

Necropolis 171

Chapter 171: Divine Spymirror

So marked the end of the entire affair, a better conclusion than what the nine celestial emperors had expected.

“With the emergence of a sacred land for immortal dao, the world will prosper. Even if we fail to ascend, we may die in peace. It is unfortunate that it ended so soon...” sighed one of the celestial emperors.

Although the gathering had ended, many still remained in Dusk. Quite a few had already entered the inheritance pagoda.

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“What? I have to travel to the capital for my appointment?” Lu Yun was ready to head to the North Sea for the hidden dragon tombs. However, a decree issued by the Nephrite court had arrived, ordering him to make a trip to the capital for the ceremony. That left him greatly disgruntled.

“Can’t I just resign?” he whined.

“No,” Qing Han denied frostily. The poison remained in his system, but he’d regained his consciousness and high spirits. “You worked so hard to earn your title. How can you just resign?”

“Ugh, fine,” Lu Yun reluctantly acquiesced. “Hey, will I see Qing Yu when I go to the capital?” Thinking of the girl who haunted his dreams filled his heart with eagerness.

“You will.” Qing Han nodded, but then added, “Didn’t you tell my big brother that you don’t like her though?”

“I... it’s not....” Lu Yun hurriedly shook his head. “I mean that I don’t really know how I feel about her without meeting her in person. I have to at least see her before I can decide, yeah?”

“Right.” Qing Han maintained an unusually cold expression and nodded slightly. He hadn’t been able to look Lu Yun in the eyes all this time. After all, his friend had seen him disrobed and topless. Although the Imperial Star had masked his true self, it was still his... her body. He could only talk tough at the moment and adopt a chilly expression to hide his shyness.

Lu Yun didn’t think too much of it. He assumed Qing Han’s stern expression was due to his recent recovery, which made the governor feel even more guilty.

“That’s it?” Qing Han asked, unconvinced.

“Yeah.” Lu Yun scratched his head. “Don’t think too much. I swear on my character that I’m straight! I don’t like men!”

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Instead of returning to its usual tranquility, Dusk City became increasingly lively. Many immortals and cultivators had gathered in the area, but none dared stir up any trouble. Even peerless immortals who’d sealed their cultivation kept to themselves and respected Lu Yun’s authority.

The tournament had earned Lu Yun a mighty reputation, spreading his name far and wide after his defeat of Zhao Tiefeng of the Exalted Immortal Sect, execution of Beigong Yu of the North Sea, and slaying monster king Lü Biao.

Cultivators and immortals alike flocked to the pagoda, some leaving with excitement and others with disappointment. Although a few had benefited from venturing inside, thus far, the best among them had only reached the tenth floor.

No one had set a new record yet.

Lu Yun would be leaving for the Nephrite Capital in three days. During this time, he remained in his manor and studied the goateed old man that Mo Yi had sealed and returned to his original form—a mirror.

“Equipment can gain human form as well?”

If it'd been any other humanoid treasure, Lu Yun wouldn't do anything to it, no matter how curious he was. All things were born equal. If he captured a humanoid treasure simply for curious study, he'd be no different from a bandit.

He was a tomb raider, not a robber.

Raiding tombs might be disrespectful to the dead, but it was for the benefit of the living. Hence, he never lost any sleep over his expeditions. The artifacts buried underground would be wasted if they weren't brought out to the light of day, so it was better for him to unearth them.

The goateed old man, however, had acted against him many times. He'd not only revealed Lu Yun's secrets, but had also attempted to turn others against him during the tournament. No guilt assailed the governor for treating the mirror like this.

“It's uncommon, but not impossible.” Mo Yi considered the mirror carefully, then continued, “I think this isn't an immortal treasure, but the treasure called Divine Spymirror.”

“Divine Spymirror?” Lu Yun cocked an eyebrow. “The treasure of the divine race who ruled the world of immortals eighty thousand years ago?”

The great war a hundred thousand years ago had severed the dao of immortals. After that, the divine race had risen to rule over the world and enslave all of the other races, be they human, monster spirit, demon, or even dragon.

Exactly eighty thousand years ago, the divine race had abruptly suffered a mysterious disaster that almost marked their extinction. This was the opening for other races to slowly recover and rebuild.

The Divine Spymirror was a treasure that the divine race had used to spy on all beings in the world to maintain their dominance. It was through this that they'd prevented any races from flourishing. As soon as a genius emerged in any race, the divine race would identify them and kill the genius before they became a threat.

“That's the mirror.” Mo Yi was slightly surprised that Lu Yun knew about it. The divine race was unfathomable and mysterious beyond belief to contemporary cultivators. Those who knew of their secrets were as rare as hen's teeth.

“However, the treasure was greatly damaged, to the point where the treasure spirit within was destroyed. Another divine took it over and infused it with their own power, thereby granting the mirror human form.” Mo Yi paused. “In its weakened state, the mirror can be considered at most a ninth-rank treasure. It can’t spy on everything beneath the heavens, like it did eighty thousand years ago. Its effective range now is about fifty kilometers in radius.”

“Fifty kilometers? Good enough.” Lu Yun’s eyes lit up. “I’m just going to use it to keep an eye on Dusk Province.... Wait! You say the mirror gained human form after a divine occupied it?”

“Correct.” Mo Yi nodded. “The mirror is a unique piece of equipment that the divine race refined with their power. Eighty thousand years ago, it was both a treasure and a powerful divine.”

“Who are you?” Lu Yun asked hesitantly. “How do you know all this?”

“Me?” Mo Yi dimpled. “I’m just like Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi, but unlike them, I do know some restraint.”

Lu Yun shrugged. That wasn’t a real answer. He’d known there was more to her than met the eyes as soon as she’d knocked Qing Quan away with a simple attack. However, what kind of circumstances would it take to force Mo Yi to sever her cultivation and go into hiding in Dusk Province?

“Alright, I’ve sealed the divine in the mirror. You deal with the treasure yourself, I’ll be returning to Duskwater City now.” She turned around and vanished as she spoke.

Lu Yun snorted wryly and grabbed the mirror, entering hell. There was a powerful divine in his netherworld; perhaps she would be able to use the mirror.

Chapter 172: Interred Alive

A divine obsession.

The very same one that had been buried beneath Mount Myriad Formation.

Though the nine bloodcorpses had consumed the undead hag that her body had become, her will—her obsession—had entered the Gates of the Abyss at the last possible second. It largely remained in a confused daze, but occasionally experienced moments of lucidity.

When Lu Yun released Aoxue from the netherwood coffin inside the bronze outer-coffin, the obsession had awakened and displayed a complete consciousness. Although the obsession eventually returned to its former torpor, the young man felt that its owner had already recovered and was merely biding her time.

After refining his nascent spirit in the shape of the six paths, Lu Yun noticed hell was undergoing a transformation. The previously chaotic, broken world was slowly recovering.

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The divine obsession floated in the air, aimlessly wandering to and fro.

“Senior,” Lu Yun approached and called out to it.

The obsession, formless beyond a faint wisp of color, didn't respond. The only reaction he got was a heavy pout from Yueshen below. Why is master greeting that thing!

"Senior, do you recognize this?" Unfazed, Lu Yun brought out the Divine Spymirror and waved it in front of the obsession, which remained entirely impassive.

"Was I hallucinating?" the young man frowned, muttering to himself.

"Sir," Yueshen advised with a poke. "She doesn't want to talk to you. You can't wake her up."

"Hmm?" Lu Yun blinked, glancing at the ghost.

"She's pretending to be asleep." Yueshen pouted again. "Your world cannot house the living, but it's a wonderful place for us ghosts—and this obsession, too. Coming here helped her recover a long time ago, but she's not interested in us."

"Really? Are you sure?" Lu Yun turned back to the obsession.

"Yes, I'm sure!" Yueshen replied confidently. "Too bad I don't remember anything or know who she is. She probably has a grudge against me... I wouldn't have been used as her corpse coffin otherwise, right?"

"I bear no grudge against you," a hoarse voice sounded, tinged with a bright spirit. "Your true name is Yueshen Jixiang and mine is Ruyi, Wushen Ruyi. We were the best of friends, and like sisters. How could I ever hate you?"

"You really did recover!" Yueshen jumped up and bounced to the obsession. "What Jixiang and Ruyi are you talking about? Friends? Why would your kinsmen kill me and use me as your coffin then?" She didn't quite believe the new revelation.

In response, the obsession began transforming. The hazy figure of a girl appeared in hell's firmament. Dressed in a white muslin robe, she moved with an ephemeral grace that brought to mind the most beautiful dances of the world.

Ruyi glanced at Yueshen, her eyes full of unfathomable guilt. "You really did die because of me. If you hadn't tried saving me, they wouldn't have caught you. After they killed you, they made you into a corpse coffin before my eyes... then interred me alive in you."

"Interred alive!" Lu Yun gasped in horror.

Used in this context, the phrase didn't just mean burying her in the earth. No, it was far worse than that! Sealing a living being inside a burial mound, consigning her body, soul, and all knowledge of her to the void....

No wonder Ruyi's corpse had transformed into an undead hag. No wonder there were so many other hags and corpsefish in the mound. Her resentment must've stank to high heaven, the governor thought.

Yueshen looked at Ruyi incredulously as well.

"Who... were they? Why did they use my body to bury yours?" She already subconsciously believed what the other ghost had said. "Why did they do all that?"

"I don't know either." Ruyi shook her head.

"The divine race's hierarchy is partially structured by twenty-four divine kings who rule over twenty-four facets. Jixiang and Ruyi were two female queens among that number," Lu Yun murmured. "Eighty thousand years ago, before the divine race exited the world, their twenty-four divine kings disappeared first for no reason at all. Even the divine emperors were killed. The ruling race was left leaderless overnight and was forced out of the world thereafter."

The memories he had of the divine race came from Aoxue. The North Sea dragons traced their lineage from the dragons of the Untroubled Sea. The latter group still retained records of various mysteries from the last hundred thousand years of history, including the matter of the divine race.

"There's no tribe among the divine race that makes corpse coffins, is there?" Lu Yun stroked his chin, searching for any relevant memories. "Wait, there's another enigmatic race in the world: the shamanic race. It seems the method of creating corpse coffins originated from them."

Being the well-traveled race they were, dragons collected knowledge wherever they went. In fact, they still possessed a considerable number of historical texts about the ancient world.

Unfortunately, they hadn't emerged unscathed from the great war a hundred thousand years ago, either. Countless books had been destroyed as collateral damage, leaving only a small portion.

Thankfully, the shamanic race had been mentioned in the remainder.

Long ago, seven draconian dao immortals had run into a group of strange individuals in a corner of the world. They called themselves shamans and practiced shamanic arts rather than walking the dao of immortals.

They were also more than a match for the immortals. All seven dragons were captured and imprisoned among the shamanic race. In the end, only one of the seven had managed a desperate escape. The rest died among the shamans, their bodies forged into corpse coffins.

When the survivor returned to his people, he informed his emperor about the shamans and their corpse coffins. The emperor was furious, but the mysterious shamans were nowhere to be found. In the end, nothing had come of it.

Traces of these shamans appeared all around the world thereafter, many immortals having fallen victim to, and becoming coffins for, these shamanic experts.

All this and more lay in the dragons' records.

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Ruyi fell silent for a while.

"The mirror in your hands was the body of Emperor Brightmirror eighty thousand years ago, one of the three great emperors among the divine court. You want me to enter it... to work for you?" she changed the subject, evidently unwilling to talk about the shamans or their corpse coffins any further.

Yueshen was a little disheartened herself. Though she'd forgotten her past life, her soul was fully reformed. Deep down, she had an awareness of her old self, but everything about her seemed just out of reach.

Lu Yun didn't see the need to press the subject. The truth would come out one day, regardless.

"Yes," he nodded. "I'd like you to live inside the Spymirror and watch over the provincial capital for me."

"I can do that," Ruyi inclined her head, "on one condition."

"Which is?"

"This space is very beneficial for me. My soul is recovering here... one day, I might even be able to return to life. I would like to be able to cultivate here whenever I wish."

"Sure," replied Lu Yun.

"Although you're an immortal ghost now, you're still of the divine race. I will teach you every art of our people, as well as all the techniques you knew in the past." Ruyi turned to Yueshen again. She still felt guilty about what happened to her friend. If Yueshen hadn't misunderstood her for an enemy, she would rather have not awakened at all.

1. The combination of their names is Jixiang Ruyi, an auspicious phrase wishing good fortune and happiness to the receiver. Yueshen's name translates to 'Music Divine', and Wushen's to 'Dance Divine'.

Chapter 173: Out for Blood

An extravagantly decorated fortress ship cut across the sky with two handsome youths at the vessel's bow, admiring the scenery below. Lu Yun was finally on his way to Nephrite Capital.

Located in Life Province, the heartland of Nephrite, it was the glittering crown to both its locality and the empire at large. Once upon a time, the capital was known by another name: Xiankan!

It numbered amongst the nine greatest cities in all the world. The human territories were called 'majors' because of these cities that adorned them. Like its eight brethren, Xiankan wasn't built by the present generation of immortals. Rather, all nine were the results of excavation.

The nine major capitals were older than even the ancient world, built by persons unknown.

There were more than a dozen main provinces and hundreds of millions of kilometers between Xiankan and Dusk, which alone meant several years of sailing. Thankfully, transportation formations linked the realm's various majors and their provinces, so Lu Yun could travel to Life Province in the blink of an eye.

There was still the matter of actually getting to the local formation, though. Rather than being situated in the governor's manor, they were located on the provinces' frontiers and well-guarded by soldiers.

These transportation formations were some of the most important facilities in the nine majors. They remained under the direct jurisdiction of the celestial emperors, rather than that of the governors. Dusk Province's very own formation was located in Cloudwater Township.

The fortress ship that Qing Han had gifted Lu Yun was incredibly fast. It traversed a few dozen thousand kilometers in only two hours, and could go even faster, but Lu Yun wasn't strong enough to fully power it just yet.

Though Cloudwater was called a township, it was comparable to the provincial capital in activity. These days, it saw bustling activity from innumerable cultivators and immortals traveling to and fro. The town was situated next to a brilliant lake, in the embrace of two lofty mountains. Military flags fluttered on the mountain peaks, signs of the troops stationed there in charge of defending the transportation formation.

"No wonder this place is called Cloudwater... it really is a town between cloud and water!" Lu Yun marveled at the scenery as they approached the township. "So places like this really do exist. I used to think that everywhere in the world of immortals would be pretty like this."

Compared to the Dusk capital, a place like Cloudwater was much closer to what Earthlings envisioned as a 'world of immortals'. The township lacked particularly high walls or tall buildings and was enshrouded by a dreamlike haze of cloud and vapor, looking so very magical and mysterious.

"There are plenty of other places like this. Dusk Province is just an exception," Qing Han remarked from nearby.

"Plenty? I'd like to go traveling sometime, then." Lu Yun nodded, then paused, taken aback by the sight. "Eh? There's a tomb of an immortal here?"

There were plenty of tombs scattered about the landscape of the world. In fact, he'd seen several in the countryside on his trip here. None of those had piqued his interest in quite the same way as this one did, though.

"There's... a tomb here?" Qing Han blinked. "Cloudwater is on the border between Dusk and Outré Province, so Dusk's restriction has very little influence here. It's not unheard of for powerful immortals to occasionally pass by. Still, I've never heard anything about a tomb."

"I haven't been here before, have I?" Pride flashed across Lu Yun's face.

"Tch." Qing Han quirked the corners of his lips. A disdainful expression crossed his face, but his eyes communicated full trust.

"A dragon sleeps in mountains coiled,

Those deathly cliffs with mysteries roiled.

If thousand peaks with locks deter,

A noble soul be thus interred!" Lu Yun roared in invocation. Energy rushed to the top of his head and took shape in the form of a compass. The compass spun at top speed, turning its needle a majestic gold before it settled, pointing to Cloudwater's rear.

"The tomb isn't just anyone's. It belongs to someone important!" The young man snapped his fingers, dismissing the overhead luopan.

“Look at the ring upon ring of ridges between the two mountains. They look like walls defending a secret, don’t they? That’s a textbook example of a noble, or royal’s tomb.” He drew a deep breath. “I just wonder whether the guy buried is from way back then or present day.”

The difference between a modern lord and an ancient one was night and day. Ancient rulers were a cut above dao immortals; Lord Sugato, for example. But in the present world, peerless immortality was sufficient for a noble title.

The ridges between the two mountains were created by the power of the person buried within the tomb, a kind of natural feng shui layout that held great protective power. Even Lu Yun’s Spectral Eye was suppressed to a certain extent.

Other immortal visitors to this place had no knowledge of feng shui or tomb raiding, and wouldn’t see the ridges alone as evidence of a tomb within.

“We might as well go down there and take a look!” Excitement gripped Qing Han. “Zhao Shenguang’s coronation ceremony isn’t for at least a dozen more days. We have lots of time to explore!” He was supremely confident in his friend, who was clearly something of a tomb raiding expert.

“Sure.” Lu Yun inclined his head. “Let’s see if there’s any evidence as to the tomb owner’s identity once we slip inside. If it’s someone ancient, we’ll leave immediately. I can’t touch an ancient who’s exceeded dao immortal before becoming an immortal myself.”

“Ah, His Excellency is here!” An audible wave of cheering broke out the moment the fortress ship landed.

“It’s the First Youth Sovereign!”

Many preferred calling him by the second title.

Cloudwater Township wasn’t originally known for its prosperity. In the past, very few cultivators were willing to come here. But after Lu Yun had unearthed the ancient lord’s heritage and made the associated inheritance tower available to everyone, the number of travelers increased explosively.

When Lu Yun took his first step into the town, he felt a considerable amount of goodwill rush in, fertilizing the Sal Tree for additional growth. He happily accepted its feedback energy, focusing it on refining his nascent spirit. He wasn’t in a particular hurry to break through before refining it as much as possible.

The young man entered Cloudwater hand in hand with his friend.

“The governor possesses uncommon moral fiber. Instead of laying personal claim to a priceless treasure, you made it widely available to countless other daoists. Please, accept our humble respect!” Someone approached him, bowing in deference.

“What moral fiber? He obviously just doesn’t have the skills to take the treasure for himself! If he really cared about his fellow daoists, he would’ve offered up the Sugato Sword as well. We should get a chance at it as well!” a snide voice interjected.

“Hmm?!” Qing Han colored. He was about to explode, but Lu Yun quickly pulled him away. They simultaneously retreated backward, when—

Swish!

The first person jerked his head up and unleashed two black sword lights, cutting down on Lu Yun in a criss-cross.

Chapter 174: Brutality

Terrifying killing intent loomed over Lu Yun, targeting him and him alone. The man had nothing in his eyes but the young governor. Forward without pause, no rest until Lu Yun laid dead at his feet!

The attack had come without warning, but it failed to catch Lu Yun off guard.

Although the first man played his role well, his expression of gratitude didn't come with any goodwill, a clear indicator that he was lying and up to no good. The second voice of strident mockery was clearly intended to distract Lu Yun, allowing his accomplice to launch a fatal attack!

Heart calm as still water, he didn't fall for their trick. As soon as the man had bowed to him, the governor's mystical force surged. Violet sword brilliance shot to the heavens and crushed the two sword slashes.

"Vast Dragon Seaturner! I've heard about this wondrous technique, but didn't expect to have the fortune to see it myself." The attacker straightened his back and moved again. "This technique will be extinct after today! Die!"

Swoosh swoosh swoosh!

Eight figures rushed out of the crowd. The now nine immortals arranged themselves in a mighty sword formation around Lu Yun, unleashing their cultivation to the limit. Nine august immortals! Real ones, who hadn't sealed their cultivation!

Immortals with sealed cultivation would be heavily surveilled by the Nephrite court after entering Cloudwater Township. They wouldn't have a chance to attack Lu Yun. Hence, this group had plainly slipped in another way. There was an unstoppable presence and keen edge to the nine august immortals. They were clearly rare geniuses, rivaling peerless immortals with their cultivations sealed.

"Don't!" snapped Lu Yun upon noticing that Qing Han was coming to help him. "Protect yourself!"

However, the imperial envoy ignored his words and thrust out his palm. A violet-gold hand imprint slammed into the formation of nine immortals, which shook with a loud boom as the immortals within stumbled. The controlled patterns of sword energy inside grew erratic.

Noting that his attack had been effective, Qing Han thrust out another strike without hesitation.

Bam!

This time, it broke through the formation. Qing Han's face paled, his breath quickening. That palm had been Empress Myrtlestar's technique, and two strikes had been sufficient to exhaust all of his energy.

"Slow Lu Yun down. I'll deal with the other one!" One of the immortals came after Qing Han.

"What is this?!" Qing Han growled. "Where are the Cloudwater guards? Why haven't any of them shown up yet?!"

Cultivators in the area had scattered, giving a wide berth to the raging battle. Meanwhile, the town remained perfectly silent, defending guards nowhere to be seen.

“Die!” The man charging at Qing Han seemed perfectly ordinary; no one would’ve given him a second glance in a crowd. But at this moment, his raging killing intent had turned him into a well-honed weapon.

The grim specter of death approached Qing Han. He didn’t even have a chance to activate the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals.

I’m going to die...

Despair flickered through his eyes, but he broke into a smile when he saw Lu Yun break free from the sword formation.

Thud!

Something round flew out from behind Qing Han and crashed into the august immortal’s head. The immortal screamed a ghastly scream and flew backward, along with something... very strange. A round thing that remained attached to his nose.

“Bastard! How dare you hurt Sir Qing Han?! This grand steward will bite your nose off! Bite bite bite!” It was a human head, one garbling insults with its teeth around the immortal’s nose.

How does he talk with a nose between his teeth? Blindsided by surprise, Qing Han’s mind gravitated toward contemplation of this crucial question.

Ge Long!

Lu Yun refining his nascent spirit had benefited not only his four envoys, but also Ge Long. The steward wasn’t an immortal, but his physical strength had greatly improved. The head he was accustomed to throwing around was now a treasure that rivaled any immortal-grade weapon.

The immortal screamed as his nose was bitten clean off.

“Pah!” Ge Long spat the nose out while his body rushed forward to catch his head. He postured before Qing Han like the young man’s personal guard. “You want to hurt Sir Qing Han? Try this grand steward on for size!”

Now the grand steward of the governor’s manor, his status was much higher than it previously was. Plus, he was loyal to a fault when it came to Lu Yun.

“What the hell are you?!” The august immortal covered his nose with a hand and goggled at Ge Long with horror. What manner of freak used his own head as a weapon?!

“What am I?” Ge Long cackled, his smile eerie. “You speak to Grand Steward Ge Long of the Dusk Governor’s Manor!”

A faint crimson figure manifested beside Lu Yun: one of Yueshen’s bloodcorpses that she’d sent out from the Gates of the Abyss. Tremendous light radiated from the bloodcorpse and pinned down the nine august immortals, as if towering mountains had sat down on the would-be assailants.

“How dare anyone attempt to assassinate the Dusk governor in Cloudwater?! Guards! Kill them all!” an angry voice exploded from deep within the village as a barrage of piercing sword energy rained down on the nine august immortals.

“Anyone who dares kill them now,” boomed Lu Yun, his clothes tattered from the previous sword qi, “will see me slaughter their entire clan!”

Terrifying energy surged as bam! the bloodcorpse swiped at the sky and scattered all of the incoming sword energy.

Roar!!

The bloodcorpse’s shriek carried a tremendous distance as it flared the power of an arcane immortal. A thick mist of blood lashed out as well, painting the entire area in crimson.

“C’mon, kill one in front of me, why don’t you!” Lu Yun straightened and scanned the town.

“You misunderstand, Your Excellency. This official is merely worried about you, that is all.” The furious voice had calmed down. “Since Your Excellency misunderstands that I am trying to cover their tracks, I will stay out of this.”

“Do as you will.”

The guards in Cloudwater were in charge of the transportation formation. Unlike the Dusk Phalanx, they served the Nephrite Court, rather than Dusk Province.

Hum.

Sword energy surged from Lu Yun’s hand, executing eight of the nine immortals on the ground before they could react.

“Tell me, who sent you?” He approached the man in black that’d gone after Qing Han, eyes blazing with hellfire as he unleashed tremendous pressure from his consciousness. The august immortal’s eyes grew unfocused from the influence of the bloodcorpse’s crimson light.

“Feng Yin of the Feng Clan.”

Swoosh!

A flash of violet light sliced the immortal’s head clean off.

“Feng Yin of the Feng Clan?” Lu Yun’s lips twisted into a vicious smile. “I’ll remember this.”

“Cloudwater’s warden is a member of the Feng Clan as well,” Qing Han interjected.

Chapter 175: Courting Death

If it weren’t for the Sal Tree of Life and Death absorbing goodwill and hence indirectly helping Lu Yun judge someone’s sincerity, he would’ve fallen to the ambush. It was impossible to avoid such a quick attack. What was worse, he’d almost dragged Qing Han down with him as well.

The offensive from the nine august immortals was far too relentless. If Qing Han hadn’t bought the governor some time, he wouldn’t have the energy to spare for summoning the bloodcorpse.

Fury blazed in Lu Yun's heart. He'd spared Feng Yin's life back in the Coretrial Arena, yet the man repaid mercy with enmity and sent assassins after him!

The nine immortals had become Lu Yun's Infernum after dying at his hands, so their new status forbade lying to their master. They were geniuses that the Feng Clan had raised in secret and would eventually have become a vital weapon for the clan. It hadn't been any of the senior council who ordered them to assassinate Lu Yun, but Feng Yin alone.

Feng Yin was the foremost cultivator in the Feng clan. Though he wasn't yet an immortal, his exceedingly high status within the clan had given him the authority to order around the nine august immortals. And he was now somewhere in Cloudwater!

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"The Feng Clan?" Lu Yun nodded to himself and beckoned with his hand.

Hum.

The provincial seal flew out, ensconcing the town with splendid aureate radiance. It sealed off the transportation formation, preventing exit and allowing only entrance. Although the governor was unable to control the formation, he could use the power of the land to seal it away.

"What are you doing, Lu Yun?!" the previous voice demanded wrathfully.

"Nothing much, just taking lives." Lu Yun's expression turned steely. "It seems that I haven't established my authority well enough, or you small fries wouldn't be fighting each other to take a shit on my head."

"I will not permit you to kill him! Do you really think that zombie of yours is enough to win every fight in this world?"

Rumble.

Loud rumbling rang out as the entire town trembled, scattering the mystical haze of clouds and ripples of water about the area. Tremendous killing intent emanated from all of the mountain peaks around the town. The heavenly soldiers guarding Cloudwater roused immediately, looking at Lu Yun with solemn, righteous glares.

They served the Nephrite Court directly rather than falling under Lu Yun's jurisdiction. Even if it was the governor who started trouble here, they wouldn't hesitate to kill him.

"I don't think I'm unrivaled in the world." Lu Yun walked deeper into Cloudwater with sword in hand. Cultivators parted to allow him passage, casting glances of admiration or schadenfreude.

"But Dusk Province is my territory and I will not be defeated here. I'll kill you if you dare stop me." His steps grew increasingly heavier, thudding ponderously as his feet hit the ground.

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"He's going to kill me. He's going to kill me for real!" Within a towering manor in Cloudwater, blood drained from Feng Yin's face. It felt like the governor was treading on his heart, locking on to him and even forming a strange connection with his heartbeats.

The strange resonance was his belief in certain death. The youth governor was determined to kill Feng Yin, the way he'd killed Lü Guhong. Not even a king like Lü Biao had been able to stop Lu Yun!

"Don't worry. I won't let him." A middle-aged man with a strong build and features that demanded respect lightly patted Feng Yin's shoulder, driving away the footsteps stamping on the young man's heart.

Thus reassured, the young scion's expression returned to normal. "I've been reckless, uncle," Feng Yin looked guilty at the man. "I'm afraid I've brought trouble down upon you."

"There's no need to apologize. Even if you hadn't done anything, I would've tried taking Lu Yun out as well." Feng Yin's uncle sniffed. "Lu Yun shamelessly laid claim to Dusk Province and ignores the authority of the heavenly court. He will betray Nephrite Major sooner or later. It's better to nip things in the bud.

"Being appointed a youth sovereign has made him forget himself. He truly thinks himself sovereign over all. Guards, take him down!"

"Yes, sir!" responded the countless heavenly soldiers stationed on top of the mountains. Deafening war drums sounded from afar, instantly changing the mood in the area. Soldiers took to the air and surrounded Cloudwater.

Lu Yun halted and looked up at the dense rim of soldiers, a mocking smile tugging at his lips.

"Oh? I have an army to summon as well." He manifested a golden token, piercing the sky with a tremendous beam of light. "Report for duty, Dusk Phalanx!"

Bam!

An absolutely enormous golden portal opened up in the air, almost blotting out the entire horizon. Yuchi Hanxing marched out of the portal with a million Dusk soldiers—the hundred thousand and some casualties suffered in the Skandha Range skirmish had already been replaced. The mighty army loomed over the entire town, casting shadows on the land below.

"Stay your hands, you two!" cried another voice. "What are you doing? Starting a civil war?"

A man in flaming-red armor hurried onto the scene. "Dao brother Wujiang, Your Excellency the Governor, you both are officials of the Nephrite Court. Let's sit down for a conversation. There's no need to resort to violence!"

The man seemed to have just rushed back from another locale and had received a nasty shock upon seeing the two armies face off above Cloudwater. If a real fight broke out, he'd be doomed.

He, Feng Wujiang, and the other warden each commanded a troop of soldiers. They were each other's checks and balances, and each controlled a third of the transportation formation. He and the other warden had been away for business, and being met with such a scene upon his early return was certainly the last thing he'd expected.

"This is none of your business, Yue Cheng. Stay out of it." Feng Wujiang appeared before Lu Yun, glaring murderously at the governor.

“There are three wardens in Cloudwater: Feng Wujiang, Yue Cheng, and Zhu Yu,” Qing Han said quietly. “Feng Wujiang is the chief warden, and the other two are his deputies. All three of them are peerless immortals. You must be careful.”

It had been wariness of the other two wardens that’d prevented Feng Yin from sending even more powerful immortals, but Feng Wujiang had anticipated his nephew’s plan and sent the two wardens away for clear, unobstructed maneuvering.

“What is the punishment for attempted assassination of the governor, General Yue Cheng?” Lu Yun called out.

“Death,” Yue Cheng blinked, his expression darkening as he realized what’d happened.

“Hahaha!” Feng Wujiang burst into hearty laughter. “You are the one who should die for your sins, Governor! The Dusk Phalanx should be defending Nephrite’s northern territory against the North Sea monster spirits, yet you summoned them all. If the seaside stronghold is lost, you won’t be able to pay for your crimes even if you die ten thousand times over!”

“That is none of your concern,” Yuchi Hanxing coolly interjected before Lu Yun could. “Lady Diexi is defending the stronghold. There will be no invasion. Hand over the perpetrators who attempted to assassinate His Excellency, or the Dusk Phalanx will erase Cloudwater from the map!”

Chapter 176: Dying Cloudwater Township Red with Blood

“Erase Cloudwater from the map?” Feng Wujiang broke into a twisted smile. “With your little Dusk Phalanx?”

The Dusk Phalanx was just an army of cultivators. Even its general, Yuchi Hanxing, was only a true immortal, and therefore lower than even ants in Feng Wujiang’s eyes.

“Feng Yin will remain safe on my watch. I’d like to see how your little tin soldiers are going to raze Cloudwater!” Expression frosty, he didn’t deny the fact that Feng Yin had attempted to kill Lu Yun. Immortals at his level considered such petty tricks to be beneath them. They did what they wanted and accepted the consequences accordingly. As such, it was people like him who were the most formidable.

Yue Cheng’s expression darkened as well. Feng Wujiang wasn’t the only warden in charge of Cloudwater; Yuchi Hanxing’s threat had also offended Yue Cheng and Zhu Yu.

However, Lu Yun wasn’t fazed at all. If he wanted to solidify his authority in Dusk and rebuild his sect, he had to firmly grasp all parts of the province in his hand, including Cloudwater Township.

The transportation formation here held great strategic significance, since it led to other regions of Nephrite Major. If he allowed others to maintain a tight grip over Cloudwater, the province would be at their mercy and his previous efforts would’ve all been all for nothing.

“Formation, arise!” commanded Yuchi Hanxing.

Rumble.

The million-strong Dusk Phalanx leaped into action. Before anyone could react, an enormous pattern of the Black Tortoise emerged in the sky.

The Heavenly Formation of the Black Tortoise!

And one that had been greatly improved!

The Black Tortoise projected by the old formation had been nothing but a lifeless image, something that was completely dead. This sacred beast image, on the other hand, seemed to have a soul of its own. The snake and tortoise chimera in the air radiated vitality and a terrifying might.

On the day of the fight between the juba and the blackwater snake, the Black Tortoise born from the two coiling around each other had imprinted a deep impression on everyone's mind. Yuchi Hanxing—and eighty percent of the army, besides—had seen that sacred beast with their own eyes. After the North Sea battle, the Dusk Phalanx had trained every day to finally evolved their lifeless formation into a living one!

The Black Tortoise roared, unleashing terrible might in all directions. Yuchi Hanxing perched on top of its head with silver lance in hand. Her long, silver locks danced in the wind, highlighting her elegant figure. Fully revealed to the world, she no longer hid her true self.

“We have eliminated even the Skandha Range, so a mere Cloudwater will be no challenge at all.” Her voice grew even more icty. If not for the juba, who could counter the Heavenly Formation of the Black Tortoise, she wouldn't have lost the hundred some thousand Dusk soldiers in the Skandha Range last time. Now that the formation had been perfected, not even the Skandha Range would put up much of a resistance should the Dusk Phalanx attack again.

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“Tempest Bird!” Feng Wujiang snarled.

“Tempest Bird!!” echoed innumerable heavenly soldiers.

The image of a giant cyan bird spanning three thousand meters formed above Cloudwater.

The Tempest Bird!

It, too, was a mythical creature just like the Black Tortoise, a connate divine spirit that wielded a power of nature. Likewise formed by a fearsome battle formation, its origins weren't as sophisticated as the Heavenly Formation of the Black Tortoise, but those who formed this one in particular were all immortals.

“Let's see if Dusk Phalanx's formation lives up to its reputation!” Feng Wujiang landed on top of the giant bird, facing Yuchi Hanxing from a distance.

The auras of the two armies clashed and tangled together in a stalemate. Neither could gain a definitive advantage.

“Stop! Both of you stop it!!” Yue Cheng shuddered when he saw the two armies take up battle positions. A clash of such scale would absolutely destroy Cloudwater!

“Why?” Lu Yun asked faintly. “Feng Yin and Feng Wujiang of the Feng Clan have just failed in their assassination attempt. General Yuchi of the Dusk Phalanx was met with violent resistance when she came to arrest them. This is outright treason.”

He was getting the hang of making such grandiose accusations.

“His Majesty has yet to pass down the throne, so he is still the ruler of Nephrite Major. His envoy is with me and almost suffered at the hands of the Feng immortals. It’s one thing to attack me, but it’s a great crime to attack His Majesty’s envoy.” Lu Yun continued striding into town with his sword at the ready. Qing Han brandished his glowing emissary’s token with a twist of his wrist.

Yue Chen shut his mouth, hurriedly transmitting orders for his army to stay put. They were not to get involved under any circumstances. A belated realization of the governor’s intentions was dawning on him.

Even if the attempted assassination hadn’t taken place, Lu Yun would’ve still found an excuse to take over Cloudwater. Dusk Province was going to become the sacred land of the immortal dao one day. It would slowly slip out of the Nephrite court’s control, and Cloudwater Township, as it stood, was an obstacle to such plans.

All of the Dusk Phalanx is here. If Lu Yun wins, they’ll take control of the town! Yue Cheng sucked in a breath, his eyes shifting rapidly in thought. The stronghold by the North Sea is protected by Zombie King Diexi, so the monster spirits dare not invade. In no time at all, another Dusk Phalanx will be formed there.

This is the clash between the Nephrite court and future sacred land. Whoever wins will control Dusk Province!

The warden remained in place. In a crossfire between two tremendous powers, any careless move could get him killed.

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The Black Tortoise and Tempest Bird faced off in the sky. Their auras sealed off the town and prevented anyone from coming or going. Countless immortals and cultivators scurried around, seeking refuge. Even august immortals were terrified of being caught between the two armies.

Meanwhile Lu Yun ventured into the town with his sword, blood still dripping from the violet blade.

“If you dare lay a finger on Feng Yin, I will slaughter your entire clan!” Feng Wujiang raged when he saw Lu Yun making his way to his manor. He was locked in a stalemate with Yuchi Hanxing, matching her aura with his own. If either of them made a move, the other would rain down the most relentless attacks possible. In the worst case scenario, one side’s entire army could be wiped out.

“There is no one left of my kin. To kill me is to slaughter my clan.” Lu Yun’s voice grew increasingly composed. “Protect yourself, Qing Han. If someone attacks you, don’t hesitate to kill them.”

“Alright.” Qing Han inclined his head. He opened a mental channel to the black dragonguard within the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals, Empress Myrtlestar concealing the ripples of power from the painting. If any further danger cropped up, an instantaneous command would summon the peerless immortal dragon into the world.

Still, he wasn't going to take action unless there was a good reason. He understood what Lu Yun was trying to accomplish. The governor was the star of this performance, so he wouldn't fight for the spotlight.

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"Trespasser! How dare you barge into the general's manor! Die!" Immortals emerged and lunged at Lu Yun as soon as he approached Feng Wujiang's manor.

Roar!

A tremendous dragon howl reverberated from his body. Violet sword energy wreathed around Lu Yun and he soared into the sky.

Nineteen Cerulean Sword Dragons!

A fifty-seven-meter-long dragon twisted nineteen times in the air.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

A hail of bodies rained down from the sky, accompanied by a downpour of blood that dyed Cloudwater red.

Chapter 177: Soul of the Black Tortoise

Tempest Manor was one of the three generals' manors in Cloudwater, inhabited by Feng Wujiang. Lu Yun hacked through a few hundred guards with a single slash and set foot into the manor.

Another few hundred guards encircled him in the span of another breath.

"Come out and meet your maker, Feng Yin!" Blood dripped down Lu Yun's sword as he spoke. "Don't let these innocent immortals die for nothing."

"My, my, listen to this arrogance!" echoed an old voice from the inner residence. A figure of faint cyan emerged out of nowhere, solidifying as a hearty old man in high spirits and clad in extravagant silk robes. His silver hair was impeccably coiffed, a gleaming topknot offsetting the deep cyan of his clothing.

All of the guards looked at him with deference as he walked up to Lu Yun.

"Get going or die," snapped the governor.

"Junior, you should know when to let things go." The silver-haired elder shook his head. "Feng Yin knows his mistakes. If you leave now, the Feng Clan will allow this to all be water under the bridge."

"Water under the bridge?" Lu Yun snorted. "Back in Duskwater City, Feng Li joined hands with Lu Yuanhou to kidnap my maid as a sacrifice for the river god, not to mention all the times he's attempted to kill me. I killed Lu Yuanhou, but spared Feng Li. That was already an olive branch for your clan.

"This time, Feng Yin combined efforts with Warden Feng Wujiang in an assassination attempt, and even came close to hurting His Majesty's envoy. How can you have the audacity to say the Feng Clan will let it all wash away?"

The old man's expression darkened. "So you insist on courting death?"

As one of the top factions in Nephrite Major, the Feng Clan surveyed all beings from a lofty position of superiority. Lu Yun was merely a provincial governor without any backing; he wasn't even an immortal! Being appointed a youth sovereign didn't change the fact that he was nothing but an insignificant ant.

It was a mercy incarnate that the Feng Clan would let bygones be bygones. The boy should've sank to his knees in groveling gratitude for their favor!

Swoosh!

A crescent of golden brilliance replaced the old man, the light coming at Lu Yun with abrupt ferocity. It wasn't an attack of sword energy, or a combat art, but the light of a golden immortal!

The old man had reached half-step golden immortal realm, the highest bar for immortals in the province. Although he hadn't fully ascended to that realm, he was in a completely different league from an august immortal.

Lu Yun wouldn't be able to defeat him. He'd been able to defeat a peerless immortal because they'd sealed their cultivation to august immortal, not a half-step golden immortal. The two were as different as night and day.

Cloudwater Township lay between Dusk and Outré Province, a nebulous placement that sufficiently weakened the influence of the Dusk restriction. Although golden immortals still couldn't set foot in the region, half-step golden immortals weren't affected.

Wham!

A crimson hand probed from the void and knocked the golden figure away. The space next to Lu Yun filled with a bloodcorpse that scanned the surroundings with its crimson eyes.

The old man tumbled roughly to the ground, a ball of uncanny brilliance glowing red at the center of his chest. Thick despair filled his eyes as he cried out, "How do you have another arcane immortal zombie at your command!"

He looked to the town gate, where Qing Han was. A crimson figure stood before the imperial envoy, protecting him along with Ge Long. There was more than one zombie under Lu Yun's banner! He'd fooled them all!

Pah!

The old man spat out a mouthful of blood as crimson light burrowed into his body, disintegrating him from within. Gone were his body and his soul!

"Uncle Heng!!" Feng Wujiang howled, as if he'd just witnessed the death of a parent. "You killed Uncle Heng. I'LL KILL YOU!!"

Bam!

The Tempest Bird extended its enormous wings and dove at Lu Yun in the general's manor, its aura exceeding even that of a peerless immortal! He weathered the overwhelming pressure with a grim look. I can't move or circulate my energy! So, too, was the bloodcorpse beside him likewise immobile.

The battle formation of a hundred thousand heavenly soldiers wasn't something a couple of immortals could face. Even peerless immortals had no choice but to flee under the pressure.

Roar!

The Black Tortoise exploded with fury as it moved.

"Your opponent is me." Yuchi Hanxing brandished her silver lance and commanded the Black Tortoise to ram into the Tempest Bird, hurling it backward through the sky.

"Kill!" she exclaimed.

"Kill!!" echoed the million Dusk soldiers. The tremendous war cry deafened countless immortals both inside and outside of Cloudwater Township.

"How is this possible?!" Yue Cheng's eyes were round with shock. "The Heavenly Formation of the Black Tortoise is powerful, but the Dusk Phalanx is composed of mere cultivators. How are they able to overpower the Great Tempest Formation?"

He'd seen the might of the Dusk Phalanx formation for himself before, but the army itself was too weak. They might be able to kill a couple powerful immortals, but the formation should've been scattered when facing a formation projected by an all-immortal army.

Yet the opposite had happened here and the Black Tortoise had sent the Tempest Bird careening backward!

"It's the same army and the same formation." Fear colored Yue Cheng's expression. "But the Black Tortoise image created by the formation seems to have come to life! What's going on here?"

"That's because the Dusk Phalanx has seen a real Black Tortoise with their own eyes," answered a smooth and graceful voice. A beautiful woman in palace attire walked out from thin air. She was the last of the three wardens, Zhu Yu.

"When the North Sea monster spirits attacked the seaside stronghold a few months ago, a Black Tortoise of coiled snake and turtle appeared for a time. Yuchi Hanxing and her soldiers saw the real sacred beast then. Witnessing that is what imparted the soul of the Black Tortoise to their formation." Zhu Yu enunciated her words carefully. "On the other hand, the Tempest soldiers have never seen the Tempest Bird. The image of the bird is a poor imitation they've created that's based on drawings of the divine beast.

"You shouldn't have returned early. Now you'll have to take a stance in the power struggle between the future sacred land and the Nephrite Court."

"I..." Yue Cheng trembled. "You knew about Feng Wujiang's plan beforehand?"

Zhu Yu nodded without a word. She'd purposefully waited until the true battle had started before returning with her soldiers. Protecting Cloudwater Township and its people was her duty. Since she hadn't witnessed the whole affair, she didn't have to take a stand.

But Yue Cheng was different. As a witness of the conflict, he'd have to pick a side when the Nephrite Court inevitably came to investigate, and wouldn't be allowed to stay on the sidelines.

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The Black Tortoise tore into the Tempest Bird in midair, gaining the upper hand. Meanwhile, Lu Yun had entered the general manor with his unsheathed sword. Although the bloodcorpse didn't make any further moves, the guards were too terrified to even try to stop him.

"Any last words, Feng Yin?" Lu Yun arrived in front of the young man.

"I am indeed less than him. If it were him, he wouldn't have rushed to kill you like this." Feng Yin sighed, disgruntled. "Feng Li, you've been building up your strength under the facade of incompetence. How clever.

"However, I won't sit here and wait for death to take me." He formed a sudden hand seal. "Activate!"

With a hum, a great formation lit up and devoured Lu Yun.

Chapter 178: Do You Regret It?

"You've underestimated me, Lu Yun." A smiling Feng Yin watched his enemy be swallowed by the formation. "My clan's Thundergust Formation can slay even golden immortals. No matter how adept you are at fighting, there's no way out of this one."

A jade bangle lay upon his wrist. He was no formation master himself, but he could control the formation's power with the ornament.

Hum!

A flash of light from the bracelet heralded a gathering of storm and thunder. Tempestuous winds filled the air, the energy of heaven and earth summoned with vortex-like motion.

Lu Yun remained stationary and stared Feng Yin down with an icy gaze.

"You're wrong," the young man shook his head. "Feng Li is a fop and a good-for-nothing. A pig, honestly. He doesn't need to pretend to be something he already is.

"You're less than him because of your blindness. You don't know when to lash out and when to hold it in. Even if Feng Li is a pig, he's one that chows down on dragons. You? If you're a dragon, you're dragon-shaped trash."

"Wait, what?!" Feng Yin didn't pay much attention to Lu Yun's words, too baffled by what he was witnessing. The governor was wholly unhurt by the tempest howling around him.

The Thundergust Formation was completely ineffective.

"Why is nothing happening to you?" Feng Yin took several steps back in fear and shock.

"You think this is strange?" Lu Yun shook his head again. "Haven't you noticed that I've been standing in the same place since I got here?"

Madness radiated from Feng Yin's eyes. He poured all of the mystic force he had into the jade bangle, exerting the formation to new, wilder heights. No longer content with just manifesting the aspect of wind, thunder and lightning crackled between the gusts of air, filling its entire area of effect.

Yet the spot where Lu Yun stood was still completely unscathed.

“Nothing is perfect beneath the heavens. To be marked with flaws is the way of life, which also applies to formations. The place I’m standing is the imperfection. If the master who’d set up this formation was here instead of you, I would probably be dead already.” Lu Yun sighed, then grasped at the western sky.

A ray of aureate light landed in his hand, which he promptly tossed airborne. Something foreign melted into the roaring storm—something that looked like a bit of physical metal: a sliver of the attribute’s connate essence.

Metal attracted thunder, and its connate essence nearly had the ability to take full control of thunder. The new addition threw the orderly operation of the thunder energy into riotous anarchy. Destructive bolts of lightning arced every which way, annihilating even the formation’s own runes and foundation.

In several more breaths, the formation that was reportedly able to slay golden immortals had turned to dust. Lu Yun stepped forward, edging right up to Feng Yin.

“Any other tricks up your sleeve?” he quietly asked.

Feng Yin was ashen by this point, and stumbled another few steps back. “I-I’m the son of the F-feng Clan p-p-patriarch. If you kill me, my c-clan will chase you down to the e-ends of the earth!” His entire body trembled as he spoke. Anyone would be afraid in the face of death!

“Do you regret anything?” came the sudden question.

“No!” Momentarily stunned, Feng Yin was quick to plug a resolute answer. “If I could do everything over, I’d still send assassins after you. I only regret being too weak. I couldn’t kill you myself in the end!”

“You’re not totally hopeless, then. You have earned the right to die by my hand.” Lu Yun nodded imperceptibly. “Dongling Shaogong said the same thing, but unlike you, he was hopeless trash.”

Before Feng Yin could respond, a violet flash emitted from Lu Yun’s hand.

Thud!

His head fell to the ground, spirit eradicated by Violetgrave.

Inside hell, Feng Yin came face to face with the nine Feng august immortals already there, as well as the several hundred assorted guards. His only reaction was a helpless smile, which they wholeheartedly shared.

“What kind of person have I made an enemy of...? I hope the master won’t be upset at the Feng Clan because of it.” He wanted to cry, but couldn’t.

Regret was now finally kicking in.

“You should be honored to have died at our master’s hand. That in itself is a worthy achievement.” Lü Guhong suddenly appeared before them. “Get up and cultivate! We Infernum start out lower than the others. If we don’t work hard, we’ll only be cannon fodder for the master.”

“Diligence! We must strive to become a force that master can rely on!” Lü Biao and Beigong Yu chorused.

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Feng Yin's death astounded the general's residence, much more so than the death of 'Uncle Heng'.

The uncle had been an old servant of Feng Wujiang, important only because of their personal relationship alone. Feng Yin, on the other hand, was the clan's brightest genius and the patriarch's son. His death meant that countless others would be held culpable and their punishments fatal.

A throng of experts surged out from the general's residence, surrounding Lu Yun in a circle. A few were half-step golden immortals, just as strong as that Uncle Heng. They hadn't appeared earlier because of two reasons: the nearby bloodcorpse, and the plan to use Feng Yin as bait.

Alas, Lu Yun had easily broken out of the trap, killing their bait in the process.

"Uoooh—" The crowd of immortals excited the bloodcorpse, prompting howls at the sky that blanketed the residence in a bloody radiance.

"I only came here to kill Feng Yin. Now that that's done, I see no reason for further bloodshed. If you don't want to die, scram." Lu Yun strode out of the residence with his sword still drawn. Held in check by the bloodcorpse, the Feng clansmen were powerless to do anything but watch.

"How dare you kill the young master? Vengeance will be had!" an angry shout cut through the silence.

Bang!

An immortal leaped into the air, a sealing rune cracking to pieces upon his brow. The rippling power of a golden immortal was freed from its bonds as he cast a brilliant sword light that scythed toward Lu Yun with blinding speed.

Pop!

Before it could make contact, however, a transparent hand reached out from the void. Its fingers closed on both the immortal and the attack, crushing them to smithereens.

It was Dusk Province's restriction. After squeezing the golden immortal to death, the hand retreated back into the nothingness. It was as if it had never appeared at all.

Although this place is on the border between Dusk and Outré, we're still on Dusk land. Removing his seal here was nothing more than suicide. What can the restriction in the ancient tomb be? Why does it forbid golden immortals and above from coming here, anyway? The questions came unbidden into Lu Yun's mind.

Chapter 179: Might of the Golden Bell

Dusk Province's restriction had killed a golden immortal with the same ease as one would squash a stink bug. Blood drained from the crowd's faces. How could an august immortal—that noble breed of immortals—be so easily dispatched?

They'd heard about the restriction simply glaring the House Dongling patriarch to death, but hearsay wasn't the same as witnessing with their own eyes.

Despite the restriction's departure, no one dared move an inch. Sweeping his gaze across the collected immortals, Lu Yun shook his head before taking his leave, bloodcorpse in tow.

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In the air, Feng Wujiang was driven to the point of delirium. Uncle Heng was dead, and now so was Feng Yin. Shrieks of rage echoing in the air, he thoroughly unleashed the Great Tempest Formation. Frightening winds beat upon the Black Tortoise image, and the Tempest Bird tore at its opponent.

However, Yuchi Hanxing stood firm. She raised her lance, pointing it at the sky. The Black Tortoise image responded with rippling tides, the skies for thousands of kilometers around becoming its personal lake. In the water's heart, the tortoise whipped up wave after inexorable wave.

Unstoppable swells washed away soldiers from the Great Tempest Formation, weakening the bird in the air by scattering the formation.

"How... how... impossible!" Feng Wujiang was completely unhinged. He roared into the air, futilely attempting to keep his men in the formation beneath his feet, but the enemy's offensive was relentless.

At this moment, the million Dusk Phalanx soldiers thought with uniform clarity, hearts beat with absolute harmony, and breathed with perfect unity.

Black Tortoise!

"Huooooh—" The line between image and reality blurred. The tortoise's body expanded tenfold, nearly blotting out the sun. In comparison, the Tempest Bird was the size of a mere sparrow. The humongous reptile strode between the waves, catching up to the fleeing bird in a single stride. It slammed forward a heavy foreclaw.

Boom!

A loud explosion rang through the firmament. The Tempest Bird's body shattered into its component soldiers before falling to earth, many of them instantly incapacitated. Feng Wujiang was left alone in midair.

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"The Tempest Battalion has lost!" Zhu Yu and Yue Cheng were aghast. "This shouldn't have happened... the Dusk Phalanx may have seen a real Black Tortoise, but its soldiers shouldn't have reached a communion with its spirit so quickly... why?"

Zhu Yu paled with the error of her projections. She'd thought the Dusk Phalanx would only be able to win a pyrrhic victory, if any victory at all. It was more likely that the battle would end in a draw after fearsome casualties.

"Say, that tortoise image just now was a little strange." Yue Cheng frowned. "The Heavenly Formation seemed to briefly ascend beyond just a military formation. Those soldiers—for just a moment—turned into a real Black Tortoise."

Most military formations in the world of immortals were modeled after connate divine beasts, or spirits with an inborn power. Compared to regular divine beasts or spirits, connate beasts and spirits were

bestowed a natural grasp of nature's dao. Emulating them granted the soldiers a similar form of power. The Heavenly Formation of the Black Tortoise and the Great Tempest Formation were both examples of this.

However, the images projected by the formations weren't truly the beasts in the flesh. They borrowed from the forces of nature, but couldn't truly command them. Yet the Heavenly Formation had just now unleashed the Black Tortoise's domain. The final swipe had appeared particularly real in its viciousness.

The two looked at each other in confusion.

"The township! Gather the soldiers back together! Defend Cloudwater!" Zhu Yu snapped to fearful attention.

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The Heavenly Formation didn't disperse after defeating the Tempest Battalion. Yuchi Hanxing continued leveling her silver lance at Feng Wujiang.

"Hahahaha!" The general cackled. "Destroy Cloudwater Township if you dare, Yuchi Hanxing!"

Whoosh!

His body hurtled toward Lu Yun in a reckless charge.

"Uoooh!" The nearby bloodcorpse shrieked, intercepting its master's assailant.

"Out of my way!" Feng Wujiang howled. The image of a Tempest Bird appeared behind him, sending the bloodcorpse flying with a single wingbeat.

Hummm...

Man and image overlapped, pouncing down in a deadly swoop upon the youth in the middle of the town.

Although the Great Tempest Formation had been destroyed by the Black Tortoise image, the fowl's residual strength still remained in Feng Wujiang. Despite being sealed, the general had a third of the formation's power behind him. An arcane immortal bloodcorpse was no match for that.

"Ah!" Yuchi Hanxing's pretty eyes widened. "No wonder he lost so easily. He's been biding his time and had reserved part of the formation's energy for himself!"

She hadn't actually taken any lives in the attack just now, opting to merely immobilize the enemy's soldiers. If she'd dared slaughter friendly forces, the Nephrite court would be the first to press charges.

Feng Wujiang knew her hands were tied and had been able to hold back a part of the formation's energy because of it. His objective wasn't to defeat the Heavenly Formation, but to kill Lu Yun! So what if the Great Tempest Formation had lost? He would still be the final winner as long as the governor died!

"Die!" Yuchi Hanxing brandished her lance, deploying the Dusk Phalanx once more and sending the Great Tortoise image hurtling down with Feng Wujiang. At peak aura, the formation's momentum sent the town trembling. Cracks and fissures appeared in the ground around Cloudwater.

“Back, ” Lu Yun called out quietly as he stood his ground. “Don’t destroy Cloudwater Township.”

His words were slow and measured, but he managed to deliver all of them before Feng Wujiang’s arrival. There was a note of resolution in them that could not be questioned.

Yuchi Hanxing saw the light in her governor’s eyes and bid the Heavenly Formation grind to a halt.

Boom!

The gigantic shadow of a tower emerged from Lu Yun’s body as an endless barrage of bladed intent flared up to the sky. He held a miniature tower, about a meter tall, in his palm. The Sugato Sword.

“The ancient lord’s sword tower is mine now!” Feng Wujiang boomed, releasing all of the energy inside him at once. The shadow of the Sugato Sword crumbled under the intensity of his martial might, since Lu Yun couldn’t make full use of the treasure just yet.

“Battle formations of the immortal world are indeed something to be reckoned with!” Blood trickled out of Lu Yun’s mouth. He squinted, raising his eyes toward the pouncing Feng Wujiang. “But right now, you’re all alone! Open up!” A weighty rumble signified the opening of a black gate behind him.

Clang...

The sound of a ringing bell echoed between heaven and earth.

Only a couple meters from him, Feng Wujiang shuddered horribly. The ghostly Tempest Bird over his body disintegrated in the next instant, and blood streamed from his orifices.

The Arcane Golden Bell!

Chapter 180: Volcano

The battle in Dusk City had left the Arcane Golden Bell as part of the spoils of war. Dread of Lu Yun ran too high for the Qing Clan to demand the dao immortal-grade treasure back.

The governor handed it to Qing Han after his friend woke up, but Qing Han had merely thrown it into the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals for Empress Myrtlestar to erase the brand and power of the Qing bloodline, then returned the bell to Lu Yun.

In his words, his clan would pressure him into returning the golden bell if it knew the treasure was in his possession. He’d rather bequeath it to Lu Yun than allow his clan the satisfaction.

As for whether or not this would offend the Qing Clan.... Well, Lu Yun had already forced the Qing dao immortal to streak naked in front of the world. It couldn’t get any worse than that. Even if Lu Yun were the one to return the golden bell to the Qing Clan, it still wouldn’t earn him any goodwill.

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Meanwhile, peerless immortals Lü Biao and Beigong Yu worked in concert to activate the Arcane Golden Bell. Terrible sound waves hit Feng Wujiang squarely from the Gates of the Abyss.

Blood geysered from all seven of the immortal’s orifices, and the Tempest Bird attached to him immediately scattered on the wind. The bell’s soundwaves left him covered in blood, gradually

rendering his body into ash and disintegrating his soul. Yet his eyes still blazed with the determination to kill Lu Yun. Not even his own destruction would stop him.

The golden bell tolled ceaselessly onwards, wearing away at Feng Wujiang's body and soul even as his sword burst into splendid magnificence.

"Die!" shrieked Feng Wujiang. All of his being was focused on the tip of the blade, which blossomed along with the last of his life force.

Lu Yun lifted his head to face the man and murmured, "You are an outstanding character. If only you could die at my hands. What a pity that I'm not yet powerful enough to take your life."

Swoosh!

Something green rushed out of the Gates of the Abyss and lunged at Feng Wujiang.

"Waughhh!!" it screamed excitedly, maw yawning open to bite down on the human. Green dyed Feng Wujiang's face as the air of death filled his eyes. His iridescent sword energy and flare of life were instantaneously vanquished.

"Poison... Fiend..." murmured Feng Wujiang.

Whoosh.

A breeze scattered the green dust that was left of him. The poison fiend belched in satisfaction and burrowed back into the Gates of the Abyss, returning to the Wheel of Poison in Lü Guhong's hand.

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Silence reigned.

One of the three Cloudwater wardens was dead at Lu Yun's hands. The newly defeated Tempest soldiers fell deeper into despair, their morale completely shattered by the loss of their general.

"There will be no Tempest Army from this day forth," Zhu Yu sighed.

Feng Wujiang had spent the last thousand years recruiting soldiers. Even the Great Tempest Formation was something he'd excavated from an ancient tomb. He was the heart and soul of the army; no one would be able to take over from him. His death had stripped the soldiers of their identity.

"You've crossed a line, Governor." Yue Cheng suddenly broke the silence. "Even though Feng Wujiang and Feng Yin committed high crimes, they were officials of Nephrite Major. The court should've passed judgment, not you unilaterally reaching beyond your station. You're a governor, not His Majesty the Celestial Emperor!"

"Picking a side already?" Zhu Yu glanced at Yue Cheng and wordlessly shook her head. Making the wrong decision between the heavenly court and the future sacred land would start one on the march toward inevitable death.

Although the Yue Clan could rival the Feng and Qing Clans, they would give up Yue Cheng in a heartbeat to protect themselves, should the circumstances call for it. Therefore, the warden needed a strong thigh to latch onto. The Feng Clan and heavenly court were much more reliable than a mere Lu Yun!

Lu Yun looked up at Yue Cheng and shook his head.

“Feng Wujiang of the Feng Clan received what he deserved. As his accomplices, the Tempest Army will be stripped of their duty in Cloudwater and await judgement.” A proclamation rang out in a clear voice. “In the name of His Majesty the Celestial Emperor, I do hereby appoint General Yuchi Hanxing and the Dusk Phalanx to redeploy from the seaside stronghold and defend Cloudwater Township.”

“Understood!” Gone was the giant Black Tortoise image as Yuchi Hanxing and a million soldiers knelt in midair on bended knee.

“Hmph!” Yue Cheng scoffed and left with a flourish of his sleeves. He’d picked his side; naturally he wouldn’t continue to be civil with Lu Yun and his allies. It dawned on the rest that great changes were on the horizon for Dusk Province, and even all of Nephrite Major.

The Dusk soldiers made camp in Cloudwater. This sleepy, picturesque town held more strategic importance than even the seaside stronghold. Losing the stronghold would at most lead to lesser monster spirits invading and killing a few Dusk cultivators.

Cloudwater, on the other hand, was not only a choke point for Dusk Province, but also a transportation hub, with its transportation formation that led to all other seventy-one provinces in the major. Losing control over it would be catastrophic for Nephrite.

Lu Yun settled down in an inn, rather than immediately make his way to Nephrite Capital. The two wardens didn’t show themselves again. Yue Cheng had made his choice, while Zhu Yu wanted nothing to do with Lu Yun, lest she be dragged into the mess.

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The moon hung low in the descending night sky, ornamented by the twinkling stars around it. Two figures snuck out of the inn and made their way to the rear of Cloudwater, to the rippling lake that the town was named after. An enormous lake behind the town provided the water and seeded the haze for the town’s signature look.

However, the two mountains sandwiching the lake and town blocked passage from the front, preventing the two from getting a good look until they drew closer. Previously, they’d only seen the shimmering plethora of clouds and reflection of the water, but nothing of the actual lake itself.

“The Great Cloudwater Lake!” Qing Han inhaled deeply and cast a curious glance at the waters. “I’ve long heard about this magical lake, but I’ve never seen it with my own eyes. Do you mean the tomb is in the water?”

The lake spanned roughly fifty kilometers in radius and resembled a magical mirror enveloped by clouds and mist. It was a stunning sight of sumptuous beauty. However, Lu Yun’s face darkened imperceptibly.

“What’s wrong?” Qing Han asked with surprise.

“This is a volcano!” The governor breathed in deeply as he scanned the landscape. “What an investment, setting up the tomb within a volcano. Not only are there mountains blocking the way, there’s also water and fire as natural barriers. This really is piquing my interest in whoever’s buried here.”

“A volcano?” Qing Han was befuddled. “There’s a giant lake here—how can it be a volcano?”

“It hasn’t erupted for many, many years.” Lu Yun pointed at the lake. “This is the mouth of the volcano. The tomb is underneath the lake. Come on, let’s go take a look.” He grabbed Qing Han and leapt into the lake.

“A volcano? The tomb of a noble?” A middle-aged man in golden attire suddenly materialized on the banks of the lake. He looked at the dissipating ripples on the surface with a cold smile tugging at his lips. “Consider this compensation for the treasure slave you took from me.”

The man jumped in as well.