

Necropolis 131

Chapter 131: Fury of the Monster Spirit Emperor

“Where did the black dragon come from?” Lu Yun goggled at the calming sea from the stronghold’s battlements.

“How can there still be something so powerful in the North Sea?” Stupefaction also filled Yuchi Hanxing’s expression. The black dragon had barreled out of nowhere and dragged the Black Tortoise image into the sea. Being able to overcome the combination of a juba and blackwater snake like that... it must be at least a peak peerless immortal!

Diexi looked oddly at the human and his equally befuddled friend, unable to understand why the two were acting this way. Wasn’t the black dragon the one Qing Han had captured in the abyss? How could they not recognize it?

Despite her innocence, she was smart enough to keep her mouth shut; something else was obviously at play here.

“Exactly!” Qing Han hurriedly chimed in. “That black dragon was at least a peerless immortal. I didn’t imagine something like that would be in the sea!”

Lu Yun tried his best to keep a straight face. “Alright, alright, the great battle between the peerless immortals is over. Let’s get back to our posts. Yuchi Hanxing, you should devote yourself zealously to defense in the near future, the monster spirits will be back for sure.”

“Yes, sir!” Yuchi Hanxing answered readily. She mentioned nothing about the juba that had so abruptly appeared. The only juba in the known world lived within the Skandha Range.

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I’m the one who saved the seaside stronghold, so why is most of the good karma going to Diexi and Qing Han?

Lu Yun was a little dejected on his way back. He’d thought he would earn the goodwill of eight hundred thousand soldiers and be propelled to the origin core realm, but the enormous amount that appeared flowed toward the zombie king and his friend instead.

The amount he’d received in the end was pitifully small. Nevertheless, they’d all benefited tremendously in other ways overall. The creatures that the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals had captured were earth-shattering enough, but there was Empress Myrtlestar’s ancient heritage, too.

Near the end of the battle earlier, the blackwater snake had intertwined around the juba to form the Black Tortoise’s image. The black dragon had then picked up both with his mouth and tossed them into the scroll, where they were now sealed.

It wouldn’t take long for the turtle and snake to fuse into a true, living Black Tortoise. When they did, the new life would immediately possess the power of a dao immortal.

The Divine Azure Dragon King that was currently recovering inside the Scroll was inscrutably strong as well. At its peak, it likely rivaled the strongest immortals in the world. Unfortunately, the severity of its injuries hampered it from doing much in its current state.

After fighting against the dragon king, Empress Myrtlestar had fallen into a deep sleep. Her lingering obsession had merged with her soul fragment, and who knew when she'd next awaken.

Naturally, Lu Yun brought the Scroll and Emperor Star inside the Gates of the Abyss and borrowed the energies of hell for a careful sweep. He handed them back to Qing Han only after he'd made sure they were perfectly safe.

Compared to his friend, he had gained even more. A seed from the Sal Tree of Life and Death! That would tremendously accelerate his cultivation. The sprout's growth would support and fill out the hell behind the Gates of the Abyss, slowly restoring it to the fearsome locale of death it was meant to be.

Qing Han remained in Dusk Province, residing in Lu Yun's manor. He was both propping up the governor and taking refuge from his own woes. He had far too many treasures on him at the moment; if he returned to his clan now, its oldest members would probably take note and rob him clean. Thus, his older brother and cousin had forced him to stay here in protective exile.

He was still the Nephrite celestial emperor's envoy in name, overseeing the province on His Majesty's behalf.

The coming days were idyllic in their peacefulness.

Lu Yun didn't do much to intentionally gather goodwill. In the eyes of his people, he was still the same ol' supreme bastard—the kind that did nothing but villainy all day long. If he suddenly did anything out of the ordinary, not only would he not be able to collect goodwill, but it'd backfire and he'd only draw the wrong kind of karma.

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Fifteen days from the governor's reselection, something momentous happened in Dusk Province. What was sunny and clear blue skies just a second ago abruptly darkened as a bank of stormy clouds rolled in to blot out the entire sky.

A calamitous wave picked up on the North Sea, pushing infinitely close to the seaside stronghold. Countless monster spirits were gathered by the wave—innumerable golden, arcane, and peerless immortals among them.

In the heart of the governor's residence, Lu Yun and Qing Han stood side by side atop Mooncatcher Tower, gazing into the north.

"They're finally here," the governor said with a frown.

There was no way the North Sea court would accept the disappearance of their king outside the human stronghold. Moreover, competition within the province over the ancient lord's heritage was truly heating up. The other regions in the world of immortals had no reason or energy to interfere, but the disappearance of one of their kings gave the North Sea monsters the perfect excuse.

“Return the King of Southern Subjugation or all of Dusk Province will be flooded! Our destruction will be mutual!” A deafening voice echoed across the province, causing innumerable lives to raise their heads with shock.

“Return our king!”

“Return our king!”

“Return our king!”

The land trembled beneath the chorus, even as the tidal wave reached the stronghold’s walls. The North Sea emperor didn’t dare step foot on Dusken earth, but he could and would drown it in an overwhelming deluge! The province’s restriction against golden immortals was powerless against the encroaching water.

“Your King of Southern Subjugation is already dead. What d’you want me to do about it?” Up in Mooncatcher Tower, Lu Yun snorted in derision at the northern sky. His modest voice was broadcast to the entire province through the provincial seal.

The humans of the province were astounded by this revelation: the North Sea King of Southern Subjugation, the giant that had a constant eye on invading the province, was dead?

A wave of impromptu cheering washed through the citizenry.

Dusk Province and North Sea monster spirits were longtime mortal enemies of each other. Beigong Zhen, the King of Southern Subjugation, was every person’s nightmare.

Dusk Province was a fairly barren place; the North Sea wasn’t much better off, but it was considerably better-endowed than its terran neighbor. Dusk Province cultivators often explored the sea for natural resources. Alas, the King of Southern Subjugation, that great blackwater snake, patrolled the sea like an inexorable guardian.

The human cultivators were overjoyed to hear that their number one threat in the sea was finally gone, despite the monster spirit emperor that was currently threatening the northern border.

I don’t get it. I’m the one who dealt with that king. Why is the goodwill from that headed to the south?

As the owner of the Sal Tree sapling, Lu Yun could visibly see the streams of karma. Rather than coming to him, they flew to the south... where the Nephrite capital was. Evidently, Dusk Province’s inhabitants attributed the beneficial feat to their emperor’s work.

“If you cannot return our king, then let Dusk Province... be destroyed!”

Boom!

An explosion ripped through the void as a mountain of water displaced the air and the surging wave crashed down upon the seaside stronghold with crushing force.

Chapter 132: The Celestial Emperor’s Trial

The provincial seal floated in front of Lu Yun. Just as the enormous tsunami came crashing down, the power of the land suddenly erupted and formed a massive wall that blocked the sea waters.

Hack!

However, Lu Yun immediately spat out a mouthful of blood.

Crack crack crack...

All of his bones creaked and groaned loudly from bearing too much stress.

“Lu Yun!” Pale with fright, Qing Han reached out a hand to help him.

“Don’t touch me!” Lu Yun growled. Through the power of the land, his body was now a rampart that withstood the fearsome waves. If Qing Han touched him, his friend would be instantly ground to dust, given that he lacked the seal’s protection.

Boom!

Lu Yun called upon the seal and conjured a mighty aura that exploded outward and forced Qing Han back. His figure then slowly rose in the air, the seal floating over his head as it continued gathering the province’s power to repel the tsunami and torrential downpour from the heavens.

However, his cultivation was too low to mobilize the land’s prodigious power in its entirety; inch by inch, the daunting waves drew ever closer to the stronghold.

Humm.

The governor’s manor suddenly lit up.

Five golden dragons shot into the sky and circled around Lu Yun, his neat topknot exploding into a mess of hair as the brightness coming from the seal became blinding.

“I’m the root cause for the situation, so I should naturally be the one to solve it.” Though calm, the tone of his voice brooked no argument.

Qing Han bit his lip, but ultimately didn’t approach him.

“Hehehe, North Sea Emperor? You’re nothing but a feral animal. How dare a wild mongrel kick up a fuss in Nephrite Major?” Lu Yun soared to the dome of the sky, his figure boring a hole in the thick black clouds. Golden sunlight spilled in from the opening, illuminating the province and dispersing the heavy, stifling atmosphere.

“Die, life core bug!” The North Sea Emperor raged at Lu Yun’s provocation.

Boom!

Deafening thunder rumbled and roiled above Dusk Province, thick black clouds once again converging to blot out the heavens. This time, there was an addition of a giant black snake, more than five thousand kilometers long, coiled in the sky over the land.

The North Sea Emperor!

The spirit emperor’s true form was that of an immense blackwater snake. Though it didn’t dare enter Dusk Province in person, its formidable powers could still project a giant silhouette into the sky.

The power of the land fiercely shook in response and blood misted out of Lu Yun's every orifice and pore, forming a bloody fog around him.

The Tome of Life and Death vibrated as it attempted to shield its owner, but the limited power it could currently muster was far too lacking to contend with the dreadful monster spirit emperor. The power it had was proportional to Lu Yun's cultivation, and although the giant blackwater snake was dozens of thousands of kilometers away in the North Sea, the governor was still no match for it, even with the help of the book. There was too big a gap between the two of them.

All of a sudden, the book and seed of the sal tree both shrank into a dot before vanishing from Lu Yun's dantian, and even the chaotic hellfire faded into nothingness.

Boom!

As a golden halo rose from the young governor's figure, the five dragons immediately disappeared and were replaced by nine golden divine dragons.

A tall, aureate figure appeared behind him and infinite energy flowed into him, filling his entire being with unprecedented power and making him feel like a single gesture of his could command heaven and earth. It was a very strange and truly glorious feeling.

"I used to think you were nothing but a disgraceful, two-bit womanizer incapable of holding office, but you actually have the courage to face the North Sea Emperor all by yourself! Commendable." A somewhat frivolous voice suddenly reached Lu Yun's ears. "No wonder the little Qing girl is infatuated with you."

"Who is this?" Lu Yun frowned. So this was why the Tome of Life and Death and sal tree had both disappeared so abruptly. They were hiding from the sudden arrival of the all-conquering power now superposed on him.

"Guess," the voice bantered back.

"It must be Your Majesty the Celestial Emperor," Lu Yun deadpanned. "Please forgive this subject for not being in a position to kneel and welcome your arrival."

"How dull." The voice now sounded somewhat bored. "I didn't expect you to hit the mark on the first try."

"Other than Your Majesty, who else would come to your humble servant's rescue at this hour?" Lu Yun shrugged.

"Zhao Fengyang!!" Above the North Sea, the monster spirit emperor roared with fury.

"North Sea Emperor? Don't make me laugh. Just as the Dusk governor said, you're nothing but a feral animal. Stop making a fool of yourself." The Nephrite Emperor sneered. "My true body may be in seclusion, but it's still child's play to flatten a puny reptile like you. Governor of Dusk, withdraw the power of the land. Let's see if this wild snakeling dares flood my domain!

"I will say in advance that if a single drop of water lands in the province, I will slaughter all of the monster spirits of the North Sea. I may have abdicated, but this affront will not be tolerated!" After stepping down from the throne, the Nephrite Emperor no longer used the royal 'We'.

Stillness descended on the North Sea at his threat, and the colossal waves retreated in the blink of an eye.

“Wise choice.” The giant shadow towering behind Lu Yun smirked. “Coveting the ancient lord’s legacy of Dusk Province? You think too little of my Nephrite Major.” Zhao Fengyang suddenly turned to the center of the province, the Dusk Tomb. “Old thing, you, too, should know your place. Don’t go thinking for a second that your restriction will stop me. I would’ve long dug you out and dismembered you if I weren’t worried about harming the people in the process.”

No answer came from the tomb. Zhao Fengyang snorted, but a hint of helplessness was in his expression. He couldn’t do anything against the restriction as long as it hid in the Dusk Tomb. It wasn’t the evil lifeforms inside the tomb that gave him pause, but rather the formations and layouts inside. The enemies that could be found in a tomb were insignificant for a powerhouse of his level.

“The selection in fifteen days won’t be a problem for you, I presume. After I go into seclusion, I hope you can devote yourself to assisting Zhao Changkong. He’s... far from outstanding, but at least he’s a little stronger than the rest.” Zhao Fengyang earnestly looked down at Lu Yun.

“Me? You mean, you want a life core cultivator to help the crown prince?” Lu Yun goggled.

“If I say you’re up to the task, then you are.” A strange note entered Zhao Fengyang’s voice. “Naturally, there will be a little test involved. Since the entire immortal world covets the ancient lord’s legacy, I shall satisfy their wishes.”

An ominous premonition rose in Lu Yun’s chest.

“All of the immortals in the nine majors, ten lands, and four immortal seas are eligible to participate in the selection for Dusk Province’s governor in fifteen days. Whoever achieves a hundred successive victories in the ‘Coretrial Arena’ will be permitted to use the provincial seal to unearth the legacy!” Zhao Fengyang’s voice rippled through the world like giant waves.

The world of immortals boiled over, with some powerhouses reacting immediately. “Is this true?!”

“Naturally. Our promise made is a promise kept.” Zhao Fengyang once again reverted to the royal ‘We’.

“Dusk Province is a special place. Will the power of the land there tolerate foreign cultivators?”

“If We proclaim it so, then so shall it be. As the emperor of Nephrite Major, Dusk Province’s land is Ours to command.”

Lu Yun immediately found that the celestial emperor’s word was law. Through the provincial seal, he could actually sense... fear, emanating from the power of the land! Just what cultivation realm had the emperor attained?

His heart raced involuntarily. No wonder the Tome of Life and Death and the sal tree seed had gone into hiding.

“In fifteen days, he who can defeat the current governor and achieve a hundred victories in succession will be the new governor. Of course, you may step down once you obtain the legacy. Whatever happens on the stage shall stay on the stage, life and death included. Whoever dares cause trouble after the selection will receive a personal visit from Us. Fellow daoists, what say you?”

“It is as it should be,” eight immeasurable voices sounded in unison from all over the immortal world. Lu Yun would now have to face challengers from the world over.

Such was the celestial emperor’s trial.

Chapter 133 The Coretrial Arena

Lu Yun felt like he was staring down the barrel of a gun, if such things existed in this world. Anyone from the immortal world would be allowed to challenge him?

If it weren’t for Zhao Fengyang adding at the end that only cultivators qualified for the challenge—not immortals—he would’ve already thrown away the provincial seal and made a run for it. Even so, stress bore down on him. How vast was the world of immortals?

There were more geniuses in the world than carp in a river. And given the significance of the ancient lord’s legacy, all of the greatest factions in the world would dispatch their most talented geniuses.

In comparison, Lu Yun’s expertise lay in tomb raiding. He was no fighting maniac, unlike Aoxue, who would’ve been delighted to be pitted against experts from all over the world.

In the following days, the governor never once set foot outside, staying behind closed doors to connect the four envoys’ various experiences with each other. In particular, he avidly went over Aoxue’s battle experience as well as all of her immortal arts and combat skills, making them his own. He could already use said skills to begin with, but merely at a superficial level. For instance, he’d only been able to kill the rimesnake king with the dragon princess’ assistance on landing the final blow.

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Undercurrents undulated through the immortal world like the gathering storm. The legacy of the ancient lord was too important for any faction to pass over. Such legacies were usually hidden inside ancient tombs, guarded by layers upon layers of formations and legions of zombies and other monsters. But the one in Dusk Province was simply buried underground and could easily be unearthed as long as one had the provincial seal.

“Foolish! How can imperial father issue such a decree? Is he suffering from a cultivation deviation?”

Crash!

A jade tea cup hit the ground at a high velocity. Since it was made of abnormally strong material, it merely bounced a few times before rolling to the side, undamaged. Zhao Changkong stalked out of his residence, anger plain on his face.

His father had already abdicated, but the fact hadn’t been made public yet. As of now, Zhao Changkong was merely the heir apparent. To be recognized as the true celestial emperor, he needed Zhao Fengyang to publicly announce his decision.

“Has he lost his mind?!” he furiously screamed into the air.

“There must be a profound reason behind Zhao Fengyang’s actions.” Not far away, Wayfarer held a brush in hand as he slowly drew a landscape in the air with a figure standing among the mountains and rivers, a woman of striking and unparalleled beauty.

He suddenly heaved a sigh and erased the woman with a broad stroke while Zhao Changkong collected himself.

“Perhaps imperial father fears a joint attack on Nephrite Major once he goes into seclusion?” The possibility struck him, but Wayfarer slowly shook his head, then erased the landscape in a few more brush strokes, leaving only a river behind.

“Dusk River,” Zhao Changkong subconsciously vocalized as he observed the river’s surging waters, only for Wayfarer to erase the river as well.

“What do you think of my father’s intentions? If the contest for the legacy had been limited to Nephrite Major, then no matter the winner, they would’ve had no choice but to hand it over to the imperial court. But if it ends up in the hands of an outsider, we can say goodbye to all of its gains.” On the verge of ascending to the throne, Zhao Changkong highly valued the legacy of the ancient lord.

“The legacy won’t fall into the hands of a foreigner. It’s sure to stay in Nephrite Major,” Wayfarer replied solemnly. “In fact... heh heh heh, even the governor’s seat is as safe as Mount Tai.”

He gently flicked his brush and sketched a great mountain in the air as he spoke: Mount Tai.

According to legend, it was a mountain where many generations of immortal emperors had once been crowned. It’d disappeared after the great war a hundred thousand years ago, but no one believed that a mountain held in such high esteem by the ancients could so easily be destroyed.

“What do you mean?” Zhao Changkong blinked.

“Lu Yun is more remarkable than you think.” Wayfarer lifted his head and looked toward Dusk Province. “Zhao Fengyang issued this seemingly absurd decree only after he met Lu Yun in person. He means to test the governor,” Wayfarer murmured. “Zhao Fengyang knows I’m here, and he knows about my past. And Lu Yun....”

Some things were better left unsaid.

Yuying had died twelve hundred years ago. In fact, he’d gathered her remains himself and buried her in the ancient tomb outside Dusk City. Yet she had now revived and followed Lu Yun.

Wayfarer had kept this knowledge to himself, because he knew that Lu Yun was the key to his quest to become truly human.

“What’s so special about this Lu Yun?” Zhao Changkong’s sword-like eyebrows creased on his brow. He didn’t have a good impression of the young man—a skirt chaser that did nothing but fritter away his days by stirring up trouble.

“This is likely an evaluation of him.” Wayfarer stayed silent for a long time, then quietly added, “From what I know of Zhao Fengyang, he won’t let others profit from him for no rhyme or reason. He’s testing Lu Yun’s mettle; it’s the only possible explanation.”

Zhao Changkong looked at him, flabbergasted. Was Lu Yun someone worthy of being tested by the celestial emperor? “It seems that imperial father has truly gone mad from a cultivation deviation.” He smiled wryly.

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As the reselection drew closer day after day, the once forlorn and forgotten Dusk Province became increasingly lively.

Once a rare sight, immortals could now be spotted on every street corner. Even geniuses known throughout the lands made an appearance now and then. The entire province was astir, and even Lu Yun himself was deeply unsettled.

As a tomb raider used to the world of darkness, discretion was second nature to him. He'd never craved the limelight. Even as governor, he'd limited himself to small quarrels with poor local cultivators, nothing worth mentioning.

But his back was against the wall, this time, and he had to grapple with an incredibly thorny issue. Despite that, he'd had no choice but to accept the challenge. Given the emperor's temperamental character, he'd certainly smash Lu Yun flat if he refused.

"Revenge is a dish best served cold!" Lu Yun grit his teeth and trained in silence. What he needed most right now wasn't enhanced cultivation, but fighting skills.

A massive structure had fallen from the sky fifteen kilometers to the south of Dusk City: the Coretrial Arena. Once activated, anyone mounting the arena would find their cultivation restricted to the golden core realm. Not even dao immortals were exempt from this rule.

The arena was a relic that'd been unearthed from an ancient tomb. It wasn't terribly useful in and of itself, but it was the most fitting treasure for the emperor's trial.

Chapter 134: Paying the Price with One's Life

"I thought gaining my envoys' memories and experiences would grant me their masteries, but I was definitely wrong." Lu Yun emerged from the Gates of the Abyss, his face swollen and covered in bruises. He swallowed a pill and circulated its medicinal effects through his injuries.

He'd been sparring with Aoxue, the dragon princess having suppressed her cultivation to the life core realm to make it a fair fight. Still, Lu Yun was no match for her.

Whenever they used the same combat art, the results were as different as night and day. Aoxue could even easily counter Lu Yun's Nineteen Cerulean Sword Dragons with a single strike.

It was a heavy blow to his ego indeed.

Aoxue was a once-in-a-thousand-years battle genius of the dragon race. Now that she was a blood dragon, she would be viewed as a top genius in the entire world of immortals. In fact, she'd already been in the top three of the world back in the day, when she was a life core cultivator.

Although Lu Yun possessed all of her experiences and memories, he could only take at most three hits from her when they possessed the same cultivation level. Still, his motivation burned fiercely. After recruiting Aoxue as an Envoy of Samsara, he'd not only gained her experience and memory, but also her talents. As long as he put in the work, he would one day become a battle genius like her.

The passage of time essentially stopped outside the Gates of the Abyss when Lu Yun set foot in hell. Here, he had all the time in the world to digest the envoys' skills and make them his. However, hell was a dead world. Every once in a while, he had to return to the real world, or the energy of hell would taint him, slowly turning him into a monster shunned by the living.

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"I can take four hits from Aoxue now!" A small smile pulled at Lu Yun's bruised face; it was such a tremendous step forward.

Originally, he'd planned to have Aoxue stay in the Skandha Range and investigate the Enneaworm Coffinbearers, but circumstances demanded that he summon her back to be his sparring partner. Otherwise, he wouldn't stand a chance against the great geniuses in the world of immortals.

"Emergency, trouble, trouble, emergency!" Wails traveled in from the door, followed shortly thereafter by Ge Long crawling in, cradling his head.

"What's going on? What's wrong?" Lu Yun frowned and snapped, "Put your head back on first."

"Of course, of course!" Ge Long wiped his head clean of tears, snot, and dirt, then placed it back on his neck. "Milord, the two ladies started trouble with someone they can't afford to offend in the southern part of the city. They're surrounded by a great number of immortals. Even this old servant almost died at their hands!"

Ge Long was seriously injured, and, in fact, would've died several times over if he'd been a regular golden core cultivator. It was only because his name was written in the Tome of Life and Death that allowed him to survive. Those haughty immortals didn't care about a golden core small fish like him, giving him the opportunity to escape.

"Yuying and Feinie?" Lu Yun blinked. "They're in trouble? Who started it?"

Those two were both on the aloof side. They would never start something, unless someone else provoked them first.

"Lady Feinie wanted to take a look at the Coretrial Arena this morning, so Lady Yuying went with her. Some arrogant womanizer came out of nowhere and harassed them. Lady Feinie drove him away at first, but the skirt chaser returned with his men and attempted to kidnap them." Ge Long continued, "Those bullies even injured Sir Qing Han, who came after hearing what happened, and have surrounded Feinie and Yuying. You must stop them, sir. If—"

"What did you say?" Lu Yun's expression darkened. "Who injured Qing Han?"

"It- it was the young man who harassed the two ladies." Noting Lu Yun's scowl, Ge Long hurriedly added, "But Sir Qing Han probably isn't seriously hurt...."

Lu Yun narrowed his eyes and vanished in a trace of shadow.

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The arena was in utter chaos. Feinie had set up multiple formations, and Yuying had sent her eight swords flying through the air to drive away the incoming immortals. Qing Han sat cross-legged at the

center of the formations: face deathly-pale, eyes screwed shut, and a bit of blood dribbling out the corner of his mouth.

More and more immortals gathered around the edges. Swords and treasures of all colors dyed the premises with a scintillating kaleidoscope of light.

“Hahaha, who do you think you are?!” A foppish young man with slicked-back hair and powdered face jabbed a finger at Qing Han. “Trying to scare me with the celestial emperor of the Nephrite Major? Clean out your ears and bow at my feet! I am Donglin Shaogong, the ninth young master of the foremost aristocracy in the Eminent Aureate Major! Do you want to die, threatening me with a decree from the Nephrite Major’s celestial emperor?”

He widened his eyes in a vicious glare and gestured wildly with a hand fan. “Attack! Raze those formations and tear that black-robed kid apart. Then capture the two fairies and bring them to my room!”

Feinie and Yuying exchanged a hesitant glance. House Donglin was the most powerful house of Aureate Major! That major was also known as the Eminent Aureate Major, spearheading the world of immortals along with the Primus Major.

Nephrite Major was considered mediocre, at best, in the world of immortals, ranking much lower than Aureate Major. The true power of the foremost aristocracy in Aureate Major was immeasurable, and much more domineering than the Qing, Feng, and Lu Clans were in Nephrite Major.

The immortals attacked the formations even more relentlessly under the Donglin scion’s order.

Feinie didn’t dare use the Formation Orb, nor could she counterattack without restraint. She could only struggle arduously with her own personal strength.

“Bastards!!” a voice exploded midair. “What do you two think you’re doing?!” Lu Yun barrelled in atop an enormous fortress ship and ferociously scolded Feinie and Yuying, an accusing finger punctuating each word of his loud censure.

“We await our punishment, Your Excellency.” Feinie and Yuying knelt down, their faces drained of color.

“Oh? So you’re the Dusk governor?” Donglin Shaogong naturally assumed Lu Yun was angry at Feinie and Yuying for offending him. His eyes lit up when they settled on the fortress ship and he struck a lofty pose. “Hahaha, you’re a smart guy. You know it’s stupid to get on my bad side. Hand over the two fairies, the head of the Qing brat, and the fortress ship beneath your feet. I can consider letting you off the hook then.”

“You two have been pulling your punches because you’re afraid of taking lives,” Lu Yun reprimanded with lingering anger. “Are you trying to make the governor’s manor the butt of every joke? Well, you aren’t to be blamed either. I forgot to tell you that while I don’t seek out trouble, I’m not afraid of it. Go on, let yourselves loose.”

He sighed, “Whoever hurt Qing Han will pay with his life. No one from House Donglin will walk away alive. No mercy, no quarter!”

Qing Han shook slightly when he heard Lu Yun.

“Understood!” Yuying and Feinie responded in unison with trembling voices. They’d been worried about making an enemy out of House Donglin, so they pulled back after learning who the young man was. However, their master didn’t seem to care about that at all!

Chapter 135: To Make An Example

Qing Han quite shared the sentiment. He hadn’t wanted to create difficulties for Lu Yun, which was why he’d flashed the imperial token, hoping to give Donglin Shaogong pause. However, the latter had shown nothing but contempt for an imperial envoy and even injured him.

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“What? Say that again!” Donglin Shaogong stared at Lu Yun’s figure on the ship, thoroughly flabbergasted. Did this governor have a death wish, talking like this?

In Aureate Major, House Donglin was the sun. Everyone except the Aureate emperor was beneath their notice, yet a measly provincial governor now spoke of killing them? Perhaps this fool didn’t know how to spell the word ‘death’.

Lu Yun ignored him entirely, instead ramming the fortress ship straight into House Donglin’s group.

“Damn it. Fall back, fall back!” An august immortal beside Donglin Shaogong turned pale with fright and beat a hasty retreat while protecting the young master.

Boom!

A tremendous ripple spread through the air in a deafening explosion, instantly scattering the crowd of high and mighty members of House Donglin like a herd of chickens and dogs running for their lives.

“Kill them!” Lu Yun’s lips were turning pale, and his breathing was growing labored. Controlling the ship didn’t require his own internal energy, but it was a mental strain nevertheless.

“Understood!” Yuying and Feinie flew out of the formations and joined hands to attack House Donglin’s immortals.

“Yuying, Feinie, no need to hold back. Immortal fires, Formation Orb, throw whatever you want at them!” Lu Yun ordered coldly.

The Nephrite emperor might be testing him, but that also meant he’d stand behind his governor and lend a hand, if need be. Accordingly, Lu Yun couldn’t be bothered to hide his trump cards.

The Formation Orb and immortal fires themselves were treasures that even dao immortals would fight over. Therefore, just as the emperor wanted to test Lu Yun, Lu Yun also flipped the trial on its head as well.

If the latter continued staying on the sidelines despite the emergence of these treasures, Lu Yun would immediately gather his belongings, ditch the province, and leave this mess to whoever wanted it.

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Hummm!

The power of the Formation Orb erupted as Feinie crossed her arms in front of her chest and great formations fell from the sky one after another in a split second, sealing off the area.

Meanwhile, an emerald fire appeared in Yuying's hand and grew into a sea of flame that flooded the perimeter created by the new formations. Instead of invoking the other two immortal fires, she'd chosen the one she was most familiar with: Emerald Mistfire.

Lu Yun had previously used all three flames to incinerate the zombie tree, but the seeds of the flames had remained with her. As long as they did, they provided her with a perpetual source of the immortal fires.

Beset by flame and formations, House Donglin's immortals perished one after another. It was simply impossible for trivial august immortals to resist the might of the two supreme treasures.

.....

"Governor of Dusk! Do you know who I am?! You're a dead man if you dare harm a hair on my head!! House Donglin will chase you to the ends of the world!" Inside the sea of fire and surrounded by a protective circle of august immortals, Donglin Shaogong barked out threat after threat, his expression filled with terror and malice.

Lu Yun couldn't be bothered with him at all. He jumped down from the ship and landed beside Qing Han. A thick concentration of goodwill burst out from his friend and flowed into his body, further enhancing his cultivation.

However, it wasn't just pure gratitude in this goodwill. There was something else mixed in it, something he couldn't quite put his finger on.

"You've noticed something, haven't you?" Qing Han forestalled him.

"Ah? What am I supposed to notice?" Lu Yun replied with confusion. However, Qing Han stared deep into his eyes without blinking, making him feel a little self-conscious. "Did he break your brains with that blow to your head?"

He gently rubbed his friend's brow with his hand, his gesture instantly dispelling the atmosphere that Qing Han had built up. Inadvertently, Lu Yun had once again succeeded in preventing the disguised girl from explaining certain things.

"Forget it!" Qing Han slapped the governor's hand away. "Aren't you afraid of offending House Donglin? They're even more powerful than the Qing, Lu, and Feng Clans."

"So what? They can be as strong as they like, they're still part of Aureate Major. Are they going to wage war on Nephrite over a few dead immortals? Will Aureate? And even if they did, would they dare set foot in Dusk Province?"

High-level immortals shied away from the province's restriction, and even the Nephrite celestial emperor was powerless against it. Therein lay Lu Yun's greatest shield. I really ought to visit Dusk Tomb sometime in the future and have a heart-to-heart with that dear ole restriction.

"But you'll have to leave the province sooner or later. This place is only a small pond. To grow, you must overlook the entire immortal world!" Qing Han sighed.

“Even dragons hide in deep waters; I must bide my time.” Lu Yun shook his head gently. “By the time I leave this place, I’ll be a dragon flying high in the sky.”

Qing Han stared at him, tongue-tied and uncertain what to say.

Plop!

Yuying lifted Donglin Shaogong and tossed him in front of the pair.

“Sir, other than this man, all three hundred and seventy two members of House Donglin have been eradicated,” she respectfully reported while extinguishing the Emerald Mistfire.

“Let go of me, let go of me! Don’t you know who I am? I’m the ninth young master of House Dongling. How dare you treat me like this?! You’re all dead, all dead!” Donglin Shaogong screamed madly, spraying spittle at Lu Yun.

With a cultivation at the peak transformed spirit realm, he was only a half a step away from immortality. He just needed to undergo a heavenly tribulation to become a true immortal, but like others, he’d chosen to come and participate in the governor selection instead.

“Yes, yes. Don’t you have anything other than this tired song and dance? Try something new for a change,” Lu Yun sighed. “You outsiders have kicked up quite a fuss over the past few days. I was too busy to deal with you lot, but now’s a good chance to give you all a warning. Kill a chicken to warn the monkeys, as they say.

“Didn’t you people see how well-behaved cultivators and immortals from Nephrite Major become once they enter Dusk City?”

Over the past few days, many outsiders had drenched the streets in blood and even extinguished a few local cultivator clans while bickering over lodging. In comparison, the factions native to Nephrite Major had kept a low profile. After all, it hadn’t been long ago that the governor had killed a Clan Lu elder and forbidden the clan to set foot in Dusk Province. His brutality was still fresh in their minds.

“W-what are you plotting?” At Lu Yun’s elusive smile, Donglin Shaogong shuddered despite himself, a chill rising from the bottom of his feet.

“Chop his head off, seal his nascent spirit inside his skull, and hang it above the southern city gates. Anyone else who causes unrest will also be dealt with in this way.”

“Understood.” Yuying nodded.

“Y-you can’t do that! I’m House Donglin’s ninth young lord, my father is Donglin Yuhuang, he’s—”

Chop!

Yuying flourished her sword, beheading him before he could finish. Feinie used a hand seal to imprison his nascent spirit inside the freshly severed head before the spirit could escape. They then grabbed the head and flew it to the southern gates.

“Let this be a lesson to you all,” Lu Yun’s voice reverberated from one end of Dusk City to the other. “I will let bygones be bygones, but if anyone dares overstep their bounds from now on, you will suffer the same fate as him.

“Nephrite Major is no fruit ripe for the picking. Don’t go thinking Dusk Province is weak! Until the day of the reselection, I am still the governor and this is still my domain! In my house, dragons will stay quietly coiled and tigers will stay obediently crouched!”

Goodwill suddenly converged from every direction and merged into his dantian.

Hummm!

The germinated seed of the Sal Tree of Life and Death burgeoned into lush green as thin rootstalks extended and embedded themselves into the emptiness of his dantian. He could even sense a dream-like glow undulating around them.

In the blink of an eye, his cultivation skyrocketed to the apex of the life core realm, only a hair's breadth away from the origin core realm.

Chapter 136: Picking Up Bad Habits

“I’ve finally won their acceptance.” Lu Yun sighed with relief when he felt the flow of goodwill from Dusk City. Although it wasn’t much, it was all directed to him, which meant that the cultivators in the city approved of this job performance.

That was a very good start.

I’m close to ascending to the origin core realm, but no hurry. I still have time. With a wave of his hand, he bid the hovering fortress ship to land.

Having taken care of that trivial matter, Lu Yun quickly put the thought of House Donglin from the Aureate Major out of his mind. What bothered him was the way he’d flown into a rage when he heard that Qing Han had been injured. He had many good friends back on Earth, but that had never been his response to a good friend’s injury before.

Has he somehow turned me gay? He decisively swept the random mess away with a firm shake of his head and retreated back to the Gates of the Abyss, beginning his grueling training regime anew.

.....

“That’s the head of the ninth young master, sir!” A group halted outside the southern city gate, looking up at the head hanging over the walls.

“This subordinate will—” A man in crimson robes moved to retrieve the head with the young master’s nascent spirit, but another man stopped him.

“No need. Let the embarrassing brat hang there and reflect over his mistakes,” said a middle-aged man with a visage that demanded respect. He carried himself with a majestic walk, and the qi of the land wreathed around him at all times. Clearly, he was a high-level immortal who’d sealed his own cultivation.

“However, we must teach that governor a lesson for disrespecting House Donglin.” The authoritative, middle-aged man’s expression turned frosty. “Soldiers, charge. Raze all of Dusk City except for the southern gate! I want the Dusk governor to retrieve Shaogong’s head on his knees.”

“Understood!” exclaimed hundreds of immortals in golden armor behind him. They rushed toward the city like a golden wave. All of them were high-level immortals who’d sealed away their cultivation. Even in this state, they were much more powerful than regular august immortals.

“Be ready, Zhu He.” The middle-aged man turned to a man in crimson by his side. “As soon as the governor’s pet zombie shows up, capture it with the Mirror of Reincarnation.”

“Understood.” The man vanished in a flash of red.

“Celestial Emperor of Nephrite Major?” The middle-aged man’s gaze turned mocking. “So what if you’re powerful? Your major is so weak. What can you do when House Donglin takes the Dusk Province seal by force and acquires the legacy of the ancient lord? Are you going to risk offending the Eminent Aureate Major?”

The immortals in golden armor began their attack on the city by making quick work of the grand defensive formation.

Roar!!

That was the cue for a tremendous dragon howl to explode from within the city. A giant black dragon head poked over the city walls with its maw wide open, creating a terrifying suction force. It devoured all of the armored immortals in a quick flash.

“What is that?!” The sudden appearance of a ten-thousand-yard long black dragon floored both the middle-aged man and Zhu He, the man in crimson who’d concealed himself in the air.

“Where did that wild dragon come from?” raged the middle-aged man. “How dare it injure the immortals of House Donglin?!”

Reaching the golden immortal realm made one royalty in this world, enabling them to preside over a city. Therefore, it was no easy task to create an army of golden immortals. Forming an eight-hundred-strong troop of entirely golden immortals was an impressive feat, even by the standards of the world of immortals.

The eight hundred armored immortals that’d just been eaten alive were all golden immortals, and one of the stronger troops in House Donglin’s employ. However, the immortals, with their cultivation sealed, had been swallowed by a black dragon before they could do anything.

Such an ignoble end quite enraged the middle-aged man, who held absolute power over his house.

“House Donglin again?” A young man clad in black floated to a graceful landing on the head of the black dragon. With a hand on the dragon’s horn, he settled his cold gaze on the middle-aged man. “Didn’t you learn your lesson last night?”

“You aren’t the Dusk governor. Who are you?!” The man narrowed his eyes and began undoing his seal. However, a cold, murderous intent locked on to him when his aura approached a tipping point, intimidating him into reinforcing the seal and halting the attempted ascension.

The Dusk Province restriction was certainly no child's play.

"Me?" The young man smiled. "I'm an envoy of His Majesty the Celestial Emperor of Nephrite Major, here to preside over the selection on his behalf. House Donglin has challenged Nephrite Major's authority one too many times. It seems you truly hold no respect for His Majesty."

Qing Han's expression turned frosty and he manifested the shiny token that represented the will of the celestial emperor. His bright voice rang throughout the province, "By the order of His Majesty the Celestial Emperor, House Donglin of the Aureate Major is hereby divested of their right to pursue the seat of the Governor of Dusk. Moreover, all Donglin immortals are to piss off from Dusk Province within thirty breaths, or there will be no mercy shown and no quarter!"

.....

"Qing Han's changed! He's picked up Lu Yun's bad habits! That governor's a bad influence!" Feng Li collapsed to the ground from his vantage point in the city.

Lu Yun had turned the Lu Clan into a Nephrite laughingstock by prohibiting the clan from entering Dusk Province. And now Qing Han had done the same... no, he'd done something even worse!

He'd humiliated House Donglin with the entire world as witness! Did he really not worry that this would trigger a war between Nephrite and Aureate?

.....

"I don't know them, I don't! Mommy, I wanna go home!" Li Youcai shot out of Duskwater City in the throes of a tearful breakdown, but a strand of starlight caught up with him in the next moment. Mo Yi grabbed his giant meatball of a body and set a course for Dusk City.

"Lu Yun and Qing Han, hmm hmm. They're quite heroic alright. Come, let's go show our support for them!" Carrying Li Youcai like a sack of potatoes, she vanished from her city in a flash of starlight.

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"What did you say?!" It took some time for the middle-aged man to recover from his shock. His eyes blazed with uncontained fury when he digested what had just happened. "Say that again?!"

"Thirty breaths have passed. Kill all members of House Donglin."

Roar!!

The black dragon under Qing Han's feet shook the skies with its furious howl. Its giant body soared into the air and lunged at the man.

"Peerless immortal!" The man widened his eyes. "Isn't there a restriction here forbidding all immortals over the golden immortal level? Why is there a peerless immortal here? Is the restriction a lie?!"

Clink!

A strange glyph appeared between his eyebrows and shattered.

Chapter 137: The Gray Eyes In The Sky

Crack!

A clap of seemingly thunder rumbled out from the middle-aged man's figure, unleashing an aura exceeding that of peerless immortal. Power as weighty as a mountain and deeply vigorous as the sea surged from the immortal, dimming the sky and cowing all things while a golden halo flickered into being around him.

"Donglin Yuhuang! It's Dongling Yuhuang, the head of House Donglin!!!" An ear-piercing shriek came from Dusk City when someone realized the man's identity.

The house head's cultivation might not have been as high as some of the old monsters out there, but in Aureate Major, his status and authority were second only to their celestial emperor. No one had imagined that he'd pay a personal visit to Dusk Province!

In fact, he likely wouldn't have revealed himself if not for Qing Han releasing the black dragon that ate all eight hundred golden immortals in a single gulp. Though the immortals had sealed away their cultivation, the entire troop was still gone in a second.

"Daddy, help! Save me!" The head hanging above the city gates bawled as soon as it realized Donglin Yuhuang had come.

"Stop whining, you utter disgrace!" the latter roared back furiously. Having broken the seal on his cultivation, Donglin Yuhuang clasped his hands behind his back and ascended to a lofty vantage point in the air, surveying Dusk City with disdain.

A strange stillness descended over the city while the people stared at him dumbly, incredulity in their eyes.

"What restriction? Nephrite Major's immortals are just playing with smoke and mirrors. This so-called restriction never existed to begin with." Donglin Yuhuang looked down at the stupefied masses below, mockery quirked his lips.

"Daddy, help me..." Donglin Shaogong continued wailing, his imprisoned nascent spirit frantically bouncing inside his skull.

"Silence!" Oh, how the Donglin house head wished he could smash his son's head in! This lowlife was nothing but a stain on House Donglin's name.

"No, that's not it!" Donglin Shaogong suddenly screamed in terror, "Daddy, behind you, behind you!"

"Hm?" Bemused, Donglin Yuhuang reflexively looked backward; what came into view made all the hairs on his body stand on end. An ice-cold chill coursed from the bottom of his feet all the way to the top of his head.

A pair of enormous, gray eyes had appeared in the sky above without warning. Each eye was thousands of kilometers wide, like a giant, invisible face had come into being in the sky. Cold and devoid of emotion, they looked down indifferently at the haughty head of House Donglin. They emitted no particular aura or presence, as though they were a mere painting drawn in the clouds. Perhaps no one would've noticed their existence, if not for the suddenness of their appearance.

“Are you that so-called restriction?” Donglin Yuhuang forced himself to calm down, a fiery fighting spirit burning in his eyes. “You are in the presence of the Eminent Aureate Major’s distinguished Hous—”

Roar!!

The snarl of a wild beast echoed through the land, interrupting the immortal and distorting the flow of energy in the surroundings.

Donglin Yuhuang opened his mouth and vomited blood.

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“So this is the Dusk Province restriction, a taboo that’s existed in Nephrite Major for a thousand years!” Having retrieved the black dragon, Qing Han now stood atop a building in the city as he stared spellbound at the giant eyes. Despite the eyes’ apparent lack of power, they exerted extraordinary psychological pressure. If not for his Scroll of Shepherding Immortals and Imperial Star, he wouldn’t have dared look at them directly.

“Yeah, my ears are worn out from all the times people have mentioned it. It’s about time I saw it for myself.” Lu Yun had come to his side at some time. “The head of House Donglin falls far short of the Nephrite Emperor. The emperor can threaten the restriction without fear, but this house head can’t even stand to look it in the eyes,” he murmured as he looked at the dejected Donglin Yuhuang in the sky.

“The restriction overpowered him with a single glance... I wonder what on earth it is. A zombie? An immortal ghost? Or is it something else?” he muttered under his breath while scrutinizing said eyes.

“I don’t know, and she’s not certain either,” Qing Han responded. He’d taken a moment just now to ask the just-awakened Empress Myrtlestar, but not even she knew the secret behind the restriction.

Humm!

A light thrum suddenly reverberated in the air as Dongling Yuhuang gently burst like an ephemeral bubble, his entire being vanishing without a trace.

In the city, cultivators and immortals alike gasped with fright. Donglin Yuhuang may not have been the strongest heavyweight in the immortal world, but he was still a powerful dao immortal, at the very least. Despite that, he’d been as sturdy as a bubble! Just what kind of existence was the Dusk Province restriction to snuff out a dao immortal in full view of the gathered crowd!

Some foreign immortals who’d previously been skeptical immediately discarded their suspicions and reinforced their own seals, layering seal upon seal lest they attract the eyes’ attention as well.

To the crowd’s relief, the eyes slowly faded away after extinguishing Donglin Yuhuang, until—

“Wait a second!” A clear and resounding shout suddenly came from Dusk City. “I want to chat with you!”

Chat? Who wanted to chat with whom?

Numerous immortals milled around in confusion, their brains still off-kilter from the fearsome restriction’s oppressiveness. At such a time, few could maintain their lucidity. A frail figure soon

appeared in front of them, riding on purple sword light as it took to the sky and arrived in front of the barely present eyes.

“Don’t be in such a hurry to go back. I want to chat with you,” the voice added, causing countless immortals to comically crash into the floor. What blithering idiot was so bold as to talk to the restriction?!

Who did he think he was? An ancient immortal emperor from the legends?

When the rest wished for nothing more than the restriction to leave as soon as possible, there was someone trying to talk to it!

“It’s the governor! He’s talking to the restriction. How... fearless...” some shouted when they recognized Lu Yun. Everyone held their breath. Who knew what consequences Lu Yun’s actions would have?

The almost faded eyes solidified once again, but unlike last time, there was now a flash of emotion in the dusky pupils.

“I shall converse with you when you are strong enough to enter my tomb.” Loud enough to rouse the dead, the expansive voice shook everyone’s mind, causing spells of grogginess.

“Alright!” Lu Yun replied immediately. “But as long as I’m governor of Dusk Province, there can be no further riots from those evil spirits!”

Dizzy with shock, the people weren’t sure they’d heard correctly. What was he doing? Negotiating with the terrifying restriction? They could already imagine the outcome. Just like Donglin Yuhuang, the governor was going to turn into a bubble, then burst with a pop.

“Agreed,” the incommensurable voice replied. Then, the eyes slowly disappeared from sight.

Chapter 138: Death Art, Mastery of the Five Elements

Stillness descended upon Dusk City, but was quickly broken by earth-shattering cheers that shook the entire city. Moved to tears, countless cultivators spread the word that the long-dreaded uprisings of evil spirits were amazingly no longer an issue!

No one questioned a personal promise from the restriction itself.

“Agreed.” A single word, as heavy as Mount Tai.

Colossal goodwill surged into Lu Yun from all directions, wildly expanding the sal tree seed and releasing a blinding jade brilliance that bathed every meridian in his body in verdant light. The light vanished about a dozen breaths later, revealing a thumb-sized tree rooted in his dantian.

Marvelous energy rippled out from the sapling and repeatedly washed over Lu Yun’s consciousness. The hopes of all things living and the resentment of the most wicked demons deluged him again and again, keeping his mind empty and clear.

The vibrant energy generated by the small tree sent Lu Yun’s cultivation soaring. He broke past the life core realm in the blink of an eye, reaching peak origin core realm!

Too bad I didn’t break through to the spirit realm!

At the same time, he knew he hadn't been cultivating for nearly long enough. No matter how great the feedback from the seed was, he couldn't expect outrageous progress without sufficient accumulation of tenure and enlightenment. This much was enough.

Upon reaching peak origin core realm, he obtained another death art: Mastery of the Five Elements.

"The five elements?" Blinking, he subconsciously lifted his hand and clutched at the northern sky.

Whirr!

A current of black air solidified and dropped into his hand, twinkling into the purest of water essence.

"What—" beside him, Qing Han gasped with shock. "This is the energy of connate water in its purest form, unsoiled by any environmental influence. How did you do that?" He goggled. "Countless pill makers or master refiners would go to war over even this tiny bit..."

"I see, so that's what this art is about." The Mastery of the Five Elements used Lu Yun's own body as a locus to attract nature's elements. However, his cultivation was still too weak, so he could gather only the weakest of elemental energies, like the small amount of water essence he now held.

Upon further thought, the ability felt somewhat familiar to him. Wait, isn't this an ability of the four sacred beasts?

Realization suddenly struck him. The Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird, and Black Tortoise—the four legendary sacred beasts also possessed similar abilities to shape the elements into formidable arts. However, each sacred beast ruled over only one element, while this death art of his could manipulate all five.

"Connate elemental energies can be crafted into pills and treasures, but more importantly, they can also temper the flesh. If you polish your body everyday with this water essence, your physique will soon far exceed those at a comparable cultivation level," Qing Han explained as he stared at the water essence in Lu Yun's hand with slight envy.

"Temper the body, you say?" Lu Yun's eyes shone and he clutched toward the horizon in all five directions: north, south, east, west, and center.

Before long, the connate energies of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth brimmed in his hand. With a single thought, he turned them into five glittering, revolving beads and pushed them into Qing Han's hands.

"When it comes to body tempering, you're the one who needs it most. Just look at your build, it's so flabby I can't see any muscle definition. You have to really work at bulking up!" He put his hand on Qing Han's chest and gave it a slight squeeze. "Where are your pecs? Look at me!"

He grabbed Qing Han's hand and placed it on his chest, then flexed his chest muscles, making his friend blush bright red. Qing Han hastily yanked his hand back and fled back to the city in a flash of snowy sword light.

Lu Yun rubbed his forehead, then headed in as well.

.....

Dusk Province's restriction had indeed revealed itself, and even killed the head of House Donglin as easily as one would swat dead a mosquito. The news soon spread to every corner of the immortal world.

Every immortal that set foot in Dusk Province now did so with trepidation, no longer daring to even entertain the idea of unleashing their true cultivation. What was even more shocking to them was that, even though widely known as good-for-nothing trash that was unable to cultivate and abandoned by Nephrite Major's imperial court, the governor was intrepid enough to negotiate terms with the restriction. He'd even convinced it not to let the evil spirits run amok!

"No matter his relationship with the restriction, we need to get our hands on the ancient lord's legacy!"

"Is that restriction as strong as they say? I wonder if it'd survive eight celestial emperors attacking it together!"

Though Lu Yun had reached an unprecedented agreement, it still wasn't enough to deter the other immortals. On the contrary, if the restriction dared interfere with the ancient legacy, the eight celestial emperors would surely jointly attack Dusk Province, tear open the Dusk Tomb, and rip that restriction to pieces.

Nevertheless, Aureate Major's House Donglin was now a target of ridicule.

The Nephrite emperor's envoy had slapped their faces in broad daylight, and even their house head had perished in Dusk Province. Although they were furious, House Donglin's immortals dared not take revenge.

Their emperor issued a decree forbidding further trouble in Nephrite Major, promising severe punishment for violators. The Aureate emperor also silenced the house's dissatisfaction through a combination of force and threats, his harsh actions coming down on them like a ruthless bucket of ice-cold water that shocked the house awake and reminded them of who truly ruled Aureate Major.

House Donglin had always considered itself the supreme faction in the major. They even looked down on the imperial clan itself, so much so that the contemporary house head had named himself Yuhuang, which used the characters for 'Plume Emperor'.

The significance of that was plain for all to see. Ergo, this had been a perfect opportunity for the Aureate emperor to take them down a peg.

.....

Lu Yun remained deaf to outside matters, no matter the storms raging at large in the world. Instead, thanks to Qin Han's pointer, he bent his mind to tempering his body with the elemental essences. He finally understood the disparity between him and Aoxue: sheer, physical strength!

Although Aoxue's cultivation was sealed at the golden core realm, she still possessed the body of an immortal. Her every movement contained a formidable strength that proved difficult for Lu Yun to withstand. If he could match her physique, he might last a few more moves against her.

As his body's strength soared, his training bouts with Aoxue became increasingly spectacular, sharpening his fighting senses at a dazzling pace. At present, he could rely on not only the dragon

princess' fighting aptitude, but also Feinie's formations, Xuanxi's talismans, and Yuying's fire arts as one whole.

"Sir, you are skilled enough to cope with those cultivators out there." Aoxue suddenly stopped, cutting a somewhat sorry figure as the front of her clothes had been torn by her master's palm strike.

"Just like that?" Lu Yun blinked.

"The arena isn't a contest of just fighting prowess. You can also use various weapons or treasures. In fact, you can even summon the bean soldiers." The dragon princess' smile was soon echoed by Lu Yun's own.

Weapons and treasures?

He had a ninth-rank immortal sword in his possession. Was there any other core realm cultivator in the world who could wield the power of a weapon like that at his level?

Chapter 139: You're Less Than Him

The day of the reselection had finally arrived!

As a remote backwater of Nephrite Major, Dusk Province was rarely visited by immortals. A spirit realm cultivator was already considered an unequalled powerhouse there, and the proportion of mortals in the general population was far higher than elsewhere. Even Nephrite Major's immortals sometimes forgot the territory's existence.

Like a stone thrown into the vast ocean, the reselection should've been a trivial affair. It shouldn't have stirred up any ripples, but today, this pebble had splashed forth torrential waves and shaken the entire world. Countless powerful factions far and wide focused their attention on this tiny spot of the world, closely monitoring the proceedings.

.....

Fifteen kilometers to the south of Dusk City, dazzling light shimmered around the Coretrial Arena, painting it with a majestic ambiance.

Qing Han's figure hovered quietly in the sky above. He was once again the urbane and genteel young master from a noble family. The imperial seal in his hand enveloped him in an aura as weighty as a mountain, as though the celestial emperor were present in the flesh.

Immortals and cultivators alike crowded around Coretrial Arena from every side, representing all of the notable factions in the vast world. It was no exaggeration to state that half of the geniuses in the nine majors, ten lands, and four immortal seas had convened in the premises.

The legacy of an ancient lord was no small matter, so much so that the great factions had come to a tacit agreement. Whoever achieved a hundred successive victories would unearth the legacy and claim it as their own.

This was a grand occasion that pitted more than half of the geniuses from the world over against each other, an event unprecedented in scope for the past hundred thousand years. In fact, many hadn't come

to vie for the legacy, but simply to measure themselves against other talents from all corners of the realm.

.....

“Tsk tsk, Little Han is coming up in the world!” In a certain corner of the crowd, a lazy youth lounged bonelessly on a recliner. Two charming female immortals stood at his sides, kneading his shoulders every now and then. “Back then, I simply gave him the token I stole from the emperor. To think His Majesty would really acknowledge him as an imperial envoy! Not bad, not bad, Little Han is really making a name for himself. What a tremendous honor to preside over such an occasion, what great glory this brings to his ancestors! This will go down in history for your Qing Clan.”

The young man was all smiles as he looked at the figure floating in midair.

“Stole? Didn’t you say His Majesty gave it to you before going into seclusion?” Beside him, a tall, stocky, and exceptionally handsome man stared at the indolent youth, his eyes wide from disbelief. “Chen Xiao, don’t you scare me!”

“Qing Buyi, are you an idiot?” Taken aback, Chen Xiao widened his eyes at the tall youth and snorted. “If I hadn’t said that, do you think Little Han would’ve accepted it? What’s all the fuss about, anyway? It’s just a stolen token, what can the emperor do to me?”

Awkwardness crept into Qing Buyi’s face.

“That Zhao Changkong is also here. I hope he’ll refrain from shaming himself this time.” A murderous glint flashed in Chen Xiao’s eyes. “That bastard released the monster that was sealed a thousand years ago on the Water Altar. What an absolute disgrace!”

Expression turning grave, Qing Buyi slowly nodded. He’d already spotted the haughty Zhao Changkong seated in the stands.

Celestial Emperor Zhao Fengyang was slated to formally abdicate after this event, making way for Zhao Changkong to be Nephrite Major’s new ruler. At that time, the major would face turbulent times.

Though the imperial envoy, Qing Han, held sway over the reselection, Zhao Changkong had come nonetheless. The message was painfully obvious: he would soon become Nephrite Major’s true master. As such, how could he be absent from such an extraordinary event?

.....

“The hour is upon us!” In the sky, Qing Han’s eyes snapped open. His voice was bright, clear, and marked with authoritative dignity, despite a touch of gentleness. “Step forward, Governor of Dusk!”

Clad in official robes, Lu Yun walked out of the crowd and leaped onto the stage. A flash of blue radiance sealed his peak origin core cultivation back to the golden core realm.

“How odd.” He stretched out his hand and waved it gently. “If I hadn’t known the arena would seal my cultivation, I probably would’ve been scared witless.”

His cultivation had been sealed in a flawless manner. To the assessing eye, it seemed that he had only ever been, and should only be, at the golden core realm. He peeled off his official robes, revealing close-fitting black clothes.

“Whether you live or die, whatever happens in the Coretrial Arena stays in the Coretrial Arena.” Qing Han’s figure slowly descended from the sky and landed in the stands, his voice ringing through Dusk City. “Admitting defeat, losing consciousness, dying, or falling off the stage will symbolize failure. If someone can overwhelm his opponents with unsurpassed skill and achieve a hundred successive victories, he or she shall become Dusk Province’s new governor, take possession of the province seal, and summon the Sword Pagoda!

“If no one can achieve this feat, then the one with the most wins will be proclaimed the victor.”

The Sword Pagoda was the ancient lord’s supreme treasure, and contained his legacy.

“There is no limit to the number of participants and no order to the challenges. Those who believe they are strong enough may step onto the stage. But if collusion or cheating arises, an execution will be doled out in the name of the nine great celestial emperors.”

The word ‘execution’ elicited answering harmonics from heaven and earth, making the crowd snap to attention. Public knowledge that the nine celestial emperors were monitoring the situation had just been confirmed. It was merely that their august selves weren’t in the public eye, was all.

“Let us begin.”

The crowd stirred with this proclamation.

“Who’s first?” Standing at the center of the stage, Lu Yun surveyed the cultivators below, waiting for his first challenger. A hazy green curtain of light spanned a radius of three hundred meters from the center of the stage, marking the limits of the Coretrial Arena. Falling outside indicated one’s defeat.

However, the crowd just looked at each other, no one willing to take the lead. This governor was rumored to be a wastrel, but he’d been able to speak directly with the restriction a few days ago. His strength was not to be underestimated.

“He’s nothing but trash from an insignificant province! I’ll take him on first,” shouted someone from the throng. A figure landed on the stage, light as a feather. It was a young man of about eighteen years old, his face still carrying a trace of childish innocence.

“Nephrite Major’s Feng Clan, Feng Yin,” he announced.

“Feng Yin? Feng Li’s younger brother?” Lu Yun looked down to where the Feng Clan was seated. As the crown prince’s envoy, Feng Li occupied a seat near the center.

The latter sensed the governor’s gaze and fidgeted uncomfortably before giving a shallow nod. Lu Yun had only been a qi realm bug at their first meeting. But just as the governor had declared then, his cultivation had indeed reached the core realm in less than half a year, giving him the right to stand in the arena.

“Feng Li? How does trash like that deserve to be my brother?” Feng Yin sneered, his voice spreading in every direction. Feng Li’s expression turned awkward and woeful when he sensed the gazes of all his acquaintances on him.

Feng Yin was one of the young geniuses of the clan, on par with the Qing Clan’s Qing Hongchen or the Lu Clan’s Lu Yuanhou. Sadly, those two were already dead. In comparison, Feng Li was nothing but a prodigal wastrel. So even though his peer delivered a public humiliation, he dared not talk back.

“You’re not half the man he is.” Lu Yun shook his head.

“What was that?!” Feng Yin flew into a rage. “Are you saying I’m less than a good-for-nothing like him?”

“I’ve crossed paths with him. His potential might be worse than yours, but overall, you’re a far cry from him.”

Feng Li’s expression twisted with conflicting emotions, and Crown Prince Zhao Changkong assessed Lu Yun with renewed interest. No wonder imperial father chose him to help me. He does indeed possess a keen eye for people.

The crown prince smiled; he, too, thought highly of Feng Li.

“Ridiculous!”

Swoosh!

The furious yell marked Feng Yin's disappearance from the stage. A light wind swirled gently by as countless sword shadows encircled Lu Yun in their midst.

Chapter 140: Cheating?

Sword shadows cascaded onto Lu Yun like torrential rain, every slash biting with killing intent. They wouldn’t be stopped until he was torn into pieces.

He looked at the sword shadows and sighed, not shifting a single step. “You only need one slash to kill a man, what’s all this bandying about for? What a waste of energy.”

He pointed in the air, a faint silver gleam around his fingertip.

Clink!

The clear sound of a collision knocked Feng Yin down from the sky and flung him backward. He only managed to steady himself after his sword flew from his hand and out of the arena. He stared at the Dusk governor with shock.

One hit. He couldn’t even take one hit from Lu Yun!

Surprise rippled through the spectators from Nephrite Capital. Feng Yin was a nascent spirit cultivator, and at the top of his level at that. Among his peers, only cultivators like Lu Yuanhou and Qing Hongchen could’ve rivaled him. Even with his cultivation suppressed to the golden core realm, he was still an absolute expert. How could Lu Yun have possibly knocked him back with a single hit, and even disarm him??

“Impossible!” growled Feng Yin as he disappeared again.

“Nothing is impossible.” Lu Yun stepped forward and punched at the empty air.

Bam!

Feng Yin flew out of the arena with a pained cry.

“There’s no need for trash like this to come up and int,” Lu Yun sighed and blew on his fist. “I want an actual challenge.”

Feng Yin’s eyes rolled to the back of his skull before blacking out. The crowd fell silent, and the members of the Feng Clan wanted to spit blood from pure fury. They didn’t understand what ‘int’ meant, but Lu Yun’s derision was clear in his tone.

“Who’s next?” The defending governor yawned delicately. “Better not bite off more than you can chew. I’ve already defeated one person now. The heritage is mine after another ninety-nine wins.”

“I am!” a voice said as soon as Lu Yun completed his declaration. A well-built, middle-aged man landed on the stage. “We meet again, Governor of Dusk.” The man narrowed his slanted eyes.

“Patriarch of House Ge?” Lu Yun cocked his head at the middle-aged man. “No, you’re the person from the Exalted Immortal Sect back in the ancient tomb.”

The man shook his head. “I’m nothing more than the patriarch of House Ge, now.” No sooner had he manifested a broadsword than his body radiated the aura of immortals. He wielded a first-rank immortal sword!

“Ge Cheng, Patriarch of House Ge of Nephrite Major, answers the challenge!”

Buzz!

Blinding luminescence flared from the sword and spanned three hundred meters, the sword qi almost cutting the arena in half. The crowd erupted into chatter. “An immortal sword! He’s able to wield a first-rank sword even with his cultivation suppressed to golden core!”

Bam!

Its tremendous power shook the very arena beneath their feet.

Expression darkening, Lu Yun attempted to dodge to the side, but the aura projected from the sword was too powerful. It flooded the entire boundary of the arena, leaving him nowhere to go.

“Dammit,” he bit out. “I thought I’d be able to keep this secret for a while, but I guess I have to use it now.”

Hum!

A flash of violet flickered across his body, followed by the swift expansion of a sword shadow that slammed into Ge Cheng’s sword light.

Crack!

The patriarch's sword shattered and the house head himself cracked like a porcelain doll. His sword had been personally refined by a sect elder with a special method, guaranteeing that he could tap into its full power even with his cultivation suppressed. Who would've thought that the Dusk governor would destroy his weapon with an even greater sword energy?

Pfft!

Ge Cheng spat out a mouthful of blood. His core had broken under the tremendous impact, and he collapsed onto the arena in a pool of lifeless flesh!

Dead!

The disciple who'd just escaped an ancient tomb half a year ago, after seven centuries of confinement, had finally met his demise on the Coretrial Arena.

The sword's violet energy pulsed as Lu Yun panted, slightly winded. The fight with Ge Cheng had taken a bit of a toll on him. Fortunately, his physical constitution had improved by leaps and bounds these days, pure elemental power honing his body's strength to an incredulous height. Otherwise, the impact would've severely injured him.

"Ninth-rank sword Violetgrave!!" An immortal with purple hair and purple robes shot to his feet. "Seventeen years ago, Violetgrave was excavated from an ancient tomb in my Thundergale Major, but was robbed by a man in white. Why is it in your hand?!"

"If I recall correctly, its current owner should be the Nephrite celestial emperor's envoy, Qing Han of the Qing Clan," rose a peculiar, eerie voice. "Why is it in your hands now? How strange."

No one could pinpoint the voice's origin. It seemed to be asking a question, but simply muttering to itself at the same time.

"I demand an explanation, Qing Clan of Nephrite Major!" The purple-haired immortal turned in the direction of the Qing Clan's seating area.

"Hahaha!" A long peal of laughter rang from the arena stage. "Treasures have their own souls. Those who deserve them may wield them. You have no one to blame but yourself for failing to seize a ninth-rank sword excavated in your major. You were plainly not destined to keep it, but now you blame the one wielding it?"

Clink!

Seemingly in response to his words, Violetgrave resonated with a faint clink and its violet splendor grew in intensity.

"It belongs to the Thundergale Major at the end of the day!" The immortal insisted, flushed with anger.

"Then this ancient heritage belongs to Nephrite Major," retorted Lu Yun. "So what are you doing here?"

The red-faced immortal fell silent and sat back down, fuming.

“You cheated, Governor of Dusk Province!” Another man rose and leveled a finger at Lu Yun. “How can a mere golden core cultivator deploy the full strength of a ninth-rank sword? You must have eluded the arena’s properties in some way!”

“You’re from the Exalted Immortal Sect, aren’t you?” asked Lu Yun.

The man blinked, then nodded. “That’s right. This seat is Zhao Tiefeng, an elder of the Exalted Immortal Sect.”

“Oh, I have a lot to say about your sect before you go around pointing fingers...” Lu Yun snarled. “That Ge Cheng, Patriarch of House Ge, was possessed by one of your own. What are you planning by replacing the patriarch of Dusk Province’s foremost aristocracy?”