

Necropolis 201

Chapter 201: Traps, Traps, Traps Everywhere

Xiankan, the Nephrite capital!

This was Lu Yun's first real glimpse into the world of immortals. The capital wasn't so much a city as it was a hub world. Heavy traffic roamed about towering architecture like any other city, but a good number of giant glowing orbs filled the air, every one of them a small, standalone world.

Renowned clans and aristocratic families lodged in these floating worlds instead of the buildings within the city. Owning a small world in Xiankan was testament to one's identity and status.

Lu Yun took in a deep breath and abruptly sensed signs of a breakthrough in his stagnant cultivation! There was an abundance of qi in the surroundings, or more precisely, immortal energy. It was almost ten times as thick as even Life Province!

And this was just the outer city.

Ambient energy within the small worlds was more than a hundred times denser than in Life Province. Even though Lu Yun had occasionally viewed the capital through his envoys' memories, he still couldn't help but be awestruck when faced with the real thing.

"First time in Xiankan, bumpkin?" mocked a haughty voice.

Cultivators around them sniggered at Lu Yun's look of wonder, sneering at him with self-importance and conceit. Their gazes made Lu Yun very uncomfortable; these people didn't just think they were superior, but were picking on him on purpose.

Xiankan is a minefield!

"It is indeed my first time here." Lu Yun kept a level head and nodded slightly.

Upon entering the city, he, Qing Han, and Ge Long had disembarked and stowed the fortress ship. Chen Xiao had taken it from a powerful clan in Nephrite Major, and Lu Yun didn't want to give anyone an excuse to move against him.

If anyone dared attack him, a Nephrite official, in the capital, it'd be considered a challenge of the imperial court's authority. No matter who the attacker was, they and their faction would be eliminated by the court, especially in sensitive times like these.

If Lu Yun courted death himself, however, that was another story. Outside the city, the fortress ship could protect him from powerful immortals, but here, it would only doom him.

Expressions further sharpened with arrogance and condescension upon hearing his response. A peculiar atmosphere descended, as if the crowd were teachers to a humble, grovelling supplicant.

"Ignore them." Qing Han stopped Lu Yun from engaging them in a conversation. "Cultivators in the outer city are mostly degenerates, struggling to live. They don't dare enter the inner city, nor do they have the courage to adventure in the outside world. Thus, they hole up here and hide away."

“What did you just say, brat?!” The cultivator who’d spoken shot Qing Han a malicious glare, manifested a sword, and pointed it at the imperial envoy. “On your knees and apologize, or die!”

Rumble. He released the power of peak transformed spirit realm.

“He doesn’t know who you are?” Lu Yun looked askance at the cultivator.

“They’re just a bunch of lowly scum who bully the weak and fear the strong,” Qing Han scoffed. “I go in and out of Xiankan on my fortress ship and rarely walk about in the outer city. They don’t have a chance to know me.”

“Fortress ship?” came a derisive snort. “You sure know how to run your mouth. Don’t blame me for not knowing mercy if you don’t apologize and compensate me with thirty thousand immortal crystals!”

How important could nascent spirit and refined spirit realm cultivators, followed by an elderly golden core servant, possibly be?

There were ten more days until the new celestial emperor took the throne. Over the past few days, cultivators from all around Nephrite Major had gathered in Xiankan to witness the ceremony. Folks in impoverished circumstances and residents of the seedier part of town would never pass up this golden opportunity that’d fallen into their laps.

They wouldn’t, and couldn’t, do anything to those who entered the inner city via fortress ships, of course. People who walked or rode a sword, however, they would stop and extort.

That’s right, this was an extortion.

Roughly three dozen other cultivators had gathered, all looking predaciously at Lu Yun and Qing Han. Uneasiness percolated through the air; it seemed they would indeed kill the three travelers if the latter didn’t comply. Regular cultivators would rather surrender their crystals than get into trouble with these thugs.

“Immortal crystals?” Lu Yun paused. “I only have spirit stones.”

Dusk Province was so poor that its main currency was inferior spirit stones. Outside the province, people used immortal crystals. It was, after all, the world of immortals.

“Spirit, spirit stones?! Hahahahaha! You really are a bumpkin from nowhere! Leave your storage item behind and get out of here.” The transformed spirit realm cultivator burst into hearty laughter.

“Piss off!” Qing Han could tell that Lu Yun wanted to avoid conflict. If he was forced to make a move, it would give others an excuse to attack him. Thus, the imperial envoy flared his power as a refined spirit realm cultivator. When he’d last returned to the Qing Clan, he’d made the ascension from a nascent spirit cultivator to the refined spirit realm, after everything he’d gone through in Dusk Province.

“How dare a refined spirit realm brat tell the Blue Dragon Gang off? If you crave death so much, I’ll grant you your wish. Let’s go, boys!” The transformed spirit realm cultivator charged Qing Han with a killing move, wasting no time with probing attacks and pulling no punches.

Physical altercation was prohibited by law in Xiankan, but cultivators fought at the drop of a hat. It was impossible to prohibit scuffles and tussles. As long as the repercussions weren't that serious, the guards usually turned a blind eye.

The Blue Dragon Gang had run amok, robbing and extorting in the outer city for years. A relationship with the guards had been formed a long time ago and, in fact, part of their income went to the guards. Backing from the local authorities had only further emboldened them.

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Lu Yun sighed. "It looks like there are some things I just can't avoid."

Sneaking a quick glance behind him, he could see Jin Heyi and his younger brother Jin Hexi trailing behind them, waiting for a good show from afar. Even if Qing Han dealt with the trouble for him this time, more would follow.

Lu Yun took a step forward and tapped his friend on the shoulder, then waved his hand.

Rumble!

A giant beast shot out of the Gates of the Abyss. The rimesnake king! After its death, it'd been kept in hell until Lu Yun summoned it to the outside world.

"An immortal beast! A golden immortal beast!" Cultivators in the area cried out when they saw the faint golden hue around the snake. Standing in the forefront, those from the Blue Dragon Gang found themselves unable to move in the beast's presence.

Hissss!! The snake reared up and grew in size.

"Bastard!!" boomed a voice from midair. "Death is the only punishment for the crime of allowing a beast to run rampant in the capital!"

A colossal aura slammed into Lu Yun.

Chapter 202: Who Dares Block Me

Lu Yun didn't want to stay his hand anymore. He'd been keeping his temper in check and avoiding conflict ever since entering Life Province, refusing to take the bait no matter how others taunted him. He'd hunkered down in his fortress ship, no matter what. It wasn't that he feared death, he just didn't want to make an enemy out of the many factions in Nephrite Major.

However, he'd had enough.

This time, his opponents had sent local thugs to taunt and force him into mistakes. This was a threat and a humiliation. He would not back down again.

There was no need for him to back down again.

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Midair, a man with an icy expression ignored the expanding rimesnake king and charged at Lu Yun, unleashing the power of a peak golden immortal. A spear manifested in his hand while endless killing intent converged from all directions into a river, wanting to rip Lu Yun apart into pieces.

Qing Han blanched. This was more than a little confusing, how dare a golden immortal openly assassinate Lu Yun in the capital?!

However, the governor had already responded with his move.

“Kill!!!” At his declaration, nine crimson figures emerged beside him and lunged at the golden immortal.

“There are nine of the arcane immortal zombies!!!” The golden immortal’s confidence crumbled. Taking out one or two bloodcorpses with his treasure was a given, but nine of them... that was too much!

Before he could come up with a plan, the bloodcorpses transformed into crimson shadows and tore through his killing intent, attacking him directly.

“Blasphemy! This seat is the deputy commander of the capital guards!” hectoring the golden immortal. “You would dare kill me?!”

“Why wouldn’t I?” Lu Yun sneered.

Thud!

Nine crimson shadows barrelled into the golden immortal’s body, tearing the haughty man apart from the inside.

“How dare you!”

“Utter impudence, you’ve crossed a line!”

“You deserve death for your crimes, Lu Yun!” various voices sounded in censure as soon as the deputy commander died.

“Governor of Dusk Province, Lu Yun, murdered the deputy commander of the city guards in broad daylight. Such a crime will not be tolerated! Soldiers, take him down!”

“Understood!” As if previously agreed upon, countless immortals swarmed the area from all directions, crowding the outer city.

Weak in the knees, the thugs of the Blue Dragon Gang collapsed in a trembling heap on the ground. They finally realized who they’d been hired to hit: Governor Lu Yun, the top cultivator in the world, one capable of killing golden immortals!

“You were willing to sacrifice a golden immortal deputy commander to force me into a mistake. What an honor.” Hands behind his back, Lu Yun looked up at the dense swarm of heavenly soldiers with a cold smile tugging at his lips. Qing Han paled slightly. The scale of this ambush was a little too much, even for him.

“Are you afraid, Qing Han?” the Dusk governor asked quietly.

“Hahahaha!!” Qing Han lifted his chin with a peal of hearty laughter. “I’ve ventured into even the tomb of an ancient immortal empress with you. What do I have to fear from a bunch of trash?”

Trash!

Instead of openly challenging Lu Yun, these assailants slunk around with cheap tricks, forcing him into mistakes so that they could slap crimes onto his head. That made them complete trash in Qing Han’s eyes.

“Good!” Lu Yun guffawed. “Since you’re not afraid, then let’s you and I hack our way to the inner city and see what these Nephrite elites can do to me!”

Hack their way to the inner city! His declaration instantly reached all parts of the capital.

“Lu Yun is the top youth sovereign, alright!” Jin Heyi, hot on Lu Yun’s heels, immediately discarded his plan to sneak up on the governor. “Heroes always emerge in chaotic eras of struggle and conflict. If he survives this, he’ll establish himself as a great personage in the world! ...so I am not his match,” he concluded slowly after taking in a deep breath.

“You’re not going to attack him, big brother?” Jin Heyi asked in surprise.

“If he survives,” responded Jin Heyi offhandedly, “I’ll make my move the day he ascends to golden immortal.”

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“Kill!” commanded Lu Yun. The nine bloodcorpses morphed into crimson shadows and engaged the enemy, while he took to the air to stand on the head of the rimesnake king with Qing Han and Ge Long. A twist of the giant snake’s body propelled them toward the inner city.

“Do you think nine zombies are enough to get you into the inner city? How naive! Hear my command, soldiers, kill Lu Yun!”

“Understood!”

“Kill!” The area was completely sealed off. Three armies, totaling more than three hundred thousand soldiers, arranged themselves into three concerted battle formations, ignoring the nine bloodcorpses and targeting only Lu Yun.

“Wauuuuuugh!! Wauuuuuugh!! Wauuuuuugh!!” The nine bloodcorpses threw their heads back and howled, each of them disintegrating into twelve smaller bloodcorpses. Every one of the smaller bloodcorpses was a golden immortal, with a total of a hundred and eight of them.

Grinning wolfishly, Lu Yun manifested twelve black command flags that radiated a subtle crimson glow.

“Heavenly fiends, open!!” With a wave of his hand, the governor cast the twelve flags into the air. They formed an odd formation in midair and became one with the hundred and eight bloodcorpses.

“Waugh!! Waugh!!! Waugh!!!” Unified shrieks from the bloodcorpses created a hair-raising, uneerie din while thick blood energy suffused the air.

Growl!

A giant crimson claw ventured out of the strange formation.

“The Great Formation of Heavenly Fiends!! Five thousand years ago, Fei Nie, City Lord of Duskwater, employed this formation to slay thirty-six peerless immortals in quick succession.” Jaws dropped at the sight of the crimson claw. The Great Formation of Heavenly Fiends! Its name alone had shaken the world of immortals five thousand years ago!

Those thirty-six peerless immortals had been monster spirit kings, the loss of which had greatly devastated the North Sea monster spirits to even today. Full recovery yet lay out of reach. And today, the formation was reborn upon the stage of Nephrite Capital!

“Grrrr!!!” A beastly roar traveled out of the great formation. The giant crimson claw slashed viciously at one of the formations, ripping through the images created by a hundred thousand soldiers like they were paper.

Dyed red by a ray of crimson light, the soldiers lay prone on the ground, incapacitated. Lu Yun reared into the air from atop the rimesnake’s head.

“I, Lu Yun, will enter the inner city today. Who dares block me?” His voice rumbled through all parts of Xiankan.

“Listen to that arrogance!” a peerless immortal scoffed. “Back in the day, the Duskwater city lord was a golden immortal who set up the great formation with the legendary connate-grade treasure, the Formation Orb. That was how she slew the peerless immortals. Your poor, hacked together imitation uses only zombies and some banners as foundation. I’d like to see who you’ll be able to kill!

“Break!” Manifesting an arc of blade light, the peerless immortal slashed at the formation.

“You’re quite wrong.” Lu Yun smirked at the moonlight blade of energy. “The great formation centered around the Formation Orb is the inferior one.”

Boom!

A shake of the formation turned all twelve flags crimson. Red ripples undulated from them and spread in all directions. Previously only covering three hundred meters, the formation expanded ten times over to cover an area of three thousand meters. An arm running the entire span of the formation poked out, swiping at the arc of sword energy.

“What?!” The peerless immortal felt the threat of death loom over him.

“Get into formation and protect the commander!” The two other armies moved as well, manifesting their battle images and slamming into the formation.

“I said I would hack my way in there, and I will! Kill!”

Bam!

A flower of bloody mist bloomed in midair. Thus marked the end of a peerless immortal.

Chapter 203: An Even Older Guy

The spectacle astounded and amazed onlookers. A peerless immortal had died right before them, crushed to death by a single claw!

Peerless immortals were called thus because, before the ultimate dao, they truly were 'peerless' — unrivaled in the realm of immortality, if not for dao immortals. Sure, a few had died in Dusk Province before, but only ones who'd voluntarily sealed their cultivation away, making them no different from august immortals.

The one who'd died just now, though, had been peerless in body, spirit, and power! But the monster summoned by this formation had crushed him in a single swipe.

"Jin Heyi, what are you doing?!" wailed a grief-stricken voice. "Why aren't you doing something about those nine zombies of his?!"

Lu Yun's heart thumped. Jin Heyi was a disciple of the Corpse Refiners. Though the sect specialized in living zombies with live people as ingredients, they might be able to deal with regular ones as well.

The bloodcorpse was a physical duplicate of Yueshen, but certain special methods could still divest it from her control.

Is Jin Heyi here specifically to deal with me? Lu Yun frowned slightly. Things could potentially turn rather messy.

"Hahahahaha!" Jin Heyi's belly shook as he laughed. "Feng, am I supposed to just do whatever you say? That'd be so ignobly embarrassing."

"You!" The speaker was patently furious.

"Come, third brother. Let's not meddle in the Feng Clan's affairs." Saying this, Jin Heyi left without another thought. Hearing this, the clan erupted in loud swearing.

"Heh... Jin Clan, is it? You think you can toss us aside now that you have the Corpse Refiners? It won't be that easy!"

Lu Yun, on the other hand, breathed a sigh of relief. "Although Jin Heyi is part of the Corpse Refiners, he doesn't seem like such a bad guy." His eyes quickly grew murderous again, though, and he stared off into the distance.

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The young man striking down the Feng peerless immortal caused quite a stir and drew an increasing congregation of soldiers and immortals to the outer city to put him down.

Lu Yun saw no reason to hold back. He pushed the Great Formation of Heavenly Fiends to its limits, conjuring the image of a great demon that followed in his footsteps as he made his way into the inner city. Blood dyed the streets all along the way; countless soldiers and immortals alike died by the formation's power.

"How dare you commit murder inside the great Xiankan, Lu Yun! This is unforgivable!"

"You are a worthless official of Nephrite Major!"

“You deserve to die ten thousand times over for your crimes!”

The death toll was so high that any remaining combatants began to fear joining the fight, thinning the crowd of immortals diving Lu Yun. Crimson light gathered around the formation’s fiendish image, giving it considerably more substance and clarity.

Inner Xiankan was right before his eyes.

“Give it up, Lu Yun. I can make the decision to send you into the wheel of reincarnation.” An old voice echoed before him, belonging to an elderly man in long, yellow robes. Sharp-witted, despite his age, and seemingly having transcended the world, he appeared at one with heaven and earth.

Lu Yun’s expression turned grave as he focused on the new obstacle. Finally, a dao immortal stood in the way of his rampage.

“Venerated elder!” Qing Han was incredulous upon recognizing the man. It was someone from the Qing Clan! Along the way, all of the attackers had been largely Feng members and their affiliates. The new interloper was certainly a surprise!

“I didn’t want to come at first.” The old man in yellow ignored Qing Han. Indeed, all of his kinsmen ignored him. Though Qing Han was a member of the Qing Clan in name, he was no better than a stranger to them. “However, you have one of my clan’s valuable treasures. Surrender the Arcane Golden Bell and I will allow your spirit to escape.”

The bell was one of Qing Clan’s dao-grade treasures. Lu Yun shook his head in disapproval. “You want the bell? Come get it yourself.”

The old man flared with savage disdain.

“Waurghhh!” Overhead, the fiendish image roared spiritedly, drawing the surrounding blood energy in and sharpening into further focus.

“Do you think a demonic formation will afford you the same status as a dao immortal? You truly are too young and far too naive.” The old man in yellow delivered a straight punch that made Lu Yun’s expression change drastically with trepidation. There was an entire world behind that fist, and it felt like creation itself rejected him!

The great formation nearly completely shattered at the blow.

“So this is the power of a dao immortal! It’s not something I can combat yet!” Face ashen, he instinctively wanted to draw upon the dread zombie’s power... his real trump card.

“Hahaha!” Jovial laughter interrupted his gesture.

Boom!

A beam of jade radiance deflected the old man’s punch and lifted a great weight off Lu Yun’s shoulders. The world no longer actively despised him.

However, the Great Formation of Heavenly Fiends was no more; the twelve command flags returned to him, while the 108 bloodcorpses re-coalesced into nine before fleeing into the Gates of the Abyss. They

looked dim and washed out; clearly, they'd sustained a considerable amount of injury and wouldn't be able to set up the formation again for quite a while.

Smiling warmly, a youth walked down from midair, wearing robes in the same shade of jade as the light. He took a stalwart stand by Lu Yun's side, bolstering him like an invisible mountain.

Lu Yun suddenly felt much, much safer, as if a towering mountain had settled down beside him. Moreover, he sensed an intangible bond of blood between them. This had to be the dao immortal of the Lu Clan.

He was a little moved by this development. After all the humiliation he'd put his clan through back in Dusk Province, he truly hadn't expected to be rescued by a fellow clansman. Such an event evoked a strange and novel emotion in him.

The Tome of Life and Death had sent him through the cycle of rebirth and to the world of immortals. His reincarnation meant that he and his body's original owner were one, and they shared the same identity.

"How can this be... how is it you? You're still alive?!" The old man in yellow stammered with amazement and apprehension.

"Why shouldn't I be?" The young man replied matter-of-factly with a smile.

"Impossible! Impossible! The Lu Clan met with disaster a hundred years ago and was nearly wiped out, but you didn't show up even then..." The Qing dao immortal stumbled a few steps backward.

"And if I didn't put in a showing even now, wouldn't my Lu Clan truly be done for?" The youth smiled again.

"I see, I see... you're still alive, no wonder the Lu Clan took only a short hundred years to recover..." murmured the old man.

"Go back to where you came from. As for your clan's Arcane Golden Bell... I'd recommend you leave it where it is. It's Lu Yun's treasure now." The young man straightened. "If the Qing Clan wants the bell back, you can send juniors to challenge him for it. But if certain old fogeys want to commit blatant robbery, then expect an even older guy—like me—to bully right back."

An even older guy!

Chapter 204: Flawless and Complete Nascent Spirit

An even older guy...? Who was this youngster, really?

All sorts of questions filled Lu Yun's mind. Evidently, this jadeite-robed youth was no ordinary Lu dao immortal. He was at least a forefather.

Sheepish, the Qing dao immortal wasn't able to muster a response. Suddenly spotting the nearby Qing Han, he reached forward, grabbing the other youth with an incredible, invisible force.

"Stop!" Paling, Lu Yun lunged to interfere. Alas, he could do nothing about a dao immortal's strength.

"That is Qing Clan family business. It's not our place to intrude." The young man in jade robes shook his head, but Lu Yun remained upset.

"I take my leave." Offering a cupped fist salute before departing, the Qing dao immortal left with Qing Han in tow.

"Senior...." Lu Yun looked at his clansman hesitantly.

"Don't worry, he won't dare do anything to Qing Han. As long as the Twin Devils are around, no one will." His youthful senior flashed a confident smile.

Lu Yun struggled to get out a nod. Qing Buyi and Chen Xiao weren't in the capital right now, but had gone to the Endless Desert in the west to search for the Ancient Tree of Life.

"Come now, let's go home." The jadeite-robed youth beckoned.

"Home...." Lu Yun trembled a little. How foreign the word was to him! "Do I... still have a home?"

"Lu blood flows through your veins. No matter what, the Lu Clan is always your home." A jade-colored cloud whipped up beneath the youth's feet, lifting him, Lu Yun, and Ge Long to the sky and slowly floating into the inner city.

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"Good heavens... the Lu ancestor is still alive!"

"An old monster like him? Seriously?!"

"The man who fought alongside the first Nephrite emperor eighty thousand years ago, defiant of gods and demons alike, one of the founding patriarchs of the celestial court! Lu Daoling!"

Abuzz with gossip after the Lu contingent left, the city bustled with news of the reappearance of someone rumored to have died tens of thousands of years ago.

"His Majesty is about to abdicate to pursue that legendary realm... Nephrite Major needs other experts to hold down the fort!" Some realized the fuller implications of the Lu ancestor's appearance.

"Master Lu Daoling probably won't be the only one. The Qing, Feng, Yue, Zhu Clans... nay, every top clan's personage is likely to make a reappearance as well."

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As one of the top clans in Nephrite Major, the Lu Clan naturally possessed a small world of its own. Inside the locale, immortal qi so thick that it was nearly liquid rushed in from all sides into Lu Yun's body. His mystical force began spinning uncontrollably, absorbing the invigorating qi for its own.

No, no, no... my six strands of nascent spirit aren't perfected yet. I'm not at the peak of my realm either. I can't break through now! Suppressing his restless cultivation, he calmed his heart and fed the qi into his nascent spirit, further compressing and refining it.

Beside him, Lu Daoling smiled with warm approval.

It was Lu Yun's first time inside a small world, called a paradise in Xiankan. In the capital, there were ten greater paradises, thirty-six lesser paradises, and seventy-two blessed lands.

The Lu Clan was situated within the sixth major paradise: the Mauve Peace Paradise. As one of the ten major paradises, it had one of the richest concentrations of qi anywhere in Nephrite Major.

Due to the potency of the nearly liquid qi, cultivators often broke through their current realm upon their first visit. For his part, Lu Yun had arrived at peak nascent spirit realm a long time ago. He was maybe half an inch from refined spirit realm.

Lu Daoling found it rather surprising that the boy was holding back his cultivation level, using the abundant qi to refine his spirit instead. The nascent spirit was the foundation of immortality, so a stronger one meant a brighter future.

Sitting down cross-legged, Lu Yun devoured a great deal of the surrounding qi. It gushed into the purple manor in his mind, where his six paths nascent spirit lay. Refining one's spirit was an exceptionally dangerous thing, as any outside interference carried with it the risk of cultivation deviation. Usually, he did so inside the Gates of the Abyss... but today, he was making use of the ambient qi instead of the Sal Tree's energies.

He had no choice but to remain outside.

Lu Daoling stood at Lu Yun's side, covering his descendant with a protective aura. Patrolling Lu Clan immortals were sent flying by his vast power before they could even begin to approach.

In the battle a hundred years ago, the Lu Clan was utterly devastated. Of its dozen or so dao immortals, only one other remains apart from me. Lu Yun is exceptionally talented... it's quite possible he will attain dao immortal realm, and maybe even the peak of this realm, known as origin dao realm. If he could come back around to the Lu Clan... the ancestor sighed wistfully.

Lu Yun clearly bore great prejudice against the Lu Clan. He wouldn't have humiliated the clan before so many other immortals otherwise. The culpability ultimately lay upon a small portion of his clansmen, but even so, it wasn't going to be easy for him to forgive all of that.

Lu Daoling didn't care about whatever future sacred land Lu Yun had in mind. Dusk Province could only become one after ten thousand years of progress. That so-called restriction could hardly stop the full might of the entire immortal world; if all nine celestial emperors moved with one purpose, they were fully capable of ripping out the restriction from that ancient tomb and leaving it devastated by the wayside.

No, he cared much more about Lu Yun's potential. If the young man would return to his kin, the Lu Clan would certainly return to its former glory.

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After an indeterminate amount of time, Lu Yun reopened his eyes. His nascent spirit was finally flawless and perfect. He needed only one more opportunity to break through to the refined spirit realm.

Inside his purple manor, the six rays of his nascent spirit were inhabited by six fuzzy figures, representing the disparate energies of the six minor paths of reincarnation. Although his nascent spirit was complete, its paths remained crude and deficient and future work and cultivation would be needed to fill them out.

“My deepest thanks for protecting me, venerated ancestor.” Seeing his ancestor being so supportive warmed his heart. He’d heard the crowd’s gossip as they were leaving earlier... this was the Lu Clan progenitor, the famous hero who had single handedly built a clan!

The fact that Lu Daoling had personally kept watch over him was more than proof enough of his care and regard. In light of that, further ingratitude would be completely rude and stupid.

“Good, good, good.” Lu Daoling was highly pleased to hear the honorific. ‘Senior’ and ‘venerated ancestor’ were two very different concepts.

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News of Lu Yun’s arrival in the Lu Clan caused a real stir in their paradise.

“What? That ingrate Lu Yun dares come to us? Is he looking to die?”

“Our venerable ancestor brought him back? That doesn’t matter! His humiliation of our clan in front of all Nephrite’s cultivators can only be repaid by blood!”

“Is he here? I’ll kill him myself!”

“Lu Yun? Where is he! Dare he accept my challenge?!”

“Lu Yun, you killed my cousin Yuanhou. I’ll duel you to the death!”

Chapter 205: Starstream Stroke

Almost all of the Lu younger generation had gathered in the core area of Mauve Peace Paradise, giving full vent to their fury and anger.

News of a Lu clansman wanting to make Lu Yun into a puppet had spread throughout Nephrite Major, but in the eyes of some Lu members, Lu Yun should’ve accepted his fate, if that was what the clan wanted. There was no place for right and wrong here. Anyone who dared offend the clan must die!

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“Lu Yun, you claim to be the top cultivator in the world, capable of felling august immortals!” exclaimed a girl in a white dress at the head of a group. “Dare you accept my challenge?!”

She was a charmingly beautiful girl, but her expression overflowed with killing intent and her eyes spat almost palpable flames. “There is no peace to be had between us after you murdered my brother! If you don’t accept my challenge today, I will detonate myself in the clan hall!”

Silence descended after this strident declaration, the gauntlet thrown at Lu Yun on his way to said building. Revered by the dozen major aristocratic houses making up the Lu Clan, the clan hall was the most important location within clan territory. It was placed on ancestral land, making the girl’s fury and hatred evident.

None of the high council had intervened when the younger generation agitated with hostility. In fact, some had even secretly stoked the fires. What the girl said, however, made faces cloud over.

“Enough of that, Qingshuang!” snapped a middle-aged man with a commanding presence, but the girl remained stubbornly glaring at Lu Yun.

Lu Yun halted one step away from entering the meeting hall and turned to look at the girl. “Lu Yuanhou’s younger sister?”

Lu Daoling had left, having done all that he could by safeguarding Lu Yun in cultivation and escorting the young man here. The youngster would have to take on the clan by himself now.

The girl in white stared back in silent hostility.

“Your brother Lu Yuanhou, top genius of the Lu younger generation, died at my hands,” Lu Yun continued faintly. “Are you sure you’d like to challenge me?”

“My brother died at the hands of your arcane immortal zombie!” The girl clearly enunciated every syllable with an unforgiving expression. “If you’d fought fairly and killed my brother yourself, I would’ve accepted that.”

“Do you think he’d be my opponent if he lived?” Lu Yun asked.

Swoosh!

A flash of sword energy shot out of her hand. “I, Lu Qingshuang of the Lu Clan, hereby challenge you!”

Hum.

Green energy flashed across Lu Qingshuang’s body as she spoke, heralding the release of her full strength as a refined spirit realm cultivator. However, her cultivation level was unstable and her mystic force had yet to be consolidated. It was clear she’d made her breakthrough in a hurry.

“Why go to all this effort?” Lu Yun shook his head slightly. “Since I must, I’ll make one attack.” He wiggled a finger before himself. “If any of you can take one attack from me, I’ll do whatever you want me to.”

“Lu Yun!!” an indignant voice cried out. “Are you insulting us?!”

“Insult?” Lu Yun scoffed. “I’ve fought numerous geniuses from around the world and even killed peerless immortals. The nine celestial emperors have personally titled me as the top youth sovereign. What right do you have to be insulted by me?”

Teeth gnashed and ground together, emotions running high to the point of madness. Lu Yun had prohibited the Lu Clan from setting foot in Dusk Province, which had naturally prevented them from attending the tournament!

“Deal!” exclaimed Lu Qingshuang. “If I can take one hit from you, there’s only one thing I want: Kneel before my brother’s tomb and kowtow to him nine times!”

“Alright.” Lu Yun nodded.

The other cultivators backed some distance away, glares fixated unblinkingly on Lu Yun. Even the immortals in the vicinity looked on with great interest. They wouldn’t do anything to Lu Yun, of course;

at least not openly. The Lu ancestor had brought Lu Yun here himself. If the clan seniors attacked Lu Yun, their ancestor would crush them.

But the younger generation was different. They were supposedly Lu Yun's peers.

Lu Qingshuang's sword glowed with an increasingly bright radiance, a weighty sword intent brewing within her.

"The nascent form of sword intent. That makes you stronger than your brother." Lu Yun nodded after taking a closer look at her sword aura. "You should go observe the swords by the Sword Lake in Dusk Province some time. It'll be good for you."

"The Sword Lake?" Lu Qingshuang scoffed. "You've prohibited the Lu Clan from entering Dusk Province, Your Excellency."

"I also stated that anyone in the world, be they immortal, monster spirit, divine, or demon, may enter the Sword Tower for training," Lu Yun responded matter-of-factly. "The Lu Clan is no exception."

"Cut the nonsense and make your move!" Lu Qingshuang spat out.

Lu Yun nodded. "Watch carefully." He placed his right index finger and thumb together and pointed straight at her.

In that instant, the air in front of Lu Qingshuang seemed to transform into a river of stars suffused with sword energy. She could do nothing but stare at it, captivated. Half a strand of hair whispered past her cheek while she remained unmoving.

"What's going on?" a baffled voice sounded.

Another shouted excitedly, "Lu Yun failed to hurt Qingshuang with that point. He's lost!"

"She seems to have lost a strand of hair..."

"But she hasn't moved at all! Lu Yun lost!"

"That's right. He has to kowtow before Yuanhou's tomb!"

"Shut up!" hectorated a golden immortal. He tamped down his anger and huffed, "Thank you for your mercy, Your Excellency. Qingshuang is defeated!"

"What was that?" Lu Qingshuang's eyes gleamed with a strange light as she looked at Lu Yun.

"That is the third sword technique that I invented," Lu Yun answered with a smile. "I call it the Starstream Stroke."

He'd already invented two techniques—Vast Dragon Seaturner and Peng of Kun. Back in Cloudwater Lake, he'd comprehended the intent of the water and completed his sword intent, thus creating his third technique, the Starstream Stroke.

"Thank you for your instruction!" Lu Qingshuang took a deep breath and cupped her hands at him before leaving. She hadn't even had a chance to react before Lu Yun had defeated her merely by pointing at her. She knew full well just how much of a gap existed between them.

“Who’s next? Or would you rather all come at me at once?” Hands behind his back, Lu Yun looked at the youths around him, a bit of pride creeping into his expression. “If all of you together can take a single hit from me, I will admit defeat.”

Chapter 206: Blockading the Entrance

“How devious, Lu Yun!” Another Lu cultivator stepped forward as soon as Lu Yun finished, contempt outlining his expression. “You’ll admit defeat if we can take a single hit from you? Aren’t you the top youth sovereign? It seems you’ve won the title not with real strength, but with tricks and schemes.”

“Oh?” Lu Yun looked at the cultivator.

“Why don’t you take a hit from us?” The cultivator smirked, believing himself to have seen through Lu Yun’s plan. “If you can take that, we’ll admit defeat. What say you?”

Many in the crowd perked up at this suggestion. Lu Yun’s attack earlier had been too unnatural; Lu Qingshuang had lost before she could even react. That told them that Lu Yun was powerful in offense, but not necessarily defense. Very few cultivators could master both.

One door opened was one window closed, after all.

“Why should we be the ones on defense and not the other way around?”

“That’s right. If you can take a hit from me, I’ll admit defeat!” A crescendo of hooting and hollering broke out, the development of which unnerved the Lu immortals.

Lu Yun mustn’t accept the challenge, if he knows what’s good for him! If our youths realize that their full strength isn’t enough to even touch him, it’ll be a fatal blow to their confidence!

Unfortunately, they couldn’t find any reason or excuse to stop him.

Lu Yun’s real level of strength might be a mystery to the youngsters, but that was hardly the case for the immortals. The top youth sovereign approved by the nine celestial emperors must far exceed any normal expectations.

“Alright.” Lu Yun nodded. “There are 1,382 of you present. You may all attack together.”

His reply draped a curtain of stunned silence over the crowd. A thousand plus cultivators may not be a lot of people, but they were all elites of the younger generation and future pillars of the clan. Lu Yun was going to take their concerted attack head-on?

Did he have a death wish?

“I don’t want you to come at me one by one and fail to touch me even after exhausting yourselves.” Lu Yun sighed. “You’ll lose the confidence to cultivate, and your dao immortals will chase me down.”

“Quit bragging!!” one of them growled in rage. “Take this!!”

Swoosh!

A kaleidoscopic ray of sword energy rose from the crowd to slash at Lu Yun. It was more than three hundred meters long and nine meters wide, ringed with a terrifying sword aura that threatened to bisect the air.

However, the sword energy halted a few meters away from Lu Yun and shattered.

“Impossible!!” Eyes wide in disbelief, the attacker’s slash hadn’t even gotten close to Lu Yun, let alone cut through his clothes!

“I told you that you should all—” An enormous explosion at the mouth of the Mauve Peace Paradise Joy cut Lu Yun short.

Kabooooom!

A clear voice rang through the area.

“You hear the words of Qing Shan, an august immortal of the Qing Clan. Today, by the orders of our forefather, I hereby blockade your entrance for ten days. Anyone unwilling to accept this may challenge me!”

Ten days was the acceptable limit, since that was the coronation day of the new celestial emperor.

The declaration sent all of Mauve Peace Paradise into a frenzy. Lu Yun’s feud with the youths had few repercussions. Having a Qing august immortal block their entrance, however, was a humiliation even worse than what they’d suffered at Lu Yun’s hands in Dusk Province. If no one in the clan could manage to defeat Qing Shan, they would have no future in all of Nephrite Major.

“This is all because of Lu Yun!” Vicious scowls of irritation shot at Lun Yun from all sides.

Their ancestor had saved Lu Yun from a Qing dao immortal. Moreover, Lu Yun possessed the Arcane Golden Bell, one of the Qing dao-grade treasures.

That was what the Qing Clan was really after.

“Over the next ten days, no golden immortal or beyond shall intervene,” Lu Daoling’s voice reverberated throughout the small world. “Anyone under golden immortal realm may challenge Qing Shan.”

The Lu immortals brooded. Qing Shan wasn’t his clan’s top august immortal, but he was among the best in Xiankan. August immortals like him had been garden-variety in the Lu Clan of the past, but the disaster that struck a hundred years ago had consumed countless talented immortals.

They’d lost roughly half of their genius cultivators then, and recovery was slow and arduous. Someone like Lu Yuanhou, who could rival geniuses of the top Nephrite factions, had finally appeared to general relief and celebration.

...then summarily met his death at Lu Yun’s hands.

A new crop of talent had not yet grown. Powerful immortals sitting in the high council had fallen in battle, and no geniuses were present among the low-level cultivators. The clan would’ve been driven out of the sixth major paradise, if it weren’t for Lu Daoling.

Frightfully oppressive, the silence was finally broken by Lu Yun’s sigh.

“They’re after me. I should be the one to deal with them.”

“Don’t get ahead of yourself just because you’ve defeated a few peerless immortals with sealed cultivation,” rebuked a Lu peerless immortal, his strongly-built frame radiating a commanding presence. This was Lu Qianjun, the current patriarch of the clan.

He was also the weakest patriarch in the history of the Lu Clan, appointed in a hurry after the last patriarch died in that disaster. Although he was a peak peerless immortal, he fell short when compared to the patriarchs of the other top Nephrite clans.

“I know I’m not his match.” Lu Yun nodded. “I’m not foolish enough to challenge a genius august immortal. You go, Aoxue.” He manifested the Arcane Golden Bell with a twist of the hand. “Kill Qing Shan and use this bell to block the Qing Clan’s entrance for a month. Kill anyone who approaches, and spare no one.”

“Understood.” A crimson figure flew past Lu Yun and rushed out of the paradise.

The Lu clansmen stared dumbly at Lu Yun, but didn’t know how to decline his solution. They didn’t have any reason to turn down his help. Like he said, trouble had arrived on their doorstep because of him, so of course he should be the one to deal with it.

“Qing Shan is a highly-regarded august immortal in the capital,” someone muttered. “He can rival even some golden immortals. All of Lu Yun’s followers must be from Dusk Province. Isn’t it suicide for Dusk immortals to challenge him?”

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“Who are you?” Qing Shan frowned slightly at the girl in red rushing out of the entrance. He didn’t remember someone like her in the Lu Clan.

“The one to end your life.” Aoxue manifested a halberd and smashed it at Qing Shan.

This strength... since when was there someone like her in the Lu Clan?! Panicking, Qing Shan didn’t even have the time to react before the halberd smacked heavily into him, rendering him into powder in body and spirit.

Chapter 207: Turn Things Upside Down

Countless immortals were gathered outside Mauve Peace Paradise. In fact, half of the capital’s residents had come to see the Lu Clan make a fool of themselves in the face of the Qing Clan’s deliberate provocation.

Apart from the imperial Zhao Clan, there were nine major clans residing in their respective greater paradises in Nephrite Major, among which the Lu Clan ranked last. Due to the disaster that’d hit the clan a hundred years ago, many of their elites, young geniuses and dao immortals alike, had fallen then.

Though they’d slowly recovered some strength, they were still no match for the other major clans. Even a vassal clan like the Jins might be more powerful than the Lu Clan. Yet they remained in Mauve Peace Paradise, a small world that ranked sixth among the top ten paradises.

The ten greater paradises of Xiankan were symbols of status and power. Many believed that the Lus didn't deserve theirs, given their current level of strength. Prior to today, the other major clans hadn't known what the Lu trump card was and thus stayed their hand. However, Lu Daoling's earlier appearance had solved the mystery.

Recovery was possible for the Lus only because of their venerated ancestor, but all of the major factions had their own ancestors as well. None of them were below Lu Daoling in status and power, so the man wasn't much of a secret weapon. Thus, here came a Qing august immortal to blockade the Lu entrance.

According to their original plan, the Qing Clan would be the first to blockade the entrance, followed by the Feng, Zhu, Yue, and other major clans. Humiliated beyond redemption, the Lu Clan would be forced to vacate the sixth major paradise.

However, a single blow had destroyed that plan!

Qing Shan had been smashed into meat paste before he could even flex his muscles. He hadn't even had the chance to fight a single Lu august immortal!

Where did the girl in red come from? Since when was there an august immortal like her in the Lu Clan?!

Qing Shan might not be the best in Xiankan, but he could at least approach their ranks. Before the bystanders could react, the girl grabbed Qing Shan's remains and disappeared in a flash of red.

"Follow her. Let's see what she's going to do!"

Vague inklings of what was to come crossed the crowd's minds, prompting visible excitement to spread across faces. It'd been years since something this big had happened in the capital.

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"I am the maid of the Governor of Dusk Province. On his orders, I am to block the entrance to the Qing paradise for a month. Challenge me if you do not accept this!" Halberd in hand, Aoxue threw down the crushed remains of Qing Shan and stood serenely in the air with her eyes closed. She'd amplified her voice with a mysterious technique, so her words had reached half of the capital.

Ranked fourth of the ten greater paradises, Triprime Perfection Paradise was home to the Qing Clan. Bystanders who'd flocked to the Lu paradise entrance now gathered here.

That mysterious girl was blocking the doorway to the Qing paradise! More surprisingly, she hadn't been sent by the Lu ancestor, but the Dusk governor, the man of the hour in Nephrite Major and the entire world.

"Die!!" No sooner had Aoxue arrived at the paradise than a growl of rage sounded. An enormous hand shot out and clawed at her. A Qing dao immortal had made his move.

Smack!

Before the hand could get any closer, a greater force emerged around Aoxue and crushed it.

"I said that this stays between the youngsters," Lu Daoling's voice rippled around Aoxue. "If any of you dare intervene by bullying your juniors, don't blame me for doing the same."

The dragon princess hadn't even opened her eyes, and her face remained impassive.

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Flabbergasted, the Lu clansmen in Mauve Peace Paradise strove to pick up their jaws. They hadn't expected Lu Yun to send one of his followers to return the favor, and for an entire month!

Only ten days remained before the new celestial emperor was due to take his throne. If Aoxue remained there, Qing members would have to leave their residence through the side doors. This was an affront that the Lu Clan had never dared contemplate, even at their strongest!

The Qing Clan was several times more powerful than the Lu Clan had been at their peak. Even after Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi had slaughtered tens of thousands of immortals more than a decade ago, the clan was still stronger than the Lu Clan.

Blockade the Qing door?

If they all wanted to die ghastly deaths, maybe.

"They say that Lu Yun is a reckless, unbridled madman who doesn't play by the rules. It looks like he really is! Doesn't he know how this will affect the clan?" The Lu Clan had just recovered some of their strength. Every step they took was carefully considered and weighed up, lest they attract retribution. What Lu Yun had done unnerved many of his clansmen. Consternation crept in about a possible Qing clan retaliation.

Some, however, applauded Lu Yun's actions. The enemy had come to their very doorstep! This wasn't the time to fear revenge. If worst came to worst, they could fight and ensure mutual destruction.

As for Lu Yun, he had his own reasons.

He was truly furious—but not on behalf of the Lu Clan, to which he felt no attachment. He may be grateful to Lu Daoling for safeguarding him during cultivation, but that wasn't enough to compel him to lay down his life for the clan.

No, he'd sent Aoxue to kick up a fuss at the Qing Clan because of Qing Han.

When the Qing dao immortal whisked Qing Han away, it was more than apparent that the clan didn't consider Qing Han as one of their own. They didn't even treat him like a person! Instead, the immortal had hauled him up like he was disposable!

It was then that Lu Yun understood why Qing Han acted wholly aloof when it came to his clan, even refusing to return the Arcane Golden Bell.

This was for Qing Han.

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"Alright, now back to us." Lu Yun cracked a warm smile. "Show me what you geniuses have got. All of you come at me and see if you can tear off even a corner of my clothes!"

Chills ran down the spines of those assembled. Lu Yun had just ordered a subordinate to kill a Qing august immortal and harass the clan at large. Now he was back to taunting them? Was he planning on turning Xiankan upside down?

Chapter 208: F*ck With Him

“You go too far, Lu Yun!” The cultivator who’d been facing down the newcomer flew into a rage after hearing the renewed challenge. His thousand or so other clansmen that’d congregated in front of the meeting hall felt the same way.

One move?

All of them wanted to smash Lu Yun to pieces. They considered the youth before them an interloper, unwanted guest, or basically anyone but their clansman. No matter why the Qing Clan had come to their front door, the clan should’ve been the one to deal with it.

Lu Yun had overstepped with his meddling, and sending out his subordinate to kill Qing Shan was unacceptable. The female immortal in red had publicly confirmed his orders—as such, this was utter humiliation!

Despite the problem having been solved, the Lu youths still burned from inordinate outrage.

“That’s right, I’m bullying you. What can you do about it?” Lu Yun proudly put both hands behind his back. “How about this? All 1,382 of you can go at the same time. I don’t care how many attacks you make, if even one of you is capable of touching the edge of my clothes, I lose.”

Silence.

Complete crickets.

Even the clan ancestor, Lu Daoling, was stunned into speechlessness. Did Lu Yun truly want to burn every bridge with the clan? Did he really want to go past the point of no return in his opposition to them?

No matter who won today, the clan would suffer a devastating blow. The consequences of this would be worse than Qing Shan’s blockade! If all thousand-odd young cultivators couldn’t touch Lu Yun despite making a concerted effort, the clan itself would be too embarrassed to further remain in the paradise.

The younger generation had come to challenge him for two reasons: first, because they’d been rather frustrated themselves, and second, someone had riled them up from the shadows. Now that their passions had subsided, they didn’t dare take Lu Yun on again.

If they fought one at a time, it wouldn’t be a problem... but all thirteen hundred together and still not touching even his clothing? That was too hefty a price to pay.

“Hahahaha!” A burst of raucous laughter cut through the deathly silence. “You really worked hard to get me out here, Lu Yun!”

It was coarse and hearty, reflecting its owner’s appearance and personality: a tall, strapping man with a mane of wild hair was emerging from thin air. Large-eyed and bushy-browed, hair echoed by a curly beard, he wore a hempen robe and nothing on his feet.

The way he carried himself made him seem like a homeless wanderer. However, the most interesting thing about him was a very large blade upon his back. The slab of a weapon was as wide and thick as a door!

“Who is this? Why is he in Mauve Peace Paradise?” Many of the Lu clansmen were highly confused by the rough and tumble newcomer. Evidently, they didn’t recognize the man.

“It’s Shenhou! He’s finally back!” Patriarch Lu Qianjun brightened when he caught a glimpse of the new arrival.

Everyone thought Lu Yuanhou was the smartest genius in the clan, but that wasn’t actually the case. That title belonged to Lu Shenhou, instead.

Since the Lu Clan was still recovering, it couldn’t exactly show all of its cards in the open. Thus, Lu Shenhou had departed thirty years ago for adventuring in the outside world. He’d only been origin core realm back then, but now he was peak transformed spirit and infinitely close to immortality.

For many of the more senior clansmen, the surprise lay in the drastic transformation of his appearance. The once dapper and urbane gentleman was no more, which was why they hadn’t recognized him at first.

“Lu Shenhou! The real number one genius among the younger generation! So he’s finally back, eh?” A wave of cheers swept the crowd. They’d heard of his name before, but three decades was a long time to them... long enough for the memory to fade from their minds.

“Lu Yun! Your name’s been repeated to me so many times that I have calluses on my ears. We finally meet... but you’re a tricky one, eh?” Lu Shenhou made his way to Lu Yun’s vicinity with only a few short steps. He towered a full two heads over the younger man.

“My concealment technique is one of the best in the world. It should be impossible for anyone below dao immortal to notice me... how’d you do it?” He stared closely at Lu Yun, trying to figure out the youth’s secrets.

“I didn’t spot you,” Lu Yun shook his head, “but my sword intent noticed yours.”

“Aha! So that’s it.” Lu Shenhou clenched a hand in agreement, then drew the heavy blade upon his back. “Wanna fight?” A fierce sword intent erupted from his body, even as his eyes flared with eagerness.

Lu Yun carefully looked the man up and down, then frowned and shook his head slightly. “Nope.”

“Hahahaha... Lu Yun, you coward! Are you afraid now?”

“So you do know your own place after all, Lu Yun. You know you’re no match for the Lu Clan’s foremost cultivator!”

“I think that Lu Yuanhou would’ve been able to win too. Too bad he died to that zombie!”

Lu Shenhou squinted slightly as he focused on Lu Yun. His fighting spirit intensified until it nearly took physical form.

“You’re injured. You’ll die if you fight.” His intended opponent shook his head again. “I’ll fight you when you get better. Ten days from now.”

“You can see that I’m injured?” Lu Shenhou blinked.

“You must’ve raided a tomb a short while ago. The evil spirits inside harmed you in some way, and their sinister qi has entered your body. However, your soul’s still alright. If not, even our venerated ancestor wouldn’t be able to save you.” Lu Yun shrugged.

Lu Shenhou’s face fell. “That tomb was packed with treasures and books,” he nodded helplessly, “but I wasn’t good enough to break through the formations there. The evil spirits got me good.”

“You can stand off to the side. I thought there was finally someone worth fighting at my full strength... but you’re practically a cripple right now.” Lu Yun twisted the corners of his mouth before glancing at the other Lu cultivators again. “Alright, it’s back to us again! All 1,382 of you can come at me at the same time. If you can touch any bit of my clothing, you win.”

Lu Shenhou did as he was told. He wasn’t upset; Lu Yun was absolutely right about his condition. However, the congregated cultivators wanted to cry.

“Son of a—” the burly man thundered furiously when he saw his clansmen’s expressions. “What’s with all of you? What are you afraid of? There’s thirteen hundred of you, but you’re worried about one guy?”

Lu Shenhou’s words shook the Lu cultivators to their core, but they still remained silently unmoving where they were.

“You’re all trash!” he proclaimed loudly. “Aside from our ancestor, everyone in the Lu Clan is trash! Everyone who lived through the disaster a hundred years ago—this means you! Trash has no rights! You can’t even die in battle right! You wouldn’t touch him even if all of you worked together! That’s because he’s a genius, and you’re useless!”

Those words got a reaction out of his audience. Heads jerked up with a hint of resentment, and anger began percolating through the crowd again.

“Heh, I’m only speaking the truth. You’re all real trash. Is failure so scary that you don’t want to fight at all? Keep being trash then! I’m not trash anymore. In the Enlightened Major, I fought Wu Tulong at least a hundred times over! I still can’t beat him, but I have the guts to fuck with him!”

Fuck with him! He’d hit his stride with crude, but effective language.

“Lu Yun said he’d stand still and let you hit him, but you’re not brave enough to even do that? Hahaha, if that’s the case, I’ll petition the ancestor to move the clan out of Mauve Peace Paradise right away. It’s a waste of resources for us to live here.”

“Fuck with him!!” Renewed fervor simmered in the Lu cultivators, their desire to fight reignited. Lu Shenhou’s insults had woken them up. Weak bodies were one thing, but if they lost their courage as well, they really would be trash.

Rumble.

Stream after stream of mystical force gathered into the air, converging into a singular will. As it swelled in strength, it grew closer and closer to immortal energy.

Lu Yun took a deep breath, pushing his heels a little deeper into the ground. A wave of sword intent as mighty as the sea flooded from him.

Rumble!!

All kinds of arts, methods, techniques and powers fell upon him in a torrential downpour. A bit of starlight glimmered in his eye. Once more, he made only a single move. Intent molded into technique; his Starstream Stroke protected him from the brunt of the attacks.

Rip—

An imperceptibly small noise made its way into people's ears.

"His shirt... the corner ripped! Lu Yun's lost!" someone murmured.

In the next moment, every eye focused on the corner of his shirt.

"I lost," Lu Yun inclined. He raised his left hand, showing a trickle of blood slowly running down from his fingers. "What do you all want me to do?"

"Um..." Every cultivator present was lost for words. What?! They'd actually hurt Lu Yun!?

They might be the best the clan had to offer, but in the other clans, they'd only be bottom of the barrel. They'd have no right to be a core disciple. Lu Shenhou was right: they really were all trash. However, their unified attack had actually hurt Lu Yun?

"The fuck you all thinking about? Have Lu Yun teach you! Right now! He said he'd do anything you asked!" Exasperated to the point of wanting to bang heads together, Lu Shenhou yelled, "He went easy on you this time. If anyone dares tell him to kowtow in front of freaking Lu Yuanhou's grave, I'll break their legs and then dig up that trash's dead body!"

He really was worried about someone making that asinine demand. While the cultivators and most of the immortals present might not have noticed, he'd seen Lu Yun create an opening and put his hand forward in that instant, allowing his finger to be cut.

Chapter 209: Refusing Face When It's Given

Even Lu Yun was a little taken aback by Lu Shenhou's suggestion. Teach the Lu cultivators?

As soon as it was on the table, a number of his clansmen lit up with anticipation. Lu Yun was the First Youth Sovereign, number one among all cultivators!

Sure, there were probably some experts hidden away in various corners of the world, but he'd killed peerless immortals and dueled dao immortals; he more than lived up to his name!

Indeed, Lu Yun was idolized by countless cultivators. Many set reaching his heights as their goal in life, and the youth of the Lu Clan were no different! They hated him, but at the same time respected his strength. It was a paradoxical conundrum, to be sure.

"I won't refuse what Lu Shenhou has asked of me," Lu Yun nodded. Everyone watched him quietly, a bigger audience gathering by the minute.

Rrr—

The young man waved a hand, throwing the Sugato Sword aloft. The weapon exploded with intent and will, gathering the ambient immortal qi around it into the shape of a steely pagoda. It spun around a single time, then landed in front of the clan hall.

Mauve Peace Paradise's natural energies rushed in, solidifying it through their absorption.

"This is...." Lu Shenhou, Lu Qianjun, and even Lu Daoling's eyes widened.

"I'm at an important juncture in my own cultivation, so I don't have the energy to spare on teaching," Lu Yun mused. "Instead, this is an inheritance tower via Lord Sugato's treasured sword, the very same as the tower outside Dusk City. All Lu cultivators are free to make use of it as you like.

"Although, it doesn't have the inheritance at the top," he added. "That's reserved for the actual pagoda, of course."

"Enough! That's more than enough! That's more than enough... hahahaha!" Lu Qianjun burst into unhinged guffaws as tears streamed down his face from the force of his mirth. "There is hope for the Lu Clan! Hope at last!"

Although there wasn't an inheritance at the top of the tower, every floor contained a test imbued with Lord Sugato's grasp of the dao. Cultivators weren't the only ones who could benefit, either. Every person in the clan, up to dao immortals—even including Lu Daoling—had much to learn from this tower of trials.

The gift Lu Yun had presented was too valuable to refuse, instantly evaporating collective enmity.

Back in Dusk Province, underhanded dealings by Lu Yuanhou, his uncle Lu Qingxuan, and Lu Qishan at the North Sea had soured Lu Yun's feelings to the point of hating his clan.

His later encounter with Lu Qingyi, however, had slightly changed his mind. The bloodcorpse in Lord Sugato's tomb had scared everyone off, save for the Lu Clan immortal. Doubts that perhaps the clan wasn't as bad as he thought had crept in then. Those who'd wanted to make him their puppet were probably only a minority.

Right now, the Lu Clan needed his help to reestablish itself. At the same time, Lu Yun didn't mind having a large clan as his backing. Otherwise, a so-called First Youth Sovereign was no better than a mere ant to some.

The inheritance tower was formed from Lord Sugato's lingering will and surrounding natural energies. If he wanted, he could use the Sugato Sword to make any number of new duplicates. The only restriction was his current level of cultivation; he'd created this replica back on the banks of Sword Lake with his then-power of a celestial emperor.

Thanks to the inheritance tower, the congregated clansmen's opinion of him flip-flopped in an instant. Those who harbored ill will toward him had no recourse but to deeply bury their malice out of dejection.

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Three days passed in the blink of an eye.

The Lu Clan was very peaceful during that time. Nearly everyone had eagerly filed into the tower to cultivate. Xiankan, on the other hand, was a vastly different story.

Aoxue had stood outside Triprime Perfection Paradise for three days and nights, slaying eighty-one Qing peerless immortals during that time. None had survived more than three blows!

The entire capital was boiling over, but the Qing Clan was strangely silent. If none of their august immortals could defeat Aoxue in the span of a month, it would be a severe blow to their reputation. Though there wouldn't be any tangible, material loss, the clan's name and standing would freefall. Various vassal factions would also lose confidence in their liege.

Inside Triprime Perfection Paradise, reticence grew perilous. The clan's third-best august immortal had been cut down only moments prior, and in three attacks, no less!

Aoxue was far too strong; she fought much harder than any august immortal had a right to. Having devoured the blood dragon's body, she'd become a true blood dragon in every way. Among her peers in the same realm, only the blood phoenix, Huangqing, could match her.

"Let Qing Han go," the Qing patriarch sighed wistfully. "We all know what Lu Yun wants."

The friendship between Lu Yun and Qing Han was an open secret.

"Absolutely not!" an elderly, white-haired golden immortal objected angrily. "We only just managed to recapture that reprobate. Releasing that bastard will only mean further trouble! He's the one who caused all of this in the first place."

"Who're you calling a reprobate? Who's the bastard here?" The patriarch glowered. "Do you really think that with Buyi and Chen Xiao gone, you can do as you wish?"

The current patriarch of the Qing Clan—Qing Taxian—was also Qing Han's father. His riposte silenced the elderly golden immortal into a sharp breath, too alarmed to continue.

"Don't forget your duties, Qing Taxian!" a new party interjected. "Qing Han has an accursed spirit root! He should've been executed a long time ago. The only reason he's still alive is because he's your son. Keeping him confined within the clan is the best choice possible."

This speaker wore a black outfit, robes that stood out in sharp contrast to the pallor of his skin. Though he was a peerless immortal, he was on the threshold of the dao realm. His qi was as vast as an ocean—far greater than that of Taxian's.

"Also, when are you going to sire a daughter with your partner? The marriage with the Dongling Clan is at hand." The man's tone remained cold throughout.

"You go too far, Qing Xiangpeng!" Qing Taxian's voice rose in indignation. He was the best of the clan's younger generation, already a peak peerless immortal, but that wasn't qualification enough to become clan head. The real qualification lay with who his dao partner was: Chen Qiufeng, a daughter of the Chen Clan.

The married couple's constitutions were unique. Children from their union might even be granted a cosmic constitution, allowing them to commune with—and even draw power from—the stars.

The top genius of the Dongling Clan, foremost clan of Aureate Major, practiced a cosmic method that required dual cultivation with someone of an appropriate constitution. As such, they'd sought out the Qing Clan to ask for a daughter from Qing Taxian and his dao partner.

The clan's high council had immediately accepted, completely bypassing the parents in question.

It was for this reason that Qing Taxian had become clan patriarch, so that his future daughter might be granted a more prominent position in the Dongling Clan, thereby increasing the gains for the Qing Clan.

Aside from his forcibly adopted fifth son, all of his seven children had been born from the high council's compulsion. Unfortunately, they were male without exception.

Qing Taxian didn't quite want to have children solely for the sake of a political marriage, but the high council was too insistent and didn't care about his personal feelings.

By this point in his life, he was thoroughly tired of it.

The man in black who'd spoken was Qing Xiangpeng, the former patriarch of the clan. He'd orchestrated both the marriage and the apparent change in leadership. To the rest of the Qing clansmen, Patriarch Taxian was only there to produce a useful daughter and had little actual authority in the clan.

"There's no need for you to worry about that female immortal outside. Making a daughter with your partner is the real task at hand," Qing Xiangpeng proclaimed with a wave of his hand. "Sage nephew Dongling, I know that you're not an august immortal, but you've killed golden immortals in the past. Might I ask you to intercede?" He looked at the youth, sitting a little further down the table on the same side with his eyes closed in repose.

"She's very strong. This is an opponent worth my time." The youth curved his lips in response, then stood and exited the meeting hall.

Qing Taxian's scowl deepened. This was an internal meeting. Why was a junior member of the Dongling Clan allowed to attend?

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"A true immortal?" Aoxue frowned at the arrogant white-robed youth before her.

"So what? I can still kill you." The youth smirked, producing a lance in his hands. "Too bad I became an immortal too early, otherwise I could've won the title of Youth Sovereign for myself.

"Die!" He shook his spear, causing it to come alive in his hands like a golden dragon. "Skydragon Method... Proud Slaughter!"

Rooooooar!

An enormous dragon howl resounded through the sky.

"The Skydragon Method! He's Dongling Shaochen of the Dongling Clan!"

"Rumor has it that he killed a golden immortal as soon as he ascended to immortality... he's here in Xiankan too? Among the Qing Clan, to boot!" Amazement washed through the crowd.

"If Dongling Shaochen hadn't already become an immortal, he would've definitely been named among the youth sovereigns back in Dusk Province."

"Capture this Dongling Shaochen and use him as a hostage. If the Qing Clan won't trade Qing Han for him, seal his cultivation and start breaking his bones—one every two hours." Lu Yun's voice sounded at Aoxue's ear.

"I gave the Qing Clan an easy way out. It would've been the end of things if Qing Han had come out and defeated Aoxue. That's not what you want, though, is it? Getting the Dongling Clan involved like this... don't you know they're my enemies?" The young man sneered. "You're the ones who asked for this."

"The Skydragon Method?" Aoxue mirrored her master's disdain. She reached for the golden dragon with her bare hand.

Chapter 210: The Path of Cultivation is Also Broken

So-called skydragons were dragons who'd ascended beyond dao immortal realm, having discarded whatever their original bloodline was during their ascension.

Donglin Shaochen had gained his heritage from a skydragon, which made his method pure! However, he was facing a true blood dragon.

The ending wrote itself.

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"Who?" Lu Shenhou asked when he heard Lu Yun mutter. "Who asked for what?"

"Nothing," Lu Yun dismissed. "Where were we? Oh, right, what's the deal with the tomb you've entered?"

Lu Shenhou tensed. "It's the tomb of a cultivator that dates back a very, very long time ago. I think it was present before the ancient times!"

The ancient times meant the period during the great war a hundred thousand years ago. Lu Shenhou wasn't sure by how much the tomb predated that. Probably... before the emergence of the ancient immortal civilization?

"In the same vein, only cultivators are allowed entrance into the tomb," he recounted his experience with a solemn expression. "The immortals who were with me were dusted to ashes as soon as they set foot inside."

Lu Yun nodded and listened quietly.

"I made a terribly frightening discovery there..." Lu Shenhou trembled uncontrollably as confusion and fear filled his eyes. "The path of cultivation is severed, and not in the way we think it is. It was broken before the ancient times! The spirit realm shouldn't be the last realm for cultivators. There's another major realm after that!"

“What?!” Lu Yun shot to his feet, gaping at Lu Shenhou in disbelief.

The path of cultivation was severed in the middle? There was another realm after the spirit realm? How did contemporary cultivators become immortals then?

Did they all skip a realm after forming their nascent spirit?

Cultivation was the foundation for immortal dao. Could one be considered a whole and complete immortal if they lacked an entire realm?

“Are you sure?!” Lu Yun grabbed Lu Shenhou and demanded with a grave expression.

“I’m not completely sure, but there were signs in the tomb that seemed to point to that conclusion. That’s why I didn’t tell anyone my findings, not even the venerated ancestor.” Lu Shenhou frowned and smiled wryly. “I want to return to the tomb and thoroughly explore it. That’s why I came to you.”

Lu Yun let him go and sat down, considering his words. “If that tomb existed before the ancient times, then you and I alone aren’t enough for the expedition.” He shook his head.

“I’ve already sent word to Wu Tulong,” responded Lu Shenhou. “He’ll be here in half a day.”

“No, that’s still not enough!” Lu Yun’s eyes flashed sharply. “Wu Tulong, Dongfang Hao, Mo Qitian, and Zi Chen all have to come... and Qing Han, we need him as well!”

Qing Han’s Scroll of Shepherding Immortals contained the ancient Empress Myrtlestar. She would undoubtedly prove invaluable on such a trip.

Lu Yun rose to his feet. “We go to the tomb not to confirm if there’s a realm missing on the progress of cultivation, but to deduce what that realm is! We’ll repair the path ourselves!”

Lu Shenhou trembled. “I’ll send an update to Wu Tulong!”

“I’m swinging by the Qing paradise.” Lu Yun turned to leave his residence. “If they don’t hand Qing Han over, I’ll kill Donglin Shaochen myself!”

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Outside the Three Primes Perfection Paradise, Aoxue held Donglin Shaochen in custody and delivered her terms. The crowd of bystanders looked on with bated breath.

Donglin Shaochen, slayer of golden immortals, had been defeated by a casual backhand. His captor only wanted to exchange him for Qing Han, that bad omen made manifest!

“Exchange Qing Han for Donglin Shaochen?” Qing Xiangpeng scoffed. “Donglin Shaochen is the top true immortal of House Donglin, and their future patriarch. You don’t dare hurt him!”

Crack!

Aoxue immediately crushed one of her captive’s bones. Despite the pain, Donglin Shaochen tightened his jaw and refused to cry out.

Eyes narrowed, Qing Xiangpeng didn’t react either. A broken bone was nothing to an immortal, and could be easily healed by circulating one’s inner energy.

“Qing Xiangpeng, isn’t it?” sounded a clear, youthful voice. “Former patriarch of the Qing Clan?”

A young man in a white robe descended beside Aoxue.

“You know who I am, and you know what’s between me and House Donglin.” Lu Yun trained his gaze on the man at hand. “Donglin Yuhuang, the last patriarch of House Donglin, fell in Dusk Province. His son Donglin Shaogong died at my hands, and his nascent spirit was displayed on the Dusk city walls, tormented for days until it faded. Do you think I’d hesitate to kill any member of House Donglin?”

With a twist of his hand, he plucked Donglin Shaochen’s spirit out of the purple manor between the youth’s brows. The young man’s head exploded like a watermelon, his headless body sagging into a boneless heap and falling from midair.

“Give me Qing Han or I’ll crush his nascent spirit,” Lu Yun declared.

Qing Xiangpeng gawked in shock, still floundering for a strategy. He hadn’t expected Lu Yun to destroy Donglin Shaochen’s body as soon as he showed up!

All of the onlookers sucked in a breath. So this was Lu Yun’s true nature—he didn’t play by anyone’s rules! Only then did their minds recall that Lu Yun had hacked his way from the outer to the inner city. Dead city guards littered his route, and the Feng immortals had been driven away by his relentless bloodlust.

“I will crush his spirit after three breaths.” Lu Yun tightened his grip, making Donglin Shaochen’s spirit wail with horror.

“How dare you!” roared Qing Xiangpeng.

“One breath left,” Lu Yun said impassively.

“Get that bastard Qing Han out here!!” shrieked Qing Xiangpeng. If it was just Aoxue, he would’ve been confident of saving Donglin Shaochen, but this harmless-looking young man was a different story.

Lu Yun had indirectly killed the last patriarch of House Donglin, and wouldn’t hesitate at all to kill more of their members. There was no love lost between him and House Donglin, after all.

Qing Han was soon manhandled through the paradise and hauled out into public view.

“Get out of here!” Qing Xiangpeng shoved the boy forward and forced a stream of immortal power into his body.

“Umph!” Pain overtook Qing Han’s expression, and he vomited out a mouthful of black blood.

“Qing Han!” Panicked, Lu Yun caught his friend and detected that the poison previously calmed by the Fusang Purewood was acting up again; it showed signs of consuming Qing Han from within.

Puff!

Lu Yun crushed Donglin Shaochen’s spirit with a vicious squeeze of his right hand.

“You court death, Lu Yun!!” Qing Xiangpeng flew into an incandescent rage. He flashed in front of Lu Yun, lunging at the boy with the side of his right hand.

“You’re the one seeking death,” Lu Yun forced out through grit teeth.

Bam!

Before Qing Xiangpeng could draw any closer, a wave of blood swirled around Lu Yun. A grand formation emerged at almost the speed of thought, into which Qing Xiangpeng rushed headlong.

“This is... the Great Formation of Heavenly Fiends!” Qing Xiangpeng’s heart sank. By now, he quite regretted hurting Qing Han on an anger-driven impulse. Who would’ve thought that Lu Yun would react so strongly? A complete formation had emerged in an instant! The Dusk governor had obviously come prepared.

“Lu Yun!!” screamed Qing Xiangpeng. “House Donglin will come after you for killing Donglin Shaochen!!”

“Worry about yourself first,” Lu Yun said coldly, but didn’t activate the formation to kill Qing Xiangpeng. The Qing dao immortal who’d stopped his progress outside the inner city was fast approaching.

“Your clan’s old fellow saved you once, Lu Yun, but no one’s coming to save you this time!” Grinning wolfishly, the dao immortal looked down at Lu Yun. This was the Qing paradise, and the one challenging the clan was Aoxue, not Lu Yun!

Not even Lu Daoling could do anything if he killed Lu Yun. He was entirely in the right, since Lu Yun had not only trapped an important Qing member in a lethal formation, but also killed Donglin Shaochen.

“I stand for him,” an emotionless voice slowly sounded in the air. “Drop this for my sake.”

“Who is it?!” The Qing dao immortal started and scanned his surroundings. He couldn’t tell where the voice had come from.

“Come back, Qing He,” a resigned voice suddenly traveled out from the paradise. “For your sake, senior, I will let this go.”

“Under... stood.” Despite extreme reluctance, dao immortal Qing He turned back to his clan’s paradise. That had been his forefather’s voice, an authority he couldn’t ignore.

With a wave of his hand, Lu Yun scattered the formation and sniffed at Xiangpeng, “I hope there will always be a dao immortal to rescue you.”

A livid Qing Xiangpeng clenched his jaw and returned to his clan’s territory.

“Keep blocking the entrance, Aoxue.” Lu Yun turned to raise a cupped fist salute to the air. “Thank you for saving me, senior.”

“I am saving the Qing Clan,” the measured voice said before fading out of existence, stunning the assembled cultivators with his response.

Saving the Qing Clan?

What was that supposed to mean?

Even the Lu ancestor was befuddled. “What did Wayfarer mean? He did this to save the Qing Clan?”

Indeed, it was Wayfarer who had intervened, the very same as Wanfeng's master. This was his first showing in Xiankan after a long absence.

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Wayfarer sure is something else. He must've sensed the dread zombie within Violetgrave. Lu Yun departed, leaving Aoxue at the front entrance of the Qing paradise.

Originally, he'd planned to have the dragon princess leave with Qing Han. However, Qing Xiangpeng's impulsive retaliation when releasing Qing Han necessitated a change of heart. For the crime of having his friend almost entirely consumed by poison, Aoxue would stay here to punish the Qing Clan... for an entire month!

This duration almost drove them mad, even though it was something they'd brought down upon themselves. If they'd accepted Lu Yun's olive branch and permitted Qing Han to leave with Aoxue, the entire affair could've ended with all parties satisfied. However, not only had the Qing Clan refused the offer, but they'd even hurt Qing Han.

Lu Yun couldn't be bothered with showing them any respect after that.

Thus, the blockade continued.

At the same time, a faint sense of melancholy rose in his heart. Wayfarer had put in an appearance, but Wanfeng was nowhere to be seen.