

Necropolis 21

Chapter 21: A Male Pig

The Duskwater prefect's manor was located in Duskwater City as well. It was grander than the city lord's manor, and both were a cut above the provincial governor's residence.

In Lu Yun's eyes, the only thing special about the city lord's manor was its feng shui, which imparted a faint aura of nobility. The prefect's manor, on the other hand, also had an above average feng shui layout. However, it was the overly grandiose architecture that made it resemble a palace more than an official's residence.

"Aiyaya, I've waited and pined for so long. My dearest Mo Yi is finally here! Do come on in, let's have a nice chat. Hm? Who is this male escort?" A mountain of flesh welcomed them as soon as they reached the front doors.

Lu Yun gaped at the ridiculously large man. It was no exaggeration to describe him as a walking mountain of human... something.

Eight feet both in height and width, the man presented quite a comical sight. He looked to weigh at least four hundred kilograms. A face like a large, round rubber ball sported features so shallow they looked like they were drawn on. His eyes, especially, were such a thin slit that one had to peer closely to spot them.

"This, this is Prefect Li Youcai of Duskwater Prefecture?" Lu Yun asked dumbly once he'd finally broken out of his thoughts.

Resigned, Mo Yi nodded slightly when she saw the governor's expression.

"Who do you think you are, lover boy?" the mountain of a man barked out furiously. "How dare you address me directly?"

"You'd better shut your damn mouth if you value your life, Li Youcai." Mo Yi huffed, but deliberately refrained from informing the man of Lu Yun's identity.

"Hey! I've betrothed you to the Skyriver city lord, Little Mo Yi. It's unvirtuous of you to cheat on your betrothed." The fat on Li Youcai's face jiggled as he talked.

Mo Yi's expression tightened.

"You betrothed Mo Yi to the Skyriver City Lord?" Lu Yun widened his eyes. "Who gave you the authority to do so?"

"Who? His Majesty the Celestial Emperor, of course!" Li Youcai didn't even hesitate. "As the prefect of the prefecture, I am both entitled and obligated to arrange marriages for my subordinates."

"Oh?" Lu Yun swallowed a laugh. "In that case, I betroth that sow to you, Li Youcai. You should host the wedding as soon as possible." He pointed at a herd of pigs rounding the corner of the street.

Mo Yi's eyes widened, her dark expression replaced by a wide smile.

“Bastard!” Li Youcai trembled with fury. “You’re mocking me! Don’t think I won’t do anything to you just because you have the city lord on your side. Guards, arrest this insubordinate brat!”

“Yes, sir!” The guards had been itching for some action.

“Hold!” Mo Yi realized what Lu Yun was planning and only made a half-hearted attempt to stop Li Youcai’s orders.

“What? Trying to save your lover boy? It’s high treason to challenge one’s superior! Even as the city lord, you can’t excuse his behavior.” Pleased, Li Youcai tried to put his hands behind his back, but his waist was too wide and his arms too short to manage the feat. “Take him!” he ordered with a self-righteous scowl.

Mo Yi snorted without a word. Challenge one’s superior? The fellow just wanted an excuse to arrest Lu Yun. She backed down only because he held more power than she did.

“You sure are bold, Li Youcai, Prefect of Duskwater.” Lu Yun held up a shiny command token—the token used to summon the Dusk Phalanx. At the same time, it also signified his identity as the Dusk Province governor. “How dare a mere prefect arrest the governor of the province? This is treason!”

The mountain of flesh froze. He tried his best to open his eyes, but they remained two thin lines. “Who are you?!” Li Youcai shuddered. He had a bad feeling about this.

“I’m holding the command token of the Dusk Phalanx. Who else do you think this governor is? The Dusk River Sacrament is upon us. Naturally, I’ve come to oversee the ritual.” Lu Yun raised the token in one hand and put his other hand behind his back.

Li Youcai pointed a trembling finger at Mo Yi. “You—you set me up!”

“I did no such thing.” The city lord smirked. “Didn’t I tell you to stop? You just didn’t listen.”

“It’s high treason to challenge one’s superior.” Lu Yun brandished the token in his hand. “You were obviously up to no good when you ordered my arrest. Guards, arrest Li Youcai and strip him of his title. The Duskwater city lord will be the acting prefect for the moment.”

He shook his head. “In addition, that sow there looks like a fine beauty. A match made in heaven with Li Youcai, so to speak. I hereby betroth her to our former prefect. The wedding will be held without delay.”

There were still mortals in the city. A swineherd just so happened to be herding his pigs past the prefect’s manor at that moment, and was giving it a wide berth out of fear. He had his back pressed flat against the other side of the road as he carefully made his way past.

Lu Yun was pointing at one of his pigs.

“That’s a male pig, Your Excellency,” Mo Yi spoke up, biting back a smile. She didn’t expect Lu Yun to set up such a humiliation for Li Youcai. As the governor, he did have the power to depose an officer of the province. Betrothing a pig to Li Youcai was just pure revenge on her behalf.

“A boar?” A brief pause later, Lu Yun continued with feigned seriousness, “Even better. A male pig suits Sir Li Youcai more. You there, I’ll give you an inferior rank spirit stone as the bride price, and I’ll play matchmaker for the former prefect.”

The swineherd was only an ordinary person, and couldn't help but violently shudder when he heard Lu Yun's words. He could sense Li Youcai's murderous gaze settling on him, even with how small the prefect's eyes were.

"Please have mercy, milord! I don't want to die yet!" He was on the verge of tears.

"Leave the pig and get out of here," Mo Yi huffed at his fearful face. Relieved, the man abandoned his entire passel of pigs and bolted.

When the gods fought, mortals suffered. If the man had accepted Lu Yun's spirit stone, the prefect would've decimated him later. The city lord's dismissal had saved him from Li Youcai's revenge.

"So you're Lu Yun!" Li Youcai bit out, his chest heaving. "You're really stripping me of my position?"

"He doesn't have the right to do so." A faint voice traveled in from the front gate, followed by a young man in black with some servants by his side. His features were fine, but his skin was dark and covered in thick, ugly scars. It looked like centipedes were crawling all over his face.

"There's only half a year left in your term, Your Excellency. You have no authority to remove any officials in Dusk Province during this period," The young man said, his expression turning to mockery.

Lu Yun frowned. "Is that so?" He looked up. "And who are you? What gives you the right to interfere with the internal affairs of Dusk?"

"I am an envoy of His Majesty the Celestial Emperor. I represent him. That gives me all the right to intervene," sneered the young man. "I'm also in charge of this year's Dusk River Sacrament, not you."

Mo Yi's face clouded over. She didn't expect there to be an imperial envoy in her city!

"There's someone like you in Dusk City as well," Lu Yun responded after a bemused pause.

"Feng Li?" The young man scoffed. "That useless piece of trash was sent by the crown prince. He isn't His Majesty's envoy. I, on the other hand, have an imperial decree, making me a true envoy."

"Alright then." Lu Yun nodded. "So I can't strip Li Youcai of his title, but I at least have the right to betroth the boar to him, don't I?"

"You're marrying off a male pig to him?" The envoy's wide eyes fixed Lu Yun with a look of disbelief.

"Li Youcai wishes to betroth the Duskwater city lord to the Skyriver city lord. Since this is the case, I'll marry off the pig to him. I do have that authority, don't I?" Lu Yun said easily. "If I can't even do that..."

He thought for a good while, then continued seriously, "Then I'll summon all one million heavenly soldiers from the northern territory. If anyone has any objections, we shall all perish together."

The command token in his hand glowed with a faint golden light.

"You're as mad as the others in your clan." The young man looked intrigued. "Well then, I'll stay out of this. However, I expect a seat at the wedding." Amused, he didn't take Lu Yun's threat personally.

"Can't it be a sow?" Li Youcai pleaded pitifully. "If it's a female pig, I can at least coach her in cultivation and help her transform into a pretty little spirit."

“No!” Lu Yun, Mo Yi, and the young man denied in unison. Despair flashed across Li Youcai’s expression.

“Only the Duskwater city lord was invited. The governor’s presence is unexpected.” The young man cleared his throat and changed the subject. “I was the one who sent the invitation.”

“You?” Mo Yi frowned. Someone had wanted to use her hand to kill Lu Yun, and she’d pinned the responsibility on Li Youcai. However, that didn’t seem to be the case anymore. Otherwise, Li Youcai wouldn’t have failed to recognize the governor and fallen headfirst into his trap.

Was it this envoy’s doing?

“The lords of the seven cities under the prefecture’s jurisdiction have all convened.” Excitement tinged the young man’s face. “Alright, let’s go investigate Myriad Formation Summit.”

“Myriad Formation Summit?” Lu Yun frowned slightly. He’d been discussing the mountain with Mo Yi. What a coincidence that the envoy had the same destination in mind. “Alright,” he agreed before Mo Yi could make up her mind. “This official wouldn’t dare defy His Majesty’s envoy.”

The young man paused. “You’re going as well?”

“If anything happens, I’ll summon the Dusk Phalanx. I’m sure a million soldiers will be able to eliminate any threats.” Lu Yun responded matter-of-factly. “I’m interested in the treasures there, too.”

“So be it, then.” The young man hunched in on himself.

Chapter 22: An Enormous Graveyard

The Myriad Formation Summit didn’t exist in Duskwater Prefecture five thousand years ago. Where the mountain sat now used to be the eighth city under the prefecture’s jurisdiction—Truewater City.

One fateful day five thousand years ago, a mountain had fallen from the sky and landed on the city. It then released a myriad of strange formations, killing all of the denizens. Not a single soul had escaped the city alive. Now, only the mountain stood where a bustling city had once been.

Before the incident, Dusk Province had been no different from the other provinces in Nephrite Major. The dao of immortals was flourishing, and though it’d be too much to call Truewater a city filled with immortals, there were still a good number of them.

The incident that destroyed Truewater marked the beginning of the decline of Dusk Province. The qi in the environment deteriorated and cultivators’ progress slowed. The province nosedived after the death of Yuying, the eighth governor of Dusk Province, a thousand years ago. Overnight, it became the most barren of all provinces in Nephrite Major.

Mo Yi’s tale about the mountain’s origin made Lu Yun’s heart itch with anticipation. There was an ancient city under the mountain! Anything buried and forgotten by history was fatally attractive to tomb raiders like him.

“You seem very interested in these things.” Mo Yi was caught off guard by Lu Yun’s visible excitement.

Lu Yun smiled. “Don’t you find it satisfying to recover forgotten histories from beneath the earth and bring them back out to the light of day?”

Mo Yi nodded after a pause. "True, the world of immortals was in shambles after the great war. It's only been rebuilt because of the artifacts excavated from the ancient tombs." She sighed faintly. "However, the tombs are very dangerous. There's always great casualties during every excavation."

"Right." Lu Yun nodded in agreement. "The greater the danger, the greater the gain."

The ancient tombs of immortals were indeed dangerous. Take Yuying's tomb, as an example. It was just a regular immortal's tomb, yet there were terrible things in it, like the thousand-year-old zombie, corpse flies, and stone spirits.

"Be careful of the envoy," Mo Yi suddenly piped up. "He failed to use me to kill you, so his next attempt might come while we're on the mountain."

Lu Yun paused. "Are you sure it was him who set me up?"

Mo Yi nodded. "Everyone from Nephrite Capital wants you dead, including those from your own clan."

Lu Yun fell silent; there seemed to be something more at play here. Something set his position apart from that of the other governors.

"Are you going to Mount Myriad Formation, milord? This old servant will follow you!" Ge Long volunteered himself with a righteous look on his face.

"Si—sir, this servant will go as well." Fear tinged Wanfeng's expression, but she clenched her jaw and volunteered.

"Ge Long will do. You should stay in the city lord manor." Lu Yun patted her head and chuckled. "It's fine if Ge Long dies, but I'd feel terrible if you get hurt."

"You're playing favorites, sir." Wanfeng's face flushed red and the tips of her ears turned crimson. Her voice was as faint as a mosquito's buzz.

"Sweet talker," huffed Mo Yi. "So our governor does live up to his reputation as a shameless skirt-chaser. You should be careful, girl. Don't let him fool you."

Lu Yun's expression turned awkward.

"Pretty big sister, my house's lord isn't a shameless skirt-chaser! He—he's still a virgin." After wracking her brains, that was the only argument Wanfeng could come up with.

Even more abashed, Lu Yun stayed silent. A chuckle forced itself out of Mo Yi.

"You're so pretty, big sister," Wanfeng said curiously. "Why do you dress as a man, instead of a woman?"

Mo Yi wore men's clothes and went without makeup, but it still wasn't enough to conceal looks and elegance that were worth cities. She shook her head without a response.

Once prepared, Lu Yun set off with Ge Long, Mo Yi, and the others. He didn't take Yuying with him. She'd yet to fully recover her cultivation, still falling a step short of the spirit realm. Besides, she could teleport to Lu Yun anytime through Gates of the Abyss. That would be his trump card, when the circumstances called for it.

The young man in black still hadn't volunteered his name. Standing beside him were the extremely despondent Li Youcai, and the other six city lords of the prefecture. All of the latter were origin core cultivators, and they knew who Lu Yun was, but showed no respect for him. It was apparent that they'd flocked to the young man's banner.

"Here you are, Mo Yi!" One of the six city lords perked up when he saw Mo Yi and reached for her hand. This was the city lord of Skyriver, who Li Youcai had betrothed Mo Yi to.

With an impassive look, Mo Yi lifted her hand out of the way.

"You!" Anger flashed through the city lord's face and he threw Lu Yun a vicious glare.

"Enough." Irritation colored the tone of the young man in black. "Since everyone's here, let's leave for the mountain."

"Understood." The Skyriver city lord could only oblige, since his liege had commanded it so.

Ah, Mo Yi is pretending to be weaker than her mark. No one present realizes that she's an immortal. Strange, why am I able to see through her pretense?

Lu Yun could tell that Mo Yi was an immortal, and an august immortal at that. There were six levels to immortals: true, empyrean, august, golden, arcane, and peerless immortal.

What surprised Lu Yun was that Li Youcai, looking like more meat than man, was also an immortal. He wasn't at Mo Yi's level, however, but was an empyrean immortal nonetheless.

As for the young man in black, Lu Yun couldn't fathom his cultivation level. There was a faint shadow shrouding everything about him. If he didn't care to display it, no one would be able to get a read on his cultivation.

Mo Yi must be the strongest in the province. No golden immortals dare set foot in Dusk, which makes august immortals the highest possible peak of strength. That's a very fat thigh! I need to hug it tightly, Lu Yun silently decided.

Li Youcai obviously thought Mo Yi was at his mercy, because, as an empyrean immortal, his cultivation was superior to hers. However, she only obeyed the prefect out of consideration for the rules of the Nephrite court. She wasn't going to violate the local laws if it wasn't absolutely necessary.

A stupendous and luxurious fortress ship cut through the sky, traveling to the mountain about two hundred fifty kilometers away from Duskwater City.

"This is it?" Lu Yun stared dumbly at the mountain soaring high into the clouds, his eyes widened in awe.

"This is it." Mo Yi nodded. "I, too, was stunned the first time I saw the mountain."

Surprised and appreciative noises rose from the others, as well. The mountain towered grandly into the air. Easily thousands of meters, a faint shroud of mist swirled all about it.

Myriad Formation Summit? More like Myriad Get F*cked Summit! There's an entire city buried beneath this mountain! No... wait! A shudder ran down Lu Yun's spine. This is an enormous burial mound! All of ancient Truewater City was entombed beneath this gigantic burial mound from the sky!

Chapter 23: Qing Hongcheng

Myriad Formation Summit was, in fact, an enormous burial mound, and a mound was very different from a tomb. Though they were both places to bury the dead, they signified very different things about those buried within.

Tombs were subterranean complexes filled with palatial grandeur, plenty of annexes, and numerous traps. Only those of considerable importance in life obtained such eternal dwellings.

Burial mounds, on the other hand, were humble and plain. The simplest sort was just a coffin a few feet beneath the ground, with some extra earth atop it. Their inhabitants tended to be pedestrian and plebeian.

Lu Yun habitually ignored any mounds he saw. He was a tomb raider, not a graverobber. There wasn't much to find within commoners' mounds, and anything there wasn't worth the trouble.

"Myriad Formation Summit... is a burial mound? Is that what you're telling me?" Mo Yi was quite taken aback. "You're joking, right? How can there be a mound this big?"

Lu Yun was dumbfounded as well. "Why not? If a very important person was buried here, the size of this mound would make sense, wouldn't it?"

Can the sect records be true? Tombs nourish corpses, while mounds raise ghosts. If I'm right, formations won't be the only deadly source of trouble in this mountain. There will be plenty of ghosts and monsters as well.

The young man observed his surroundings very carefully from his perch atop the ship's tower. And this is one of the province's lifepoints, too. Lesser than the main one within the capital, but crucial nonetheless.

He began to understand the reasons behind the course of history. According to Mo Yi, the arrival of Myriad Formation Summit five thousand years ago had destroyed Truewater and marked the start of the province's decline.

It's no wonder! A burial mound stifling one of the province's lifepoints would certainly have that kind of effect on Dusk's feng shui.

Mo Yi remained quiet as Lu Yun murmured softly to himself. She had no idea what he was saying.

"The burial of an eminent personage in a mere mound would certainly cause unbelievable resentment. He's definitely become a vengeful ghost without hope of reincarnation."

In the texts of Lu Yun's tomb raiding sect, important individuals buried in mundane graves would refuse to pass onto the next life. Instead, they became restless, wrathful spirits who were imprisoned in their own burial mounds. The mounds would then continuously expand from all of the negative emotions, until the earth around it became anathema to life.

This was just what was written down by his sect ancestors, of course. Lu Yun hadn't ever seen anything like that for himself. He certainly hadn't expected to arrive in the immortal world and encounter a burial mound tall enough to reach the clouds.

“The person buried here couldn’t be an immortal emperor, could it?” he murmured. “Are you sure the formation orb you’re looking for is in there?”

Mo Yi shook her head dubiously. She was clueless when it came to graves and the dead. What Lu Yun spoke of was unfathomable to her.

“Milord, the mound looks really tasty.” Ge Long kept swallowing his saliva. “It’s a yum-yum, a big yum-yum! It’s many, many times yummier than that zombie we saw last time!”

Lu Yun shuddered. He knew what Ge Long was now. The old man’s name was written in the Tome of Life and Death, and though he was dead, he lived on still. In other words, he was one of the living dead, able to consume nether energies to strengthen himself.

All negative qi was food to his eyes. The stone spirit had been imbued with that kind of energy, which was why Ge Long had been able to eat it with such ease. Even a thousand-year zombie was something he could sink his teeth into.

“Something tastier than the thousand-year zombie, eh? Can you actually eat that?” Lu Yun looked at the old man, who licked his lips.

“I’m only a little bit away from the core realm, milord. If I have just a few more bites to eat... I can have a golden core of my own!” The old servant seemed ready to charge into Myriad Formation Summit at any second. “When I do, I’d be able to absorb a sliver of energy from... that. A tiny bit will be more than enough to satisfy me many times over!”

Neither Lu Yun nor Mo Yi said anything after that. Li Youcai and the youth in black were already out of the cabin, as was most everyone else.

The lord of Skyriver City glared at the Dusk Province governor with venom in his eyes. He believed that the rival before him had stolen away his betrothed’s heart.

“Why don’t you just kill him?” Lu Yun asked Mo Yi, having noticed the murderous attention upon him.

“He’s a city lord of Nephrite Major. If I did that, it would just give that fatty over there an excuse to move against me.” Mo Yi shook her head, her eyes weary.

Lu Yun blinked. There was something behind her words that hinted she was only in her current role to hide from something. She wasn’t afraid of Nephrite’s laws, but she also didn’t want her cover blown.

Li Youcai had accidentally stumbled upon this, which was the only reason why he’d been able to exert any influence over her at all.

The youth in black wasn’t interested in Lu Yun and Mo Yi’s conversation. His dark complexion had only been growing darker and darker.

“What’s wrong, Sir Envoy?” Lu Yun asked with some confusion.

“All of you need to listen to my orders in a moment, or you’ll all die.” The youth in black gnashed his teeth. “My fifth brother is here.”

“Your fifth brother?” Li Youcai shivered violently. He had a bad feeling that something horrifying was going to happen.

Boom!

As if on cue, a collision rammed the fortress ship they were on, causing the entire vessel to shake tremendously.

“That’s enough, Qing Hongchen!” The youth in black soared into the air, shrieking in frustration. A fortress ship larger than theirs had appeared behind them at some point, and the quake just now had been caused by the two boats’ collision.

Lu Yun hurriedly put a hand on the gunwale.

“I just love seeing you all worked up. Come at me if you can!” The one called Qing Hongchen was a young man around eighteen years old. He cut a rather handsome figure in his green tunic, but his features were just a tad too effeminate and sinister.

A snide sneer was plastered across his face, making him look like a cat playing with his food.

“Ram that boat as hard as you can! We’re not at home in the clan right now. I’d like to see who’ll protect you here!” Qing Hongchen’s features tangled themselves into a savage snarl. He seemed almost crazy.

Boooooom!

The fortress ship experienced an even bigger convulsion. Frightening cracks crawled across its body.

“He really means to kill me!” The youth in black turned ghastly pale.

Hum!

A golden pillar of light blasted into the heavens right beside him from the boat’s deck. An enormous gate slowly opened in midair.

“Dusk Phalanx, hear my call! An assassin is trying to take the life of Dusk Province’s governor! Immediately send a force here to exterminate the traitors!” Lu Yun roared mightily with the command token in his hand.

“Yes, sir!” A loud answering cry could be heard behind the gate. Yin Xuantian emerged a moment later, ten thousand soldiers behind him. They hovered in midair, forming a barrier between the two boats.

“The Dusk Phalanx?! You ants dare stand in the fifth young master’s way? Crush those fools!” An angry voice responded from within the larger boat.

R-r-rumble!

An aura of faint gold encased the larger boat. Thus protected, it gathered its strength and viciously hurtled toward the Dusk Phalanx.

Chapter 24: Maze Journey

“These people are incredibly bold and lawless to attack even the Dusk Phalanx!” Li Youcai trembled in fear.

Though the Dusk governor had direct command of the Dusk Phalanx, the army was under the overall jurisdiction of Nephrite's imperial court. It was charged with guarding the province's northern borders against the monsters of the North Sea.

Qing Hongchen's assault wasn't something major, but neither was it something that could be easily brushed aside. But before the fat official could react, a tremendous force picked him up and threw him at the larger ship.

"Hugaaah!" He instinctively shouted as loudly as he could. A burst of energy exploded from his body, blasting right into Qing Hongchen's fortress ship.

Boom!

The sparkling golden light upon the fatty made him look like a mountain of treasure, and the impact of his body against the ship was enough to slam it aside.

"You intend to oppose me, Li Youcai?" Qing Hongchen's cool voice slowly rose from the deck.

Li Youcai shuddered. He froze in midair, breaking into impassioned wails. "I didn't do anything! Which bastard tossed me out here?! Show yourself, right now!"

Mo Yi stood at Lu Yun's side, completely unperturbed. However, Lu Yun had clearly picked up on a gust of fragrant wind that had preceded Li Youcai's flight.

"The Dusk Phalanx's post at the northern border is very important. You should avoid calling on them if possible." Her wispy voice made its way into his ears, to which he could only shrug.

"You're very brave to attack the Dusk Phalanx, fifth brother! Do you intend to rebel?" The youth in black floating in the void paid no heed to Li Youcai's antics, focused as he was on his brother. "I recorded what you did just now, and we'll sort things out after we get back to the capital." He flicked his sleeves in derision, then returned to his own vessel.

"Hahaha! You think you can trip me up with something so minor, Qing Han? You think too little of your fifth brother!" Qing Hongchen addressed the youth in black by name.

"I wouldn't think so, if you were actually my kinsman. But you're just an adopted slave who was given our surname! All you have today comes from my father."

"Shut up!" The youth in black had clearly hit a sore spot. Qing Hongchen's face contorted in rage and his chest heaved with emotion. He flushed a dangerous purplish-red. "You're asking to die here, Qing Han."

Qing Hongchen glared murderous daggers at his brother and his voice was edged with steel.

"Hoi fatty Li Youcai! My fifth brother holds grudges for life and he always repays his debts. You blocking his way here today means that he'll cut you up and fry you tomorrow, do you hear me?" Qing Han grinned as he looked at the trembling Li Youcai.

The rotund official's face blanched in fear and frustration. He'd heard of Qing Hongchen before. The boy was famous in the capital, where they'd both come from. After all, Dusk Province didn't have many native immortals. The youth was renowned for being brutal, petty, and extremely hard to deal with.

“Oh... I’ll get whoever framed me for this!” Li Youcai gnashed his teeth angrily, then allowed his fleshy cheeks to droop down in a cheerful smile. His intensifying aura told a different tale, though—the radiating presence spoke of a peak empyrean immortal.

“Are you threatening me, fatty?” Qing Hongchen snickered.

“No, no, it’s a misunderstanding!” Li Youcai remedied hurriedly with a beaming simper. “We came to Myriad Formation Summit to hunt for treasure, not to fight. Let’s all get rich in peace, shall we?”

“So you are threatening me, then...” Qing Hongchen repeated his accusation darkly.

The fatty was an empyrean immortal who’d repelled the fortress ship with a single strike, saving the ten thousand Dusk Phalanx soldiers behind him. Despite his prestige, Qing Hongchen wasn’t an immortal yet and was no match for the fat official in his way. It wasn’t a stretch for him to assume that he was being browbeaten into submission.

“We should all just get along! Riches in peace!” Li Youcai was still all smiles.

Qing Hongchen responded with an angry smirk. He was about to say something, but his sprightly old advisor intervened. “Fifth young master, you’ll only create unnecessary trouble by intercepting the seventh young master here. Since he wishes to enter Myriad Formation Summit, you can deal with him inside.” The old man smiled proudly. “If he dares enter the mountain, his life is as good as forfeit.”

The ‘seventh young master’ was Qing Han, of course.

Qing Hongchen’s eyes lit up. He suddenly recalled who the old man was: the thirteenth ranked formation master in Nephrite Major, called Formation Thirteenth by most who knew him. “I will rely on you then, Senior Thirteenth.”

“We’re leaving!” A wave of Qing Hongchen’s hand signaled his fortress ship to withdraw. The vessel disappeared into the horizon in mere moments, and Yin Xuantian’s troops disappeared soon after.

Color had yet to return to Li Youcai’s face. He looked with doubt and suspicion at those on the ship. He’d definitely been sent flying by someone’s foot just now, but despite being a peak empyrean immortal, he had no idea who the culprit was.

“Was it a ghost?” wondered the fatty with some confusion.

He was actually quite strong. Though he was only a peak empyrean immortal, he could easily beat most august immortals. The one who’d booted him out was at least a golden immortal. But golden immortals couldn’t possibly come to Dusk Province!

Aside from a ghost, what else could it be?

“We’re going in.” Qing Hongchen’s sudden appearance dampened Qing Han’s high spirits.

As they grew closer to the mountain, the air grew stiff and sticky, making the ship fly noticeably slower. Formations poked out from the ether from time to time, casting themselves down upon the ship at random.

Qing Han's vessel was strong enough to shatter them as they approached, breaking them upon a veil of rippling light. Well, no surprise there—the fortress ship had survived a larger ship's ramming maneuver unscathed. They continued smashing through formation after formation, going deeper and deeper as time passed.

“Stop!” Lu Yun suddenly called out.

“What is it?” Qing Han frowned a little as he looked over.

“We'll never make it into the mountain proper at this rate.” The young governor examined his surroundings, then affirmed his observation. “We're going in circles around the body of the mountain. This is actually the thirty-fifth loop.”

“What?!” Everyone was collectively stunned.

“Don't make things up. The ship is going in a straight line! We couldn't possibly be going in circles!” loudly rebuked the Skyriver city lord.

“Shut up, stupid!” Lu Yun shot back. He closed his eyes, appraising what the circumstances before them meant.

Ghost Hits Wall? No, there was something more insidious at work.

The feng shui layout here hinted at incredible dangers within. The deception went deeper than just the senses that Ghost Hits Wall would ensnare. It was possible for someone lost within it to suddenly lose their head without rhyme or reason.

If he guessed correctly, the formations the fortress ship had smashed just now were reforming into something stronger that awaited them just ahead.

“Land! Land onto the ground. We need to head inside on foot. If we circle around one more time, we'll all die.” Cold sweat beaded across Lu Yun's forehead.

“Take the ship down!” Qing Han furrowed his brow, but gave the command nonetheless.

The fortress ship slowly drifted down to earth.

Boom!

As if on cue, an enormous formation materialized in the sky. Fire and blade painted the firmament red with destruction, consuming everything within its range.

They couldn't help a collective shudder when they landed.

“What a powerful formation,” Qing Han muttered as he looked at the tear in the air. “My ship wouldn't have survived it.” Only strength surpassing a golden immortal could tear through space in such a fashion.

Once everyone had alighted from the fortress ship, Qing Han put it away.

“Look!” Ge Long suddenly cried out. “There's things floating in midair! Why didn't we see them earlier when we were in the sky?”

Chapter 25: Malicious Diligence

There were items and corpses floating about, all of them in pieces. Even the corpses were more torn limbs and bones than whole bodies.

“Those are left over from people who attempted to enter the mountain by air,” Lu Yun said calmly. “If we’d been a bit slower about landing, we’d be part of them now.”

Qing Han shuddered, then transformed that emotion into a vicious glare at Li Youcai.

“I—I didn’t know that would happen either!” Color drained from the fatty’s face and he wanted to burst into tears. It’d been his idea to travel to the mountain with the fortress ship as their protection. “W— why didn’t we see those things earlier? My consciousness sensed nothing dangerous.”

“Your consciousness was also confused by the layout,” Lu Yun said as he observed the landscape.

“You! It must be you!” accused the Skyriver city lord with a finger in Lu Yun’s face. “No one else can see what’s wrong with this place. How can a qi condensation weakling like you see through everything?”

“Milord prefect is an empyrean immortal! Do you understand what that means? He’s an immortal on high, far loftier than all of us! You’re just a bug!”

“You should consider replacing him, Li Youcai.” Lu Yun’s expression darkened. That city lord kept targeting him because he appeared to be close to Mo Yi. Though she was dressed as a man and wore no makeup, she was still stunning enough to topple a city.

The Skyriver city lord considered her as his personal property the moment Li Youcai had decreed the match. Seeing her interacting so closely with another man while giving him the cold shoulder ignited a raging jealousy in his heart, and he could barely stay rational.

“Oh? You want to replace me, eh?” he snarled with a feral grin. “Honored Envoy, everyone wants this kid dead, don’t they? People are only staying their hand out of consideration for imperial dignity. Why don’t I do the dirty deed for the greater good today?” The Skyriver city lord manifested a sword.

Qing Han didn’t say anything, an indication of silent approval. His first attempt to kill Lu Yun through Mo Yi had failed. He’d only brought the governor along to finish the job.

“Good, very good!” Li Youcai raised both hands in agreement. “This is Myriad Formation Summit. We can kill him and say he died in the mountain due to his weak cultivation. No one will be able to fault us for that.”

Lu Yun had betrothed a male pig to him! With Lu Yun dead, the ridiculous arrangement would be forgotten as well. The prefect raked a murderous gaze over the other city lords, who hurriedly voiced their support.

“Hahahaha!” Laughter rang through the area. Qing Hongchen appeared out of nowhere with his men and crowed with laughter.

“Qing Hongchen!” Qing Han twisted his lips. “So we meet again, seventh brother.”

The Qing genius sneered at Qing Han, then turned to Lu Yun with a smile. "It seems they all want you dead, Governor of Dusk. If you join me now, I promise to keep you alive. They want you dead in order to plant a new puppet here. In my opinion, though, it's better to use you than to cultivate someone else."

Qing Han frowned. "He's a member of the Lu Clan, fifth brother."

"So what?" Qing Hongchen smiled. "I hear that our governor here threw Lu Yuanhou out of his manor after a good beating. Lu Yuanhou couldn't have suffered a worse humiliation. That's enough for me to look kindly on Lu Yun."

In Nephrite Capital, Qing Hongchen and Lu Yuanhou were considered the two top geniuses beneath immortal realm. However, tensions between their two clans made the two young geniuses bitter enemies. Their clashes were a source of great entertainment in the capital.

Qing Han's fury was almost a tangible flame.

"Since the fifth young master is offering me protection, then I am the fifth young master's man." Lu Yun had little to no shame. That was how he'd survived to this day. There seemed to be no reason to turn down the fifth Qing son.

"Utterly shameless!" Qing Han bit out.

"Recognizing the times he's in is a sign of wisdom," Qing Hongchen laughed and turned to Li Youcai. "What about you, fatty? The governor, your superior, has already joined me."

"I'll abide by your orders, fifth young master," Li Youcai hurried out. "If you would please put earlier incidents behind us."

"Earlier incidents?" Qing Hongchen asked with feigned confusion. "Did something happen earlier?"

Delight seized the fatty, while Qing Han's livid face clouded over. He hadn't expected Qing Hongchen to turn things around with only a few choice words.

"I serve the fifth young master, now." Li Youcai glanced at the other city lords. "What about the rest of you?" What a perfect display of adding insult to injury.

"I—" The Skyriver City Lord felt the murderous gaze behind him before he could move. "I'm loyal to the venerable envoy, of course!"

Despite their reluctance, the city lords had to stay on Qing Han's side. There was no doubt that if they dared betray the envoy, he would make quick work of them. As a spirit realm cultivator, it would be a piece of cake for him to kill a few origin core city lords.

Qing Han calmed slightly, but his eyes remained cold.

"Alright. This is my little brother, so we shouldn't embarrass him too much," Qing Hongchen chuckled. "Why don't we work together to venture into the mountain, seventh brother? Go on then."

Qing Han shuddered, fear and despair tightly gripped his heart. This elder brother of his wouldn't hesitate to kill him, if an opportunity presented itself. This was no simple infighting within the clan, but the common wish of the clan majority.

Qing Hongchen had only spared his younger brother because he needed cannon fodder for the exploration, but he wouldn't let Qing Han leave the mountain alive. They hadn't yet entered Myriad Formation Summit proper, and even the fringes swarmed with danger.

A single misstep could land them in a formation that could get them all killed.

"What intricate formations, as befitting a treasure of the immortals recorded in the ancient texts from this tomb!" Formation Thirteenth muttered in awe as he observed his surroundings. With his guidance, the group made it to the foot of the mountain with no fatalities, despite plenty of narrow scrapes.

"We should stop," Lu Yun objected suddenly. "If we go further, we're as good as dead."

"Oh?" Everyone turned to him questioningly.

Formation Thirteenth was just about to take apart the first formation and scoffed upon hearing those words. "Scared, little junior?"

Lu Yun shook his head. "The name of the mountain is self-explanatory. How many formations do you think you'll be able to handle if we ascend from the foot of the mountain?"

"Hahaha, you haven't heard of the old master, have you, Lu Yun?" mocked Li Youcai. "This is Formation Thirteenth, the thirteenth best formation master in all of Nephrite Major!"

Deep pride crossed Formation Thirteenth's face.

"The thirteenth best of Nephrite Major?" Lu Yun scoffed. "That's the reason for his arrogance? What about the twelfth, or the top formation master? Are they so mighty that they float instead of walk on the ground?"

Formation Thirteenth's expression darkened.

Lu Yun couldn't be bothered to waste his time on the man. He continued, "The mountain has stood in Dusk Province for five thousand years. High-level immortals could still enter the province up to a thousand years ago, yet the mountain stands still."

He looked up at the shards of treasure, fragments of weapons, and body parts of cultivators and immortals alike silently hovering in the air. His point was clear. Countless formation masters had tried to unravel the mountain over the past five thousand years, but they'd all failed. Some had managed to get out alive, while others had become floating debris outside the mountain.

Formation Thirteenth's face flushed red, but he didn't know what to say.

"The governor has a point," Qing Han nodded, then continued with an impassive expression, "and he was the one who saw through the formation midair and told us to land."

"Oh?" Qing Hongchen's eyes lit up. "What do you propose we do, then?"

Formation Thirteenth's face burned. They'd been following Qing Han's ship and would've died if it wasn't for their quarry's sudden landing. He'd thought it was a coincidence, but it turned out the young governor had spotted the trap!

“The mountain is actually a large burial mound, but its core is still underground. To explore the mountain and locate its treasure, we must open a path leading underneath the mountain.” Lu Yun wholly ignored their words. Qing Han wanted to kill him in the mountain, and Qing Hongchen was using him as a pawn. Both were up to no good.

However, he, too, was using them on this trip. He wasn’t powerful enough to explore the mountain on his own, so he needed labor and cannon fodder.

“What?!” Qing Hongchen exclaimed.

Mo Yi had heard these outlandish speculations before, so she wasn’t too surprised. The others, on the other hand, were stunned. A large burial mound?

Myriad Formation Summit, a mountain tall enough to reach the sky, was a large burial mound?

Impossible!

“Nonsense!” Formation Thirteenth yelled. “There’s no burial mound this big! Not even the tombs of the ancient immortal emperors would reach such a scale.”

Lu Yun ignored him in favor of scanning the landscape.

This is the... Duality of Dragon and Tiger! The dragon fights the tiger, while the tiger vies with the dragon. The person who set everything up must bear a deep hatred for the dead buried within! He was gravely shaken.

The Duality of Dragon and Tiger was a malicious feng shui layout. Dragons symbolized emperors, and tigers represented kings; the two plainly couldn’t coexist peacefully with each other. There existed a saying of yore that said how there would always be clashes between dragon and tiger, due to their irreconcilable hostility.

The conflict between the two was never ending. This meant that not only would the dead buried here never enter the wheel of reincarnation, but they also couldn’t even find peace in death.

More importantly, the layout contained the violent energies of the two beasts, which would amplify the unresolved grievances of the dead. On top of that, there were the countless residents of Truewater who’d died before their time.

Lu Yun had no idea what great horrors the burial mound could create.

“Nine kilometers to the southeast lies a valley,” he declared confidently after some calculations. “We can dig our way into the graveyard there.”

“A valley nine kilometers away?” After a pause, Qing Hongchen pointed at one of the city lords serving Qing Han. “You there, go and take a look.” He clearly didn’t fully trust Lu Yun.

Qing Han’s face remained impassive.

“I—” The city lord’s heart sank. They’d only safely made their way here because of Formation Thirteenth. It’d be suicide for a mere origin core cultivator like him to go anywhere without the formation master.

“Close your eyes and go straight in that direction for nine kilometers, nine meters, two hundred and three centimeters,” Lu Yun cautioned seriously, locking eyes with the city lord. “No matter what you encounter or hear, don’t open your eyes. And do not, under any circumstances, stop. You’re dead without a doubt if you do.”

The city lord shuddered and bobbed his head vehemently.

Chapter 26: Don’t Eat Too Much

Eighteen miles away, there was a valley that was the feng shui’s weak point. There was no telling how long the layout had existed here. It’d likely nurtured creatures both strange and bizarre to defend that weak point. At the same time, the Duality of Dragon and Tiger was a grand formation. The location Lu Yun had pointed out was also the formation’s weak point.

Everyone held their breath as they watched the city lord haltingly set off in the direction the governor directed him to.

“Ah, right!” Lu Yun slapped his forehead. “I forgot to tell him something.”

Just then, the city lord, who hadn’t yet walked too far, turned around and opened his mouth, like he was talking to someone. And then—

Thud.

His head detached from his neck and hit the ground. Blood geysered into the sky and the headless body wavered, then toppled over like a log.

“Didn’t I tell him not to talk?” Lu Yun scratched the back of his head. “Don’t think so.”

No one answered him. The group was overcome with shock. The city lord had died so suddenly, seemingly without any reason at all. No one knew how his head had just fallen off like that.

“How did that happen?” Master Thirteenth stared dumbly at the body and murmured, “Did he step into a formation? But I didn’t sense any ripples of activation.”

“This was my oversight.” Lu Yun frowned slightly. “I thought he would be fine walking in a straight line with his eyes closed, but who would’ve thought the fool would talk to the thing in the formation instead!”

“The thing in the formation? Is there something else here?” Master Thirteenth frowned deeply and snapped, “What’s going on here? Talk!”

“Rank thirteen in all of Nephrite Major, you said, Master Formation Thirteenth!” Lu Yun locked eyes with the vaunted master. “Do you not realize that we’re already in a formation? The valley I pointed out is the key to breaking it, which will allow us entrance into the burial mound.”

The formation he spoke of was the Duality of Dragon and Tiger. However, that was the feng shui layout, and Lu Yun didn’t know its formation name. What surprised him was that while he was able to clearly discern the feng shui, Formation Thirteenth—supposedly the top of the pack of Nephrite Major—had failed to recognize the corresponding formation.

“Charlatan,” Lu Yun muttered under his breath.

“I—!” Thirteenth’s face flushed red. “Of course I can tell this is a formation, but when he died, there was no sign of it being activated!”

“That’s because you’re a bumpkin.” Lu Yun unceremoniously pointed at the Skyriver city lord. “You, make your way to the valley. Don’t speak. Don’t turn around. Don’t stop until you’re there.”

The formation master grit his teeth, wanting nothing more than to murder Lu Yun on the spot. However, Qing Hongchen shook his head slightly to prevent rash actions.

“Why don’t you go yourself?” The city lord’s expression tightened. “Are you trying to get me killed, then take my fiance afterward?”

Her expression darkening, Mo Yi bit her lip without a word.

“Oh, fiance? Interesting.” Qing Hongchen could tell the city lord had beef with Lu Yun, but he didn’t expect there to be such a scandal.

“Oh? Fiance, you say?” Lu Yun smiled faintly. “The prefect arranged the marriage for you. If he was able to marry off the Duskwater city lord, then I, as governor of the province, should have the right to annul the engagement.”

“You!” The city lord spat out. “You and I will be enemies until the end of time if you steal my wife! Besides, you only have half a year left in your term. You have no right to annul the engagement!”

Lu Yun turned to Li Youcai with a smile. “Tell him if I have the right to, Li Youcai.”

The prefect glowered without a word of response. Lu Yun had betrothed a male pig to him! Even now, the pig was having the time of its life in his manor.

“Fine. Since you want me to go, then I’ll go myself.” Lu Yun didn’t want to waste his breath arguing with the city lord.

It was ludicrous for Li Youcai to betroth Mo Yi to the Skyriver city lord, anyway. However, she’d been unable to resist, despite being an august immortal. That told Lu Yun that things weren’t as simple as they seemed.

No matter how complicated the truth was, however, everything would be resolved as long as the Skyriver city lord and Li Youcai died here.

“No, not you!” Qing Hongchen rushed out. Lu Yun seemed to be in his element here. If he went, he might escape from Qing Hongchen’s control. The Qing scion pointed at Ge Long, who’d been by Lu Yun’s side all along. “You go.”

“What should this old servant watch out for, milord?” Ge Long cast Lu Yun a pitiful look.

“Well...” Lu Yun scratched his head. “Don’t eat too much.”

“Understood!” responded Ge Long. He gleefully skipped toward the valley.

“Don’t eat too much?” The Qing brothers shared a confused look.

“Ha! I thought there was something haunting this place, but it turns out it’s a delicious snack. Take my Flying Head Technique!” Ge Long suddenly yelled from his position in the southeast. Under everyone’s horrified looks, he took off his own head and flung it with great force.

“Is he—is he a man or a ghost??” Li Youcai blurted out in shock, rubbing his eyes hard.

Lu Yun clapped his hand to his forehead. The old servant always lost control, like a horse ripping free of its reins, whenever he saw something made of negative or yin energy.

“A ghost...” Qing Han muttered woodenly.

“Actually, that’s not his head,” Lu Yun said seriously. “That’s his treasure, it just looks like a human head. ...hmm? What are you doing, Mo Yi? What are you grabbing my head for?”

He plucked Mo Yi’s delicate hand off his head and brushed his tousled hair. She’d gripped Lu Yun’s hair and pulled upward, checking whether his head was detachable as well.

“Good.” Mo Yi let go with a sigh of relief. “You’re normal.”

“Of course I am,” Lu Yun grunted, annoyed.

Hum.

A strong vibration came from some distance away, followed by Ge Long’s delighted cheers. “Hahaha! Milord, this old servant has finally ascended to the core realm! Oh? An even tastier meal’s coming! Yum-yum don’t go, here I come!”

Another raucous cheer marked his chase. The fellow had completely forgotten about Lu Yun’s order.

The governor cleared his throat. “Well, this old servant of mine has been practicing the Flying Head Technique. He’s able to use his own head as a treasure and devour creatures of yin energy. There are all kinds of techniques in the vast world of immortals.”

He turned to Qing Hongchen with great ‘sincerity’. “Surely you’ve heard of this method, fifth young master?”

“Hm?” After a pause, Qing Hongchen blinked and laughed knowingly. “Of course, of course. I’ve read about such a method in historical texts. There was indeed a Flying Head Technique in the ancient immortal world.” He flushed red and quieted down, unable to weave any more lies.

Qing Han snorted derisively.

“Alright, whatever was in the formation has been scared away by my servant. Now we can make our way to the valley. Remember, you mustn’t speak, stop walking, or open your eyes.” Without giving the others any time to think, Lu Yun set off. “Let’s go.”

Chapter 27: Bronze Outer-Coffin

The others shared a look. Despite their reluctance, they had no choice but to follow when Lu Yun was so self-assured.

“Do you still plan to make Lu Yun one of your own?” Glancing at his brother, Qing Han transmitted silently with a sneer and a sniff.

Qing Hongchen’s gaze flickered rapidly. “A talented man is a man I can use!”

“Ha, but can you keep him under control?” With a huff, Qing Han closed his eyes and trailed after Lu Yun.

Whoosh. Whoosh.

Chilling wind swept past their ears when they set foot into the formation, like something whispering in their ears. Shudders ran down their spines. Only then did they understand what had happened to that city lord before his death.

“Master!” someone yelled, followed quickly by the sound of a head falling to the ground.

“What? Is Qing Hongchen dead?” Qing Han tensed. He wanted to open his eyes, but Lu Yun’s words came to his mind and gave him pause. He barely suppressed his curiosity and kept walking forward with his eyes closed.

“No! Don’t kill me!” Another yell, and another thud of a head hitting the ground.

“Li Youcai is dead?” Mo Yi shook slightly, but her expression remained calm and unaffected.

Finally, the group reached their destination and everyone opened their eyes.

“Lu Yun?” said the Skyriver City Lord in disbelief when he saw Lu Yun, alive and well. “Aren’t you dead?”

“You’re alive, Qing Han!” Qing Hongchen was surprised to see his brother, too.

“I thought you were dead too,” Qing Han responded coolly.

Mo Yi remained silent. Seeing Li Youcai made her realize what was going on.

“The Cloudlake City Lord is gone,” someone counted.

“He’s the only one who actually died,” Qing Hongchen pronounced in a cool voice. “He most likely opened his eyes when he heard someone die, which made him the one casualty.”

Lu Yun pursed his lips without a word. Ge Long had scared away the strongest beings in the formation, leaving only a few weaklings, yet someone had still died at their hands.

Formation Thirteenth looked back thoughtfully in the direction they came from. “This is indeed the eye of the formation,” he said, pointing at a light violet shoot of grass. “If we go down there, we’ll be able to enter the place guarded by the formation without triggering the defenses.”

Lu Yun nodded. That shoot of grass disrupted the layout, leaving a weak point in the Duality of Dragon and Tiger.

“Dig here, and we’ll be able to enter the great mound.” Lu Yun’s breath quickened. A great burial mound! Buried beneath it was someone with unimaginable power! Their unresolved grievances were strong enough that they’d turned a mere burial mound into an enormous mountain! His blood boiled with excitement just thinking about raiding a tomb like this.

“Dig?” the Skyriver city lord scoffed. “You’re trash who couldn’t cultivate before, alright. We cultivators have mastered the techniques of the five elements. An earth-bending combat art will get us underground without digging.”

Lu Yun shrugged and gestured at him to go on.

“You can’t do that.” Formation Thirteenth shook his head. “There are always strange formations in ancient tombs that can negate a cultivator’s consciousness, or even their combat arts. Digging a path down is the safest way to go.”

The city lord’s face turned blue, but he wasn’t going to argue with the formation master.

“Stop after digging a hundred and thirty-five yards, seven feet, and three inches,” Lu Yun commanded in a low voice. “No more, no less!”

“Move it!” ordered Qing Hongchen.

Li Youcai wasn’t going to get his hands dirty. He sat down on the ground and took out a piece of grilled meat, leisurely enjoying his snack. That left the four remaining city lords and Qing Han as the group’s laborers.

Sword energy slashed through the air and cut into the soil, creating a small tunnel that led directly underneath the ground.

“A hundred and thirty-five yards, seven feet, and three inches. Done!” After twenty-odd breaths of time, the Skyriver city lord’s voice echoed from underground. “There’s nothing here.”

“That’s because you’re a fool.” Lu Yun sniffed and turned to Mo Yi. “Stay here. If anything happens underground, come help us.”

“Alright.” She nodded.

Qing Hongchen’s face darkened. “She’s not coming with us?”

“If she does, we’re all dead.” Lu Yun shook his head slightly. “There are great dangers underground, so we need someone outside to coordinate with us.”

“I—I’ll stay with her!” Li Youcai volunteered himself.

“No, we only need Mo Yi,” Lu Yun responded as he entered the tunnel, a cold smile tugging his lips. “I’ll take care of all of you in the tomb!”

“Come on,” Qing Han sighed, then entered the tunnel in a flash.

“You—” Li Youcai stammered to Mo Yi before following them, “you must watch this tunnel well. Don’t let anyone destroy it!”

She couldn’t be bothered to respond.

“Oh, heavens above!” An excited exclamation travelled from the end of the tunnel. “There are so many immortal weapons and treasures here. What’s that? An immortal pill!”

“There really are treasures here!” Li Youcai was already fantasizing about his potential loot. He picked up speed as he rushed down the tunnel.

“A teleportation formation.” Yuying’s experience greatly enriched Lu Yun’s knowledge, so he now knew there was such a thing in the world of immortals.

This burial mound is much more powerful than the ancient tomb Yuying was buried in, but its tomb odor has aired out. That means the coffin inside has definitely been tampered with, and the general layout of the mound has changed.

Yuying’s tomb had been broken into by those from the Exalted Immortal Sect, but they’d failed to pry open her coffin so the odor of her tomb remained. This burial mound was another story. It was clear that someone had opened the coffin five thousand years ago, or even earlier.

What Lu Yun was after, though, was the Formation Orb that Mo Yi had told him about. Since the formations outside the mountain were still standing, the Formation Orb must still be here. He didn’t care if the coffin had been tampered with.

Those at the end of the tunnel had disappeared.

“This is the Sevenfold Layout, the seven parts of which form a teleportation formation.” The intricate layout was buried underground. If Lu Yun hadn’t been paying close attention to the landscape outside, he wouldn’t have noticed it.

His precise calculations placed the tunnel straight at the Sevenfold Layout. Prior to stepping into the formation, he memorized the arrangement of the feng shui.

A swirl of flashing images later, an extravagant palace appeared in front of him. A plethora of items and treasures were scattered all over the place. There were also the utmost treasures of immortal dao that Yuying remembered, but could never get her hands on.

Lying at the center of the main hall was an enormous bronze outer-coffin.

“A bronze outer-coffin!” Lu Yun felt his skin crawl. There were two things tomb raiders never wanted to encounter: A netherwood coffin, and a bronze outer-coffin!

Chapter 28: A Real Illusion

“So much treasure!” Qing Hongchen and Qing Han’s faces were slightly flushed. Strangely enough, however, a bizarre atmosphere was giving everyone pause, despite the great number of treasures present.

Lu Yun stared unblinkingly at the cottage-sized bronze outer-coffin in the middle of the main hall. Unknown evils laid within any such coffins. As a tomb raider, he would rather face a thousand-year-old zombie than deal with a bronze outer-coffin.

Back on Earth, the sect of tomb raiders that Lu Yun belonged to was prestigious in its field. Flourishing and prosperous, there was once a legion of them all over the world.

However, they'd once encountered a bronze outer-coffin during an excavation, which marked the thriving sect's fall from grace. Their numbers dwindled, until finally, there was only Lu Yun. With his reincarnation into the world of immortals, there was no one left of his sect on Earth.

But this is the world of immortals, and I'm a cultivator now. That coffin isn't going to stop me! He trembled with great excitement. He would see with his own two eyes just what kind of evils lay within the bronze outer-coffins that'd doomed his sect!

"Nineheavens Ganoderma!" the Skriver city lord suddenly shouted. "A legendary supplement surpassing even ninth-rank ingredients! Consuming it will immediately make one an immortal!" He roared and rushed to one of the corners to fight for the ganoderma.

"Bastard, get back here!" Li Youcai cried out in panic. "There's a formation over there!"

Crack!

Out of nowhere, black lightning struck the city lord. He screamed as his body was fried into a lump of charcoal.

Crack crack crack!

He'd triggered a mechanism, and bolts of lightning showered down, striking everyone in the room.

"Master Thirteenth!" Qing Hongchen shouted, his expression panicked.

Eyelids twitching, Formation Thirteenth stooped down and put a hand on the ground.

Bzzt.

Lines of formation etchings appeared on the tiles of the main hall. A powerful defensive formation abruptly materialized, shielding everyone within. However, there seemed to be no end to the lightning, which ruthlessly struck the formation again and again.

"What a formidable thunderstorm. This is the tribulation cultivators undergo when they ascend to immortality!" Blood trickled down from the corner of Formation Thirteenth's mouth, his eyes shining with disbelief. "What is this formation?! It's summoned an immortal's tribulation!"

"Get the hell out!" He sent a pulse of power through the formation, pushing everyone but him and Qing Hongchen out of it. The main hall was flooded by an electric sea, tearing everyone outside the formation to pieces.

"It's all an illusion." Lu Yun lifted his hand and watched as a strand of lightning thicker than his arm struck him. It hurt. Every cell in his charred body was screaming, and he could smell burned flesh.

"The pain is so real," he murmured. "If not for the lightning, I wouldn't have seen through the illusion." His body healing at an unnatural speed, he put his hands behind his back and leisurely strolled further into the main hall.

"Cultivators and immortals crave treasure, so there's an endless supply of that here. They fear heavenly tribulations the most, so that happened too. And right, the bronze outer-coffin is one of my biggest fears. Something sensed my fear and created it. I've already died once, though, so why should I be afraid

of a mere coffin?" Lu Yun chuckled, then disappeared from the main hall. A faint white figure flickered and followed suit shortly afterward.

Master Thirteenth's formation had been broken. With a final cry, he and Qing Hongchen collapsed to the floor, unconscious.

Is this the underground palace of the burial mound, or is it Truewater City? Lu Yun scanned his surroundings as he walked, his eyebrows furrowed. Strange. Why is there light underground?

As soon as he said that, his vision went dark. Something is following me to confuse my senses. This is an enhanced version of Ghost Hits Walls!

He stopped in his tracks and closed his eyes, silent and unmoving. A soybean manifested in his hand, which he lightly threw into the air. A faint vibration manifested a seven-meter tall giant in golden armor before Lu Yun. Bean Soldiers!

"Bloody hell, is there anyone as evil as you?!" The giant barely made a sound before he died, then disappeared.

Chilled to the bones, Lu Yun stood rooted to the spot. There was a bottomless pit in front of him, one that had devoured and decimated the bean soldier as soon as he fell in. The soldier's spirit had now returned to the other world.

Thank heavens. I knew I was in an illusion, but I couldn't see through it. If I'd taken one more step, I would've fallen to my death. Lu Yun's back was drenched in cold sweat. Knowing he was surrounded by illusions didn't mean he could pierce through them and see the environment as it truly was.

There was a faint, whispering sigh, and the world around him changed. Rays of strange red light cut through the darkness, signaling the return of his vision.

Palm-sized bugs clung to the stone walls around him, their red glow illuminating the room. The bugs remained unmoving, seemingly asleep, but Lu Yun felt his hair rise of its own accord.

Corpse flies!

A whole colony of glowing corpse flies! They were several times bigger than the flies in Mount Carmine Dusk, each of them as large as his palm.

It looks like something's following me. It created the illusions to lure me here so that the darkness would devour me. The fact that it didn't just kill me tells me it can't.

A large door slowly opened next to Lu Yun in the next moment.

"Infernum Lu Tian greets the master!" Holding a large sickle, a man dressed in a black robe appeared beside Lu Yun. He was one of the four immortals Lu Yun had killed with the Enneawyrn Provenance Formation. They had been Lu Yuanhou's followers that had been bestowed the surname Lu, and were named Tian, Di, Xuan, and Huang, respectively.

"Get up," Lu Yun ordered. "Take off your uniform and follow me."

"Understood!" Lu Tian hurriedly took off his robe.

There were many dangers within the great burial mound, and Lu Yun would be safer with Lu Tian protecting him.

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“What’s going on?” After an indiscernible period of time, Formation Thirteenth and Qing Hongchen finally came to.

The surroundings were illuminated by luminous pearls. There were no extravagant palaces or exotic treasures. They were in an enormous stone chamber, surrounded by piles of skeletons. Who knew how many had died in this place?

“Was it all an illusion?” Formation Thirteenth felt his skin crawl. He hadn’t realized it at all! “Where are the others?”

Other than skeletons, the only ones left in the chamber were Formation Thirteenth, Qing Hongchen, and the Skyriver city lord. The latter was lying prone on the floor, seemingly dead. Scowling, Qing Hongchen stepped on the city lord. “Are you dead or not?”

“Fifth young master! I’m still alive?” The city lord jerked awake and looked at Qing Hongchen. “Ah, my Nineheavens Ganoderma!” He lifted his hand and saw himself clutching a skull that was looking back at him with a mocking grin. With a shriek, he threw the skull away. “What’s going on here?!” the city lord’s voice trembled.

“It’s fake. It’s all fake,” Formation Thirteenth sighed. “Lu Yun was able to see through the illusion. He’s better than me.”

“Lu Yun has joined my banner, which makes him one of mine. How dare he abandon me?” A cold, vicious smile tugged at Qing Hongchen’s lips. “If he can see through the illusions here, I’ll make him be my guide!”

Chapter 29: Ninefilia Specter Fostering

Sunlight had never touched the depths of this burial mound. Tunnels formed by unknown forces were illuminated by the crimson glow of countless corpse flies, painting an eerie and macabre scene.

“The flies are all second-rank inferior monsters, which makes them as powerful as a core realm cultivator.” Lu Tian stared incredulously at the slumbering flies. “What are these flies? This subordinate has never seen such monsters before.”

“Corpse flies, only born of zombies that are over a thousand years old.” Lu Yun’s face clouded over. The corpse flies he’d encountered in Yuying’s tomb had only been as big as his thumb. Those had burrowed their way out of a thousand-year-old zombie.

These flies were much more powerful. They must’ve come from something terrifying, something much worse than an ancient zombie.

“Wait!” Alarm shifted Lu Tian’s expression. “There’s a consciousness brand on you, master!”

“What?” Lu Yun tensed. Thanks to Yuying’s experience, he knew that a consciousness brand was a locating art that allowed the user to track its prey. “Qing Hongchen!” he realized without missing a beat.

It must be the Qing scion. As a qi condensation cultivator, it was impossible for Lu Yun himself to notice the brand.

“This subordinate will destroy it now, master.” Lu Tian was a true immortal. Destroying a brand planted by a spirit realm cultivator would be as easy as lifting a finger.

“No need.” Lu Yun shook his head. “Move it to a stone for me.”

Lu Tian didn’t know what Lu Yun was planning, but he wasn’t going to disobey his master. He attached the brand to the tail of his master’s shirt, then cut off the offending piece of fabric and stuck it to a stone.

With a conniving smirk, Lu Yun threw the stone into the bottomless pit in front of him.

“Let’s go!” he cackled, speeding off with Lu Tian.

“Cunning, what a cunning man,” muttered a faint, disembodied voice in the air. “If I was as cunning as he is, I wouldn’t be here today... eh? But, who am I?”

The terrain underneath the burial mound was a complicated maze. The mound had patently merged with Truewater City.

“Fortunately I have some knowledge under my belt, or I’d get lost in the maze.” Lu Yun clucked his tongue. The feng shui layout here was extremely complicated and every part was interconnected. Even an immortal like Lu Tian was feeling out of his depth.

Nevertheless, Lu Yun was able to calculate the right path and continuously made his way toward the center of the mound.

“Things would be much easier if I had my compass.” All tomb raiders treasured their feng shui compass, also known as a luopan. His, however, had been left behind on Earth when he was reincarnated. “Hm? What’s that?” Lu Yun abruptly stopped in his tracks.

A humanoid figure was wobbling its way to him.

“A zombie!” Lu Yun’s eyes were wide with shock. “A zombie in a burial mound?!”

That didn’t make sense.

It was common knowledge that zombies were found in tombs, while burial mounds saw mostly ghosts. His chance of encountering a ghost should be much higher than encountering a zombie, yet here the zombie was, the first thing he’d encountered.

It stumbled and swayed as it walked, its body tattered and rotten. The marks of decay everywhere indicated that it wasn’t a particularly powerful zombie.

“Hmph!” With a scoff, Lu Tian decapitated the zombie with a flash of sword energy from his hand. The zombie stumbled a few more steps forward, then collapsed to the ground.

“What a thick layer of yin energy!” Lu Tian took in a deep breath, then shouted in panic, “It hurts, master. Help me!”

Gurgle.

The underworld soldier's transformation was a sudden one. Rotten patches spread throughout his body. In no time, he'd turned into a bag of poorly pieced together body parts, just like the zombie!

"Help, master!" A grating voice ground out from his rotten mouth. His cheeks had decomposed, and his eyes fell out of his sockets. "Master, help me!" Lu Tian reached out for Lu Yun.

"What the hell!" Lu Yun hurriedly dodged to the side.

"Help, master. It hurts." Lu Tian stumbled after the governor.

"He's dead!" Lu Yun's stomach lurched.

Lu Tian was one of Lu Yun's Infernum, but his name wasn't in the Tome of Life and Death. Death, for the Infernum, was permanent with no hope of resurrection.

"He's dead, and his soul has scattered. His body's turned into the zombie from earlier." Lu Yun tamped down his terror and ran.

"Ha, hahaha! Are you abandoning this subordinate, master?" Lu Tian chased after Lu Yun with an eerie smile.

"Take him!" Lu Yun threw a soybean behind him. A flash of gold heralded the emergence of a majestic warrior in golden armor.

"Watch yourself, ghoul! This god will send you to where you should be!" The warrior growled and took a step forward and twisted the zombie's head off with his bare hands.

"Hahahaha! Such a weak ghoul—too weak to warrant my attention!" Highly pleased with himself, he threw his head back with laughter even as his body rotted away at a tremendous speed to become a giant zombie.

"Too... weak... to warrant... my... attention." He turned to look upon Lu Yun with rotten, unblinking eyes.

"Disperse!" commanded Lu Yun as he ended his combat art. The giant zombie morphed back into a decomposed soybean and fell to the ground.

The Dusk governor panted heavily, his back drenched with cold sweat.

"The zombie wasn't particularly powerful," he muttered. "Even I could easily break its neck."

Any bean soldier that Lu Yun summoned was only as powerful as he was. If the warrior could easily wring the zombie's neck, he could too.

"If I did it myself though, I would also turn into a zombie. What the hell was that?" He searched through his memory and came up with nothing. "It must be a delicacy of the world of immortals."

He was probably the only one who could so nonchalantly consider a zombie a local delicacy.

"Hahaha! Treasure! So much of it! I'm rich, I'm rich!" Loud, penetrating laughter reached Lu Yun's ear. Li Youcai!

“That fool is here, too?” With a tight expression, he carefully made his way to the source of the laughter.

A stone chamber.

A black coffin, haphazardly surrounded by eight smaller coffins, was in the center of the chamber. Li Youcai’s large body sat on the floor, laughing maniacally while holding a skull in both hands.

“Ninefilia Specter Fostering,” Lu Yun muttered as he stared past Li Youcai’s shoulders.

There was a faint white figure perched on Li Youcai’s back, its slender arms covering his eyes. Noticing Lu Yun’s approach, the figure turned and stared unblinkingly at him.

Chapter 30: The Ninefilia Specter

Ninefilia Specter Fostering!

Legends spoke of special ghosts created when nine maidens, born on a yin hour of a yin day in a yin month during a yin year, were buried alive together in a mother-coffin and eight child-coffins. They weren’t ghosts, in the usual sense, but extraordinarily evil specters that killed without discrimination.

Lu Yun had only read about this technique in the annals of his sect, but had never seen this utterly repulsive ghost breeding method in practice.

“So ghosts really do exist?!” He reflexively cried out in astonishment when the white figure behind Li Youcai looked at him.

Holding a pile of skulls and giggling mindlessly, the fatty abruptly jerked to seriousness. “Who goes there? What is it!” On high alert, he stood up and scanned all around him.

Two hands stretched out from the white shadow and covered his ears.

“Oh, it’s just a large rat. Strange, why’s there a rat in here?” grumbled Li Youcai. His bulky frame plopped back down, grabbed another skull in a tight hug, and resumed his silly laughter.

“Well, we’re in a world full of gods and immortals, so what’s so strange about a ghost?” Lu Yun murmured placatingly as he observed the white shadow.

A female voice drifting from place to place reached his ears. “Who are you?” A face, very pretty but bloodlessly pale, poked out from behind his head.

“You dare come so close to me, hmm?” Lu Yun smiled coldly. The black fire inside his dantian gently jumped.

“Ahhh—” A miserable scream echoed in the air. He turned around to see a girl of around seventeen years old crouching on the ground, trembling. Her figure was dainty, and though her features were charming, her face was fully devoid of blood. Her body was also semi-transparent.

A ghost!

It was Lu Yun’s first time seeing one, but there was no doubt as to this girl’s nature.

“I have no power over existences like zombies that exist outside of the three realms and five elements... but how dare a mere ghost like you approach me?” Black flames ignited within his eyes. These tongues of fire were the bane of every ghost in the world.

“Mercy, mercy!” The young girl knelt on the ground and kowtowed repeatedly.

Strangely enough, Lu Yun could still see the white shadow behind Li Youcai. Her face was also ashen with fright.

Ninefilia Specter... Nine girls of extreme yin refined into a single entity! It’s a single body with nine souls! Lu Yun took a deep breath. “Who created you?”

The girl looked up blankly and shook her head.

“You don’t know anything?” Lu Yun frowned slightly.

“I’ve been here ever since I became aware of the world,” the girl answered pitifully.

“Have you met the others?” Lu Yun continued to probe.

The girl nodded.

“Where are they?” But he laughed wryly as soon as he asked. “No need to answer, I think I know where they’ve gone.”

It was obvious from the mess of skulls and bones scattered on the ground that she’d killed them all. If not for his arrival, the fat Li Youcai would likely have soon perished as well, his yang energy absorbed by the girl.

The girl pouted and sulked, “I’m so cold. I can only warm myself by absorbing the yang energy from the living.”

“You might as well come with me,” Lu Yun offered, his eyes shining bright.

“Mercy please, my lord!” The ghost prostrated herself again. “I’ll die the moment I set foot outside this place.”

“Do you still feel cold now that you’re around me?” Lu Yun smiled.

The girl blinked in surprise, then shook her head. Ever since his arrival, the soul-penetrating chill that had always seemed to surround her had vanished without a trace.

Lu Yun waved his hand.

Rumble! Whoosh!

A haunting wind arose as the phantasmal Gates of the Abyss opened.

The girl froze on the spot. A look of intense, urgent longing floated onto her face. The underworld behind the gates was the final destination for every departed soul. Only there could they be finally reincarnated.

Hum— A formless power sucked the nine coffins within the stone chamber inside the gates.

These coffins were the foundation of the girl's existence. If they were destroyed, she would perish along with them, so the safest place to stow them was within the gates.

"Stay by my side from now on," declared Lu Yun. "What is your name?"

"My lord, my name is Yueshen." The girl leapt up from the ground, excitement plain on her pale face.

"Yueshen... Can you control that fatty?" Lu Yun asked.

"Yes!" Yueshen nodded, but then shook her head. "I can make him see what I want him to see, but I can't control his will."

"That's enough." Lu Yun grinned mischievously. "Make him follow me."

"Wow! So much treasure! Gods above, I'm rich! So rich!" With a shriek, the fatty stood up and followed Lu Yun, his face feverish with excitement as he rubbed his hands together.

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"Huh. The kid carried off the 'immortal ghost' nurtured in this place," a voice whispered softly in the air after Lu Yun and Yueshen's departure. "It looks like he opened a pair of gates just a moment ago. I wonder where they lead."

Humans become ghosts when they die, and immortals become immortal ghosts when they die. The ghost of an ordinary mortal would never dare approach an immortal one.

Only an immortal ghost could delude a living immortal and absorb his vitality. This particular Ninefilia Specter Fostering art hadn't used ordinary mortals, but nine female immortals of extreme yin instead.

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"My lord, 'It' was here just now." Yueshen's dainty figure floated beside Lu Yun.

"Who?" the latter asked in surprise.

"I don't know who 'It' is, nor can I see 'It,' but I can feel 'Its' presence. 'It' came with you just now."

Horrified goosebumps popped up on Lu Yun's skin in response to her words. Something had followed him inside this enormous burial mound, yet he hadn't sensed it at all?

"Is that thing still here?" he asked after taking a deep breath.

"Not anymore. It's gone," answered Yueshen.

Lu Yun sighed in relief. "Do you know what it is?" His eyes narrowed.

Yueshen shook her head.

"Fine, then do you know where I can find a treasure called the Formation Orb?"

That item was the entire purpose of his trip. As the local boss, Yueshen should be aware of its location. But again, she merely stared blankly at him.

“In that case, take me to the heart of this place.” He changed tactics instead after seeing her reaction. If there were indeed treasures inside a great tomb like this, they were most likely grave goods. Such items were usually found at the center of the tomb.

“Okay... But that place is very dangerous. That thing following you earlier probably comes from there, my lord,” Yueshen said after a moment’s hesitation.

“Oh?” Lu Yun’s heart beat fiercely. “All the better. Let’s find out what was following me.”

Danger? Was tomb raiding ever devoid of danger?

Li Youcai’s figure mindlessly followed behind Lu Yun, saliva drooling from his mouth and one of Yueshen’s specters on his back.

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“Why do the tunnels here feel vaguely familiar?” Lu Yun’s brows furrowed a few minutes later. Despite the nagging feeling of familiarity, he was dead certain he’d never set foot inside this tomb before.

“Strange, what’s going on here?”

The number of corpse flies on the walls decreased with every step, and the ambient light was dimming by the second when the sparkling, undulating waters of a great lake came into view.

“Lu Yun—” A voice brimming with rage reached his ears before he could fully take in the sight. Qing Han’s livid face appeared out of nowhere. “Li Youcai, you’re here as well? Wonderful, isn’t this just fabulous!”