

Necropolis 211

Chapter 211: A Clan's Ruination

Fortunately, Qing Han hadn't been seriously hurt by the newly restless poison and Empress Myrtlestar managed to cleanse it in time. Wu Tulong was quick to arrive after receiving the message, followed by Mo Qitian, Dongfang Hao, and Zi Chen. They gathered around with Lu Yun, Qing Han, and Lu Shenhou.

Lu Shenhou's findings stunned all of them.

"The path of cultivation was severed before the ancient times?" Wu Tulong asked, his sharply slanted eyebrows deeply furrowed.

"That's right." Lu Shenhou nodded. "From the clues I found in the tomb, there were four cultivator realms instead of three, back when the owner of the tomb was alive. There should be another after the spirit realm!"

"The answer lies in the tomb, awaiting our discovery," Mo Qitian said with confidence. "If there's another realm, the seven of us should be able to figure it out."

Seven. He'd included Qing Han as well.

Someone at his level could easily sense the real strength of other cultivators. To his shock, both Lu Shenhou and Qing Han possessed the power to rival the youth sovereigns.

Strange. Qing Han was a decent enough cultivator when we last met, but he wasn't at our level.

The development took the other three youth sovereigns by surprise as well.

They weren't from Nephrite Major, but they were all familiar with Qing Han. After all, this was the bearer of the infamous accursed spirit root! More importantly, they'd heard about the arranged marriage between the Qing Clan and House Donglin. Prior to Qing Han's birth, all signs showed that the child would be a girl. That the world welcomed a boy instead had taken everyone greatly aback.

Frankly, with Empress Myrtlestar as his personal teacher, it was no surprise that Qing Han could quickly reach their level.

"When do we enter the tomb?" Dongfang Hao asked calmly, his gaze sweeping over the other six men. Eagerness to battle flashed through his eyes when he looked at Lu Yun.

Back in Dusk Province, he'd fought Lu Yun for three days and nights before just barely losing out to the young governor. He'd been studiously cultivating since then, hoping to one day defeat Lu Yun.

"There's going to be a treasure auction at the Panorama Pavilion in three days," said Lu Yun. "I need an utmost treasure being sold then to refine something."

"The auction in three days... are you after their supreme material, the Ten Orientations Stone?" Lu Shenhou asked bemusedly.

Being a rare natural material that exceeded ninth-rank immortal grade, the emergence of the Ten Orientations Stone would attract all of the master refiners in Nephrite Major, perhaps even the entire

world. In addition, Nephrite's new celestial emperor was soon to be crowned. All major immortal factions would pay a visit to witness the ceremony.

Thus, it was the perfect time for the Panorama Pavilion, one of the biggest merchant guilds in the world, to hold an auction. With a vast audience gathered in the major, the material would fetch its highest possible price point.

"But Zhao Shengguang will be crowned in a few days," Lu Shenhou said hesitantly. "Are we entering the tomb after his coronation?"

"Who cares about him taking the throne? It's fine even if we don't attend the ceremony." Qing Han shrugged. "Once we buy the Ten Orientations Stone and Lu Yun refines his treasure, we'll be on our way."

Zhao Shengguang was nothing but Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi's sidekick, so Qing Han didn't take him seriously at all. The disguised girl had also figured out why Zhao Shengguang was the new celestial emperor, instead of Zhao Changkong. The former crown prince had plotted with the Qing dao immortal to kill Lu Yun, almost getting Qing Han killed during the process as well. That roused Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi's ire, which meant they'd dragged Zhao Changkong off the throne before he could even be properly seated.

Lu Yun was the only one who showed hesitation. He was the Dusk governor, after all. Not attending the coronation might give people another excuse to attack him. A cultivation realm beyond spirit realm, though... screw it all!

Wu Tulong and the other three youth sovereigns agreed without reservation. They weren't cultivators from Nephrite Major, so the major's new celestial emperor had nothing to do with them.

As for the Ten Orientations Stone, it was the main ingredient of a feng shui luopan!

Lu Yun had known nothing about treasure refinement to begin with. With the addition of Huangqing to his envoy ranks, however, he'd become a foremost expert in the field. After some analysis and deduction, he realized that the luopans of his sect back on Earth had been made of Ten Orientations Stone, which meant the material had also existed on Earth!

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"Do you want to meet Qing Yu?" Qing Han suddenly asked when everyone had left.

"What?" Lu Yun was both stunned and pleasantly surprised.

"I said, do you want to meet Qing Yu?"

"I do!" Lu Yun blurted out. "Where is she? With the Qing Clan?"

Qing Han shook his head. "No, she's in the Chen Clan."

The Chen Clan wasn't a major faction, even with one of their daughters being the Qing patriarch's dao partner. It wasn't until Chen Xiao rose to notoriety through slaughtering tens of thousands of Qing immortals that the clan had risen in status.

Prior to Chen Xiao, the clan hadn't even been fit to reside in one of the seventy-two blessed lands. They were now located in the Precious Arcane Paradise, one of the thirty-six lesser paradises, and it was all due to Chen Xiao's infamous reputation.

"When are we going?" Lu Yun couldn't wait, his eyes bright as polished copper coins.

"We can go now if you want to." Qing Han fidgeted uneasily.

Precious Arcane Paradise wasn't as vast as Lu Clan's Mauve Peace Paradise, and its ambient qi was a touch inferior. However, it was still much more of a world meant for immortals than the world outside the paradise.

Qing Han led Lu Yun into the lesser paradise and excused himself. Lu Yun found a seat in a pavilion, lazily enjoying the beautiful scenery around him.

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"What? You're meeting Lu Yun as your real self?!" Chen Dongyu, patriarch of the clan, shot up from his seat. With a wave of his hand, he set up thirty-two barriers to thoroughly seal off the premises. "Lu Yun's even more reckless and violent than your cousin, Chen Xiao. He's going to turn the world upside down if he knows you're a woman!"

He'd heard of how Lu Yun had attacked Qing Quan for Qing Han, then blockaded the Qing entrance after entering Xiankan. He himself was one of the few who knew Qing Han's secret.

"Those Qing bastards arranged a bullshit marriage to latch onto House Donglin's thigh. If they find out you're a woman, Lu Yun will get dragged into things with you!"

Qing Han's accursed spirit root had been the first of her to manifest at birth, radiating beyond the Qing paradise and into all of Xiankan. However, that wouldn't stop House Donglin. They only cared that the woman had a cosmic constitution.

The house was too great and influential. They didn't fear either the Nephrite Court, or even the Nephrite celestial emperor. If they found out that Qing Han was a girl, they'd bring the entire major to heel.

As for Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi... if the two of them had the power to defeat House Donglin, they wouldn't have disguised Qing Han with a starstone.

"I..." Qing Han bit his lip and sighed. "I'm just going to meet him. I won't tell Lu Yun my secret."

Chen Dongyu sighed with resignation at his granddaughter's beseeching gaze. "Fine, fine, but you mustn't tell him the truth. Your cousin and Buyi can keep the Qing Clan under control, but House Donglin is too much to handle.

"I'll channel the power of the paradise to isolate the area, but remember, it'll last for only forty-five minutes! After a stick of incense finishes burning, you must return to your male self, no matter what!"

"I understand." Qing Han nodded. This was Xiankan. Even the paradises weren't a hundred percent secure. If a dao immortal's consciousness scanned the area, his secret would be revealed.

That was why Qing Yu had to ask her grandfather for help if she wanted to meet Lu Yun. She needed the paradise to be shielded so tightly from outside detection that not even an immortal emperor would be able to pierce the barrier.

Qing Han also sealed the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals with a final thought, obstructing Empress Myrtlestar's senses.

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"Strange. Why is there the power of a vicious star in this paradise?" Lu Yun frowned and deployed the cosmic feng shui method, only to be stunned by the results.

"Greedy Wolf leaps through the sky while White Tiger approaches from the east. The Army charges, and Seven Kills brings about destruction. Here gathers the four vicious stars of lore. This clan is going to fall!" Lu Yun stared in disbelief. "But the feng shui layout here is prosperous. Why would the clan be destroyed?"

Before he could further explore that train of thought, his gaze fell on a girl dressed in a light yellow dress, approaching him from the distance.

Serene and otherworldly, she was the focus of heaven and earth and the favored of all creation, no matter where she went. It seemed that she was born to be the most valued treasure in all of the world.

Qing Yu.

"Something's wrong!" Lu Yun's expression tightened. The power of the vicious stars had surged the moment the girl appeared. "Qing Yu? She's the reason for the Chen Clan's impending doom?"

"Impending doom? What do you mean?" Qing Yu's expression darkened. She knew what Lu Yun was capable of; if he said the clan was in danger, then it must be.

Wait, didn't Lu Yun say the clan would fall because of her?

Can it be... Her face paled.

"Feng Wuming, patriarch of the Feng Clan has come to visit. Please open the paradise, Patriarch Chen!"

"Here it comes," muttered Lu Yun.

Chapter 212: Art of Words

The Feng patriarch wasn't alone on his quite unexpected visit. He was accompanied by a dao immortal from House Donglin! Unfortunately, his companion would surely discover Qing Yu and her cosmic constitution once he entered Precious Arcane Paradise.

Based on House Donglin's tyrannical style, they would not only take her away, but also level the Chen Clan. Though the Chens resided within one of the thirty-six lesser paradises, there were no dao immortals holding down the fort. One dao immortal could single-handedly destroy the entire clan.

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“Feng Wuming? What’s he doing here?” Chen Dongyu frowned. He’d naturally noted the Donglin dao immortal beside Feng Wuming. “Please return another day, Patriarch Feng. This old man has reached a crucial point in my cultivation. Forgive me, I am not able to see any visitors.”

“That’s fine if you don’t want visitors,” interjected the dao immortal. “Just open the paradise and let us in.” Black lightning flashed across the paradise as he spoke, and an almost unnoticeable tremor passed through it.

“Each paradise is one of Xiankan’s great treasures, and this one will be rewarded to someone who’s contributed to our great undertaking. This seat doesn’t want to destroy it, so let us in now!” the dao immortal enunciated with great pride, flicking off invisible dust from his cyan attire as he spoke. House Donglin had never kept their ambitions a secret. They wanted to conquer the world of immortals!

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“The power of the four vicious stars has grown thicker. It’ll peak in about a hundred breaths, bringing about the destruction of the clan!” Lu Yun looked up with his brows tightly knitted together. The power of the four vicious stars was almost physically tangible.

Qing Yu tightened her jaw, ready to channel the starstone to disguise herself. Once she hid her true form, the Chen Clan would be safe. She’d already made up her mind to spend the rest of her life with Lu Yun, and she’d use the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals to destroy her cosmic constitution without batting an eye.

“Wait.” Empress Myrtlestar’s voice rang in her head.

Qing Han started. Hadn’t she sealed off the scroll? How was the empress transmitting to her?

“The scroll was drawn by a good friend of mine,” the empress explained. “If I wish to know what is happening in the outside world, sealing it will not stop me.”

That was how Empress Myrtlestar had been able to leave the scroll and treat Qing Han’s poison the last time, despite Lu Yun having told his friend to seal the treasure away.

“Lu Yun can resolve this danger,” said the empress. “If he can see the power of the four vicious stars, he can help the clan navigate the dangers. The power of the stars has already descended, so hiding your true self will not stop the impending doom.”

She could tell that the dread zombie her corpse had mutated into was now a battle puppet with the power of a celestial emperor. If Lu Yun called upon that, it would grant him enough power to save the Chens.

“Feng Wuming and the dao immortal from House Donglin are after me.” Lu Yun looked up and flashed a smile at the girl, not noticing her change in mood. “Wait for me!”

Qing Yu blinked and nodded without a word.

“...Qing Han?” Lu Yun paused and blurted out. That expression and trust in her eyes all looked so very familiar to him.

Qing Yu tensed and wiped her mind clear of emotion.

“Qing Buyi told me that you don’t like me, that you have feelings for Qing Han and have already risked your life for him many times.” She cocked her head. “I’ve saved you more than once, but you’ve fallen for Qing Han instead.”

“Um, I’ll be right back.” Lu Yun fled with an embarrassed expression. The power of the four vicious stars had grown thicker and he couldn’t afford to waste time agonizing over matters of the heart. He’d take care of the threat, then explain everything to Qing Yu.

Eyes curved into two crescents from her wide smile, a resolute trust sparkled deep within Qing Yu’s eyes. She believed that Lu Yun would be able to overcome any threat.

“Strange, the danger to the clan originates from Qing Yu. Why does me leaving the paradise dispel it?” Skepticism of this deduced solution swirled in Lu Yun’s mind. While Feng Wuming and the Donglin dao immortal had come for him, what’d that have to do with the overall danger to the clan and its connection to Qing Yu?

Back in Dusk Province, he’d humiliated House Donglin and indirectly killed their patriarch. Upon reaching Xiankan, he’d promptly slaughtered Donglin Shaochen, the foremost true immortal of their house. House Donglin was certainly itching to take him down after all of that.

The Donglin dao immortal wasn’t going to barge in when he’d been in the Lu paradise, not with Ancestor Lu Daoling there. Now that he was paying a visit to the Chens, it was the perfect opportunity for House Donglin to come baying for blood.

What surprised Lu Yun was that the Feng patriarch led the way. It would seem that the foremost aristocracy of Aureate Major had deeply infiltrated the power structure in Nephrite Major.

Wait... is Qing Yu the one with the cosmic constitution?! A pang struck Lu Yun’s heart. That would explain everything. He’d heard about the arranged marriage, which was further corroborated by Qing Yu staying with the Chen Clan, rather than the Qing Clan. He’d asked around for information on Qing Yu back when he was in the Lu Clan, but no one had even known of her existence.

“No wonder, no wonder.... Heh, House Donglin is a right and proper bully.”

Swoosh!

Light from a talisman flashed across his body the moment he approached the threshold of the paradise entrance, taking him through the doorway.

“Eh? Lu Yun?” Feng Wuming and dao immortal Donglin Zhi perked up when they saw the Dusk governor. He was the reason why they were here, and for him to appear of his own accord as soon as they arrived was a happy development.

“He’s fast!” Feng Wuming’s expression snapped in shock. “Quick, he’s running away!”

“Running? Where to?” Donglin Zhi cracked a smile. “Clever. He knows the Chens can’t save him, so he plans to return to the Lus with the aid of a supreme treasure. However, he really does underestimate the power of dao immortals.

“Return!!” the dao immortal boomed with a simple command.

At this point in time, Lu Yun was already fifty kilometers out, and almost at the fringes of Mauve Peace Paradise. However, a sudden force yanked him back to the Precious Arcane Paradise to face Donglin Zhi and Feng Wuming.

Lu Yun reflexively peeked into the paradise and saw the power of the four vicious stars dissipating, then looked at Donglin Zhi.

“The Art of Words,” he breathed.

“Indeed.” The dao immortal smiled faintly and grabbed for Lu Yun, intent on taking him alive.

Chapter 213: Don't Ascend to Immortality

So this is what inexorable power feels like... It was heaven, it was earth, it was the supreme heavenly dao incarnate. Everything beneath the dao immortal realm was so insignificant it didn't even register!

Lu Yun's mental faculties were frozen like a fly trapped in amber, but the state lasted only an eyeblink.

Bam!

An explosion of great power scattered Donglin Zhi's compulsion. A young man roughly twenty-four years of age emerged from the void with an emerald-color bamboo stick, expression weary and clothes worn, but clean. He walked on empty air, looking ahead with empty, unfocused eyes, like those of a blind man.

“Wayfarer?” Donglin Zhi paused. “After a millennia-long disappearance, Art Saint Wayfarer, communer of colors, reappears as a dao immortal and... blind?”

A thousand years were to a dao immortal as a snap of the fingers were to an ordinary person.

“Communer of colors? Art Saint?” Wayfarer's face remained impassive. “Stay your hand, I do this to save you.”

“Save me?” Donglin Zhi chortled. “Who are you to save me? Why do I need saving? This seat has eighteen thousand years of cultivation and plucked nine dao fruit. I am at peak aether dao realm. Who do you think you are to save me?” he sneered. “Do you think that old man from the Lu Clan would dare make a move against me?”

“This isn't Mauve Peace Paradise, so of course Lu Daoling won't intervene.” Wayfarer nodded slightly and turned to face Lu Yun with an empty gaze. “It's best not to use that thing without good reason.”

Lu Yun paused, knowing that Wayfarer was talking about the dread zombie. Even though Donglin Zhi had trapped the young governor's consciousness, the dao immortal hadn't been able to sever his connection with the puppet. In fact, its power would've automatically descended upon Lu Yun after another eyeblink.

This was his contingency plan.

“There are many things I don't remember,” Wayfarer said quietly. “But I remember the sword and the woman who walks out of the sword. What she offers should be treated with caution.”

Lu Yun nodded without a word.

“Die!” Donglin Zhi had had enough of their blathering. He unleashed his power with bellicose fury and snarled with death-dealing intent. The portentous Word he voiced seemed able to wilt all life and destroy everything in the world.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Wayfarer tapped the air thrice with his bamboo stick, scattering the Word. Donglin Zhi blanched and stumbled back.

“Impossible!” Wide-eyed with disbelief, he couldn’t comprehend what he’d just seen. The Art of Words was a grand combat art infinitely close to the heavenly dao! Anyone with a cultivation inferior to his would be compelled to do as he spoke.

Yet Wayfarer, seemingly a mere initial aether dao immortal, had countered his Word without any difficulty.

“Run along now,” Wayfarer brushed off faintly.

The air stretched taut with tension, then... the Donglin dao immortal did as he was told, not simply retreating, but running and skipping away from the scene!

The Art of Words!

Wayfarer knew this supreme technique as well! Seeing the downfall of his companion, Feng Wuming meekly took his leave. Donglin Zhi hadn’t taken Wayfarer seriously, but the Feng patriarch knew very well that the man had induced even the Qing ancestor to retreat with a few words just days ago.

“Thank you again, senior.” Lu Yun cupped his hands at Wayfarer.

Wayfarer shook his head. “I’m not helping you, but Donglin Zhi.”

He turned to leave, but Lu Yun hurriedly stopped him. “Wait, senior!”

Sensing Lu Yun’s question, Wayfarer responded, “Wanfeng has reached a critical juncture in her cultivation. She will ascend to immortality soon.”

“Then, please tell her to not ascend for the moment!” Lu Yun said earnestly.

“Not ascend?” Wayfarer’s impassive face twitched, attempting a surprised expression, but failing in the end. He nodded in acknowledgement.

Don’t ascend to immortality! Other immortals in the area also heard Lu Yun.

“Judging from their conversation, Wanfeng must be someone who’s intimate with Lu Yun. Wayfarer saved him twice because of her!” Many immortals built upon what they believed to be the truth.

“Why would Lu Yun tell that Wanfeng not to ascend to immortality?”

That was the universally befuddling part. Reaching immortality was the life’s goal and greatest ambition of cultivation. Cultivators were merely children, adolescents. Only after they ascended to immortality were they considered adults.

“Maybe he’s talking in riddles on purpose.”

“The Dusk governor has always been a mysterious one. He even recreated the Great Formation of Heavenly Fiends, the formation that appeared five thousand years ago and killed thirty-six monster spirit kings. Maybe there’s a reason behind his suggestion.”

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Lu Yun returned to Precious Arcane Paradise once everyone left. The power of the vicious stars had dissipated, and the danger that would doom the clan was resolved. He could relax.

“Where’s Qing Yu?” Lu Yun asked, blinking innocently at Qing Han.

“She’s gone back.” Qing Han shrugged and purposefully pivoted, “She seemed a little unhappy, what did you say to her?”

“Nothing!” Lu Yun hurried out. “Nothing at all!”

Qing Han smiled. “Really?”

“Oh, that’s right!” Inspired by a thought, Lu Yun flung out a great deal of formation disks and set up a hundred and eight formations to thoroughly seal off the area. “Qing Yu’s the one with the cosmic constitution in the Qing Clan, isn’t she?”

He asked because he wanted to know, but also to change the subject.

Qing Han paused, a trace of panic flashing through his eyes. That cemented Lu Yun’s suspicions. “No wonder no one in the Lu Clan knows about Qing Yu.”

Qing Han sighed and asked, “What do you plan to do about this, then?”

“I like her!” Lu Yun declared solemnly. “The second I saw her just now, I knew that she’d be my future dao partner, even though I only saw her for that brief while!”

He remembered clearly how his heart had pounded when he’d laid eyes on her, despite the interference and distraction of the vicious stars. Qing Yu felt very familiar to him, like they’d spent a great deal of time together. He also saw her trust for him in her eyes.

Lu Yun shook his head slightly as he spoke. For some reason, the figure of Qing Yu in his memories seemed to be gradually merging with Qing Han before him.

Must be a trick that my mind’s playing.

“What do you plan to do?” Qing Han lowered his head, not daring to meet Lu Yun’s gaze.

“If House Donglin dares make a move on her,” Lu Yun promised with great determination, “I’ll destroy them.”

Qing Han’s head jerked up. “Even if it starts a war between Nephrite and Aureate Major?”

As his grandpa had said, there was nothing Lu Yun wouldn’t do for Qing Yu.

Chapter 214: Three Requests

As the day of the new emperor's coronation grew nearer, foreign cultivators filled Xiankan's streets, and Nephrite's crown jewel bustled with activity.

Six days before the ceremony, Panorama Pavilion's auction officially began. This auction in particular was a nexus of attention, especially from master refiners. The Ten Orientations Stone was to be made available, an immortal-grade material surpassing ninth rank!

The present world wasn't as prosperous as the ancient era, but its resources remained quite abundant, at least in terms of various special and unique natural materials. However, something as precious as the stone was an extreme rarity.

It was no ordinary supreme material. Rumor had it that a real world was hidden inside, one that could be used to make particularly extraordinary treasures. The pavilion had paid the hefty price of four dao immortals in the process of obtaining it.

So why was it selling it, then? That remained unknown.

As one of the largest mercantile guilds in the world of immortals, the Panorama Pavilion owned a blessed land in Xiankan's inner city—one that had promptly been renamed upon their occupation of it.

Sublime mist wreathed around the buildings in the small world, and crane songs wafted through the air. On this highly anticipated day, Panorama Blessed Land opened its gates with great fanfare. A collective jolt of excitement ran through the immortals assembled out in front.

"What?! I need to pay ten thousand premium crystals just to get in?!" Dissatisfaction rang out strongly when the rules were announced.

True immortals usually consumed inferior crystals for cultivation. A premium crystal was worth a hundred inferior ones, making ten thousand of them an astronomically large sum for most.

"Today, we auction off three treasures that cannot be priced with immortal crystals. Ten thousand premium crystals serve only as an entry fee to keep out the rabble."

"What do you take the Panorama Pavilion to be? A tavern house for peasants and rubes?" A rather arrogant youth casually tossed a storage ring to the guards, then entered with ease, along with his followers.

His words easily shut up the crowd. They'd wanted to see a top-notch auction in person, but the entrance threshold effectively barred them from doing so.

Lu Yun, Qing Han, Lu Shenhou, and the other sovereign youths strode in together in a small group, led by a few immortals from the Lu Clan. After they paid the fee, they were allowed to enter the Panorama Blessed Land.

"Ten thousand premium crystals...." Lu Yun felt the pinch. "That's enough to buy a third of Dusk Province."

"Why do you care about such a paltry sum?" Zi Chen couldn't help chuckling. "If you charged entrance for that inheritance tower outside Dusk Capital, plenty of people would be willing to pay just as much. You'd become the richest man in the world, practically overnight."

Lu Shenhou's eyes lit up, rather inspired by the suggestion. Could he talk the clan ancestor into doing the same with the tower back in the clan paradise? Would a hundred thousand be a good price?

"Forget it. Charging an entrance fee goes against my original intentions," shrugged Lu Yun.

He wanted to make Dusk Province fundamentally his. Its standing should be so secure that even if the restriction disappeared one day, it would still remain safe from the predations of the rest of the world.

Emulating the Skandha Range was a good way to go about it. That place protected countless evil and otherkind cultivators, a sacred land for them in the world's eyes. If not for Aoxue's mastery over that place, Lu Yun would've been cut to shreds as soon as he left Dusk Province.

He'd flung open the doors of the tower to everyone in the world. If even a tenth of those who used the inheritance tower were grateful to him, it would be more than enough. In fact, he still received a small trickle of goodwill from Dusk City's direction, even now.

"Actually," Qing Han smiled, "remember the talismans you used during the reselection tournament? There's a lot of old collectors who love ancient artifacts like those. If you're willing to sell a few of them, you'll easily make a few hundred million immortal crystals off that."

Lu Yun nodded eagerly, noticeably more pleased with this idea. As they spoke, the Panorama Pavilion staff seated them at a floating gazebo. Thousands of these gazebos hung in the blessed land's airspace.

Immortals who qualified to enter the blessed land were generally prominent individuals in their own right, or perhaps the core disciples of various great sects and clans. The mercantile guild was hardly going to neglect them.

Only about ten meters in diameter from the outside, spatial formations inside the gazebos expanded the interiors to a dozen times that. Each one was furnished with a plethora of tasty foods, as well as multiple august immortal singers and dancers.

"Tsk tsk. This is quite the arrangement. I guess the price tag makes sense now." Mo Qitian stroked his bare chin in thoughtful praise. "The Panorama Pavilion does good business. No wonder my clan's Treasure Emporium can't beat them."

"Yes," Wu Tulong nodded with utmost seriousness. "Just from the name itself, 'Treasure Emporium' is a bit too tacky. 'Panorama Pavilion'? Much more sophisticated. It makes perfect sense."

Mo Qitian took a swig from the flagon on the table, speechless at the response.

Qing Han glanced at the dancers and waved a few fingers. "You're all excused."

They bowed and slowly departed, leaving Lu Shenhou to smack his lips in sadness.

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"It's about to start soon!" In a different gazebo, Zhao Changkong squinted with great concentration at the floating platform in the center of the blessed land. "The Ten Orientations Stone will be mine." He balled his hand into a fist. "Sir, you must help me!"

“Don’t worry, I will.” A masked man stood beside him, cloaked in a perpetual state of shadow. His face was completely hidden from the world, but the veiled covering couldn’t blank out his bloody eyes.

“The Panorama Pavilion’s requests are rather unique, but I’m more than capable of handling them,” he remarked coolly. “I’m glad that old thing isn’t interested in the stone. If he was here, this Obscuring Shroud wouldn’t be enough to hide me from his senses.”

The masked man was none other than the communer of colors, Art Saint Wayfarer.

“Very good!” Zhao Changkong spat viciously. “Chen Xiao... Qing Buyi... how could those two bastards convince father to take away my throne?! I have to get the Ten Orientations Stone no matter what. If I can refine that treasure, I’ll have a chance to rise again!”

Wayfarer silently inclined his head.

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Rather than asking for immortal crystals in exchange for its three invaluable treasures, the Panorama Pavilion had listed three tasks. If the requests were fulfilled, they would be sufficient payment for the treasures. The general populace had no idea about this, but Xiankan’s great clans had prepared well in advance.

“Three conditions for three treasures. I wonder what the Panorama Pavilion is planning?” In a different gazebo, a girl in silver sipped from her teacup and giggled. “Recognizing herbs, distilling herbs, and refining pills... that’s what you need to do to get the treasures, huh?”

“There are a lot of master refiners here, but they mostly specialize in treasures over pills... I wonder what they’ll think of the requests?”

“They’ll be alright, young miss. They must’ve heard the same news we did. There’s plenty of pill masters in attendance too, see?” Her maid responded cheerfully by her side.

The girl in silver stood up for a languid stretch, putting her graceful figure on full display. Her name was Yue Longsha, the youngest daughter of the Yue patriarch. Alongside the Zhu Clan’s Zhu Yan, the two girls were called Xiankan’s Twin Stars—unrivalled in cultivation and beauty both!

In the eyes of many, they rivaled the immortal world’s twin beauties of many millennia ago: Ao Xue and Huang Qing. Although Zhu Yan and Yue Longsha were only august immortals right now, they had connate immortal constitutions!

In other words, they were born as immortals, much like the ancients had been, thus they were hailed as the world’s brightest hope.

“I don’t want the Ten Orientations Stone, but those luminous wings are mine.” Yue Longsha flashed a dazzling smile. “Those idiots in the Panorama Pavilion are offering the fragments of a connate-grade treasure... do they mean to do that? Maybe it’s a real mistake... those are the Lunar Wings, one half of the Lunisolar Wings...”

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A lovely girl appeared upon the high stage at the heart of the blessed land, accompanied by enchanting music. She was outlined by a faint golden light, signifying her identity as a golden immortal.

"The Panorama Pavilion is honored to receive so many guests," she said in a voice that was as captivatingly ethereal as the song around her. "I bid you all welcome on the guild's behalf."

She made a slight curtsy to the crowd at large.

"Fairy Qing Xun!"

"I didn't expect her to be the host of this auction!" A fair portion of the audience became fired up. The beautiful and talented Qing Xun was one of the hallmarks of the Panorama Pavilion, a disciple of its owner and master.

"There are the three treasures for sale today: the Skydragon Tendon, Divine Lightwings, and the Ten Orientations Stone!" Qing Xun waved a hand, producing all three items in front of her and holding the audience's attention captive. "However, the bidding will not be done with immortal crystals or any valuable treasures. Instead, it will be a competition to fulfill three requests!"

Chapter 215: Recognize All of Them

"Three requests?" Inside the gazebo, Lu Yun's eyes were as wide as saucers. "Immortal crystals aren't the auction currency?"

"Wait, you didn't know?" The other youths looked at him with some confusion. Lu Yun wasn't the only one surprised; his clansman Lu Shenhou was equally bewildered.

"What am I supposed to know about?" he quickly retorted.

"The Panorama Pavilion already secretly informed various factions that, rather than pay crystals and treasures, we must fulfill their three requests to the best of our ability!" Wu Tulong replied, confused by Lu Yun's confusion. "They sent the Immortal Martial Sect a message half a month ago, but we weren't much interested so we didn't make any preparations. Did they not tell the Lu Clan?"

"It seems the Panorama Pavilion no longer considers us a great clan." Lu Shenhou ground his teeth from the slight.

"What are the requests, exactly?" Lu Yun remained nonchalant, not taking the insult nearly as personally.

"Recognizing herbs, processing herbs, and refining pills," answered Wu Tulong. The young man nodded to his friend in acknowledgment before sinking into thought.

"We've already informed many of you about the necessary preparations for today," , Fairy Qing Xun's voice sounded again from upon the platform.

Some in the audience beamed with confidence, while others gaped with consternation. Before the latter group could respond, their host conjured a thousand and eighty kinds of immortal herbs in the air overhead.

“These thousand and eighty materials are extinct in the present world. The guild dug them up in an ancient tomb. Now, let the auction for the first treasure begin. The Skydragon Tendon is the tendon of an ancient skydragon’s remains. It contains a portion of the dragon’s power, while being a rare treasure material in its own right. The one who recognizes the most types of herbs and their effects will receive the tendon!”

“A thousand and eighty types of herbs....” Lu Yun frowned slightly.

Yuying’s experience could only identify one hundred thirty-four of them. Feinie, Huangqing, Aoxue, and Xuanxi’s memories added maybe seventy more. Yet leveraging his first envoy’s acumen led him to an inkling that these thousand and eighty herbs might be refined into a legendary pill. Not that Yuying was capable of figuring out the recipe at present, but still.

If I can already recognize this many, then a little bit of analysis will help me recognize even more. Lu Yun cast his consciousness forth in order to scrutinize the herbs on the platform more closely.

A number of people came to the platform to try their hand. The Panorama Pavilion was entirely unafraid of potential theft. All of the herbs were freely accessible to the pill masters for them to look, touch, and sample. Some tried tasting the herbs while others brought out their pill cauldrons. No matter what they wanted to do, Qing Xun gave them free rein.

Twelve hours passed in no time at all. No one near the platform bothered to talk during that time, either to themselves or anyone else.

“Ahem!” A grey-robed old man suddenly spoke. “My sincerest apologies. I hold three millennia of experience, but I can only figure out eighty-one herbs. Fairy Qing Xun is exactly right. These eighty-one are extinct in the present world.”

“Greetings, Senior Gu Zun. I did not expect you to come in person,” Qing Xun congenially greeted the old man.

Gu Zun was a renowned pill master in the world of immortals. Though he was only a golden immortal, he could refine supreme pills that were effective even for dao immortals. The old man nodded, then continued, “From what I understand of these herbs’ properties, sixty-four can be used to refine the Dao Fruit Pill—alongside eight other types of supplemental herbs.”

He added the last part because Qing Xun didn’t look particularly impressed with his results.

“The Dao Fruit Pill!” Bored immortals instantly boiled over in their various gazebos. “Master Gu Zun can reconstruct the recipe for the Dao Fruit Pill!”

The Dao Fruit Pill was a pill long since disappeared from the world. Much like the Aurum Openia Pill, it was very popular once upon a time, but had dwindled from existence following the death of its creator.

A peerless immortal had to become one with heaven and earth in order to pluck a dao fruit. The latter part of the breakthrough was exceptionally dangerous. Failure meant a lethal backlash; the chance of reaching dao immortality was sometimes less than ten thousand to one.

A Dao Fruit Pill allowed a peerless immortal to freely blend in with heaven and earth, increasing the possibility of plucking their dao fruit by fifty percent. In some ways, it was a miracle pill.

Even the previously calm Qing Xun was affected. "What are the other eight herbs, Master Gu Zun?" Palpitations filled her chest as she voiced her curiosity.

"Ahem!" Gu Zun reddened. "The other eight herbs are extinct ninth-rank materials as well. I simply had the chance to read about them in an ancient text."

The audience let out a collective sigh of relief. The Dao Fruit Pill was so powerful that it'd likely disrupt the balance of power in the present world. It was much better that it didn't appear.

"I can only recognize seventy-two of these, but I can refine a ninth-rank pill with them!" another attendee exclaimed.

More and more pill masters began to voice their findings, but Gu Zun remained on top.

"Alright, enough squabbling." the tinkling voice of a girl spoke out. A silver moon seemed to materialize in the sky. "I recognize five hundred and two of them."

Yue Longsha sashayed out of her gazebo onto the platform. Everyone who beheld her involuntarily held their breaths. She was too beautiful! Even peerless and dao immortals found it difficult to ignore her natural grace. She was a bright, glistening moon that dimmed the stars around her.

"These are the five hundred odd herbs' properties." She didn't talk about what pills she could refine with them, just handed over a detailed jade slip.

Qing Xun looked rather pleased. Whatever pill recipes were possible was hardly important. Knowing the herbs' properties was far better.

"It seems the Skydragon Tendon is mine," Yue Longsha smiled in light of the others' expressions.

"Many say that you'll become the best pill master in Nephrite Major one day, Miss Yue. Some claim you're more talented than Yuying, the Pill Fairy from twelve hundred years ago. Today, I see you live up to your fame," Gu Zun bestowed his heartfelt approval upon the girl.

Recognizing these herbs had nothing to do with one's pill refining skills. As a member of one of the greatest clans in Nephrite, Yue Longsha had plenty of experience to draw on. Deducing more than five hundred of the herbs' properties and uses, however, was sufficient proof of her talent.

"You're too kind, senior Gu," Yue Longsha giggled.

"More talented than Yuying?" suddenly objected a low voice. "If the Pill Fairy were here in person, she'd be able to recognize at least eight hundred. I cannot quite match her, but I recognize six hundred and some."

Wayfarer flew onto the platform, still concealed in his Obscuring Shroud. A true pill master didn't need to touch an herb to figure out what properties it had. Color, veins, the shape of its roots and leaves... these provided enough evidence to fuel substantially accurate conjecture. Yue Longsha had this expertise, but so did Wayfarer.

"These are the properties of the six hundred and thirty-six herbs I recognize." Wayfarer handed a jade slip to Qing Xun.

Yue Longsha fell silent, while Gu Zun gaped with shock.

“Nephrite Major has many hidden sages indeed. The Skydragon Tendon is yours, good sir.” Qing Xun verified the new jade slip cheerfully.

Wayfarer inclined his head, his face entirely devoid of expression.

“This new master looks a little unfamiliar. If I may ask...” Gu Zu ventured.

“I serve the King of River Province. You may call me the Painter.” Wayfarer answered coldly.

“A retainer of the king!” the audience gasped in understanding.

River Province was the largest province in eastern Nephrite Major and was wealthy beyond compare. Its king was... Zhao Changkong, the former crown prince. Having lost his claim to the throne, he received a lofty post instead; his new title was embarrassingly inconvenient.

“This is the Skydragon Tendon.” Another wave of Qing Xun’s hand produced the treasure, which she proffered with both hands.

“Hold!” A crisp voice interjected as a youth in white came out of a different gazebo. He quickly bridged the space to the central stage.

“Ah, it’s the First Youth Sovereign. What insight have you come to offer us, Your Excellency?” Qing Xun asked with some astonishment. She knew who he was, but didn’t believe he would be able to recognize very many herbs.

Cultivators who were exceptional warriors—Lu Yun and Wu Tulong, for example—generally spent most of their time and energy on cultivation, rather than the auxiliary paths. Moreover, the Panorama Pavilion hadn’t informed the Lu Clan about the requests beforehand. The governor had only come with a few other youths today, no pill masters were in his company.

“Insight is a stretch,” Lu Yun grinned, “but I know all thousand and eighty types of herbs here.”

“What?!” His wild claim stupefied everybody. All... thousand and eighty... types of herbs... here? They were all extinct in the present world! Even the pill masters here could only rely on their experience to make heuristic deductions about their properties. How could this young man make such a bold claim?

Yue Longsha’s eyes gleamed with interest, while Wayfarer flared with bloodthirsty annoyance. “Don’t make things up, Lu Yun.” Zhao Changkong wanted the Ten Orientations Stone, but he was personally after the Skydragon Tendon.

“Here are the herbs’ properties, all thousand and eighty of them. Oh, their names as well.” Lu Yun ignored the bristling artist.

Chapter 216: Immortal Medicine and a Poison Pill

“You recognize all of them? And you can name them all?”

Shock rippled through the crowd. The thousand and eighty immortal herbs had gone extinct in the world of immortals long ago. In fact, the herbs on display had been dead for tens of thousands of years, their medicinal effects only preserved through special methods.

“Impossible!” blurted Master Gu Zun. “Quit lying, young man. Don’t destroy your future for a mere treasure!”

Lu Yun didn’t even spare him a glance, his eyes remaining fixed on Qing Xun.

“Well...” The pavilion’s representative hesitated as she looked at the jade slip Lu Yun handed her. It was too far-fetched that he’d be able to recognize all thousand and eighty herbs and name them—not even their top pill master could do that! She didn’t lack for worldly experience, but the appropriate next step in this situation was slow in coming to her.

“Stop this nonsense at once, Lu Yun,” reprimanded Gu Zun, adopting a patronizing tone like he was lecturing a junior. “These herbs are premium ingredients from the ancient times. Even immortals from that era might not recognize them all. The environs of the present world can’t even sustain their growth, so it’s impossible for you to recognize all of them.”

Lu Yun half-rolled his eyes after all the highfalutin’. “Ignorance isn’t a crime, but mistaking it for superiority is.”

“How dare you?!” Expression dark, Gu Zun unleashed his power as a golden immortal and swooped down on Lu Yun. As a pill master who could refine supreme grade pills, even dao immortals would treat him with respect. How dare a little junior run his mouth and talk back!

“This is the Panorama Pavilion, Master Gu Zun.” Face clouded, Qing Xun stepped between Lu Yun and Gu Zun, countering the pill master’s attack. She wasn’t afraid that Gu Zun would hurt Lu Yun, but was worried that the Dusk governor would go berserk and deploy the Great Formation of Heavenly Fiends. Then the auction would become a hellscape of violence and bloodshed.

“I will let this go for Miss Qing Xun’s sake.” Scowling, Gu Zun sniffed disdainfully, recalling how volatile Lu Yun was. Even without the Great Formation of Heavenly Fiends, the governor’s zombies alone were something he couldn’t deal with.

“It doesn’t matter who you’re doing what for, you can’t mask your ignorance.” Lu Yun shook his head and ignored Gu Zun’s furious expression. “These herbs are impossible to grow now because the immortal dao has been severed.”

“Oh?” His words drew everyone’s attention.

“What do you mean?” Yue Longsha’s eyes lit up, a certain hypothesis seemingly within touching distance.

“Unlike other natural materials and treasures, immortal herbs contain not only the qi of the land, but also the heavenly dao. These herbs were born of the ancient times, and nursed by the ancient immortal dao,” Lu Yun explained in a faint tone. “With the immortal dao now severed, no more of these herbs can be grown.”

“No wonder the ancient tombs house many materials and treasures, as well as connate grade spirit roots, but never any living herbs.”

This explained what everyone was wondering about.

“What does any of this have to do with you recognizing the herbs?” Wayfarer frowned.

“So you really did escape that place.” Lu Yun turned to Wayfarer, intimidating the latter into silence. “How I recognized the herbs is none of your business,” he snorted, “do you honestly expect me to tell you all of my secrets?”

Awkwardness overtook the onlookers’ faces. Everyone had their own hidden aces, so it was rather out of line to push for an answer.

Lu Yun didn’t actually recognize the herbs himself. He’d done his best to analyze their properties and effects, but could only identify eight hundred and eight of them. However, there was another entity inside of him that could provide the answers.

The Sal Tree of Life and Death!

The tree that grew in hell as the netherworld’s pillar was the ancestor of all trees. With its properties, information about these herbs had flooded into his mind as soon as his gaze settled on them. The tree wholly exceeded connate-grade spirit roots.

“Don’t even think about refining pills with these herbs,” Lu Yun continued before anyone could react. “With the immortal dao being incomplete, so too are the principles of dao within these herbs. Pills refined with them are nothing but poison. Even a celestial emperor would die after consuming one.

“As for Dao Fruit Pills... Well, even if this Master Gu Zun can refine one, taking it will certainly make you one with nature, never to return to the world of the living.”

Face flushed, Gu Zun forced his fury back under control.

Principles of the immortal dao were the most precious core of immortal herbs. Destruction of the ancient path of cultivation had corrupted the principles within the herbs on display as well. Refining them into pills would only result in the most potent poison in the world.

Qing Xun’s expression shifted ever so slightly. The Panorama Pavilion had brought out all of these herbs with great fanfare because they wished to refine an ancient pill. Their own pill masters weren’t good enough to identify all of the properties and effects, so they’d put together the auction to draw on the collective wisdom of pill masters from around the world.

Together, the group would identify the herbs, process them, and refine the pills. Of course, the merchant guild knew it wasn’t possible to restore the pill recipe in one go. Thus, they planned to hold these auctions every time a new celestial emperor took their throne, with Nephrite Major as the starting point. Continuously gathering the knowledge and experience of pill masters from all over the world would one day restore the pill recipe.

As for why they’d chosen to operate in such a fashion, well, they didn’t want the rest of the world to know what they were planning. The herbs they’d shown today were merely part of the ingredients. Running into someone like the Dusk governor at their starting point was entirely unexpected.

“I’ve digressed.” Lu Yun turned to Qing Xun. “Milady, I’ve identified all of the herbs and told you their properties and effects. According to your rules, the Skydragon Tendon should be mine, should it not?”

Qing Xun nodded and handed Lu Yun the tendon. “Since Your Excellency has identified all of the herbs, this is naturally yours.”

Wayfarer's eyes turned almost completely red at the development, but he didn't dare make a move after the earlier warning.

"Let us begin the auction of the second treasure," said Qing Xun. "Please process these thousand and eighty herbs. The one who extracts the most essence from them may take home the Divine Lightwings."

Nervousness flickered through Yue Longsha's eyes.

Chapter 217: An Ancient Pill Recipe

Yue Longsha was determined to acquire the Divine Lightwings. She hadn't previously considered any of the pill masters to be a threat and was confident that she'd be able to defeat even Master Gu Zun, an adept who could refine supreme rank pills. However, two unexpected threats had emerged in her way—Lu Yun and Wayfarer.

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Thus commenced the second auction. The participants were to extract the essence of all thousand and eighty herbs.

For most pill masters, that was a much more difficult task than identifying ingredients, since each herb required a different extraction method. Knowing what it was didn't mean one could distill it. More importantly, the Panorama Pavilion had set a new rule: only those who had processed at least ten herbs could enter the auction for the Divine Lightwings.

As soon as Qing Xun explained the rules, many pill masters bent to the task at hand, focusing on the herbs they'd identified.

"I suggest you back out of this now, young man," Gu Zun sneered at Lu Yun. "You can't cheat at this stage."

The man plainly resented Lu Yun for his earlier words. Once he left Panorama Paradise, he would undoubtedly use his connections against Lu Yun. After all, a pill master at his level wielded great influence over the major factions of the world.

Without sparing the young man another glance, Gu Zun brought out his cauldron and set up a defense formation before getting to work.

The Panorama Pavilion had more than one portion of the thousand and eighty herbs. Even if the participating pill masters failed in their extraction attempts, the pavilion could provide them with more.

"Gu Zun is one of Zhao Shenguang's men." Qing Han's expression darkened. Though he'd been grounded by the Qing Clan after setting foot back in Nephrite Capital, he knew what Zhao Shenguang had been up to.

The celestial emperor-in-waiting had started building his inner circle immediately following the imperial succession decree, and Gu Zun was one of the elites he'd recruited.

"Shenguang means divine light." Lu Shenhou curled his lip. "Zhao Shenguang probably thinks the Divine Lightwings are fated to be his, which is why he sent in Gu Zun. What a fool."

As someone about to take the throne, Zhao Shenguang didn't need to send his own people to fight for the treasures. Even if he didn't say anything, whoever gained his namesake treasure would likely present it as a gift afterward.

That was a common refrain in most of the participants' minds.

Sending Gu Zun had not only revealed his trump card, but also attracted derision for his lack of intelligence.

"My cousin wouldn't have broken his legs and hung him on the city wall if he weren't a fool," Qing Han commented dryly.

Zhao Shenguang was a completely useless fop with mediocre cultivation and potential. He lacked ambition and motivation, and hardly knew what strategies were. Stirring up trouble was his only great talent. If he hadn't been born in the imperial family, he would've long been beaten to death.

During a chance encounter with Chen Xiao, the two had ended up brawling with each other. The ruthless Chen scion didn't care who the hell Zhao Shenguang was. He broke both of the young man's legs and even tore down one of the great halls within the Nephrite Palace.

Every following princely attempt at retaliation had failed. In the end, Chen Xiao stripped him naked and hung him from Xiankan's city wall. To everyone's great surprise, Zhao Shenguang then became one of Chen Xiao's sidekicks and did everything the man told him to do.

Irritation rose in Qing Han's heart. Gu Zun was loyal to Zhao Shenguang, while Lun Yun was his close friend. Qing Han could clearly feel the blatant hatred aimed at his friend from the old master, thoroughly out in the open!

Unfortunately, there was nothing he could do at the moment. Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi weren't in Xiankan, leaving no one that could bring the soon-to-be celestial emperor under control.

"Why does it seem to me that Nephrite Major's future suddenly looks dimmer?" remarked Mo Qitian with a half-smile. The nine majors in the world of immortals were rivals and, as a top genius of Lazuli Major, he was more than happy to see Nephrite poised for decline.

"His Majesty has long wanted to pass the throne onto my cousin, but my cousin turned him down. This is just another roundabout way to hand the reins of power over to Chen Xiao." Qing Han calmed himself and shook his head. "Just wait for my cousin and big brother to return."

He shifted his gaze back to Lu Yun on the elevated stage, while those around him fidgeted when they heard the name Chen Xiao.

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Lu Yun, Yue Longsha, and Wayfarer remained unmoving with bemused expressions, all three of them considering something.

The herbs contain corrupted principles of the immortal dao, thought Lu Yun. What good will it do even if we extract the essence? Identify the ingredients and extract their essence, then refine pills.... Are they looking for ways to distill the ingredients in order to restore a pill recipe?

This seemed highly likely to him.

There's a certain synergy between the effects of the herbs. Clearly, they're part of some heaven-defying pill recipe. That must be what the Panorama Pavilion is trying to reconstruct!

Further contemplation increased his confidence in his speculations.

The Panorama Pavilion must've happened upon an ancient ruin where shards of the ancient immortal dao are preserved. That's how they can grow these herbs!

The ancient world of immortals consisted not only of nine majors, ten lands, and four immortal seas, but also a mysterious central world. All of them had combined to form a complete greater world.

The war a hundred thousand years ago had left the world in shambles, and the immortal dao in tatters. However, many ruins from the ancient times remained, preserving shards of the dao from the era. The shards themselves weren't enough to repair the path of cultivation, but they could nurture some of the ancient herbs.

There must be such a ruin within the Panorama Pavilion. There's got to be more herbs they haven't shown us if they're planning to restore an ancient pill recipe. There will definitely be more than one auction! Let's see what pill they're trying to recreate! Lu Yun manifested a yellow immortal fire when he opened his eyes.

Daevic Skyfire!

Its emergence immediately stirred great waves of heat in the air, transmuting the herbs into a river of ingredients that entered the fire.

"Daevic Skyfire!" exclaimed Gu Zun. "That fire is supposedly sealed in the supreme treasure, the Profile of Harmony. How is it in your possession?!"

Greed flickered through his eyes.

Emerald Mistfire, Lucent Voidfire, and Daevic Skyfire were some of the highest ranked fires in the world. Acquiring any one of them would propel a pill or treasure refiner to much greater heights in their respective expertise.

Lu Yun bringing out the flame stunned the crowd, and their jaws dropped even further when he decided to refine all thousand and eighty herbs at the same time. This was something no pill master would dare attempt!

Chapter 218: Refining the Dao Fruit Pill

Some of the other pill masters paused their motions and stared incredulously at Lu Yun. The boy was distilling all thousand and eighty herbs at the same time! It wouldn't matter if he failed, but if he were to succeed, he would prove himself to be monstrously talented.

He was the top youth sovereign, the strongest cultivator in the world. How was it possible for him to be a genius in pill dao as well? What a perverse existence that defied the limits of creation!

“That’s Daevic Skyfire! The Profile of Harmony must be in your possession.... Hand it over!” Great power roared from one of the floating gazebos as a peerless immortal made for the center stage, unable to sit still.

“Away with you, cretin!!” answered a tremendous growl from the void. The peerless immortal was blasted back the second he left the gazebo. “Zhao Yinfeng of the Exalted Immortal Sect, this is Panorama Pavilion territory. I will kill you if you put another toe out of line.”

Panorama Pavilion’s dao immortal slowly emerged from the air. He was talking to the peerless immortal, but his eyes were fixed on Lu Yun, closely observing everything the young man was doing.

Forced back into his gazebo, Zhao Yinfeng’s eyes hardened with malice.

“Lu Yun has definitely been to the burial mound! The Profile of Harmony, Portrait of Emptiness, and even Yuying’s Panorama of Clarity are all in his possession!” He grinned wolfishly. “The Panorama Pavilion dares interfere with one of our great matters? Hehehe....”

A little hummingbird appeared in his hand as he spoke, then vanished into thin air with a flap of its wings.

Back on the stage, Lu Yun had already entered and exited the Gates of the Abyss many times. He could hardly distill the thousand and eighty herbs himself, so Yuying had returned to hell to help him.

She possessed remarkable brilliance in refining pills, and her talent hadn’t plateaued. Her potential had instead been expanded to its fullest after becoming one of Lu Yun’s envoys, constantly improving her level of pill dao.

Supreme pills were nothing to her. As soon as she ascended to the golden immortal realm and grasped its principles, she, too, would be able to refine those pills. Only dao immortal pill masters would then be able to rival her in the field.

And as an Envoy of Samsara, her talent was Lu Yun’s talent. Together, they distilled the thousand and eighty herbs with ease.

Bam!

An enormous explosion sounded in the air. The Daevic Skyfire over Lu Yun’s head scattered, leaving behind a thousand and eighty glowing orbs.

Yue Longsha paled, not only because she couldn’t acquire the Divine Lightwings, but also because of Lu Yun’s ridiculous talent! As a natural-born immortal, she was considered the hope of reconstruction for the world of immortals. Yet today, she’d been bested by someone even greater!

This was the first time in her life that her ego was bruised. Previously, she hadn’t thought much of Lu Yun’s title as the top cultivator in the world. But the happenings of today had finally enabled her to truly understand what the moniker ‘Youth Sovereign’ truly meant.

Crimson light glinted ever more voraciously in Wayfarer’s eyes, but thinking of how the other Wayfarer had twice defended Lu Yun against the Qing and House Donglin dao immortals, he refrained from any action. On the other hand, he didn’t even spare a stray thought for the Panorama Pavilion’s dao immortal.

“Here is the essence of all the herbs.” Lu Yun sighed faintly in relief. He and Yuying had each worked on half of the herbs, but the whole ordeal had still taken them eight hours. He didn’t like attracting attention, nor was he interested in the Divine Lightwings. However, he was increasingly intrigued by the pill recipe that the pavilion was attempting to restore.

It must be an extraordinary creation if a world-class merchant guild would use a Skydragon Tendon, Divine Lightwings, and Ten Orientations Stone as bargaining chips.

“The foremost youth sovereign lives up to his reputation, alright.” Qing Xun had shifted her address from ‘Your Excellency’ to ‘foremost youth sovereign’ as an indicator of approval. “The Divine Lightwings is yours, Sir Lu.”

A light wave of her hand sent the treasure into Lu Yun’s hands.

“Lunar Wings, one half of the connate-grade treasure Lunisolar Wings. The Panorama Pavilion does indeed overflow with wealth.” Lu Yun nodded as he accepted the treasure and sent it to the Gates of the Abyss.

Yue Longsha gawked at him. She didn’t expect the young governor to recognize and identify the Lunar Wings too! Since he knew it was part of a connate-grade treasure, it would be next to impossible to obtain it from him.

“Sir Lu is quite knowledgeable indeed, to be able to recognize the fragments of this ancient treasure.” Qing Xun didn’t sound at all surprised; she’d known about the treasure beforehand.

Gu Zun’s eyes blazed with fury. The Lunar Wings were why he was here, but the humiliation piled high on his suffering stopped him from saying anything. He’d been jeering at the boy just moments ago, claiming that cheap tricks wouldn’t help with the second request, but Lu Yun had promptly delivered a face slapping with his impressive demonstration.

The young governor had distilled all thousand and eighty herbs in one go, with the strength of a cultivator. That was a feat never before achieved, much less in front of a watchful crowd. Apart from the dao immortal pill masters, very few could accomplish what he’d done.

Currently, Gu Zun wanted nothing more than to dig a hole and crawl into it.

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Thus began the third round of the auction for the Ten Orientations Stone. The participants were to refine pills with the thousand and eighty ingredients. Whoever refined the highest ranking pills would win the treasure.

Lu Yun had pointed out before that the ingredients made from corrupted dao principles would yield only poison, but the Panorama Pavilion was after the refinement methods, not the actual pills produced by the refinement process.

“Luck can get you through identifying and distilling the herbs, but refining pills require talent and real strength! Even though you have the Daevic Skyfire, your cultivation will prevent you from refining high-ranking pills!” Gu Zun felt a little more confident.

Even though he'd let the Lunar Wings slip through his fingers, gaining the Ten Orientations Stone would still help Zhao Shengguang gain the support of a great master refiner. That would be enough to redeem his mistakes.

"Yuying refined a first-rank pill as a cultivator a thousand years ago, shocking the entire world. That won't help you today, even if you did have her talent." A smile tugged at his lips. He strode forward and grabbed the sixty-four herbs he'd identified. Then he laid claim to another eight ninth-rank ingredients—the ingredients he'd said to have gone extinct!

Clearly, he'd feigned ignorance when he'd claimed to have only read about them in ancient texts.

"Those sixty-four ingredients and eight extinct herbs... Master Gu Zun's going to refine a Dao Fruit Pill!"

Dao Fruit Pill!

The crowd was on their feet to closely follow Gu Zun's movements and a red flush marked the face of the pavilion's dao immortal. While the thousand and eighty herbs they'd brought out for the auction were dead and the dao principles within them corrupted, there were living specimens inside the ancient ruins located within the Panorama Pavilion.

Therefore, even if Gu Zun could only refine a poison pill, as long as his methodology was recorded by the stage, Panorama Pavilion's own pill masters would be able to refine real Dao Fruit Pills!

Unfortunately, Gu Zun was oblivious to their trick. Since the pills would be nothing but poison, he didn't even attempt to hide his refining method. He carefully placed the herbs into a pitch-black cauldron one by one, then began the refining process.

Chapter 219: Reaching the Heavens with a Single Bound

"A Dao Fruit Pill..." Lu Yun frowned. That was a ninth-rank pill, but it was much more valuable than many supreme-rank pills. He knew very well that the Panorama Pavilion wanted the methods with which each master refined their pills, but didn't care about the actual pills themselves.

Once the pill was refined, Gu Zun would be deemed the winner, even if it ended up being poison. All Lu Yun had done would be for nothing. Neither the Skydragon Tendon and the Lunar Wings held any value to him; he was here for one thing and one thing alone—the Ten Orientations Stone. He needed it to create a luopan!

All eyes focused on Gu Zun. No matter how impressive it'd been for Lu Yun to identify all of the herbs and extract their essence in one fell swoop, none of that meant anything in comparison to the Dao Fruit Pill.

Identifying and distilling herbs were a means to an end, just a part of the journey to the real task of refining pills. Even if one were immensely skilled at the first two tasks, it was still completely useless if pill refinement was out of their reach.

"Dao Fruit Pill? That's something, but pills like these have a fatal flaw," muttered Wayfarer. "After consuming one and successfully picking a dao fruit, the immortal in question will never be able to progress beyond that point."

His words registered in all ears, but no one cared. The flaw was common knowledge. For many peerless immortals, the dao immortal realm was a tantalizing goal ever out of reach. Plucking just one dao fruit and ascending to the aether dao immortal realm would fulfill their heart's desire for a lifetime.

Wayfarer got to work, materializing a giant cauldron before him. He selected a number of ingredients and cast them into the cauldron, quickly disintegrating them with intense fire. The other pill masters followed suit.

"Although Gu Zun deduced the recipe of Dao Fruit Pill, he won't necessarily succeed in refining one," muttered one of them. "We still have a chance!"

Though the pill masters were competing for the three treasures at the behest of others, they nevertheless felt an urge to prove themselves. Lu Yun had completely dominated the first two tasks, but they remained confident in their ability to refine pills. Only the top pill masters of the world possessed the courage to remain on stage now.

One after another, cauldrons and flames appeared, marking everyone's progress in the refining process. Yue Longsha threw a glance at the unmoving Lu Yun, then summoned a ball of flame to bend her mind to the task at hand.

What pill can exceed the Dao Fruit Pill? was the question that Lu Yun frantically sought an answer to. He sent his question to hell as well, where his envoys and Infernum were waiting. He could tell from Gu Zun's well-practiced motions that he'd already tried refining the Dao Fruit Pill many times.

The man was very likely to succeed this time.

Lu Yun had offended the pill master to the point of no return. Or, to be precise, Gu Zun had been hostile to the Dusk governor since the very beginning. If the man acquired the Ten Orientations Stone, Lu Yun would never be able to get hold of it.

"There is," Ruyi's voice sounded in his head. "There is a pill called the Heaven Descent Pill, also known as the Empyrean Pill. It cannot be assigned a rank, and has only one singular purpose."

Lu Yun's eyes lit up. "What is it?" Rankless pills were always the most impressive ones.

"To ascend to the heavens with one bound," explained Ruyi. "When a pregnant being takes a Heaven Descent Pill, her newborn will possess a dao foundation and constitution tempered by the principles of the golden immortal realm. In other words, the child will be born a golden immortal."

"What?!" Electricity passed through Lu Yun, dumbfounded by the explanation. The child would be born as a golden immortal?!

That sounded far-fetched, even for the ancient world of immortals! And that had been an age where the dao of immortals was still complete. While the children of immortals were also immortals, it was still unheard of for newborns to be golden immortals. That impacted not only their starting point in life, but also their potential!

A natural-born golden immortal could easily become a celestial emperor, and was very likely to ascend beyond the broken immortal dao and reach that fabled realm.

“Among the 1,080 herbs, 943 are main ingredients for the pill, but you need another supplementary ingredient,” Ruyi relayed seriously, “the heart’s blood of a golden immortal.”

Lu Yun nodded. A golden immortal’s heart’s blood contained their essence, where the golden immortal principles collected. It was the only thing that could channel the doctrines of cultivation to temper one’s body.

With a single thought, Ruyi transmitted the pill recipe to Lu Yun; it was so ancient that even a mental copy of it exuded a prehistoric air.

It doesn’t make use of the immortal dao principles within the herbs! His heart shook after studying the recipe.

All of the ingredients they were presented with were dead, and the corrupted immortal dao principles within meant that any pills refined from them would be great poison. However, the Heaven Descent Pill didn’t require the immortal dao principles. Its effects resulted from the combination of the ingredients’ inherent properties and effects. Therefore, if Lu Yun succeeded in refining a pill, it would be the real deal!

“For my luopan!” Lu Yun took a deep breath and looked at Qing Xun. Her attention was on him as well. All of the other pill masters were buried deep in their work; in fact, Gu Zun had finished extracting all of his ingredients’ essence and was refining his pill.

Qing Xun didn’t believe for a second that Lu Yun knew only to identify and distill herbs. Someone who could process all thousand and eighty ingredients at the same time couldn’t be a novice in pill refinement.

“This humble one has a favor to ask, Fairy Qing Xun,” Lu Yun broached with a smile.

“Oh?” Qing Xun paused. “Pray tell, Sir Lu.”

“I would like to borrow your heart’s blood,” the governor said slowly.

“My heart’s blood?” Qing Xun frowned.

“Have you lost your mind, Lu Yun?!” a man snapped from a gazebo when he heard Lu Yun’s request.

“That’s a golden immortal’s essence. One drop will take ten years of cultivation to replenish! Fairy Qing Xun, I am at your service to kick this bastard out!”

The young man rolled up his sleeves and was about to jump onstage, when his elders pulled him back. This was the blessed land of the Panorama Pavilion and an internal affair. Outsiders were not to stick their noses where they wouldn’t be welcome.

“What does he need that for?”

“Is he refining something incredible to counter the Dao Fruit Pill?” The crowd erupted in discussion. They expected Lu Yun to amaze them, since he’d performed very well in the previous stages.

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Wu Tulong and the other youth sovereigns shared a look of shock in their gazebo, feeling nothing but complete admiration for Lu Yun. That young man was not only the best of cultivators at his level, but also an expert in pill refinement!

Wu Tulong and the others were all cultivation fanatics that devoted their energies into studying various combat arts and techniques; they didn't have time for the supplemental paths.

Qing Han maintained an impassive expression, despite the displeasure that flared when Lu Yun drew close to Qing Xun.

"He wants to refine a Heaven Descent Pill," Empress Myrtlestar floated up to Qing Han's mind. "The heart's blood of a golden immortal and 943 immortal herbs form the basis of this pill. Also known as the empyrean pill, it enables one to reach the heavens at birth. It is a rankless pill that all pill masters can refine, invented by Qi Hai, the foremost pill master of my time. However, he only successfully refined three of them in his lifetime, giving rise to three immortal emperors."

Her tone was tinged with melancholy. It was clear she'd had a history with the pill master. "I never dreamed I would see the recipe again."

Chapter 220: Pill Tribulation?!

Heaven Descent Pill!

A pill that propelled one to the heavens at birth and had contributed to the formation of three immortal emperors back in the ancient times. However, its refinement success rate was pitifully low. Even Qi Hai, the foremost pill master of the time, had only created three throughout the course of his lifetime. Since then, no one had managed to refine the pill, despite the recipe having been passed down.

There must be a tremendous catch to such a powerful pill, and it shouldn't be allowed to proliferate without limit in the world of immortals. However, Lu Yun didn't give an inch. This pill was his only hope for gaining the Ten Orientations Stone.

"Might I inquire what pill you're refining with my blood?" Qing Xun's eyelashes fluttered. She already had an inkling of what his answer might be, but it was too outlandish for her to believe.

"Milady asks when she already knows the answer in her heart." Lu Yun shook his head and didn't name the pill. Its fame had reached all parts of the world in the ancient times, so naturally there would be records about the pill. Thus, its name and effects weren't completely unknown even today.

"As I thought." Qing Xun nodded. "Sir Lu is indeed a genius of the new generation. I shall not refuse your request." She closed her eyes, slowly coalescing a drop of crimson blood that radiated a faint, but brilliant golden glow.

"Oof," the luminous girl grunted and paled.

"Lu Yun!!" railed an agitated voice from one of the gazebos surrounding the stage. "If you fail to refine a pill with her heart's blood, I'll kill you even if I have to die for it! Do you hear me?!"

"That's right! If you fail, I'll do whatever it takes to kill you!"

Qing Xun was highly regarded in Xiankan. The young men, especially, idolized her like a goddess, which was why they were so displeased when they saw Lu Yun truly taking her blood. Both Feng Li from the Feng Clan and Jin Hexi from the Jin Clan were among the clamoring men.

Lu Yun heartily ignored them all and cupped his hands at Qing Xun.

Thump!

With a wave of his hand, an enormous cauldron thudded onto the stage, shaking the platform. It wasn't the cauldron itself that was heavy, but the fire within it. Lu Yun had forgone the three immortal fires and summoned hellfire!

Hellfire ranked higher than even the three immortal fires, and was the instrument of extraction for the three immortal fires out of the paintings that'd housed them. A powerful flame like that could naturally be used to refine pills.

He wasn't strong enough to manipulate his hellfire for pill refinement yet, but he had the Sal Tree of Life and Death, which was what hellfire burned on. With the tree as a medium, he could dip a toe in using the fire to refine pills and treasures.

Lu Yun knew from the start that normal fires—even the three immortal fires—wouldn't be powerful enough to refine the Heaven Descent Pill. Only supreme fires, like hellfire, stood a chance of success.

But he couldn't help but wonder... if even a pill like Heaven Descent Pill required only 943 ingredients, what kind of pill was Panorama Pavilion trying to recreate? It must far exceed the Heaven Descent Pill.

The crowd settled down and fixed their eyes on the center stage. Finally, everyone was undergoing the refining process.

Bam!

One of the cauldrons exploded and a black mushroom cloud rose before the pill master.

"Ah, I failed!" Dejection crossed that master's expression. He hadn't been following a pill recipe, but experimenting based on his analysis of herb properties and effects. It was no surprise that he'd failed.

What he didn't know was that the methods he'd used had been secretly recorded by the stage, and not everyone would fail like him.

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It was now the third day of the auction, and Zhao Shengguang was scheduled to take his throne three days hence. Most of the pill masters on the stage were done. Some had succeeded, others had failed, and some had finally created an end product after multiple adjustments. Those who'd produced a pill began explaining their pill's rank and effects.

Only four were still hard at work: Gu Zun, Yue Longsha, Wayfarer, and Lu Yun. All four of them had reached critical points in their refining processes.

"It is done!" The fire in Yue Longsha's cauldron retracted after a final flare, allowing a heavily perfumed fragrance to waft from the cauldron. A moon-white pill slowly took shape, brilliant and pure in its milky

translucence. "This is a ninth-rank Moondew Pill, refined from 108 herbs and the moon essence of my clan." With a twist of her wrist, the pill landed in a jade bottle in her hand.

"The real Moondew Pill would be the gold standard in healing pills," she explained with a soft voice. "No matter how severe the injury, anyone below the dao immortal realm will recover after consuming this pill, so long as a strand of their soul remains.

"Unfortunately, the principles of immortal dao within the pill are corrupted," she continued ruefully. "This particular pill cannot heal anyone, but will instead shatter their souls."

"Lady Yue is truly talented!" Many pill masters marveled at her work. "She invented such an impressive healing pill with ingredients she's never seen before. She will be the final winner, unless Master Gu Zun succeeds in refining a Dao Fruit Pill."

Yue Longsha nodded and handed the pill to the Panorama Pavilion's pill master. He would be the one to verify its effects. Although the principles of dao within it were corrupted, a dao immortal pill master could still deduce its effects through certain special methods.

All eyes shifted back to the grave Gu Zun. He made several hand seals that entered the cauldron one after another.

"Form, I say!!" he suddenly exclaimed.

Bam!

The cauldron before him shattered, making way for a pill with a thick, golden glow. As soon as it appeared, the very power within the blessed land seemed to undergo a shift. Gu Zun had truly refined a Dao Fruit Pill!

"It was a success," muttered Qing Xun. The method by which the pill was refined had been fully recorded. From now on, the dao immortal pill masters of Panorama Pavilion would be able to replicate Gu Zun's success!

"I am so lucky as to be blessed with success." Gu Zun wiped off the sweat beading his forehead, a small smile tugging at his lips. He subtly tightened his hand to summon the qi in the environment, energy that converged as a seal over the little ball of sunshine within the ruins of his cauldron. He handed the pill to Qing Xun, whose hands shook as she beheld it, visibly overwhelmed.

"Master Gu Zun proves to be the best in the end. I heartily admit defeat." Deference flashed across Yue Longsha's face, it was only natural for her to lose to Gu Zun, since the pill master was much more experienced than she was.

"The Ten Orientations Stone is mine," Gu Zun said proudly.

"Dao Fruit Pill?" said a derisive voice. "Only weaklings have any use for it."

"Oh?" The statement took everyone aback.

Wayfarer opened his eyes. With a casual wave of his hand, a green pill landed before Qing Xun.

“The Lifeline Pill,” Wayfarer introduced faintly. “It grants a second soul to dao immortals, one that will die once in their place.”

“A Lifeline Pill! Those pills are real?! No, impossible, impossible!” Gu Zun shrieked. A crazed look stole into his eyes. “Pills to die in the place of a dao immortal don’t exist in this world! It’s impossible for you to refine one!”

“Under any other circumstances, the pill would be repelled by heaven and earth as soon as it formed. A pill tribulation would descend upon the area,” Wayfarer explained faintly. “However, this isn’t a real Lifeline Pill. It’s just poison.”

Gu Zun’s chest heaved as frustration rose from the bottom of his heart. His Dao Fruit Pill paled in comparison to Wayfarer’s work. After all, there was only a fifty percent chance for the Dao Fruit Pill to aid one’s ascension to the aether dao immortal realm, and the immortal would never be able to take another step further.

The Lifeline Pill, on other hand, would grant all dao immortals, including the celestial emperors, another life.

Gu Zun was reluctant to admit defeat, but there was nothing he could do. He held on to a sliver of hope that things would be different after the dao immortal of Panorama Pavilion examined the pills.

Crackle.

Silver lightning pierced the sky and crashed onto the stage.

“What was that?”

“Isn’t this the Panorama Pavilion’s blessed land? Why would there be lightning?”

“It seems to be... a heavenly tribulation? Is someone breaking through here?”

“No!” shouted someone in realization. “It’s a pill tribulation!”

“Pill tribulation?” Wayfarer tensed and whirled around to look at Lu Yun.

The young governor stood beside his cauldron while three hundred and sixty-five layers of formations guarded him and the cauldron. An unassuming pill floated above it, rotating continuously.

Rumble.

Silver lightning snaked through the sky and hammered down at him, vicious impacts repelled by ripple upon ripple from the formations. Incredibly, the layers of light were standing strong against the terrifying pill tribulation.

No one could believe their eyes, and even Wayfarer was agog with shock. Despite all his wisdom, he couldn’t figure out what was going on. A pill tribulation?! How could a pill that looked so perfectly ordinary attract a tribulation? Only pills that defied the heavenly dao would have such an effect!

They could only exist in the world after overcoming their tribulation, and that shouldn’t happen with a useless pill refined with corrupted ingredients. Even Wayfarer’s Lifeline Pill was merely poison.

Judging from the tribulation that strove to wipe something off the face of the world, however, Lu Yun's common-looking pill actually worked!