

## **Necropolis 1371**

### **Chapter 1371: True Cultivation**

“It’s seen through my sword dao!” Lu Yun gasped with shock as the specter of death loomed over him. His mind remained fixed on surprise, rather than the fear he should more logically feel at impending doom. The soldier had obtained a solid grasp on his sword dao!

Second stroke: Dragonsoar!

The second stroke was a precursor to the meaning behind the third stroke—he’d used the will of the third stroke to defeat the last enemy standing from the earlier round. To think that the soldier would reappear and this time, dismantle the move entirely!

Lu Yun shook, flaring cerulean light from his hand and shattering the blow aimed at his neck. He darted rapidly backward and deployed the Stellar Sword’s keen light to sweep away all soldiers in a whirlwind of death.

The Stellar Sword was so sharp that almost nothing could withstand more than one blow from it. Just it alone more than doubled Lu Yun’s strength.

He stood in the middle of an empty clearing, his expression flickering rapidly.

“What the heck was that... Are these soldiers actually alive? I used that stroke to pull myself from the jaws of defeat the first time around, but when that soldier appeared a second time, it knew how to counter my move!”

He’d been headed for certain death just now. Once the attack hit his neck and decapitated him, the light within would’ve certainly pierced through his nascent spirit and ended him where he stood. There would be no chance for survival.

He’d lost. To a soldier.

Setting aside the possibility of all one hundred and eight soldiers charging him at the same time, he didn’t have any hope of winning against that one soldier alone.

“Where do these soldiers come from? Are they purely formed from the rules of this treasure, or are they real beings?” Lu Yun looked around blankly. “No wonder cultivators who train in the Army Pagoda either come out as a stunning expert or never emerge again...”

“Since I used the edge of the Stellar Sword to defuse danger this time, that soldier will probably come back with a similar level weapon.” He shuddered and quickly put the treasure away. Honestly, using the Stellar Sword here was too close to cheating.

The Hongmeng was endless without end and its treasures too many to be imagined. If he owned the Stellar Sword, then there were certainly others who possessed a similar level of treasure.

Only one’s personal strength was the true foundation of everything.

“I can’t think so highly of myself anymore. One hundred and eight soldiers appear at the same time—who knows what other surprising characters lurk among them? I don’t lack for encounters of life and death, I only want to temper my sword dao and gain more battle experience.”

Ten half step king soldiers appeared in front of him as he mused over his thoughts. This was the lowest level trial of the Army Pagoda.

Lu Yun cleared his mind of everything and refrained from rushing to kill them. He focused more on observing their methods and techniques, using his sword dao, instead of brute force, to defeat their combat arts.

He was much more at ease in his third attempt compared to before and improved at a rapid clip. The meaning behind his third stroke of sword dao also began to crystallize.

He’d used less than a hundred breaths to kill all hundred and eight soldiers the first time, but he’d ended the round covered in wounds and almost on death’s door. He’d needed less than ten breaths and a quick brandish of the Stellar Sword the second time, but he’d also completely lost the round.

This time, he used two hours to defeat the soldiers one after another. In the end, they raised cupped fist salutes at him and uniformly vanished into the Army Pagoda.

“So the exploration of sword dao intent doesn’t just mean pure slaughter.” Comprehension dawned on Lu Yun. Swords were used to kill, but the honing of sword dao intent was to scrupulously abide by one’s conscience and heart, so that one wasn’t lost in indifferent slaughter.

Lu Yun’s first attempt had summoned one hundred and eight soldiers for an epic massacre. That was the training of deranged fanatics and would lead one down the wrong path. If he continued in that vein, he would eventually lose himself to senseless killing.

“No wonder the pagoda sent out a soldier like that to stop me from continuing further,” Lu Yun gave a long exhale of understanding.

“Again!”

A second wave of ten soldiers appeared. They were likewise half step kings without the slightest change in strength, but their combat arts and techniques were more profound than they’d exhibited to date. Incredibly, they tailored their attacks for Lu Yun’s sword dao and began to piece together a complete answer for it!

Dragonrise—perfect and infallible in Hua Fengwen’s eyes, proved unable to stand up to the ten soldiers!

First it was Dragonrise, then it was Dragonsoar!

By the time the third set of ten appeared, the soldiers could perfectly counter Lu Yun’s two greatest moves. As he abstained from killing them, so did they not make a move on him. They raised cupped fist salutes once more after dispelling Lu Yun’s two sword techniques and vanished upon the wind.

He sat down cross-legged, deep in contemplation.

“I’d always thought that my Dragonrise was at the heights of perfection, that it was flawless and reigned unchallenged. But those ten soldiers were able to disperse the move—not through superior strength or

cultivation level, but simply because they found the flaws in my sword technique!” Lu Yun inhaled deeply. “If there are that many flaws in my first move, then there are even more in my second and third moves. I’ve been rushing through things too quickly.”

Dragonrise showed that it was riddled with holes when deployed against the ten soldiers. The second stroke and yet unformed third stroke were all derived from the first. If the foundations were shaky, then the entire building would collapse.

With that, Lu Yun gently reached out and crushed Dragonsoar out of existence. He would first perfect the first stroke and then recreate the second!

“The senior who refined the Army Pagoda is absolutely a great expert. If I don’t bear the intent to kill, the soldiers in here won’t seek my life either. This is the true way of cultivation.” He took a deep breath and braced himself.

Under ordinary circumstances, cultivators used the pagoda to summon soldiers for target practice and to enhance their own strength with the soldiers’ power after death. Since Lu Yun had abstained from doing so from the very beginning, he’d gradually shifted into a prime cultivation mindset and extinguished his flames of bloodlust. When he didn’t focus on killing soldiers, the true path of training in the Army Pagoda revealed itself.

He also learned to let go of cocky self assurance that’d crept in after all this time. Since these soldiers looked to be real cultivators, then they were certainly based off of real people in the Hongmeng. He was far inferior to their true selves—all of them were only half step kings who weren’t even worthy of a title, but they could beat him through combat arts alone.

Lu Yun wasn’t even invincible among his peers, much less approaching the peak of the third realm!

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Another ten soldiers appeared with a quick thought. He no longer paid attention to their moves, instead focusing on himself and the Dragonrise technique. He noted the flaws and openings that the soldiers had detected and gradually improved upon them.

He was defeated again after two hours.

After a slight round of reflection, he summoned another ten soldiers and held on for three hours before defeat. This time, he greeted his defeat with a wide grin. He’d finally identified the greatest weakness of his sword technique!

### **Chapter 1372: King Soldier**

Lu Yun spent three days inside the Army Pagoda. Upon determining the proper approach for his path, he carefully avoided biting off more than he could chew and focused on practicing Dragonrise after erasing Dragonsoar.

Dragonrise had been created in the chaos—it was a technique that contained a bit of the Dragonquake Scripture, but was also wholly Lu Yun’s own sword dao.

This stroke was perfect from the perspective of the second realm, but too awful and weak to consider from the heights of the Hongmeng. The two realms were on completely different levels of existence.

When Dusksnow Morningstar deployed it, just the move's meaning alone had overcome Hua Fengwen with awe. Since Lu Yun's true level was in the fourth realm, any techniques he created were superior to the plethora of combat arts in the Hongmeng. However, a more sophisticated level didn't mean that it was flawless.

In Lu Yun's journey throughout the third realm, he'd never truly cultivated. All he relied on was his fearsome preexisting level. Without his level in the fourth realm, the flame of order, and the incredibly mysterious Tome of Life and Death, he didn't have the right to walk the Hongmeng.

He composed his mind and reflected over all of his gains to date, turning them into his own. In doing so, he gradually perfected Dragonrise's details and corrected its flaws.

"I've finally really defeated the ten soldiers." Panting heavily and drenched with sweat, not a single wound marred his skin. This was cultivation, not a fight to the death.

Cultivation was a process to identify and shore up one's weaknesses, not a single minded focus on lethality and killing the enemy. If one solely focused on slaughter as a way of training, they would be able to easily dispatch their peers or weaker opponents based on experience alone. But if they met an expert or an opponent whose combat arts were practiced to the heights of perfection, they would be defeated by the flaws in their own techniques.

Experiences of life and death as well as a bloodthirsty way of cultivation were equally necessary in cultivation, but Lu Yun's current method was the most important!

"The Army Pagoda is a wondrous cultivation treasure indeed! If it wasn't for this pagoda, I would have to seek out a high level king to feed me moves, so as to complete the combat arts for my sword dao." A trace of a smile appeared on Lu Yun's face.

"I'm just one tiny step away. When I defeated the last soldier, it managed to hit my left arm before it vanished. It looks like there's still an opening there, which means that my opponent can use it if this was a fight to the death and cut off my arm!"

Lu Yun recalled his last stroke and employed formula dao to finally perfect the new and improved version of Dragonrise.

Though this tiny opening didn't seem worth mentioning, it would be a gaping hole to true geniuses and they would defeat, or even kill Lu Yun through it.

Within the Army Pagoda, his greatest advantage wasn't his plethora of purple crystals, but that his formula dao could derive combat arts at any time. After all, he and Qing Yu had first invented formula dao to use in theorizing new combat arts.

"That should do it... These are the only flaws I've been able to find, at least," he murmured with a frown. "Let's try again!"

He called upon the Army Pagoda once more and summoned a new round of trial. A familiar face appeared before him—the soldier who'd nearly killed him twice!

There was a longsword glowing with hazy purple light in his hand this time, plainly not an ordinary weapon.

Lu Yun's pupils contracted violently. He finally noticed something different about this soldier—there was a tiny, indistinct purple “king” character imprinted on his chest.

A king soldier?

That didn't really matter to Lu Yun.

“Make your move,” said the soldier. “If you defeat me head-on, that will mean the combat art you've pioneered is a perfect and flawless combat art.”

“You talk?” Lu Yun blinked.

“Who told you that we don't talk?” The soldier smiled faintly. “We are indeed formed by the rules of the Army Pagoda, but we were once living beings. Our death brands were collected by the pagoda, which then turned us into the soldiers here. As you can see, I am the king of the first level.”

He pointed to the tiny “king” character on his chest.

Lu Yun nodded, he'd guessed as much. When he'd purely killed the soldiers, that resulted in gains outside of the true way of cultivation. After he set foot on the right path, the pagoda began tailoring its reaction to help him locate his flaws and force him to correct his form.

Fueled by a mammoth amount of purple crystals, the entire pagoda's rules were activated to help Lu Yun train his sword dao. After the final flaw in his Dragonrise was erased, the inordinately strong soldier appeared once more.

“There are mountains beyond mountains and heavens beyond heavens! Defeating you doesn't necessarily mean that my combat art has reached the peak of existence. Just because you or the pagoda can't identify weakness in my combat arts doesn't mean that none exists.” None of Lu Yun's previous arrogance could be seen now.

“You're very right, there are mountains beyond mountains and heavens beyond heavens... A fourth realm exists outside of the Hongmeng, so might there be a fifth realm beyond that as well?” murmured the soldier.

Whoosh!

He suddenly shifted into motion and slashed at Lu Yun with a long arc of sword light from his purple longsword.

“Whether your sword dao combat art is perfect or not, this ultimate treasure of the realm—the Purple Sunrise sword—will be yours if you defeat me!”

An ultimate treasure of the Hongmeng!

The soldier had brought out a weapon of this caliber against Lu Yun! His moves were fast and furious, leaving no breathing space for the young man. His opening move was a swift stroke to the head.

Lu Yun reacted extremely quickly and took a slight step backward, unsheathing the Stellar Sword with a flash of cerulean light and forming it into a dragon that hovered protectively in front of him.

Clang!

Lu Yun shuffled three steps back, but the soldier remained where he was. He took a dozen steps forward and split his sword light into thousands of rays, rushing for Lu Yun's left arm.

The left arm was the final flaw in Lu Yun's Dragonrise.

"Dragonrise!" Lu Yun suddenly roared. "Let me tell you why this stroke is called Dragonrise!"

Boom!

He didn't rush to defend his left arm—with the aid of formula dao, he'd long since resolved the weakness there. A cerulean blue dragon sword shadow probed out of his body and slowly lifted its head.

Dragonrise was the initial stroke of his sword dao and the move in which he accumulated strength for his next action.

Only when a dragon lifted its head could it see the apex of the multiverse and rise into the nine heavens! The dragon's head was lifted now, its eyes all-embracing and seeing through everything in the world.

Lu Yun then followed up with his second stroke.

### **Chapter 1373: Looks Easy to Bully**

One instance of Dragonrise blocked the king soldier's stroke and Lu Yun swiftly followed up with a second blow. It was a very ordinary gesture, one that lacked any hint of sword dao or combat art.

Just the regular swing of a sword.

In this crucial moment, it was also a fatal stroke. Cerulean blue sword light pierced through the king soldier's throat.

Clang!

The soldier's Purple Sunrise sword clattered to the ground and he nodded at his opponent before slowly fading away.

A profound power tried to enter Lu Yun's body, but he declined it as before. When experts crossed paths, they needed only one move and a split second to determine the outcome. The king soldier hadn't held anything back; neither had Lu Yun treated the exchange lightly. They'd both unleashed their strongest force in the exchange—whoever was defeated would die.

Lu Yun had followed up with a second move to finish off his opponent. But when he looked down, he saw a faint bloody trace slowly knitting together on his chest.

"If I hadn't struck again, I would be the one dead! The king soldier found my second flaw on my chest!" He took a deep breath.

Though formula dao could theorize combat arts, it wasn't an all-purpose tool. It needed clues to go off of and a starting point for its basis. If a combat art had never been deployed before, it wouldn't be able to fully identify the art's weaknesses.

"I lost, but I won because I can adapt. I snatched victory from the jaws of defeat when you noticed the opening at my chest and triumphed in that manner." Lu Yun murmured.

“I see.” The king soldier materialized once more and nodded gently. “You have truly defeated me and are invincible on the first level. You can train through the manner of slaughter at any time.”

“Training through the manner of slaughter? That’s meaningless to me.” Lu Yun shook his head. “But I do need the sword, so I’ll take it.”

He picked up Purple Sunrise and put it away.

The king soldier nodded once more. “I used this sword in life, you must treat it well.”

“I will be sure to live up to its illustrious name,” Lu Yun promised. He could tell that the weapon’s former owner didn’t want Purple Sunrise to continue collecting dust in the Army Pagoda.

“Do not attempt the second floor before you become a titled king. Your death would be a foregone conclusion,” the king soldier warned. “There are true kings and false kings in this realm—many of the kings in the outside world travel down the wrong path. You must not become a ninth step king when you ascend, or you will not be able to turn back!”

He looked solemnly at Lu Yun—in his eyes, this young man absolutely had the ability to break through as a ninth step king.

Lu Yun frowned slightly and thought of the black entity that’d obstructed Qing Yu and the little fox. Judging from the king soldier’s words, that entity didn’t seem to be malicious.

“I understand.” Regardless, he nodded to show that he took the warning to heart.

“Since you are not willing to train through the manner of slaughter, the first level of the Army Pagoda is useless to you. You should depart the premises.” The king soldier waved a hand and sent Lu Yun out of the treasure, his final instructions echoing in the young man’s mind. “Since you have passed the test of the first level and perfected your half-step-king combat art, the soldiers of the first level can fight for you. I can as well, as long as you supply sufficient purple crystals. The more you provide, the stronger we will be.”

He spoke no more.

Lu Yun finally understood what Qing Yu had said to him before, how the Army Pagoda wasn’t just a cultivation treasure, but a terrifying treasure of war. He didn’t press for further explanation since it was obvious that the king soldier wouldn’t elaborate any further. Some things required his own exploration and experimentation.

As for purple crystals... he didn’t exactly lack for them at the moment. Though what he owned constantly streamed out to others in exchange for ghost crystals, the Immortal Pagoda continued to turn a profit. Haotian Tower might impact them to a certain degree, but the pagoda sold many items that the tower lacked.

The emotion formation, for instance.

It wasn’t a complicated formation and could be refined as long as one had a karmic fruit. The replica that Lu Yun had left behind in Multitude City could manage it with ease.

There were also many supplemental grandmasters and kings who applied to join the Immortal Pagoda, and while most of them came with ulterior motives, Lu Yun didn't turn any away.

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He finally exited seclusion on the fourth day. Qing Ting was beside herself with worry and immediately rushed in when she saw the formation shrouding the residence deactivate.

"You're finally out, Champion Duke! Do you know that a lot of people think you got cold feet in the three days you've been in closed door cultivation?? They think you don't want to go through with the challenge anymore!" she spoke rapidly.

The city lord had agreed to the challenge on the second day of Lu Yun's seclusion. Given the Champion Duke's background and demonstrated strength, there was no reason for the city lord to refuse. Additionally, there was only upside to be found in forming a relationship with the Immortal Pagoda through the Champion Duke.

"I observed Coiling Dragon City's feng shui after I arrived and came to a few reflections. The moment seized me, so I had to shut myself away for three days." Lu Yun smiled. Hongmeng cultivators entered closed door cultivation for tens of thousands of years, or hundreds of thousands at a time. Three days was nothing.

"Leng Che and the others have been waiting for you at the sparring grounds for the past two days. Do you need to prepare yourself first?" Qing Ting asked hesitantly when she looked at Lu Yun.

A few days' wait was inconsequential to Hongmeng cultivators. Some experts waited several hundreds, or thousands of years for a match in which both sides were at their prime.

Of course, it was almost time for the Dragonling Assembly. If Lu Yun hadn't appeared within three days of its commencement, that would indicate his forfeiture.

"Nope, we can go directly." He rose into the air and flew toward the city lord manor's sparring grounds.

Leng Che, You Cang, and Ghost Dragon meditated within the ring as they awaited their opponent's arrival. Numerous cultivators under the city lord's banner gathered around them; they were also waiting quietly for the Champion Duke.

Azureclad and Crimsonclad counted among their numbers.

"The Champion Duke has arrived!" Qing Ting yelled out behind Lu Yun.

A jerk of surprise rippled through the crowd as everyone lifted their heads.

"So you've really come. I thought you were just running your mouth." Azureclad lifted a corner of his lips. He looked at his sister with some annoyance—though the Champion Duke was much more pleasing to the eye now, he still didn't like Qing Ting being too close with the boy.

"Hey there, little brother Champion Duke. We meet again." Crimsonclad smiled at Lu Yun.



Lu Yun raised a cupped fist salute to everyone when he landed. The sparring grounds didn't look spacious, but they were far bigger than they appeared. There seemed to be a minor world inside them that could fully contain a match between high level kings.

"You are the Champion Duke?" Seated in the main seat, a sixth step king in blue robes looked at Lu Yun and inclined his head. "You are quite the talent indeed. Who might you be challenging for their spot?"

The sixth step looked very young, like he wasn't much different from Lu Yun. However, his cultivation was already peak sixth step king, far beyond the likes of the Human King and almost on par with Jin Naluo.

He was the Coiling Dragon city lord's younger brother, the Dragonfeather King.

"Greetings to Your Majesty Dragonfeather." Lu Yun raised a cupped fist salute before turning to the three in the sparring grounds.

Leng Che, You Cang, and Ghost Dragon had opened their eyes and were sizing him up.

You Cang was an elder with white temples and a graying beard. He exuded uncanny black qi at all moments, plainly someone who walked the dao of darkness.

Ghost Dragon also appeared to be a young man. Clean cut and shaven, he wore pristine robes and appeared completely harmless. He didn't share any resemblances with the Ghost Dragon that Lu Yun knew, but the latter acutely picked up a wisp of a very dangerous, yet familiar presence from Ghost Dragon.

"This little brother looks easy to bully. I choose him." He pointed at Ghost Dragon with a smile.

#### **Chapter 1374: An Opening? A Trap**

"You want to challenge Ghost Dragon?" gaped Leng Che, Azureclad and the others. Ghost Dragon also turned to Lu Yun with surprise.

"Are you crazy, Champion Duke? He's the strongest of us three and you think he's easy to bully?!" Leng Che repeated with incredulity.

"So you're the strongest." Lu Yun gravely took his measure of his opponent. "Since it's a challenge, I'm going to challenge the strongest. Otherwise, people will think that the Champion Duke only picks on weaklings."

The crowd didn't know how to react to this astonishing about-face. He'd just said that Ghost Dragon looked easy to bully, but now wanted nothing less than the strongest?

"What do you think, Ghost Dragon?" asked the Dragonfeather King. Though Ghost Dragon was an exceedingly strong cultivator who rivaled a titled duke, only Leng Che had a title out of the three of them.

Titled dukes were different from titled kings since the latter was bestowed by the Hongmeng Tower. Meanwhile, titled dukes meant public acknowledgement and acceptance of the half step king's strength.

Those who gave themselves a title without validation by others were treated as jokes. It was why so many had intensely disliked Lu Yun when he first appeared in Cloudexit City.

There were four publicly acknowledged titled dukes in the Hongmeng—the Azureclad, Purpleclad, Bloodclad, and Crimsonclad Dukes. Though others like the Poissondragon Duke also bore titles, he wasn't as renowned as the first four.

Although Qing Ting was stronger than her brother, she still lacked a title. It wasn't that she didn't want one, but that her strength hadn't been validated by the realm. While she bickered and smacked her brother regularly, she would never defeat him in public and humiliate him in such a way.

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“Since this Champion Duke wishes to take my spot, I will naturally step forward to defend it.” Ghost Dragon responded shyly, as if he was a young and innocent boy. However, a chilly hint sparkled in his eyes. He pushed off the balls of his feet and landed in the center of the sparring ring.

“If I defeat this Champion Duke, might I have a title of my own?” He suddenly looked hopefully at the Dragonfeather King.

“If you emerge victorious, I will bestow you with the title of Ghostdragon Duke,” chuckled Dragonfeather. As a sixth step king, he absolutely had the right to give a title to a half step king.

“My thanks to Your Majesty Dragonfeather!” Absolutely delighted, Ghost Dragon turned back around and regarded Lu Yun with excitement. “I've always wanted a title of my own. Who would've thought that you'd be my chance to get one!

“The Ghostdragon Duke, hehehe!!” He looked merrily at his opponent.

Lu Yun furrowed his brows. Though Ghost Dragon brimmed with happiness, it seemed only skin deep. The emotion was just camouflage for the true feelings in the depths of his heart. Ghost Dragon gave him an unfathomable feeling, like he was an ancient well whose depths could not be plumbed.

“Let's fight!”

Whoosh!

A long spear appeared in Ghost Dragon's hands, one that was black throughout like a snarling black dragon. The air hummed with strange pulses when the spear vibrated. It wasn't any kind of legendary treasure, just a very ordinary spear. The combat art that Ghost Dragon imbued it with instilled uncanny qualities into the spear.

Strong cultivators could project their combat arts onto their treasures and turn anything into a weapon. Ghost Dragon had plainly reached this level.

Lu Yun summoned the ordinary flying sword he'd used in the Army Pagoda with a wave of his hand. Waves of cerulean sword radiance blossomed from the sword, shrouding the void.

“Are you not using your Stellar Sword, Champion Duke?” Azureclad raised a brow.

“Aren’t you the one who doesn’t want me to use it?” Lu Yun complained. “Relying on the keenness of a treasure... Ghost Dragon... Duke won’t accept my superiority if that’s how I beat him.”

He enunciated “duke” with particular clarity.

Azureclad shrugged and fell silent, whereas Qing Ting was very confident in Lu Yun. In her eyes, Lu Yun almost rivaled her and could stand toe-to-toe with a second step king. He wouldn’t even break a sweat against Ghost Dragon.

“Let us begin.” The Dragonfeather King gestured for the fight to commence.

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Ghost Dragon didn’t waste time with words. He brandished his spear, transforming it into a black dragon with a hum and sending it at Lu Yun’s chest.

Lu Yun struck out as well, deploying Dragonrise. The meaning behind the stroke was an interweaving of thousands of combat arts. It was both a technique of his sword dao and the entire significance of his sword dao. If this had been a fight before his stint in the Army Pagoda, he would’ve melded all of his combat arts into this move.

But now, he’d comprehended the true way of the sword. In the chaos and world of immortals, the meaning of sword dao was to “wield dao through the sword”. In his current rendition of understanding, he’d excavated a deeper level of connotations.

Swords had their own dao! It wasn’t to wield the great dao through the sword, but to wield sword dao through the sword!

One stroke of Dragonrise was thousands of swords striking out with Dragonrise!

A cerulean dragon figure condensed in the air—one with its head slowly rising upward. Lu Yun raised his sword upright within the dragon’s head, rays of sword light circulating around him and becoming flying swords themselves. They flew through the air in every possible direction, blasting apart Ghost Dragon’s forward motion.

The spear swept away everything in front of it with indomitable momentum. When it encountered Dragonrise, it was forcibly brought to a halt and couldn’t proceed even a centimeter further.

Lu Yun’s ten thousand swords smashed brutally onto the black spear, then followed it back to Ghost Dragon.

He suddenly let go of this weapon and materialized a second spear that was equally pitch black, as if a coiled black dragon. Stabbing forward with it, Ghost Dragon had only one target in his sights—Lu Yun’s chest!

He’d discovered that this was the flaw of the Dragonrise move.

“Die!!” Ghost Dragon roared, stepping forward and flinging the spear at Lu Yun’s chest. A third spear appeared in his hands and he stabbed it into the same spot!

Lu Yun’s chest!

The flaw of the Dragonrise move!

“Forward!” Lu Yun advanced three steps in the face of two spears bearing down on him, striking out with his sword each time he took a step. Every stroke was a very ordinary stroke, but each ordinary stroke also contained a terrifyingly keen light.

Ghost Dragon’s spears splintered to pieces when they encountered the sword light. Taken aback, he swiftly backed away and barely evaded the three sharp rays.

Shocked gasps rose and fell through the crowd. No one had anticipated that the Champion Duke would immediately gain the upper hand in their fight and break Ghost Dragon’s weapons! Given the audience’s skill level, they could naturally tell that the Champion Duke had used his own sword dao to destroy Ghost Dragon’s weapons. He hadn’t surreptitiously taken out his Stellar Sword.

“The flaw of your chest is a trap. You revealed it on purpose.” Ghost Dragon stared at the offending spot with a mix of emotions. His right hand grasped at empty air and came back with another long black spear.

It was immensely different from the ones before—this was a king grade spear with three dao rules inside.

### **Chapter 1375: That Ghost Dragon**

Lu Yun had shored up the weakness of his chest a long time ago, but he still left traces of it as a trap. Just like he’d said to the king soldier, there was no such thing as perfect combat art. If a combat art reached that level, then either it was one big flaw, or mistakes could be found everywhere within it.

The opening he’d left in front of his chest had seemed just right enough to attract an attack from Ghost Dragon at his full strength. That, in turn, gave Lu Yun enough leeway to destroy his opponent’s weapon with three moves and force him back.

Far from just shattering Ghost Dragon’s spear, Lu Yun had also shattered his combat art.

Ghost Dragon shook his spear, summoning bleak wails from the weapon. The grim cacophony drew a shocked look from Lu Yun.

“The three dao rules within that spear aren’t from the hand of a supplemental king—they’re from three different dragon kings!” The Dragonfeather King sucked in a sharp breath and considered the fight in a new light.

Refining a king’s dao rule into a treasure was highly forbidden in the Hongmeng. Regardless of where Ghost Dragon had obtained his spear, his possession of it would result in enormous consequences.

It was a different case from Qing Ting’s Azuresky Sword as the Enforcer Alliance had employed special methods to cleanse the sword’s dao rule of lingering resentment and bloodlust. If Heilin hadn’t told them about its background, not even Lu Yun would’ve found anything wrong with it.

The one in Ghost Dragon’s hand was markedly different—malice, brutality, violence, and bloodthirst seeped out from its three dao rules. All cultivators beneath half step king trembled uncontrollably after it was revealed.

“I took this spear from a first step king of Kunvoid Paradise that I killed thirty thousand years ago.” Ghost Dragon realized he’d been too brash when he felt a variety of unfriendly and hesitant gazes on him. He offered an explanation in a faint tone.

Kunvoid Paradise was one of the Ten Valleys of Evil and all made sense after his words. Only the evil cultivators of the valleys could do something like refine a king’s dao rule into a treasure!

Dragonfeather nodded gently and said no more.

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Battle began again.

Changing tack from identifying flaws in Lu Yun’s sword dao, Ghost Dragon shot into the air and used his spear as a club, smashing it down on his opponent’s head. It descended with the ponderous mass of an indomitable mountain and employed pure strength without any bells or whistles.

One stroke to break all methods.

Lu Yun gave a long whistle and sent out his flying sword, transmuting it into a cerulean dragon of light to meet the spear head-on.

Bam!

Sword and spear crashed into each other. Lu Yun’s sword broke into pieces and he himself flew back five hundred kilometers.

Rumble—

The sparring grounds trembled and the great formation around it lit up, dispersing the fearsome aftershocks from the spear.

“Nice!” Azureclad rose to his feet and cheered on Ghost Dragon. At the same time, he analyzed how he could’ve possibly defused that harrowing blow. I can only run away from it. If I can’t evade it, I’d be dead without a doubt! He took a deep breath and felt that he wasn’t a match for Ghost Dragon.

Before he had time to form a second thought, Lu Yun blazed back into the sparring grounds as a streak of sword light and shot straight for his opponent’s body. There was another sword in his hands.

The Stellar Sword!

Since Ghost Dragon had already drawn a king grade treasure, Lu Yun naturally wouldn’t hold back. Though there was only one dao rule within it, it was most perfectly suited to him since he’d personally refined it.

It exploded and revolved around him as rays of sword light, turning its wielder into a keen sword.

“Piss off!” roared Ghost Dragon to see his opponent immediately counter attack. Lying on the ground, his long spear shuddered and reversed direction like a dragon flicking its tail, sweeping toward Lu Yun in the air.

Clang!

The spear brutally rammed into the sword, violently shaking both wielders. Lu Yun flew out five thousand kilometers this time while Ghost Dragon remained solidly where he was, as if a nail driven into the ground. However, both arms had exploded from the impact and flesh and blood flew everywhere, exposing stark white arm bones.

“Again!” he snarled, ignoring the wounds. He was as if a dragon churning the seas, charging Lu Yun with a dark momentum.

He was using a combat art this time. It still looked like a straightforward thrust of his spear, but it split into endless copies and besieged Lu Yun from all possible directions. There was no place for him to retreat to—he had to take the terrible blow.

Hummm.

Cerulean sword light blazed from his body with a mind-numbing hum, coalescing into a cerulean dragon that shot into the air with a piercing dragon croon.

The second stroke: Dragonsoar!

Black and blue light occupied the sparring grounds.

Rumble!!

An enormous crack fissured the grounds after a tremendous explosion and rapidly snaked outward. Lu Yun remained firmly on the ground, wielding his sword with one hand like he was trying to poke a hole in the sky. Ghost Dragon was also on the ground, his spear frozen in a downward movement.

Rumble...

The sparring grounds exploded after three breaths, crumbling into a massive pit five thousand kilometers apart. The two opponents stood in its center.

“They, they, they—” Jaw dropping, Azureclad sagged with a deep sense of helplessness. They were on par with second step kings! They’d left him far behind in the dust!

“Qing Yan, geniuses abound in the Hongmeng and there is always someone stronger. Do you really think yourself to be the strongest among half step kings just because the realm hails you as the Azureclad Duke and a premier half step king?” His father’s voice suddenly sounded in his mind.

“You’re only a flag raised by others—this doesn’t mean that you’re worthy of the position. Your sister has already advanced beyond you and reached the level of the Champion Duke and Ghost Dragon.

“If you continue to wallow in your arrogance and give no thought to improvement, there will only be more people who surpass you!”

Azureclad shook violently and nodded in understanding.

“Purpleclad and Bloodclad have both undergone extreme tempering after encountering great disaster. They are extraordinarily determined now and have left you behind on the path of cultivation.

“I now permit you to train for three months at the Coiling Dragon Battlefields. You will still be the Azureclad Duke if you are alive after three months. If not, your sister can assume the title.” Featherdragon waved a hand in dismissal.

Azureclad stood up without a word and left.

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A victor hadn't been determined yet, despite the large pit in the center of the sparring grounds. The two maintained their positions for nearly a hundred breaths before Ghost Dragon's clothes flew apart as shreds. Wisps of black smoke rose from his body.

“You tricked me!” He sounded like a vicious ghost from the depths of hell, malevolence dripping from his tones.

“As I thought, you're of the ghost race.” Though Lu Yun spat out a mouthful of fresh blood, he smiled through bloody teeth. Ghost Dragon was indeed that Ghost Dragon!

### **Chapter 1376: Grand Steward of the Immortal Pagoda**

“A ghost!”

“Ghost Dragon is actually a ghost!” General shock and pandemonium swept through the crowds at the sparring grounds. They hadn't thought that ghostly qi would exude from Ghost Dragon's body!

In the Hongmeng, only those of the ghost race possessed ghostly qi. Any other being, even those who cultivated the daos of extreme yin or even of the ghosts, would at most possess yin-attributed strength. They wouldn't wield ghostly qi.

Only ghosts had that kind of energy!

The Dragonfeather King reacted extremely swiftly—attacking as soon as ghostly qi rose from Ghost Dragon.

“Hahaha!!” Ghost Dragon roared with laughter when he saw that he'd been exposed. He rose into the air and easily evaded Dragonfeather's attack. “Champion Duke, huh? I'll remember you.”

Puff!

He dispersed into the void as a curl of black smoke and vanished without a trace.

Lu Yun remained standing where he was, his expression flickering uncertainly. Ghost Dragon had once been a friend. He and Ghost Phoenix had appeared several times when Lu Yun needed help, aiding Dusk Province to withstand external foes.

Now that they met again, they were enemies. He didn't know what had happened to Ghost Dragon, but he'd clearly seen his old friend for a split second just now. And not just Ghost Dragon, but also a terrifyingly evil intent wrapped around his friend's soul, hellbent on destroying everything.

“Damn it!” Dragonfeather circled over Coiling Dragon City for a long time before returning to the city lord's manor.

Ghost Dragon had left the city entirely and Dragonfeather was absolutely furious. The ghosts had infiltrated Coiling Dragon and claimed a precious Dragonling Assembly spot! This was the utmost humiliation for the city!

A ghost had walked around freely right under his nose. He, a vaunted sixth step king, had had absolutely no inkling of it!

“Champion Duke, did you challenge Ghost Dragon because you realized there was something wrong about him?” Dragonfeather approached Lu Yun.

Lu Yun responded with a shake of his head and a radiant grin. “I told you, I chose Ghost Dragon because he looked easier to bully.”

Dragonfeather repressed an eye roll and waved his hand impatiently. “Fine, fine. Ghost Dragon’s spot is now yours. You can take the spear if you want it, but you should have the Enforcer Alliance purify it before you use it.”

The king pointed at the king grade spear forgotten in the wake of Ghost Dragon’s departure.

Instead of claiming his spoils, Lu Yun raised a cupped fist salute to the king and left. There was still half a year until the Dragonling Assembly—not a long period of time. It would flash by before they knew it.

But for Lu Yun, six months was sufficient for him to do many things, the first of which had to do with Ghost Dragon. Perhaps Ghost Phoenix was also in the third realm with him. Lu Yun wanted to investigate what had happened to them.

He’d stolen a wisp of presence from his former friend before the latter’s abrupt departure. With Qing Yu’s help, Lu Yun should be able to derive certain things about Ghost Dragon from the wisp.

The Azureclad Duke was nowhere to be seen when Lu Yun bid farewell to Qing Ting, but that only made sense. After witnessing their battle, Azureclad was surely thinking of ways to increase his strength. Coiling Dragon wasn’t a small faction; surely they possessed training grounds or unusual training treasures.

“There’s still half a year to the assembly, remember to come back a month before it.” Qing Ting bit her lip. “This is a token of your affiliation.”

She gave him a palm-sized medallion that was the color of jade. This was the token of Coiling Dragon City and proof that he belonged to the faction. As a city, Coiling Dragon was extremely tolerant since it was neither a sect or clan. Even Trueriver disciples could join it.

“Alright.” Lu Yun nodded at her after taking the token. The light of a transportation formation appeared around him and whisked him away from the city.

“Qing Ting, what do you think of this Champion Duke?” A merry Dragonfeather appeared before the girl. She shook her head without a word.

“What is it? Is he unworthy of you, or are you unworthy of him?”



“Second uncle.” Qing Ting turned around with an extremely serious expression on her face. “If you insist on randomly playing matchmaker, not only will you not push us together, but you might force us apart as enemies.”

Dragonfeather blinked.

“You don’t want what happened to Auntie Ying to happen to me too, do you?” she pointed out with mixed emotions.

Qing Ying had been the city lord’s younger sister and lost her life due to a failed political marriage. Though the city lord personally killed her betrothed after the fact, the matter remained a painful lesson for House Qing.

One of the major reasons why the Coiling Dragon city lord spoiled Qing Ting so much was because of Qing Ying. Qing Ting was a natural recipient of the amends that would’ve gone to her aunt.

“Do you really feel nothing for him? I see that he’s given you a lot of presents, doesn’t that mean he has some thoughts about you?” Dragonfeather asked with confusion. Of course he wouldn’t force Qing Ting into anything. If he did, his brother would be the first to crush him out of existence.

Qing Ting was a young beauty. Though not as stunning as the little fox, she was lovingly delicate and inspired affection from everyone who saw her. Leng Che, You Cang, and the exposed Ghost Dragon had all harbored certain thoughts about her. All of the youths of Coiling Dragon City and associated forces viewed her as their goddess.

“If he did, he wouldn’t have returned those three thousand crystal veins to me,” Qing Ting murmured.

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Indeed, Lu Yun didn’t have any particular feelings for Qing Ting. In his eyes, Qing Ting and Li Zhen were the same—his friends.

Li Zhen had run afoul of heavy pursuit in his journey throughout the land. After being less than careful during one instance of using the purple crystals, their aura leaked out and even more cultivators hunted him down now.

Naturally, Lu Yun wouldn’t sit idly by. He utilized the resources of the Immortal Pagoda and Hopeless Major to send assistance from the shadows, helping Li Zhen grow tremendously through battle after battle.

When Lu Yun returned to Multitude City, Jin Naluo was sitting in front of the pagoda’s doors with a small leather whip, occasionally whipping a lifeless Lewd King. This was one of the key ways in which he vented his displeasure.

After Lu Yun and the little fox handed the Immortal Pagoda over to Jin Naluo with their departure, his ambitions soared to the heavens upon receiving a hundred supplemental grandmasters. He wanted to achieve something grand and also incorporate the Immortal Pagoda into his Bloodpool Mountain. Who would’ve thought that the two would return shortly afterward, and with a bunch of experts he couldn’t see through?

Those bastards gnawed his Bloodpool Mountain dry in a split second and only left Jin Naluo alone because he was Lu Yun's ally!

"That's strange, wasn't the Human King captured last time he came to make trouble for the Immortal Pagoda? When did he get away?" As he whipped the Lewd King, Jin Naluo regarded the Human King in Haotian Tower with bafflement.

"Eh? Immortal King, you've come b—out." He quickly stood up when he saw Lu Yun. "No, wait, why should I be so fearful toward that kid?" He was being too pitiful!

Jin Naluo was likely the only person in the Hongmeng who knew Lu Yun's background.

"Mhmm." Lu Yun nodded at him. "I now promote you to grand steward of the Immortal Pagoda. The Acclaim, Ruin, and Daredevil Kings won't bully you after that."

"I... how... how would they dare bully me?" Jin Naluo blushed fiercely. "It's more like me bullying them!"

"Are you sure?" Lu Yun leveled a questioning stare at him. "They're all ninth step kings, are you sure you can bully them?"

Jin Naluo snapped his mouth shut.

### **Chapter 1377: Aiming for Mount Cloudcover**

Lu Yun grinned when he saw Jin Naluo's tongue-tied expression and clapped his shoulder. "Follow me well and put your back into it—becoming a ninth step king isn't an impossible dream."

Jin Naluo suddenly felt like he'd been lured into a den of thieves by a key to the Hongmeng Tower. He took another involuntary look at the Human King across the way—though the latter's Colosseum was no more and his subordinates dead or fled, at least he was a free man!

His word was law in Haotian Tower, apart from the Runaway King Shenyu. He wasn't like Jin Naluo at the Immortal Pagoda, beaten up by the Ruin King today and pummeled by the Daredevil King yesterday!

Jin Naluo was infinitely close to seventh step kingship and clung tightly to the notion that he'd be able to stand up for himself after he broke through. But today, he found out that his bullies were all ninth step kings!

How could he keep living like this?!

Become a ninth step king himself? He might stand a chance if he summoned the entire Blood Sea to him and absorbed it, but now?

Don't even think about it.

The Human King swept an envious glance at Jin Naluo. It was his fondest wish to stay by master's side and oversee the Immortal Pagoda for him. Jin Naluo had even just been made the grand steward!

Lu Yun's replica had killed the Human King when he attempted to probe if Lu Yun was still present at the Immortal Pagoda. After he became an Infernum, he was sent back as a spy. While Lu Yun might not be aware of every single happening over at Haotian Tower, he knew of most things.

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Lu Yun immediately headed up to the ninth floor when he returned to the Immortal Pagoda.

“I’ve figured it out.” A smiling Qing Yu emerged from a meditation chamber, holding the ball of Ghost Dragon’s presence that Lu Yun had already sent to her.

“Um... that quickly?” He paused. He’d tried deducing Ghost Dragon’s whereabouts from the ball of presence, but had come up empty-handed. He’d thought that it’d take their combined efforts to determine where Ghost Dragon was, but Qing Yu had managed it herself!

Her grasp of formula dao was far more advanced than his, and this was a good thing!

“Naturally,” she giggled. “You focus on supplemental dao in the Hongmeng and reached kingdom through it. I spent my days in Hopeless Major focusing on formula dao and calculating your whereabouts.

“Ghost Dragon and Ghost Phoenix are at Mount Cloudcover.” She turned serious. “It wasn’t that easy for me to deduce where they are, but the Hongmeng Treasurehunter Rat you tamed pays frequent visits to the mountain. I detected a hint of a familiar presence from it, which is how I determined where our two friends are.”

Lu Yun had given the rat free rein and commanded it to search out all of the treasures in the Hongmeng, but it had eyes only for Mount Cloudcover. It often went hunting in the mountain and occasionally came back with items bearing unique ripples. Lu Yun hadn’t had a chance to scrutinize them, so he’d thrown them all into the nest that the rat had set up for itself.

“Mount Cloudcover?” Lu Yun furrowed his brows. “That’s a huge grave with a frightening character buried underneath. Their endless resentment is what turned the grave into a huge mountain...”

“That’s right.” Qing Yu nodded. “I’m coming with you if you’re going.”

Her gaze was steady and brooked no disagreement.

“Alright!” Lu Yun agreed readily. She was a ninth step king now; according to the king soldier in the first level of the Army Pagoda, many of the realm’s kings tread the wrong path. If they set foot into titled kingdom as a ninth step king, their errors would be beyond redemption.

Since Qing Yu had destroyed one of her dao rules and regained the heights of ninth step kingdom, there must be a solution to the issue. Lu Yun also wanted to resolve this for her.

“The two of you go, I’ll look after the Immortal Pagoda.” chuckled the little fox. “That Runaway King is nothing good and I’ll be able to keep a close eye on him from here.”

She didn’t want to disturb Qing Yu and Lu Yun. The couple hadn’t spent much time together since arriving in the third realm; it’d been her that’d enjoyed all this time by Lu Yun’s side instead.

“Let’s go together.” Qing Yu shook her head. “Just Lu Yun and I might not be enough to shift the mountain. We’ll certainly run into unknown dangers in Mount Cloudcover and might need to deploy the Dragonquake Scripture.”

She spoke the forbidden method's name with ease and without any hint of reservation.

"Alright!" Miao agreed happily, her eyes curving into two crescents from her smile. Her joy swiftly turned to worry. "Can the people here hold onto the Immortal Pagoda though? The path to the world of immortals that Hopeless Major guarded is under the pagoda now."

"Don't worry, the current Immortal Pagoda is even more indestructible than the once Hopeless Major." Qing Yu smiled faintly.

Though Hopeless Major had withdrawn from the Endless Reaches, the passage they'd guarded had been transferred to the Immortal Pagoda. They hadn't lost their territory in the Endless Reaches either, so all was under control on that front.

Lu Yun, Qing Yu, and the little fox departed from Multitude Region without fanfare. Though Shenyu noted their movement, he was unmoved.

"Have those old farts from the Supplemental Dao Alliance spent so much time in seclusion that their brains rotted?!" he grumbled unhappily. "Haotian Tower has sixty-three branches throughout the Hongmeng, but they've operated at a total net loss of thirty thousand premium crystal veins in just three months!

"What in the heavens are they doing?! Why can't they think of ways to earn purple crystals?? All they know is to throw it out the door!"

As furious as he was, he couldn't really take up his grievances with anyone. The supplemental kings and grandmasters of the alliance were his seniors and cornerstones of the Immortal Region.

Though he was the Dao King's disciple, his foundations were shallow and he couldn't control the supplemental kings. All he could do was look on as Haotian Tower continued to hemorrhage money. It wasn't a loss of the unwanted king grade treasures in the alliance's vaults, but a tangible loss in other areas.

"If this is how things are going to be, we might as well imitate the Immortal Pagoda and buy popularity with ghost crystals. ...it's Hopeless Major behind the pagoda and they shouldn't know how to do business either. So why have they gradually stemmed their losses and begun to operate at a profit?" Shenyu couldn't make sense of it no matter how he tried.

The Immortal Pagoda's profits factored in expenses of the purple crystals and king grade treasures traded for the ghost crystals.

"The old fossils of the Supplemental Dao Alliance and Immortal Region have no idea how to run a business. We might as well ally with a renowned trading company in the realm and have them take over the tower's operations." Shenyu stroked his chin. "But those old farts will probably never agree to it."

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Lu Yun, Qing Yu, and the little fox followed the Treasurehunter Rat once more to Mount Cloudcover.

It seemed the same as before from a distance—so tall that its peak couldn't be seen with dense clouds of Hongmeng qi wrapped around it. This was an enormous grave of an unparalleled heavyweight.

A tiny tunnel marked the foot of the mountain. After countless tries, the rat had created a thieves' tunnel that led straight to the depths of the landmass.

Lu Yun still couldn't understand or communicate with it, but that wasn't a problem for Miao.

"Not bad, the little guy's a fast learner. I haven't taught it the art of tomb raiding for nothing." The little fox smiled to see the tunnel.

"Little guy? That rat's older than you." Lu Yun curled his lip and slapped two Size Manipulation Talismans onto Qing Yu and the little fox. The trio swiftly shrank down. "Let's go in."

### **Chapter 1378: A Dead End**

The tunnel dug by the Treasurehunter Rat was very long, twisting and turning to its destination and often splintering into numerous forks and side passages. The rat was very smart—it hadn't concealed the tunnel, but neither did it want others to profit off its work. Thus, it turned its tunnel into an underground maze.

A sinister atmosphere oozing with evil and uncanny presences filled the tunnel. Even Lu Yun couldn't help but shudder, but he didn't release hellfire.

After the tenth tendril of order solidified, the flames of the five hells slowly became the structure of support for the hell of order. Only when three hundred and sixty-five tendrils of order crystalized and became the true fire of order would the other five be released.

Miao and Qing Yu shifted around, keeping Lu Yun protected between them as they walked.

"Oh, Little Yu, I've come to a few more reflections in my recent cultivation. They might be useful to you," the little fox suddenly said to Qing Yu.

Walking at the front with Quiet in hand, Qing Yu paused.

"Remember how I followed your theory after ascending to kingdom and combined my dao rules?" Miao continued quietly. "I've been attempting this sort of combination recently and think that the path after ninth step kingdom is precisely that of combination—to combine nine rules into three, then three into one.

"I think my current strength is beyond any conventional ninth step king in the realm."

Lu Yun was once more reminded of the king soldier's words when he heard this, how most of the kings in the Hongmeng were treading the wrong path. The little girl in a red skirt had also once said that Hongmeng kings were just ants, that even ninth step kings glimpsed only the tip of the iceberg.

"But I think this path is more complicated than that and it needs further exploration. My grasp of formula dao isn't as strong as the two of yours, so I leave the rest to you," the little fox concluded.

"I see." Qing Yu nodded. "I've only just returned to ninth step kingdom and my ninth dao rule isn't polished yet. I'll be able to study this path once my dao rules are all perfected."

She looked excitedly at Lu Yun, who also understood her meaning. In the world of immortals, he and Qing Yu had respectively become the headmaster and dao sovereign of the world because they'd

repaired the void realm and perfected the immortal dao. Who knew what would happen here if they achieved something on a similar level?

“Wondrous existences abound in the Hongmeng, it’s not impossible to find someone above ninth step kingdom.” Lu Yun shook his head. “We need absolute, domineering strength if we want to reign superior in the third realm.”

His thoughts turned toward the Metal Potentate who’d taken away Jin Gushen. That was a prime example of someone who’d most likely reached the level of combining his dao rules and progressed far down the path.

“Mm.” Qing Yu came to her senses as well. They were in the Hongmeng, not the world of immortals. She and Lu Yun could see far beyond the horizon in the world of immortals, but they couldn’t even see the real Hongmeng as of yet.

According to the little fox, the path that was to come was the most important.

“Scrr screech scrrrr!” The Treasurehunter Rat suddenly stopped and pawed at the ground, then began gesturing wildly.

Even with their connection through the Tome of Life and Death, Lu Yun still couldn’t understand the creature. It’d once been able to take human form, but had completely lost the ability after Lu Yun beat it back to its true form. It couldn’t voice human speech or even transmit human thoughts anymore.

Lu Yun felt like he’d picked up a large boulder just to smash it down on his own foot.

“It says that someone’s modified this passage—someone’s been here before us!” Miao interpreted with an unpleasant expression.

Lu Yun frowned slightly. “Let’s turn smaller and use the Silence Talisman!”

He flung out a few more talismans and shrank the entire group to smaller than a dust particle floating in the air. Silence Talismans refined from karmic fruits completely concealed all trace of their presence.

“It’s Ghost Dragon,” whispered Qing Yu. “He discovered the thieves’ tunnel and modified it. It’s a dead end ahead. If we keep following the path, we’ll end up dead without a doubt!”

Lu Yun’s frown deepened. Ghost Dragon had modified the path ahead, but not the overall layout, preventing Lu Yun from discovering that there was anything wrong. If it hadn’t been for the rat’s sudden warning, he would’ve died here if he traveled to the mountain alone.

“The layout hasn’t changed, but the road ahead is a dead end. The only way to manage that is... to have a terrible creature ahead!” He took a deep breath.

Qing Yu’s proclamation of a dead end considered all of their strength combined. A dead end didn’t mean lack of a path, but that this passage would lead to the dead end of their lives.

Any treasure, formation, or mechanism would change the layout of the great maze and result in minute changes that put Lu Yun on guard. That the layout hadn’t changed meant that there must be an extraordinarily terrifying creature ahead.

The Treasurehunter Rat wasn't an ordinary animal and was equipped with extremely keen senses. Far more perceptive than the trio, it'd immediately detected the dangerous presence lying in wait for them.

"Is there any other way?" Lu Yun looked at the rat; it couldn't have made only one passageway to the heart of the mountain.

"Scrr scrr scree!" The rat paused, then nodded and headed in another direction.

"The other way is more dangerous, but it's a bit better than the one ahead of us," Miao responded.

The thieves' tunnel was only a meter across, but it might as well be a world compared to the trio's current size.

Splish splash.

The sound of water suddenly traveled into their ears, followed by a searing heat wave.

"A magma river, there's a magma river here!" Lu Yun blinked. No wonder the rat had said this way would be more dangerous.

Magma rivers of the Hongmeng weren't ones of the lower worlds. If one drop of magma from this river dripped into the world of immortals, it would transform into a blazing star and burn for all of eternity.

"There's an arcane beast king in the river—a crimson python," the little fox pointed out. Being only a common realm cultivator, an arcane beast king was incredibly frightening to the Treasurehunter Rat.

"It's just a sixth step arcane beast king, ignore it." Qing Yu spared a single glance for the river and carefully helped Lu Yun across. Sixth step kings wouldn't see through his Silence Talismans.

"We'll be at the main section of the grave after this magma river...wait!" Miao suddenly shrieked.

"What's going on? Is this an illusion?? Why are we back to that dead end?"

It was another dead end after the magma river, one just like the passage they were just in!

### **Chapter 1379: Lend Me Ten Inches of Time**

"It is indeed the dead end." Qing Yu took a deep breath after looking at the road ahead. "An absolute road, a road of death! With our strength, the three of us will only die if we try to barge through it!"

"It's not Ghost Dragon behind this... he isn't strong enough to hold us in the palm of his hand like this."

Like she said, Lu Yun, Qing Yu, and the little fox were being toyed with like a cat playing with mice. Death stared at them in the eyes no matter where they looked. All paths led to their demise. The Treasurehunter Rat had dug all of them, but a terrifying existence had taken control of every path and turned them all into dead ends.

Instead of changing the local layout, Ghost Dragon had set a horrific creature at the end. Or, he might be waiting for them himself.

"Come on out, Dragon Butterfly." Lu Yun waved a hand and propelled the six-year-old girl out of the Purple Stellar Mountain.

“What is it?” Having sealed off her senses, Dragon Butterfly opened bleary eyes. She shuddered when she realized where they were. “This is Mount Cloudcover! What are you guys doing here?”

“This is Dragon Butterfly?” Qing Yu and the little fox knew of her existence, but she’d cultivated inside the Purple Stellar Mountain all this time and it was the first time that Lu Yun had summoned her.

Qing Yu’s calculations of their future had included her as well.

“You... you...” Dragon Butterfly trembled as she looked at the paths of death around her, not knowing what to do.

“Everyone stay here, I’m going to fetch the thing to resolve these passages of doom.” A hazy blue door materialized when Lu Yun turned around; he set foot through it.

The Gates of the Abyss.

Faced with the terrifying sprawl of death, Lu Yun was the only one who could leave through these gates. He wasn’t affected by the power of Mount Cloudcover since he possessed the Tome of Life and Death, but the same didn’t hold true for the others. They would only set foot onto another path of death even if they walked through the Gates of the Abyss—they wouldn’t actually end up leaving the premises.

Lu Yun’s temper was growing. Come out and fight! What was this nonsense of batting them around like a toy? Did they think he was an easy target or a pushover?

He didn’t bring out the Bridge of Forgetfulness; the bridge was standing guard over the passage to the world of immortals that Hopeless Major had guarded.

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“That’s it? He’s left just like that?” Dragon Butterfly looked askance at Qing Yu and the little fox. There was also a Silence and Size Manipulation Talisman on her now, making her the same size as the other two.

“Don’t worry, he’s just gone to fetch what will resolve the dead ends. He’ll be back soon.” Qing Yu found Dragon Butterfly’s chubby cheeks irresistible and couldn’t help but squeeze them. The incarnation of the mighty and noble Redbud dragon wanted to cry.

Mount Cloudcover was strictly forbidden grounds within the Hongmeng. Dragon Butterfly wouldn’t dare provoke the entity inside even after she reclaimed her dragon body.

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A ponderous being in front of Lu Yun jumped up with shock the moment he stepped out of the Gates of the Abyss.

Rumble—

A hundred million kilometers of air shook from surprise as the huge head of a black qilin swung in front of Lu Yun’s face. A half eaten carrot dangled out of its mouth.



“Didn’t you make it out, kid? What are you doing back here?” The qilin had greatly decreased its size from before. It was standing in front of a spacious clearing that was planted with hundreds of thousands of carrots.

Lu Yun: .....

“Where’s Hong?” he asked.

“Hong?” A blank look flashed through the qilin’s eyes. “Who’s Hong?”

“Forget it.” Lu Yun shook his head and leapt into the air, heading for the river of time. He’d left a mark on the qilin last time he was in the lost ancient city, just in case a return trip was necessary some day. Entities on the level of the qilin were unable to detect marks left by the Tome of Life and Death.

This time, Lu Yun returned to the ancient city because he wanted more water from the river of time! He would use the great poison of time to dismantle the path of certain death!

Hadn’t the terrifying existence behind Ghost Dragon placed a fearsome creature at the end of the thieves’ tunnel? Lu Yun would use time to poison that creature to death!

Even the strongest being of the realm couldn’t escape the toxic effects of time.

The river of time flowed quietly through the city, the enormous clock still hanging at its end and its hands whirling around in quiet confusion. Large fish drifted among its currents; they turned a blind eye to Lu Yun now since the same aura from the order of time was also present on him.

These fish were once heavyweights of the Hongmeng who’d cultivated the order of time. They’d been transformed into their current form after a terrifying encounter with misfortune. Lu Yun couldn’t tell if their current status was alive or dead.

“Maybe I’ll also turn into a large fish one day and end up here.” He frowned at the thought.

His order of time stemmed from the combat art of Spacetime Reincarnation that he’d practiced in the world of immortals. The source of this combat art was the ultimate treasure of human dao—the Timelight Tower.

After the akasha ghosts stole the tower’s power, they transformed into long-haired monsters that infested the Dao Tree. When Lu Yun obtained their weapon, he was able to derive the reincarnation of space and time, thereby controlling the orders of space and time.

Now that he nurtured the hellfire of order, these two orders very naturally melded into his flame of order. With ten tendrils of order blazing inside his body, the disorderly river of time couldn’t harm him.

“Hong!!” He stood over the river and shouted into the void. Though his voice echoed through the air and down the entire river of time, the little girl’s figure did not appear.

“What are you doing here again?” A human face suddenly appeared in the void and considered Lu Yun with annoyance.

When Lu Yun saw it clearly, his heart slowed for half a beat. Too beautiful. Though he saw beautiful women such as the little fox and Qing Yu on a daily basis, he was still stunned by the wonder of this face when he saw it.

“Who are you?” He quickly recovered his shaken dao heart. “Where’s Hong?”

“I’m the city lord of this ancient city, Hong’s not here.” The face frowned. “I would’ve killed you if not for Hong stopping me last time. How dare you come again?!”

“Because I possess the order of time?” Lu Yun raised a brow and subconsciously looked at the river beneath his feet.

“I’ll let you go for now since you’re not yet a king. This will become your home the moment you become a king.” A large fish jumped up from the river and fell back down.

“Speak, what are you here for?” The city lord looked at Lu Yun.

“I’m here to borrow water... lend me ten inches of time!” he responded seriously.

### **Chapter 1380: Yun of the Future**

“If it wasn’t for Hong stopping me last time when you took the river’s waters, I would’ve turned you into a big fish on the spot! Now you want more water from me?!” The city lord’s expression darkened.

Lu Yun had also noticed that when he siphoned off ten inches of water; he wouldn’t be immediately looking for Hong after his arrival otherwise.

“I’m just borrowing water, it’s not like I won’t return it to you,” he grumbled. “Don’t they say that returning borrowed things on time means that you’ll be welcomed next time?”

The city lord laughed merrily from the sheer temerity of this little bastard. If it wasn’t for what Hong had said to her before the little girl left, she would’ve turned Lu Yun into a large fish the second he appeared and dumped him into the river.

“And what will you be returning in lieu of the water?” she asked coldly.

“A life.” Lu Yun raised his head and looked fearlessly straight in the beautiful city lord’s eyes.

“Your life will be mine in due time.” The look in her eyes turned even colder.

“Your life, not mine,” Lu Yun enunciated carefully.

“What did you say??” Shock snapped across her face.

“You’re dead—the lingering will and mind of an unparalleled powerhouse. You’ve found sustenance in this city and become its city lord. I can help you collect your true spirit and soul again and come back to life!” he said in an intense tone.

Humm!

A young girl with powder-blue long hair and a similarly colored silk dress appeared in front of him.

“The Hongmeng is a cage and its denizens the birds in the cage. They are not prisoners under lock and key in a prison. You’ve taken the Hongmeng beings who grasped the order of time and kept them here because that order is not allowed to exist, right?” Lu Yun ignored the city lord’s appearance and murmured to himself, “If my guess is right, you play the role of a Hongmeng ruler. Your rule is that the order of time is not allowed to appear in this realm.”

“Can you really return me to life?” The city lord looked at the human, not knowing herself what mix of emotions she was feeling. She suddenly recalled Hong’s words—that the little girl was saving her, not the young man.

Save her? How?

The city lord was one of the rules of the realm and would remain so as long as the realm existed. Who could save her??

However, Lu Yun’s words jarred her into wakefulness. Save her? Could that really be done?

“Yes.” Lu Yun nodded and materialized a red flower with the flip of a hand.

A Hell Flower!

A hundred and eight thousand karmic fruits revolved around the flower, the full sum of all of the fruit currently hanging on the Karmic Tree. Gifting all of the fruit wasn’t a concern since a steady stream of goodwill flowed to the tree due to the Immortal Pagoda constantly acquiring ghost crystals. Not only did the pagoda’s bounty indirectly eliminate the ghosts, but it also provided another avenue for cultivators in need of purple crystals.

“This flower and these fruit can help you recollect your true spirit and soul, returning you to the state of a real living being.” Lu Yun gently pushed the flower and fruit to the city lord.

Her eyes remained fixed on the tiny flower and she slowly sighed after a long moment.

“This flower and fruit can indeed help me evade the various rules of the realm and resurrect with none the wiser. You may take the water from the river.” A complicated expression floated onto her face. “But you’d do well to remember that water from the river of time is deeply poisonous to Hongmeng beings. If this river overflows, it will wipe away all life within the realm.

“Thus, if you use its waters to kill innocents, someone will be along to take care of you before I even get to you.”

“Thank you for your reminder.” Lu Yun raised a cupped fist salute to the city lord.

She vanished without a trace after accepting the gift, leaving only Lu Yun and countless fish glimmering with purple light in the river of time.

He immediately summoned another karmic fruit with a flip of his hand. It’d only just formed on the Karmic Tree and wasn’t ripe yet, but it was enough for his purposes. With his internal force as flame, he crafted the fruit into a gourd and extracted ten inches of time from the river beneath his feet.

He’d taken water from downriver last time—the time there had just coalesced into the light of time. The time, he was standing upstream. The light here had solidified into water and possessed a slight weight.

Thus, the ten inches of time obtained on this visit were much more powerful than what he'd gained last time.

After he collected what he'd come for, he opened the Gates of the Abyss and instantly left the lost ancient city.

"Those two left just like that and leave their mess for me to clean up!" Hong's diminutive form appeared when both the city lord and Lu Yun were gone. Grumbling with irritation, she erased traces of what had taken place with a quick wave of her hand.

"Or did they know I was here all along and did it on purpose?" She swiftly looked around her. "Mount Cloudcover..."

She suddenly turned in the mountain's direction and sighed, "Who knows what got into Meng's head for him to bury himself there? The characters for Cloudcover are 'meng' and 'yun'... 'meng' stands for Meng, and 'yun'... for Yun of the future."

She waved her hand again and erased the mark that Lu Yun had left on the black qilin.

"Hey big guy!" She suddenly appeared with a merry smile in front of the enormous creature. "Do you want to get out of here?"

"No." It munched placidly on a carrot and didn't even lift its head.

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Less than one hour had elapsed when Lu Yun returned from the ancient city. The other three were sitting docilely on the ground, having remained strictly in place.

"Did you—" Dragon Butterfly was about to speak when a purple light flashed through the air; Lu Yun had stuffed her back into Purple Stellar Mountain.

She stomped her foot furiously when she realized what had happened.

"Don't waste time and focus on cultivation. With your current level of strength, you won't be able to get the ancestral blood even if you make it into Dragonhollow Mountain," Lu Yun lectured before cutting off the mountain's connection with the outside world.

"Oh? The path of death is now one of life!" Qing Yu wanted to ask him something when she exclaimed with surprise, "You've figured out how to resolve the danger!"

"That's right, the solution is here." Lu Yun smiled faintly. "Come on, let's go see what the heck is at the end of this path."

He took point and headed down the nearest passage. Someone had changed the thieves' tunnel anyhow, so all roads would lead to the same dead end.