

MO XIANG TONG XIU



Heaven Official's Blessings

TIAN GUAN CI FU

7

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Heaven Official's Blessings

TIAN GUAN CI FU

7

墨香铜臭



Heaven Official's Blessings

TIAN GUAN CI FU

7

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Seven Seas Entertainment

HEAVEN OFFICIAL'S BLESSING: TIAN GUAN CI FU VOL. 7

Published originally under the title of 《天官賜福》

(Heaven Official's Blessing)

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US English edition arranged through JS Agency Co., Ltd

Interior Illustrations by ZeldaCW

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Seven Seas press and purchase enquiries can be sent to Marketing Manager Lianne Sentar at press@gomanga.com. Information regarding the distribution and purchase of digital editions is available from Digital Manager CK Russell at digital@gomanga.com.

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Julie Davis

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER: Adam Arnold

PUBLISHER: Jason DeAngelis

ISBN: 978-1-63858-552-7

Printed in Canada

First Printing: September 2023

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1





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Contents based on the Pinsic Publishing print edition originally released 2021



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TIAN GUAN CI FU

ARC 5

**Heaven Official's
Blessing**

Chapter 105: Dominate Heaven and Earth, Divine Being Breaks Through the Kiln

XIE LIAN LAY on the hard, unforgiving ground with that half-crying, half-smiling mask stuck to his face. Next to him, White No-Face seemed to be admiring the sight of the appearance that was exactly like his own. The cry-smiling mask was secured to Xie Lian's face with a peculiar force, and he couldn't remove it no matter how he tried.

"Keep it on," White No-Face said. "Stop wasting your strength on these pointless struggles. You want to leave? You'll break out of the Kiln easily as long as you follow my directions."

Xie Lian pretended he didn't exist.

Despite the constant snubs and rebuffs, White No-Face never gave up. He sighed. "We could become the greatest master and disciple—and the best of friends. Why do you insist on rebelling?"

Xie Lian finally stopped his struggle to reply in disgust, "Stop using that tone. Acting like you've seen it all, been through it all... I don't want a teacher or friend like you."

His contempt was on full display, and White No-Face sneered. "I know. In your mind, the only ones who can guide you are the state preceptor and Jun Wu. Am I right?"

His tone was oddly pointed, full of disdain and ridicule. Xie Lian didn't feel like getting tangled up in that particular subject. He asked about something else.

"Was Lang Ying the first crown prince of Yong'an?"

Lang Ying was from Yong'an and had contracted Human Face Disease. The little crown prince was the only possible identity Xie Lian could think of.

"That's right," White No-Face replied. "The very same crown prince you knocked out and abandoned in the Palace of Yong'an after hacking the elder Lang Ying's corpse to pieces. And then you set fire to the place."

The Yong'an crown prince was Lang Ying's nephew. He had likely been infected by the remnants of Human Face Disease on Lang Ying's corpse.

"Why didn't he pass the disease to anyone else?" Xie Lian then asked.

"The people at the Palace of Yong'an discovered he was infected," White No-Face replied. "An order was given in secret to suffocate him with a blanket to prevent the disease from

spreading. However, he killed his executioner during the struggle and fled.”

At that point, Yong’an had announced to the world that both the King of Yong’an and the crown prince had passed away from severe illness. After the ensuing internal conflict, another of Lang Ying’s nephews was established as the crown prince. That prince was Lang Qianqiu’s ancestor.

“How did you manage to deceive him?” Xie Lian asked.

“I didn’t,” White No-Face replied. “I only told him the truth. I revealed the identity of the criminal responsible for turning him into such a monster. And I swore that as long as he lent me a bit of his spirit, I would help avenge him.”

“You call *that* ‘a bit’?” Xie Lian was incredulous. “You consumed him completely just to feed yourself!”

White No-Face was indifferent. “No one would genuinely care for him, looking like that. He was neither man nor ghost. He was suffering just existing in this world,” he stated blandly.

“Your Royal Highness?” Xie Lian suddenly said.

“...”

In that moment, Xie Lian could tell that the creature had very nearly answered to that address but had stopped himself. Xie Lian probed further.

“You. You’re the Crown Prince of Wuyong, aren’t you?”

The stifling heat of the Kiln grew denser when the words left his lips.

Xie Lian had been pondering that question from the moment he had fallen in here. He could understand the words spewing from the mouths of the corpse-eating rats, which meant that someone had transplanted a portion of their memories and feelings into his mind, and that person knew the language of Wuyong. Of the three possible candidates capable of the feat—Jun Wu, the state preceptor, and White No-Face—Jun Wu had been born after the fall of the Kingdom of Wuyong, but the other two were highly suspicious.

Why had Hua Cheng been cast out of the Kiln? It couldn’t have been because he was already a supreme—Xie Lian had confirmed with him that Supreme Ghost Kings could reenter the Kiln, just as a heavenly official could undergo more Heavenly Tribulations after ascension. And yet he had still vanished halfway through their plunge. The most straightforward explanation Xie Lian could provide was that the Kiln obeyed the command of White No-Face!

And if that were true, what was his most likely real identity?

It was dead silent within the darkness. After a while, Xie Lian repeated with certainty,

“You *are* the Crown Prince of Wuyong.”

Finally, White No-Face broke his silence. He lunged at Xie Lian with sharp, powerful strikes. This time, it was Xie Lian’s turn to dodge—he leapt to his feet and pressed the subject further as he evaded the blows.

“Your Highness, I’ve got a question for you. Why don’t you ever show your true face to anyone?”

“Your Highness, I’m warning you—do not address me with that title,” White No-Face replied darkly.

“You call *me* ‘Your Highness,’ so why can’t I do the same?” Xie Lian retorted. “You won’t answer me, so I have to make my own guesses. There are only two reasons why you wouldn’t want me to see your true face: either you’re someone I know or a stranger I could easily identify. Or your real appearance is incredibly ugly, so ugly that you can’t even stand it! Just like—”

He heard two whizzing sounds, and a sharp pain shot up Xie Lian’s arm. White No-Face had seized him with great force.

“My dear crown prince, have I been a little too friendly? Do you think you no longer need to fear me?”

Xie Lian hung on to his consciousness through the pain. He seemed to have truly angered White No-Face; the creature’s tone was thick with frost as he picked up the black sword and slowly raised it to point threateningly at Xie Lian.

“You named this sword ‘Fangxin’?”

As the eerie blade came closer and closer to his throat, Xie Lian watched it with unblinking eyes, unfazed. “Is that a problem?”

White No-Face scoffed. “You don’t know how to name things. Listen well—this sword’s original name is ‘Zhuxin.’”¹

“Who’s there?!” Xie Lian suddenly cried, his eyes wide.

However, White No-Face didn’t bother looking behind him. “You’re trying to use a child’s trick when fighting me?”

Xie Lian was perplexed. “You...didn’t notice?”

“There’s nothing there. What was I meant to notice?” White No-Face asked coldly.

He hadn’t noticed, but Xie Lian certainly had.

The firelight on the ground was reflected in Fangxin's blade and refracted onto the stone walls around them. And for an instant, Xie Lian had seen a face.

He could swear he wasn't mistaken—he had seen a human face, an *enormous* human face! White No-Face's cultivation was surely stronger than Xie Lian's, so how could he possibly miss it? Unless...something even more terrifying than White No-Face was lurking here!

The glimpse he'd had was very brief, but he still remembered what he'd seen. The face had all five features, and...it looked familiar. Xie Lian felt a slight chill run down his spine.

“There's something else in here!”

However, White No-Face replied, “Aside from you and me, there is nothing but stone and lava inside the Kiln.”

Xie Lian was about to say more when sudden realization dawned on him. *Wait...stone? And a familiar face?*

So...that's it!

He suddenly knew exactly what he'd seen.

The moment he understood, Xie Lian's hands began to rapidly form seals behind his back.

White No-Face noticed his movements. “It's pointless, even if you—”

Yet before he could finish, there was a deafening cracking sound, and a storm of rocks and earth tumbled from above. White No-Face sensed something coming and swiftly flashed away to dodge the attack. He was fast, of course—there was no one faster. He should've been able to dodge perfectly. Unfortunately, the thing attacking him was just too big.

It was a giant hand with fingers balled into a fist. That fist came crashing heavily down... right on top of White No-Face!

The massive hand was made of stone, and it really was too big—that single fist was as large as a mansion. The firelight on the ground could only illuminate that one body part—everything above the wrist was still awash in darkness.

Amidst the sound of splitting rock, the hand flipped over and opened its palm toward Xie Lian. Despite its size, its fingers were long and slender, with fine, delicate joints—it was a hand both gentle enough to hold a flower and tough enough to wield a sword. In one smooth motion, Xie Lian quickly grabbed Fangxin and jumped up from the ground, then leapt into the heart of the palm.

Just as the hand was about to hoist him higher, Xie Lian suddenly cried “Wait!” as he remembered something.

He jumped down to grab his bamboo hat, then leapt back up.

The giant hand lifted him into the air, drawing farther and farther away from the firelight. Xie Lian could feel himself being lifted higher and higher, and his hands formed a series of seals once again.

“Break out!”

With that command, he felt a subtle falling sensation as if the giant holding him had bent its knees to prepare for a mighty leap. A moment later, Xie Lian felt himself crushed back against the hand. The giant had launched itself toward the sky, crashing against the sealed mouth of the volcano!

Rumble... Rumble... Rumble...!

Amidst the violent tremors, Xie Lian heard the extremely clear sound of stones splitting—the rock was about to shatter, unable to withstand such a violent attack.

A stream of light leaked in from above.

He had broken through!

The sealed top of the Kiln had been cracked open, and blinding white light came pouring through. Whirling winds twisted inside, shrieking and howling.

Xie Lian stood on the giant’s palm, one hand pressing the bamboo hat down on his head while another blocked his face from the snowstorm. The stifling hot air was swept cleanly away, and Xie Lian took a deep breath of fresh, freezing air and shouted:

“*San Lang—!*”

The first syllable was still echoing in the air when a pair of arms pulled him into an embrace from behind. Xie Lian stiffened at first, but he relaxed when he looked down and saw red sleeves and silver vambraces circling his waist.

A deep, forlorn voice came from above his ear. “...I was about to lose my mind!”

Xie Lian hurried to turn around. He cupped his captor’s cheeks with his hands and soothed him, “Don’t...don’t. I’m here...I’m out!”

Hua Cheng stood before him. His raven hair was mussed, and there was a lost look in his eye. He gripped the cry-smiling mask Xie Lian hadn’t been able to remove no matter how hard he tried, easily tore it off, and tossed it away.

Xie Lian had cupped Hua Cheng’s cheeks on instinct, and he couldn’t pinpoint exactly why he was doing it—surely it was to comfort him, but perhaps he was also worried Hua Cheng

would get frostbite from the snowstorm. After all, for as long as Xie Lian had been in the Kiln, Hua Cheng had been out here guarding the mouth of the volcano.

They had jumped in together so easily, and Hua Cheng was thrown outside so abruptly. He'd had no idea what was going on inside; of course he was about to lose his mind!

Hua Cheng held Xie Lian tightly and spoke in a low voice touched by despair. "...I couldn't get into the Kiln no matter what I tried, and you had to break out on your own! I'm so fucking—"

"San Lang, it's okay—it's really all right!" Xie Lian said quickly. "Besides, I didn't break out on my own!"

Hua Cheng finally calmed down a little. "What? Gege, how did you get out?"

"You helped me," Xie Lian replied. "Look."

He gestured upward, and Hua Cheng's eyes followed.

A giant sculpture of a man carved from mountain rock stood amidst the snow and wind, flurries swirling about its face. It almost looked like it was holding up the heavens and keeping the earth grounded. The two of them were standing in the heart of that giant statue's palm.

The contours of its face were gentle and beautiful. Long brows with elegant eyes, refined lips with slightly upturned corners—almost a smile. It seemed affectionate but not frivolous, expressionless but not unkind. It was a face of compassion and beauty.

That face was Xie Lian's own!



Xie Lian raised his head to look at it. “Is this the one you told me about? The best divine statue you ever sculpted?” he asked softly.

Hua Cheng gazed up at it as well. It was a long while before his eyes fell back on the man beside him. “...Yes.”

He must have sculpted this enormous divine statue while he was trapped inside the Kiln enduring intense trials and immense suffering. It had been hidden inside the darkest recesses of Mount Tonglu for centuries; part of it was still covered with ivy. The perilous Kiln served as its natural cavern, and it was the only god of that uniquely spectacular cave.

It and the Kiln were of one body, made from the same material. It wouldn’t have been able to break out of the volcano if it had been carved from ordinary stone; it would have shattered to pieces in the attempt. It surely never would have awakened and moved to begin with if Xie Lian himself hadn’t issued the command, or if Hua Cheng hadn’t given him spiritual power before they jumped down.

Xie Lian turned to Hua Cheng. “So, San Lang, I made it out. We broke through together.”

Suddenly, they were shaken by a wave of tremors. Their smiles faded, replaced by tension and vigilance.

“What’s going on?” Xie Lian wondered with slight nervousness. “Is the divine statue shaking? It’s not going to collapse, is it?”

The Kiln’s seal was made of massive million-ton rocks laden with evil. If the giant stone statue fell apart because it breached the entrance, he would feel awful—after all, this was the best divine statue that Hua Cheng had ever sculpted for him.

“Don’t worry, it’s fine. It’s the mountain that’s shaking,” Hua Cheng said.

Sure enough, a heavy sheet of snow collapsed below them. The body of the mountain was already exposed in some spots. It seemed something else was about to break through the Kiln.

Hua Cheng stood in front of Xie Lian, shielding him.

“It’s White No-Face,” Xie Lian said flatly.

Of course White No-Face couldn’t be squashed dead by a punch from this giant divine statue—that blow would make the creature falter for a moment at most. Xie Lian was on high alert, and not a moment later, both of them were hit head-on by a gust of scorching hot air.

The scalding air erupted from the abyss of the volcano, reeking of sulfur. Xie Lian’s instincts pricked with imminent danger.

“Gege, go!” Hua Cheng said darkly.