

Necropolis 221

Chapter 221: Four Hundred Eighty Million Bolts of Lightning

Yue Longsha's Moondew Pill, Gu Zun's Dao Fruit Pill, and Wayfarer's Lifeline Pill were stunning enough. Although the pills were poison and couldn't bring about their intended effects, the three pill masters had impressed everyone with their techniques.

However, Lu Yun's pill laid a surreal veneer over the scene, what with the tribulation it'd summoned. Wasn't it said that all of the herbs for the auction were dead, and that pills refined with them were nothing but poison?

Why would one of them elicit a pill tribulation then?

Or was the pill so poisonous that the heavenly dao refused to tolerate it?

"He succeeded. He actually succeeded...." Qing Xun gaped at Lu Yun in disbelief.

"The blood of a golden immortal... refined with ancient herbs to create a pill that isn't immortal-grade. Can it be...." Wayfarer trembled, shock flickering through his face. No, this can't be real! It simply can't be!

"This isn't a pill tribulation!" Gu Zun burst into uproarious laughter. "To hell with this bullshit 'top youth sovereign'. He just used some cheap tricks to call down lightning and fake a tribulation. It's a hoax!

"It's just a lightning technique that looks like a pill tribulation! We all know that Lu Yun used similar smoke and mirrors in Dusk Province to summon lightning from the nine heavens. This tribulation is all his doing! Not even dao immortal pill masters can create a miracle pill with dead herbs."

Many took his explanation as the truth. Lu Yun had used a strange technique to summon heavenly lightning before, which was what heavenly tribulations consisted of.

"I agree with the Dusk governor, Master Gu Zun," rang out a clear voice from one of the gazebos. "Ignorance is not a crime, but mistaking it for superiority surely is."

"Who was that?!" Gu Zun raged. Armed with three thousand years of cultivation, he was one of the greatest pill masters in the world. Even dao immortals treated him with respect whenever they saw him, as did the major factions of the world.

Zhao Shengguang, for instance, had paid a heavy price to recruit him. No matter how good his self control was, he couldn't keep down his anger after being called ignorant again and again in public.

"Jin Heyi of the Corpse Refiners."

Gu Zun's face clouded over when he heard the sect name and a trace of fear flashed through his eyes.

"The blood of a golden immortal and nine hundred and some ancient herbs.... He must've refined the Heaven Descent Pill from the legends of old," Jin Heyi sighed. "He deserves his title as the top youth sovereign. It's said that even the ancient pill master Qi Hai only succeeded in refining the pill thrice after billions of attempts. Yet the young governor succeeded on his first try."

"Heaven Descent Pill?" The name threw many for a loop. Clearly, they hadn't heard of the pill before.

“What is that? This pill looks like nothing and doesn’t even seem like an immortal pill. Can it really be mentioned in the same breath as the Moondew, Dao Fruit, and Lifeline Pills?” The majority was far more willing to believe Gu Zun’s words. Lu Yun must’ve faked this so-called tribulation with a special lightning method to pass his pill off as a success.

The Jin Clan wasn’t among the top clans in Xiankan, and many had never even heard of Corpse Refiners before. Therefore, Jin Heyi’s explanation wasn’t terribly persuasive.

“Allow me to introduce the pill, then.” Unfazed, Jin Heyi cracked a small smile as he looked at the frowning Lu Yun up on the stage. While he might respect the young governor, they were enemies. He was more than happy to stir up some trouble for Lu Yun.

The young man already had a good number of enemies; there were quite a few who wanted him dead so they could gain control over Dusk Province. Revealing Lu Yun’s talent in pills would only hasten his demise.

“The Heaven Descent Pill has no rank, but it’s said to allow someone to ascend to heaven at birth! If a pregnant woman takes this pill, she will give birth to a babe with a constitution tempered by the golden immortal principles. The newborn will be a golden immortal! And as I just mentioned, the ancient pill master Qi Hai could only refine three in his lifetime, but those three pills gave rise to three immortal emperors!”

“Can such a heaven-defying pill be real?!” The crowd erupted in an uproar.

Some didn’t believe it. “The heavens wouldn’t permit such a thing to exist...” one person trailed off.

The tribulation had grown even more intense. Lightning struck the unassuming pill like a downpour of torrential rain. But now, Lu Yun was floating in midair with his pill and cauldron. Had he stayed on the stage any longer, the treasure that could record anything that happened on it would likely be destroyed by the tribulation.

“That’s right,” Jin Heyi responded faintly. “It’s said that every Heaven Descent Pill must overcome four hundred and eighty million lightning strikes before its emergence. Master Qi Hai refined five of them, but two were destroyed by their tribulations.”

Widened eyes stared at Lu Yun without blinking as many gazes turned murderous. With the immortal dao severed, it was unlikely for anyone to become an immortal emperor, and no one wanted Lu Yun to help give rise to more of them.

Nine were more than enough for the world.

“Is it really the Heaven Descent Pill?” Gu Zun’s face grew dark as ink. “Then this Lu Yun must die!”

“Who is he?! How does he know so much about Qi Hai and the tribulation that the pill must overcome?” Shock painted Empress Myrtlestar’s face within the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals. “Other than Qi Hai and myself, only three of our contemporaries knew about the need for this pill to endure a pill tribulation. They would never tell others or put it into the records! There’s more to this man than meets the eye!”

“It’s his sect that’s more than meets the eye.” Qing Han didn’t look at all surprised. “Lu Yun said the Corpse Refiners were experts in refining corpses and living zombies. Perhaps they have a way to extract the memories of dead immortals.”

Empress Myrtlestar fell silent.

Four hundred and eighty million bolts of lightning streamed down from the sky. It was fortunate that the pill was their sole target, or a tribulation of such intensity would destroy the entire blessed land. The Panorama Pavilion had activated a grand formation, isolating the space around Lu Yun and preventing the lightning tribulation from spreading.

“The tribulation....” Lu Yun frowned at the thickening thunderclouds. “It seems I haven’t prepared enough formation disks. I need to set up more formations!”

He didn’t use any foundation stones, since they wouldn’t be able to withstand such power, instead opting to etch formations directly into thin air.

“What... what is he doing?” His actions made the clamor soften in shock.

“He’s setting up formations!”

“He’s skilled in formations as well?!”

“What a freak!”

Chapter 222: Swallowing Thunder

No one doubted Lu Yun’s mastery of formations anymore. Ordinary formation masters had to etch runes into stones and use them as anchors to set up formations. However, Lu Yun could imprint lines in the air with a simple wave of his hand and deploy formations out of nothing!

No formation master present could accomplish that feat. Only grandmasters who’d reached great heights in the field could conjure formations out of thin air. Neither Formation Thirteenth nor Qin Xianhuo had been at that level.

“Setting up formations without physical anchors... that’s a method that only exists in tales!” A flushed formation master stared doggedly at Lu Yun’s hands, taking in every minute move.

“How is this possible?!” Jin Heyi was flabbergasted. “How old is he? Not only can he refine the Heaven Descent Pill, but he can also set up formations without anchors?!”

It was still within the realm of possibility for Lu Yun to refine a miracle pill that called down a pill tribulation. That merely meant he was a pill genius, and one of those that came along every ten thousand years. But to deploy formations without needing formation stones? That took years of polishing the craft! Even if Lu Yun had started cultivating as a fetus, he couldn’t have reached such heights in both fields!

Is he an old powerhouse who’s come back to life by possessing Lu Yun’s body? But that doesn’t make sense either, not even those old freaks of nature would’ve mastered both pill and formation dao. Besides, if he really were an old soul, he would’ve quietly cultivated in a remote area, waiting until he’d

recovered part of his power before reemerging in the world. He wouldn't have attracted so much attention, being both a youth sovereign and the Dusk governor...

Possibilities chased each other in Jin Heyi's mind; he couldn't figure out what was going on with Lu Yun. But it's all fine, he won't survive the tribulation!

He wasn't alone in his view; most of the crowd held the same belief.

Endless lightning pierced through the blessed land and struck down like heaven venting its wrath. The pill had originally been the sole target, but now the tribulation was targeting Lu Yun as well.

Though his formations managed to repel the lightning strikes, the shockwaves that resulted from each hit still injured him. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth and his speed at setting up defensive formations had visibly decreased. The ones that were in place began wobbling, ready to shatter at any time. Once they did, not only would the pill be destroyed, Lu Yun himself would be killed too.

Back in the gazebo, all color had drained from Qing Han's face. He tried to rush out numerous times, but Lu Shenhou and the others always stopped him.

"This is Lu Yun's tribulation!" Wu Tulong said seriously. "You'll cast your life aside for nothing if you charge in!"

Qing Han bit into his lip until it drew blood. The Formation Orb! That's right, Lu Yun can protect himself with the Formation Orb! He calmed himself somewhat, but his expression remained dark.

Bam!

A great rumble shook the entire blessed land, signalling the collapse of Lu Yun's greatest formation and leaving both human and pill directly exposed to wild bolts of lightning.

"Dead!"

"That bastard Lu Yun is finally dead!" The Feng and Qing Clans, as well as a few other immortals who resented Lu Yun, burst into riotous laughter.

"Hahaha, a good death, a fantastic death! A cultivator should've never attempted to refine a Heaven Descent Pill!" Gu Zun laughed to his heart's content.

Qing Xun and Yue Longsha remained silent, and many other pill masters looked mournful. The Dusk governor had proven himself to be a foremost pill master by refining this mythical pill. If he'd truly died in the tribulation, it would be a great loss for the world.

"Dying in a pill tribulation isn't a bad way to go for a premier pill master," a pill master sighed softly. "If I could refine a pill that summoned a tribulation, I'd be content even if I was immediately smote to death afterward."

"Once he's dead, the Daevic Skyfire will emerge. The Skydragon Tendon and Lunar Wings will also be discarded."

“And... the Sword Pagoda too! Those treasures won’t be destroyed by the tribulation!” Many immortals left their gazebos, expectant and poised to act. Once Lu Yun died, his wealth of treasure would emerge and it’d be time to fight over the loot!

Rumble rumble rumble!

Rampaging lightning had enveloped Lu Yun and his cauldron.

Boom!

A terrible force whipped around the young man as lightning shattered the high-ranking cauldron. All of the onlooking immortals were fully circulating their internal energy, ready to break out in a fight at the drop of a hat.

“Hahahaha!” Within the radius of frenzied light and booming thunder, the young governor burst into laughter. “What can a mere four hundred and eighty million lightning strikes do to me!?”

Bam!

He extended his right hand upwards, all fingers curled in a fierce grab at the skies above him.

“What’s he doing?!” Many found the action familiar, but couldn’t pinpoint where they’d seen that move. Events that happened next gave them the answer. Like an insatiable black hole, Lu Yun’s right hand devoured the endless lightning!

Beneath collective amazement, an enormous vortex gradually took shape. One side tapered off into Lu Yun’s extended right hand, and the funnel opened up into the thick tribulation clouds in the sky!

Thunder Palmstrike!

The death art enabled him to devour heavenly lightning, which tribulations were made of!

Given his current level of strength, he wasn’t able to summon heavenly lightning of this rank himself. Naturally, he wouldn’t waste the emergence of a tribulation.

There were two stages to the Thunder Palmstrike. The first was to channel the heavenly lightning in the sky into one’s body through the palm. The second was to release the lightning.

Normally, it’d take a couple months for a tribulation of this scale to dissipate, but through the Thunder Palmstrike, Lu Yun devoured all of the lightning in only a dozen breaths. The devastating bolts consolidated into a silver thunder core within his body that was immediately suppressed by the Tome of Life and Death.

After the clouds dissipated, clear blue skies returned once again. The unforeseen turn of events caught the readied-immortals off guard, and they even had difficulty reeling their energy back in.

Lu Yun hovered in the air with an unassuming pill on his left palm.

“Fortunately, I haven’t wasted Fairy Qing Xun’s blood.” He landed on the stage and nodded at Qing Xun. Her breath hitched; she could feel a connection to the pill.

It'd been refined with her blood and tempered with her golden immortal principles. The pill would only work for her, or her blood relations. As she beheld the pill with wonder, a great rush of air suddenly formed and drilled toward the unassuming object in Lu Yun's hand.

Chapter 223: Qing Ruyan

Everyone felt the gust of air, but it was too quick and too powerful for anyone to stop it. Moreover, the attacker had been discreet and skillful and no one could even pinpoint which direction the attack had originated from.

Anyone who knew about the Heaven Descent Pill would also know that the pill would only work on Qing Xun's blood kin, since it'd been refined with her blood. Destroying the pill would be a personal affront to the Panorama Pavilion.

Just when most expected the pill to be destroyed, a cyan luster resembling the vast sky above suddenly dazzled from the pill and forcefully scattered the aura.

"This is a pill that survived a pill tribulation," scoffed Lu Yun. "How would a peerless immortal be able to dent it?"

Gasps of astonishment resounded around the stage. This fabled ancient pill could even counter a peerless immortal's aura!

With a wave of Lu Yun's hand, the pill flew to Qing Xun. She inhaled deeply and accepted the pill with great care.

"I win the third auction as well, don't I?" Lu Yun smiled at Qing Xun.

"Having refined a pill as incredible as the Heaven Descent Pill, Sir Lu naturally—"

"Hold!" Gu Zun took a step forward and exclaimed. "Fairy Qing Xun, do you recall the request you listed before the auction?"

Surprised eyes shifted to him.

"Of course I do," Qing Xun replied indifferently as she tucked the pill away. "Whoever refines the highest ranking pill will win the Ten Orientations Stone."

"My Dao Fruit Pill is the best of ninth-rank pills! The pill master from River Province refined a supreme-rank pill! Even Miss Yue's Moondew Pill ranks higher than the Heaven Descent Pill. Why would Lu Yun be the winner then?"

The Heaven Descent Pill was rankless.

"They say that the pill can confer upon a fetus the golden immortal principles and establish their dao foundation, but that's just unproven tales. Who knows if the pill Lu Yun created actually works that way?"

"Only three Heaven Descent Pills have ever been refined, even back in the ancient times. Who can say for sure that this pill really is one?"

Qing Xun's face tightened. She knew the pill master was forcing his conclusion, but she couldn't find the words to counter his argument.

At this, everyone felt silent. Many actually agreed with Gu Zun. Moreover, they didn't want the pill to be the real deal. If it were, they, too, would need to find a way to destroy it! Panorama Pavilion mustn't be allowed to raise a celestial emperor!

There were nine majors in the world, each with their own celestial emperor. That was enough. No one desired a tenth peak dao immortal, even if it was decades later!

Qing Xun paled when she realized the key to the problem.

"Little sister," called out a smooth, gentle voice. A dignified and graceful woman stepped onto the stage. There was a strong resemblance between her and Qing Xun. While the host of the ceremonies looked to be about seventeen, the newcomer comported herself with a dignified bearing.

"Big sister!" Qing Xun perked up at the new arrival.

"Would you let me have the pill, sister?" smiled the graceful madam. Delighted, Qing Xun fumbled out the pill and handed it to the woman, who promptly swallowed it before anyone could react.

"You..." Gu Zun's expression darkened. Most present didn't know who the woman was, but Qing Xun had just called her sister. That indicated the woman must be a senior member of the Panorama Pavilion.

"Qing Ruyan expresses gratitude to Sir Lu on behalf of my unborn child." The mysterious madam swept a gracious curtsey to Lu Yun.

That prompted a reaction out of everyone. The woman was pregnant, and she was Qing Xun's blood relation! She could use Qing Xun's golden immortal principles to build a dao foundation for the child in her womb.

Qing Ruyan was the dao partner of the pavilion head's firstborn son, and she was Qing Xun's biological sister. Due to her mild temper and dislike of attention, most people didn't know of her. She'd only taken the stage because Qing Xun's blood had been used to refine a Heaven Descent Pill, and the pavilion wouldn't have been able to keep the pill without her intervention.

"How courageous of you to take a pill refined with dead herbs, madam," Gu Zun mocked before Lun Yun could respond. "Who knows if it actually works?"

"Whether it works or not, Sir Lu is the winner of the final auction." Smiling, she levitated the Ten Orientations Stone to Lu Yun with a point of her finger.

"Hmph!" Gu Zun snorted. It was obvious that this Qing Ruyan didn't think much of him. He placed his hands behind his back with a sneer and arrogantly declaimed, "The Panorama Pavilion is quite unfair in its dealings."

"Unfair?" Qing Ruyan chuckled gracefully. "The Ten Orientations Stone is ours. Even if we decided to gift it to Sir Lu Yun with no strings attached, that would still be our right. What do you think you are to question our decisions?"

"What did you say?!" Days of accumulated fury had finally reached a tipping point. Gu Zun snarled irately and flung a slap at Qing Ruyan.

“You seek a swift and unpleasant death!” Qing Ruyan scowled, unleashing a tremendous might. Changes instantly swept over the entire blessed land; the skies darkened and earth trembled. The very world seemed to tremble beneath her fury.

Face slack with shock, Gu Zun’s upraised right hand froze in the air against his will.

“Ar... arcane dao immortal!!” He almost collapsed. He, a golden immortal, had attacked an arcane dao immortal!

There were three dao immortal realms on the path of cultivation: aether, arcane, and origin.

Qing Ruyan was an arcane dao immortal, which put her on equal footing with the ancestors of the major clans. She might’ve only plucked her first arcane dao fruit, but she was among the top heavyweights in the world!

Many immortals gasped in shock, no wonder she’d fearlessly swallowed the pill Lu Yun had refined!

With a wave of her hand, Qing Ruyan threw Gu Zun out of the blessed land.

“Sir Lu Yun,” she turned back with a smile. “I have a favor to ask, I hope you don’t mind.”

“Pray tell.” Lu Yun was caught off guard as well. He hadn’t expected the coquettish young madam to be an arcane dao immortal!

“My child will be born in ten years,” she said gravely, “and I would like you to take my child as your disciple.”

Chapter 224: Forge of Earth and Sky

Panorama Pavilion’s auction finally came to a close, and Lu Yun had walked away with all three prizes. After today, his name would be known far and wide.

He’d succeeded in refining a Heaven Descent Pill, and a female arcane dao immortal had taken it! Qing Ruyan’s unborn child was destined to become a celestial emperor and was already promised to Lu Yun as a disciple!

There was no reason for the youth to refuse such a tempting offer. For the rest of the world, things had definitely taken a turn for the worse.

There’d been some uncertainty before on whether Dusk Province could truly grow into a new sacred land. If a new celestial emperor rose up there, that would no longer be the case. More importantly, no one knew how quickly Qing Ruyan’s child would attain origin dao realm. In the ancient times, the Heaven Descent Pill alone had been sufficient!

The nine existing celestial emperors were about to seclude themselves from the world in order to seek that legendary realm. The winds of change were blowing, portents of the momentous affairs that were yet to come, and the Heaven Descent Pill was another catalyst.

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“Sir Lu, a moment of your time!” As the crowd began dispersing, an aged voice called out to Lu Yun. It was an old man with fiery hair, dressed in matching robes.

“This old man is Zhurong Cangshan of the Zhurong family.” He approached the youth with a smile.

“Zhurong Cangshan!” The introduction elicited a considerable reaction from the surrounding crowd. The Zhurong family!

Although it wasn’t a great faction in the world of immortals, it was definitely one of the oldest. ‘Zhurong’ was the official title of a god in the ancient divine court; specifically, it was the god of fire. The family that now claimed the surname was a bloodline descended from that god.

At the beginning of the new world order, the divines had enslaved countless people, but hadn’t dared levy the same treatment on the Zhurongs. Even now, its kinsmen had mastery over nearly every kind of fire. Their proficiency with fire rivaled the Vermilion Bird tribe! Naturally, the family had engendered many genius pill masters and treasure refiners as a result.

Zhurong Cangshan himself was a capable member of the latter group and was the author of multiple superior treasures. His status was reflected in the deep fear and respect that others showed toward him.

“Is there anything you need, Mister Zhurong?” Sobering up, Lu Yun made a courteous bow toward his elder.

In a roundabout way, he owed a considerable amount to the old man’s family. Huangqing had once studied under a dao immortal Zhurong master, eventually rising beyond her master’s expertise. As such, Lu Yun could be considered an indirect student of the family’s knowledge.

If he hadn’t met Huangqing when he had, he’d act on his desire to dig up the Zhurong’s ancestral graves instead....

Zhurong Cangshan blinked with momentary surprise. He hadn’t expected respect from a youth who’d shown incredible arrogance to Gu Zun only moments earlier. In terms of renown and position in the world, he was very much the other master’s counterpart: a well-respected expert in his field.

Below dao immortality, in fact, he was the best.

The young governor hectoring Gu Zun meant that he might’ve been willing to dish out the same treatment to the master refiner. Instead, he showed a civility that was the direct opposite. Zhurong Cangshan was secretly very pleased.

“Need is too strong a word,” he replied seriously. “What I have is a humble request. The Ten Orientations Stone is very important to me, I am willing to exchange it for three unowned dao-grade treasures.”

Dao-grade treasures were a completely different beast from supreme-ranked treasures. As a result of being refined by dao immortals, they were much more powerful than supreme-grade treasures. Unowned treasures were especially precious; fusion and refinement via one’s blood would easily convert them to treasures that could be inherited by an entire clan.

In most people’s eyes, three unowned dao treasures were far more precious than a single Ten Orientations Stone. However, Lu Yun shook his head slightly. “I’m afraid I must disappoint you, Master Zhurong. I came here today for the stone as well.”

“Are you also here on behalf of another?” Zhurong Cangshan asked, a little bemused.

“Not at all,” said Lu Yun. “This junior intends to refine a treasure in the near future, and the Ten Orientations Stone is its main material.”

“What?!” the crowd clamored once more.

“You’re going to... refine a treasure?” An expression of intense bewilderment indicated that Zhurong Cangshan thought he’d misheard.

Lu Yun inclined his head in confirmation. “I have some modest accomplishments in that field as well. Unfortunately, I came to the auction for the stone. If the senior needs the Lunar Wings or the Skydragon Tendon, however, I am happy to offer them to you!”

“Is this true?!” Zhurong Cangshan focused on Lu Yun with delirious zeal. “You—can—refine—treasures?” he pressed, word by measured word.

Lu Yun had shown off his terrifying pill refining skills only moments earlier, with the Heaven Descent Pill. After that, he’d conjured a formation out of thin air without needing to set down any foundations, a technique that countless formation masters could only dream of. Now he could refine treasures, too!?

With something as fine as the Ten Orientations Stone, to boot!

“Yes!” Lu Yun responded with absolute certainty. He’d tried to keep a low profile before, but an avalanche of trouble had come his way regardless. A little bit of pomp and affectation wasn’t all bad; at the very least, it would do a good job of warding off some of the flies.

More importantly, the more useful he showed himself to be, the more connections others would want to make with him. That was a different kind of defense.

If hiding was no use, why not come out straight into the open?

Zhurong Cangshan drew in a sharp breath at the bright-eyed youth’s answer.

“How are your refining abilities, compared to your skill in pills and formations?” he spoke with utmost solemnity. “The Ten Orientations Stone is one of the choicest materials in the immortal world. It contains a mysterious and profound energy that is tremendously fascinating, and I will not allow it to be wasted by a possible novice.”

Lu Yun smiled and waved a hand. A bright yellow flame jumped in his palm: Daevic Skyfire! The handful of embers bounced upwards, vanishing into the void. In the next moment, a tremendous rush of heat enveloped the surrounding half-kilometer of land or so. It was as if this patch of territory had become a great forge.

“Forge of earth and sky!” Zhurong Cangshan colored in shock.

Pill, equipment, formation, talisman: all four auxiliary daos had their own corresponding ultimate techniques: pill dao’s ‘medicinal properties reformation’, treasure dao’s ‘forge of earth and sky’, formation dao’s ‘formation without foundation’, and talisman dao’s ‘talisman of the void’!

Only a master of the appropriate discipline could comprehend these pinnacles of their craft, although it wasn't guaranteed.

Gu Zun, Yue Longsha, and Wayfarer were all leading authorities in pill dao, but they were all incapable of medicinal properties reformation. The technique involved breaking down and reforming the properties of herbs to obtain new material that was needed, but unowned. It came very close to creating something out of nothing!

Once upon a time, Feinie had been hailed as the world of immortals' Formation King. It wasn't only because of her slaying of thirty-six peerless immortals, but also because of her mastery of the 'formations without foundation' technique.

In the span of an hour or two, Lu Yun had shown off both the pinnacle techniques of formation and refinement dao.

"Good, good, good... it's been ten thousand years! I didn't expect the forge of earth and sky to reappear, just like that!" Zhurong Cangshan recalled the girl prodigy who had astounded the whole world, only to die at the hands of the divines: Huang Qing.

The 'forge of earth and sky' drew upon the energies inherent in the land, using the laws of nature itself to aid in refining treasures! Alas, the technique had always been out of his personal reach.

Lu Yun wagged a finger, retrieving the Daevic Skyfire. Its source gone, the effects of the forge disappeared.

"Can you draw talismans, Lu Yun?" someone in the crowd blurted out.

Lu Yun squinted, then coughed with some embarrassment. "A little, I guess."

Zhurong Cangshan blinked at the audience.

The crowd blinked back at him.

A long, befuddled silence stretched on.

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The Lu Clan erupted in activity on this day, as enthusiastic as if it were the dawn of a new year.

After the calamity a hundred years ago, the clan's slow recovery had only allowed it to return to a fraction of its former glory. Still, in the eyes of most, it was only a matter of time before it'd be forced to leave Mauve Peace Paradise.

Many factions had already chosen to distance themselves from the clan. But today, the world renowned master refiner, Zhurong Cangshan, had come calling on the dilapidated faction!

There'd been many in the clan who grumbled after Lu Yun had offended Gu Zun; well, they'd long since forgotten about that old fart by now. Zhurong Cangshan didn't represent just himself; his entire family was behind him!

"Should I stop holding back? Is it time to break through to refined spirit realm?" Meditating inside hell, Lu Yun began seriously considering the question.

He'd received plenty of goodwill as of late. Aside from the gratefulness of his clansmen due to the inheritance tower, he had felt two powerful surges from the Qing Clan after saving his friend—from Qing Han's parents, no doubt. Resolving the Chen Clan's crisis had also earned him Chen Dongyu's gratitude.

"Qing Ruyan felt genuine sincerity for me, too. She didn't have ulterior motives."

He recalled the astonishing rush of goodwill upon her consumption of the Heaven Descent Pill; he'd nearly lost control and broken through on the spot. He would've done it, too, had it been any other time.

But ever since finding out that the path of cultivation was also broken partway through, he no longer dared risk it. The spirit realm was especially important, and he wanted to keep his options open with regard to what came next. The ancient immortals hadn't noticed it, because there'd been no cultivators, per se, back then.

"Breaking through can wait. I'm going to explore that tomb first!" He took a deep breath, stifling his desire to break through once more.

A fist-sized rock appeared between his fingers. It didn't look big, but it weighed more than a hundred tons. Its surface was as black as pitch—no, more like a minor black hole that swallowed up all surrounding light.

It was none other than the Ten Orientations Stone.

Chapter 225: Traces of Hell

Inside the netherworld, Lu Yun could maximize his abilities in every way. His thoughts, consciousness, and available energy were all at their absolute peak. Only under these circumstances did he dare refine the Ten Orientations Stone into a feng shui compass.

The stone was very difficult to come by; if he wasted this one, it would be nearly impossible for him to find another.

The fires of hell burned ever brighter, filling the entire demiplane in a blazing sea. All five Envoys of Samsara returned to their place of origin, creating a small sanctuary amid the inferno for Yueshen, Ruyi, and the Infernum.

The invincible stone gradually began melting under the hellfire's heat, liquefying into molten rock. As he refined the stone with methodical skill, Lu Yun called upon the Dragonsearch Invocation and poured energy from every fiber of his body into the material.

Three hundred years!

Three entire centuries passed within hell.

Lu Yun spent all that time sitting in the center of the sea of hellfire, refining the Ten Orientations Stone bit by painstaking bit. The fist-sized chunk of rock underwent a fundamental transformation in that time.

The applied heat had caused it to expand into a glittering star! Not a starstone, but a real shining sphere of power. It possessed the gravity and laws that were its birthright. However, the star born was a dead one, governed by laws that were more closely aligned with death and inertia.

All things were separated into yin and yang, the living and the dead, and laws were no different. The star that'd been born from the Ten Orientations Stone belonged firmly in the latter category.

In other words, the world it nurtured belonged to the dead.

Hell hath no borders, it was plenty large enough to contain this star.

"The deathly laws of the stone are similar to those from hell... could this stone have come from hell in the first place?!" The revelation shook Lu Yun awake. He opened his eyes, allowing his consciousness to flow into the star like quicksilver. As soon as he made contact, he felt a striking familiarity from it. Only hell could hold those principles of death!

Yet despite searching far and wide, Lu Yun could find no trace of the Ten Orientations Stone inside the netherworld.

Can this stone be holding hell's secrets? The young man didn't stop refining the stone, but diverted part of his attention to considering the events that had transpired to him so far. I got the Tome of Life and Death back on Earth, and it took me to the world of immortals.... Was it not pure coincidence after all?

The first death art I learned, the 'realms of yin and yang', opened the Gates of the Abyss. Meanwhile, the Ten Orientations Stone has something to do with hell. When I found the Tome of Life and Death, I was holding a feng shui compass and ended up here instead of dying, so... that... old compass... was made from another Ten Orientations Stone?

That must be the key behind it all; no wonder he'd been chosen by the book!

His old compass, refined from another Ten Orientations Stone, had contained the power of hell, which activated the Tome of Life and Death. After saving and depositing its human package, the book had decomposed the compass, using its energy to reopen the gates of hell and resuscitate it from its former closed state.

Now that hell is connected to me through the Tome of Life and Death, it's essentially a world that belongs entirely to me. As long as my cultivation continues progressing, I won't need to draw on the Ten Orientations Stones to restore it. Lu Yun exhaled gladly. If not for that, this stone would've been swallowed up to be more building blocks of the netherworld as soon as he set foot past the Gates of the Abyss. Without a doubt, the Ten Orientations Stone had come from hell!

It would seem that the world of immortals wasn't completely devoid of traces of hell. The appearance of one of these stones was more than proof enough. His curiosity sated, Lu Yun refocused on refining the stone through the Dragonsearch Invocation.

Two hundred more years passed.

Hum...

A jet of black light flashed before his eyes as the enormous star disappeared, replaced by a palm-sized compass. The compass was dyed purest black and separated into three layers. The first discerned direction, the second inferred fortune, and the third analyzed feng shui!

After five centuries, the feng shui compass was finally complete!

Lu Yun felt exhaustion wash over him. Even hell couldn't mitigate this level of fatigue. As soon as he extinguished the hellfire, Yuying rushed forward and stuffed a large handful of pills into his mouth.

"Who in the world was the grandmaster of my sect?" He took a deep breath, then began rapidly recovering his stamina.

"Inside hell, I'm not much different from a celestial emperor at peak origin dao immortal, and I still needed five centuries of time and hellfire to refine a feng shui compass," the young man murmured. "There's no way the grandmaster was an ordinary mortal, not with how he could refine a feng shui compass!"

Another question popped into his head. "Did the sect go downhill only because someone opened a bronze outer-coffin?"

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Five hundred years in hell was no more than an instant in the outside world. Lu Yun left it considerably paler than he'd entered and found it difficult to maintain a steady footing. The energy he'd spent on the feng shui compass was mostly recovered, but recovering his stamina and vigor wouldn't be so easy.

"Milord, the Yue Clan's Yue Longsha seeks an audience!" an opulently garbed Ge Long reported eagerly.

Lu Yun had become extremely important in the Lu Clan overnight. His clansmen scrambled all over themselves to put him on an almost literal pedestal. As his servant, Ge Long was similarly lifted up in both prominence and treatment. However, the ghostly servant remained steadfastly loyal to Lu Yun, staying nearby to satisfy his master's every need.

"Yue Longsha?" A spark of disorientation flickered through Lu Yun's eye. A moment later, the memories from five hundred years ago came flooding back.

After spending five centuries in hell, he felt a little detached from the sudden return to reality.

"What's she doing here?" The young man frowned, then nodded permission. He could hardly refuse a visit from one of the Yue Clan's brightest daughters, a natural-born immortal and grandmistress of pills.

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Lu Yun lived in an area specially designated by his clan. Breathtakingly scenic and filled with immortal qi, it rivaled the living spaces of the clan's dao immortals. Inside the garden, a youth sat across from Yue Longsha. The atmosphere was a bit tense... like there was a strange stare down happening, for some reason.

Hostility? Whatever for? And why's Qing Han here, anyway? He felt a rush of warmth in his heart at the sight. After five centuries, Qing Han was the one he missed the most.

Wait, shouldn't I miss Qing Yu the most instead? Well, there's nothing wrong with missing Qing Han, I think. Lu Yun swung his head around, rattling its contents. ...but why?

His thoughts confused him.

"What in the world happened to you?" The murder in Qing Han's eyes was replaced with a deep concern, and he stood up to lend an arm to his friend. Lu Yun's entire appearance was slightly disheveled; his hair was messy and matted over, footsteps shaky, face ashen, and he was substantially thinner.

"Eh, I'm alright." Lu Yun couldn't resist reaching out to pat Qing Han's head.

Qing Han froze at the gesture, unsure of how to respond. Yue Longsha's jaw also dropped. A man, gently caressing another man's head...? A strange sort of malicious annoyance brewed in her.

Although Qing Han very much enjoyed the feeling, he ultimately decided to tilt his head to the side. Lu Yun didn't feel anything strange himself, but plopped down beside his friend, picked up the tea that Qing Han had just drunk from, and gulped it down.

The ensuing lip-smack made Yue Longsha twist with even greater discomfort.

"You must've come for the Lunar Wings, Miss Yue." Lu Yun got straight to the point. It'd been five hundred years for him, but his memories were rapidly coming back to him. Plus, his five envoys' memories were just fine. A few centuries were nothing to him. He still remembered the small burst of excitement from Yue Longsha when she'd first seen the Lunar Wings.

"Indeed," Yue Longsha nodded, "what will Sir Lu accept for it?"

Qing Han sighed with a mixture of relief and embarrassment, leaving Yue Longsha in the dark about why the young man's hostility had so suddenly come and gone.

"Ah, that's not something you should ask me." Lu Yun glanced at his friend nearby. "I gave them to Qing Han already, so you should discuss that with him instead."

A smile crept over Qing Han's face.

Lu Yun had kept the Skydragon Tendon for himself, as the material was very useful to Aoxue and could increase her strength immensely.

The Lunar Wings, however, were one half of the connate-grade treasure, Lunisolar Wings. Refining it granted unparalleled speed—excellent insurance whenever one's life was on the line, and his group was about to head out to an ancient tomb. In light of that, giving Qing Han the Lunar Wings had made the governor a bit more comfortable with his friend's safety.

"Back in Cloudwater... ah, no, Sword Pavilion, your clan's Yue Cheng already chose to oppose Lu Yun," Qing Han responded solemnly. "I've seen no evidence that your clan has changed its mind about that decision. You should return, miss."

He uttered a staunch refusal before Yue Longsha could even attempt to persuade him otherwise. What a joke! The Yue Clan's attitude aside, these Lunar Wings were Lu Yun's gift to him. How could he give them to someone else? And to an exceptionally pretty woman, at that!

Yue Longsha sighed wistfully. It was an answer she expected, but she'd hoped for a different result, regardless. She saluted the two young men with cupped fists, then turned to leave.

"One moment," Lu Yun suddenly stood up.

The Yue immortal wheeled around, a faint smile upon her face. "Are you deciding on Sir Qing Han's behalf, Sir Lu?"

Lu Yun shook his head. "You must have the Solar Wings, Miss Yue, the Lunisolar Wings' other half. Is there anything I can offer to get them from you?"

Chapter 226: Ten Yins Estuary

The Lunar Wings were only a fragmented part of the connate-grade Lunisolar Wings. No matter how useful and powerful it was, it couldn't measure up to the completed form.

"Oh?" Yue Longsha swiveled her head, casting a meaningful glance at Qing Han. "You want the Solar Wings, Sir Lu? That's fine, if you refine a Heaven Descent Pill for my clan."

"Is that so? I bid you good day then, Miss Yue." Lu Yun pressed his lips together before turning around.

Yue Longsha gaped slightly, but nothing came out. She hadn't expected such firmness, but her counteroffer was quite unreasonable.

A Heaven Descent Pill?

Ten complete pairs of Lunisolar Wings wouldn't be a fair trade for that, much less a single pair of Solar ones. Yue Longsha took another thoughtful look at Qing Han before departing in turn.

The imperial envoy tilted his head, then shrugged; it helped him shake off some of his discomfort.

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"Why do you look so awful?!" Wu Tulong and the others were just as shocked as Qing Han had been.

"Does Mauve Peace Paradise have a ten-thousand-year-old fox spirit or something? Did she suck the life out of you with too much bedtime activity?" It'd been less than twenty-four hours since they'd last met. Lu Yun's emaciation in the interim scared the living daylights out of his friends.

"Refining a treasure did a number on me, but I'll be okay." Lu Yun coughed. Five hundred years of sedentary fasting would do this to anyone. "How're your preparations?"

"We're pretty much ready. The important thing is how you are...." Dongfang Hao furrowed his brow. "Why not rest a few days?"

His sentiment was echoed by the others; Lu Yun looked like he would be bent over by a stiff breeze.

"I'm alright, really." Laughing helplessly, Lu Yun drew upon a little bit of the Sal Tree of Life and Death's lifeforce. He carefully fed it into his veins for immediate results, restoring him back to nearly good as new. He'd been concerned that using too much would accidentally cause him to break through, but there was nothing for it.

Lu Yun's companions breathed collective sighs of relief. They were curious as to exactly what he had refined, but their questions could wait. What in the world could do this to a man?

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There was one day remaining before Zhao Shengguang's coronation. All of Xiankan was renovated and redecorated. It was more aureate, splendid, and magnificent than ever. Throngs of immortals lined the streets, bustling with excitement and anticipation.

It was on this day that Lu Yun and his six friends quietly left the capital. The moment they did so, a flurry of movements ensued in other places. Many immortals discreetly followed their tracks.

Mauve Peace Paradise was densely surrounded by spies. As soon as Lu Yun left the place, reports were sent to certain individuals' hands. Even if he'd disguised himself, his enemies had treasures that could pick him out. Besides, he had no intention of doing so in the first place.

Lu Yun's departure from Xiankan made huge waves in the city. No one had dared attack him within city walls. Wayfarer had already saved him twice, but the Lu ancestor awaited in the wings as well. Once outside the capital, he was easy pickings—in theory.

Before now, various factions would've refrained from an open assault out of respect for the imperial court. But considering recent events, that was no longer true.

Such was the obstacle that was firmly in Lu Yun's way. Even within the court, a great number of officials wished for his death. Imperial dignity was worthless before actual gain. He had no time to squirrel around any more; instead, he proudly sailed out of the capital on his dazzlingly majestic fortress ship.

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"The tomb is over here." Upon the ship's deck, Lu Shenhou took out a jade slip that projected a holographic map into the air.

Life Province spanned half a million kilometers. The tomb was situated in an unassuming corner of the province, with no mountains or rivers anywhere nearby. There was, however, a small town of mortals near it.

Lu Shenhou had come upon the tomb due to venturing into town for a snack. He'd been accompanied by a number of immortals and powerful cultivators, but had ended up as the only survivor. Even more frighteningly, the tomb had entirely forbidden immortal entry. The immortals with him had been slain by a mysterious force as soon as they'd gone inside.

"This place?" Lu Yun frowned slightly. "Magnify the map a little, I need to see how Life Province is laid out."

Lu Shenhou nodded, then used his thoughts to do exactly that. Every prefecture, city, mountain, and river appeared as the map expanded. Aside from these, a smattering of red lights showed up as well. They designated ancient tombs, which made a map like this nearly priceless. The fact that Lu Shenhou had it was great proof of how much his clan valued him.

"Ah..." Everyone blanched upon taking another look at the map.

“Those mountains and rivers, with that tomb at the center... that’s the shape of a skull!” Wu Tulong’s eyes bulged with shock.

“This is a Ten Yins Estuary layout! Not even grass should be able to grow inside, are you sure there’s a town there?” Lu Yun spat out through chattering teeth.

Ten Yins Estuary!

Nine was the ultimate number. Generally speaking, a land of nine yins was sufficient to name a land of utter despair and desolation. But ten yins?

Nothing living could possibly survive.

A sea of yin qi should’ve flooded the layout’s borders, creating a zone of death fifty thousand kilometers wide. Anything that breathed would be turned into the walking dead upon venturing within.

The ancient tomb at its heart was a devil’s nest. Even Lu Yun had no idea what kind of monster would be born there. Yet a mortal town was very clearly upon the map. No one had ever heard of a forbidden region like this inside Life Province.

Boom!

Before Lu Shenhou could speak, an explosion sounded in the fortress ship’s airspace. The stalwart vessel began to shudder violently, slowing down as if entering a miry swamp.

“This is the Exalted Immortal Sect’s Diabolic Formation of Soul Refinement!” Wu Tulong raised his head. His expression noticeably darkened as he noticed what was happening. The formation was infamous for being used to kill dao immortals!

Chapter 227: Utterly Dumbfounded

Outside Mauve Peace Paradise, a man in a white tunic sat cross-legged, his features obscured. Lu Daoling saw him as soon as he stepped outside. Conflicted emotions wrestled each other through his face before he finally turned back with a sigh.

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“Go back, Miss Ruyan. For your child’s sake.” A few figures blocked Qing Ruyan’s way outside the Panorama Pavilion’s blessed lands. She narrowed her eyes and unleashed her inner energy, planning to hack a way out in blood.

“Come back, Ruyan,” a wizened voice transmitted to her. “Lu Yun must have a contingency plan if he dared leave Xiankan. You couldn’t help him even if you went to him.”

Qing Ruyan nodded mutely before suddenly saying, “From now on, the Panorama Pavilion will terminate all collaboration with the Qing Clan and the Exalted Immortal Sect.”

Dumbfounded silence reigned.

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“Give up, senior brother Zhurong.” Gu Zun winked at a glowering Zhurong Cangshan. “You’re not influential enough to save Lu Yun. He put himself in the situation this time, and has no one else to blame.”

“Hmph!” Zhurong Cangshan scoffed and left with a flourish of his sleeves.

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“If death is what you lot wish for, I won’t intervene again.” Wayfarer sat in a little tavern in the outer city of Xiankan, sighing into the cup of water he was holding.

A powerful dao immortal had locked onto him. Not far away, the other Wayfarer stared at him coldly.

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No one showed themselves or said a word. The only sound came from the whirling Diabolic Formation of Soul Refinement as it continued to refine the fortress ship.

Crack.

In only a few breaths, ugly cracks had spread through the ship’s defensive formation, threatening imminent destruction.

“The Exalted Immortal Sect has gone to a lot of effort to kill you!” Wu Tulong said with a wry smile. He’d expected the sect would send dao immortals to attack Lu Yun, but they’d opted for the great formation instead, leaving nothing to chance.

“Not only that,” Lu Yun shook his head, “but the formation is also protected with a barrier to prevent anyone from breaking it from the outside.”

“Barrier?”

“It’s the Arcane Goldenlight Formation of the Qing Clan!” Color drained from Qing Han’s face, along with all faith in his clan. “Give me the Arcane Golden Bell!”

Lu Yun tensed at the change of expression. “What for?”

“I’ll detonate the bell and break the formation!” Qing Han declared. The Arcane Golden Bell was the Qing Clan’s supreme treasure. Although the bloodline within it had been erased by Empress Myrtlestar, the dao immortal power left by the Qing ancestor still remained. Its explosion would shake the heavens themselves.

“Don’t!” Lu Yun jumped in shock. “That’ll kill all of us as well!”

Qing Han lowered his head and fell silent, nails biting into his palms as he balled his hands into fists.

“I can deal with a little formation.” Lu Yun sneered at the crimson clouds in the sky. “I didn’t want to take this many lives, but can’t blame me for not showing mercy when you’ve shown me none.”

He slowly rose into the air.

“What are you doing?” Back on the ship, the others gaped at him.

“Breaking the formation, of course.” He took a deep breath. “Activate all of the defensive formations on the ship, Ge Long.”

“Understood!” At his deep inhale, the key in Ge Long’s hand glowed and the entire ship lit up, slowly stabilizing from its wobbling. Lu Yun disembarked from the ship. Flickering around his body were the four hundred and eighty million lightning bolts from the pill tribulation!

“We’ve activated the Diabolic Formation of Soul Refinement of my sect and the Arcane Goldenlight Formation of your clan to kill Lu Yun. He should die happy that we’ve put so much effort into dealing with a small fry like him.”

Zhao Yinfeng cracked a smile when he looked at the two formations. Qing Xiangpeng’s lips twitched as well. They’d gathered a total of five hundred peerless immortals, thousands of golden immortals, and eighteen aether dao immortals for this little expedition.

Donglin Zhi, the peak aether dao immortal from House Daolin, was present as well. Combined with the two great formations, their forces were more than enough for them to kill even an arcane dao immortal. As a mere cultivator, Lu Yun wouldn’t be able to survive no matter how talented he was!

That bastard Qing Han is on the ship as well. He can die with Lu Yun. Let’s see how Chen Xiao and that ingrate Qing Buyi react when they return!

The major factions in the world of immortals had banded together against Lu Yun, yet Qing Han had still remained staunchly by his side. He only had himself to blame if he died along with the young governor; Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi wouldn’t dare retaliate.

“The ship will be ours in about half an hour... Hm? How dare Lu Yun leave the ship on his own? What is he doing?” Zhao Tiefeng’s expression changed drastically. “Thunder tribulation?!”

Rumble.

Terrifying lightning arced from Lu Yun’s body. It was the four hundred and eighty million lightning strikes he’d devoured with the Thunder Palmstrike back when he was refining the Heaven Descent Pill!

Facing two great formations at once, he activated the Thunder Palmstrike again and released all of the thunder and lightning he’d devoured.

Sizzle crackle boom!

Silver lightning exploded, its brilliance so intense that the sun, moon, and the entire world paled in comparison.

Oof!

The eighteen aether dao immortals in charge of maintaining the formations threw back their heads and vomited blood, while the five hundred peerless immortals and thousands of golden immortals spontaneously disintegrated!

The lightning wouldn’t have hurt the dao immortals if it were to descend bolt by bolt, but Lu Yun had unleashed the tribulation’s power all at once! Even the eighteen dao immortals couldn’t stand the tremendous power, and all immortals below the dao immortal realm died at a touch of the lightning.

Crack. Bam!!

The two top-level formations exploded in midair, rendering seven of the weakest dao immortals into ashes from the resulting shockwaves and lightning. Qing Xiangpeng and Zhao Yinfeng had only survived because they were a little further from the formations, but they were still hurled off their feet by the impact. Heavily injured, the eleven surviving dao immortals struggled to flee from the center of the explosion.

An enormous mushroom cloud billowed into the air, through which a giant fortress ship sailed right out. Lu Yun stood atop the bow with his hands behind his back.

“Qing Xiangpeng!” exclaimed Lu Yun. “Zhao Yinfeng!!”

“Hahaha, Lu Yun, Lu Yun! Who would’ve thought he’d have this up your sleeves? You collected the Heaven Descent Pill’s tribulation for this moment!” Qing Xiangpeng laughed madly despite his unkempt condition. “You’ve killed seven dao immortals, severely injured eleven more, and slaughtered thousands of immortals! The entire world will retaliate, just wait and see!”

The Qing Clan and the Exalted Immortal Sect had spearheaded the operation, but most of the major clans in the world of immortals had sent a few of their members. It was not only an assassination attempt on Lu Yun, but also a go at partitioning the future Dusk Sacred Land.

No one could’ve expected the young governor to kill thousands of immortals—and seven dao immortals—in one fell swoop with his pill tribulation! After today, many factions in the world would name him in their wanted lists and do everything they could to kill him!

“Retaliation?” Lu Yun scoffed. “I’d really like to know who’s going to do the deed! If you lot are so displeased with the five youth sovereigns, you may send your youths to challenge us. But you went so low as to attack us with dao immortals and great formations. Tsk tsk, how shameful!”

Silence unfurled throughout the scene when Wu Tulong, Dongfang Hao, Zi Chen, and Mo Qitian walked out of the fortress ship.

Qing Xiangpeng, Zhao Yinfeng, and the surviving dao immortals were dumbfounded at the four emerging youths. They’d never for one moment thought that these four would also be on Lu Yun’s ship as well. When had they come to Life Province?!

Chapter 228: Firmament Prison

A prodigious trap!

Those who’d survived the armageddon of thunder and lightning, and the audience who bore witness at a far distance, all believed this to be a colossal trap. Lu Yun must’ve set this up and just waited for others to fall into it, hook, link, and sinker!

No wonder he’d left Xiankan the day before the coronation rather than stay in the city. He was trying to lure out his attackers! No one had fathomed that the other four youth sovereigns would be on the fortress ship as well.

The Qing Clan and Exalted Immortal Sect could never explain this away, and the participating factions would sooner go into hiding than exact revenge. Qing Xiangpeng and Zhao Yinfeng fled immediately.

Aside from Lu Yun, the other four youth sovereigns all came from powerful factions. The Immortal Martial School behind Wu Tulong, especially, could even rival House Donglin. Moreover, the five youth sovereigns had been appointed by the nine celestial emperors to serve as an example for the cultivators of the world.

Sending dao immortals and setting up great formations to assassinate them was open rebellion against the celestial emperors. Although they were prepared to hand over their thrones, the Nephrite celestial emperor was the only one who had done so thus far, while the others yet reigned supreme.

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Back on the fortress ship, the others stared at the governor like they'd seen a ghost, but Lu Yun remained nonchalant.

"So where were we?" Lu Yun cocked his head. "Are you sure it's a town of mortals?"

Lu Shenhou gawked at his clansmen; the jaws of the other youth sovereigns dropped as well.

"Did you and Lu Shenhou put on this show so that the four of us would come and fix your problems, Lu Yun?" Zi Chen frowned. The same thought had occurred to Wu Tulong, Mo Qitian, and Dongfang Hao.

"You call this a problem?" Lu Yun looked at him with surprise.

The others responded with confused looks. He'd offended at least a third of the top factions of the nine majors. Wasn't that a big enough problem?

"Gentlemen, you might have misunderstood." Ge Long approached them with a smile. "Milord was a public enemy even back in Dusk Province. He offended every major sect and house in the province even before he set foot on the path of cultivation. Their cultivators, and even immortals, wanted nothing but to kill him, but here he is, still breathing."

Wu Tulong fidgeted awkwardly. So this fellow is a troublemaker who makes enemies wherever he goes.

Lu Yun scoffed inwardly. None of that was on him, but he couldn't tell them the truth. So be it then.

"You should know that I don't fear trouble after I set up Dusk City's inheritance tower and demonstrated my mastery over the supplemental paths by refining a Heaven Descent Pill in public." Lu Yun sighed. "I don't need you guys to handle some flies."

Wu Tulong and the others didn't respond. He turned to Lu Shenhou. "Please continue, Shenhou."

"There was indeed a town of living, mortal residents," Lu Shenhou affirmed seriously. "I remember a bun shop that made great buns. I'll treat you guys to some when we get there, you'll believe me then."

Wu Tulong and the others exchanged a look. Judging from Lu Yun and Lu Shenhou's conversation, the two must've been telling the truth about the broken cultivation path.

Lu Yun didn't pay them any attention, but instead, closely considered the Life Province map. The skull formed by the Ten Yins Estuary gave rise to ghostly countenances that crowded the southwest corner of the province, painting a macabre scene. The fortress ship remained on course and soon approached their destination.

“There really is no yin energy here...” Lu Yun stood atop the bow and cast his gaze at the yin layout. Per his orders, Ge Long dropped anchor outside the estuary rather than barging in.

“Notice anything off?” Qing Han came up to him with a quiet question.

“Let me check.” Lu Yun opened his Spectral Eye and scanned the terrain before him.

Buzz.

A great rumble consumed his mind, emptying it of all thought.

Pah!

Blood geysered out all seven of his orifices as he collapsed onto the deck, facing upward.

“Lu Yun!!” Qing Han panicked and grabbed his friend, stuffing valuable healing pills into the governor’s mouth like they were candy.

“Don’t move him!” Mo Qitian came to Lu Yun’s side and touched his forehead. “His spirit and soul were hurt by a combat art gone awry.”

“What’s going on?” Wu Tulong made his way to the bow and frowned at the landscape in front of them. “Is there really something strange ahead?”

“I got it. I got it!” Lu Yun struggled to sit up. Dark blood gushed out of his mouth as soon as he opened it.

Qing Han went stark-white upon seeing his friend like this.

“I’m fine, really!” Lu Yun waved a careless hand and took a deep breath, healing his soul with the vitality of the Sal Tree of Life and Death. “That is indeed a Ten Yins Estuary ahead of us. It’s a place where malicious yin energies, grudges, and malevolent killing intent converge! Countless living creatures have died there.”

In fact, too many had died there. As soon as Lu Yun had cast his Spectral Eye in that direction, an endless supply of information had rushed into him and almost made his brain explode. That was why his Spectral Eye ended up hurting his soul.

It was impossible to count the number of dead there. It was more than the numbers he knew, and certainly more than he could take. That’d never happened before, even in the abyss where the divines were buried. Just what was this place?!

Lu Yun looked at the geography ahead. Covering the land was no dirt, but... bone powder from the countless beings that had died and rotted away here. The mountains and rivers were also formed of bone powder, and the flora grew upon a base of bone powder.

“The farthest reaches of yin is yang,” muttered Lu Yun. “The Ten Yins Estuary has reached extreme yin and returned to yang!”

Everyone sucked in a breath at his words. That the concentration of extreme yin within a five thousand kilometer radius was so dense it’d formed a land of pure yang instead... even the mere thought was terrifying.

“That’s the ruins of the Firmament Prison,” Qing Han suddenly spoke up. “Spanning five thousand kilometers, the Firmament Prison was built out of endless skeletons. No one knows when it was built, nor who built it. It was there before the ancient heavenly court was established.”

Empress Myrtlestar had relayed this to Qing Han from the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals. The Ten Yins Estuary was the aftermath of the Firmament Prison’s destruction.

Realization dawned on Lu Yun—the dread zombie had mentioned the prison before. It’d been the prison of the heavenly court, and housed those who’d committed great felonies.

No one ever left the prison alive.

When the ancient world of immortals was shattered in the great war, the prison was also destroyed, leaving nothing but ruins. The malicious energies, grudges, and killing intent accumulated in the prison constantly grew thicker, until the mixture reached extreme yin and returned to yang. Still, it was an area of great yin energy, thus, it was dangerous. It was nowhere as peaceful as it seemed on the surface.

“Are we still going?” Excitement flashed through the youth sovereigns’ gazes. Exploring a place like the Firmament Prison was a great dream of theirs.

“Of course, why not?” Lun Yun’s eyes lit up as well. “Only such a place would preserve a tomb from before the ancient times and the records of the cultivation path back then!”

Chapter 229: Abnormal

After crossing into the Ten Yins Estuary, the fortress ship continued on to the ancient tomb. Tensions ran increasingly higher during the journey, but there didn’t seem to be anything unusual about the place.

A bright sun hung high in the sky, feted by faint wisps of clouds. No strange occurrences had arisen. There were even a good number of immortals and cultivators passing through, who all gave Lu Yun’s fortress ship a wide berth when they drew near.

“Is this really the Firmament Ruins?” Dongfang Hao found it difficult to believe. It would be far more appropriate for there to be evil spirits and ghosts plaguing the area, but nothing set the place apart other than the skull marked on the map.

“If there’s something wrong with the place, it would’ve been noticed by the elites of nearby Xiankan,” Wu Tulong said with some hesitation. “However, neither the divine court from eighty thousand years ago, nor the Nephrite court in power now, has ever taken note of this area.”

“Extreme yin became extreme yang,” commented Lu Yun. “As a result, this place seems no different than other parts of the world. Anyone who’s noticed anything is probably dead.”

Lu Yun glanced at Lu Shenhou, who nodded in agreement.

“But the earth is indeed made of bone powder.” Mo Qitian looked down at the ground. “If it weren’t for Lu Yun, we wouldn’t have paid any attention to the dirt’s composition.”

Immortals and cultivators alike regarded themselves too highly to waste time considering the earth beneath their feet. It was likely that those who’d noticed were dead, as Lu Yun speculated.

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“Here we are!” Lu Shenhou’s eyes lit up. “That’s the town of mortals, the tomb is on the other side!”

The town was only about three kilometers in radius with a few hundred residents. A few dozen acres of farmland surrounded it.

Ge Long halted the fortress ship a few kilometers from the town and stowed it away. They made their way to the town on foot. It wasn’t large, but it bustled with energy. Lu Shenhou had wanted to taste some of the local delicacies again, but thinking of how everything was grown in bone powder had changed his mind.

Located in the southwest corner of Life Province, the town saw many immortals and cultivators pass through; the townsfolk seemed to have gotten used to their presence.

Lu Yun frowned upon entrance. “Something’s wrong here!” Something about the town niggled at him, but he couldn’t pinpoint what it was.

Almost involuntarily, he activated Spectral Eye. Since he was prepared this time, he didn’t allow the endless information to rush into his head. He simply watched the residents quietly. However, his death art spotted nothing amiss.

Qing Han had gone to play with a six-year-old girl snacking on candied hawthorn. The little girl giggled happily at his teasing.

“What’s wrong?” Dongfang Hao came up to Lu Yun, noting the tension in the governor’s expression.

“I just feel that something isn’t right here.” Lu Yun’s scowl deepened. As a skilled tomb raider, he had complete trust in his instincts. Even though he hadn’t spotted anything with his Spectral Eye, he believed the alarm bells ringing in his mind.

“I agree,” Wu Tulong concurred faintly. “The people here are too joyful, like they don’t have anything to worry about.”

“Isn’t that how mortals live?” Mo Qitian paused. “They don’t have to cultivate or overcome tribulations, nor do they have any part in the schemes and fights between the different factions in the world of immortals. They can lead peaceful lives...”

“That’s not true.” Wu Tulong shook his head slightly. “Mortals have their own concerns as well. It’s even more difficult for them to survive in our world. Not only do they have to worry about their livelihood, they have to face the threat of aging, disease, and death. Moreover, the monsters and beasts in the world can easily kill them.

“These people, however, are entirely too carefree.” He expanded his consciousness to cover the entire town and turned to Lu Yun. Although the residents had their own feelings, they didn’t seem worried by the difficulties of life at all. “This isn’t normal.”

In lieu of a response, Lu Yun took out his three-layered luopan. The indicators rotated at a great speed as he activated it.

Qing Han's eyes gleamed to see the treasure. He'd previously witnessed Lu Yun use the Dragonsearch Invocation to manifest something similar with his inner energy, but now the governor had a real one. The luopan must be the treasure he'd refined with the Ten Orientations Stone.

"There is life and death in the world, and yin and yang to everything," chanted Lu Yun.

Hum.

The luopan's indicators stopped. With furrowed brows, Lu Yun carefully considered what the compass was telling him, then sighed when he saw the slot the indicators pointed to.

"Let's not disturb their livelihood," he spoke with great undertones. "We'll enter the tomb." He turned to leave.

"Did you discover something?" Qing Han caught up with him and asked quietly.

"Yeah." Lu Yun nodded without a word.

"What's wrong?" Qing Han transmitted at the sight of his friend acting oddly.

"This isn't the time," Lu Yun responded softly rather than transmit back. "I'll tell you when we get back."

Qing Han paused. He must not want to hide anything from the others, but he doesn't want to tell the truth either. The imperial envoy didn't push, and the others didn't say anything, either. They could tell from Lu Yun's expression that he wouldn't talk.

The luopan had pointed to where the tomb was: under a barren expanse with no feng-shui-influenced terrain or tricky, formation-guarded landscape. It seemed perfectly normal.

"It's down there." Lu Shenhou pointed at the ground under his feet. "We went underground with earthbending techniques and discovered the entrance beneath the earth."

He was about to do the same when Lu Yun stopped him with a shake of his head.

"That's not how you enter a tomb." With a snap of his fingers, he cast three soybeans and summoned three golden-armored warriors. They used their arms and legs to dig a long tunnel into the ground.

"We don't know what's down there. There may be complex formations that can counter combat arts. This is the safest way of entrance. Stay outside and guard this tunnel, Shenhou," Lu Yun said. "Don't let anyone destroy it."

Lu Shenhou frowned deeply, his thick brows snapping together in a frown.

"The hell do you mean by this, Lu Yun?" There was a grossly offended edge to his tone. "Anyone can stand guard, so why me? I'm the one who discovered the tomb. I was the first to realize that the cultivation path has been severed." He raised his voice to a shout. "And now you're telling me to stay outside?!"

Wu Tulong and the others' gazes at Lu Yun hardened as well. Lu Shenhou was the reason why they knew about the broken cultivation path in the first place and were here to repair it. It would be the greatest contribution to the world of immortals and any worlds beyond. Lu Shenhou was destined to go down in history as a great hero and the greatest contributor.

Not wanting him down there wasn't right.

Meanwhile, Lu Shenhou didn't care about fame or glory. He simply wanted to witness the moment the cultivation path was repaired.

"You're not allowed into the tomb no matter what!" Lu Yun growled, summoning his warriors back.

"Lu Yun!!" Lu Shenhou's eyes blazed with fury, his hackles raised. "Tell me why!"

"No reason why!" Lu Yun formed a talisman out of thin air, a technique that indicated peak mastery of talisman dao. With a flip of his wrist, he attached the talisman to Lu Shenhou and bound him.

Whoosh.

Wu Tulong blocked Lu Yun's way.

"Give me a reason." He maintained a calm expression, but his inner energy was fully unleashed.

Lu Shenhou was a true friend of his. In the thirty years Lu Shenhou had been away from Nephrite Major, he'd spent it training with Wu Tulong, and going on adventures with him. Lu Shenhou had been there to witness his feat of defeating a suppressed dao immortal in an ancient tomb.

Mo Qitian, Zi Chen, and Dongfang Hao followed his lead and surrounded Lu Yun and Qing Han.

"I don't want him to die down there," murmured Lu Yun.

"Hahahahaha!!" Lu Shenhou burst into laughter. "Die? Everyone dies in the end! Why should we fear death? Unhand me! I'm going down even if I'll meet my end there!"

Lu Yun glanced at him and sighed. "I hope you don't regret this." He dissolved the talisman restraining Lu Shenhou with another snap of his fingers.

"Why would I?" Lu Shenhou responded with a prideful look. "I'm no lesser than any of you. Why are you so certain that I'll die in the tomb?"

Wu Tulong frowned and looked at Lu Yun.

"Let's go then. You must listen to me down there." Lu Yun headed into the tunnel, unwilling to say another word to Lu Shenhou.

"That kid's been acting weird since he used that compass thing in town." Mo Qitian was the more observant one of the bunch. He continued with some hesitation, "What did he discover? Does it have something to do with Lu Shenhou?"

Having no answer, Zi Chen and Dongfang Hao quietly followed Lu Yun into the tunnel, while Ge Long stayed outside with a pout. He wanted to go as well, but Lu Yun had forbidden him from entering and he could only do as his master commanded.

After the seven of them entered the tunnel, a faint crimson figure materialized by the mouth of the tunnel and sat down cross-legged to defend it. The figure was none other than Huangqing.

Chapter 230: The Door of Demise

The tunnel ran deep, ending about three kilometers below ground. It was perfectly safe, since Lu Yun's bean soldiers had dug it themselves, and they'd even unearthed an underground river along the way. The group made their way to the bottom as quickly as they could.

A clearing of about twenty-five meters in radius greeted them. On the other side of it was an underground structure, its entrance flanked by two lit green lanterns. The faint light brought to mind a pair of eerie eyes, illuminating the tight space with a dim radiance. There was even a trace of blood on the door that was slightly ajar.

"There it is, the entrance to the tomb!" Lu Shenhou's eyes shone bright with enthusiasm. "On my first visit, I thought it was an expert's abode. Only after I entered did I realize it was a tomb."

Lu Yun stared at him in disbelief. "You just... opened the door and entered?"

"How else were we supposed to go inside?" Lu Shenhou was befuddled by the questioning, to which Lu Yun just shook his head, his expression growing graver.

"Those are Soulstealer Lanterns." The governor inhaled portentously. "The lanterns, the doorway, and the interior of the tomb combine to form a layout called the Door of Demise. There is no path for the living past the Door of Demise!

"It's a pure killing feng shui layout!" Lu Yun said under his breath. "There's no trace of any formation... the dao of feng shui must've existed back when this tomb was set up!"

The art of feng shui was lost in the current world of immortals. There was no trace of its existence, even back in the ancient times. The tomb, however, contained a pure feng shui killing layout.

That'd caught Lu Yun's attention.

This tomb was from a time when feng shui was known and the cultivation path was complete. The Door of Demise was the main layout of the tomb.

"Step back." Lu Yun took a deep breath as he looked at the lanterns and manifested his luopan again. The others did as he said.

"To find a tomb in mountains coiled, those deathly cliffs with mysteries roiled.

"If danger lurks in layers told, then hereby they do come unfold."

Rumble.

The Dragonsearch Invocation came into effect, rotating the three indicators of the luopan at great speed. Heaven and earth, male and female, and yin and yang continuously recombined and changed, analyzing the countless possibilities of the layout.

Coiled mountains referred to not only real mountains, but also the obstacles in a feng shui layout. Overcoming the coiled mountains would be breaking the layout.

"The two lanterns are the first layer of coiled mountains in the Door of Demise!" Luopan in hand, Lu Yun strode to the lantern on the left. The compass rotated furiously, tempering his inner energy so that it could suppress the lanterns.

“Wah!” The lantern before Lu Yun came to life and wailed like a baby, a terrible ghost face emerging from within the green flames.

“Wah wah wah!” screamed the ghost face as it shot a long tongue at its quarry. However, Lu Yun fully restrained the face with his own inner energy.

“I’ve seen this face before!” exclaimed Lu Shenhou. “It ate Lu Cai!”

Lu Cai was the bodyservant he’d grown up with. Over the thirty years Lu Shenhou was away from the clan, Lu Cai had constantly been by his side. Although the servant wasn’t as talented as Lu Shenhou, he was far from mediocre. He’d reached peak transformed spirit realm and was only a step away from becoming an immortal, but a ghost face in this tomb had eaten him in one gulp.

“Watch out!” Qing Han shouted.

Lu Yun had suppressed the left lantern with his luopan, making room for the right one to take flight and turn into another ghost face, biting at Lu Yun. “The two lanterns are the first line of defense. As soon as they move, the coiled mountains break, which increases our chances of survival within the Door of Demise.”

With a whistle, Lu Yun held up his luopan and shot a beam of golden light with his other hand, stilling the other lantern.

“Do you think a mere lantern spirit can get to me?” he huffed. “Open the door!”

Qing Han walked up to the door and kicked it open without missing a beat.

Rumble.

The very air seemed to shake as the door opened.

“It... it looked different the last time we came!” Lu Shenhou was stunned by what he was seeing.

“You must’ve been haunted by the two lantern spirits as soon as you entered,” chuckled Mo Qitian.

“Tsk, how did you even survive?”

Lu Shenhou raked his fingers through his beard, his expression dimming with dejection. The twenty-some companions he’d come with were people he’d befriended over the past thirty years, but only he was left now.

“Go in,” Lu Yun said with a commanding edge to his voice.

Qing Han walked in without any hesitation. Other than his two brothers, he trusted Lu Yun the most. After some hesitation, Wu Tulong and the others followed him into the pitch-black darkness. Lu Yun entered with the two lanterns in hand, illuminating the immediate premises.

“It really is a burial chamber!” Wu Tulong gasped in surprise. Seven cabin-sized coffins lay in the center of the room, oozing traces of fresh blood from the cracks between coffins and lids.

“When we reached this point, a mysterious power killed the three immortals in our group. Look there!” Lu Shenhou pointed up, where two crimson characters hovered in the air. They weren’t written in the

language of the current world of immortals, nor were they the language of the ancient world, but the group could comprehend what the phrase meant.

Immortals Forbidden!

Immortals were prohibited from entering the tomb.

“Bronze outer-coffins,” Qing Han muttered, turning to Lu Yun.

Lu Yun felt his scalp prickle with numbness. He’d encountered a bronze outer-coffin before; within it was a netherwood coffin with an even more terrifying blood dragon. There were seven of them here, and they were arranged in a formation!

“This is the second layer of coiled mountains!” he said slowly. “Don’t go near the coffins.”

“He’s right, stay far away from them!” Lu Shenhou’s voice trembled at remembrance of the terrible occurrence. “There are powerful zombies inside that none of us can defeat. We have to take a detour.”

Lu Shenhou wasn’t at Lu Yun or Wu Tulong’s level, but he could rival the other youth sovereigns. Yet even he felt they wouldn’t be able to deal with the zombies.

“The zombie-nurturing formation has been here for a long time, spanning the entirety of the ancient world’s time. The zombies within the coffins are probably even capable of eating dao immortals.” Lu Yun sucked in a breath. “However, this is the second layer of coiled mountains, so it must be dealt with!”

He’d resolved the first layer of coiled mountains, but the Door of Demise was still dangerous. If they left the second layer intact, the later obstacles would be undetectable, let alone overcome. The power of several coiled mountains descending at once would be enough to kill without them realizing what had happened.

“We really can make our way around the formation and enter the chamber behind it,” Lu Shenhou ventured cautiously.

“That’s why your companions all died,” Qing Han said coldly in Lu Yun’s stead.

“But I’m more familiar with that route…” mumbled Lu Shenhou.

Lu Yun took out a thin golden rope and tied one end to his waist, handing the other end to Qing Han. “Hold on to this and pull me back if anything happens.”

Huangqing had refined the Skydragon Tendon into an unbreakable treasure after Aoxue had first absorbed its internal power.

“I will.” Qing Han tied the other end of the rope to himself. Lu Yun entered the formation with the two lanterns.

“Protect Qing Han,” commanded Wu Tulong. The five of them circulated their energies and created a barrier to protect the young man.

Lu Yun disappeared as soon as he entered the formation. The six of them stared at where he’d vanished.

“Roar!”

Rumble.

Inhuman roars abounded from the coffin formation. Balls of cyan fire ignited, setting the formation ablaze.

“Pull me out!” shouted Lu Yun, prompting an immediate yank from Qing Han. The tendon stretched to its limit, but it felt as if the other end was tied to a titanic mountain. Even the six of them together couldn’t reel it in.

Crack!

The coffins crumbled as the cyan fire ate away at them.

A zombie measuring roughly fifty meters in height slowly rose from the flames. Shriveled skin and withered flesh clung to its bones, making it seem more like a skeleton. It threw its head back and snarled, releasing a strange pungent smell. The six of them were top cultivators in the world, but even they could barely resist the urge to throw up.

“Lu Yun!!” Qing Han’s shriek resembled an undead hag’s. The figure in the zombie’s grip was Lu Yun, and it’d just thrown the human into its maw!

Crazed with grief, the disguised girl broke free of the other five and rushed at the giant zombie.