

## Necropolis 181

### Chapter 181: Tadpole

Two azure talismans gleamed on Lu Yun and Qing Han's bodies, allowing them to glide through the water with the ease of fish. They were Swiftwater Talismans—naturally Xuanxi's doing.

"Is the tomb underwater?" Qing Han scanned the pitch black surroundings. An occasional fish swam past them, but he didn't see anything unusual. He turned his gaze downward. There was no telling how deep the lake was; even his consciousness couldn't reach its bottom.

"We should be able to access the tomb through the bottom of the lake. Right now, we're at the mouth of the volcano, one that goes straight down into earth," Lu Yun responded slowly. "The unique landscape may give birth to unknown creatures, so be on your guard."

The water increased in temperature as they sank deeper. In the end, they had no choice but to call upon defensive treasures to protect them from the oppressive heat.

Roar.

A muffled growl sounded from below. Mighty water currents disturbed the surface of the originally calm waters, instantly scattering the barrier of light from the treasures warding them. Terrible heat waves directly assaulted the defenseless humans.

"Is this water or lava?!" Surprised, Lu Yun threw out a few Yu Talismans. Layers of golden light covered them in a protective bubble.

Roar!

Another growl sounded, marking an increased ferocity in the water currents. The water rushed along with an edge as keen as an immortal's flying swords. Lu Yun had activated nine Yu Talismans, but the tremendous current instantly crashed through seven of them. The remaining two teetered on the verge of shattering as well.

Hum.

Brilliant violet beams exploded from Violetgrave and hacked at the depths of the lake. Lu Yun's attack split the powerful currents and shunted them to the sides.

"Oof!" He paled, blood trickling down from the corner of his mouth.

"Lu Yun!" Alarm writ large in his expression, Qing Han manifested a sword and channeled the Scroll of the Shepherding Immortals.

"I'm fine." Lu Yun shook his head, his eyes gleaming brightly. "The currents... are the water's intent." A bubble escaped his mouth as he exclaimed, "Now I know what sets Dongfang Hao's sword aura apart from mine. It's the intent!"

A sword in the hand was a sword in the heart, and the sword in the heart was a sword in one's will. No sword aura was complete until it incorporated an intent. Lu Yun's sword ocean had lost to Dongfang Hao's precisely because it lacked one.

Its vast nature should've been intrinsically more powerful than Dongfang Hao's sword aura, but without the support of concrete intent, it was more like an extravagant palace built upon the clouds—beautiful gossamer. Flashy without substance. Any true swordmaster would easily be able to slash through his sword aura.

Lu Yun might've grasped Dongfang Hao's sword aura, but the intent behind it was unknown to him. He could therefore only imitate the form, but not the function, which left significant openings in his moves.

If I can incorporate the water's intent into my sword ocean, my sword aura will be complete and I will no longer fear Dongfang Hao's sword intent! Lu Yun closed his eyes.

Black luminescence from the Tome of Life and Death rushed into Lu Yun's mind. The lake before him suddenly seemed different. The clear water seemed murkier in his eyes, swimming with undertones and subtleties. Water benefited everything and won without contending. It had neither shape, nor texture, and was free of all restraints.

Lu Yun's sword intent was freedom manifested in the form of the sword ocean. Both the Vast Dragon Seaturner and peng morphed from kun-fish existed to break through all restraints on their freedom.

The intent of the water was perfect for his sword aura.

Gurgle!

Strange noises traveled from the depths of the lake, calming down the violent currents. An enormous shadow swam out at top speed, coming at the humans with a cavernous, open mouth.

"What the hell is that?!" Qing Han gawked with shock. It was extremely dark in the water, but he could still see a giant black creature. Round body spanning half a kilometer in radius, there was a long and thin tail attached to it. It looked like a ridiculously large tadpole!

Lu Yun remained unmoving, his eyes closed as he immersed himself in the intent of the water. His expression alternated between joy and solemnity.

Qing Han knew his friend had entered a key phase of comprehension and was not to be disturbed. He struck a protective stance before his hand, his sword horizontal in front of him and gaze fixed on the tadpole-like creature.

I don't feel any internal energy from it, and it doesn't give off the presence of a zombie. It seems to simply be a very large beast. Confusion filled Qing Han's gaze. The tadpole wasn't a sentient monster spirit, but a simple beast.

"Be careful, it's the larva of a Spiriteater Demon Frog," Empress Myrtlestar's voice echoed in Qing Han's mind. "The tadpole has no internal energy at all, but it can easily devour a golden immortal. You're not its match. Let the little dragon out and have it deal with the creature."

The empress was referring to the black dragonguard, which was a bona fide peerless immortal. Since it was stuck in a peculiar state between life and death, the restriction wouldn't target it.

"No, that won't do!" Qing Han shot down without hesitation. "Lu Yun is in a delicate state of comprehension. As a powerful member of the North Sea water spirits, the dragonguard will disturb the energy of this region, possibly startling Lu Yun out of his current state. I'll do it myself."

After battling the half of the Azure Dragon King, Empress Myrtlestar's unresolved grievances had merged with the remaining fragments of her soul. Although she could use a myriad of combat arts, she couldn't fight anymore.

Silver starlight blossomed from Qing Han's chest, turning his hair and eyes the same color.

Qing Han had three starstones on him. The first was the Fire Starstone he'd had for some time. The second was the Big Dipper stone that Lu Yun had gifted him. The third was the Imperial Star from the empress.

Assigning the Imperial Star to disguise duty, Qing Han called upon the Fire Star and the Big Dipper to release their might, bathing him in starlight and dyeing the body of water in a faint sheen of silver.

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"What's going on? Why does starlight glitter in the Great Cloudwater Lake?" Zhu Yu and Yue Cheng were alerted by the happenings.

The lake has always been an unknown entity. Even dao immortals can't reach its bottom. Is some sort of grand treasure emerging? Yue Cheng's heart raced with excitement.

The two generals moved out at the same time and made their way to the lake. Other cultivators in Cloudwater followed suit as well.

"His Excellency the Governor has matters to take care of within the lake," sounded an aloof voice.

"Please return to your positions." Yuchi Hanxing blocked the way with the Dusk Phalanx.

Though the obstacle surprised and enraged Zhu Yu and Yue Cheng, they didn't dare start anything. The Heavenly Formation of the Black Tortoise could easily crush them.

Within the lake, the two starstones circling Qing Han blasted the lunging giant tadpole back into the depths.

"Starstones? Didn't expect a Qing kid to be in possession of such treasure. Hand me the stones, or I'll kill the brat," a malevolent voice suddenly spoke up. A man in gold appeared out of nowhere, shooting out a beam of sword light that stopped four inches away from Lu Yun's forehead.

## **Chapter 182: Demon Frog**

The man in gold had lain in wait all this time, hiding so well that Lu Yun and Qing Han were oblivious to his presence. However, the sight of the starstones was too tempting for him to remain hidden. He showed himself, threatening Qing Han with his best friend.

A starstone was formed of celestial energy gathered over the span of countless centuries, a treasure valuable beyond compare. The sword light inched closer and closer to Lu Yun's brow.

Qing Han froze in place with worry, simultaneously preoccupied with the resurfacing of the large tadpole he'd sent back down. The combined power of two starstones had sunk it into the deep, but it'd sustained no lasting injuries.

“What? Are the starstones worth more to you than his life?” the man in gold snickered when the young man didn’t move.

“Alright, you can have the starstones.” Silvery light receded from Qing Han’s body and his sterling locks returned to their usual black. He tossed the two starstones—two glittering points of light—into the man’s hands.

“Hahahaha!” Starstones in hand, the man in gold cackled loudly. “Now that I have these, I don’t need to go looking for some noble’s tomb any longer. You two... can die!”

His sword light expanded malevolently, thrusting toward the middle of Lu Yun’s head.

“Heh.” It was Qing Han’s turn to snicker.

Hum.

The starry stones in the man’s hands burst forth with blinding radiance, accompanied by a terrifying force that sent him flying. His sword light disintegrated as soon as it touched Lu Yun’s brow.

“How stupid are you? Or should I say, naïve? Taking my starstones barehanded like that....” Starlight returned to Qing Han as he spoke. A simple backhand slap repelled the enormous tadpole once again.

“How is this possible!” the man in gold gaped. “The stellar energy from starstones can’t possibly be refined, it can only be borrowed... how did you do it?!”

Anyone could borrow an endless stream of power from a starstone, but it was practically impossible to make it a personal item.

When Qing Han had drawn upon his starstone’s power in the past, he’d needed to remove his disguise in the process. But thanks to the Imperial Star and Empress Myrtlestar’s assistance, he’d made it entirely his.

Formed by the heavenly body that was its namesake, the Imperial Star was no ordinary starstone. Its sovereign status over the stars commanded mastery of the real Polar and Fire Stars, much less their starstones.

Although the man in gold had gained temporary possession of them, their power remained attached to their rightful owner. Qing Han once again blasted the tadpole back with one hand and hurled the man away with the other. The exchanges took place in the span of a breath.

Silver starlight flooded everywhere. Spreading from Qing Han’s hair, it cascaded into the water and filled the firmament above. Even Cloudwater was plated with a layer of brilliance.

“This is the power of a starstone!” Fervent recognition seized Yue Cheng. “Its power is that of a connate-grade treasure! A starstone, under Cloudwater Lake!!! Move!” He couldn’t sit still any longer. He had to get his hands on it!

Zhu Yu turned serious as well. “A starstone... if I could have that, I might be able to become a dao immortal.”

“Avast!” Yuchi Hanxing and her lance were both aloft in the air. Nearby, soldiers of the Dusk Phalanx clumped up into the Heavenly Formation of the Black Tortoise again. The beast’s clamorous image and terrifying momentum pressed upon everyone’s heart.

“Don’t bother stopping them. If they want to die, they can come all they like.” Qing Han’s voice cut through the air.

Yuchi Hanxing blinked, then retracted her weapon. Though she moved out of the way, the image of the Black Tortoise didn’t disperse.

A throng of crazed treasure-seekers charged toward Cloudwater Lake, ignoring the dire words they’d just heard. By now, the waters of the lake were also a glistening silver.

More than a dozen tadpoles writhed among the waves, each of them easily three meters long. The man in gold was tangled in a messy brawl, leaping to and fro to evade the tadpoles’ bites. Qing Han stayed at Lu Yun’s side, shielding him with a barrier of multilayered starlight.

“What kind of monsters are those?!” The immortals were shocked by the tadpoles’ grotesque form and size. They exuded neither immortal nor monster spirit energy, but their sinister auras were palpable.

“These are the spawn of Spirit-eater Demon Frogs! Are those demonic creatures not yet extinct?” Zhu Yu gasped. “No wonder the dao immortal who once dove into the lake never returned. If these larvae are here, there must be a mature frog as well!”

Severe dread spread across her face. “We need to leave, now! Even these tadpoles aren’t something we can deal with.”

Following Qing Han’s repulsion of the singular tadpole, a dozen of its brethren had come out to join it. Smart enough to figure out which target was easier, they beelined for the strange man instead.

The man in gold was a strange being in his own right. His cultivation was only at the peak of the august immortal level, but he fought like a golden immortal. Among the dozen or so demonic spawn, he remained relatively unscathed.

“Rawwwr!” Amid a loud roar, one of the tadpoles slithered out of the water, lunging at the immortals and cultivators on the shore. Its black hole of a maw enveloped several hundred in terrifying suction.

“Wh-what’s happening? Help!”

“I can’t move!”

The captives shrieked and struggled, but their energies and movements were sealed. They could only gibber in terror as the noxious maw threatened to swallow them whole.

Boom!

Light erupted from the water in the form of a silver pillar, sending the tadpole flying and helping those under its nefarious influence regain their freedom.

“Scram.” Qing Han’s voice was cold. The crowd didn’t need any further prompting to disperse in terror.

“That starstone is Qing Han’s treasure, eh!” Greed flashed in Yue Cheng’s eyes.

“If you dare take it from him, the Twin Devils will tear you to shreds. Don’t expect to be safe anywhere you go,” Zhu Yu murmured. Her words were a bucket of icy water, forcibly separating Yue Cheng from his avaricious thoughts.

His clan rivaled the Qing Clan in size and importance, but any clan that lived in Xiakan knew not to rub Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi the wrong way.

“Still, there must be other treasures beneath the lake!” Yue Cheng gritted his teeth. “Qing Han and Lu Yun wouldn’t have disturbed the monsters there, otherwise.”

Ribbit.

Before Zhu Yu could reply, a loud croak echoed from the serene lake. The dozen or so tadpoles immediately retreated at the sound.

“The Spiriteater Demon Frog... that ancient monstrosity really is here!” The woman turned deathly pale.

### **Chapter 183.1: Tomb of the Phoenix**

Ribbit, ribbit, ribbit!

A loud stream of frog croaks reverberated in the air with deafening force. With a great big splash, a roughly four-kilometer-wide head poked out of the lake.

Spiriteater Demon Frog!

The demonic amphibian was the stuff of ancient legends and lived only in tombs. So... why was it in a lake?

Two crimson eyes bulged like bloody hillocks from its even larger black skull. Its visceral gaze instantly locked onto Yue Cheng and Zhu Yu. Both were sealed peerless immortals, but found themselves unable to move.

Ribbit!

Another croak, this time in fear. The frog lifted its eyes from its coveted prey onto the bigger threat behind them. A humongous Black Tortoise thudded to Cloudwater’s lakeshore, a silver-haired girl with matching armor and lance upon its head.

“Auuuuu!” The sacred beast roared to the sky in turn. Holy light shone from two pairs of eyes to loftily scatter down upon the frog in the lake—the tortoise’s own, as well as the serpent fused to its back.

Yue Cheng and Zhu Yu felt the weight lift from their bodies and fled the scene like homeless stray dogs.

“That’s not the Dusk Phalanx! N-no, it can’t possibly be!” Yue Cheng rasped hoarsely with disbelief. Incredulous shock flooded his eyes, even more surprised than he’d been to see the frog. “It’s not the Heavenly Formation of the Black Tortoise either.... This is a real Black Tortoise! Not a divine beast with its bloodline, but the true northern god of water!”

Zhu Yu whitened as well. Her cleverness didn’t spare her from feeling helpless here. A Spiriteater Demon Frog in Cloudwater was one thing, but a real Black Tortoise?! And Yuchi Hanxing right there, on top of its head?!

Everything was too crazy to comprehend.

Dusk Province, a place so insignificant that it barely produced any immortals... a place ruled by a restriction powerful enough to strike fear into dao immortals' hearts... so many monstrosities were hidden beneath the surface here!

"Uoooooh!" The roaring tortoise moved toward Cloudwater Lake with resolute strides. As it walked, it sucked in a seemingly endless amount of water energy from the environment.

Out of the general scene of panic by the shores, the ancient demonic frog was perhaps the most frightened of all. Its head slowly sank beneath the lake surface, even as the tortoise finally dipped its ponderous form into the water.

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Lu Yun opened his eyes. They possessed a newfound keenness that reflected his understanding of water. It was a part of his sword intent now; not raw elemental power, but an essential intuition. His sword intent finally had a foundation that brought him infinitely closer to the realm of great perfection. Dongfang Hao's sword intent could sever his own no longer.

"An ancient Spiriteater Demon Frog?" The young man frowned slightly, watching the black shadow beneath his feet swim away. "Thanks for the help just now. You really saved me."

He smiled at his friend, who'd returned to a much less luminous state.

Qing Han shrugged. "That gold-robed man is still nearby. We need to be careful."

"Yeah." Lu Yun nodded.

Yuchi Hanxing approached with the Black Tortoise as her steed. "Milord," she saluted. She'd sworn loyalty to Lu Yun quite a while back, which meant the Dusk Phalanx was his own private army.

The Black Tortoise was born as a result of the juba and blackwater snake's fusion. Within the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals, the Azure Dragon had awakened and come under Qing Han's service, becoming the tortoise's catalyst for true fusion—and teacher—as a result.

After that, Qing Han had released the Black Tortoise and sent it to the seaside stronghold so that the Dusk Phalanx might train and learn from its continued presence. Through this new source of inspiration, they'd gained a new soul and power for their formation that much more closely resembled the sacred beast's.

The million or so soldiers of the Dusk army hailed from a multitude of factions all over Nephrite, as well as every walk of life. Some boasted of noble origins, while others were from a commoner background. Now they were all united under Lu Yun's banner, poised to become the elite force of the future Dusk Sacred Land.

A Black Tortoise was a connate divine spirit. Though this particular one was born of a more artificial union, the Azure Dragon's tutelage and the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals had transformed its constitution into a connate one as well.

As the northern god of all water, the Black Tortoise's dominion ruled over even a fearsome, ancient beast like the Spiriteater Demon Frog. However, it was difficult to say who would win in an actual fight; this tortoise in particular was only a child.

"The Black Tortoise will live in Cloudwater Lake from now on. You will be the town's only mistress," Lu Yun told Yuchi Hanxing.

"Yes." The general nodded as sadness flashed through her eyes. As an army commander, she would've been able to return home after reaching empyrean immortal. If she were assigned as a town administrator, that would no longer be true.

"Don't worry, Dusk Province will return to her former glory. The natural energies here will revert back to what they were five thousand years ago. It'll be no different from anywhere else in Nephrite and you'll be able to become a peerless immortal, even here." Lu Yun smiled, noticing her disappointment.

He'd dismantled the Enneawym Coffinbearers layout that'd previously sealed the province's lifepoint. With Dusk's feng shui restored, life and heavenly qi would soon flourish.

Yuchi Hanxing found her governor's statement a little dubious, given the five thousand years of decline, but she took it at face value anyway. She returned to Cloudwater Township, leaving Lu Yun and Qing Han to continue their dive.

The Black Tortoise was a necessary companion in their adventure. In the event of a frog attack, the dragonguard wouldn't be a match. Within the Great Cloudwater Lake, only a connate water beast like the Blackwater Tortoise could cow the Spiriteater Frog into submission.

Faint reddish rays of light peeked out from the depths as the pair returned to the water. The temperature here would be unbearable for any ordinary immortal.

"No wonder there's so much mist and vapor over Cloudwater," Qing Han came to a striking realization.

"Mount and river 'round the tomb,

Winding shape of dragon's palm." Lu Yun murmured, invoking the Dragonsearch Invocation. His eyes flared with black light and scanned the depths.

"This isn't a human tomb, thank goodness." He breathed a small sigh of relief. "A monster spirit king is buried here! One of the modern world, too. A... a phoenix!"

### **183.2: Tomb of the Phoenix**

The Spectral Eye told him everything about life and death within five hundred kilometers. There were no protective ridges here to obstruct his vision, so he could see the tomb below more clearly. Suddenly, his body trembled with excitement.

"No wonder this phoenix was buried inside a volcanic crater! As a refiner of treasures, it fits perfectly." He waited for more information to stream into his mind.

"Huang Qing of the phoenixes. She was just as famous as I was, once upon a time." Aoxue's voice abruptly echoed through his mind. "I didn't think she would die too. I thought she would become a dao immortal and usher in a new golden age for her race."



Much like dragons, phoenixes were a race of their own, long separated from monster spirits in general. However, they were much less prosperous by comparison.

Dragons were infamous for their lasciviousness. Their children littered the world, creating innumerable half-breeds in the process that were also counted among their race. Half-breeds could purify their bloodlines through hard work and eventually become pureblooded dragons.

That alone exceedingly multiplied their numbers.

Phoenixes were quite different, in that they sought a mutual, long-lasting bond between two members of their own race. Tainting their bloodline with a non-phoenix was utterly detested, resulting in much more meager numbers. In fact, a calamity ten thousand years ago had nearly extinguished the race entirely. Huang Qing arose during those times as their ray of hope, a genius in refining treasures as well as cultivation. Back then, she and Ao Xue were hailed as the immortal world's Twin Beauties.

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"Ah, do you... do you have the ability to revive people buried in tombs or something?" Qing Han couldn't help but raise a question that'd niggled at him for quite a while when he saw how animated Lu Yun looked. Is another ancient personage going to appear in the flesh soon?

Of course, he didn't ask it out loud since the man in gold was still hiding nearby.

"Yeah," Lu Yun nodded, then watched Qing Han drag the memory out of his mind and destroy it. "I can revive people who are buried in tombs," he transmitted.

Qing Han again followed suit with this second, newer memory.

"Stop telling me whatever it is!" He jumped when he saw his friend look expectantly at him, about to transmit something. "I know I've asked something I shouldn't have. My nascent spirit will crumble if we keep doing this!"

Extricating and wiping away a memory was very damaging to one's soul and spirit.

Lu Yun reached out to the east, then pressed a handful of connate wood energy into Qing Han's brow. Its vitality would help heal the self-inflicted mental injuries.

"I said, I can bring the one in that tomb back to life!" he transmitted once more, very seriously.

Qing Han wanted to cry. "Alright, but why're you telling me?"

"You were the one who asked, yeah?" Lu Yun scratched his head. "Getting rid of this memory just means you'll ask again later on. Just keep it in mind for the future."

The imperial envoy quieted down with a hint of well-hidden joy.

"Anyway, here's the entrance to the tomb." Lu Yun pressed his lips together. "It belongs to a phoenix king—not an ancient one, but I bet it'll still be pretty dangerous because the tomb itself is way older, I think."

"Huh," Qing Han grunted in assent.

Lacking knowledge of feng shui, modern immortals built tombs that were only protected by powerful formations. Any feng shui influences that came about were purely products of accident and chaos.

An ancient tomb, on the other hand, used feng shui in a cohesive way, with the tomb structure as an additional layer of esoteric protection. Here, feng shui's power was much greater than the formations that backed it.

There was a spacious cave between countless slabs of half-molten rock below. At least fifteen kilometers across, it was where the Spiriteater Frog and its spawn had emerged from.

As it turned out, this cave was also the entrance to the phoenix's tomb. The Black Tortoise swiftly shrank in on itself and burrowed into the cave, still in a protective stance for the humans on its back.

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"An ancient phoenix tomb, eh? This must be where Huang Qing was buried after our race slew her!" The gold-robed man came into the open, a smile curling at the corner of his mouth. "Her race's lost treasure must be here too: the Phoenix Plumebolt!

"I can't take the starstones with the Black Tortoise nearby, but that Plumebolt is mine!"

A reddish-gold feather appeared in his hand.

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Inside the cave, the demonic frog and its tadpoles were nowhere to be found.

"We're pretty much already inside the tomb. Anything can happen here!" Lu Yun warned his friend as a precaution.

Pop!

As soon as he said this, both of them felt earth underfoot.

"Huh?" Qing Han blinked. The two youths and the tortoise were no longer submerged, but in a completely different place.

"That wasn't transportation, that was a boundary." The water of the lake was still visible behind Lu Yun. It glowed dark red, reflecting the light of the surrounding magma.

The same dark red color permeated this place; molten rock was everywhere, radiating a frightening amount of heat that was even more intense than before. Thankfully, the Black Tortoise's innate water nature protected them from harm.

"Look, it's that Spiriteater Demon Frog!" Lu Yun pointed into the distance.

A large lava lake lay in the distance. The Spiriteater Frog and its dozen tadpoles lazed upon its surface, their eyes fixated unmovingly on Lu Yun. Black frog eggs were scattered all around the lakeshore, clearly of the same species as the frog.

"Let's not disturb those guys." He pulled on his friend's arm, and both of them jumped onto the Black Tortoise's head.

The reptile trundled its way deeper in. It felt rather uncomfortable in this fiery world of lava. Concentrated fire energy filled the air, cutting off the lake's vapors.

The frog and its tadpoles were content to let the tortoise and its riders pass by.

"Muuuuu," the Black Tortoise growled without warning. The serpent on its back twisted back and forth, as if it were anxious.

"There's something ahead!" Vigilantly alert, Lu Yun stared ahead for danger. Nearby, a flying sword leisurely poked out from a pool of lava. A spirit-grade weapon without an owner? Why was it moving by itself?

"This is..." Lu Yun and Qing Han gaped in equal surprise.

"A zombie?!" Qing Han gasped. "Isn't this a flying sword?! How did it become a zombie?"

### **Chapter 184: Tomb Keepers**

Both Lu Yun and Qing Han were nonplussed by the flying sword wobbling their way. Radiating an energy unique to zombies, it was a zombie sword!

"How is this... even possible?" Befuddled, Lu Yun searched through the memories of all four of his envoys, but found nothing about zombified swords. This was too strange an occurrence.

"Uooahh!" snarled the Black Tortoise, the enormous soundwave destroying the flying sword. Smoke left in the destroyed sword's wake slowly dissipated.

Lu Yun remained tense, and the Black Tortoise's two eyes settled somewhere ahead; there was still something there. The sword zombie had been a scout, testing the waters for whatever terrible thing lurked in that far corner. The sacred beast didn't dare advance without knowing what it was.

Lu Yun and Qing Han looked on with matching solemnness. Once again, silver starlight flickered about Qing Han as he channeled the power of starstones.

"Don't." Lu Yun stopped his friend. "The thing's gone."

Qing Han dismissed his starlight.

"Recall the Black Tortoise," said Lu Yun. "It won't be of any help here."

Qing Han nodded and collected the giant beast into the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals. Too much water-attribute energy was present on the Black Tortoise, which served as a continual irritation to the fire elemental power in the environment. As soon as the divine beast returned to the scroll, the fire ceased its violent surges.

"To seek a dragon of mountains coiled,

Those deathly cliffs with mysteries roiled.

If danger lurks behind doors closed,

Let it remain in yin yang form."

Hum.

Lu Yun's mystical force gathered above his head and collected into a luopan; but this time it radiated starlight like Qing Han.

"Five stars orbit in the skies, five dragon veins course the ground.

Five stars and veins are as one, to which the latter follows the former.

From them emerge five archetypes, to be divided, analyzed, and understood!"

Emitting a continuous hum, the luopan rotated at top speed, attracting an endless stream of starlight that split into five blinding stars over Lu Yun's head. Three of the stars faded, leaving two that brutally slammed into the luopan over his head.

Lu Yun paled as blood trickled down the corner of his mouth.

"Lu Yun!" Qing Han rushed to his aid, but Lu Yun waved him off and made another seal with both hands. The luopan flickered once before devouring the two stars, and the governor's face grew even more pale.

"Right, the luopan that the Dragonsearch Invocation creates isn't a real one, which makes it difficult to use the cosmic feng shui method." Lu Yun opened his eyes and wiped the blood away.

The cosmic feng shui method was another technique unique to his sect. Through observing the trajectory of the stars were they able to divine the landscape and true layout of a tomb.

Back on Earth, however, the method based its conclusions on the position of the stars. In the world of immortals, it created actual images to facilitate judgment of which star's influence had reached the tomb. The feng shui of tombs wasn't just a result of formations influencing the local environment, but the power of the stars was a crucial component as well.

Lu Yun had reasons to believe there was a connection between the sword zombie and the tomb's feng shui. However, the complicated terrain and endless lava prevented him from getting a clear look.

"Strange, this is an intersection of the Gold and Fire Stars." Lu Yun dismissed the cosmic feng shui method with a flash with surprise. Instead of the actual celestial bodies, he was referring to the power the stars possessed.

There were three enclosures, four symbols, and twenty-eight mansions found in the celestial sphere. The celestial bodies had no connection to the five elements while in the sky, but once their light reached the world of immortals, it combined with the five elements and created the five cosmic elemental powers.

Thus emerged the Gold, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth Stars. Wherever their influence touched, corresponding terrain emerged. Although the tomb was covered by the Great Cloudwater Lake, it wasn't beyond the reach of cosmic power.

"The Fire Star should counter the Gold Star, so how can they coexist here? Strange, how strange." Lu Yun frowned. In the wheel of the five elements, fire countered gold. The relationship between the five cosmic powers followed the relationship of the five elements.

“Is there possibly a treasure that can balance gold and fire here?” Qing Han posited after some consideration.

“If there’s a treasure that can overrule the relationship of the five elements...”

Qing Han and Lu Yun exchanged a glance and answered in unison, “It must be connate-grade!”

Only a connate-grade treasure would possess such mystical power; Feinie’s Formation Orb was one such treasure. Though stuck deep in the burial mound, its power had still reached beyond the mountain and created a summit of formations that deterred even immortals.

Although Lu Yun’s Sugato Sword could slash through connate-grade treasures, it wasn’t one itself. Its power was tremendous, but it didn’t possess the mystical abilities of a connate-grade treasure.

“A connate-grade treasure!” Qing Han’s eyes lit up with expectation. Such treasures were fatally attractive to anyone. Even if one couldn’t use it, studying its inherent dao would greatly improve their cultivation and strength.

“Let’s go!” A smile tugged at Lu Yun’s lips. They made their way into the depths of the ancient, lava-filled tomb.

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Confusion appeared on Qing Han’s face after some time. “Strange. Are we lost? This is where we entered, isn’t it?”

He looked around and realized that they’d made a full circle. Reptilian inhabitants still crouched in the lava pond behind them, the demonic frog and tadpoles regarding them with thick curiosity now, rather than wary alertness.

Croak!

A tongue suddenly flickered out and delivered food to the demonic frog.

“What did it just eat?” Qing Han gaped, blinking rapidly.

“A zombie.” Lu Yun scowled. “Just like the sword zombie we encountered earlier. There’s a formation of eight doors here.” He inhaled deeply. “I almost led us into a trap in a moment of carelessness.”

A formation of eight doors was a variant of the eight trigrams, but it was even more strange and unpredictable than the eight trigrams. The eight trigrams followed the rules of nature and represented the evolution of all things in the world, while the formation of eight doors was derived from them.

Placing it here served only the purpose of killing people.

The eight doors were the open door, rest door, life door, harm door, fabrication door, scenery door, death door, and the fright door.

Every door represented a major permutation of the eight trigrams. Although there were only eight doors, their corresponding relationship to the eight trigrams gave rise to endless varieties and possibilities. A formation of eight doors essentially contained eight sets of eight trigrams.

Lu Yun could see through feng shui and solve a formation accordingly, but the eight doors were constantly changing. Even he had trouble identifying the only life door.

It was fortunate that they'd been walking in circles around the scenery door. That door misled and confused, but it wasn't that dangerous. If they'd set foot into the death door, a baffling death would be their only end.

Lu Yun's back was drenched in sweat. "Activating the Dragonsearch Invocation is too taxing, and the luopan of mystical force isn't a real luopan." The one he'd manifested had almost shattered under the force of two stars.

"Go!" He tossed thirty-six soybeans, summoning thirty-six warriors in golden armor. Using them as scouts might not be the most ingenious idea, but it was his only option.

The nascent spirit realm warriors spread out within the giant ants' nest of a tomb, disappearing down the various corridors. Some passages were real, some were fake, but all of them fell within the purview of the eight doors.

"Dead. Dead. Dead again." Lu Yun's brows knitted together. One after another, the bean soldiers died and returned to the other world. Although they were connected to Lu Yun's consciousness, their deaths remained a mystery to him.

"Ah, one of them survived." The governor's eyes lit up. "Follow me."

He led Qing Han to that particular soldier's route, suffering the increasing ambient heat around them. Even the watery ripples protecting them barely held on.

"Wait, no! This is a trap!" Lu Yun's hackles raised. "The soldier is at my cultivation level and doesn't have any treasure to protect him. He can't possibly have survived here. This is the death door! We need to turn back!"

He grabbed Qing Han and turned around, but realized to his shock that the road they'd taken was now an endless ocean of lava.

"Dead again!" Lu Yun narrowed his eyes. The last of the bean soldiers had died at exactly this moment.

"Lalala~ Yiya lala~" A melodious voice sang over the sea of lava, followed by the emergence of a girl. Long, fiery hair floated slowly around a charming face, mimicking her moderate speed out of the molten rock. Her upper body was unclothed, and her lower body was comprised of a fish tail.

A mermaid, just like Xuanxi!

"Barging into the tomb of the phoenix queen and disturbing her slumber? You two pathetic insects are bolder than you should be." The mermaid paused her melody and flicked a derisive glance at Lu Yun and Qing Han. Ruby-red eyes glinted with thick killing intent.

"She's half dead. Her body is that of a zombie, but her soul is alive." Lu Yun frowned. "A living soul inhabiting a zombie body. You're the tomb keeper!"

“What a surprise that someone knows about tomb keepers in this day and age. You’ve got a bit of knowledge in you.” The mermaid smiled faintly. “Are you also willing to guard this tomb until Her Majesty awakes from her slumber in resurrection?”

1. Ancient Chinese astronomers divided the sky into four regions that corresponded with four symbols, AKA the four sacred beasts. The three enclosures are divisions of the North Celestial Pole and focus on the stars that can be seen year-round. The twenty-eight mansions are part of the Chinese constellations systems and can be considered the equivalent of zodiac constellations in Western astronomy.

### **Chapter 185: Sword Barrow**

A number of figures suddenly arose from the lava sea—humans, monster spirits, dragons, and even divines. However, none of them were alive. All of them were living spirits inhabiting the bodies of zombies.

They were all keepers of this tomb.

Tomb keepers!

On Earth, tomb keepers were said to be such loyal followers of the buried dead that they turned into zombies to guard the tomb, lest their master’s resting place be disturbed by tomb raiders.

Unlike zombie kings, who devoured the essence of others to return to life, tomb keepers were merely living souls inhabiting undead bodies. They maintained their own consciousness while gaining the enormous strength of a zombie, whereas zombie kings overflowed with violence and unresolved grievances.

Regardless, both wandered the nebulous zone between life and death, constantly tormented by their inability to either seek an end or achieve rebirth.

Lu Yun had always thought them to be merely a myth. Human souls zombified along with their bodies, turning them into mindless monsters. How was it possible for zombies to guard tombs?

Yet now he was looking at living proof of that myth.

The tomb keepers in the sea of lava were devoid of vitality and radiated presences unique to zombies, but their gazes were clear like that of a living person. Now freed from the lava, the mermaid brought up molten waves with a light flick of her tail. Hundreds of tomb keepers followed her ashore.

“A divine intruding upon the tomb of the phoenix queen? Show yourself!” The mermaid scoffed and directed a ripple of flames at a corner of the air with a casual wave.

A grunt preceded a man’s fall from the air. Clad in gold robes, disbelief shone in his eyes.

“Tomb keepers, tomb keepers... the legends are real!” snarled the man. He’d made it here only through shadowing Lu Yun and Qing Han—the two being none the wiser—but the mermaid had all too easily spotted him. “There really are living souls who volunteer to become zombies!”

Becoming a tomb keeper granted one the great strength of an undead, but at the cost of forever being trapped in their now-zombified body. They didn’t even have a chance to develop into a zombie king and come back to life.

“This is the Sword Barrow!” Gaping, an even more terrible memory surfaced in the man’s mind before he could recover from the shock of encountering tomb keepers. “That Lu Yun kid just said this is an intersection of the Fire and Gold Stars. This is the Sword Barrow, a tomb of tens of thousands of flying swords! No wonder the swords became zombies!” The man in gold backed away.

“Hahaha! What a mistake you all made by burying Huang Qing here! Phoenixes can be reborn after death, but being buried here took that chance away from her! You tomb keepers are waiting for something that’ll never happen!! Hahaha!!” the man roared with mad laughter.

The mermaid and the other tomb keepers stilled, their eyes shining with regret. It had been they who’d buried Huang Qing here. They’d then volunteered to guard her as tomb keepers, awaiting the day of her rebirth.

However, they waited ten thousand years.

Ten thousand years after her burial, Huang Qing’s body still remained dormant, showing no signs of resurrection. It was then that they realized something was wrong. But what was done was done, and couldn’t be undone. Even the tomb keepers couldn’t enter the Sword Barrow to retrieve their mistress’ body.

The Sword Barrow had become one with Huang Qing’s tomb and morphed into a tomb for nobility, a sum far more dangerous than its parts. The mountains trapping Cloudwater Township were the physical manifestation of the tomb.

Likewise, the tomb hadn’t been set up within the volcano, but the volcano had appeared because of it.

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“The Sword Barrow?” Lu Yun frowned. Neither he nor his envoys knew anything about sword barrows.

“A resting place for swords,” replied Qing Han. “Legends speak of the Sword Barrow in our world, a tomb for swords built by persons unknown at an undefined time. Every time it emerges in the world, deadly conflicts arise. Actually, Violetgrave came from the Sword Barrow.”

Qing Han didn’t know about sword barrows, but Empress Myrtlestar did. In her own words, she hadn’t even dared venture into the Sword Barrow at her peak. The sword tomb had buried a number of would-be adventurers, even heavyweights at her level.

“There are other swords like Violetgrave there?” Lu Yun’s eyes lit up.

The tomb keepers and the man in gold stared at him dumbly.

“That... I’m not sure.” Qing Han met Lu Yun’s eyes with a wry smile. He knew what the governor was thinking: a sword barrow was still a tomb.

Living creatures were laid to rest in tombs and burial mounds, whereas inanimate objects called barrows their final resting place. Sword and clothing barrows were common examples, the latter being reserved for those whose bodies couldn’t be recovered.



At the end of the day, however, barrows were no different from tombs. As the commandant of the most noble sect of tomb raiders, Lu Yun wasn't going to back down. This might be the death door of the eight doors, but he could still break out and turn the tide, given enough time!

"You are going to the resting place of the swords?" The mermaid's eyes blazed as they fixed on Lu Yun. Phoenixes were immortal. Even after their souls were scattered, there was a chance for them to be reborn if they could gather their souls.

Huang Qing was the greatest genius of the phoenix clan. Although she'd been killed by the divine race, she'd still be able to resurrect, once placed in a locale with an abundance of fire element.

Her followers had set up the tomb here to prevent the divines from locating her. Tombs were where the dead were buried, and burials marked the end of a life. Even if the divines were almost omniscient, they'd be blind to Huang Qing while she was hidden in this tomb.

Unfortunately, the tomb keepers hadn't spotted the terrible Sword Barrow hidden deep within the fire element under the Cloudwater Lake until it was too late. The Sword Barrow's energy had shredded the power of rebirth and disrupted the phoenix's resurrection.

"I can enter the Sword Barrow and find your mistress' body." Lu Yun proclaimed, his eyes shining with great confidence.

"We will let the two of you live if you can retrieve her body. This divine, however..." The mermaid shifted her gaze to the man in gold, who shuddered violently.

The tomb keepers were all peerless immortals! He himself was a peerless immortal as well, but even lifting his seal wouldn't save him from the tomb keepers.

"Kill him if you want to," Lu Yun commented nonchalantly. "Even if you don't, I'll somehow get him killed myself."

### **Chapter 186: White Tiger Divine Race**

The man's expression shifted drastically at Lu Yun's declaration.

"The human's not to be trusted!!" he yelled. "He's the Dusk Province governor, an official of the Nephrite Court! There exists a death feud between Nephrite Major and the phoenixes! If he finds your queen's body, he will refine it into pills or treasure!"

The tomb keepers hesitated. Phoenixes did indeed have a feud with the Nephrite Court. Tens of thousands years ago, the two factions fought over rule of the major. Defeated by the human immortals, the phoenixes were forced out of the region, marking the start of their decline.

Huang Qing had risen out of nowhere during those grave straits and became the race's hope to rise again. Nephrite Major sent hunters after her, but to no avail. Learning of Lu Yun's identity injected killing intent into the eyes of the tomb keepers.

"Huang Qing was killed by the divines," Lu Yun said calmly, "and this man is a divine."

The mermaid paused.

“Nephrite Major’s feud with the phoenixes stems from the struggle to establish one dynasty as the major’s rightful ruler. It was an honorable war between two honorable factions.” Lu Yun lifted his head. “The divines, on the other hand.... Heh, they are the public enemy of all races in the world.”

With the demise of all the world’s immortals in the great war, the divine race had seized the opening and conquered the world. They enslaved all races, playing with and killing their toys as they would. Many races still considered the divine race their mortal enemy, even now.

The Nephrite court and phoenixes had indeed clashed against each other, but the court’s victory had been just. Even after Huang Qing’s rise to stardom, the human court sent only immortals at her level after her. Although the attackers fought as a team, the court never sent out any dao immortals.

Instead, it had been a divine race’s dao immortal who’d killed Huang Qing.

“Enter the Sword Barrow and retrieve our mistress’ body,” the mermaid said, then suddenly pointed at Qing Han. “But he stays here.”

“Alright,” Qing Han replied before Lu Yun could edge out a word. He knew he would only be a burden if he stayed by his friend’s side. Without the need to consider his safety, Lu Yun would easily be able to extricate himself from any danger.

Qing Han had come to that realization throughout the course of Myriad Formation Summit, the Skandha Extinction Tomb, and the abyss beneath Dusk River.

“When I return, if Qing Han has lost even a hair...” Lu Yun’s expression darkened. He couldn’t not worry about Qing Han remaining with a group of tomb keepers. Despite their living souls and sentient minds, they were still zombies.

“Gyakakakaka!” Strange laughter cackled in the air before a voice mocked, “A hair? What can you do even if we eat him?”

Boom!

A large explosion sounded from behind Lu Yun as a girl with crimson hair strode out from the void. Blood-red dragons seemed to frolic around her in streaks of crimson light.

“If there is so much a hair missing on Sir Qing Han’s head,” Aoxue proclaimed with steely eyes, “I will kill you all.”

All of the tomb keepers shuddered.

Aoxue was merely an august immortal at present. She’d once been a peerless immortal, but was yet to fully recover her cultivation. Lu Yun wouldn’t allow his envoys to ascend beyond golden immortal before he met with the Dusk restriction.

After all, he didn’t know if the restriction would tolerate his envoys’ existence.

The black dragonguard, zombie king, bloodcorpses, and even the tomb keepers were able to ascend beyond the golden immortal realm because they weren’t alive in the traditional sense.

On the contrary, Lu Yun’s envoys had truly resurrected.

Although Aoxue was merely an august immortal, she had unleashed all of her presence as a blood dragon. Terrifying killing intent threatened to freeze the air.

“A blood dragon.” The man in gold widened his eyes, recalling the terrible legends surrounding the creature. “You are First Princess Ao Xue of the North Sea dragon palace. How... how did you become a blood dragon...?”

Even the mermaid looked pale. The tomb keepers might be peerless immortals, but they couldn’t move at all beneath the blood dragon’s aura. Neither zombies nor tomb keepers would dread blood dragons. However, the legends surrounding them alone were intimidating enough to petrify. Blood dragons were the harbinger of unbelievable bloodshed!

Aoxue was not only a blood dragon, but also Lu Yun’s Envoy of Samara. Aura from both of her identities roiled over the tomb keepers, taking away their breaths and crushing them like a mountain on their chests.

Bam!

With a single point, a strand of crimson light annihilated the tomb keeper who’d threatened Qing Han. Such was the power of a blood dragon. Outside the tomb, Aoxue wouldn’t dare call upon her power like this; it would send the entire world of immortals after her. But here in the tomb, protected by layers of mountain ranges, she could tap into the blood dragon’s power all she liked.

“Anyone who offends my master will die,” she said with an icy expression.

Both the man in gold and the mermaid gawked with disbelief. How had the blood dragon even killed the tomb keeper?

“Your, your master? Why would the vaunted First Princess of the dragons serve a human?!” The mermaid was visibly shocked.

Aoxue turned her murderous gaze at the mermaid in lieu of a response. Color drained from the latter’s face.

“I will spare you for Xuanxi’s sake,” Aoxue proclaimed coldly. “If you dare run your mouth again, do not blame me for not showing mercy.”

Xuanxi wasn’t around. If the Dusk river god was, she would’ve killed the mermaid herself. Aoxue knew the mermaid tomb keeper in front of her. Xuanxi was the blood dragon’s subordinate, while the girl—Xuanying—served Huang Qing.

The two mermaids were twins. They’d been captured by human immortals and sold as slaves, and it’d been Aoxue and Huang Qing who saved them. From then on, one sister each served the dragon and the phoenix.

Being the Twin Beauties of the world, Aoxue and Huang Qing were both rivals and close friends. Right now, Aoxue urgently desired her master to find Huang Qing’s body and make her an Envoy of Samsara. Incidentally, Xuanying had her own unique set of skills.

The blood dragon would thus rather Lu Yun kill her himself.

The mermaid lowered her head and fell silent.

“Stay here and protect Qing Han.” Lu Yun nodded at Aoxue and turned to the man in gold. “Follow me, White Tiger descendant.”

The man trembled and looked at Lu Yun in disbelief. His real identity was revealed to be a descendent of the White Tiger of the west!

Descended from the four divine beasts, the divine tribes of the four cardinal directions were extremely mysterious. Even back when the divine race had ruled the world eighty thousand years ago, the four tribes never showed their faces.

They existed only in tales recounted by the various races of the immortal world. Even the divine race could only regale each other with stories of their most mysterious members. And now, one of them had shown up in Dusk Province!

The man had carefully kept his identity a secret all along; he was blindsided by Lu Yun seeing through him at first glance.

“Follow me if you value your life, or I’ll kill you where you stand.” Lu Yun turned to leave. With a glance at Aoxue, the man in gold tightened his jaw and followed the governor.

### **Chapter 187: A Great Curse**

Compared to Aoxue, the man in gold would rather stay with Lu Yun.

A blood dragon, even one in the august immortal realm, was a great threat to him, while a nascent spirit realm cultivator like Lu Yun was nothing. Even if the young governor was good enough to kill peerless immortals, those were ones with their cultivation sealed to august immortal. Suppressing their cultivation made those immortals trash, but Lu Yun was bound to fall if he met true geniuses.

The White Tiger descendant was not only a peerless immortal, but a genius among his peers. Despite his sealed cultivation, he could make quick work of any mere cultivator.

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The tomb keepers opened a pathway through the eight doors formation that led to the Sword Barrow. They might not understand feng shui, but their very existence had become a part of the tomb, which allowed them to control the fringe formations and layouts. The Sword Barrow deep within the tomb, however, was beyond their reach.

They deactivated what defense mechanisms they had authority over, making way for the human who was their only hope of resurrecting their queen.

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The further Lu Yun and the divine ventured into the tomb, the higher the ambient temperature grew. Every once in a while, ghostly figures appeared in the labyrinthine underground tomb, all of which were zombified flying swords.

Strangely enough, though the zombies flickered in and out of visibility, seemingly keeping watch on Lu Yun and the man in gold, they never attacked the intruders. The two were allowed to make their way to the Sword Barrow in peace.

“Who is Yuchi Hanxing to you?” Lu Yun asked suddenly.

The man in gold started and violently turned his head in the human’s direction.

“No one!” he responded harshly.

Lu Yun stopped and looked back with a half-smile. “Shouldn’t you ask me who Yuchi Hanxing is?”

The man’s expression was as black as charcoal.

“I would’ve killed you, had you nothing to do with Yuchi Hanxing,” continued Lu Yun.

The man took a few steps back. “You think a nascent spirit realm cultivator like you can touch me?”

“Of course not. Relax.” Lu Yun smiled faintly. “I’m just asking.”

He turned around and kept on walking, but the man in gold wanted nothing more than to swat Lu Yun dead. After a long pause, he answered, “Yuchi Hanxing is my daughter. How could you tell?”

“There’s a trace of pure White Tiger bloodline in her body. House Yuchi... there wasn’t a House Yuchi five, or even ten thousand years ago.” Lu Yun responded as he walked, “Someone specifically established House Yuchi for her.”

Wushen Ruyi had finished refining the Divine Spymirror not too long ago, acquiring the memory of the treasure slave within it. That was how Lu Yun learned the man in gold was related to Yuchi Hanxing.

She served Lu Yun as the commander of the Dusk Phalanx. Since the man in gold was her father, Lu Yun wouldn’t hurt him, for the moment. If he left the man to the tomb keepers, they would certainly kill him.

“You refined my treasure slave?” The man’s expression darkened. That slave had known almost all of his secrets.

Lu Yun shrugged. “I didn’t. Someone else did.”

“What do you want?!” Agitation brewed and stirred in the gold-clad White Tiger descendant.

“All that is left of the White Tiger divine race is you. ...no, you and Yuchi Hanxing.” Lu Yun turned to look at him. “Yuchi Tianhuang, I want you to swear fealty to me!”

“In your dreams!” Yuchi Tianhuang immediately snapped. “I am the divine king of the White Tiger race. I will never serve a pathetic human like you!”

Silvery light shone out of his eyes and terrible killing intent surged within his body. “Don’t even think about threatening me with Yuchi Hanxing.”

He would love to kill Lu Yun now, but he couldn’t. Yuchi Hanxing was the last hope for their kind. If Lu Yun died here, she would suffer the consequences.

“In addition to the White Tiger, she’s also a descendant of the Black Tortoise.” Lu Yun remained unfazed beneath Yuchi Tianhuang’s murderous glare. “After I taught her the method of the Black Tortoise, she imparted it to the Dusk Phalanx’s formation, imbuing it with the soul of the divine beast. It even transformed the image of the Black Tortoise into a real one.

“She doesn’t know who she is, does she?” the governor surmised.

Yuchi Tianhuang didn’t respond.

“Hahaha, the divine race betrayed the clans of the four cardinal directions! Your own kind is the reason for your people’s downfall. You conceal your identity not because you’re afraid of the human immortals in the world, but because you fear the existing divines!

“Remember the Skandha Extinction Tomb?” Lu Yun took a step toward Yuchi Tianhuang to stare at the man squarely in the eyes. “Empress Myrtlestar’s people aren’t the only ones cursed by the tomb, but also your tribe!”

The White Tiger descendant backed away, panic growing on his face.

“Not just your kind, but all four of the divine cardinal tribes! The curse will destroy your bloodlines!” Lu Yun advanced again. “When you slipped into the Skandha Extinction Tomb, you were seeking a way to break the curse, weren’t you? Sadly for you, you didn’t know there were five tomb realms in addition to the five tombs, which were where the real curse was set up!

“The Skandha Extinction Tomb being a curse on a people, born from burying five generations of the same bloodline? The truth is so much worse.” Lu Yun scoffed. “You should’ve headed to the tomb realm of the western tomb. There, you’ll find the body of your great ancestor—the White Tiger Divine King. He might be alive. He might be dead.

“Regardless, the real curse will end your bloodline and even prevent your dead from reincarnating. Your tribe will disappear from the world forever. The best way to achieve this is to anchor the curse to your ancestor!”

Color drained from Yuchi Tianhuang’s face, turning the man almost translucent.

“Empress Myrtlestar and her people were merely burial goods for the four cardinal tribes, sacrificed for no reason in the making of the five tomb realms.”

Within Violetgrave, the dread zombie fell silent. Meanwhile, Empress Myrtlestar’s expression clouded over as she listened in from within the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals. Lu Yun was still within the range of her consciousness.

“How do you know all this?” Yuchi Tianhuang looked at Lu Yun with shocked disbelief. Through the Divine Spymirror, he’d perceived that the Skandha Range of Dusk Province was the source of the curse against his kind. That was why he’d come to the province.

The tomb in question, however, housed only Empress Myrtlestar’s people. It seemed to have nothing to do with the divine race. He’d thus departed from the tomb without learning anything. But Lu Yun had enlightened him with the full truth. The Skandha Extinction Tomb existed only to create the five tomb realms, where the four divine kings were buried.

“The four divine kings are merely your ancestors. Their parents—the true Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird, and Black Tortoise—should be resting within the tomb realm of the central tomb.” Lu Yun didn’t answer Yuchi Tianhuang’s question. It was the Sal Tree of Life and Death that’d recorded what he’d said just now. It wasn’t sentient, but its body instinctively remembered the past.

It was also this tree that’d preserved a sliver of hope against the curse of the Skandha Tomb and its five tomb realms, allowing Yuchi Tianhuang to survive, and it’d even permitted the birth of Yuchi Hanxing.

What is the Dusk restriction protecting, that it appeared so suddenly a thousand years ago? Who is the dead of the ancient tomb, the one that fought Aoxue and Xuanxi? This Sword Barrow wouldn’t have appeared in Dusk Province for no good reason.

Lu Yun had a prickly feeling that he would discover a great secret in the Sword Barrow deep within Cloudwater Lake.

A secret regarding the Skandha Extinction Tomb and the Dusk restriction!

### **Chapter 188: Endless Sword Zombies**

The divines had left their footprints everywhere in Dusk Province. Mount Myriad Formation, the Skandha Range, even that abyss beneath the river.... Could the restriction in the ancient tomb be a divine as well?

This Sword Barrow feels like it could very well be the most important place in the province, mused Lu Yun. Sword barrows, where swords are buried.

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Yuchi Tianhuang didn’t know what to say. The four cardinal divine tribes hadn’t been created by the four divine beasts themselves, but rather by their royal children, the cardinal divine kings. The tribes actually derived their ancestry from the kings, while the four divine beasts were revered as divine emperors. But now... the divine beasts were apparently dead and buried inside the Skandha Extinction tomb realms?

“Is that true?!” Despair flashed through the man’s eyes. “Are the four divine kings dead as well?”

“Who knows?” Lu Yun shook his head. “A curse as powerful as that would need an endless source of resentment. Sure, you can get some from the dead, but it pales in comparison to the amount that can be gathered from someone steeped in misery and suffering. Regardless, have you reconsidered?”

“In your dreams!” Yuchi Tianhuang’s reply was the same.

“Then I’ve no problem making use of your essence qi to break the layout outside the Sword Barrow.” Lu Yun flashed a radiant smile. “Yuchi Hanxing has no idea who you are, anyway.”

Tianhuang’s face colored and he backed off a little. The next appearance of a delicate girl dressed in white satin shocked him even more so. Her every movement and gesture embodied the most beautiful of dances beneath the heavens; her every turn defined another type of beauty.

“Wushen Ruyi!” The tigrine divine gasped. “You’ve possessed the Divine Spymirror!”

“You know who I am?” Ruyi’s voice held a crystalline timbre to it. She glanced at Yuchi Tianhuang, then shook her head slightly. “You weren’t a member of the divine court eighty thousand years ago, how can you recognize me?”

Yuchi Tianhuang had dug up the Spymirror and its treasure slave eighty thousand years ago from the ruins of the divine palace. As such, the treasure slave had no memories of the man before that.

“Wushen Ruyi, you’re one of the twenty-four divine kings. Have you betrayed your own race to become a dog of man?!”

“The four cardinal tribes were the traitors and exiled accordingly,” Ruyi replied. “Your tribe is among those culpable, White Tiger divine. We could’ve stayed out of the war a hundred thousand years ago, but you dragged us into it for selfish reasons. You nearly destroyed our race!”

“Enough chit-chat. I don’t have much time to waste,” Lu Yun hectored, putting a stop to the rather historical banter.

Hum...

Silvery mirror-light burst forth from Ruyi’s form, roaring toward Yuchi Tianhuang in a radiant beam.

“Wait!” Tianhuang shouted. “I surrender!”

The silver radiance stopped about a meter short of him.

“Grrrrrr!” An explosive tiger’s roar erupted from Yuchi Tianhuang’s maw, the image of a White Tiger materializing behind him. Making use of this brief respite, he fled on a ray of white deeper into the tomb.

Ruyi retracted her attack, then nodded curtly to her master before returning to hell.

“If you die, your essence qi will be no more. Only a living White Tiger divine can use their qi to break the enormous layout outside the Sword Barrow,” Lu Yun murmured, then pursued the streak of white.

Although Lu Yun could summon his own connate metal energy from the west, his cultivation was still too weak to apply the necessary amount of force. His energy wouldn’t have enough of a biting edge to it, either.

Contrary to Yuchi Tianhuang’s assumption that Lu Yun had been leading the way with perfect knowledge, the human had actually taken several trips inside the Gates of Hell to analyze the layout ahead. They were truly terrifying grand feng shui influences.

After much deliberation, his final conclusion was that connate metal energy, or the essence qi of metal would be required, hence the conversation just now. He’d wanted Yuchi Tianhuang to use his essence qi of his own volition.

The White Tiger divine had no other option. He was dead in the water against the tomb keepers, so the Sword Barrow was his only chance at life.

Lu Yun hadn’t told a single lie just now, either; the Skandha Extinction Tomb did indeed curse the four cardinal tribes.



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Rumble...

The entire tomb began shaking.

"It's open!" Lu Yun lit up with excitement. He quickly stuck a talisman onto himself, disappearing in the next instant with a flash of the 'dun' character. Being the character for 'flee', the Dun Talisman allowed him to accelerate to incredible speeds for a very short period of time.

Zoom!

His body pierced a barrier of light, then landed on solid ground.

Clang!

As soon as he did so, the ringing of swords crashed against his eardrums. An immortal longsword took a swing right at him!

Clink!

Violetgrave erupted with tinted light, blocking the blow.

"Lu Yun—" Before he could collect his thoughts, an angry roar came from deeper into the crypt. "You were just using me!"

"You have no other choice," Lu Yun exhaled, observing his surroundings. There were swords... everywhere.

On the ground, on the walls, even suspended in midair... there were swords as far as the eye could see. All of them were zombies, without exception. The countless swords pointed themselves at him in unison. If they moved to strike, he would be torn to shreds.

"No wonder those tomb keepers didn't dare come in. This is suicide!" He drew a sharp breath, then raised Violetgrave. It glowed and resonated in response, warding off its zombified fellows. The mass of swords did indeed pause their offensive when they recognized the violet sword.

"Violetgrave left the Sword Barrow long ago. It's practically foreign to this place now. Are you sure you won't let me out?" The dread zombie's alluring voice sounded again.

"Was Violetgrave a sword zombie when it first appeared in the world?" Lu Yun retorted.

Only blank silence responded.

"The Sword Barrow now is not the place you once knew. Even if I did let you out, you'd be cut up just like everything else."

Fwoosh!

Black fire enveloped Lu Yun, cutting off every trace of life upon him. To an outside observer, he was no different from a cold, stony statue.

“Something unexpected happened to this place, turning all of the swords buried here into zombies.” He strode forward, deeper into the barrow.

The flying swords returned to their previous sluggish state. They wandered about aimlessly, completely ignorant of the youth in their midst. Now that they were zombies, they only held interest in the living.

### **Chapter 189: The Forge of Swords, Burial of Swords**

“Is this the Sword Barrow?” Lu Yun gaped as he reached the end of the passage.

A fiery space was laid out before him, full of fire and magma. Connate fire energy flowed about with incredible purity. In fact, the energy here was even purer than what he could summon with Mastery of the Five Elements.

Ignoring the mass of sword zombies everywhere before him, he looked further inward and saw a gigantic furnace!

Thousands of kilometers tall, it spewed fiery energy everywhere like a terrifying, active volcano. The heat was intense enough to reduce the stone walls to sluggish magma.

Since Dusk Province leaned toward the attribute of water, connate water energy flowed within its borders. Yet there was a place that teemed with fire on its borders... beneath the Great Cloudwater Lake, no less! This furnace had to be at the bottom of all of this.

“Huang Qing’s body is inside that furnace!” Lu Yun opened his Spectral Eye and gulped. “This... this furnace is the real Sword Barrow. But... how can a furnace for smithing swords become a burial ground instead? Do you know?” His last question was as much rhetorical as purposeful, since the dread zombie was just as confused as he was.

“Many immortals have tried their luck in the Sword Barrow, but there’s never been rumors of a furnace here,” it heaved. “Still, we’re definitely in the right place. This must be the true heart of the barrow. You’re probably the first one who’s ever set foot in here.”

The endless swarm of swords outside would cut any living visitor to ribbons. Even an emperor-level expert wouldn’t be able to handle the sheer number of assailants. Now that the swords were also zombies, their horde was even more powerful than before.

“Nah, I don’t think so. I’m not the first, or even the second.” Lu Yun disagreed. “Those tomb keepers must’ve come this far to bury Huang Qing’s body here.”

Being zombies as well, the tomb keepers had been able to enter unscathed. However, Huang Qing’s burial here had then turned this place into a noble’s tomb. Countless natural defenses and layouts formed as a result, preventing them from returning a second time.

.....

Nearby, Yuchi Tianhuang was at death’s door, with more than a hundred swords buried in his body. His eyes blazed with hatred for the human youth beside him, even as his lifeblood streamed out of his wounds. This White Tiger descendant would depart this world with just a little more blood loss.

Lu Yun ran up to the gravely injured divine. "Glad you're still alive. If you weren't, I'd have to revive you," he muttered.

The dread zombie and Yuchi Tianhuang were both at a loss for words.

Revive? What did he mean by that?

Splort!

Before either of them could come to their senses, Lu Yun sliced off Yuchi Tianhuang's head with a clean stroke.

Hum...

The dead divine appeared beside him in the next instant. Wreathed in wry smiles, he finally understood everything that'd transpired before. No wonder Aoxue, princess of the North Sea and blood dragon, followed this human so willingly.

"Hail, master." Yuchi Tianhuang knelt to the ground.

"Go back. I'll need you again in a bit," Lu Yun nodded in acknowledgment. The new Infernum returned to hell before the sword zombies could notice his new existence.

"Who... who are you really?" The dread zombie stared at Lu Yun incredulously. It uttered a quick bark of helpless laughter, understanding that it would never be allowed to leave Violetgrave, now that he'd glimpsed the human's secrets.

Well, unless Lu Yun gained enough strength to become invincible and dominate the world, but it was much more probable that the zombie would have to pledge its allegiance in order to reobtain its freedom.

Lu Yun ignored the dread zombie. A beam of black light surged out of his eyes as he paced slowly toward the furnace.

Suddenly, he rocked back on his heels and glanced overhead. A pair of sanguine eyes had snuck up on him and were wordlessly trained on his figure below. Floating implacably overhead, they were as humongous and emotionless as ever.

"Is that you?" Lu Yun ventured. The restriction.

The restriction that ruled over Dusk Province was here... why?

"The barrow spells doom. Trespassers will die." A dispassionate voice echoed in the air.

The young man's brows furrowed at these words. "Who are you? I can feel the aura of death upon you, but you're definitely alive. What are you safeguarding?"

Amazement briefly flickered through the giant eyes, right before it slowly disappeared.

"It really is alive." Lu Yun stared into the empty space they'd left behind. "But it's not far from death... Why is it killing every high-rank immortal who comes into Dusk Province? It must be watching over something, right?"

“The barrow holds doom and trespassers will die, huh?” he snorted before taking a step forward, vanishing in the void. In this new space, the heavy scent of blood filled his nostrils.

A thousand kilometers of blood-red soil!

It was as if countless creatures had died here, staining the earth itself an indelible crimson. The entire world was written only with desolation and ruin. A dark red sky overlooked a ground gaping with fissures, and a bleak sun feebly hung in the crimson backdrop, as if to declare that this place still deserved existence.

“Is this the real Sword Barrow?” Lu Yun scanned his surroundings. Aside from a black mountain in the distance, there was nothing sword-related at all. He turned back; the door he’d come through was nowhere to be found either.

“The hell is this?” He looked down to see a stone obelisk under his feet. Three words were etched into its face, but he couldn’t read them at all. They seemed to be characters, but also symbols. Whatever they were, the sands of history had worn away their edge and spirit.

“Divine Sword Hall.” The dread zombie within Violetgrave piped up. “According to legend, a great divine court ruled heaven and earth countless aeons ago. The world was known as the world of divines then, rather than one of immortals.

“There was no dao of immortals either. Only the path to divinity. So, too, was the endpoint of cultivation: godhood, instead of immortality!” Its words were steeped with wistfulness. “The Divine Sword Hall was where every sword of that court was forged. Every sword in all the world came from this place.

“...and now, I see that the legends were true. These words are written in the language of the ancient gods. Myrtlestar studied them, once upon a time. There were records about them on her body,” the zombie explained.

“A divine court. Ancient gods.” Lu Yun’s forehead wrinkled in curiosity. “I was right! This place really is related to the divines.”

He focused his eyes and mind upon the words underfoot. The Tome of Life and Death whirred at high speeds, assisting him in analyzing and deriving their language.

### **Chapter 190: Forge a Sword For Me**

Intelligence filled the pages of the Tome of Life and Death, while civilization crafted its spine. Channeling the powers of the book enabled Lu Yun to enter a marvelous state of mind that granted him unique abilities to simulate any situation. The Vast Dragon Seaturner had arisen from such a brainstorming session after observing other people’s sword auras. He’d also invented the Kunpeng method through studying the creature itself, and the Great Peng Spirit of the Exalted Immortal Sect.

Now, he would attempt to understand the ancient divine language through the three characters that referred to ‘Divine Sword Hall’, in order to gain insight into their civilization.

.....

Pah!

Disorder punched into Lu Yun's clear gaze and he threw up a mouthful of blood as soon as his lips parted. He looked up with reflexive consternation. "What's stopping me from studying their language?"

After a pause, the dread zombie commented, "It was during her search for the ancient divine civilization that Myrtlestar was severely injured for no reason. Someone then came along to kill her, and buried her within the Skandha Extinction Tomb. The restriction was right, this Sword Barrow is a place of misfortune."

Lu Yun didn't respond. The black flames surrounding him grew thicker, burning away the blood energy within the Sword Barrow.

"While the ancient divine race suffered misfortunes, they at least left traces that suggest a once-magnificent civilization," he muttered. "But hell used to reign over all life and death and the reincarnation of all the realms. However, nothing is left of it." His lips quirked up. "Which of them is more of a bad omen, I wonder?"

"Reign over all of life and death? Reincarnation of all the realms?" The eye-opener whitened the dread zombie's face. To its horror, the ghostly shadows of the tombs within Violetgrave became more concrete as Lu Yun spoke.

Lu Yun dropped their conversation and activated his Spectral Eye, scanning the depths of the Sword Barrow. "Huang Qing's body is under that pitch-black mountain."

Violet light flickered around the governor as he sped up. "No, that's not a mountain!" He suddenly stopped and gaped with stupefaction. That wasn't a mountain in front of him, but the hilt of a sword!

The blade itself was buried within the earth at a diagonal angle, whereas the hilt towered over the land, reaching a couple thousand kilometers in height. Terrible fissures in the ground snaked from the hilt throughout the entire terrain that was coated in red.

All of the cracks on the ground originated from the giant sword, and it in turn was surrounded by swords of different sizes and shapes. All of them had lost their spirit and lay lifelessly on the ground, every single one of them broken.

"Who did the sword belong to?" Lu Yun gulped at the giant sword.

"It's dead as well," the dread zombie said somberly. "It died before birth along with the civilization of the ancient divine court. Both have been forgotten by the long river of history."

"Died before birth...." It dawned on Lu Yun that the sword was a work in progress.

"If my guess is right," the dread zombie commented in a distant voice, "this unfinished sword must be the ultimate weapon that the ancient divine court had hoped would win their final stand. However, it was destroyed before its completion, along with this Divine Sword Hall.

"Who knows if, numerous aeons later, someone else will set foot in the ruins of an immortal dao civilization and lament our loss, like we're doing now for the ancient divine court."

Lu Yun remained silent.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Smithing sounds that were both crisp and heavy, lilting and solemn, suddenly resonated in the air.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The sounds were startling out of place in this world of silence and lament.

“The sky as the sheath!

“The earth as the guard!

“Bless the divine race,

Sword of Chaos!”

.....

“The sky as the sheath! The earth as the guard!” “Bless the divine race, Sword of Chaos!”

.....

“The sky as the sheath! The earth as the guard!”

“Bless the divine race, Sword of Chaos!”

.....

Old, desolate convictions spread in all directions following the sharp clinks and clangs. Lu Yun didn’t understand the ancient divine language, but he could decipher the meaning behind the words.

Clang!

A curl of black sword energy shot out of the giant sword hilt and soared into the air, morphing into several fine swords before burrowing out of this world. A cacophony of combat and violence slowly built from all sides, as if an endless army bristling with swords was charging out of the hall. It took roughly an hour for the commotion to quiet down.

Eyes wide with shock, Lu Yun reeled from what he’d just experienced.

“Is this how the swords in the Sword Barrow were made? The Sword of Chaos... is it that giant sword?” He took a deep breath and made his way to the enormous black sword.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The same sounds reached his eardrums, but they were much more discrete than the tremendous cacophony from before. No matter how glorious, that din hadn’t been altogether real; it was completely different from what he heard now!

A smear of crimson stood atop a broken smithing platform, blazing like a flame as it hit something of the same color over and over again.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

“It’s Huang Qing!” Lu Yun narrowed his eyes, recognizing the figure from Aoxue’s memory. Disbelief widened his eyes when he got a good look at the fiery being. “Her soul is hammering her corpse!”

“Mould my bones...

“Recast my flesh...

“Purify my blood...

“Shape my soul...” murmured the figure. She suddenly paused her movements and turned to point colorless eyes at Lu Yun.

“Mould my bones with your bones.

“Recast my flesh with your flesh.

“Purify my blood with your blood.

“Shape my soul with your soul.”

The crimson figure approached Lu Yun with a giant hammer in hand, a strange smile splitting her stunning face.

“Come...

“Come....

“Come to me.

“Forge my sword!

“Forge my sword with your body!”

.....

“What the hell is that?!” Lu Yun backed away in horror. “It’s neither a ghost nor a zombie! What is it?!”

“A blood phoenix,” the dread zombie identified in a perturbed voice. “Blood dragons and blood phoenixes are two variants of a blood fiend. Blood dragons herald bloodshed, while blood phoenixes bring destruction.”