the hall, smashing every stone person to ash as they went. But after giving it some thought, they realized that it was more important to deal with the others who were surely rushing to the summit at that moment. They decided not to stick around waiting for Pei Ming to return and left the temple to scale the mountain.

The mountain seemed to have a peculiar gravity—they tried, but the silver butterflies couldn’t carry them, and flying on swords was a nonstarter. They could only climb on foot. The higher they hiked, the steeper the path became and the colder the air grew. The snow was sparse at first, but it became thicker as they ascended until it could swallow almost half a boot. They were up to their knees in it after four hours of climbing, and their trek was becoming more and more arduous.

Xie Lian didn’t feel cold since they had been hiking nonstop. He was instead covered in a thin sheen of sweat, and his red cheeks gave a shock of color to his powdery white face. He wiped away the sweat and looked back, about to speak to Hua Cheng—but suddenly, his step caught nothing, and he dropped half a meter!

His body had sunk into the heavy snow. Thankfully, Hua Cheng had been following him closely and pulled him up quite easily, like he’d been prepared for it.

“Gege, be careful.”

Xie Lian stood next to him and looked back at where he’d stumbled. A large section of

snow had caved in, revealing a deep, dark hole that led to somewhere unknown. If Xie Lian hadn't grabbed hold of the edge in time, or if Hua Cheng had moved too slowly, he would've fallen in for sure.

"There are many holes like that in this area. I still remember their general locations, so just stay close to me," Hua Cheng stated. "Take your time and it'll be fine; gege was walking too quickly."

As it turned out, the mountain's body was quite weak. There were holes everywhere beneath the snow, large and small—but how many and how deep was unknown. But as they climbed, it seemed Hua Cheng really did remember where all of them were.

Xie Lian puffed a breath. "All right. Let's stick closer together," he suggested. "In any event, we can't yell or make loud noises on a snowy mountain like this, so it wouldn't be easy to call for help if anything happened..."

He stopped when they heard angry roars coming from up ahead.

"Are you done?!"

"..."

Which good brother dared to yell like that on such a steep and perilous snowy mountain?!

Xie Lian was dumbfounded as he looked toward the source of the noise. Amidst the snow-covered landscape, he saw two little black dots engaged in a fight, their weapons clinking and clanking. One of them held a longbow and was shooting arrows nonstop. The other held a zhanmadao¹ and swung with the vigor of a tiger; they struck down every single arrow. Both the blade and the arrows had a sheen of spiritual light, and both parties were shouting curses at each other.

"I already said I didn't kill that little bastard; I'm looking for them too!" the man wielding the blade yelled.

It was Nan Feng and Fu Yao!

Without even trying to guess why they had come here too, Xie Lian very nearly let out a shout of "Shut up!" However, he caught himself in time and swallowed it before he added to the noise. If he started roaring the same way they were, and the three of them all began screaming at each other, could the snow on the mountain really remain still?

Hua Cheng hugged his arms and cocked an eyebrow. "Don't they know that they'll cause an avalanche if they yell like that?"

"They...can't be that foolish?!" Xie Lian said. "Maybe they do know. But that's just the

way they are—they forget everything else when they're angry!"

Nan Feng and Fu Yao were both furious and cursed at each other as they fought, but they were too far away from Xie Lian—he couldn't tell what they were fighting over from their broken, muffled phrases, and for their part, they completely failed to notice that anyone else had arrived.

Xie Lian wanted to rush over and pull them apart, but there was no way he could make it there in time to stop them with the heavy snow dragging down his pace and the deep holes lurking beneath. He only managed to run two steps before he stumbled over another hole, and he came to a stop.

"We can't just let them keep fighting like this! We have to stop them!"

As soon as he said so, a silver butterfly darted past like an arrow. Xie Lian was startled but relaxed a moment later.

Good idea! If neither of them could make it in time, why not just use a wraith butterfly to fly over and transmit communication?

As expected, the silver butterfly's speed was miraculously fast—it made it over to the brawling duo after only three more shouts. But before Xie Lian could try to speak through it, he saw Hua Cheng's expression turn cold.

Xie Lian noticed something was amiss. "What's wrong?"

The smile on Hua Cheng's lips had disappeared completely, replaced by a look that was as frigid as the snowy mountain upon which they stood.

"San Lang, what's going on?" Xie Lian pressed.

Hua Cheng's lips twitched, but he didn't manage to answer before Xie Lian suddenly felt an inexplicable wave of panic. His head shot up to look at the top of the mountain, and his eyes widened.

Giant chunks of the snowy white bluffs were trembling. And then they collapsed.

Even engrossed in their heated fight, Nan Feng and Fu Yao also sensed that soundless pressure. Both looked up, and they finally realized what was about to happen.

The snowy mass was like an enormous embankment that stretched for a thousand miles. And when in the next second it broke, it carried a snow tsunami along with it. It rumbled, rolled, and pushed down toward them!

They had caused an avalanche!

Xie Lian grabbed Hua Cheng's hand, turned, and ran. But after dashing a few steps, he remembered that the other two were much closer to the avalanche's charge. He stopped abruptly, looking back. Sure enough, they had ceased their aggression to flee together. Fu Yao didn't get very far before stumbling into a hole and sinking down more than halfway; he was buried up to his chest in snow. Although Nan Feng ran faster than him, he hesitated for a moment and looked back, seeming like he wanted to save him. But the wave of snow was already bearing down!

Xie Lian released Ruoye the moment before they were swallowed. The white silk bandage instantly stretched far into the distance, lassoed Fu Yao and Nan Feng with sharp precision, and yanked them up.

"Gege! Leave them—don't bother!" Hua Cheng said darkly.

Xie Lian held Ruoye tightly, dragging the two as he ran. "I can't! They might end up buried for a hundred years if this goes wrong!"

"Too late!" Hua Cheng said, his voice dire.

"What?!" Xie Lian cried.

He looked up, and the enveloping shadow bearing down overhead came crashing in.

Nan Feng and Fu Yao had stalled Xie Lian after all. The thick, icy wave of snow surged relentlessly and swallowed him whole, separating him from Hua Cheng. The force knocked Xie Lian everywhere, and he tumbled along with the coursing snow—although he somehow managed to keep struggling, there was just too much snow and the force was too powerful. Xie Lian was buried again and again, suffocating over and over each time his head went under.

In the end, Xie Lian couldn't hang on. With a final shout of "*San Lang!*" he was devoured by the icy snow current.

An unknown amount of time passed before the snowy mountain finally calmed.

A long moment later, somewhere in the field, a pile of snow shifted a few times before a hand burst out from underneath!

The hand felt around randomly, then an arm poked out. Then a shoulder and then, finally, a head. Face covered in chunks of snow, he took a deep breath the instant he broke free, then let loose a flurry of coughing. Soon after and with some difficulty, the man crawled his way out, shaking his head as he sat down on the snow.

It was Xie Lian.

Digging himself out from beneath that heavy layer of snow was not unlike his prior experience digging himself free of a grave. Xie Lian's face and hands were chapped red from frostbite and essentially numb, but he only bothered to rub his face a few times and huff some hot breaths on his hands before looking up with a lost expression.

There was not a trace of that captivating red in the sprawling blanket of white.

And Xie Lian couldn't even call out for him—it would be all over if he caused another avalanche. He could only rise to his feet and wander aimlessly, all alone in that snowy world.

He called out in a small voice as he walked. “San Lang? San Lang? Nan Feng? Fu Yao?”

It was strange. Although he was walking the same path they had been hiking before, the air seemed so much colder than when he and Hua Cheng had been together. Ruoye was also gone from his hand. Xie Lian was puzzled, as Ruoye shouldn't have slipped off—it would still wrap itself around him even if he let go of it, so what happened?

He knew something was wrong but couldn't put his finger on what, so he continued to wander in confusion.

Suddenly, someone emerged from within the billowing snow ahead. His white robes and black hair flapped in the wind, and he kept his head down as he slowly approached.

Xie Lian was delighted at the sight of this traveler and pushed forward. “My friend! You...”

But just as he spoke, the man looked up. He was wearing a chilling white mask, half of it smiling, the other half crying.

Xie Lian screamed at the sight of it as though he'd been stabbed.

His eyes flew open at the sound of his own scream, and he shot upright. He panted harshly for several moments before his shaken mind could process that he wasn't standing on the snowy mountain at all—he was lying in a dark, shadowy place.

So it had been a dream.

No wonder something had felt off. Xie Lian exhaled a long breath as he relaxed, wiping away the cold sweat on his forehead. After feeling around for a bit, he determined that there was flat stone beneath him, covered with a blanket of grass. Fangxin hung from his waist and Ruoye was wrapped snugly around his arm. Xie Lian steadied himself and ignited a palm torch to illuminate the room. He sat up immediately and called out.

“San Lang? Are you there?”

The moment the flames brightened the room, Xie Lian discovered that there was a person standing right next to him in the darkness, soundless and silent.

This was no small shock, and Xie Lian was awash in cold sweat as his hand flew to Fangxin. There was no way he wouldn't have noticed someone lurking so close by!

However, the cold sweat dissipated when he looked closer. It wasn't a living person but rather a stone statue—and not one of the many stone statues of the victims of the volcano's eruption. This was clearly a man-made sculpture.

Palm torch in hand, Xie Lian scanned the room and was soon certain of where he found himself.

The place where he lay was a cavern for cultivation. He had once gone into seclusion to cultivate in a place like this, so he was familiar with this type of chamber. It meant that the sculpture inside the cavern was not a regular statue but a divine icon for worship.

The divine statue had been erected in a cavern with an arched ceiling. Its figure was long and slender, its bearing was natural and relaxed, and its pose was graceful. Its right hand rested on the hilt of the sword at its waist. It had been sculpted with sublime skill; even the flowing lines and folds of its robes were exquisite.

However, there was something peculiar about it—the face of this divine figure was covered by a light veil.

The veil was light as flowing smoke. While it was quite strange to see a divine statue with its face obscured like this, it wasn't ugly. Instead, it added a mysterious sort of beauty. Xie Lian had never seen a divine statue like this, displayed with its face covered. He unconsciously reached out to pull the veil off but was interrupted by a voice from behind.

“Gege.”

Xie Lian's head whipped around. A figure in red had appeared at the entrance of the cavern without him realizing. It was Hua Cheng. The mysterious face of that divine statue instantly went to the back of Xie Lian's mind, and he rushed over to him.

“San Lang! Thank goodness, I was wondering where you were. Are you all right? Are you hurt? That avalanche was so sudden.”

Hua Cheng entered the room. “I'm fine. How's gege?”

“I'm always fine,” Xie Lian said. “What is this place?”

Once he left the cavern, it became clear that this place was far more expansive than

expected—the corridor he found himself in seemed quite long, and who knew where it led?

Xie Lian had long ago gotten used to Hua Cheng having the answers to everything, yet this time he replied, “I don’t know. Most likely under the snowy mountain.”

