

Necropolis 1351

Chapter 1351: Aureate Fruit

“See my blade transform into a dragon!” roared Lu Yun.

An azure dragon shadow floated out behind him and melded into his blade light. The cerulean blue light shifted into an aquamarine color.

Lu Yun struck out with his sword.

“What?!” Li Quan’s eyes widened with shock and horror. “Bastard! Li Zhen, you taught our clan’s ultimate method to an outsider!”

Pfft!

Li Quan’s blade light and king grade weapon shattered to Lu Yun’s stroke. He flew backward, his chest caved in and bloody froth bubbling out from his mouth.

But he wasn’t dead. He stared fixedly at Lu Yun across the way, incredulity flooding his face. A single blow from the Champion Duke had defeated him, and the other had used the Dragonslay method of the Li Clan!

Li Zhen also fixed his gaze on Lu Yun’s blade light. He’d only used one stroke to defeat Li Quan! Though Li Quan wasn’t at a titled duke’s level, he was a very powerful half step king second only to titled dukes. But he’d just been defeated by his own method!

A blade as a dragon, and shattering a king grade weapon!

Li Zhen remained dumbly where he was, constantly replaying Lu Yun’s move in his mind. With his level of skill, he could naturally tell that the Champion Duke hadn’t fully practiced Dragonslay—his move was a result of observing Li Zhen’s technique.

And yet, it’d fully deployed the true meaning of Dragonslay.

Become a dragon?

Bewilderment appeared in Li Zhen’s eyes. Though the Li Clan possessed a dragon bloodline, all they obsessed over at every possible moment was to kill dragons and completely sever their clan’s connection with the dragon race. Transforming into one... ran counter to the clan’s core principles.

However, the stroke that’d transformed into a dragon really had displayed the true essence of the Dragonslay method and unleashed its full power.

If I can master this technique and practice it to great perfection, then I’ll be a half step king on the titled duke level! Li Zhen thought.

“The senior who created this move was an unparalleled genius. It’s a pity that his descendants are all idiots who changed the method beyond recognition. Even the true essence and meaning of the method is lost.” Lu Yun shook his head with sorrow and dismissed the blade light in his hand, departing from the inn.

Li Zhen shook himself all over and quickly caught up to his friend.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Lass Qing Ting’s hurt and the three of us have been through some tough times together. I can’t just turn a blind eye to her current condition, can I?” Lu Yun recalled a certain custom on Earth and took out a few Hongmeng spirit fruits from his seed storage. He’d planned on eventually using them in pill refinement, but tossed them into a bag instead and set off for Coiling Dragon City.

He didn’t look at Li Quan throughout all of this. That was still an obstacle for Li Zhen to cross. Only when he completely defeated Li Quan would he truly grow into his own strength.

“The, the bag of fruit you’re carrying... is that Aureate Fruit?” Li Zhen’s teeth chattered together when he looked at the bag of pale golden fruit in Lu Yun’s hand.

“Aureate Fruits taste great and they’re a perfect gift for a little girl.” Lu Yun nodded.

Aureate Fruit was an uncommonly rare king grade spirit fruit. Upon eating one of them, the fruit’s power condensed a layer of pale golden light over the body, as if the golden body of a Buddha. Its defensive properties were uncommonly ferocious and thus it was named the Aureate Fruit. [1]

Not only that, but this fruit was a key ingredient in refining the king grade Undying Aureate Pill. The indestructible body that the pill granted was truly fierce, making one on par with a king grade flying sword.

However, that indestructible body also made one’s skin resemble metal. Sparkling and glittering with every move, the wielder couldn’t retract the power at will. Thus, Lu Yun couldn’t be bothered with refining this particular pill. No one around him would be able to use it if he made it.

On the other hand, the golden body that one formed after consuming a fruit could be deployed at will, making it much more useful. His bag of thirty-six fruit would craft a perfect golden body for Qing Ting.

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Lanterns and streamers festooned the Coiling Dragon City encampment in Cloudexit City and a joyous atmosphere filled every nook and cranny. Their little princess had been on the brink of death after being injured by a ghost king; even if she’d recovered, most of her cultivation would be gone and she’d have no hope of ascending to titled kingdom.

To think that she’d receive good from misfortune and be gifted a Pill of Creation! The Immortal Pagoda’s head overseer in Cloudexit City, the Skyfall King, had personally come with a pill for Qing Ting!

Many actually felt that it was a waste for the little princess to take it since it wasn’t just a healing pill; the secrets of creation lay within and its marvelous uses too many to count. However, the various kings in the city didn’t say anything. After all, the Skyfall King specifically said this was a gift for Qing Ting. After taking it, her strength would grow explosively and place her on the same level as her brother.

This overawed Coiling Dragon City and elicited some concern. Every faction in the Hongmeng begged to build a good relationship with the Immortal Pagoda, particularly after the one hundred and eight sixth step kings appeared. The pagoda’s sheer strength was greater than the city’s, but here it was with a present!

They plainly wanted to be friends with Coiling Dragon City, and the latter wasn't fool enough to kick a gift horse in the mouth.

When Lu Yun arrived with his bag of Aureate Fruit at the Coiling Dragon encampment, a banquet was in full swing. The Mountain King would hear nothing of Skyfall leaving after he completed his errand and declared that the festivities wouldn't end until they were both drunk.

Skyfall didn't know Lu Yun's intentions; though Coiling Dragon was a large faction and possessed high level pills, it wasn't worth his master using a Pill of Creation to befriend. But since he was here, he would show them face. Skyfall was an old hat at navigating social settings—of course he knew why Coiling Dragon was making such a fuss over him. Thus, he happily sat down at the banquet.

When the Coiling Dragon servants noted Lu Yun and Li Zhen's arrival, they didn't block the two since they knew who the youths were. After reporting it to their superiors, they led the boys to where Qing Ting was recovering.

Lu Yun's grand shopping spree in Haotian Tower a while ago had outfitted nearly every single hair on Qing Ting's head. If it wasn't for her mountain's worth of king grade defensive items, she might've truly died to the combined attacks from the ghost king and Li Zhen.

The city lord of Coiling Dragon had only two children—Azureclad and Qing Ting. He doted exceedingly on his daughter and if she'd died, he might've blasted the Li Clan out of existence the next second. Of course, the depths of his fury might've impacted any other cultivator in the vicinity, so everyone was grateful that she'd now make a full recovery.

"Eh? You're here!" Qing Ting was meditating in a rear garden while she digested the pill's energy. When she sensed Lu Yun and Li Zhen's auras, she quickly opened her eyes.

"It looks like you've almost recovered," smiled Lu Yun. "Catch!"

"What's this?" Qing Ting opened the bag with curiosity; delightful fragrance burrowing into her nose immediately enchanted her. "It smells so good!"

She couldn't help but take out one of the golden fruits and bite into it.

Li Zhen swallowed hard—that was an Aureate Fruit, a treasure that could condense a golden body! The little girl was popping it into her mouth like it was candy!

"Ooh, yummy!" Not a care in the world, Qing Ting quickly plowed through the bag.

"Champion Duke, Li Zhen, how dare you two bastards show your face!" roared a furious voice as a glowering Azureclad Duke rounded the corner. "...eh? Qing Ting, what are you eating?"

"Some kind of fruit, the Champion Duke gave it to me." She shoved another shimmering fruit into her mouth and swallowed it after a few crunches. Golden light flashed across her body.

"Is that... Aureate Fruit?!" Azureclad paused, shocked.

Chapter 1352: Qing Ting Flies Into A Rage

Aureate Fruit?

Azureclad's brain was having trouble functioning. This Champion Duke kid just gave thirty-six Aureate Fruits to my sister??

Qing Ting was still happily devouring her present, oblivious to the fact that her brother slightly envied her. First, the Skyfall King of the Immortal Pagoda delivered a Pill of Creation for her wounds that also greatly advanced her cultivation, now the Champion Duke came with Aureate Fruits!

Once she formed her golden body, he might not even be able to pierce through her defenses if she used it in conjunction with her defensive treasures.

"What did you say? Aureate Fruit?" Qing Ting cocked her head in a daze after she swallowed the last bite.

She'd heard about the fruit before, of course, but never actually seen it. She'd also been secluded in Coiling Dragon City for most of her life and rarely set foot outside. Unlike the experienced Azureclad Duke and Li Zhen, she hadn't seen much of the world. Therefore, she hadn't recognized the fruit despite knowing of it.

Rays of golden splendor suddenly flared from her body and formed a wall of light a meter thick.

"Holy shit, it really was Aureate Fruit!" Azureclad drew his sword and slashed it down on the wall of light. His king grade flying sword bounced off and only a small ripple traveled across the light's surface in return.

"Do you know that if a sixth step king ate those thirty-six fruits, the resulting golden light would make him invincible among his peers?! No one would be able to penetrate his golden body! You're really making a hefty investment to get a girl..." Azureclad abruptly whirled around, grabbed Lu Yun's collar, and hauled him off his feet. Azureclad roared into the other's face, "You! Are not! Allowed! To think! About my sister! Do you hear me?!"

"Brother!" Blushing hotly, Qing Ting retracted her golden light.

"You gave her a full set of defensive items last time and now bring her Aureate Fruit. What's next? Pills of Creation? Or the ultimate treasure of the realm??" Azureclad demanded viciously after he set Lu Yun down.

"Um, didn't someone already bring a Pill of Creation?" Lu Yun asked weakly.

He didn't have the slightest inclination of pursuing anything with Qing Ting. If it'd been Li Zhen who was injured, he would also deliver the same pill and fruit. In fact, he'd already gifted the youth a ghost-headed blade and the true meaning behind the Dragonslay technique. Those two were much more valuable than Aureate Fruit,

Since arriving in the Hongmeng, he'd been running too and fro, busying himself with this and that. Everything was undertaken with consideration of profit in mind. He hadn't fully integrated into the realm and yet, cultivating order required him to witness everything about life in the Hongmeng. What he was doing now was slowly becoming part of this realm. Making friends, making enemies, and everything else—just like the rest of the Hongmeng denizens.

“The Pill of Creation is a gift from His Reverence the Immortal King, how are you worthy of being mentioned in the same breath as him?” Azureclad glared. “Anyway, stay away from my sister!”

“Didn’t you tell her to follow me?” Lu Yun laughed wryly.

Azureclad almost choked on his spit and Li Zhen nodded solemnly in agreement.

“Brother! Don’t blame me for getting harsh with you if you keep spouting this nonsense!” Qing Ting grew irritated.

“Hmph!” Azureclad snorted. “My baby sister is the favored daughter of heaven and possesses the same strength as me though she’s young. When she grows up, it’s not impossible for her to surpass Hua Fengwen!

“The only one worthy of her is the Immortal King, so you should just give up now!” He looked down his nose at Lu Yun.

Qing Ting couldn’t be bothered to react. Yes, she was only a few tens of thousands of years old, an absolute youngster when compared to someone several million years old like her brother. But there was no order of time in the Hongmeng. Time was just a measurement and any talk of age was just an imaginary concept. Hongmeng denizens matured by absorbing the energy of the realm.

That was impact from the order of growth, not time. If the order of time existed in the realm, Hongmeng denizens would eventually die of old age.

Azureclad didn’t look at Qing Ting—he knew what was on his sister’s mind and that she didn’t feel anything for the Champion Duke. But what if a certain emotion was fostered after spending a long period of time together?

Qing Ting was his dearest sister and easily beguiled, easily deceived—especially by people like the Champion Duke, who all but had “I am a liar” written across his face.

“Oh, I hear you defeated Li Quan of the Li Clan with one move?” he suddenly asked.

Lu Yun nodded. “I barely won by a move.”

“With the Immortal King’s appearance seven days ago and defeat of a dozen high level ghost kings, Cloudexit City is temporarily at peace. You and I can have our battle then!”

Swoosh!

Azureclad brandished his king grade flying sword and sent it circling around him as a rainbow of sword light.

“If you lose, the Stellar Sword is mine. If I lose, I won’t interfere with things between you and my sister,” he stated coldly from the air.

“Qing Yan!!” Qing Ting shrieked with anger and erupted with golden light, blasting her brother away. Qing Yan was the Azureclad Duke’s real name.

Boom!

The golden light was the golden body that she'd just formed. Her furious blow punched her brother up into the sky and out of sight.

"So... did I win or lose?" Lu Yun stroked his chin thoughtfully.

Li Zhen:

"Ahem!" Qing Ting coughed delicately and said with a deep blush, "That was just Qing Yan running his mouth, ignore him."

She snuck a look at Lu Yun, like a child having done something wrong.

"I already have a dao partner, so nothing else is on my mind," Lu Yun chuckled.

"Oh..." Qing Ting grumbled softly with another look at him.

"Shall we head out of the city and hunt some ghosts?" proposed Li Zhen. "They've have been dealt a resounding defeat and they're cowering with fear after the Immortal King's counterattack. It's the perfect time to hunt ghosts and earn purple crystals or other treasures. Many cultivators in ClouDEXIT have ventured deep into Starspace to kill the enemy. The Crimsonclad, Purpleclad, and Bloodclad Dukes have all gone."

Li Zhen had wanted to go too, but his strength fell just a bit short and no one cared for him in his clan. This was why he kept following Lu Yun around.

"Let's!" Qing Ting agreed with high spirits. She'd just taken a Pill of Creation and refined a golden body. It was time to show those ghosts what she was capable of!

She'd been injured last time because she was gravely distracted after Li Quan ambushed her. The ghost king might not have bypassed her defenses otherwise.

"There's no point in killing ordinary ghosts, the three of us can definitely take down a ghost king! Let's strike deep into Starspace Region and find ourselves some kings!" Qing Ting bounced up and down on her feet.

"I forbid it!" Slightly worse for the wear, Azureclad fell down from the sky. "You've just recovered and you haven't—"

Boom!

Golden light flashed before he could finish and blasted him back up into the sky.

"Eh, a golden body can be used like that?" Lu Yun asked dumbly after Qing Ting retracted her light.

"Do you have more Aureate Fruit? Give me some, give me some!" Li Zhen sidled up with a grin.

"Sure, give me your blade and I'll give you thirty-six Aureate Fruit," Lu Yun smirked.

"Forget it! No can do!" Li Zhen hastily backed off.

"Let's go! To Starspace Region!" Qing Ting confidently charged out at the head of the trio.

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“Skyfall King, there’s something legendary about that Champion Duke. He came by the Stellar Sword and treasure like the Aureate Fruit!” chuckled the Mountain King. The disturbance in the rear garden naturally attracted attention from the kings dining in the front hall.

After the Immortal King gifted nine thousand premium crystal veins to the Trueriver Sect, everyone viewed them as allies. The Champion Duke was the disciple of the Trueriver King, so naturally the Mountain King would ask further. To him, treasures such as the Stellar Sword and Aureate Fruit couldn’t be measured in purple crystals. Even a sixth step king like him could barely contain himself, much less the titled dukes.

Skyfall laughed. “The Champion Duke is naturally worthy of his title and capable of wielding the Stellar Sword. Do you think that he can’t retain ownership of those treasures?”

The Mountain King frowned faintly and sank into deep thought.

Being Lu Yun’s Infernum, Skyfall naturally knew that the Champion Duke was his master. But since Lu Yun wasn’t purposefully concealing his identity or revealing it, Skyfall wouldn’t say anything else. All would proceed in a normal fashion.

Lu Yun’s battle strength may not be strong, having barely managed to reach the threshold of a titled duke after condemning the fire of order, he had too many trump cards up his sleeve. Take supplemental arts in combat, for instance. Both the Alchemist and Wild Formation Kings combined wouldn’t be his match.

Chapter 1353: To Kill and To Loot

Many took note of the Champion Duke leaving Cloudexit City. The treasure chest on legs was on the move! While most of his treasures could be obtained with purple crystals, the Stellar Sword was too valuable. Stellar Stone Magneticus could only be happened upon through luck and not be found; anything it crafted would be one of the sharpest treasures in the realm.

Previously, the strongest of all heavyweights in Cloudexit was the Earthmartial King at third step kingdom, but now there were more powerhouses than could be counted. Sixth step kings could be found in bulk on the streets and an occasional seventh step king could be seen among them.

When the Champion Duke left the city, multiple kings tailed him closely. Skyfall and Jinse noted everyone’s movements, snorting coldly without a word. They would gain new colleagues if any of those kings died to their master.

The number of ghosts on the border between Starspace and Clouduin Region had decreased drastically. Though they traveled in packs, cultivators had almost hunted them to extinction in this area. It reminded Lu Yun of crayfish back on Earth.

Regarded as an invasive species and a plague when they were worthless, they became hot commodities when value could be assigned to them. Likewise, ghosts were now precious targets that people fought each other to kill.

As many as the ghosts in Starspace Region were, they couldn’t withstand this level of hunting. Lu Yun awarded five million out of his twenty million crystal veins, as well as countless supplemental treasures, over two short months.

“We’re five billion kilometers into Starspace Region now and we haven’t seen a single superior realm ghost, to say nothing of a ghost king,” grumbled Li Zhen.

“Hush,” Qing Ting shushed him. “I’m sensing ripples from kings fighting up ahead, and they’re not fighting ghosts. Let’s go take a look!”

She bounded forward in the direction of the fight.

“Don’t!” Lu Yun grabbed her ankle and dragged her back down to the ground.

She blushed hotly, but Lu Yun continued before she could say anything, “That’s a battle between two high level kings. We won’t be able to withstand the reverberation from their moves!”

“High level kings!” Qing Ting shuddered. “The power ripples there do seem to be greater than sixth step kings...”

Lu Yun knew who was fighting ahead—Jinse and the Turtle King.

The Turtle King was a peak eighth step king here to kill Jinse and Hua Fengwen, whereas Jinse wanted to use him as a whetstone. If she killed him, she would ascend to eighth step kingship.

She wasn’t his match, but Lu Yun had lent her the Purple Stellar Mountain and gifted her a hundred karmic fruits, enabling her to stay in prime fighting condition at all times.

She would kill him even if she had to literally use him as a grinding stone.

The two had fought for three days and nights in this locale. Many around them had sensed their battle, but no one dared draw near. They fought with abandon since it didn’t matter if they devastated the region throughout their conflict.

Lu Yun, Qing Ting, and Li Zhen silently backed away and turned in another direction, killing countless ghosts along the way.

The thin strand of fire that Lu Yun had condensed out of the flame of order consumed any ghost he killed and devoured it for nutrients. He discovered with delight that any ghost crystals he refined in this manner were thirty percent stronger than using crystals collected by others.

These ghosts violate the order of life and I’m upholding the law when I kill them. Therefore, the heavens also bless the hellfire of order in turn when I kill a ghost! Lu Yun suddenly understood why this was the case.

The flame of order in his body had one toe in reality and could swallow ghost crystals of its own accord now. It didn’t need Lu Yun to refine the crystals for it; it would continue to grow as long as Lu Yun kept killing.

When his thoughts traveled here, he abruptly let loose with all of his battle strength and unleashed strength on par with a titled king. His sword light snaked through the land like a dragon, smiting a dozen ordinary superior realm ghosts with one blow.

“He really has reached a titled duke level!” murmured Li Zhen as he watched Lu Yun encounter no effective resistance from the ghostly army.

“He almost crippled Li Quan with one stroke, do you honestly think he’s a normal guy after that?” Qing Ting half rolled her eyes. When she’d first met Lu Yun, he was still leaning on the Stellar Sword’s might and using the innate keenness of its light to kill enemies. But he now fully controlled the light and deployed every stroke to precise perfection. No effort was wasted and no enemy was left alive.

“He reached a titled duke’s level after one month of closed door cultivation?” Li Zhen still couldn’t believe what he was seeing.

“He’s a genius to begin with, what’s so strange about that?” Qing Ting looked into the distance. “There’s a ghost king over there, I’m going to get it!” Azure sword light enveloped her body and sent her hurtling through the air at the ghost king.

Her original suggestion had been to hunt down and kill ghost kings after entering Starspace Region. But when they arrived, they discovered that duties were clearly assigned to the ghostly army and that the ghosts were mining the crystal veins of the region.

If the ghosts wanted to build a ghost nest, they needed a tremendous foundation of Hongmeng qi. Since they couldn’t pass through Clouduin Region, they had to start mining what was present in their territory.

The smaller crystal veins could be excavated and used as currency in purchasing treasures or as a formation base for cultivation. The premium crystal veins that Lu Yun handed out were all small ones.

The larger ones couldn’t be excavated as they supplied Hongmeng qi for an area of five billion kilometers around them. They were the critical link for the local ecosystem, and once excavation began—even for an inferior grade crystal vein—everything within five billion kilometers would wither away. The land would turn into a desert, but the ghosts didn’t care about that. It had nothing to do with them even if the entire Hongmeng turned into a desert.

The ghost army contingent in front of them was composed of more than a million inferior, common, and superior realm ghosts. A single first step king directed them in collecting crystals from the large inferior crystal vein below.

It was the trio’s third day in Starspace Region and they’d revised their plan to preventing ghosts from mining the crystal veins. Thus, they charged in without hesitation when they saw the million-strong mining detachment.

Qing Ting had her eyes fixed on the ghost king. She now rivaled her brother in terms of battle strength and killing ordinary ghosts was too easy for her. Only in killing a ghost king would she continue to temper herself and accumulate further experience and strength.

Li Zhen came back to his senses and didn’t want to bite off more than he could chew—he didn’t have the strength to challenge a ghost king as of yet. Once he truly understood the meaning behind the Dragonslay technique that Lu Yun had displayed, he would also reach the level of a titled duke.

What he needed to do now was practice the technique on the enemy and to experiment and adapt. He also needed to identify his own weaknesses. Instead of copying Lu Yun’s move, Li Zhen followed the duke’s suggestion and tried to activate his latent bloodline so he could transform into a dragon.

Hummm.

Azure sword light blossomed through the skies, followed swiftly by golden radiance. The first step ghost king lost an arm to Qing Ting's sword after the harrowing stroke. It threw the ghost king into a rage and it pounced on Qing Ting in sheer fury, vivid green ghostfire running over its body.

A large bony claw reached out from its chest, seizing and crushing Qing Ting's sword light. It opened its mouth and sprayed a meter-wide pillar of black smoke that barrelled down on Qing Ting's chest.

"This move again!" Qing Ting shouted and erupted with brilliant golden light, blocking the pillar of black smoke. However, she swiftly backed away like she was a rubber ball that'd been kicked.

Another ghost king had pierced through her body with the same move ten days ago. When ghostly qi invaded her, she'd almost died on the battlefield. Though she'd retreated alive in the end, the ghostly qi had remained in her body and she'd recovered only with the aid of the Pill of Creation.

Now that she'd refined a golden body, she could protect herself before the pillar of smoke arrived.

"Die!" Her sword flashed forward the moment she fell back and azure sword light condensed into a hazy dragon that ripped the ghost king into two.

A pure black, crystalline structure the size of a fist fell to the ground.

"The crystal of a ghost king is worth one premium crystal vein! It's mine!" A gleeful voice suddenly rang out of the void and a figure flashed by, picking up the crystal and vanishing without a trace.

"You asshole!" Qing Ting snarled. She couldn't give chase since she was still dealing with the remnants of the ghost king's power on her.

Chapter 1354: Robber King

"Who's the asshole that dares steal my shit?!" Qing Ting cursed loudly in her anger. One king grade ghost crystal was the equivalent of a premium crystal vein or a king grade flying sword! That was no small sum of wealth in the Hongmeng.

The figure was out of sight—Qing Ting didn't even get a clear glimpse of who'd taken her ghost crystal.

The troop of ghosts scattered in all directions when their king died. Lu Yun paused and soundlessly called upon the Spectral Eye; a black sparkle flashed through his eyes.

"It's a third step king," he frowned slightly.

"A third step king? A third step king went to the effort of stealing from a half step king?" Qing Ting looked on with resignation. It was a walk in the park for a third step king to kill a ghost king, why would they bother with stealing the spoils of a half step king?

"Don't let me find out who he is or I'll make him pay!" she grumbled sulkily. She was the little princess of Coiling Dragon City and the daughter of a seventh step king after all. If she wanted a third step king dead, it really wouldn't take that much effort.

"We need to get out of here as quickly as possible after I detonate the crystal vein!" Lu Yun burrowed down into the crystal vein beneath them and directed a Detonation Talisman at its core section.

Numerous minor crystal veins formed around a large one, but someone had already excavated the ones here. Thus, the large crystal vein was an enormous mine. Lu Yun had to detonate not only this one, but the entire system in Starspace Major. Otherwise, the crystal veins would become cornerstones of the ghost tomb.

If he didn't ruin the crystal vein, more ghosts would be along after a while to continue mining it. Small crystal veins could be completely extracted, but not large ones. Large crystal veins were rooted beneath the earth and not even ninth step kings could fully pull them out. They could only mine the crystal veins in increments.

The higher grade a vein was, the harder it was to excavate.

Rumble—

The entire vein shattered to pieces with the rise of a mushroom cloud. Endless purple crystals smashed into each other and returned to their most primitive form of Hongmeng qi, dispersing in the void.

Lu Yun, Qing Ting, and Li Zhen were already gone. High level ghost kings came to investigate the disturbance as soon as it was felt, but the area had been leveled and no clues were left behind.

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"You really blew up a major crystal vein!" Qing Ting looked incredulously at Lu Yun. "The larger veins are incredibly tough and though ordinary king grade Detonation Talismans can damage them, they can't completely destroy one like how you just did! You—"

She abruptly stopped talking, realizing that she was asking too much and infringing on a taboo. All geniuses of the Hongmeng possessed their own secrets and trump cards. Take herself, for instance. Her cultivation tenure paled far in comparison to her brother's million years, but she also had her own secrets and aces.

"I assembled a king grade formation talisman with a hundred king grade talismans, then detonated the formation. The formation was what ignited the crystal vein, so there wasn't much to it." Lu Yun smiled carelessly. He actually possessed simpler methods—such as the Dragonquake Scripture. If he employed the Dragonshift Method within it, he'd be able to instantly crumble the crystal vein away.

However, he didn't dare attempt that since the Dragonquake Scripture was forbidden within the Hongmeng. Instead, he had to deploy a fussier plan to blow up the crystal vein.

"The ghosts occupying Starspace Region are mostly gathered in the mines. There will certainly be high level kings in residence at the higher grade crystal veins. We won't be able to touch those, but we can still destroy a few of the lower grade ones," Lu Yun explained before they headed for another mine.

They'd carefully studied a map of Starspace Region before setting out, committing all of its important locations to memory.

Over the next seven days, Lu Yun detonated another three large, inferior grade crystal veins and slew three first step kings. Qing Ting took utmost care in her hunts this time and avoided having someone steal her spoils again.

Lu Yun condensed a second wisp of the order of flame during this process—naturally not through his own efforts alone. The Infernum in the Immortal Pagodas kept a steady stream of ghost crystals flowing to Lu Yun through the Tome of Life and Death. Bolstered with this incredible wealth of ghost crystals, not only did the second wisp solidify, but so did a third begin to form.

However, the fact that four large crystal veins had been destroyed in the region within ten days infuriated numerous high level kings in the core of Starspace Region. The ghosts couldn't march through Clouдруin Region to access Redbud Region, so every crystal vein in Starspace was extremely precious. Any one of them being ruined meant a tangible weakening of the ghost tomb.

One hundred and eight purple crystal cannons were reassembled outside Starspace Region, firing barrages every second at the ghost tomb undergoing repairs. The relentless offensive kept the ghosts frantic and exhausted by their sorry plight.

Gradually, first step ghost kings overseeing inferior grade crystal veins were replaced by a team of one second step ghost king and two first step. While Qing Ting could triumph over first step ghost kings, she was still far from taking on second step kings. Li Zhen had yet to reach the titled duke level, so any random first step ghost king could easily take his life.

Ghost qi also abounded in Starspace Region, strengthening ghost kings in this territory by thirty percent compared to the outside world.

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"What's wrong, Li Zhen?" Lu Yun looked at his friend.

"I'm so close! I keep failing to grasp the core of transforming into a dragon. The dragon bloodline in my body seems to be sealed away," Li Zhen answered dejectedly.

Lu Yun smacked his own forehead. "Why are you so concerned with tapping into that tiny bloodline? Did you see me turn into a real dragon when I deployed that technique?"

Li Zhen hunched in on himself without a word, simulating Lu Yun's stroke in detail once more. Qing Ting sat off to the side, taking a moment to recover.

She'd made enormous gains over consecutive days of intense battles, especially since she'd killed four ghost kings by now. She'd outstripped her brother in terms of accumulated experience and cultivation reflections.

Lu Yun's third wisp of order was about to solidify, granting him an enormous increase in strength when it did so. He didn't know how strong he was either—at the very least, he could easily slice the version of himself who'd left Cloudexit City into two.

"Who goes there?!" He suddenly shot to his feet with an unfriendly shout.

"Kekekeke..." Strange laughter rang out. "You three kids are quite something to kill four ghost kings. Be smart and hand over all of your ghost crystals and treasures!"

A thin man dressed in a black combat outfit walked out of the shadows. He seemed to be submerged in black smoke as he drifted in and out of view. It was impossible to identify him.

“it’s you!” Qing Ting’s eyes shot wide open. “You’re the one who stole my king grade ghost crystal!”

Though she hadn’t gotten a clear look at the thief, she recognized him when he reappeared.

“So what if I am? I’d thought of letting you off the hook after robbing you once, but you’re unexpectedly strong and killed another three ghost kings. Considering all of the wealth you must have on you... you’ve got at least ten premium crystal veins worth.” Hidden in the smoke, the man shot two beams of vivid green light from his eyes and pierced through the inky smoke.

“You’re the Robber King!” Li Zhen suddenly shouted. “Your name is listed on the Enforcer Alliance’s Bounty Ranking. It’s a hundred million premium purple crystals for your life!”

Chapter 1355: Teach the Fresh-Faced Robber King a Lesson

Li Zhen had tried to join the Enforcer Alliance a hundred thousand years ago, so he naturally paid a bit more attention to its affairs.

The alliance maintained a Bounty Ranking on which it offered rewards for capturing despicable villains of the realm. The Robber King in front of them was on that list. His bounty was a hundred million premium purple crystals for his head.

Though a hundred million crystals was impressive, it was far from enough to eliminate a third step king. Thus, the alliance’s Bounty Ranking was more used as a warning or deterrence.

Self-proclaimed as the greatest robber of the Hongmeng, the Robber King came and left like the wind. He stole from high level kings and inferior realm cultivators alike—in other words, a man without principles.

He was a very active individual and hailed himself as the benevolent Robber King in that he only ever took one’s goods and not one’s life. To think that he would be in Starspace Region and robbing anyone he came across!

“You know me, kid?” The Robber King started. “Since you recognize me, you can’t blame me for showing no mercy then!”

“Aren’t you supposed to be benevolent and only steal items? You never endanger lives,” Li Zhen asked with bafflement. He and Qing Ting were looking at the king with amusement, wholly unafraid of the newcomer’s arrival.

“Hmph! Those busybodies from the Enforcer Alliance are already here. If I don’t kill you, you might tip them off and I’ll have no place to go in Starspace or Cloudruin Region!

“And heh, you believe it when I say I don’t kill anyone? Come on, that Lewd King calls himself the Luminous King of Virtue and Integrity!

“...huh? Why aren’t you three half step king brats afraid of me?” He’d finally picked up on something odd—these three little fellows didn’t show any signs of fear.

“I recognize you, but you don’t know the person next to me...” Li Zhen jerked his thumb at Lu Yun and continued with relish, “Several sixth step kings followed us out as soon as this one left the city. We

borrowed a battlefield of two high level kings to shake off our keepers. But you throw yourself in that spot instead? Tsk tsk tsk.”

The dumbfounded Robber King blinked; Lu Yun flashed a brilliant grin at him and snapped his fingers.

Snap!

A formation of hazy purple light appeared out of thin air and sealed off the area. An aura unique to king grade formations came down oppressively over the area, immediately confining the king. Huge handfuls of king grade Detonation Talismans appeared in Lu Yun, Qing Ting, and Li Zhen’s hands.

The Robber King’s expression froze, and the next development made everyone gape with shock.

Thunk!

The Robber King dropped to his knees and sobbed loudly, “Mercy, young masters and mistress! This humble one was forced to a life of thievery in order to provide for my family of elders and children! I’ve never harmed the innocent and anyone I killed deserved to die! Mercy, oh mercy!”

Slam slam slam!

He smashed his forehead against the ground in fervent kowtows.

Lu Yun’s expression froze and he turned around stiltedly, staring dumbly at Li Zhen.

“This... is the Robber King?” he asked with disbelief.

“I, er, I don’t know either.” Li Zhen didn’t know what to make of the situation.

The notorious Robber King, a third step king, was kowtowing to three juniors who weren’t even kings? People said that he had no bottom line, but this wasn’t even a bottom line, this was a black hole!

A guy like this can become a king? And his dao heart is still intact?? Lu Yun couldn’t believe his eyes.

“Kyakyakya, you little things are too young. Die!” Weeping up a storm and kowtowing as if his life depended on it, the Robber King suddenly jumped up with a shortsword in hand. He shot at Lu Yun and brought the weapon up to stab into the young man’s forehead.

Hummm!

Radiant golden light exploded out of nowhere and blocked his fatal stroke. Qing Ting had released her golden body on pure instinct, resulting in the one-meter-thick layer of light blasting out to nine meters and enclosing Lu Yun and Li Zhen in a dome of safety.

The golden body’s strength was determined by her cultivation level. Since she was currently a half step king, it could defend against a first step king or one blow from a second step king. The Robber King, however, was a third step king!

The tenacious light lasted only a moment before the king pierced through it with his shortsword.

Hummmm.

Multiple rays of brilliant light flared from Qing Ting's body—her wondrous collection of king grade defensive treasures were all active.

Clang!

Clang!

Clang!

Metallic collisions sounded from the void as the Robber King's attack was deflected.

"I forgot about my piles of treasures last time when I faced that second step king. I won't forget this time!" Qing Ting mumbled.

The Robber King almost vomited blood at her words. When were king grade treasures counted in terms of "piles"?! The shortsword in his hands was very dear to him and was less than king grade—but the little girl had piles of them?

He didn't feel any bliss at the thought of impending fortune falling into his hands. Rather, he drowned in dread!

He knew that these little fellows were extremely wealthy, but he'd never fathomed they possessed so many king grade treasures! Lu Yun's Stellar Sword, Qing Ting's king grade flying sword, Li Zhen's ghost-headed blade... the king grade formation that'd appeared out of nowhere and almost confined him, and the king grade Detonation Talismans in their hands...

Just where did these little guys get so many treasures from? Had they robbed the Supplemental Dao Alliance??

He knew that the monopoly over supplemental dao was ended; he was robbing people in the Starspace Region so he could exchange ghost crystals for king grade treasures himself. To think that three little targets he had his eyes on were insanely hard to take down!

"The Robber King is too naive!" Lu Yun murmured to himself. He hadn't been afraid from beginning to end—if Qing Ting possessed piles of king grade treasures, wouldn't he have the same?

Indeed, he was assimilating into the Hongmeng so he could train the fire of order, but that didn't mean he'd let himself come off worse for the wear here.

"Come on, let's teach this young whippersnapper king a lesson!"

"Yeah, let's teach him a lesson!"

Boom!

Boom!

Boom!

Detonation Talismans exploded one after another, terrifying the Robber King into wails and shrieks for his mother.

"Ghost Blade Method!

“Ghost Walk, go!

“You can’t see me, you can’t see me!

“Float like a spirit butterfly, sting like a dragon!” The Robber King jumped, ducked, and rolled into the void, trying to get away. Lu Yun’s formation proved insufficient to suppress him and all of his antics up to now were just to mislead the trio.

Though it couldn’t restrain the king, the formation still kept him confined to this part of the void. He ran out of space to dodge in the end and yelped when the talismans connected with their target.

“You three brats, this king will remember you!” he finally screeched.

Boooooom!

He flung out a black bead that exploded in the air and blew a hole in Lu Yun’s king grade formation. Howling with tragic laughter, the Robber King fled through the hole.

On his way out, he turned back and committed the trio’s appearance and presence to memory. He’d journeyed the Hongmeng for countless years and evaded pursuit from the Enforcer Alliance all this time. It was the first time he’d failed so miserably.

Chapter 1356: The Three Dukes

“What the heck was that, it blew a hole in a king grade formation!” Li Zhen gaped.

Lu Yun’s formation had cost at least three premium crystal veins, but the Robber King had forced a hole through it!

“That was a real treasure, what a damn shame it’s ruined.” Heartache crossed Lu Yun’s face as he looked at the dispersing smoke.

There were also natural treasures in the Hongmeng. Ones born naturally in the land were called connate treasures in the worlds, chaos treasures or ultimate chaos treasures in the chaos, and ultimate Hongmeng treasures in the third realm.

The bead that the Robber King had detonated was one such ultimate treasure. Lu Yun didn’t have a single one yet, yet their opponent had ruined one so easily! If I’d known about this beforehand, I would’ve scammed him out of his seed storage instead.

“Ai, it looks like I’m the naive one instead,” Lu Yun remarked glumly.

Li Zhen and Qing Ting looked wordlessly at each other.

“We can’t stay here for long, the ghosts will send someone to investigate the disturbance. We need to go!” Lu Yun made preparations to depart.

“We can’t,” Qing Ting chuckled wryly. She pointed around them—or rather, at a second step ghost king, two first steps, and a couple million ordinary ghosts that’d appeared out of nowhere.

They were surrounded.

The ghosts were a contingent mining another crystal vein nearby and had rushed over when they noted the disturbance. They were the ones that Lu Yun's group wanted to take down.

"Roar!!" snarled the leading second step king. That directed the first step kings and several million ghosts in a headlong charge at the intruders.

"Li Zhen, protect yourself!" Lu Yun shouted and drew his sword, intercepting one of the first step kings. He had to kill one in the shortest amount of time possible so he could focus on the second step king.

Lu Yun didn't want to use any schemes or roundabout ways when facing the ghosts. This was a trial and chance to temper himself. As strong as his supplemental dao was, that was still supplemental dao. Only when his own cultivation was strong was that true strength.

Qing Ting didn't say a word, she was already preoccupied with the other ghost king.

"I, am not, a burden!" Li Zhen protested with frustration. However, he also knew that he couldn't fight a ghost king yet. He would be able to exchange moves with a king only when he reached a titled duke's level.

He roared and released a dragon shadow from his blade, smashing it down on the endless ghosts charging them.

Transforming the blade into a dragon!

If he could reach the level of transformation, then he'd be a titled duke too!

Generally speaking, anyone who reached half step kingship could set foot into full kingship. However, half step kings ascended only as first step kings. The previous Dusksnow Morningstar and the current Li Zhen were at this level.

But if one was a half step king who was also a titled duke, it was very likely that one would ascend to second or third step kingship!

The criteria to be a titled duke was the ability to match blows with a first step king or possess equivalent battle strength. The Bloodclad, Purpleclad, and Azureclad Dukes, as well as Qing Ting, were all characters of that level. They were favored children of heaven who could even kill a first step king!

Lu Yun had once been short of that requirement—he was at most a little stronger than Li Zhen. But after he'd coalesced two tendrils of order and melded the fire into his body, his battle strength had risen explosively.

He, too, was at the titled duke level now.

With his battle strength fully unleashed and his sword dao completely deployed, one instance of Dragonrise and another of Dragonsoar circled around him like two silver dragons.

The ghost king he fought continuously retreated.

However, he was still slightly weaker than Qing Ting. He could defeat a first step king, but he couldn't kill one by himself!

“Roar!!” The second step ghost king shifted into action. Blurring into a smear of black, it pounced on Qing Ting.

Qing Ting had grievously injured her ghost king and was about to run it through.

“So it’s you!” the second step ghost king snarled. It reached out two bony hands blazing with ghostfire and swiped viciously at Qing Ting.

She could defeat a first step ghost king and withstand a second, but the two combined would result in her death!

Hummm!

Her golden body blasted out at the second step ghost king and she flung out her flying sword, turning it into an azure dragon.

Aooooou!

Bright dragon croons rang out as the dragon fiercely bore down on the first step ghost king.

Boom!

Pfft!

The golden light sent the second step ghost king flying and her sword decapitated the first step ghost king.

“Hahaha!!” she laughed with pride. She’d done it! She’d battled a ghost king on one side and killed one on the other!

“Second step ghost king! This lady was injured by one of you last time, this is payback!!” Qing Ting blew up her dragon of sword light with a wave of her hand and sent it raining down on the second step ghost king.

Azure sword rain enveloped the area; ordinary ghost kings couldn’t approach her.

“An unparalleled genius of the Hongmeng!” The king’s ghostfire twitched. “You can’t be allowed to continue developing, or you’ll be another Hua Fengwen. Die!!”

Swoosh!

A large black sickle abruptly materialized in its hands, made of the same material as Li Zhen’s ghost-headed blade!

The sickle swung with infinite ghostly force and rammed upward at Qing Ting’s sword rain.

She paled with consternation and her golden body flickered for a second. Her collection of king grade treasures vibrated and shattered one after another.

“That isn’t an ordinary second step ghost king!” She quickly grasped the truth of the matter and reformed her king grade flying sword with a wave of her hand. It returned to her grasp and she slashed it outward several times to defuse the ghostly force.

The ghost king didn't give her time to catch her breath. The sickle whirled in a frenzied dance, delivering blow upon blow to Qing Ting. She didn't even have time to take out Detonation Talismans.

A tide of ghosts had surrounded Li Zhen. While he faced ordinary ghosts, there were too many of them—and quite a few superior realm ghosts at that. Covered with blood, his wounds wafted terrible ghostly qi. However, he still swung mechanically, continuing to ponder over Lu Yun's stroke.

Li Zhen had forgotten the circumstances of the move, but he remembered its essence and true meaning.

Transform into a dragon!

Transform into a dragon!

Not through the sealed dragon bloodline in his body, but with the power of his mind! Not a true dragon of flesh and blood, but one in spirit and symbolization!

...he seemed to understand something.

Boooooom!

A dragon shadow floated up from his body—not a projection from his sealed bloodline, but from his mind.

Hummm!

His next stroke reached five thousand kilometers into the distance and vanquished every ghost that the black sword light encountered!

"If I wish to slay a dragon, I must become one first! I will slay tangible dragons while I am an intangible one! ...I see!" His black hair flowed freely in the wind, daring and dynamic. He struck again and again, eliminating every ghost in the area.

He finally possessed the battle strength of a titled duke.

"Champion Duke, let me help you!" He jumped up into the air and landed by Lu Yun's side, slicing down on the ghost king the latter faced.

Li Zhen didn't go to Qing Ting as the second step king was too frightening; he wouldn't be able to kill it either. It was better to help Lu Yun kill this first step king first, then focus the strength of three dukes on the second step ghost king.

"Well met!" Lu Yun's eyes lit up.

Li Zhen's blow sent the unprepared ghost king flying out over the land. Lu Yun beckoned with both hands and twisted the two silver dragons around each other, churning the ghost king to pieces.

The power within the ghost king that violated order flooded into his body and was devoured by the flame of order. A third tendril of fire finally solidified.

Chapter 1357: Ambush

Hummm.

Resplendent silver radiance blossomed from Lu Yun's body. His hair, eyes, and every inch of his skin turned pure silver. Twin flames of silver also ignited in his eyes. Lu Yun's battle strength rose explosively once more.

"Die!" He didn't say a word to Li Zhen, redirecting his flying sword at the second step ghost king instead.

"Eh?!" The ghost king trembled and subconsciously twirled its sickle toward the silver sword light.

Kaboom!

Black and silver crashed against each other in the air. Lu Yun's Stellar Sword came hurtling back to him and the ghost king's sickle was also flung from its grasp.

"So strong! Since when did so many geniuses exist among the Hongmeng creatures?!" The king's ghostly fire flickered with agitation. The strength behind the blade was almost on par with the little girl it'd been fighting!

"Die!" Having been given some breathing space, Qing Ting drilled her king grade flying sword through the ghost king's head, injuring it deeply.

The core of second step ghost kings was their vivid green ghostfire. As long as that remained, they wouldn't die.

"I can't stay here any longer!" Highly alarmed, the ghost king rapidly reconsidered the situation. It was confident of killing the girl if she was by herself, but it was very dangerous if another cultivator of the same level appeared. Their flying swords were possibly even higher than king grade!

"Want to leave?" A pitch-black blade light descended from the sky and cut off the ghost king's avenue of retreat. Ghost-headed blade in hand, Li Zhen's azure dragon shadow was gradually overtaken by dark shadows until it turned into a wholly black dragon.

"You're not going anywhere other than dying here!" Lu Yun blocked the remaining path available to the king; the trio formed a triangle that fenced in the second step king between them. The regular ghosts in the surroundings couldn't participate in their battle anymore.

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The second step ghost king turned its sickle sideways in front of it; twin pinpricks of vivid green glared out through a haze of black qi and surveilled the three. None of these cultivators were kings, but they'd managed to keep it here and leave it with no option to withdraw!

"Die!!" Li Zhen suddenly roared. Though he was the weakest among the trio, he was the first to act. His blade light transformed into a black dragon that swooped down on the king with a snarl. Lu Yun and Qing Ting made their moves at the same time as well.

The ghost king growled and flared sinister ghostly qi from its weapon, blocking their attacks.

The qi of the area exploded from their clashes and mushroom clouds rose into the air; the ghost king yelped and shrieked as attacks connected with it.

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“Eh... those... three little fellows who are yet to become titled kings are keeping a second step ghost king down!” Three kings who’d entered Starspace Region to hunt ghost kings noted the disturbance in this area. Their eyes widened with surprise when they took in the situation.

“It’s the Champion Duke of the Trueriver Sect, the Coiling Dragon city lord’s daughter, and the son of the Li Clan traitor—Li Zhen.” A wary third step king sized up the situation. “They’re equipped with formidable treasures and throw out dozens of king grade Detonation Talismans at a time. We shouldn’t provoke them!”

“They’re geniuses from a major faction, alright! We cultivated for a hundred million years to ascend to third step king, but they’ll likely be third step as soon as they become titled kings,” another third step king sighed.

“Forget them, our goal is to accumulate more ghost and purple crystals so we can buy king grade treasures. The monopoly has just been lifted and it’s only because the Immortal Pagoda and Haotian Tower don’t get along that we have such cheap supplemental treasures to buy.”

These kings had cultivated for hundreds of millions of years; they were kings in the era before supplemental dao was restricted to the Supplemental Dao Alliance. Therefore, they clearly recalled how much supplemental treasures used to cost.

A regular king grade flying sword should cost at least a dozen premium grade crystal veins, putting it out of reach for ordinary kings.

The Immortal Pagoda wanted to turn Origin World and Hopeless Major’s long accumulated wealth into purple crystals, so they sold their items at cost. Haotian Tower wanted to crush their rival, so they sold their items at half cost.

One had to know that the true value of a king grade treasure could hardly be calculated in terms of cost of materials. The various great daos and dao rules they incorporated also brimmed with endless bounty.

And when supplemental dao had been monopolized, several tens of billions of premium crystals wouldn’t have even bought one a look at a king grade flying sword.

“Fellow daoists!” A man in black robes and a growing vicious expression suddenly proposed, “They say that with great risk comes great fortune—”

“You can’t be thinking of the Champion Duke’s Stellar Sword, are you?” The wary king cut him off before he could finish.

“That’s right, I want that sword!” The man grit his teeth. “If we get that sword, we can sell it and buy king grade treasures more suited for ourselves. We can even request supplemental kings to personally forge one for us!

“The king grade flying swords and treasures being sold in the Immortal Pagoda and Haotian Tower aren’t necessarily the best fit for us. Only ones containing our own dao rules and personally crafted by supplemental kings will do!”

The other two were swayed by his words.

“And, the son of the Li traitor wields a ghost-headed blade that doesn’t belong to the Hongmeng. If we sell it to the Supplemental Dao Alliance, we might reap unexpected gains,” the man in black continued.

“In... that case, let’s give it a try!” the wary king agreed.

They looked at their third companion, a woman in yellow robes.

“Very well, but we must conceal our tracks.” She nodded and mused, “We must kill them with one move and take their treasures. If we can’t, we leave immediately without hesitation!

“Out of those three, one is a disciple of the Trueriver Sect, another a daughter of the Coiling Dragon city lord, and the third an impenetrable son of a clan traitor. None of them are characters we can afford to offend.”

“Alright!” nodded the man in black. “We have one chance—when they kill the second step ghost king. They’ll be most relaxed then, the perfect moment for us to make our move!”

They hid themselves in the void and silently observed the battle still taking place.

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The three kings had judged the situation correctly, Lu Yun and Qing Ting combined overpowered a second step king. One azure and two silver dragons in the air continuously walloped the ghost king’s body, shattering its ghostly qi and weakening it.

The ghost king wanted to retreat, but Li Zhen sent it back with a mighty stroke whenever it sought to escape. It could only gibber with indignation.

“Ahhhhh!!” It suddenly lost its mind and howled with desolation. Piercing white light suddenly burst from its ghostfire.

“Get away, get away, it’s self detonating!” Lu Yun gasped when he saw the ghost king’s condition. He grabbed Qing Ting and Li Zhen, deployed Boundless Step without thought of anything else, and traveled five hundred thousand kilometers into the distance.

He took a hundred steps in one thousandth of an eye blink, instantly shifting five hundred million kilometers away.

Boom!!

A black mushroom cloud rose into the air, sweeping across everything within five hundred million kilometers. Lu Yun happened to be precisely on its edge and was still caught up within it. The three hurtled through the air and even Qing Ting’s golden body broke upon contact.

They flew uncontrollably another dozen million kilometers away before crashing heavily to the ground.

“That was just a single second step ghost king—they’re crazy! They self detonate at the drop of a hat!” Li Zhen heaved for breath and vomited mouthfuls of blood, spewing out bits of his organs among the liquid. His entire body was like a ragged cloth bag, almost completely shredded by the force. The only thing still complete on him was his king grade battle armor and ghost-headed blade.

Lu Yun and Qing Ting were just slightly better off, but they were also incredibly injured. With the complete destruction of Qing Ting's golden body, it would take a lot of time and purple crystals to reform it again.

"We won!" Qing Ting splayed out on the ground and panted heavily. "We really beat a second step ghost king and forced it to self detonate!"

Though its ghost crystal was also destroyed in the detonation, triumphing over a second step ghost king was a tempering of the heart and soul, an extremely valuable addition to one's foundations.

That was far more important than a ghost crystal.

However, the scene suddenly darkened in front of Qing Ting's eyes and a keen sword light aimed at her forehead descended from the sky.

"Who goes there?!" Color drained from her face to find that the sword light was fully locked onto her. She could acutely sense that she wouldn't be able to dodge this blow even when she was at full strength.

A strike from a third step king at full strength!

Their joy in defeating a second step king instantly dissolved, replaced by a yawning despair.

Chapter 1358: Ghostblade Duke

Is this how I die?

Qing Ting felt a bit lost. She'd just defeated a second step ghost king and reached the peak of her life by officially surpassing her brother. She hadn't even had time to cheer her accomplishments or bask in her father's praises. Was everything about to end, just like this?

She didn't accept this fate!

But she couldn't move and could only watch as the horrifying stroke came closer and closer to her.

Whoosh!

Hazy blue light flashed through the air and a crisp sound echoed in her ears. The sword light flashing at her like a leering grin was shattered by the blue light and a body flew through the air, smashing heavily into the ground.

A man with robes as white as snow appeared in Qing Ting's line of sight.

"Hua Fengwen!" She immediately recognized the man. Why had someone on his level saved them??

The third step kings that'd planned on ambushing the trio were already three corpses.

"Are you alright?" Hua Fengwen asked faintly and swept his eyes across the three. When his gaze flitted past Lu Yun, the corner of his lips tugged up. He didn't really understand what Lu Yun was doing.

Lu Yun was a supplemental king and he'd created a terrifying sword dao with Dragonrise. He only needed to refine a pill for himself if he wanted to immediately become a titled king. It was even possible for him to ascend as a high level king with just the meaning behind Dragonrise.

But despite that, he voluntarily set aside his accomplishment as a supplemental king and continuously tempered his battle strength to ascend to kingship in that manner. Is he unwilling to be an ant and wants to walk further?

If Hua Fengwen hadn't discovered that a second step ghost king was self detonating in this area and swung by out of curiosity, Lu Yun might've truly lost everything this time.

"Thank you for saving our lives, Senior Hua," mumbled Li Zhen. He was like a little fountain as he spewed out a stream of blood and mangled pieces of his organs.

Hua Fengwen's expression sank and he crushed two pills, injecting pure medicine qi into Li Zhen and Qing Ting's bodies to stabilize their condition.

"Starspace Region is a very dangerous place and much less stable than before. While the three of you can force a second step ghost king into self detonation, this still isn't the place for you. Hurry and get out of here." Hua Fengwen turned on his heel.

"What about me?" Lu Yun lay straight on the ground and laughed ruefully.

"Figure something out for yourself, don't even think of mooching off my pills!" Hua Fengwen snorted and vanished.

Lu Yun kept chuckling.

"Hua Fengwen is still as remote and aloof as he was a hundred thousand years ago, an otherworldly legend! Strange, though, why would he save us?" Li Zhen crawled up from the ground and looked with puzzlement at the direction the king had left in.

He'd once seen Hua Fengwen before the latter became a titled king. Remote, aloof, distinguished above everyone else, his manner of speech was blunt and he abhorred getting involved in anyone else's affairs.

To think that the great genius would save the three of them!

"Him? Remote and aloof? Otherworldly?" Lu Yun thought back to when he'd first met the man—someone at complete odds with the transcendent sage of Li Zhen's perspective.

Qing Ting imitated Hua Fengwen and crushed a king grade healing pill, directing the medicinal qi into Lu Yun's body to help him slowly recover.

Li Zhen ignored Lu Yun and sat down cross-legged, adjusting his condition.

"I'm still too young... First the Robber King taught me a lesson, then the second step ghost king, and now these three third step kings that suddenly appeared out of nowhere," Lu Yun mumbled dejectedly to himself.

He'd thought that everything was completely under control because he'd accounted for all possible developments. He'd even anticipated that someone would ambush them! But for all his calculations, he didn't think that the second step ghost king would think of nothing and self detonate!

Ghosts can self detonate?

Lu Yun didn't know what to make of all this.

“Ai, I’m still too young!” Lu Yun grumbled softly.

“We did very well this time. If it was my brother here instead of you, we’d all be dead from the explosion already!” Qing Ting comforted him.

Lu Yun had crossed five hundred thousand kilometers in one step with the Boundless Step death art. He'd run fifty billion kilometers in the thousandth of an eye blink and created a life-saving distance between them and the ghost king’s detonation.

There were numerous half step kings in the Hongmeng who could cover the same distance within the same amount of time, but they all needed ponderous quantities of qi to support the usage of these combat arts or methods.

When the ghost king self detonated, it threw the local void into disarray and also scattered qi currents into massive turbulence. It was as if a large prison that left half step kings no place to run. Only kings that’d coalesced their dao rules stood a chance.

“No, it’s my fault!” Lu Yun frowned fiercely and murmured, “From the Robber King destroying a Hongmeng treasure, to the attack of the second step ghost king, and now the ambushes of the third step kings, all of them were tightly interlinked with each other. The slightest carelessness will land us all in absolute disaster.

“I’ve been too confident—we have so many more aces up our sleeve that we’ve yet to use. The king grade formations, talismans, and healing pills all lay untouched in our seed storage. We need to be cautious and prudent, not negligent like we’ve been.”

Qing Ting:

“Champion Duke, aren’t you a little too harsh on yourself?” Li Zhen protested. “If it’d been anyone else in those situations... even the Bloodclad Duke and the others... they’d be dead without a doubt too. We’re alive!”

“We’re alive because Hua Fengwen was here. If he wasn’t, we’d be dead!” Lu Yun said dolefully. “I have indeed been overconfident.”

Li Zhen and Qing Ting didn’t respond further; they didn’t want to entertain this funk of his. Instead, they collected the third step kings’ corpses. Though the deceased’s seed storage had burst upon their death and destroyed everything within, there were still a lot of quality treasures on the kings themselves. Their signature flying swords were still clenched in their hands—though they weren’t king grade, they were still rare items.

When the three left the area, they dug a hole in a small mountain and hid inside.

“Qing Ting, you’ve surpassed the Azureclad Duke now, have you thought of giving yourself a striking title?” Li Zhen walked up to Qing Ting with a smile.

“A title?” Qing Ting blinked and propped her chin up with her hands, taking a look at the still contemplative Lu Yun. “I haven’t thought of one yet, have you? You’ve reached the battle strength of a duke and have the right to bear a title too.”

“Of course I have!” Li Zhen puffed his chest out. “The Ghostblade Duke! From now on, I’ll be the Ghostblade Duke!”

He lifted the ghost-headed blade in his hand.

“The Ghostblade Duke? Then you’ll share the same first character as the Robber King, though his is silent,” Qing Ting asked with surprise.

“Pfft, Robber King? More like the Bowdown King! He kowtowed to me just now and cried like a baby!” Li Zhen brought out an impression stone with a flip of his hand. A water curtain flowed out from it—the Robber King from earlier, begging for mercy.

Chapter 1359: Central Crystal Vein of Starspace Major

“The heck you record that for?” Qing Ting stared blankly at the image.

“You might not know that the Robber King is notorious throughout the Hongmeng. Many notable heavyweights hate him with a passion!” Li Zhen chuckled. “I can make copies of this recording and sell it to them. They’ll definitely buy it!”

Qing Ting had spent her life in seclusion and only recently set foot in the world. Lu Yun hadn’t arrived in the third realm for long, so their understanding of the Hongmeng wasn’t as extensive as Li Zhen’s.

“If the Enforcer Alliance has listed a bounty of a hundred million crystals for the Robber King’s head... then those heavyweights will definitely buy these recordings for the same amount. Hehehe, I’m rich! Rich!” Li Zhen cackled with satisfaction.

The heavyweights he spoke of were mid level kings. Though the Robber King was a third step king, there were fourth, fifth, and sixth step kings, as well as their progeny, who numbered among the Robber King’s victims.

“Part of the credit goes to me too, so make sure to send me a few copies. I’m going to sell them as well!” Qing Ting hastily interjected. “I’m also why he got on his knees and begged!”

Though she was the daughter of a seventh step king, she didn’t own that many purple crystals. She didn’t even have a complete crystal vein, so a hundred million purple crystals was a large sum to her.

Purple crystals were both the currency of the Hongmeng and a necessity for cultivation. If she carried crystal veins on her during her adventures, she would draw unwanted attention and potentially invite fatal disaster.

An ordinary sixth step king, the Trueriver King had instantly broken through to peak sixth step kingdom when Lu Yun gifted him nine thousand premium crystal veins. Though the Trueriver Sect had lost their territory in Multitude City, their overall status rose to a new standing due to their sectmaster’s increase in strength.

Not only that, but some of the other Trueriver kings stuck at a cultivation bottleneck also found success through utilizing the nine thousand crystal veins. Purple crystals, in particular purple crystal veins, were strategic cultivation assets in the Hongmeng on par with war resources. It was an utter waste to use them to purchase goods.

Whether it was during the era of supplemental dao restriction or present day, there were very few people who would be willing to purchase a king grade Detonation Talisman with a few hundred thousand premium purple crystals.

In their eyes, Lu Yun throwing out a dozen of the talismans in one go and his massive shopping spree for Li Zhen and Qing Ting in the Haotian Tower was an incredible squander of resources.

The Immortal Pagoda exchanging purple crystals for ghost crystals was even more unbelievable. At least the Haotian Tower didn't follow their rival in that madness!

Qing Ting also lacked purple crystals as well. As much as her father doted on and spoiled her, he didn't entrust her with too many crystals. Therefore, she naturally wouldn't pass up any chance to earn crystals.

The mid level kings would pay so much for this recording purely out of extreme frustration inflicted by the Robber King. Spending a few hundred million purple crystals for contentment was purple crystals well spent.

"Don't worry, we've been through life and death together. You'll get a cut of any transaction we make!" Li Zhen grinned.

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"Hoo!" After an indeterminate period of time, Lu Yun breathed out with ease and slowly opened his eyes.

"Have you thought things through?" Qing Ting cast an annoyed look at Lu Yun.

"Mhmm." Lu Yun nodded. "You two should go back."

"Eh?" Qing Ting and Li Zhen paused. "The two of us should go back? What about you?"

Lu Yun looked down without a word.

"Oi oi oi, what are you thinking about? What will I do if you run off with the Stellar Sword after we go back?" Qing Ting grumbled with dissatisfaction. She'd long since forgotten about her brother's mission, so she brought it up now mostly to make a joke, but also to express her unhappiness.

He wanted to leave them behind? What, were they burdens?

"You're not thinking of blowing up the central crystal vein of Starspace Region, are you?" Li Zhen suddenly thought of something.

Every region possessed a central crystal vein from which derived countless major veins. A region was only as strong as its central crystal vein. Redbud Mountain of Redbud Region was its central crystal vein.

The central crystal vein that Li Zhen spoke of was a similar concept. Three thousand six hundred and fifty major premium crystal veins encircled it, anchoring the fortunes of the region. Innumerable small premium crystal veins splintered off from the major ones—they weren't the personal wealth of the Starspace King, but the communal property of all Starspace cultivators.

The central crystal vein supplied the region with Hongmeng qi, and all crystal veins throughout the land were its derivative. Destroying it meant ruining the layout of the entire region, and the ghost tomb undergoing repairs would naturally not exist anymore.

“Mmhm.” Lu Yun nodded and didn’t conceal his intentions. “It will be impossible to destroy the partially formed ghost tomb if the central crystal vein isn’t eliminated. The ghosts will continue to stream forth and this war will never end.

“Additionally, when the ghost tomb reaches a higher degree of completion, more and more ghosts in the Hongmeng will congregate on it. The ones here won’t even need to mine purple crystals after a while, they can just use the bodies of inferior realm ghosts to finish the ghost tomb—ghost nest.”

The Acclaim King had already ventured inside to destroy it, but she hadn’t been able to uproot it despite her strength as a ninth step king! The ghost nest had already become one with the central crystal vein of Starspace Region.

“I’m going too!” Qing Ting volunteered when she heard this. “It’s too dangerous for you to go alone!”

“That’s right, we go together! Having another person with you is one more source of strength!” Li Zhen quickly agreed.

Lu Yun could clearly sense their conviction through the Karmic Tree and nodded after some careful consideration. Half step kings at the titled duke level possessed resolute dao hearts that couldn’t be swayed. Anything they decided upon was set in stone.

Therefore, if he didn’t take them with him, they’d find a way there themselves.

“Here are two Transformation Talismans drawn by the Immortal King himself. They can turn us into ghost kings that not even ninth step ghost kings can see through.” Lu Yun materialized two pure black Transformation Talismans.

“The Immortal King drew these himself?” Qing Ting and Li Zhen gasped.

“That’s right. One of these is worth more than that emotion formation, so if you’re truly decided, refine the talisman and we’ll be on our way once we turn into ghost kings.” He released the two talismans into the void.

“Of course we’re going! Why the heck wouldn’t we? I thought we’d be risking our lives and probably not make it out alive, but here we have this kind of treasure to use!” Li Zhen merrily accepted one of the talismans and melded it into his body. He transformed in the next instant and curls of black ghostly qi wafted from him.

He was a first step ghost king now.

As a titled duke half step king, Li Zhen possessed the battle strength of a first step king. Once he became a first step ghost king, he could deploy the strength that he should command.

“Are you actually the Trueriver King’s son? How come he’s given this kind of treasure to you?” After a careful look at himself, Li Zhen discovered that he didn’t exude any presence of the living. He really was enveloped by ghostly power and it wasn’t uncomfortable at all.

Qing Ting took a deep look at Lu Yun and quickly integrated the talisman into her body, also becoming a first step ghost king.

Lu Yun casually threw her the large sickle left behind by the second step ghost king. He'd picked it up before the ghost king self detonated!

"Cut off the heads of those third step kings. We go to Starspace City!" Lu Yun ignored Li Zhen.

Chapter 1360: Revenge of the Purpleclad Duke

Ghosts could be found wherever cultivators and arcane beasts were absent in the Hongmeng. Some weaker cultivators couldn't even travel alone in the wild—they were too easily targeted by a variety of vengeful and vicious ghosts.

When Zhuo Bufan took Lu Yun and the little fox to Starcloud City and had their trip interrupted by the Redbud King's forcefield, they'd hurried to the closest Redbud City to avoid running into ghosts in the wild.

Now with Starspace Region falling to the ghosts, ghost kings in nearby regions broke through the cultivator blockade and surged in to reinforce their new territory.

Lu Yun had gained some clues from the self detonated ghost king, which was why he'd decided to disguise himself as a ghost and sneak in to destroy the central crystal vein, thereby destroying the ghost nest.

There seems to be cultivators working with the ghosts.

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Each of the three grabbed a third step king's head and quietly headed further into the region. There were still many cultivators and kings entering Starspace to kill ghosts, and they also targeted the contingents gathered around the crystal veins. However, they didn't dare approach the heart of the region—Starspace City.

There were signs of ninth step ghost kings in the Starspace capital, yet the strongest Clouduin defender on the surface was Jinse and Hua Fengwen. The Acclaim King had yet to show herself in public.

Despite that, the cultivators of Clouduin Region didn't panic. All would be fine as long as they avoided the core territory of Starspace Region. The ninth step ghost kings were too busy overseeing the ghost nest.

One hundred and eight purple crystal cannons outside Clouduin City fired barrages into the ghost nest at every possible moment. They completely preoccupied the Moon King's attention as she was the only ghost king in all of Starspace Region who could dispel the cannons' attacks.

Dispel, not block.

The light pillars from the cannons contained the will of the Hongmeng. Even when blocked, the encompassed will could still deliver a fatal blow to the ghost tomb.

Only a ninth step king of the Moon King's caliber could fully dispel the realm's will within.

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The further in the trio headed, the more ghosts they could find. When they drew near Starspace City, the land and sky teemed with ghosts. The enemy was as dense as particles of dirt and ghost kings were so numerous that they rubbed elbows with each other.

However, everything was deathly silent with no sound whatsoever.

Though the ghosts understood the common language of the Hongmeng, they rarely communicated with each other. Lower level ghosts were given orders with a simple thought ripple from a high level king.

As first step kings, Lu Yun's trio was completely inconsequential when they arrived. Instantly lost among the crowd, other ghost kings even snatched the three heads from their hands.

"I'd thought it'd be easier for us to blend in with these tokens of our loyalty, but there's no order here to speak of. It's a complete mess," Qing Ting transmitted to the other two.

"Indeed, there's no order at all to be found in ghosts—none of life or anything else." Lu Yun nodded. "But they also look disorderly only on the surface. There's actually a clear division of labor among them, so it's probably going to be difficult for us to slip in and make it to the central crystal vein underground."

He'd noticed that it was very hard for first and second step ghost kings to enter below ground. They either left after handing over their purple crystals or wandered around aimlessly until given new orders.

On the trio's way here, they recruited several million wandering ghosts and formed them into a contingent, stole a crystal vein from another group of ghosts, and killed their three ghost kings. They then battled with numerous cultivators before finally making it here.

The formerly glittering Starspace City, immense in its might and stature, had become scattered ruins and ghost territory. Lu Yun could see the Moon King.

She didn't appear to be a ghost king. Instead, she was pure white and flawless throughout, her silver long hair sparkling with light. Life filled her eyes, not the air of death found in ghosts. Three kings from Mangcang Mountain stood next to her—they were all ghost kings now and under her control.

The purple crystal cannons continued their relentless barrage, vaporizing countless ghosts at every second. Ghost kings struck back at every moment as well, dispelling the pillars of light from the weapons.

The heart of the ghost tomb lay under Starspace City.

"Thank goodness the central crystal vein of the region hasn't been fully corrupted. The big dragon inside is resisting the Moon King's ghostly power. Though she is a ninth step ghost king, she can't immediately refine the crystal vein," Lu Yun heaved a slight sigh of relief. "What about the Starspace King? Was he eliminated from existence or has he been assimilated as well?"

Lu Yun dismissed his ghostly troops after he turned over his purple crystals and shuffled around. The ghost tomb was built not only below ground, but laid out aboveground as well. Any arrangements on the ground had been destroyed by the purple crystal cannons. The ghosts that'd been in charge of that portion of the tomb drifted about inane since they hadn't received new commands.

“Would you say that ghosts are intelligent?” Li Zhen wandered around like the other ghosts, making careful observations as he transmitted to his companions.

They were equipped with both Lu Yun’s Transformation Talisman and a Stillness Talisman as refined from a karmic fruit. The latter could quiet any sort of ripple from them, including that of message transmittal.

“They’re intelligent.” Lu Yun nodded. “But low level ghost kings are absolutely obedient to higher level ghost kings. If a ninth step king was there, they’d be just as docile as the rest of us. Be careful not to expose yourself.”

“Wait, look over there!” Qing Ting suddenly transmitted urgently. “There’s a cultivator over there—the Purpleclad Duke!”

“What?!” Lu Yun and Li Zhen’s eyes widened with surprise. They didn’t dare extend their consciousness, however, but looked in the relevant direction seemingly by chance.

Purpleclad wore a black cloak and stood in the air over Starspace City. He hovered in open view, not concealing anything about his figure or face.

“Moon King, so it is you,” he said coolly.

“To think you’d really come, Purpleclad Duke!” The Moon King smiled charmingly at the duke. “Since you have, that means you’ve accepted my proposal. Have you brought ten thousand premium crystal veins with you?”

“Hmph!” Purpleclad snorted coldly. “They’re in my seed storage. Where is my master’s body?”

“Right here.” The Moon King summoned the corpse of a woman with a wave of her hand. She was extraordinarily beautiful even in death. Though she no longer drew breath, she didn’t appear to be overcome by the final end.

She was once the master of Starspace Region—the Starspace King.

Her corpse floated to Purpleclad with another wave of the Moon King’s hand; the duke’s eyes instantly reddened.

“...master!!” he forced out through grit teeth. “Here are ten thousand premium crystal veins!”

He released his seed storage, first sending in his master’s body and then retrieving the crystal veins.

“Detonate!” he suddenly roared.

KABOOM!

Ten thousand premium crystal veins exploded and their innate power spread out over five billion kilometers in all directions.

“Hahaha, you’ve been had, Moon King! I wouldn’t betray the Hongmeng even for my master’s body! Enjoy the ten thousand crystal veins!” He was already gone in a streak of light, but his voice echoed in the aftermath of the terrifying explosion.

He'd come prepared—a king grade Detonation Talisman was buried in each of the crystal veins. When activated, each crystal vein exploded to its fullest limits, leaving nothing behind for the Moon King.

Purpleclad himself made use of a king grade Flee Talisman to immediately escape to safety.

“You bastard!!” the Moon King’s anguished howl reverberated through Starspace Region. An explosion of ten thousand premium crystal veins shook the ghost tomb setup underground. It’d already been severely damaged; another devastating blow ruined it almost completely beyond the scope of salvaging!

Never had the Moon King imagined that the Purpleclad Duke would have this in store for her. She was quite lost at what’d just happened.

Wasn’t supplemental dao monopolized by the Supplemental Dao Alliance? King grade supplemental treasures were almost never seen. Mangcang Mountain’s Oddmoon had only been completed with her help.

Why did the duke suddenly have so many king grade Detonation and even a Flee Talisman?

Had he switched allegiances to the Supplemental Dao Alliance?

Though the crystal veins exploding didn’t hurt her, they still caused her to sink into a baffled stupor for a time.