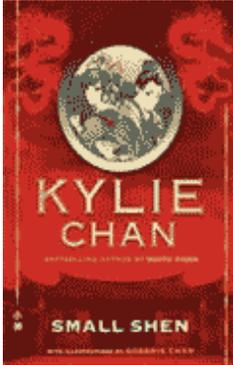


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*'Small Shen' was first published in December 2012, by Harper Voyager. It was written by Kylie Chan, and adapted into 'comics-prose' by Queenie Chan. Despite being a prequel to Kylie's best-selling 'White Tiger' series, is a stand-alone novel.*

*This extract is the comics-prose script of the 9 comics-prose chapters, and is an adaptation of part of the original prose script.*

*To see this script in comics-prose format, you can purchase the physical book at [Fishpond.com](http://www.fishpond.com) with [Free International Shipping](#), or buy the e-book from Amazon or iBooks.*

Read the first 3 chapters adapted in 'comics-prose':  
<http://www.queeniechan.com/manga/smallshen/1/1/>

\*\*\*

## **Comics-Prose script of: SMALL SHEN**

*(23,000 words, out of 75,000 words total)*

- Written by *Kylie Chan* (<http://www.kyliechan.com>)
- Adapted into comics-prose by *Queenie Chan* (<http://www.queeniechan.com>)

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## Comics Section

### <A>Prologue<A>

### <B>1903<B>

#### Page 1

## Comics

**Full Spread Page:** Depicts Jade and Gold kneeling in front of Xuan Wu. It's Page 8 from section "1903", just before Jade and Gold are sentenced by the Jade Emperor for selling tea seeds to Robert Fortune.

**Caption:** The Year 1903.

**Caption:** The Imperial Cell Complex, in the Celestial Palace.

**Xuan Wu:** Enough. The Jade Emperor is waiting.

#### Page 2

**Panel 1:** A sad looking Gold, kneeling and looking up at Xuan Wu woefully.

**Caption:** Gold, The Golden Boy, Child of the Jade Building Block of the World.

**Xuan Wu:** You two will be sentenced together/

**Panel 2:** A tearful, dishevelled Jade, kneeling.

**Caption:** Jade, The Jade Maiden, 82nd daughter of the Dragon King.

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### Page 3

**Panel 1:** Gold pleads with Xuan Wu.

**Gold:** Lord Xuan Wu ... Will we be executed?

**Panel 2:** Xuan Wu looks at the two of them, expressionless.

**Caption: Xuan Wu,** Emperor Zhenwu of the Dark Northern Heavens.

**Xuan Wu:** If you are both very lucky, you will be.

**Panel 3:** Gold is let out of his cell.

**Panel 4:** As is Jade.

### Page 4

**Panel 1:** Gold looks beseechingly at Xuan Wu.

**Gold:** And if we are unlucky?

**Panel 2:** Xuan Wu turns his back, his face betraying nothing. Behind him, the door opens.

**Panel 3:** A door opening. There's nothing but blackness on the other side... what fate will befall these two?

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**Panel 4:** A caption in the opening door.

**Caption:** That was 92 years ago ...

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## Comics Section

# <A>Beginnings<A>

## <B>1720<B>

### Page 1

## Comics

**Panel 1:** A panel depicting a shelf of books and scrolls.

**Caption:** How did all this begin?

**Caption:** How did this story come to be?

**Caption:** How, in the long-lived lives of the immortal Shen, does fate intervene and bring us unions both strange and unexpected?

### Page 2

**Panel 1:** A panel depicting a shelf of books and scrolls. This is a shelf from the Hall of Records.

**Caption:** Just as every story has its beginning, every tale has an end.

**Caption:** This tale began 275 years ago, with the meeting of two *small Shen* -- an unlikely pair in this fearsome world of gods and demons.

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**Panel 2:** A picture of Gold in his human form and also his True Form. Next to him, is a depiction of Jade in her human form, and also in her dragon form.

**Caption:** ... **Gold**, the child of a Building Block of the World.

**Caption:** ... And **Jade**, a dragon princess.

### Page 3

**Spread Page:** Depicts the Hall of Records, where Gold in human form is carrying a bunch of scrolls and books. He is looking down at Jade, in human form with a trailing dragon's tale, floating down a few bookshelves away from him. She is dressed elaborately and accompanied by two plain-looking maids.

**Caption:** The year 1720.

**Caption:** The Hall of Records. The Library of the Gods. Every book in existence has a place here.

### Page 4

**Panel 1:** Jade is interrupted mid-flight by Gold, who swoops in to speak with her. She turns towards him.

**Gold:** Can I help you?

**Jade:** Yes.

---

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**Panel 2+3:** A panel showing Jade's full figure. *Her face was round and beautiful, her skin as white as snow. Some of her jade-green hair was tied in elaborate buns and braids on top of her head, adorned with silver and gold butterflies, and flowers of semi-precious stones. The rest of her hair swept in a magnificent smooth ripple down to her knees.* She turns to him and speaks, and as she is speaking Gold's eyes are sweeping down her body appreciatively.

**Jade:** I am looking for an English book.

**Jade:** It was written about a hundred years ago. I believe it is called *Sonnets*.

## Page 5

**Panel 1:** Middle-distance shot of Jade and Gold stands talking to each other. The two maids stand behind Jade. There are bookshelves and a passageway in the background.

**Gold:** Shakespeare, then?

**Jade:** Yes, I think that is the name of the author

**Panel 2:** Gold turns slightly and gestures with his hand. Jade starts to follow him, and the two plain-looking hand-maids are left behind.

**Gold:** Come with me. Leave your handmaids – they're not permitted there.

**Panel 3:** Gold looks over his shoulder and smiles cheekily. He is leading her down the passage way.

---

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**Gold:** I know exactly what you are looking for.

## **Prose**

'What is your honoured name, Lady?' Gold said as he led her through the vast, silent aisles of scrolls.

'Princess Jade.'

He bobbed his head. 'I am honoured, Princess.'

She waved him down. 'I am the eighty-second daughter of the Dragon King, very low in precedence. Your name?'

'I am Gold, Lady.' He smiled into her jade-green eyes, then straightened slightly as he walked beside her. 'I am a child of the Jade Building Block of the World.'

'There was a jade building block?'

He sagged slightly. Nobody seemed to know of his parent's existence. Gold had not spoken to his parent in nearly six hundred years.

'Yes, Lady,' he said, rallying. 'My parent was worn by the Yellow Emperor's Empress.'

'How interesting,' she said, not hearing. 'How far is it to this room that holds the sonnets? It seems a long way.'

'We are already here.' He led her to the right through the aisles and into one of the small reading rooms.

---

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**Comics**

## Page 6

**Panel 1:** Gold and Jade walk into the room. *The room contained a rosewood couch, carved with phoenixes, plush with silk cushions. The reading table in front of the couch already had a teapot and teacups. A pair of priceless Song braziers sat on decorative stands to one side.*

**Gold:** Please sit, Lady. This is our reading room.

**Panel 2:** Jade is on human legs, and sits down on the couch.

**Panel 3:** Gold pours her tea.

**Panel 4:** Gold heads towards the door.

**Gold:** I will return with your sonnets.

**Panel 5-6:** A shot of Gold concentrating, then he shape-shifts into his true form. *A smooth quartz stone the size of a human fist, gleaming with veins of gold.*

**Caption:** *Gold shape-shifts into his **True Form** – a smooth quartz stone, gleaming with veins of gold.*

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## Page 7

**Panel 1:** Gold floats up towards the bookshelves.

**Panel 2:** He floats, looking at the bookshelves.

**Gold:** <thinks> *Shakespeare ...*

**Gold:** <thinks> *Sonnets ...*

**Panel 3:** A shot of Gold in True Form, but with his human face in the background concentrating, to show that Gold is thinking hard.

**Gold:** <thinks> *Not there!*

## Prose

Damn, he'd seen the book only a week before, but for the life of him he couldn't find it. His memory was perfect, stored in his quartz lattice, why the hell couldn't he find the damn book?

He floated over the small English section, becoming more and more frantic as the book didn't appear before him. Dragons weren't renowned for their patience. He'd better find the book soon.

Eventually he had no other choice, he had to contact the Archivist. He spoke silently without moving from the English shelves.

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**Insert 1/4 page comic panel on bottom right hand corner of page: A**

**picture of Gold in human form, communicating to the Archivist through a thread of telepathy.**

*Archivist, he said, the Dragon Princess would like a copy of the Sonnets, and it is not on the shelves.*

**Page 8**

**Insert 1/4 page comic panel on top right hand corner of page: A picture of Archivist (with a caption), a young boy of 12 wearing a black silk robe, communicating to Gold through a thread of telepathy.**

*She must have slipped past me when she came in, she wasn't expected until later, the Archivist said. Number Seventeen Son of the White Tiger of the West has it. He knew she'd come looking for it and wanted to have his paws on it first. He's been courting her for nearly eight years. Send her to the Western Palace, he's waiting for her there.*

Gold was astonished. *You're in on it?*

*Of course I am,* the Archivist said with a touch of amusement. *The White Tiger and the Dragon King contacted me, they're tired of these two dithering and want to see*

---

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*them safely wed. Apparently the Lady and the Tiger haven't even been intimate, they are waiting until they are married.*

*Some son of the Tiger, Gold said. Can't even bed a woman after eight years of chasing her. His father must be horrified.*

*Completely. Apparently this particular son is a very powerful half-Shen, but didn't inherit his father's skills with the Ladies at all.*

**Insert 2 wide comic panels:** A picture of Gold, hit with a sudden burst of inspiration. "Hmmm...".

*Thank you, Archivist, he said, attempting to sound suitably respectful.*

## **Page 9**

*Send her off, Gold, and get back to cross indexing those scrolls, the Archivist said. You should have finished that a long time ago.*

Gold returned to the reading room to find Jade sitting impatiently clutching the teacup.

## **Comics**

**Panel 1:** Jade is impatiently clutching her tea cup, with an annoyed look on her face.

**Jade:** So, do you have the book?

---

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**Panel 2:** Gold leans lazily against the door, looking down on the princess. He has a morose expression on his face.

**Gold:** I am so sorry, Princess. I didn't realise it was you.

**Jade:** What?

**Panel 3:** He looks at Jade out of the corner of his eye, with an almost pitying look.

**Gold:** The Archivist gave the Sonnets to that **bastard** who has been chasing you.

**Panel 4:** Jade frowns, but leans slightly forward, curious as to why Gold is saying that.

**Jade:** That is hardly an acceptable way of referring to him.

## Page 10

**Panel 1:** Gold flops down onto the couch next to Jade, fairly close to her. He doesn't look at her. She doesn't shrink from his closeness.

## Prose

'You didn't hear what he said, Princess'

Gold sat next to Jade, not looking at her. 'He came in here first, seeking the book as well, and the Archivist gave it to him. But I heard what he said while he was searching, and I cannot believe anybody could be so cruel. But then, he is a son of the White Tiger, and the Bai Hu is notorious for his poor treatment of women.'

---

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Jade sat straighter, suddenly more interested. 'What did he say?'

'He said that if the sonnets didn't bring you to his bed then nothing would,' Gold said. 'And then he could settle the bet, collect his winnings, and have you thoroughly out of his fur.'

**Insert small comic panel to side of next paragraph: A picture of Jade's eyes narrowing.**

'Bet?'

'Apparently this particular son of the Tiger has a bet with a couple of the others,' Gold said, still not looking at Jade, and doing his best to appear outraged on her behalf. 'All of the Tiger's sons are aware of your ...' he hesitated, searching for the right word. 'Virtue, and there has been a bet among them as to who would be first to break through your defences.'

**Page 11**

**2 small comic panels to right side of next paragraph: Jade toys with the teacup, a slightly embarrassed look on her face. She is smiling and blushing slightly.**

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Jade studied her teacup. 'I do not believe it. He has been nothing but a perfect gentleman to me from the start.' She smiled slightly, still watching the teacup. 'In fact, it is more *me* that has been trying to break down *his* defences.'

**Small comic panel to left side of next paragraph: Gold's eyes, as he looks at Jade. His expression is cool and calculated, trying to persuade.**

'That was part of the bet. The longer he could make you hold out before submitting, the more his brothers will be forced to pay.' Gold moved closer to Jade and guided the teacup out of her hand onto the table. He took her hand in his.

**Small comic panel to middle of next paragraph: Gold looks into Jade's eyes compassionately, as she blushes.**

'You deserve much better than that furry bastard, my Lady. You have waited too long for someone to treat you with the care and respect that you deserve.'

**Small comic panel to left side of next paragraph: He moved his face closer to hers, and she didn't move away**

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'Much too long,' he whispered.

## Page 12

**2-3 Wide comic panels: Gold reached gently around the back of her head and held her as he kissed her. She remained rigid for a second, then opened up. He felt her respond and moved closer, putting his arms around her.**

It had obviously been a long eight years for her, because she returned his attentions with satisfying enthusiasm. He pushed her backwards on the couch, then hesitated, concentrating, and locked the door without releasing her.

He pulled away slightly. 'I don't think your defences are so great, my Lady,' he whispered. 'I think that he has made a terrible mistake.' He gently pushed the green silk robes down over her shoulders. 'A terrible mistake.'

She smiled up and kissed him again.

**Break: Jade's robes in disarray, which continues onto the top half of the next page.**

## Page 13

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**Wide half-page comic panel:** They lay on the couch in each others' arms, her robes a magnificent green disarray around them.

Gold turned to look at Jade. 'Let's run away together,' he said. 'I have a fortune on the Earthly Plane, Princess. Nothing is holding me here. Run away with me.'

She pulled herself onto her elbow to smile down at him, and he admired her snow-white skin. 'Really?'

He nodded. 'I know a place where we can go.' He stopped smiling and mused. 'You go first, I will follow. I will fulfil my honour and my duty to the Archivist, and then join you. Do you know the Garden of Heavenly Delights?'

'Yes,' she said, breathless.

**Page 14**

**Wide comic panel:** Gold starts to get up as he talks to Jade, who is still on the ground.

'Wait for me there in the Pavilion of Tranquil Contemplation,' he said. 'I will come in about two hours, I need to tender my resignation here. We can go to a place I know, and spend the rest of Eternity sharing our love.'

She lowered her beautiful face and kissed him. 'I will be waiting.'

'Go, my darling,' he whispered.

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She and her clothes both disappeared.

He shook his head and rose, then concentrated and conjured his gold silk robes.

Now for the real challenge.

**Insert 1/4 page comic panel on both corners of page: A picture of Gold in**

**human form, communicating to the Archivist through a thread of telepathy.**

**Archivist communicates back to Gold.**

*Archivist, the son of the Tiger has summoned me to the Western Palace. He wishes for me to point out which of the sonnets would be most suitable for winning the heart of the lady.*

*Haven't you sent her on yet?* the Archivist said, impatient.

*I have sent her to the Western Palace, but he is waiting for some tips before he sees her.*

*I suppose you are the ideal person for this, Gold,* the Archivist said. *But be back before dinner, I want you to finish indexing those scrolls. And no funny business.*

At that, Gold smiled, and disappeared.

**Comics**

**Page 15**

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---

**Panel 1:** Gold floats in the breeze, heading towards the Western Palace.

**Gold:** 'Funny business'? Heaven forbid, Archivist.

**Panel 2:** A shot of the Western Palace from the aerial point of view. Gold is flying above the palace. *Blocks of red stone framed arched windows that guided the cool breezes from the mountains across the desert.*

**Caption:** *Western Palace*, Home of Bai Hu, the White Tiger.

**Panel 3:** Gold is concentrating on the book. He gets a signal and notes it.

**Gold:** Now to find the book... Ah!

## Page 16

**Panel 1:** Gold materialises in the corner of a courtyard, *full of flowering trees, an ideal place for a romantic liaison. A blue-tiled fountain splashed in the centre, gold-finned koi carp glittering beneath.*

**Panel 2:** He looks across the courtyard at the fountain, and sees the figure of someone sitting behind it.

**Panel 3:** This figure is a young man. *His skin was pale and delicate, almost transparent, and his hair was shining platinum blond. He was slender and young, graceful and*

---

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*languid as he leaned on the back of the bench and studied the poetry. He appeared to be rapt in the words of the Bard.*

**Panel 4:** Gold approached quietly and sat next to him.

**Gold:** She's not coming, you know.

### Page 17

**Panel 1:** The young man doesn't look up from his book.

**Man:** Why not?

**Panel 2:** Gold replies to him, nonchalantly.

**Gold:** Because she wants to make you suffer even more.

**Panel 3:** The young man gets an angry look in his eyes.

**Panel 4:** The young man slammed the tiny book shut.

**Panel 5:** He pulls himself roughly upright to sit on the bench. Gold watches him, pleased with the reaction.

**Man:** <indignantly> I think I've had about enough of this.

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**Panel 6:** Gold smiles.

**Gold:** She's been leading you on for eight years, honoured ...?

**William:** William.

## Page 18

**Panel 1:** William turns to look at Gold. His eyes are clear.

**William:** My mother is English, the Tiger's Wife Number Forty-five.

**Panel 2:** Gold smiled at the irony.

**Gold:** ... William. Ironic. I think it's about time you moved on.

**Panel 3:** A small panel of William, eyes looking downcast and unhappy.

## Prose

William sagged over his knees and sighed. 'I do love her, you know.'

'She's a *dragon*. Those reptiles are incapable of loving anyone but themselves.'

William stiffened slightly but didn't say anything.

Gold held out his hand. 'May I?'

**Wide comic panel:** William passed him the book of Sonnets.

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'The love described in these poems is love that is true and would last the test of centuries. All that dragon would give you is suffering.'

William didn't say anything, but his face was full of misery.

**2 Wide comic panel:** Gold flips through the book. William looks dejected.

Gold reads out "Ah, the notorious Sonnet Number Twenty".

'A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted

Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion;'

**Wide comic panel:** He shifted slightly closer to William, just so that their thighs were touching.

**Page 19**

**2 comic panels, side by side:** William glanced up at Gold, slightly blushing.

Gold smiled slightly at William over the top of the book, and continued.

'A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted

With shifting change, as is false women's fashion;'

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**Wide comic panel:** Gold moved slightly closer to William, looking at him.

William didn't move at all.

'An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,

Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;'

**Wide comic panel:** William dropped his head into his hands. 'That's

true...' he said into his hands. 'It's all pretence. All fallacy. All lies.'

'A man in hue, all "hues" in his controlling,

Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.

And for a woman wert thou first created;

Till Nature, as she wrought thee, fell a-doting,'

**Wide comic panel:** Gold dropped his voice and pressed himself into

William.

'And by addition me of thee defeated,'

**Page 20**

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---

Gold reached around to turn William's head towards him. He studied William's face for a long time, eyes unreadable.

**Wide comic panel: Gold looks at William.**

This particular tiger's son was not the usual large, brawny Horseman. His skin was pale and delicate, almost transparent, and his hair was shining platinum blonde. He was slender and young, graceful and languid. Gold smiled.

He then pulled William in and kissed him.

**Wide comic panel: They kiss. William says '...Yes.'**

**Wide comic panel: Gold pulls away**

**Wide comic panel: Gold puts a finger on William's lips.**

'Have you ever done this before?'

**Page 21**

William didn't say anything, he just studied Gold's features, his eyes roaming over Gold's face.

'Then let's go to your quarters, and I'll show you realms of pleasure that you never knew existed.'

---

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\*\*\*

Gold felt remarkably proud of himself as he returned to cross-indexing the scrolls. He had rescued the two fools from each other, shown young William where his true preferences lay, and had had a very enjoyable experience doing it. He quietly wondered if Jade was still searching for the non-existent pavilion. Quite possibly. Dragons weren't very good at subtlety.

He chuckled quietly as he picked up the next scroll.

**Comics**

**Panel 1:** A shot of Gold, as he is contacted telepathically. Gold is surprised.

**Voice:** <telepathy> *Please come into my office, Gold.*

**Panel 2:** A shot of the Archivist, giving a telepathic link to Gold.

**Panel 3:** Gold continues to be surprised.

**Gold:** ... Archivist?

**Archivist:** <telepathy> *Who else?*

**Panel 4:** Archivist continues to speak.

---

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---

**Archivist:** <telepathy> *Hurry up. There is someone here to see you.*

## Page 22

**Panel 1:** Gold knocks on the large red door to the Archivist's office (Knock SFX).

**Caption:** The Archivist's office.

**Voice:** Come in.

**Panel 2:** Gold opens the door, looking around.

**Gold:** Archivist? Who —

**Panel 3:** A small shot of Gold's startled eyes, as he realises who was there.

**Gold:** Ah!

**Panel 4:** A shot of the Archivist's office. The Archivist sat at his desk, with *a tall graceful man in his mid-thirties with golden skin and a shock of snow-white hair with matching sideburns. He wore cotton pants and jacket of white trimmed with gold.* The man is standing in front of the desk, facing the door.

## Page 23

**Panel 1:** A closer shot of the man identifies him.

**Caption:** The White Tiger of the West, **Bai Hu.**

---

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**Panel 2:** Gold is on his knees, saluting the Tiger.

**Gold:** Lord Bai Hu.

**Panel 3:** A shot of Bai Hu's mouth as he speaks. He has sharp teeth.

**Bai Hu:** Rise.

**Panel 4:** Gold turns to the Archivist behind the desk, who gestures to the two chairs in front of the desk.

**Gold:** Archivist...

**Archivist:** Sit, Gold.

**Panel 5:** Gold sits down uncomfortably next to the White Tiger, who takes the other chair.

**Archivist:** Now...

## **Page 24**

**Panel 1:** A shot of the serious look on the Archivist's face.

**Archivist:** Gold, please tell us in your own words, exactly what passed between you, Princess Jade and Prince William.

---

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## Prose

'Jade came in and asked for the sonnets,' Gold said. 'I told her they weren't here, and she went away. Then William summoned me, and I went to help him find a suitable poem to win the lady.'

'Did you seduce either of them, Stone?' the Tiger said, his voice low and gruff.

Gold hesitated.

**Insert small page comic panel on right hand side of next paragraph:**

**Gold looks definitely guilty as the archivist and tiger glared at him.**

Both the Tiger and the Archivist glared at Gold.

'What will we do with it?' the Tiger said.

'Gold is working here as punishment for a similar transgression,' the Archivist said. 'Obviously he hasn't learnt his lesson.'

'If I hadn't intervened they would have ended up miserable with each other!' Gold said, interrupting. 'He wasn't even aware of his own nature, and she would have languished neglected for years!'

'Right now she is weeping inconsolably in the Dragon King's Palace Under the Sea,' the Archivist said. 'She attempted suicide, but changed her mind at the last minute.' Then, with emphasis, he added 'Because she wants to kill you first.'

---

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---

**Insert small page comic panel on left hand side of next paragraph: Gold**

**looks stubbornly defiant.**

'I did both of them a favour,' Gold said.

The Archivist sighed with exasperation, banged his hand on the desk, and turned away.

**Page 25**

'I'd like to take him to the palace and teach him some manners, but a creature like him should not be let anywhere near my harem,' the Tiger said. 'The Dragon King just wants to eat him alive —'

Gold squeaked.

'The Dragon King wants to eat him alive,' the Tiger said without looking at Gold.

'What do you suggest, Archivist?'

**Wide comic panel: The Archivist studied Gold expressionlessly, saying "Hmm...".**

**Gold looks terrified.**

'I have a solution.' The Archivist said finally. 'Put a charm on him. Make him

retain True Form, as a stone. Then set him to work lifting and carrying at the palace.

---

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Even better, put him to work in your harem. He will be close enough to touch your

women, but unable to do anything about it while a stone.'

Gold squeaked again.

'Good idea,' the Tiger said, 'but I don't have power over stones, my nature is Metal. We'll need somebody with Wood alignment to do it to him.'

'I'm sure the Dragon King will be happy to oblige.' The Archivist straightened. 'Gold can finish indexing those scrolls, then I'll send him over to the Dragon King to be bound. Then you can have him until your honour is satisfied.'

## Page 26

**Wide comic panels:** Gold looks terrified. The Tiger and Archivist turns to look at Gold, with little smiles on their faces. Gold gulps.

'Works for me,' the Tiger said. 'How long will it take him to finish the scrolls?'

'Not more than twenty-four hours,' the Archivist said with a small smile.

'Otherwise I will ask the Dragon King to make the binding permanent.'

**Wide comic panel:** The Tiger looked Gold in the eye.

'This time tomorrow, you will present yourself to the Seraglio Elite Guard for assignment of duties.'

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**Wide comic panel:** A closer shot of the Tiger, with a mean smile.

**Wide comic panel:** Gold continues looking terrified.

**Wide comic panel:** Black background, with the white text 'Serve me

well... and I may only hold you bound for one hundred years.'

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## Comics Section

# <A>The Tiger's Harem<A>

<B>1804<B>

## Page 1

## Comics

**Panel 1:** A shot of the Tiger's mouth shouting, and a shot of Gold's human face directly under the shouting bubble.

**Tiger: Gold!!**

**Panel 2:** Pull back to reveal a floating stone, carrying a batch of towels. There's a faint shot of Gold directly above the stone, to suggest that the stone is actually Gold's true form. Gold's human form is looking back over his shoulder in alarm, at the Tiger's voice.

**Panel 3:** This speech bubble is a "mental speech" bubble, so there's a shot of the Tiger's mouth speaking, communicating to Gold.

**Tiger:** *Come to the pool. I have a job for you.*

**Panel 4:** The stone is floating in a corridor, with the towels. Close-up of the stone floating down the corridor, as he approaches the exit of the corridor he is in.

**Gold:** <Replying with "mental speech" bubble> *Yes, Lord Bai Hu.*

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## Page 2-3

**Double Spread Page:** A double-page spread of the Tiger's Pleasure palace, drawn in traditional Chinese style. Gold floats down an open passageway, surrounded by lavish and ornate open-air baths. Beautiful women in various states of undress are sitting around the baths, some posing seductively, others bathing.

**Caption: The year 1804.**

**Caption: Palace of Bai Hu, the Tiger, Lord of the West.**

**Gold:** *I'm on my way, my Lord.*

## Page 4

**Panel 1:** Gold floats past a group of semi-naked women sitting by a bath, one of whom spots him and calls out.

**Woman:** Ah! Give me a towel!

**Panel 2:** Stone is immediately surrounded by half-naked women grabbing at the towels on-top of him. He struggles to get away from them.

**Woman:** Me too!

**Woman:** Bring me a silk gown!

**Woman:** When will the Tiger come by and see me?!

**Gold:** L-ladies...!

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**Panel 3:** Thinks to himself, as the commotion around him continued.

**Gold:** <thinks> *Arrgh, if only I can turn back into my human form...*

**Panel 4:** Gold imagines himself momentarily in his human form, as the group of beautiful naked women move back to the baths they were at.

**Gold:** *Heh ...*

## Page 5

**Panel 1:** Gold floats on, with a towel on his "head".

**Gold:** <thinks> *Phew ... at least they didn't take **all** the towels.*

## Prose

But Gold didn't grumble too much as he continued with the towels he had been carrying between the laundry and the Seraglio. The Tiger's wives seemed to use every towel taken almost immediately. They spent most of their time bathing, hoping that the Tiger would wander past, see them, and invite one or two of them for a small dalliance.

Unfortunately Gold saw the women all the time and, due to the particular way he'd been bound, he couldn't even tell them about their obvious charms. He wasn't just frustrated; he was way through frustration and out the other side.

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But he had decided to work hard and serve his sentence with good humour.

Perhaps when he was released he would be able to return and tell the Tiger's wives exactly what he'd been thinking as he'd carried the towels through the harem.

Gold placed the towels on a side table, and quickly floated in stone form to the gardens and the side of the pool, where Bai Hu the Tiger awaited in his True Form.

## Comics

**Panel 1:** A shot of the Tiger's face and mouth, eating something.

**Tiger:** Gold. There's a snake by the side of the pool.

### Page 6

**Panel 1:** A wide shot of the tiger, with Gold floating in the foreground. *The Tiger was in True Form; an enormous white tiger with pale gold stripes, easily half as big again as a natural animal. He lounged beside a deck chair with the half-eaten haunch of an antelope between his front legs. There is a pool in the right-hand side of the picture, some distance away, with a dark snakey lump resting on the side of it.*

**Tiger:** Don't know where it came from.

**Gold:** Oh?

**Panel 2:** A closer look at the pool, with the dark long shape lying beside it, resting.

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**Tiger:** I want you to find a stick or a blade or something and kill it before I bring some of the wives in.

**Gold:** I wonder how it came in?

**Panel 3:** A shot of the tiger chewing on his food again.

**Tiger:** No idea, but if the wives see it they'll panic.

**Panel 4:** A shot of Gold floating off .

**Tiger:** Just be a good lad, Gold, and find something to kill it with. Hurry.

**Gold:** Yes, sir.

**Page 7**

**Prose**

Gold cast around and saw a couple of Horsemen guarding the gates that led through the three-metre high wall separating the pool deck from the desert plain. One of them carried a large sword, a suitable weapon. He approached the Horsemen, floating at eye level.

'May I borrow your blade?' he asked the Horseman with the sword.

'Certainly,' the Horseman said. He pulled the blade from its scabbard at his side, and held it out.

'Thank you,' Gold said. 'I need to kill a snake with it, then I'll give it right back.'

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'You do that,' the Horseman said with obvious amusement. The Horseman at the other side of the gate made a strange hissing sound, and Gold glanced at him, but his face was rigid.

Gold couldn't shrug in stone form. He turned and moved towards the edge of the pool, the sword floating behind him.

**Wide comic panel:** A picture of Gold floating back to the pool and snake, with the sword floating behind him.

The Tiger had been wise to choose Gold to kill the snake; Gold could move silently in stone form, floating, and still wield the blade with reasonable accuracy.

The snake was a monster, more than two metres long, stretched out on the gold-coloured pavers that edged the pool. It appeared to be a cobra, but was a shiny black from its blunt nose to its pointed tail. It seemed to be sleeping in the sunshine.

Gold approached the snake from behind, moved to the side next to its head, and raised the blade.

**Page 8**

**Three Small comic panels, in one row:** A picture of Gold raising the sword over the snake. Then a shot of the sword falling, and Gold appearing to

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freeze. Then a shot of the sword embedding itself onto the ground where it was dropped, with Gold falling.

**Wide comic panel:** Gold sits trembling on the ground, as he looks at the snake, who looks back at him, raising its head.

**Wide comic panel:** A close-up shot of the snake looking at Gold. 'I hope that wasn't intended for me,' it said.

It had a deep, masculine hiss.

'The Tiger ordered me to kill you,' Gold said. He had been bound, and was unable to move. 'I didn't know you were a Shen, I thought you were a natural snake. My apologies. Would you mind leaving the poolside? The Tiger would like to bring some of his wives in, and he is concerned that you would frighten them.'

Something black and enormous that Gold hadn't noticed before stirred at the bottom of the pool beside the snake. 'The Tiger ordered you to kill me, eh?' the snake said.

'Yes, sir,' Gold said, distracted by the water surging in the pool. The large dark thing in the pool approached the surface; it was oval, and nearly five metres long. Gold made another attempt to move but was still bound.

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## Page 9

## Comics

**Panel 1-3:** *The snake grew. It stretched and widened and lengthened until it was also nearly five metres long and at least thirty centimetres around. It raised its head and studied Gold where he lay on the ground.*

**Snake:** And you were ready to chop my head off, were you?

**Gold:** Y-Yes, sir.

**Panel 4:** Something huge rises out of the pool behind Gold with a big GUSH of water.

**Panel 5:** *Behind where Gold sat, the dark thing in the pool surfaced. Its massive black shell sparkled as the water rushed from it. It raised its head above the water and grinned at Gold. It was a huge black turtle, but unlike any natural beast. Its head was like a cross between a lion's and a dragon's, but much darker and uglier. Its shining black shell radiated cold menace.*

**Panel 6:** Gold whispers.

**Gold:** <whisper> Oh, shit.

## Page 10

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**Panel 1:** The turtle turns towards the snake, who is starting to coil towards the turtle.

**Turtle:** I think I may have a small chat to the Tiger.

**Panel 2-3:** *The snake slithered forward and wrapped itself around the turtle's shell, disappearing inside it where they met. Then the horrifying reptilian combination twisted, darkened, and shrank...*

**Panel 4:** *...and changed into a man wearing a black jacket and pants. His skin was golden, but his long hair and shining eyes were as black as the snake's scales and the turtle's shell.*

**Panel 5:** *He pulled himself completely upright and turned.*

**Man:** Come with me, and let's talk to the Tiger. Leave the sword.

## Page 11

**Panel 1:** Gold, freed of his bonding, flies straight up into the air in front of Xuan Wu's face. He greets the lord quickly.

**Gold:** Lord Xuan Wu!

## Prose

As Xuan Wu and Gold approached, the Tiger obviously couldn't contain his mirth any more and roared with laughter over the top of the antelope. He laughed so hard he rolled

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onto his back, his paws in the air, the snow-white fur of his belly rippling as his sides heaved.

Xuan Wu flopped onto one of the deck chairs and gestured towards Gold without looking at him. 'Go to the kitchen and bring me something cold to drink. Non-alcoholic.'

'Sir,' Gold said.

'You've failed me, Gold,' the Tiger wheezed with delight, still on his back with his paws in the air. 'I ordered you to kill that goddamn snake, and instead you're going to serve it drinks.'

'And vegetarian *ho fan*,' Xuan Wu said.

'Sir,' Gold said.

'Go,' Xuan Wu said.

'Sir,' Gold squeaked, and floated away to the kitchen as quickly as his stone form could carry him.

**Wide half-page comic panel: The kitchen demons are all laughing raucously.**

**Page 12**

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**Wide half-page comic panel:** A shot to show the rest of the kitchen, as the

tame demons surround Gold, laughing. 'Quit it already!' says Gold, as

another demon said, 'Wish I was there, ha ha ha!'

### **Caption: The Kitchen**

'Cut the laughing and make some vegetarian *ho fan* for the Dark Lord,' Gold snapped loudly. 'And he wants something cold and non-alcoholic to drink.'

The demons didn't stop laughing as they hurried to prepare the noodles.

One of the demons, in the form of a teenage girl, approached Gold. 'How close did you come to cutting off the Serpent's head?' she said with a huge grin.

'I wish I'd seen that,' one of the other demons shouted from the other side of the kitchen.

'He knew I was coming from a mile off,' Gold said. 'He was just waiting to see what I'd do.'

'It wasn't your fault, Gold,' she said, still smiling. 'It was Lord Bai Hu's idea.'

'I didn't even see the Turtle at the bottom of the pool,' Gold said, miserable.

The demons all laughed again.

### **Page 13**

'Better be careful what you say near Lord Xuan Wu,' an older demon said as he approached. 'You've already managed to insult him by not recognising him. No turtle

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words, Gold. I know what you're like, and if you insult the Dark Lord then the trouble you're in now will be nothing compared to what he could do to you.'

**Small comic panel on left hand side of next paragraph: A shot of a young female demon talking to Gold, her face excited.**

'I've never seen him,' the young female demon said. 'What does he look like?'

'His human form is a tall man with long hair,' Gold said. 'Black eyes.'

'Did you see his True Form?' she said. 'You saw the Serpent? Did you see the Xuan Wu, the whole thing?'

Gold floated slightly higher, enjoying her rapt attention. 'The Serpent was lying on the poolside, then the Turtle came out of the water and I saw them join together. I saw the whole majestic Xuan Wu.'

'How powerful is he?' she said. She turned to the older male demon. 'I've heard he's very powerful. He's the Spirit of the North. How powerful is he?'

**Small comic panel on right hand side of next paragraph: A shot of a the older male demon talking to the young female demon.**

'He is second in power and majesty only to the Celestial One, the Jade Emperor Himself,' the male demon said with deference. 'He is First Celestial General. He

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commands the Armies of the Thirty-Six. He wields the Blade of Seven Stars. He is the mightiest demon destroyer in existence ...'

The young female demon's eyes were huge.

'He is Sovereign of the Four Winds,' Gold said, grabbing back her attention. 'He commands the other three spirits; the White Tiger of the West, the Red Phoenix of the South, and the Azure Dragon of the East.'

'He's the Tiger's lord,' the older male demon said.

## Page 14

'You don't get much bigger than him without entering the Celestial Palace itself,' Gold said. 'And he spends most of his time there, anyway. He is Right Hand to the Jade Emperor.'

'He spends a lot of time here, too,' the older male demon said. 'He and the Lord Bai Hu are very good friends.'

'I didn't know that,' Gold said. 'And the Tiger took advantage of my ignorance.'

'Well, from what I've heard, Gold, that would be poetic justice for you.'

Gold stopped at that. 'I suppose you're right,' he said softly.

## Comics

**Panel 1:** Shot of a tray with a large noodle bowl, spoon and chopsticks. An ice-tea too.

**Demon:** Noodles, Gold.

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**Panel 2:** A shot of Gold holding the tray, as the demon continues to talk to him.

**Demon:** And the drink. It's iced tea, it's hot out there.

**Panel 3:** Gold floats back out the door, tray on his head.

**Demon:** If he wants something else, he can ask the demon in the pool bar.

**Gold:** Thanks.

**Panel 4:** Gold carefully held the tray as he floated back to the poolside. He notices a voice saying something.

**Voice:** ... And if you do it again, you'll be eating nothing but rat for three days.

## Page 15

**Panel 1:** Wide shot of the pool area, where Xuan Wu is standing in front of the tiger, who is sitting with his head bowed, looking slightly apologetic. Gold floats towards a table and chair.

**Tiger:** My Lord, it won't happen again.

**Xuan Wu:** Very well.

**Panel 2:** Xuan Wu notices Gold, who puts the noodles and drink on the table.

**Gold:** My Lord, your order.

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**Panel 3:** Xuan Wu looks at Gold, as he sits down at the table to eat.

**Panel 4:** A close-up shot of Xuan Wu, looking at Gold. The Tiger is in the background, sitting up.

**Xuan Wu:** So, is this the one?

**Panel 5:** A shot of Xuan Wu smiling as he looks down on Gold.

**Xuan Wu:** Doesn't look like much.

## Page 16

**Panel 1:** Gold floated higher, indignant.

**Gold:** I am a child of the Jade Building Block of the World!

**Xuan Wu:** Is that so.

**Panel 2:** Xuan Wu smiles with amusement.

**Xuan Wu:** I've had your father locked away in a jewellery box for nearly five hundred years.

**Panel 3:** Gold continues haughtily.

**Gold:** I am well aware of that, my Lord. And we prefer the term 'parent'.

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## **Prose**

'Learn some humility or you'll join your dad,' the Tiger growled. 'Wait here, you can bring me some wives later.'

'My Lord.' Gold moved to one side and settled on the ground, resting in the afternoon sun. The sun warmed his golden veins and he nearly sighed with bliss.

'A group of missionaries from the West invaded one of my establishments in Sichuan,' the Tiger said. 'They have some interesting ideas about the nature of the universe. I'm always making plans to spend more time on the Earthly plane and gather information about this, but then find something better to do here on the Celestial.'

'Don't harm any Westerners if you can avoid it,' Xuan Wu said. 'The increasing conflict between the Qing and the traders from the West is causing us a great deal of concern.'

### **Page 17**

The Tiger stretched on the paving and curled his tail around his hind legs. 'China has no need for them. We are large and mighty. They are small and divided. They have nothing that we need.'

'They are well aware of that. But they love our tea.'

The Tiger chuckled. 'Good luck to them. So do we.'

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**Small comic panel on left hand side of next paragraph: Xuan Wu is**

**stirring the noodles with his chopsticks.**

'Chinese tea is selling for a small fortune in the West, Ah Bai,' Xuan Wu said, stirring the noodles with his chopsticks. 'The traders see the possibility of great profits and are looking for all possible avenues to tap into this market.'

'They can buy as much tea as they want, provided they pay for it in silver or gold.'

'They are. They pay for the tea with silver.'

The Tiger pulled himself slightly more upright. 'And where are they mining this silver from?'

'Southern China,' Xuan Wu said. 'Guangdong. Fukien. Chaozhou provinces.'

**Small comic panel on right hand side of next paragraph: The tiger has**

**sat up and is now taking notice.**

'There's no silver to be had there, Ah Wu,' the Tiger said. 'What are you talking about?'

'They grow opium in India. They sell the opium in Southern China, they sell it for silver. Then they use the silver to buy tea. The streets of Guangdong province are lined with opium houses.'

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The Tiger flicked one ear. 'This is very bad news, Ah Wu.'

'The Qing Emperor is planning to outlaw the sale of opium. The Western traders are willing to go to war for the right to sell it.'

## Page 18

'This is extremely bad. Because of the reign of the previous emperor and his corrupt little boyfriend, China's army is almost useless.'

'I am seriously considering intervening,' Xuan Wu said to the noodles.

'You're not the only one,' the Tiger growled. 'I will not see our Middle Kingdom invaded by them.'

**Wide comic panel: Xuan Wu leans back as he sits and addresses the Tiger.**

**They both look serious.**

'The Jade Emperor will shortly issue an edict.' Xuan Wu leaned back and studied the Tiger intensely. 'No Celestial may intervene in Earthly affairs. We will watch and wait. But we do not like where this is heading.'

'If we sit back and wait then it may be too late,' the Tiger said. 'The Qing Empire is becoming more corrupt all the time. The Empire is failing, Ah Wu, it is time for Divine

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Mandate to be removed from this dynasty. If the Empire is weak then the Westerners may see their chance to move in.'

'We will only intervene as a last resort. Only if it appears that the entire Empire will fall,' Xuan Wu said. 'Even then, we will hesitate. It is not our place.'

The Tiger sighed, shook his shaggy head, and flopped back down to lie on the paving.

Xuan Wu placed the chopsticks back onto the table. 'I've been summoned by the Jade Emperor. The Celestial wants to see me. Duty calls.'

'My Lord,' the Tiger said, bobbing his head.

Xuan Wu disappeared.

## Page 19

'Gold,' the Tiger said.

'My Lord?' Gold said.

'Seventy-six. Fifty-eight. Sixty. Seventy-three. Oh, and what the hell, the new one. Eighty-one. She'll have to learn to share eventually, might as well start teaching her now.'

'My Lord,' Gold said, and drifted away to collect the Tiger's five selected wives.

**Comics**

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**Panel 1:** Gold is in the corridor, with a few women running ahead of him. They squeal in excitement.

**Gold:** He's at the pool, ladies. Now don't run ...

**Panel 2:** Gold notices something behind him, as a group of soldiers walked past.

**Gold:** ... Huh? Aren't you ...

**Panel 3:** It was William, who turns around in surprise, with a frown on his face. *William wore the white and gold uniform of the Seraglio Elite Guard, the most respected select unit of the Western Horsemen.*

**Gold:** William!

## Page 20

**Panel 1:** A closer shot of William's uniform.

**Caption:** The white and gold uniform of the Seraglio Elite Guard, the most respected select unit of the Western Horsemen.

**Caption:** The Tiger only entrusted the care of his wives to those who were of the highest standard as warriors, and had also proven that they lacked interest in women and preferred men.

**Panel 2:** William turns around and just walks off, in a huff.

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**William:** Go away!

**Gold:** Wait!

**Panel 3:** Gold floats after William, trailing him.

**Gold:** You were promoted?

**Panel 4:** William stops suddenly as he hears what Gold says. His back is still turned to Gold.

**Gold:** ...Without me you wouldn't be here.

**Panel 5:** William says slowly and angrily, without looking at Gold.

**William:** You may think you have done me a favour...

## Page 21

**Panel 1:** He turns to look at Gold angrily over his shoulder.

**William:** But both Jade and I have been deeply shamed by your actions!

## Prose

William growled, his eyes blazing. 'Nothing will undo the fact that we were made a laughing stock by you.' He turned away to hide the pain in his face. 'Everybody on the Celestial plane knows what you did, and knows what we did. Everybody knows. They

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still laugh when they see me coming.' He glared at Gold. 'Even the wives joke about me, they call me the "little stone's toy".'

Gold dropped slightly in the air. 'I didn't realise it was so bad for you.'

**Wide comic panel: William talks to Gold in the corridor.**

'I've been in constant contact with Jade, trying to talk her out of killing herself,' William said. 'She *wants* to make a trip through Hell, she wants to suffer. She says that anything she would be subjected to at the hands of Hell's demons would be *nothing* compared to the treatment she receives from the other dragons. Dragons are not renowned for their mercy, and in this case, they ...' His voice trailed off and he glanced away. 'In this case they have been having a great deal of fun.'

Gold dropped even further. 'I never thought of it like that.'

**Page 22**

**Wide comic panel: William looks coldly at Gold. 'Hn' he said.**

'Frankly, Gold, I'm not surprised.'

**Wide comic panel: A shot of Gold, with his human face in the background, looking sad and forlorn.**

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'Thinking is obviously not something you're very good at.'

**Wide comic panel:** William turns on his heels and walks off, without looking back.

**Wide comic panel:** Black background, with white text, saying 'Particularly thinking about the feelings of others.'

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## Comics Section

# <A>Freedom and Theft<A>

## <B>1820 – Part I<B>

### Page 1

## Comics

**Panel 1:** A black background with a speech bubble – a shot of a floating stone.

**Demon:** Hey. Gold.

**Panel 2:** Pull back to reveal a corridor. The stone turns around to look at the demon who called him.

**Gold:** What is it? I'm about to turn in for the night.

**Demon:** Go to Number Two Dining Hall. The Tiger wants to see you.

**Panel 3:** Close in on the demon and Gold talking.

**Gold:** This late? What is it now?

**Demon:** Just go.

**Panel 4:** Gold heads off towards an open set of red doors.

**Panel 5:** Gold enters the open doors into the dining room.

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**Gold:** I'm here, Lord Bai Hu ---

## Page 2

**Panel 1:** A wide shot of the dining room. There's a group of people sitting around the rosewood table, and some of them are standing up when Gold enters. They are seen in the middle distance, so it's not immediately apparent who they are.

**Panel 2, a row:** A row of panel depicting every face in detail, from left to right --- The White Tiger, Bai Hu. William, Number Seventeen Son. Princess Jade of the Dragons.

The Archivist, this time appearing as a youth of about eighteen. The Number One Son of the King of the Dragons, his hair, eyes and robe all brilliant shining gold.

**Panel 3:** Gold stops dead in his track. A bead of sweat falls down Gold's "face".

**Caption: It was the year 1820.**

## Page 3

## Prose

Gold floated closer to the table, then dropped six inches in the air. 'This humble stone is present. My Lords. My Ladies.'

'How long have you served me, Golden Boy?' the Tiger said, his voice low and gruff.

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Gold counted, then felt a wild rush of hope. 'Exactly one hundred years, my Lord.'

'Do you wish to be released?'

Gold tried to keep the enthusiasm from his voice. 'I do, my Lord.'

'What have you learnt from your hundred years of serving me?' the Tiger said, his golden eyes blazing.

Gold nearly said, 'how to carry towels', but swallowed it. 'I have learnt to think twice before meddling in the affairs of others, my Lord,' he said. 'In pursuing my selfish interests I harmed both William,' he bobbed in the air, 'and the Princess Jade.'

'My honour is satisfied,' the Tiger said. 'He has served me well. I have no objection to his release. Princess?' He nodded to Jade.

**Wide comic panel: Jade, with an angry face, looks at the Tiger when he looks at her.**

Jade glared at Gold, her green eyes flashing. 'I agree to his release on one condition.'

'Anything you wish, my Lady,' Gold said.

'Stay well away from me and mine,' Jade said.

Gold swallowed a retort and made his voice suitably even. 'If you do not request my company then I swear I will not approach.'

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Jade placed both pale slender hands on the table, still glaring at Gold. 'I agree.'

#### Page 4

#### Wide comic panel: The Tiger looks towards William.

'William?' the Tiger said.

'Same for me,' William said. 'Don't come anywhere near me, stone, or I swear I will have your human head.'

Gold flew backwards then moved forward again. 'I thought of you as a friend, William,' he said softly. 'Often when I was alone in my niche during these long hundred years I have thought of you. I was looking forward to seeking you out once I had my freedom and regained my human form. I thought I was your first.'

William leaned forward over the table and glared at Gold. 'Stay well away from me!' he spat. 'You come near me, I will tear you to pieces! My tiger form has never tasted human flesh.' He grinned with menace. 'I would be happy to make you my first.'

'I've seen enough,' Jade said. 'Don't come near me, Gold, or I'll have your head in my teeth.' She disappeared.

'I have things to do,' William said, and also vanished.

'Honour is satisfied,' the Archivist said. 'You have been warned, stone.' He nodded to the Number One Son of the Dragon King.

'Yi Long, you may proceed.'

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**Wide comic panel:** The dragon concentrated.

**Wide comic panel:** His long golden hair floated around his head. 'Release!'

said the dragon.

### Page 5

The charm fell away from Gold, but he waited until the dragon's hair had completely fallen back before attempting the human form.

**3 comic panels side by side:** Gold shape shifts from his true form back to his human form.

Even after a hundred years the form was simple to take. He fell to one knee and saluted the Tiger, the Archivist, and the dragon. 'My Lords, I thank you.' He pulled himself back to his feet.

'You have scrolls for me to index, Archivist?'

'I have no further need for your services, Gold,' the Archivist said with a small smile. 'You'll have to find gainful employment if you want to live as a human.'

Gold glanced at the Tiger.

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'Don't even think I'm giving you a job near my women while you're in that form,' the Tiger said with amusement. 'I still don't trust you. You have ten minutes to get your carcass out of the palace, and if you ever return I will take off your head.'

'I hear there is plenty of work in Guangdong,' the Archivist said. 'Why not go there? Business is booming, there is much need for Shen with mathematical ability, and you stones are famous for your aptitude with an abacus.'

Gold didn't salute them or say a word. He just disappeared. He had no intention of ever seeing any of them again.

**Page 6**

**Comics**

**Panel 1:** A shot of Gold waving his chopsticks, relaxing, sitting at a yum-cha table, surrounded by food. One of the steamers has some barbeque pork bun.

**Caption:** City of Hong Kong, Southern China

**Gold:** And so here I am. Finally released after a hundred years, and looking for something to do.

**Panel 2:** Gold picks up a dumpling with his chopsticks, waving it around in front of a rotund middle-aged Chinese businessman.

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**Gold:** The Earthly Plane has come a long way. Hong Kong seems a lot of fun.

**Gold:** I love this idea. Who thought of it?

**Man:** A human.

**Panel 3:** A shot of the table, covered with delicacies. The man picks up a barbecue pork bun.

**Man:** It's developed from the snacks served at the tea houses in Southern China, that's why it's called *yum cha*, 'drink tea' in Cantonese.

**Panel 4:** The man points at Gold, sitting at the other end of the table.

**Man:** But why do you need a job? What for? You're a stone. Unlike us demons, you don't even have to eat.

## Page 7

**Panel 1:** Gold shrugs, holding some vegetable dumplings with his chopsticks and inspecting them.

**Gold:** I like to eat. I like a soft bed to sleep in.

## Prose

'Ah,' the demon said, understanding. 'You need a soft bed.' The demon had taken human form to meet with Gold; he appeared to be a middle-aged Chinese businessman, one of

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many found in this part of Southern China who dealt with the opium traders from the West.

Gold smiled through a mouthful of dim sum. 'Precisely.'

'I have no need for a book-keeper right now,' the demon said, pouring the tea and then placing the lid sideways on the pot to indicate that it needed filling. 'You're out of luck if you want work from me.'

Gold chuckled. 'Who says I want to work?' He inspected the steamer carefully. 'What would you pay for one of the Tiger's wives? To hold for ransom?'

**Wide half-page comic panel:** The demon chokes on his tea, making a

**Puuh! noise.**

**Wide half-page comic panel:** Gold watches the demon as he coughs.

**Page 8**

The demon took several wheezing breaths before he calmed himself down, and sipped the tea again.

'I can enter the seraglio,' Gold said. 'I served there for a hundred years. Many of the wives know and trust me. What would you give for one of them?'

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'It wouldn't be worth it,' the demon said. He took another sip of tea. 'The White Tiger is nearly as formidable a demon destroyer as the Xuan Wu. It would come after me and destroy me.'

Gold thought quickly. 'How about this, then? I take the wife, you hold her. I rescue her, and pretend to destroy you. I return her to the Tiger, and we split the reward.'

**Wide half-page comic panel: The demon looks at Gold for a long time.**

**Gold looks back at the demon. It's clear that Gold is serious.**

The demon studied Gold over the tea. Then he placed his teacup on the table and put his hands, palms down, on either side of his bowl. 'I like it. But the harem is like a fortress. The guards are the Tiger's finest sons. There's no way you could get in.'

'I can get in anywhere,' Gold said. 'I could steal the Great Seal of the Jade Emperor if I wanted.'

**Page 9**

'Oh, now *that's* an interesting claim,' the demon said. 'The Hall of Celestial Treasures is damn near impenetrable. You couldn't possibly do it.'

'If I can't get you a wife then I'll get you the Great Seal,' Gold said.

'I have a tea plantation in Fujian province,' the demon said. 'It produces the finest silver-tipped tea in China. Nearly five *qing*, the largest tea plantation on Drum Mountain.'

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If you can get me one of the White Tiger's wives, you can have the plantation and half the reward.'

'Does the plantation have a manor?' Gold said.

'Of course,' the demon said. 'Fifty rooms, human servants thrown in. Plenty of lovely soft beds for you to take your pleasure in.'

'If I can't get you a wife then I'll get you the Great Seal,' Gold said.

'A young wife,' the demon said. 'A pretty one.'

'They're all pretty, you know that,' Gold said. 'The Tiger only wants beautiful women.'

The demon raised his teacup. 'It's a bet.'

Gold raised his own tea. 'Good.'

**Wide comic panel:** The demon and Gold clink their teacups together with an audible CLINK.

'To the Tiger's beautiful wives,' the demon said.

'To my own personal tea plantation and manor,' Gold said.

**Page 10**

**Comics**

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**Panel 1:** Gold is floating, pressed against the wall, along an ornate corridor – one that's recognisable from the Tiger's palace in Part 2. It's night-time, so it's dark.

**Caption: Palace of Bai Hu the Tiger, Sleeping Quarters.**

**Panel 2:** He stops at an open door.

**Gold:** Number Thirty-eight, Thirty-nine ... this is it.

**Panel 3:** He turned into the wife's bedroom. She was asleep in her rosewood four-poster, the gauzy curtains drifting in the soft desert breeze.

**Panel 4:** A shot of the wife sleeping. She was beautiful once, but old now.

**Gold:** Mary ... **Mary ... Mary Robinson.**

## **Page 11**

**Panel 1:** Seeing there's no response, Gold pauses for a second.

**Panel 2:** Then Gold mutters her other name, and she smiles at that, but doesn't yet wake.

**Gold:** ... Perdita.

**Mary:** Mmm ... Florizel?

**Panel 3:** Gold leans closer to Mary to whisper in her ear. Mary's eyes snap awake, wide.

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**Gold:** Mary, I have come to return you to the King. He has sent me to bring you

**Mary:** ...Huh?! **Gold?**

**Panel 4:** Mary turns to look at Gold in astonishment.

**Gold:** Yes, Mary. Your Florizel wants to see you.

**Panel 5:** Mary looked sad at that.

## Page 12

**Panel 1:** Mary starts sitting up in the bed, face still downcast. Gold floats next to her, puzzled.

## Prose

Mary pulled herself as upright as she could, her useless legs dragging under the covers. 'I am happy here, Gold. The Tiger is more man than Florizel — than George ever was.'

'The King would like to see you, one more time, my Lady,' Gold whispered. 'He discovered that you are not dead after all; he learnt that you are here. He wants to apologise to you, and beg your forgiveness.'

She was silent, her eyes wide.

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'He is dying, Mary. If you were to do this for him, he would die with a clear conscience.'

She turned away. 'I am old and ugly now, Gold. I do not wish my Florizel to see me like this.'

'He has seen your portrait and says you are as beautiful as ever, and I agree with him,' Gold said. 'Come with me, and I will take you to see him. I will return you here as soon as you wish.' Gold took human form, sat beside her on the bed, and reached to her. 'Take my hand, and I will take you to see your Florizel.'

She turned to him, smiled gently, and took his hand. Gold carefully lifts Mary in his arms, and then dropped his head and concentrated.

## Comics

**Panel 2:** Shot of the two disappearing, with a 'Vssh!'

### Page 13

**Panel 1:** Shot of pure nothingness.

**Panel 2:** Shot of the two re-appearing. Gold and Mary stand, covering their faces, with Gold a bit confused about where they are.

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**Panel 3:** They both reel in shock at the realisation that they are in a big chamber, *in a large room with red stone walls and floor. The Tiger, William, and another burly son of the Tiger waited for them.*

**Panel 4:** A closer shot of the Tiger, and William.

## Page 14

**Panel 1:** The Tiger talks to William, who smiles nastily.

**Tiger:** Well done, Seventeen.

**William:** Thank you, Father.

## Prose

William grinned menacingly at Gold. 'Congratulations, Gold. You have truly outdone yourself this time. Permission to return and watch the sentencing, my Lord.'

'Oh, shit,' Gold whispered.

'Granted,' the Tiger growled.

'I just wanted to forgive Florizel,' Mary said from the floor, desperate. 'I would have returned straight away.'

'I know that, my darling,' the Tiger said. 'I know you have a good heart. But this little piece of shit stone was going to take you to a demon, not to your old love. That one

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has completely forgotten about you, and if he saw you today he would not love you

nearly as much as I do.'

'You are my heart, Tiger,' Mary whispered without looking up.

'And you are mine, Mary,' the Tiger said. 'Now return with Seventeen to the seraglio. I am not displeased with you, and to prove it you will grace my bed tomorrow night.'

Mary dropped her head.

'You alone.'

Mary burst into tears, and William gently lifted her from the floor and carried her out.

**Page 15**

**Wide comic panel: The Tiger looks at Gold, who looks terrified.**

**"Heh..." said the Tiger.**

The Tiger linked his hands behind his back in front of Gold. 'Now. What to do with you.'

Gold couldn't control his trembling.

'Kneel,' the Tiger said.

Gold flopped to his knees without being aware of the movement.

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**Wide comic panel: A sword is given to the Tiger by the other burly son, as the Tiger said 'Blade'.**

**Wide comic panel: The Tiger holds the blade high above his head, poised to strike.**

'The demons in Hell are going to have a great deal of fun with you, little stone,' the Tiger said, hefting the blade.

'Mercy, my Lord,' Gold whispered.

'You may even run into the demon that you were taking Mary to,' the Tiger said.

'I'm sure he has a few words he would like to say to you.'

'Mercy,' Gold choked. 'Lady Kwan Yin, hear my cries.'

## **Page 16**

'Oh, the Goddess is a long way away right now,' the Tiger said. 'I believe she's in retreat. Feel free to call on her. From. Hell.' He hefted the sword again.

Gold couldn't control his quivering.

**Wide comic panel: 'Do it.' William said from the doorway.**

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The Tiger strode forward, sword raised high ...

**Wide comic panel:** A black panel, split in half in the middle and slightly asymmetrical as if slashed by a sword.

... and sliced Gold's head from his neck with a single swift stroke.

**Page 17**

**Wide comic panel:** Gold finally emerged after three months of torture in the Hell of Trees Full of Swords and the Hell of Red-Hot Grates.

**Caption:** 3 months later, at the Gates of Hell.

Gold finally emerged after three months of torture in the Hell of Trees Full of Swords and the Hell of Red-hot Grates.

Normally Shen such as he were escorted directly to the Tenth Level of Hell and then released back to the Earthly plane. But this time the judges had seen fit to punish him for his misdemeanours.

Gold quickly headed for the hills of western Guilin province, where the mountains were thick and vertical, clustered around the Li River. He found a cave in a mountainside overlooking the Li and hid.

He was too slow.

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He heard the rush of wind and tried to run, but the demon blocked his exit from the cave and sauntered closer. The demon had taken True Form; ten feet tall, black and scaly, with bulging eyes, tusks, and tufts of red hair on its head.

**Wide comic panel: Ugly demon stands, filling the entire panel. 'I believe we had an agreement.'**

### **Page 18**

'No idea what you're talking about,' Gold said. 'Are you sure you have the right stone?'

'Oh, definitely the right stone,' the demon said. 'The Golden Boy, child of the Jade Building Block of the World, yes?' The demon gestured and a ceramic table with two stools, suitable for outdoor use, materialised on the damp floor of the cave. 'Sit, Gold, I believe we have things to talk about.'

'I didn't see you in Hell,' Gold said, sitting on one of the stools as far from the enormous demon as possible. 'I wondered what happened to you.'

'Business is very good,' the demon said. 'We buy their opium with our silver. We sell our tea for even more of their silver. We sell the opium for a great deal of gold.'

Business is very, very good.'

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'Oh, I'm glad for you,' Gold said, relieved. 'So you need someone to keep the accounts, do the sums for you. Well, you've found the right stone. I'll be happy to work for you in return for a soft bed and a bowl of rice every day.'

'Oh, I already have someone to do that for me,' the demon said, leaning back and placing one scaly clawed hand on the table. 'What I don't have, though, is the Great Seal of the Jade Emperor.'

Gold squeaked.

**Comics**

**Panel 1:** The demon stood back into the shadows, with glowing eyes.

**Demon:** You have two full moons to bring me the Seal.

**Demon:** If you do not provide me with the Seal, then you are unable to pay your debt to me. And you are mine.

**Page 19**

**Panel 2:** *Gold couldn't squeak, his voice had completely gone.*

**Panel 3:** The demon began to fade away into the distance.

**Demon:** Two moons.

**Panel 4:** Gold stares, cold with fear.

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**Panel 5:** *Gold curled up where he had fallen on the damp floor of the cave. Left alone, he feels cold and forlorn. He has a troubled expression on his face.*

**Panel 1:** *A shot of the seal, carried by Gold. At least twenty centimetres tall and ten on each of its four sides.*

## **Prose**

The Great Seal of the Jade Emperor was hewn from the finest green Celestial Jade. It was also exceedingly heavy, but nothing that Gold couldn't handle.

Gold carried the Seal behind him as he floated in stone form out of the Hall of Celestial Treasures. It was midnight; the palace was quiet. It looked like he was going to make it.

The hall was sealed; Shen could only travel in and out through the main door. Gold floated along the final silent corridor to the door.

The lower half of the walls were wood panels; elaborate paintings of birds and flowers adorned the walls above. The wooden floor had been polished to a high silken sheen by centuries of passing feet.

Gold silently floated closer to the door, full of desperate hope. If he could get the Seal through the door, then he could travel directly out, disappear, and take the Seal to the demon in Hong Kong. Just a few more centimetres ...

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Gold stopped at the door and listened. Not a sound. He pulled the Seal slightly closer to him and concentrated. The door wasn't locked. It swung silently open.

## Page 20

**Full Page Spread:** The enormous black bulk blocking the light moved forward, and Gold dropped the Seal. It was Xuan Wu, in full majestic Celestial Form, twelve feet tall. His long black hair was wild around his head; his thin black beard fell from his square, ugly face. He was garbed as Celestial General in black lacquer armour over his black silk robes.

## Page 21

It was Xuan Wu, in full majestic Celestial Form, at least twelve feet tall. He was garbed as Celestial General in his black lacquer armour, worn over his black silk robes.

'Come with me.' He turned, and walked away without looking back, the floorboards creaking under his massive weight.

Gold checked behind him; the Seal was gone, leaving a dent in the floor where it had landed. He turned back and followed Xuan Wu.

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Xuan Wu led him through countless corridors in the Celestial Palace. The lamps brightened as they approached, then darkened behind them, a pool of light following them through the silent halls.

**Wide panel:** A shot of Gold, looking at the large, looming back of Xuan Wu, and looking worried.

'My Lord ...'

'We are going to my audience room, where you will tell me the whole story,'

Xuan Wu said softly without looking at Gold, his deep voice rumbling. 'Until then, remain silent.'

Gold did as he was told, and followed Xuan Wu through the corridors. If he was lucky, he would just be executed. If he was unlucky, he would be executed and the demon would be waiting for him again when he emerged from more suffering at the hands of the residents of Hell.

Xuan Wu stopped at a pair of dark wooden doors and they slid silently aside. He led Gold into his audience room.

**Page 22**

**Wide panel:** A shot of the audience room. The room was very plain; a cold stone floor, bare wood walls, a slightly raised dais at the end with a large

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rosewood desk set upon it. A large brass plaque with calligraphy of 'Xuan Tian Shang Di' in the Jade Emperor's own hand hung on the wall above the desk — 'Supreme Emperor of the Dark Northern Heavens' — Xuan Wu's full Celestial Title. The infamous Seven Stars sword hung beneath the calligraphy on the wall — nearly two metres long, as dark and menacing as its owner.

Xuan Wu moved around the desk and sat. Gold settled on the cold stone floor in front of the desk, took human form, and fell to his knees, touching his head to the floor.

'*Wen sui, wen sui, wen wen sui,*' Gold said. Ten thousand years, ten thousand years, ten thousand ten thousand years.

'Rise,' Xuan Wu said. 'Retain human form, I want to see your eyes. Tell me why you have done this.'

Gold carefully didn't look into the Dark Lord's eyes. 'After I was released from the Tiger's service, I needed to make a living. I did a foolish thing; I made a pact with a demon. We arranged to hold one of the White Tiger's wives for ransom.'

## Page 23

'I am aware of your attempted kidnapping of Wife Number Thirty-Nine,' Xuan Wu said. 'At the time I found it difficult to believe that even you could be so stupid.'

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'I thought it would work,' Gold said. 'It didn't. I was caught. The Tiger sent me to Hell.'

Xuan Wu shifted in his seat and placed a hand on his desk. 'And you obviously still have not learned your lesson, even after what happened to you in Hell.'

'I made a bet with the demon, Celestial Highness,' Gold said. 'I foolishly boasted that I could steal the Seal. We made a bet that if I could not give a wife to the demon, then I had to give him the Seal.'

'Ah.' Xuan Wu leaned back. 'If you cannot provide the Seal to the demon, then you belong to the demon.'

'Celestial Highness,' Gold said, dropping his head with misery.

'If you had not made the bet with the demon, stone, what would you have done with yourself when you were released from Hell?'

**Wide panel: A shot of Gold, hesitating, afraid to look at Xuan Wu, who is looking at him.**

Gold decided to tell the truth. 'I don't know, my Lord, truly. I only know that if I had a choice, it would be something legitimate. I would search for somebody who would be in need of my particular skills. Someone who needs my mathematical abilities.'

**Page 24**

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'Look into my eyes,' Xuan Wu said.

Gold hesitated, then looked up from the floor.

**Wide panel: Gold looks at Xuan Wu, afraid.**

**Wide panel: Close up of Xuan Wu's eyes. His eyes were black as his**

**turtle's shell, shining black from one side to the other, with no whites at all.**

Gold froze, looking into the eyes that held the Yin force of the universe. Xuan Wu was Yin personified: dark, cold, water, winter, death. All of those things were in his eyes.

Gold shivered, and the ice-cold power that held him snapped off.

Xuan Wu rose with the grace of a true Master of the Arts of War. He walked around the desk, and stepped down off the dais.

Gold still felt cold, and shivered on the floor as the Dark Lord approached him. It was all he could do not to run.

Xuan Wu stopped in front of Gold. Gold carefully gazed at the elaborate silver embroidery of snakes and turtles on the Dark Lord's black robes without looking up.

'Rise,' Xuan Wu said.

Gold pulled himself to his feet and resisted the urge to hug himself against the cold.

'Come with me,' Xuan Wu said, and disappeared.

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Gold followed. He had no choice.

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## Comics Section

# <A>Number Eighty-Eight<A>

## <B>1820 – Part II<B>

### Page 1

## Comics

**Panel 1:** *A half-page shot of Spring Garden Lane in Hong Kong. The Lane was bordered on both sides by brothels with large numbers outside; the infamous 'Big Number Brothels'. The street was full of rickshaws carrying wealthy European businessmen and local Chinese entrepreneurs. Young, fresh-faced prostitutes from both China and the West leaned over the second floor balconies, calling to their clients beneath.*

**Caption: 1820.**

**Caption: Spring Garden Lane, Hong Kong.**

**Panel 2:** *Same shot as above, except that Gold and Xuan Wu have materialised in the middle of the street. Xuan Wu has taken the form of an extremely old Chinese, stooped and grey, wearing a traditional black robe. He wore his snow-white hair shaved in the front and braided into a long queue at the back, as all Han Chinese had been ordered under the Manchurian Qing.*

**Xuan Wu:** Which one, Gold?

**Gold:** ... Eighty-eight.

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## Page 2

## Prose

Xuan Wu had taken human form as a wrinkly old man as they materialised in Spring Garden Lane in Hong Kong. The lane was bordered on both sides by brothels with large numbers outside; the infamous 'Big Number Brothels'. Of those, Number Eighty-eight was the largest and most well-kept on the street, with elaborate white Corinthian columns on either side of the door.

Xuan Wu stopped and studied the building.

**Wide comic panel:** Gold waited patiently. Rickshaws and coolies hurried by. A sedan chair passed along the centre of the street, its occupant hidden from view by red curtains. Probably a woman; an expensive courtesan on the way to her client.

Xuan Wu glanced at Gold, his dark eyes emotionless. 'The demon is there. Many demons are there. You will have many to serve.'

Gold sighed and dropped his shoulders. 'I don't want to belong to this demon, my Lord, I beg you. Do not give me to it.'

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'You should have considered that when you made that foolish bet, and then tried to steal the Jade Emperor's Great Seal. Come.' Xuan Wu slid effortlessly through the crowds of people that lined the street, despite his stooped posture.

When they reached Eighty-eight they stopped.

### Page 3

'Don't take your grandpa in there, boy,' a coolie shouted from the other side of the road. The coolie was well over sixty, wearing nothing but a loincloth and a filthy straw hat. A basket of protesting ducks hung suspended from each end of a bamboo pole over his bony shoulder. 'Don't take the old man in there, sonny, he'll use up all his ching and die on you.'

'Not grandpa using his ching,' a rickshaw driver called as he hurried past.

'Grandpa showing little Number Three Grandson where to put it!'

'Anywhere he likes, in Number Eighty Eight,' the coolie said. He hefted the pole holding the ducks and hurried away into the crowd with the peculiar sliding gait used to avoid upsetting the load. His voice faded. 'They even got foreign devil women in there.'

**Small side comic panel: Xuan Wu gestures to Gold. 'Let's go.' He said.**

**Small side comic panel: A shot of the Indian Sikh guarding the door.**

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The doorman was a huge Indian; a Sikh, with a white silk turban and a red embroidered jacket. He eyed the two Shen suspiciously through his fierce, bearded face. Xuan Wu didn't hesitate. He walked up to the door and nodded to the doorman. The doorman opened the door with one hand and collected a one-dollar note from Xuan Wu with the other.

*You are to remain silent, Xuan Wu said to Gold. You are only to speak if asked a question. That is an order. Disobey and things will go very bad for you.*

Gold nodded. His only thought was to where the demon was. He cast his eyes around suspiciously as they entered the brothel.

#### Page 4

## Comics

**Panel 1:** *The large entry hall was lavishly decorated in red and gold, with rosewood furniture inlaid with mother-of-pearl lining the walls. An altar to Guan Yu, God of Justice, guarded the main entrance. To the right a door led to the parlour; to the left curving stairs carried patrons to higher floors and greater delights. Beautiful young Chinese girls in brilliantly coloured silk cheongsams lounged in chairs around the entry, their overly made-up faces full of boredom. Two of the women on the seats notice Xuan Wu and Gold.*

**Panel 2:** The two young women jump to their feet, their faces filled with excitement.

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**Woman1:** Oooh! Chen Sing San!

**Woman2:** It's so wonderful to see you here!

**Panel 3:** The women spring towards Xuan Wu, one on each arm. Xuan Wu cackles.

**Xuan Wu:** I only came here to provide a birthday present for my Number One Grandson here, but I think I may buy a present for myself!

**Woman1:** You know you can have anything you like here, Chen Sing San.

## Page 5

**Panel 1:** Gold looks puzzled, as he stands off to the side staring at Xuan Wu.

**Gold:** <thinks> "Mr Chen?"

**Panel 2:** Xuan Wu turns towards the two women.

**Xuan Wu:** I'd like to speak to dear Mr Wong first, please, ladies. My grandson came with me to meet him. But first, presents for you both!

## Prose

Xuan Wu reached into his robe and pulled out two small jade ornaments, tiny carved rabbits embellished with gold on solid gold chains. 'For you, because you are so very beautiful.'

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The girls took the rabbits. One of them squealed like a schoolgirl and jiggled with delight. 'This is real!'

'Of course it's real,' Xuan Wu said, sounding like a jolly grandfather at New Year with a pocket full of lai see. 'Now where's that Mr Wong? I want to give him a present as well.'

The two girls giggled as they led Xuan Wu through the parlour, one on each arm. Gold followed silently.

## Comics

**Panel 3:** A young African woman in a bright blue cheongsam eyed Gold and Xuan Wu suspiciously as they entered.

**Panel 4:** Xuan Wu sees her.

**Xuan Wu:** ...Oh!

## Page 6

**Panel 1:** The parlour was lavishly decorated in European style. Heavy cream-coloured curtains covered the lace shielding the occupants from the eyes of those in the street. More gorgeous girls lounged on heavy rococo couches picked out with far too much gilt. Xuan Wu stopped in front of the black girl and grinned down at her.

**Xuan Yu:** How long has this one been here?

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**Panel 2:** The Chinese girl on Xuan Wu's left arm speaks up. She tossed her head with disdain.

**Woman1:** About two weeks. Doesn't speak Chinese. But some of the gweilo men like their women black. Can't see the attraction. Dirty, smelly, black demon women.

*Humph.*

**Panel 3:** The black woman angrily mutters under her breath.

**Black Woman:** *<I am going to get out of this hellhole if it's the last thing I do!>*

**Panel 4:** Xuan Wu has an alarmed look on his face as he turns back to the black woman.

The two women on his arm freeze in surprise.

**Xuan Wu:** *<You are American?>*

**Panel 5:** The black woman looks at Xuan Wu in shock, preparing to spring to her feet.

**Black Woman:** *<You speak English, sir? Please help me and call the police! I'm here against my will!>*

## **Page 7**

**Panel 1:** The slender black woman springs to her feet, desperate and holding onto Xuan Wu's shoulders.

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**Black Woman:** *<I took a job to come to Hong Kong to sing and make some money, but I didn't know I would be doing this. They've held my passport and say I owe them money!>*

**Panel 2:** A woman in the corner of the room whispers to a young man, who is standing near the door. She points at the black woman and Xuan Wu.

**Panel 3:** The black girl continues to clutch at Xuan Wu.

**Black Woman:** *<Please, help me. I'm a prisoner here. Tell the police. I don't want to be here.>*

## Page 8

**Panel 4:** Xuan Wu looks the black woman in the eyes. He has a strange light in his eyes.

**Panel 5:** The black woman's eyes go pale with shock, and she gasps.

**Panel 6:** The black woman's eyes lose their light, as if her soul has been stolen.

**Prose**

Eyes blank, the black woman fell back to sit on the couch, mesmerised.

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**Wide half-page comic panel: A banging noise, as Xuan Wu and some other female heads turn to see where it came from.**

A burly young Chinese rushed through the back door, racing straight up to Xuan Wu and the black girl. She slowly turned to look at him, her eyes empty.

'She said she's happy to be working here,' Xuan Wu said to the guard in Chinese. 'She wants to give me special attention.'

'I'd like to visit with this lovely old man,' the black girl said in English. 'I hope he chooses me.'

The young Chinese guard relaxed. 'You want to see Mr Wong?' he asked Xuan Wu.

'I haven't seen my old friend in years,' Xuan Wu said. 'I thought I'd pay him a visit before my grandson enjoys his birthday present. But after seeing this little black rose, I may give myself a present as well.'

**Page 9**

The Chinese girls on his arms pouted. 'Now, girls, don't worry, one is enough for this old man. I'll give you two to my grandson, and if you entertain him well, I'll

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have special little gift for both of you.” The two girls giggled again and nodded,

sneaking delighted glances at Gold.

*Play along, Xuan Wu said.*

Gold forced a flush to his face and looked away, making the girls giggle even more. “He’s too old for his first time,” one of them said. “He looks more than eighteen already.”

“He’s been sheltered by his mother. I finally got him out of her clutches, the evil old dragon,” Xuan Wu said with good humour.

**Wide half-page comic panel:** The two women standing to Xuan Wu’s side giggle at Gold, while Gold does his best to look embarrassed.

The guard bobbed his head, turned, and gestured towards the back of the house. ‘We will prepare the girls for you while you visit with Mr Wong. Please pass me any weapons that you are holding.’

Both Xuan Wu and Gold raised their arms. ‘No weapons,’ Xuan Wu said.

The guard didn’t attempt to search them. ‘Come this way, then, sir.’

**Left comic panel:** Small shot of office.

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The guard showed them into a bright and airy office containing an enormous rosewood desk. Small high windows allowed rays of afternoon sun to light up the hardwood parquet floor.

The guard bobbed his head, 'the Master will be here shortly,' and went out.

## Page 10

'I think you will enjoy working here, Gold.' Xuan Wu studied the ink paintings on the wall across from them. 'I thought it was this particular demon that made the bet with you. I was right.'

Gold remained silent. He couldn't speak unless a question was asked of him, and Xuan Wu knew it.

'We have some time before we meet Mr Wong,' Xuan Wu said to Gold, voice casual. 'He'll make us wait so that he will gain face. Do you think you will like working here?'

## Left comic panel: Shot of Gold talking emotionally to Xuan Wu.

'My Lord, this poor American girl is held here against her will!' Gold cried softly.

'We have to get her out of here!'

'Don't you want to know my connections with the owner of this establishment?'

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'No,' Gold said. 'All I want to do is make sure that none of these women are here against their will. And to get that poor black girl out of here.'

'If you worked here, you could do that,' Xuan Wu said, studying the painting.

Gold silently considered his options, then nodded once sharply. 'I can use my skills as a Shen to help them if I'm working here.'

'You are a very small Shen, Gold. I doubt if you could carry them very far. How will you get that girl all the way back to America?' Xuan Wu turned to study Gold. 'The owner probably wouldn't care if you took your pleasure with the girls when they're not working. You have the finest young women in Hong Kong here for the taking.'

**Wide comics panel: Gold looking downcast as Xuan Wu looks at him.**

## **Page 11**

'This isn't like you at all, Gold.'

'I know.' He raised his head. 'I suppose after being held in the palace, and then Hell against my will, I know what it is like to be a prisoner.'

'Silence,' Xuan Wu said softly. The demon approached.

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**Wide comics panel: The round-faced jolly demon from part 3**

**appears, rubbing his hands. 'Welcome, honoured guests —' he starts to say.**

The demon stopped dead and went completely white when he saw Xuan Wu and Gold. He spun to escape, but Xuan Wu quickly bound him and held him motionless.

Xuan Wu pulled himself to his feet and transformed from an old man into his usual human form; long hair and sculpted face. He strolled to the demon and held his hand in front of its face.

The demon's face went from horror to blank.

Xuan Wu moved his hand, and the demon followed, its eyes never moving from Xuan Wu's palm. Xuan Wu turned the demon and then walked towards the desk, his hand still in front of the demon's face. The demon followed like an automaton.

'This is the Number Twelve Son of the Demon King,' Xuan Wu said conversationally as he led the demon to the desk. 'How many girls are you holding here against their will, Twelve?'

'Thirteen, here,' the demon said.

'Other places?'

'I don't know.'

'Twenty? Forty? Fifty?'

'Probably about fifty.'

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## Page 12

Xuan Wu glanced at Gold. 'Fifty like that American girl.' He strode around the desk and fell into the large office chair, then placed both hands, palms down, on the desk. Not a single scrap of paper sat on the desk; its only residents were a large brush and ink set and a priceless jade ruyi, a sceptre that granted its owner fulfilment of his will.

'Number Twelve here,' Xuan Wu said, gesturing dismissively towards the hypnotised demon, 'has been planning for years to make an attempt against his father, the King of the Demons. He has amassed an army in the hills above Guangdong province. Human and demon.'

'Normally I let the demons sort this type of thing out among themselves,' Xuan Wu said. 'The current demon king has been around for a long time, though, and his behaviour has been reasonably honourable. His word is good and he doesn't create half-human demon hybrids to use as weapons against us.' Xuan Wu rose, walked back around the desk, and stood next to the demon still standing motionless in front of the desk. 'This one, however, is not particularly trustworthy and treats humans with contempt. If it were to gain the position of king, many humans would suffer.'

**Wide comics panel: Gold looks at Xuan Wu, unsure of where this is going.**

'You cannot interfere directly, my Lord,' Gold said. 'Celestial interference in demonic dominions is forbidden unless they attack us first.'

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'I am well aware of that,' Xuan Wu said, studying the demon.

Gold blanched as he understood. 'No.'

### Page 13

'You may do your best to free the captive women while you work for the demon. I can help you if you require it. These women must be freed. But, apart from that, all I want is for you to provide information. On the opium trade, on the tea trade, on the prostitution and organised crime, and particularly on the planned bid against the king. You are cunning, Gold, and your intelligence has been going to waste. I think now is a good time to begin using it.'

Gold hesitated, thinking. Then he nodded once. 'If you can help me, I think I can get some of them out.'

**Small comics panel to right of next paragraph: Xuan Wu holds small black jade turtle on light gold chain. Gold puts it on.**

'Good.' Xuan Wu held out his hand, and a small black jade turtle appeared in it, hanging from a light gold chain. 'Take this. Connect with this jade, stone to stone. It will allow you to communicate with me. Be aware that if I am on duty to the Jade Emperor, the Celestial takes precedence. Even if the demon is about to take your head.'

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'I understand, my Lord.' Gold took the turtle and slipped it around his neck. He had an inspiration; a black turtle around his neck was an obvious giveaway of his connection with the Dark Lord. He absorbed the turtle and chain into his human form and wrapped them around the stone, deep inside his body, where not even a demon could see.

'Good thinking, Gold, I think you will do well at this.' Xuan Wu held his hand in front of the demon's face. 'I am going to walk it back to where it entered the room. Then I am going to give you to it. You know how to behave. Ready?'

Gold returned to his seat. 'Ready.'

Xuan Wu walked the demon back to the door, and concentrated. Then he went back on the rosewood chairs next to Gold.

**Page 14**

**Wide comics panel:** The demon jerked to life, and saw them. It spun to run out.

**Wide comics panel:** 'Do not move.' Xuan Wu said.

The demon froze.

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'I am not here to interfere in your dealings,' Xuan Wu said. He gestured dismissively towards Gold. 'This Shen has an honour debt to you, I believe. I caught him trying to steal the Great Seal of the Jade Emperor.'

The demon slowly turned back, its horrified expression changing to one of cunning. 'You are here to ensure the debt is paid?'

Xuan Wu rose. 'I am. That is all I am here for.' He waved one hand at Gold. 'This worthless stone is yours.'

The demon bent to study Gold, grinning with avarice. 'I will put it to good use, my Lord.'

'You are bound to this demon's servitude until the Celestial judges your debt discharged, stone,' Xuan Wu said. He disappeared.

Gold fell to his knees in front of the demon. 'I am yours. I can only trust that you will treat me well.'

'Can you take female form?' the demon said with barely controlled greed. 'Attractive female form?'

**Page 15**

**Small comics panel to left of next paragraph: Gold grimaces in disgust.**

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'If I must. But, my Lord ...' He gazed up at the demon. 'I am sure I would be more useful managing your administrative dealings. As I am bound by the Celestial, I am completely trustworthy, and you can pass me the management of your accounts without concern.'

The demon straightened and studied Gold. 'You have a point. Managing the Little Brothers is a pain.' He gestured dismissively towards the desk. 'Behind the desk is a cabinet full of documents that need to be sorted, and in the basement there are outstanding reports that need to be brought up to date. Can you do that?'

Gold rose and bowed slightly. 'I am more than capable. I can manage the whole operation with minimal supervision, my Lord. And you can trust me.'

**Small comics panel to right of next paragraph: Demon licking his lips in satisfaction.**

'Sounds good, I ate the previous manager of this particular house last week, he was skimming takings into a private account. You won't do that, will you?'

'I cannot,' Gold said. 'I am bound.'

The demon grinned, jolly. 'I think the Xuan Wu has given me a very useful little toy. You can handle all of this while I deal with more important matters. I haven't tallied the earnings in a while, it's too much trouble. You can tell me when you've worked it out.'

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Gold bowed slightly again. 'I will be delighted to.'

The demon slapped Gold on the back. 'Let me show you where the documents are.'

## Page 16

## Comics

**Panel 1:** Gold looks gentle as he speaks to someone.

**Gold:** Just relax.

**Panel 2:** A beautiful black woman lies in bed, her eyes closed. Her dark face was rigid with a combination of fear and determination.

**Black Woman:** I-I'm *trying* to... It's just... **all right.**

**Black Woman:** **Do it.**

**Panel 3:** Gold looks down on her as she holds his hands.

**Black Woman:** Thank you so much, Gold. For everything. I'll never forget you.

**Gold:** Give your little girl an extra hug for me.

**Panel 4:** Gold concentrates.

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**Panel 5:** He puts his hand over the woman's face.

## Page 17

**Panel 1:** The woman's hand, in Gold's hand, went limp.

**Panel 2:** The woman's face becomes ashen pale, next to Gold's face, as he looks into her face.

**Panel 3:** Gold reaches into the drawer of the bedside table, and pulls out an opium pipe.

**Panel 4:** He puts a bit of opium into the elaborate pipe.

**Panel 5:** He puts the pipe gently into her hands.

**Panel 6:** He then leaves the room, leaving the pipe burning in the woman's hands.

## Page 18

## Prose

Gold went back downstairs, and sat at the desk in the demon's office. He pulled out the records of the days' takings, and began to add the figures when noises erupted outside the door.

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One of the junior demon guards rapped on the door and charged in. 'We lost another one.'

'Damn,' Gold said, rising. 'Was it bad opium again?'

The demon gestured towards the door. 'No, I think she just took too much. Deliberate overdose.'

'Call the Master,' Gold said. He led the way up the stairs. 'Which one is it?'

'Anne,' the demon said, then disappeared into the back of the house to call the Master.

**Wide comic panel: Gold kneels next to Anne's bed, and holds her hand.**

**The demon boss appears in the background.**

The demon Master appeared next to Gold. 'Is she dead?'

'Yes, my Lord,' Gold said. 'Don't worry about it, I will take care of the body.'

'Dump it in the harbour or something,' the demon said. 'Damn! This black one was expensive. And popular. Where the hell are we going to get another one?'

Gold rose and turned. 'My Lord, we are losing too many to this. I think it would be better if we only used girls who choose to be here. The ones we hold against their will always end up killing themselves.'

**Page 19**

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'Deny the opium,' the demon said.

'If you deny the opium then they are too distraught to serve the customers,' Gold said. 'Either way, we lose. I think the best option is just to use girls who want to do it.

There's plenty over the border who will give anything to come and work in Hong Kong.'

'Very well,' the demon said with resignation.

'Permission to release the rest of the girls as we find replacements for them,' Gold said. 'At the rate we're losing them, the growing pile of corpses will attract the attention of the authorities.'

'I pay the police very well to leave us alone,' the demon said.

'I am not talking about the police.'

The demon was silent as he understood. 'The Celestials won't intervene. It's none of their business.'

'If enough humans are suffering, a Celestial may take it upon himself to do something,' Gold said. 'I recommend that you release the rest of the girls, my Lord.'

'Very well. Take care of it, Gold. I have other, more important things to attend to.'

'My Lord.' Gold bowed slightly. 'Don't worry, it will all be taken care of.' He ventured a question. 'How soon will you make your bid, my Lord?'

**Wide comic panel:** The demon studies Gold's face intensely.

**Wide comic panel:** Gold stares back, expressionless.

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## Page 20

'Another two, three weeks, that's all,' the demon said slowly. 'Then I may promote you to oversee all of my Earthly establishments.'

Gold bowed. 'I would be profoundly honoured, my Lord.'

The demon chuckled. 'A Demon King with a pet Shen. Who would believe it?'

'You will be the most powerful and ruthless king that Hell has ever seen,' Gold said.

The demon laughed and slapped Gold on the back. 'You are worth more to me as a slave than any wife of the Tiger would have been.'

Gold bowed again. 'I thank you, my Lord.'

'Now sort this mess out,' the demon said, gesturing towards Anne. 'Get rid of it and the rest of the slaves. You're right, they're more trouble than they're worth.' He hesitated. 'But if you could find another black one that wants to do the job, I'll give you a special bonus.'

Gold grinned. 'I'll see what I can do.'

The demon disappeared. Gold quickly closed the bedroom door. He stood in the centre of the room, lowered his head, and concentrated.

*Yes?* Xuan Wu said.

*I have another one, my Lord,* Gold said.

*I'm sending somebody right now.*

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**Comic panel, to the right of next paragraph: A tall white woman with short brown hair, wearing a long, full Western-style dress. Gold almost laughs in return.**

A tall European woman appeared next to Gold. Without saying a word, she moved to Anne and took her hand.

'Well done,' the European woman said. She glanced up at Gold. 'My name's Meredith, I'm one of the Dark Lord's lieutenants.'

Gold couldn't hide his amusement.

## **Page 21**

'Westerners can gain Immortality as well, Gold,' Meredith said, turning back to Anne. She put her hand over Anne's face. 'Good job.' She concentrated, and Anne jerked as if shocked, then took a deep gasping breath. Her eyes snapped open and she cast around.

'It's all right, dear,' Meredith said. 'I'm taking you home.'

Meredith and Anne both disappeared.

Gold lifted the opium pipe and returned it to the cupboard, then headed back downstairs. He had a lot of recruiting to do.

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**Comics**

**Panel 1:** A shot of a door flinging open, and a demon breathlessly running in.

**Caption:** A few weeks later.

**Demon:** Sir! It's on! The battle has begun!

**Panel 2:** Gold, formerly sitting on the chair behind his desk, has now stood up.

**Panel 3:** A closer shot of Gold's serious face.

**Gold:** Pull in all the guards! Throw out all the customers! Round up all the girls, and put them into the basement!

**Demon:** Yes, sir!

## Page 22

**Panel 1:** Gold thinks to himself with the black jade turtle, as a shot of Xuan Wu's human face in the background shows that they are communicating through the jade turtle.

**Gold:** *My Lord Xuan Wu.*

**Xuan Wu:** *I know. Keep your head down.*

**Panel 2:** A shot of the commotion outside Gold's door. The demon guards roughly escorted the protesting customers out the door. Some of the men were still only half dressed.

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**Chief of Police: Hey, I'm the Chief of Police! I'll see you shut down for this!**

**Panel 3:** The customers are herded out the door.

**Panel 4:** Gold pointed the guards towards a door, as they herded a group of girls before them.

**Gold:** Get the girls into the basement and guard them!

**Girls:** Eeek!! Arrgh!!

### **Page 23**

**Panel 1:** Gold then stood still, and concentrated. He is casting around trying to sense something.

**Panel 2:** When he does, his eyes open in shock at the sight.

**Gold:** *<thinks> The demon approaching here... is not the Master of the House!*

**Panel 3:** Gold realises in shock.

**Gold:** *<thinks> The existing king... must have successfully fought off the coup!*

**Panel 4:** Gold closes the basement door quietly and gravely.

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**Panel 5:** He walks down the corridor towards the office door.

**Page 24**

**Prose**

Gold was sitting quietly in his office when a demon appeared. Gold rose, walked around the desk, and bowed. 'Good day, sir.'

The demon was in human form, appearing as a Chinese in his mid-thirties, slim and good-looking. 'You are Gold?'

'I am, your honour,' Gold said.

The demon grinned. 'Number Twelve's pet Shen.'

'No more, I believe, my Lord,' Gold said.

'You're free now, stone,' the demon said. 'What are you doing here?'

'Waiting to see the new proprietor of this establishment,' Gold said. 'I have enjoyed working with the women, and if you are as understanding as the previous owner, I may choose to stay. What is your honoured name, sir?'

'I'm the One Hundred and Twenty-Second Son of the King,' the demon said.

'You can call me Mr Wong. I provided my father with a great deal of assistance in the recent altercation, and I have been granted all of Twelve's property as reward.'

'I will show you the deeds, sir,' Gold said.

The demon gestured dismissively. 'Let's see.'

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**Small panel: Gold opening a cabinet behind the desk.**

Gold opened a cabinet behind the desk and pulled out the books. 'These are all of the establishments possessed by the late Number Twelve. There are thirteen brothels similar to this one. There are three export traders in Hong Kong, and six in Guangdong.' Gold flipped through the papers. 'A few other minor holdings, real estate, restaurants, businesses.' He pulled out a set of books tied with a red ribbon. 'These contain details of underworld activity; the names of the gangsters, their ranks, and the amount of protection money they are collecting from businesses.'

## Page 25

'How much is it all worth?' the demon said.

'Seventy-five million Hong Kong dollars,' Gold said.

The demon whistled through his teeth. 'Yes.'

'The girls are hiding in the basement, sir,' Gold said. 'They are delightful ladies, all working here of their own free will, not even held by debt. Would you like me to call them up so you can inspect them, try some of them out? They'd probably like to meet you.'

'Go right ahead,' the demon said, moving to the desk to inspect the books. He spoke without turning away from the deeds. 'Seventy-five million. Excellent.' He glanced up at Gold. 'How many women?'

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'Fifteen here, my Lord. All human.' Gold said.

'Oh, yes,' the demon said with relish. 'Humans. Any spare?'

'My Lord?'

The demon focused on Gold. 'Are any of the women excess to our needs? Not satisfactory in performance? Do any of them need to be ...'

**Wide comics panel:** A shot of the demon's evil eyes, excited.

**Wide comics panel:** The demon licks its lips.

'*Punished?*'

'Every single woman here is a good worker and well behaved, my Lord,' Gold said. 'None of them are excess.'

The demon shuffled through the books. 'I think I shall go and inspect my other properties. My other women.' He glanced up at Gold. 'Have the women here ready for me when I return. I will inspect them last.'

'My Lord,' Gold said.

**Page 26**

**Wide panel:** A shot of Gold, looking worried at the retreating back of the demon.

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Gold watched the demon depart, and waited until it was a good distance away. He turned and quickly scabbled through the cabinet behind him. For a horrible moment he couldn't find what he was looking for; then pulled it with triumph from the back. He unrolled the document; the deed to the tea plantation in Fujian, the one that the previous demon owner had used in their bet. Gold rolled the parchment up and shoved it into his human body.

He slipped down the stairs to the basement, and opened the door.

**Wide panel:** A shot of the girls looking up at Gold, as the door is opened.

**'Gold?' said one of the girls. 'How are things outside?'**

'Girls, listen,' Gold said. 'There is a new Master and he's a bad one. He will hurt you. Come with me, I can help you.' Gold felt a rush of remorse; he couldn't do anything for the girls in the other houses. He straightened. He would do what he could for these ones. 'Come with me, I'll take you to Guangdong train station, and you can go home.'

The girls silently followed him up the stairs. They grabbed what they could and ran.

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## Comics Section

# <A>Fortune Knocks<A>

<B>1851<B>

## Page 1

## Comics

**Splash Page:** *The tea pickers sang a love song as they plucked the tea shoots on the terraced hillside. The mist had burned from the hills and the morning sun shone over the gardens. Gold sat on his terrace, sipped his tea, and sighed with bliss.*

**Caption: 1851**

**Caption: Gold's tea plantation in Fujian.**

## Page 2

**Panel 1:** A demon servant races up to Gold, who is sitting sipping tea.

**Demon:** My Lord Gold!

**Panel 2:** Gold turns to the Demon servant.

**Gold:** Yes, Fifteen?

**Demon:** We have visitors.

**Panel 3:** Gold rises to his feet, an agitated and worried look on his face.

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**Gold: Visitors--?!**

**Demon:** Do not be concerned, my Lord.

**Panel 4:** The demon says to Gold, who is on his feet. He holds in his hand a piece of paper which he is about to give to Gold.

**Demon:** It is a human. A European. He is accompanied by a female dragon ...

**Panel 5:** A shot of the folded note in the demon's hand, as he hands it to Gold.

**Demon:** ... who has given me a message to pass to you.

**Page 3**

**Prose**

Gold sat back down, took the paper, and scanned it.

**Small side comic panel:** A shot of the note in Gold's hand. It says 'This European knows nothing of Shen, but he has a noble heart and his cause is worthy. Please help us to free our nation from the slavery of the opium trade.

**Jade.'**

**Jade.**

---

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Gold snorted with amusement. After all this time, she was looking for him. He glanced up at the demon servant. 'Show them up to the house, and tell the maids to prepare guest rooms. How big is their entourage?'

'The Dragon Princess, the European, and three servants,' the demon said.

'The Princess is acting as interpreter?' Gold said, surprised.

'This European does not require an interpreter,' the demon said. 'He speaks High Beijing dialect like a native.'

'Interesting.'

A flash of light erupted from the hillside below them; the sun reflecting off steel. Gold scanned the paths leading to his manor, and saw them. Two sedan chairs, and three walking servants.

'I wonder what she really wants,' Gold said. He smiled slightly. 'Maybe her memory of me is one of the best she has.'

'I believe it is something to do with the tea,' the servant said. He bowed slightly.

'By your leave.'

'Go.'

**Page 4**

**Wide comic panel:** Gold entertained Jade and Mr Fortune on the terrace in the sunshine. Jade says 'So that is all we want. Tea seeds.'

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**Side comic panel, to left of next paragraph: A closer shot of the European.**

**He was tall and gangly, in his late thirties, with light brown hair and intense**

**blue eyes. A caption says "Robert Fortune". He is sitting next to Jade.**

Robert Fortune leaned forward over the table to speak earnestly to Gold. 'Tea is the root of all the problems in China. The opium to tea trade is killing your people. If we can take the tea trade out, then the British won't bring the opium into China.'

'If I let you have the tea seeds, I am giving you the seeds to my own downfall,' Gold said. 'You won't need to buy my tea any more.'

'We've been planting the tea in India,' Fortune said, 'and the results are unsatisfactory. The plantations in Ceylon are performing slightly better, but we will never have the same quality as you, the climate just isn't suitable.'

'So?' Gold said.

'So, your tea will always be superior,' Fortune said. 'You can provide the finest China tea to the gourmet market, at a higher price. Our tea will be the low grade drink for the poor of England.'

'The China tea trade will continue,' Gold said. 'They will still bring the opium in.'

'Not if they are dealing in smaller quantities,' Fortune said. 'They will be able to find enough silver to pay for the tea if they deal in premium quantities.'

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## Page 5

**Side comic panel, to left of next paragraph: Gold sipped his tea**

**thoughtfully.**

Gold considered the proposition. Fortune was offering him a great deal of money for the tea seeds. He already had seeds from a number of different plantations; he was offering Gold even more money for Drum Mountain's famed silver-tipped tea, only produced in this part of northern Fujian province. Gold glanced up at Fortune's earnest face. The European really did have the best interests of China at heart; a refreshing change after so much of what had happened during the wars. The Europeans had bludgeoned the Dowager Empress into granting more and more concessions; half of Shanghai was now European concessions. The entire island of Hong Kong had been ceded to Britain; and Macau to Portugal.

The Empress was weak and the foreigners were strong. If they wished, they could take over China as easily as they had gained control of India. But if they could grow their own tea, then it would not be worth the effort. China had nothing else the Westerners wanted.

**Wide comic panel: Gold smiled, and thinks "I'm doing the right thing**

**here."**

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'I'll do it,' Gold said. 'I'll provide you with all the seeds and seedlings you need.'

'I also need trained staff to tend the plants,' Fortune said. 'You know that what I am doing is highly illegal, and any workers found leaving the country to assist me would be sentenced to death if discovered.'

## Page 6

*Please provide him with some demons, Gold, Jade said.*

'Very well,' Gold said. 'For the lady.' He smiled at Jade, but her expression was remote. 'I will provide you with three of my staff to help tend the plants.'

Fortune jumped up and grabbed Gold's hand, shaking it vigorously.

## Wide comic panel: 'It's a done deal, then!' says Fortune.

Fortune continued to shake Gold's hand until Gold felt he would shake it off.

'Thank you. You have saved your country. You will be a national hero.'

*I'm a hero, Gold said to Jade.*

She gazed directly into his eyes, her pale serene face expressionless. *Don't even think about it.*

Fortune turned to Jade and took both her hands in his, then kissed her on the cheek. 'Thank you so much, Lady Jade.'

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## Page 7

Jade was obviously desperately embarrassed and blushed furiously.

'Oh, sorry,' Fortune said. He released Jade and returned to his chair. 'I forgot.'

'That's quite all right, Robert,' Jade said, still blushing. 'I know that Europeans do things differently.'

'I cannot thank you enough,' Fortune said to Jade.

*Oh, I see,* Gold said, making no attempt to hide his amusement.

*Nothing happening,* Jade said, her lie obvious to Gold. *Europeans are just more ... demonstrative.*

Fortune raised his teacup. 'Here's to a prosperous future for the people of China.'

Jade and Gold raised their cups as well.

**Wide comic panel:** The three of them clink their cups together.

**Wide comic panel:** The three of them each have smiles on their faces as they look at their toast.

**Wide comic panel:** Black comic panel, with white text, saying 'And freedom from the tyranny of opium!'

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## Comics Section

# <A>The Sentencing<A>

<B>1903<B>

## Page 1

## Comics

**Panel 1:** A shot of the outside of Gold's tea plantation in the mist.

**Caption:** 1903.

**Caption:** Gold's tea plantation in Fujian.

**Demon:** Lord Gold! It's — it's —

**Panel 2:** The demon bursts into the dining room, where Gold is sitting with two of his wives. The demon almost falls over, gesturing at the door.

**Gold:** What is it?

**Demon:** It's — it's —

**Panel 3:** *Xuan Wu stormed in behind the servant and stopped when he saw Gold. He was in his human form, mid-forties, wearing black silk robes.*

**Demon:** <small voice> Lord Xuan Wu ...

**Panel 4:** *Xuan Wu glowers.*

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**Xuan Wu:** Everybody out.

## Page 2

**Panel 1:** The demon servant and the two wives scurry past Xuan Wu out the door.

**Prose**

**Small side comic panel:** A shot of Gold kneeling down to greet Xuan Wu.

'Wen sui, wen sui, wen wen sui,' Gold said.

'Rise,' Xuan Wu said. He gestured towards Gold's chair. 'Sit.'

Gold flopped into the chair.

Xuan Wu didn't sit; he clasped his hands behind his back. 'How did you come by this tea plantation?'

'When Number Twelve was ousted, I lifted the deed for this property,' Gold said.

'Nobody else knew that Twelve owned it.'

'Theft,' Xuan Wu said.

Gold raised his hands, palm up. 'The new owner didn't even know that the plantation existed. I prefer to think that I inherited it.'

'Tell me about Robert Fortune,' Xuan Wu said. He sat in one of the chairs and conjured a pot of tea for himself.

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'He did a great thing,' Gold said with pride. 'He worked to free our nation from the tyranny of the tea and opium trade.'

'You were aware that the Celestial has forbidden interference in human affairs?'

'If the human asks for assistance, is it interference?'

**Wide comic panel: Gold looks at Xuan Wu, as Xuan Wu holds the teapot.**

### Page 3

Xuan Wu poured himself some tea. 'You are very sheltered here in the hills of Fujian. Let me tell you what has been happening elsewhere.'

'Please,' Gold said. 'I would love to hear.'

'After the tea was grown successfully in India, the English no longer required our tea. The trade trickled down to nothing.'

'I know,' Gold moaned. 'I am reduced to selling on the local market. It's very hard, I had to dismiss half my workers. I may lose part of the plantation.' He brightened. 'But that means less opium.'

'True,' Xuan Wu said. 'So the streets of the southern provinces were full of addicts with no supply. The tea merchants were forced to dismiss many of their staff. Suddenly the streets of Guangdong were full of addicts in withdrawal, and workers with no livelihood.'

Gold was silent. He hadn't seen it that way.

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**Side comic panel, to right of next paragraph: A shot of an altar, where a statue of Xuan Wu was worshipped by his worshippers.**

'When there is poverty, there is unrest. The obvious ones to blame were the foreigners. Many of the homeless men joined secret societies of martial arts practitioners. They worshipped *me*.'

Gold began to feel that things were once again not going his way.

**Side comic panel, to left of next paragraph: A shot of the worshippers running rampant with knives and weapons.**

'They believed that I protected them against the Westerner's weapons,' Xuan Wu said. 'They attacked the foreigners in their enclaves.' He leaned back and glared at Gold. 'The Dowager Empress *supported them*. They killed every foreigner they met. Women and children as well.'

'They were freeing our nation,' Gold said. 'I have heard that the foreigners were carving up our country.'

**Page 4**

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'The Empress fled.' Xuan Wu thumped his fist on the table. 'The foreigners put down the rebellion and the Empress *ran*.' He leaned back and sighed with exasperation. 'The Westerners have taken over. Heavenly Mandate has been removed. The Empress will last no more than a couple of years. Very soon she will poison *her own son* to stop him from taking control when she dies, because she fears that he will bring China the reforms that it so desperately needs. She will set up a three-year-old as Emperor, to keep this country stunted and backwards.'

**Side comic panel, to left of next paragraph: Gold's face, in shock. 'The Empire has already fallen, Gold', says a speech bubble.**

Xuan Wu continued. 'You are a very small Shen. You do not know the extent of the suffering that our country is about to encounter. Millions of people will starve to death.'

'I have no vision of the future, my Lord,' Gold said. 'I am too small.'

'Be glad of that. If the tea trade had continued, it is possible that we may have maintained enough control of our economy to lessen this disaster. It is impossible to tell how much the theft of the tea contributed to these catastrophes.'

Gold moaned. 'I helped do this.'

'The Jade Emperor would like to speak with you.' Xuan Wu rose and pulled out a vermilion scroll bound with gold ribbon — an edict from the Jade Emperor.

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**Wide comic panel:** Xuan unfurls the scroll in his hands in front of Gold, his face severe.

### Page 5

Gold shot to his feet, then fell to his knees. 'Wen sui, wen sui, wen wen sui.'

'Present yourself at the Imperial Cell Complex in the Celestial Palace,' Xuan Wu said. 'You are to be held at the mercy of the Jade Emperor.'

'This small Shen is honoured.' Gold rested his forehead on the floor. 'No.'

'I will give you a day to organise your affairs,' Xuan Wu said. 'Do you have any children?'

'No, my Lord,' Gold said without rising. 'But I have three wives.'

'Human?'

'Yes.'

'They will never see you again,' Xuan Wu said without emotion. 'Say your goodbyes. Settle your affairs. I will be acting as Celestial General when next you see me.'

His voice softened. 'Rise, Gold.'

**Wide comic panel:** Gold's face looks sad. Then he wiped his face.

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'I can understand why you have done this, but the Jade Emperor is furious,' Xuan Wu said. 'You have openly disobeyed an Imperial Edict. You have meddled in human affairs. Be ready, stone, this will be very bad for you.'

## Page 6

## Comics

**Panel 1:** Gold calls to Jade, who is sitting in the other cell with her face in her knees.

**Gold:** Jade!

**Panel 2:** Jade looks up.

**Panel 3:** Jade notices Gold.

**Jade:** Oh, Gold!

**Panel 4:** Jade speaks to Gold through the bars.

**Jade:** I am so sorry, Gold ...

**Gold:** No...

**Panel 5:** Gold speaks back

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**Gold:** It wasn't your fault. You didn't force me. We both thought we were doing the right thing.

**Panel 6:** A voice speaks up.

**Xuan Wu:** Enough. The Jade Emperor is waiting.

## Page 7

**Panel 1:** Xuan Wu appears at the bars of the cell and watches the two of the them.

**Xuan Wu:** You two will be sentenced together.

**Panel 2:** Gold turns to look at Xuan Wu, as does Jade. They both have a pleading look in their eyes.

**Gold:** Lord Xuan Wu ...

**Panel 3:** Both Gold and Jade kneel in front of Xuan Wu.

**Gold:** Will we be executed?

**Panel 4:** Xuan Wu's eyes are dark and unreadable. He is turning to the door.

**Xuan Wu:** If you are both very lucky, yes.

**Panel 5:** Gold continues to ask.

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**Gold:** And if we are unlucky?

**Panel 6:** Xuan Wu says nothing, but looks at the two over his shoulder as he turns towards the opening door.

### Page 8

Xuan Wu walked through the open doors of the dungeon, with Jade and Gold trailing him. His pace was quick, and he led them through a number of dark twisting passages, lit by small torches on both sides.

Midway through the long walk to the Jade Emperor's audience chamber, Xuan Wu changed his form. He was now in full Celestial Form, with black lacquer armour and the Seven Stars sword on his back.

**Panel 1:** They follow Xuan Wu through a long corridor.

Jade and Gold followed quickly, Jade visibly quivering with fear. Xuan Wu escorted them into the small audience chamber; obviously they weren't important enough for anything grander. The Jade Emperor appeared small and elderly on his golden throne, and Xuan Wu took position as First Heavenly General at the Jade Emperor's right hand, emotionless and intimidating.

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**Panel 2:** A shot of the small audience chamber. *The Jade Emperor sat on the throne at the end of the chamber. A set of gold embroidered screens with imperial five-toed dragons adorned the wall behind the throne. He appeared as a slim, elegant gentleman of about sixty wearing an unadorned robe of imperial golden yellow. His long grey hair was tied in a simple topknot, held with a wooden spike. Xuan Wu walks towards the Emperor's right hand. The Seven Stars sword rested in its scabbard on his back.*

**Xuan Wu:** Your Majesty, the Jade Emperor.

**Page 9**

**Prose**

Jade and Gold fell to their knees and touched their foreheads to the floor. 'Wen sui, wen sui, wen wen sui.'

The Jade Emperor had taken human form for the audience. He watched the two Shen prostrate themselves with amusement.

**Wide comic panel:** A closer shot of the Jade Emperor's amused face. He says "Rise" to the two shen.

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Jade and Gold rose and carefully didn't look into the Emperor's eyes.

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'Read the charges,' the Emperor said. He raised a tea cup from a small table next to the throne and sipped the tea.

The guard behind Jade and Gold moved forward to stand next to them. He opened a scroll. 'Princess Jade of the Dragons.'

**Small comic panel to the left and right sides of the page: A shot of Jade's worried face, and Gold's frowning face.**

'This small Shen is present and honoured, Celestial Majesty,' Jade said.

'Golden Boy, child of the Jade Building Block.'

'This small Shen is present and honoured, Celestial Majesty,' Gold said.

'These Shen are charged with interfering in Earthly matters. They aided a Westerner in the theft of one of the Middle Kingdom's greatest treasures. This interference was in direct contravention of an order issued to all Shen by your own Celestial Majesty that Shen were not to interfere in Earthly affairs during this time of unrest.'

## **Page 10**

'How do you plead?' the Emperor said, returning the teacup to the table.

'Guilty as charged, Celestial Majesty,' Jade whispered.

'Golden Boy?' The Jade Emperor's amused expression didn't shift.

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'Guilty as charged, Majesty.'

'No argument, stone?'

'It was a foolish thing to do, Majesty.'

'What shall I do with them, Ah Wu?' the Emperor said without looking at Xuan Wu.

'I'll take them, Majesty,' Xuan Wu said. 'I may have need of their abilities.'

'Oh, come on, Ah Wu,' the Emperor said. He raised his tea cup and swept his long sleeve out of the way. 'You have an army on the Mountain at Wudang, you have the entire Northern Celestial Heavens, and you claim need of these two? I think not.'

'Celestial Majesty,' Xuan Wu said.

'You always were too soft, Ah Wu.'

'My nature is yin, Majesty.'

'That it is. Summon the Azure Dragon of the East,' the Emperor said.

Jade stiffened and Gold squeaked.

**Series of drawings: Several shots of Qing Long appearing from**

**nothingness. He was in his Celestial Form, with flowing long turquoise hair.**

**Page 11**

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**Side drawing: A full-body shot of Qing Long. Ten feet tall, slim and**

**elegant, with flowing long turquoise hair and a robe of shimmering silver**

**embossed with a turquoise scale design.**

Qing Long appeared next to Jade and Gold. He fell to his knees and touched his head to the floor. 'Wen sui, wen sui, wen wen sui.'

'Rise,' the Emperor said.

Qing Long rose beside Jade and Gold. He glanced at them, his long serene face emotionless. 'These two have offended Heaven,' the Jade Emperor said. 'You want them?'

Qing Long folded his hands into his long sleeves and studied the dragon and stone next to him. 'Are they good for anything?'

'Jade Dragon, list your accomplishments,' the guard said.

'Embroidery, ink painting, pipa, erhu ...' Jade began.

'No!' Qing Long snapped. 'Useful stuff. Any Earthly qualifications?'

'I can read and write, add and subtract, I know all of the laws and the precepts,' Jade said stiffly.

'Stone of Gold,' the guard said.

'I am a stone. We are renowned for our mathematical abilities. I also know all of the laws and precepts,' Gold said.

Qing Long turned back to the Jade Emperor. 'I'll take them, Majesty.'

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'Write out an edict, Ah Wu, and give this worthless pair to Lord Qing Long,' the Jade Emperor said.

'As you wish, Celestial Majesty,' Xuan Wu said.

## Page 12

The Emperor put his teacup carefully on the side table. 'The Jade Girl and the Golden Boy are to serve the Azure Dragon of the East until I decree otherwise. They are both to retain human form,' he glanced at them, '*constantly*, day and night, while they are serving him, unless he permits otherwise.'

## Wide comic panel: A shot of Jade and Gold's dismayed faces.

Jade and Gold didn't look at each other but they were both clearly completely mortified. Human form, twenty-four hours a day? Eating, sleeping, washing, all of the human inconveniences ... It was worse than being bound in True Form.

The Jade Emperor watched their reactions carefully. 'Concluded. Dismissed.'

Qing Long bowed deeply, his hands still in his sleeves. 'Celestial Majesty.' He beckoned towards the two Shen quivering next to him. 'Come with me. I have a lot of work for you to do.'

Jade and Gold both touched their foreheads to the floor. 'Thank you for your merciful correction of our erroneous ways.'

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**Wide comic panel:** A shot of the Jade Emperor at his table, with Xuan Wu by his side. 'Good.' Says the Jade Emperor.

'Next time I will not be so lenient,' the Jade Emperor said. 'Take this as your final warning, both of you. Next time it will be a very long visit to Hell.'

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## Comics Section

# <A>Qing Long Works People Hard<A>

<B>1969<B>

## Page 1

## Comics

**Panel 1:** Gold comes into the small room. There are two bunks in the room, one occupied by Jade who is lying in bed.

**Caption: 1969.**

**Caption:** Somewhere in the palace of Qing Long, the Dragon, Lord of the East.

**Gold:** Heavens, I'm so tired ...

**Panel 2:** Gold flops into his small bunk.

**Gold:** I'm stuck in this form, and I really need to take a bath.

**Panel 3:** Jade turns around to look at him.

**Jade:** You all right?

**Gold:** I'll live. I haven't slept in days.

**Panel 4:** Jade turns her back to go back to sleep.

**Jade:** If we're lucky, Lord Qing Long will work us to death.

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**Gold:** Hell would be ten times better than this.

**Panel 5:** Jade frowns into her pillow.

**Jade:** Gold ... You ever considered suicide?

## Page 2

**Panel 1:** Gold frowns.

**Gold:** You too, eh?

**Panel 2:** Jade turns to look at Gold, who is still lying in his bed.

**Gold:** We'd just spend a few years in Hell and then end up back here with our sentences extended. Complete waste of time.

**Panel 3:** Jade looks sad.

**Jade:** Hell would be a *holiday* compared to this.

## Prose

'I had to go through every single contract in his records room. Every single one. Looking for loopholes. Some of them are more than five hundred years old.' Gold stretched and his joints cracked. 'It took me three weeks. I had to sleep on the floor in there. I ache all over. I *hate* being human.'

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Jade threw the covers off and staggered to Gold's bunk. Before he could protest she sat next to him on the bed, lifted his plain white cotton shirt, and rubbed his back.

Gold relaxed. 'Thanks, Jade.'

'Nothing more,' she said. 'Friends.'

'Frankly, I'm too exhausted to be interested, anyway.'

'Me too. It's been ages.'

'How long have we been working for Lord Qing Long?'

'Must be close on seventy years,' Jade said with a sigh. 'We've served him well. We perform our duties diligently and without complaint. When will we be freed?'

'When the Celestial Majesty wills it, and not before,' Gold said. 'I'm really past caring anyway. My human form is aging. I didn't know that I could die of old age in this form. It will be an interesting experience.'

'How long do humans live here on the Celestial Plane? That never occurred to me. I thought the wrinkles were from overwork. I'm getting *old*?'

**Page 3**

**Side comic panel: Gold and Jade talk to each other, as Jade rubs his shoulders.**

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'I think humans live about twice as long on the Celestial Plane,' Gold said. 'Some of them have a name for it. "Shangri-La". I don't know about stones or dragons, but we both seem to be growing old.'

Jade stopped rubbing Gold's back and returned to her own bunk. Gold hoisted himself with effort, fell to sit next to her, and massaged her shoulders. She stretched her neck beneath his hands. 'Thanks.'

'I've seen some of the other poor workers here, the tame demons particularly, and compared to them our working conditions are luxurious. At least Qing Long allows us to sleep.'

'I know,' Jade said. 'I suppose we'll stay here serving Lord Qing Long until we die as humans.'

Gold returned to flop on his bed again. 'It's all the same to me.'

Jade fell back onto her pillow. 'Me too.'

'At least I have your friendship,' Gold said into his pillow. 'I don't know what I'd do without you to talk to, Jade. I really appreciate it.'

'I feel the same way, my friend,' Jade said, but Gold was already asleep.

**Wide comic panel: A shot of mahjong table, with the four gods sitting around it. Jade and Gold are kneeling to the side.**

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## Page 4

**Bordering the text:** For the rest of the chapter, there will be a border around the text. The border depicts the four gods according to their representative cardinal direction, their expressions changing as they talk. On this page, Qing Long looks particularly smug.

'Why do you drag those two little Shen around with you everywhere you go?' the Red Phoenix of the South said. She banged her tile on the table, and the colours in the scarlet fabric of her robe rippled. 'Pung.'

'Shit,' the White Tiger said. 'Yeah, Ah Qing, there's no shortage of servants here. There's nothing for them to do while you're visiting. Why the hell don't you just leave them in the East?'

Qing Long glanced at Jade and Gold who knelt to one side watching the game without interest. 'Aren't they decorative, though? So pretty. And I love the way people react when they discover who they are.'

Xuan Wu lifted a tile from the wall and checked it. He slammed it into the discard at the centre of the table, making the other tiles rattle.

'They look awful,' the Phoenix said. 'What have you been doing to them?'

'They're just soft,' Qing Long said. 'A proper day's work is a new experience for both of them.'

'You'd better be sure her father isn't too upset,' the White Tiger said.

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Qing Long raised a tile from the wall and waved it airily. 'Frankly I don't think the Dragon King is even aware of her existence. She's number eighty something, a long way down the list.' He slammed the tile onto the table. 'Damn.'

Jade sagged slightly over her knees.

## Page 5

**Bordering the text:** They all look at Xuan Wu on this page.

'Pung,' the Phoenix said, and snatched the tile Qing Long had just discarded.

The Tiger groaned.

The Phoenix shuffled her tiles, her face alight with grim satisfaction. She pulled one tile out of the group and put it into the discard.

'Sik,' Xuan Wu said, and flipped his tiles so that the others could see them.

All three of the other Shen groaned and tipped their tiles over.

'Another round,' Xuan Wu said.

'I'd rather hear about the West,' the Phoenix said. She opened the drawer in the table and counted her cash, then handed Xuan Wu a gold coin. 'You've reported to the Celestial. Tell us about it.'

'Yeah, I'd like to know what happened as well,' the Tiger said. He handed Xuan Wu three gold coins. 'You've been gone an awful long time, Ah Wu, was it really worth it?'

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'It was worth it,' Xuan Wu said. 'Let's sit beside the pool, I'll tell you about it in True Form while I have a swim. I wasn't able to take True Form nearly as much as I would have liked in England, and I'm using every opportunity.'

'My Lord,' the Phoenix said.

## Page 6

**Bordering the text: Xuan Wu is a snake, while the Tiger is a tiger on this page. The other two remain human and stare at Xuan Wu.**

They rose and sat at a table near the pool bar. The demon from the bar quickly brought drinks for them.

Xuan Wu changed to True Form; the black serpent and turtle. The two reptiles separated and the turtle slid into the pool.

'You'd live in that pool if you had the chance,' the Tiger growled. He took tiger form and flopped to lie sideways. He stretched, sheathing and unsheathing his claws.

The Phoenix and Dragon both remained in human form and sat at the table.

The Serpent stretched out on the warm pavers. 'I'd been watching England for a while. I went there to learn two things: one, how long I could stay so far from my Centre without suffering unduly. None of us had tried this, and it was an interesting experiment.'

'But you're the only one really big enough to do it for two years straight,' the Tiger said. 'You spent five years there, and only came back twice.'

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'I proved that it can be done. The second thing I wanted to learn was the impact of the changes in society that have been happening the last few years. It was most enlightening.'

'Tell us,' the Phoenix said. 'What did you learn? Did you have much difficulty living as one of them?'

## Page 7

**Bordering the text: Xuan Wu is a snake, while the Tiger is a tiger on this page. The other two remain human and stare at Xuan Wu.**

'I had planned to live as a European, so that I could merge into the culture,' Xuan Wu said. 'I couldn't do it. I couldn't hold the shape for long stretches. Eventually I had to take my usual human form.' The Serpent raised its head slightly. 'I experienced racism for the first time in my history. It was most unpleasant. That was the worst part about being there.'

The Tiger chuckled. 'Well, you're home now, you collected your doctor or degree or whatever that thing was, gathered plenty of information, and the Jade Emperor is mightily glad to see you back.'

'All of us are,' the Phoenix said. 'It was extremely worrying to have you so far away. The demons could have attacked us, and it would have taken you days to return.'

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'Hell has been quiet, I've been watching,' Xuan Wu said. 'The Jade Emperor wouldn't have sent me if we thought there was any danger. With modern transport the travelling time is only hours, now, in human form. The world is shrinking. We may even begin to see powerful demons and Shen from other Centres come and visit us in China. The Jade Emperor and I wanted to see what was happening in Europe. I may visit America next. And it was a PhD, a Doctorate in Philosophy, and you can call me *Doctor* John Chen, now.'

'Doctor Serpent,' Qing Long said under his breath. The Serpent fixed its small black eyes onto him and he looked away.

## Page 8

**Bordering the text: They all look very amused in this one.**

'An English name as well, Ah Wu?' the Tiger said with disbelief. 'Turncoat. Did you meet any Western Shen? What did they have to say when they saw you?'

'Now there's a strange thing.' The Serpent coiled its body and raised its head. 'I did not encounter a single Western Shen the entire time I was there. Demons, yes. Western demons are extremely interesting. In many ways similar to ours; in many ways different. But Shen; no.'

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'Did you see any of those new people in London? The ones we've heard about?'

the Phoenix said.

'Hippies,' Xuan Wu said. 'I joined a commune for a while during semester break.

They are searching for the Tao. They are following the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures, they have gurus. They are regarded as highly fanatical and dangerous. Because they search for the Tao.'

The Tiger chuckled.

'One of the gurus tried to show me the error of my ways, and put me onto the correct path towards Enlightenment,' Xuan Wu said with amusement. 'Apparently knowing some Chinese Taoism is a great help in my search for the True Way.'

The Tiger laughed, his feline vocal chords making his voice a throaty growl. 'I'm sure you were suitably humble and attempted to learn from the sage. And the verdict was?'

'He said with exasperation that I would never get there.'

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## Comics Section

# To Love a Human

1992

## Page 1

## Comics

**Panel 1:** Gold walks down a hallway, carrying a pile of scrolls. *The corridor appeared to be an open air breezeway, about twenty feet wide, constructed entirely of milky translucent white crystal. The walls of water held at bay on either side of the walkway were the only indicator that the Dragon's Palace was on the sea floor.*

**Caption: 1992.**

**Caption:** The Underwater Palace of Qing Long, Dragon Lord of the East.

**Panel 2:** Gold notices voices in the hallway ahead of him.

**Panel 3:** Gold kneels down and places the scrolls on the floor in front of him, to the side of the corridor.

**Voice:** But why me?

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**Panel 4:** *The Dragon had taken his smallest True Form; only four metres long. His silver and turquoise scales glittered as he glided down the hall towards Gold without touching the floor. Xuan Wu in human form walked beside the Dragon.*

**Qing Long:** The workings of the female human mind are as mysterious to me as they are to you. Ask the Tiger.

**Xuan Wu:** If I were to use the Tiger's advice she would leave me immediately.

## Page 2

**Panel 1:** Xuan Wu and Qing Long continue to talk.

**Qing Long:** The Phoenix has had human wives.

**Xuan Wu:** She hasn't taken male human form in more than four hundred years, and you know it.

**Panel 2:** Xuan Wu turns to look at Qing Long. Gold is in the foreground, kneeling.

**Xuan Wu:** And don't suggest the Jade Emperor, his family is about the most dysfunctional on the entire Celestial Plane.

**Qing Long:** Only you could say that and get away with it, Ah Wu.

**Panel 3:** Qing Long notices Gold.

**Panel 4:** Gold is kneeling there with the scrolls, looking down at the scrolls.

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**Qing Long:** What are you doing here?

**Panel 5:** Qing Long and Xuan Wu stand there, looking at Gold, who is kneeling to the side in the foreground

**Gold:** I finished these contracts and I was returning them to the Records Room, sir.

**Panel 6:** Both Qing Long and Xuan Wu get a thoughtful look in their eyes.

**Page 3**

**Prose**

The Dragon turned to Xuan Wu, his turquoise eyes flashing in the reflected ripples of the water. 'This is the one you should be asking, Ah Wu. It holds the record for seducing the greatest number of Shen on the Celestial. There are very few small Shen anywhere that have not seen the underside of its sheets.'

Xuan Wu studied Gold expressionlessly, his dark eyes piercing. He thought for a while, then appeared to come to a conclusion. 'Lend it to me for a week or so. Let me talk to it.'

The Dragon turned back to Gold. 'Return those scrolls to the Records Room, then present yourself at the Hall of Undersea Delights. If you mention the purpose of this trip to anybody, I will eat you myself.'

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Gold bobbed over his knees. 'I understand, My Lord.'

'Go.'

Gold rose, picked up the scrolls, stole a quick glance at Xuan Wu's fierce face, and hurried away.

**Comics**

**Panel 1:** *The Celestial Mountain of Wudangshan was green and cool in the morning light. Clinging mist hid the lower steppes of the seven peaks. Gold and Xuan Wu sat in a small pavilion overlooking a misty gorge and shared tea. The mist carried the scent of pine and spruce through the open moon gate.*

**Caption: Celestial Mountain of Wudangshan.**

**Panel 1:** Gold sat with Xuan Wu in the pagoda, enjoying the tea and the scenery.

**Panel 2+3:** A bird chirps, while a shout nearby is heard as the Dark Lord's disciples start their early morning practice.

**Xuan Wu:** Her name is Michelle.

**Page 4**

**Prose**

'I met her in Florida. She was singing. I had never heard anything like it.'

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'You'd never heard Western opera before?' Gold said.

'Of course I had. But this was different.' Xuan Wu studied his teacup, his face rigid with control. He glanced up and looked into Gold's eyes. 'Her voice went straight through me, like an arrow. Pleasure and pain.'

'That can happen, my Lord.'

'And then I met her at the backstage party, and it was ...' He was obviously lost for words, then gathered himself. 'She is French Canadian. She has courage, and spirit, a spark you don't often see in humans. She lives for her art, and she sings like the Heavens. She has a temper that even I find intimidating.' He sighed. 'She is wonderful.'

Gold poured the tea. 'I think I understand. When you encountered this with other human women, what did you do? What mistakes did you make? Human women are different to Shen, particularly animal Shen like dragons. They must be approached more cautiously.'

'I have never loved a human woman.'

**3 panels: Gold looking shocked, teacup halfway to lips, while the Dark Lord looks totally rigid and miserable. 'You...'** Gold started to say.

'You are one of the oldest of us all, my Lord. You have been around since the Dawn of Creation; you are North Wind. I have heard that you were already old when humans began to walk the Earth.'

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'And I have never loved a human woman.'

Gold poured the tea. 'This one must be exceptional.'

Xuan Wu sighed. 'She is.'

## Page 5

'Well then, let's win her for you.'

'No deception. No use of the fact that I am a Shen. I want to win her as a human man. I want you to help me win her, not by doing what you would do, but help me to avoid the mistakes I could make because she is human and therefore different.' Xuan Wu sagged slightly. 'I do not want to lose her.'

'When she finds out what you really are, you may lose her forever, my Lord.

Your True Form is ...' Gold hesitated.

'I am well aware of the fact that my True Form is one of the ugliest in creation,'

Xuan Wu said evenly. 'Even without the Serpent, I am truly horrifying.'

'Without the Serpent?'

'I have no idea where it has gone, Gold. I have searched the planet, from pole to pole, and it does not answer the Turtle's calls. Right now I am only Yin Turtle. The Yang Serpent is out there somewhere, hiding.'

'I had not heard about this happening, my Lord.'

**Wide comics panel: Xuan Wu looks darkly at Gold at this point.**

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'And you will not share it. The residents of Hell must not know about this.'

'I understand. You have my word, I will tell no one. When did this happen?'

'About twenty years ago. Nineteen seventy three.'

'Has this happened before, my Lord?'

Xuan Wu turned his teacup in his long fingers. 'No.'

'That may explain some of the strange weather patterns in the last ten years. The Serpent affects the weather.'

'I am well aware of my own abilities.'

## Page 6

'Apologies, my Lord, you are the only Shen who is two creatures. It must be very difficult for you, being in two pieces with one half gone.'

'You have no idea.'

Gold straightened and changed the subject. 'So. This woman. Tell me what you have done so far, and I will help you to take this further. Is she still in Florida? I don't know if I can travel that far from the Centre, I am very small.'

'She is in Hong Kong doing a concert series. This is the perfect time.'

Gold raised his teacup and smiled up at Xuan Wu. 'Let's win you this exceptional woman.'

Xuan Wu leaned back. 'Good.'

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## Comics

**Panel 1:** *Gold sat in the plush lobby lounge of the Hong Kong Regent while Xuan Wu checked in. The enormous three-storey windows gave a spectacular view of the Harbour and the high-rises clustered on Hong Kong Island across the water. Xuan Wu sat next to him in one of the large, comfortable sofas.*

**Caption: Regent Hotel, Hong Kong.**

## Page 7

**Panel 1:** Xuan Wu hands Gold a portfolio and a room key.

**Xuan Wu:** Here. Identity documents, enough cash and a couple of credit cards to cover expenses.

**Panel 2:** Gold speaks to Xuan Wu, holding the documents.

**Xuan Wu:** Go overboard with the spending and I'll remove an equivalent amount in gold from your own stone self.

**Gold:** Sir ...

## Prose

'I understand, my Lord, but there is no need,' Gold said. 'Lord Qing Long sent me down here to study Law about ten years ago. I'm a registered barrister both here and on the Mainland, and I already have a small bank account and full identity papers.'

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'Really? Useful,' Xuan Wu said. 'Why not accounting? That would be more in line with your talents as a stone.'

'Jade is the accountant. My skills as a stone allow me to connect with devices that are also made of stone. Silicone. Computers.'

'You can hack into networks?'

'No computer system is closed to me. I have been through every major system in the world.'

'It is not honourable to be prying like that.'

'Lord Qing Long doesn't seem to be very bothered about those details, my Lord.'

'Stop calling me that in public. Here I am Mr John Chen. Just "sir" is enough.'

'Sir.'

'As I said, back here at seven. You can come with me to the Cultural Centre, and we'll begin.'

'Sir,' Gold said.

The bag was already in Gold's room when he went in. He went straight into the bathroom and had the longest, hottest bath he'd had in years.

**Page 8**

**Comics**

**Panel 1:** *Xuan Wu and Gold materialised together in Qing Long's audience hall. Gold fell to his knees. Qing Long was in thirty-metre long True Form, stretched out on the grey*

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*tiles in front of his blue and silver throne. He shifted and turned his ice-cold turquoise*

*eyes onto them. He rose and bowed as a Dragon to Xuan Wu.*

**Caption: Qing Long's Audience Hall.**

**Xuan Wu:** I am finished with it, Ah Qing. It has been extremely useful.

**Panel 2:** Xuan Wu says, with Gold kneeling next to him.

**Qing Long:** Good. Return to the Hall of Records, Gold.

**Gold:** Yes, my Lord.

**Panel 3:** Gold turns to leave.

**Qing Long:** Stone.

**Panel 4:** Qing Long, now sitting on his throne.

**Qing Long:** Do not think for one second that you will receive any special treatment because of this.

**Panel 6:** Gold looks back over his shoulder to Qing Long, eyes betraying nothing. His expression is neutral.

**Qing Long:** And do not mention this episode to anybody, or it will go very badly for you.

**Gold:** ... I understand, my Lord.

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## Comics Section

# <A>Farewell to Heaven<A>

<B>1995<B>

### Page 1

## Comics

**Panel 1:** Gold and Qing Long in human form. *They are standing in front of the Great Hall of Celestial Audience, right at the top of the Imperial Palace. The buildings of the palace stretched below them and disappeared into the clouds at the base of the mountain.*

**Caption: 1995.**

**Caption: The Great Hall of Celestial Audience, at the top of the Imperial Palace.**

**Panel 2:** Gold is silent.

**Qing Long:** Remember, Gold. Record everything you see. If what I've heard is correct, this should be very, very good.

**Panel 3:** They approach the massive red double doors, each door decorated with an enormous door god, who glared at the two. General Wei speaks, with his fierce red face.

**Wei:** What business have you here?

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## Page 2

**Panel 1:** Qing Long talks to Wei, Gold by his side.

**Qing Long:** I wish to attend court. It is within my rights as a Celestial and as the East Wind.

**Panel 2:** Wei's expression relaxes.

**Wei:** Enter, my Lord. The show's about to begin, and everybody's here to see it.

**Panel 3:** *The five storey high doors swung open to permit the Dragon and Gold entry.*

**Panel 4:** *General Wei was right. The Audience Hall was at least thirty metres long and a similar distance deep, and it was packed with Celestials of all types craning to catch a glimpse of the Jade Emperor seated on the Celestial Throne at the end of the Hall. The Emperor wore splendid Tang style robes of Imperial golden yellow and a square hat with beads hanging like a curtain in front of his eyes.*

## Page 3

**Panel 1:** An armored foot falls on the gold carpet, which has been left bare for the person walking up it.

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**Panel 2:** A shot over the man's heavily armoured shoulder, as he approaches the throne.

In the background is Qing Long. *Qing Long stood with Gold below the two metre tall dais that carried the Emperor's throne and waited where the entrance carpet met the base of the stairs to the dais.*

**Panel 3:** *Xuan Wu in full majestic Celestial Form, complete with black lacquer armour and Seven Stars sword on his back, strode down the carpet.*

## Page 4

**Panel 1:** *He stopped at the base of the dais and looked at the Emperor.*

**Panel 2:** *Xuan Wu fell to one knee, saluting the Emperor as senior retainer. He was so tall that on one knee he still towered over many of the smaller Shen.*

**Panel 3:** A close-up shot of Xuan Wu, face down.

**Xuan Wu:** Celestial Majesty.

**Panel 4:** A close-up shot of the Jade Emperor.

**Jade Emperor:** Emperor Zhenwu of the Dark Northern Heavens. Arise.

## Page 5

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## Prose

'This humble servant petitions your Celestial Majesty with a request,' Xuan Wu said, his deep voice echoing through the hall.

'Name it,' the Emperor said.

'This humble servant has married a human woman and requests permission to join her and live on the Earthly plane as a human.'

'What of your duties as First Heavenly General?'

'I would that they were delegated to Er Lang, Second Heavenly General.'

'Your dominion, the Dark Northern Heavens?'

'My Generals will manage the Heavens in my absence.'

'Your Mountain?'

**Wide comic panel:** Xuan Wu frowns, his face betraying his emotions.

A soft rustle echoed through the hall, the hissing sound of moving silk. None of the gathered Celestials said a word, but everybody present knew how much the Celestial Mountain of Wudangshan meant to the Dark Lord.

Xuan Wu waited until the noise died to silence. Then he raised his head and looked the Jade Emperor in the eye. 'I have lieutenants capable of running the Mountain in my absence. I request permission to remain on the Earthly.'

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'Permission denied,' the Emperor said. 'You are needed on the Celestial Plane, Dark Lord of the Arts of War. We cannot spare you. Bring her to the Celestial, she will be welcomed and given full honours as your Empress.'

The rustle of moving robes hissed through the hall, then once again there was silence.

## Page 6

**2 comic panel: Xuan Wu and the Jade Emperor look searchingly into each other's faces.**

'She refuses to leave the Earthly,' Xuan Wu said. 'If it needs be, I will forsake my dominion for her.'

'Permission is still denied, you are not given Celestial consent.' The Jade Emperor spoke with an edge of exasperation. 'This has been discussed and negotiated. The position of the Celestial is clear.' His voice became vehement. '*You are needed here.*'

Xuan Wu raised his head with defiance. 'I will do it anyway, Celestial Majesty. With your permission or without it, I will be with my wife.'

The rustle of robes was accompanied by a gentle hush of voices which trickled to silence.

The Jade Emperor spoke loudly and clearly. 'You will not do this.'

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‘Arrange someone else to fulfil my duties for the next hundred or so years, Majesty, I will be living on the Earthly.’

The Jade Emperor banged the arm of the throne. ‘You will not do this, Ah Wu, I forbid it!’

Xuan Wu took two steps towards the dais.

**Wide comic panel:** Xuan Wu looking grave and defiant. ‘I will do it anyway.’

#### **Page 7**

The Jade Emperor rose, stepped forward, and glared with menace. ‘You are walking a very fine line, Ah Wu, *do not disobey me!*’

**Wide comic panel:** Xuan Wu faces the Jade Emperor.

“Go to hell.”

And with that, Xuan Wu stalked out of the hall, surrounded by a dull roar of astonishment.

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**Small comic panel, to left side of next paragraph: Qing Long, whispering**

**to Gold.**

*Oh my, that was better than I expected, the Dragon said silently to Gold. Did you get it all?*

*Yes, my Lord, Gold said. He hesitated, then, If I had known it would lead to this much trouble I would not have aided him.*

*He may be thrown from Heaven, the Dragon said, still amused. There are many who question his place here, and this is exactly the excuse they have been looking for.*

The Celestials filed out of the hall, quietly discussing the events once they were through the door. Gold and the Dragon followed the crowd. It took some time for them to reach the door, and they were the last people in the hall to leave.

**Page 8**

**Comics**

**Panel 1:** *A shot from the door, at Qing Long and Gold's astonished faces as the Jade Emperor bellowed so loudly that the clerestory windows on the square raised roof forty metres above them rattled.*

**Jade Emperor: Golden Boy!!**

**Panel 2:** *Gold and the Dragon stopped and slowly turned.*

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**Panel 3:** *The Jade Emperor stood on the dais in front of the throne and glared at them.*

**Panel 4:** A close-up of the Emperor's scowling face.

**Jade Emperor:** Golden Boy, child of the Jade Building Block. **Approach!**

**Page 9**

**Wide comic panel:** Gold looks defeated. Not again...

**Prose**

Gold slumped and wiped his hand over his face. Not again.

'Azure Dragon, you are dismissed,' the Jade Emperor said. 'I wish to see the Golden Boy alone.'

*You're on your own,* the Dragon said, and disappeared.

Gold sighed and walked to the dais. The empty hall echoed with his footsteps. He fell to his knees in front of the dais and spoke the obeisance with resignation. '*Wen sui, wen sui, wen wen sui.*'

'Rise,' the Emperor said.

Gold rose and waited.

'Find the Jade Girl. Bring her here to my private apartments in one hour. I wish to speak to both of you.'

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**Small comic panel, to left side of next paragraph: Gold, pursing his lips and looking worried.**

Gold took a deep breath, hesitated, and then threw his life away. 'Celestial Majesty.'

**Small comic panel, to right of next paragraph: The Jade Emperor, leaning on his elbow.**

The Jade Emperor had turned to sit on the throne. He paused for a moment, then sat and leaned his elbow on his knee. 'Speak.'

'Celestial Majesty.' Gold fell to his knees again. 'If it pleases your majesty, the Jade Girl was not involved in this. It had nothing to do with her; it was all my doing. I take full responsibility. Please do not punish her for something she did not do. It was me and me only who assisted the Dark Lord in this matter.'

'Did you hear my order, stone?'

'I did, Celestial Majesty, and still I beg for my friend's life. She was not involved.'

## **Page 10**

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'Your *friend*, eh?' The Jade Emperor didn't move. 'I repeat my order, stone.

Return with Jade Girl to my private apartments in one hour. Do not even begin to think of running. You will obey me.'

'I will obey you, Lord, you know I have no choice.' Gold dropped his forehead to the floor. 'This humble Shen is honoured.' He shook his head, still with his forehead on the floor, and whispered, 'No.'

'Go.'

Gold pulled himself to his feet and went.

\*\*\*

**Comics**

**Panel 1:** Jade was in the Hall of Numbers, busily running over the budgeting spreadsheets.

**Caption: Hall of Numbers.**

**Panel 2:** She looked up and smiled wanly when she saw him.

**Jade:** Oh, Gold!

**Page 11**

**Prose**

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Gold sat in the office chair next to her at the desk. 'You remember when the Dark Lord asked for my help to win the human? How we laughed about that?'

Jade smiled down at the printouts then back up at him. 'That was delightful, the most I'd laughed in twenty years.'

Gold's voice was hoarse. 'He married her, and now he's forsaken his duties and wants to live on the Earthly with her as a human.'

**2 comic panels: Jade looking shocked, then her hand flying to her mouth, as she says "No."**

'He just had a major altercation with the Jade Emperor. Let me show you.' Gold concentrated and presented the recording so that Jade could view it.

When the recording had finished Jade shook her head, confident. 'Without the Dark Lord to defend it, Heaven is at the mercy of the demons. They won't throw him from Heaven, it's simply not possible. Besides, he's the North Wind.'

'With him full-time on the Earthly, Heaven is at the mercy of the demons anyway,' Gold said. 'This is just the excuse his enemies have been looking for.'

'He has no enemies.'

'He is Yin itself, he refuses to play the political games and is straightforward in all his dealings. Of course he has enemies.'

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Jade sighed. 'I hope it doesn't happen, I have a great deal of respect for him. And he tried to help us when we were in trouble, by taking us into his service.'

'Jade.' Gold fingered the printouts. He sighed. 'This is very hard.'

Jade touched Gold's hand. 'Go on, I trust you, my friend.'

Gold didn't look up from the paper. 'The Jade Emperor wishes to see me in his private apartments in forty minutes. Apparently my interference, once again, has returned to bite me on the ass.'

## Page 12

**Small comic panel: Jade talking to Gold, Gold looking sad and Jade looking stricken.**

'He wants to see you too.'

Jade shot to her feet. 'No!'

Gold put his head in his hands. 'I am so sorry.'

Jade grabbed Gold's forearm and hauled him to his feet. He watched with confusion but didn't attempt to defend himself.

She threw her arms around him and held him close, pulling his face into her shoulder. 'Don't worry, whatever happens, it will work out.'

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'I hate to think what our sentence will be, Jade, and it's all my fault.' He nuzzled her shoulder. 'And you had nothing to do with it at all.' He gripped her tighter. 'This shouldn't happen to you!'

**Comics**

**Panel 1-2:** Jade stroked the back of Gold's head sadly.

**Panel 3:** She pulled back to see his tear-filled eyes and ran her hand over his cheek.

**Jade:** Well, wherever we're going, we're going together.

**Panel 4:** Gold looks sad, his face in his hands.

**Gold:** I just keep making people suffer.

**Jade:** Gold ... Don't worry.

**Panel 5:** Jade has tears in her eyes as she says this.

**Jade:** Wherever we are, we'll always have our friendship.

**Panel 6:** They stand together in the hall, Jade comforting Gold.

**Jade:** We'll do this together, I know we can ...

**Page 13**

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**Panel 1:** *The private apartments were large and roomy with a polished hardwood floor and exquisite rosewood furniture. A Ming-style bookshelf held a priceless collection of teapots from all dynasties and provinces. The Jade Emperor sat on the couch; and next to him in an armchair sat the Dark Lord Xuan Wu in human form, his face rigid with restraint.*

**Caption: Jade Emperor's Apartment**

**Panel 2:** Jade and Gold stopped dead as they entered.

**Panel 3:** Jade and Gold fell to their knees.

**Both:** *Wen sui, wen sui, wen wen sui.*

**Jade Emperor:** Rise.

**Panel 4:** The Jade Emperor turns to Xuan Wu sitting next to him, as Xuan Wu is looking at Jade and Gold with a faint smile on his lips.

**Jade Emperor:** You sure they won't be more trouble than they're worth?

**Xuan Wu:** I think they'll be useful.

**Panel 5:** Gold's face, as he felt a leap of hope.

**Page 14**

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## **Prose**

Xuan Wu turned to the Jade Emperor. 'The Dragon released them, Celestial Majesty?'

'He had trouble finding them more work. He said they were just redoing tasks because he'd run out of things for them to do.'

'Well, I'll have plenty for them to do.'

Jade inhaled sharply but didn't look up.

'Jade Girl. Golden Boy,' the Jade Emperor said sternly.

'Celestial Majesty.'

'The Xuan Wu is so obviously insanely in love with this human woman that the Celestial has seen fit to give him permission to remain on the Earthly with her for a human lifetime.'

**Comic panel, to left of next paragraph: Jade sneaks a questioning look at Gold.**

**Comic panel, to left of next paragraph: Jade and Gold look startled and happy.**

'The Xuan Wu will obviously require assistance whilst living on the Earthly, and he has suggested that you worthless pair may be of some use.'

'Where should they present themselves, Ah Wu?'

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Xuan Wu shifted slightly. 'Hong Kong, Peak. One Black Road. Top floor.'

'You heard him,' the Jade Emperor said. 'You have three hours to collect your belongings and present yourselves there. You are to remain in human form while in the Dark Lord's service, you have not atoned completely for assisting the foreigners to steal China's greatest treasure.'

'Don't bring too much, Hong Kong is very small, there won't be room,' Xuan Wu said. 'One bag apiece. If you need more you can purchase it later.'

'Celestial Highness,' Jade said.

The Jade Emperor waved them away. 'Go.'

**Page 15**

**Comics**

**Panel 1:** Jade and Gold in their small room, packing things into one bag each.

**Caption: Jade and Gold's Room**

**Jade:** Hey, do you know anyone who's worked for him?

**Panel 2-3:** Gold continues to pack, without looking at Jade, frowning. Jade's eyes widen as she hears what he says.

**Gold:** No. He's so senior that even his retainers are too big for me to know. I've heard that he is a hard master.

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**Panel 4:** Jade stands there, worried. Her hand is over her mouth. Gold, in the background, notices her.

**Jade:** Harder than the Dragon?

**Panel 5:** Gold turns and smiled.

**Gold:** I don't think *anybody* is harder than the Dragon.

**Jade:** Ha ha ... Yes, you're right.

## Page 16

**Panel 1:** With their bags packed, they both start towards the door.

**Gold:** You know... Hong Kong is an interesting place now. It will be fascinating to see the changes there.

**Panel 4:** They turn to leave. Jade says as she sighs happily.

**Jade:** I can't wait to meet the woman --- his wife.

**Gold:** Yes.

**Panel 5:** A dark background, with a single speech bubble.

**Gold:** Her name's Michelle, and she is as remarkable as he says!

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**End Comics-Prose part (The rest are purely prose)**

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