

## Necropolis 241

### Chapter 241: Chains and Shackles

Resentment erupted from the vengeful ghost, whipping up into a terrifying storm. The sheer volume of hatred was simply too much. It didn't only come from the ghost itself, but from all life that had died during its era. The countless years that the Firmament Prison's inmates had spent in confinement had only steeped it with further strength.

Even the power of hell was insufficient to quench it.

If the ghost's rancor was allowed to leave the tomb, it'd render all of Nephrite Major into a ghostly domain.

"I need to become stronger so I can restore hell and gain the power to control all ghosts." Lu Yun's eyes fixated upon the vengeful ghost in its full form. The Tome of Life and Death glittered with spectral light, resisting the flood of malice. Though hell was broken, the Tome itself had retained its complete form and the book's power instantly forced the resentment back.

Shrieking, the vengeful ghost charged Lu Yun, but was unable to penetrate the book's defenses.

"Back off," he called out to his frantic envoys and ghostly soldiers. If Yuying and the others came forward now, they would only be infected by the resentment, turning into vengeful ghosts themselves. Even hell wouldn't be able to keep the threat at bay.

If that happened, Lu Yun would be forced to kill the former to return them to the Tome, then wait for them to regenerate.

The envoys also swiftly came to this realization and retreated as quickly as they'd come. The Infernum weren't so quick to react, however. The weaker ones were nearly instantly converted by the vengeful ghost.

"Waaaah!" A piercing wail erupted from the ghost's maw as its form began to rapidly expand. In no time at all, it'd transformed into a three-hundred-meter tall giant. Its aura changed once more, and a strikingly familiar feeling began pervading the air.

"This isn't the girl from just now... this ghost has nothing to do with her!" Goosebumps popped up all over Lu Yun's body. "This is the great terror the girl was talking about... she sealed it within her own body!"

He drew a sharp breath, then disintegrated the servants who'd fallen under the ghost's control with a wave of the book.

"This... this is an akasha ghost!" The young man finally remembered why the ghost in white felt so familiar. He'd felt the same otherworldliness with the akasha ghost he'd encountered in the certain death layout. It was the same blend of indelible substance and ineffable ephemerality.

Lu Yun refrained from using the Judgment of Life and Death, though; there was no karmic retribution upon this ghost, only the deep-seated pollution of resentment. Moreover, he detected the smallest of movements of thought upon the ghost, sealed by a strange force.

“That orb’s certain death layout must’ve summoned this akasha ghost... What the heck is going on here?” Inside hell, Lu Yun had boundless power. In this repeat encounter with the akasha ghost, he was no longer a helpless sheep headed to the slaughter. The akasha ghost couldn’t overcome the Tome of Life and Death.

At the same time, there was so much more to this ancient tomb than he’d ever imagined. Was the cultivation path really the only thing buried here? It couldn’t be that simple!

He felt the onset of a heavy headache. What exactly was an akasha ghost?

After someone or something died, if their resentment refused to dissipate, it would fuse with their souls and turn into a ghost. Ordinary people, animals, and so forth became ordinary ghosts. Immortals became immortal ghosts. What turned into an akasha ghost?

Honestly, he had no clue.

The akasha ghost continued to spew its frustration everywhere, roaring all the while. It seemed to want to turn all of hell into its ghostly territory.

Crack crack crack.

Pine-colored lightning danced around Lu Yun’s body, crackling toward every direction. Bolstered by the power of hell, the cleansing thunderbolts rushed toward the resentment in an attempt to purge it. Alas, the akasha ghost’s resentment was too powerful for even the Yi Wood Cleansing Thunder to dispel.

“Wh-what are those?!” Lu Yun blanched in shock.

In the endless void within the depths of hell, figure after figure shambled out. Filled with the same brand of intense resentment, their scarlet eyes stabbed through the darkness in a desire to manifest into the real world. However, an invisibly potent seal seemed to hold them back. As long as it persisted, the figures would not have their freedom.

The young man’s heart sank with trepidation.

“Waaah— waaah—waaaah—” The akasha ghost continued to wail. Its loud screeches almost seemed to be summoning the figures from their rest.

“Don’t... don’t let them appear...” a faint voice sounded in the gloom. It was the girl in white from earlier. “Hell was created... to summon them...” Before she could finish, her words and will were forcefully cut off.

“To... summon these figures in hell? The blood sea, the Avici Cell, and the Door of Demise! All of those are intended to emulate hell!” Lu Yun jolted awake.

The Door of Demise was a layout that existed on Earth as well. It had an alternative name: Gates of the Abyss!

Beyond the Door of Demise, there was no return to life; the resemblance was uncanny!

Everything in the tomb simulated hell in an attempt to communicate with the true Hell! If the Avici Cell could become a true Avici Hell, it was very much possible to connect his shard of hell to the ancient tomb.

No wonder the akasha ghost had shown up after the girl in white had recognized hell. The release of torrential resentment made sense too.

“Why was hell destroyed in the first place? What are those shadowy figures in its deepest, darkest depths?” Lu Yun’s thoughts grew heavier and heavier, but he had no time to fully consider everything.

The monstrous shadows were horrible indeed. If they managed to break their seal, he would be torn to pieces.

Tome of Life and Death in one hand and Sugato Sword in the other, Lu Yun hurtled toward the akasha ghost, cleansing thunder shimmering all over his body. A storm of sword auras blasted from the Sugato Sword, converging into a gleaming edge that cut down from the sky.

The akasha ghost turned back, touching the sword-light with a single finger.

Pop!

The foremost refined treasure’s attack was so easily countered, just like that!

More sword light surged out from the Sugato Sword, swelling into a turbulent sea. The keen rays mixed with Lu Yun’s Yi Wood Cleansing Thunder, creating an ocean of electricity and steel. Within the ocean, a dragon soared. Above it, the kun fish transformed into a peng bird and took to the skies.

Overcome, the akasha ghost stumbled several steps back.

Whoosh!

A river of stars decorated the sky to seal the deal. Thunder and sword aura danced among the stars, then slammed down upon the akasha ghost.

Starstream Stroke!

Among the sword techniques Lu Yun had invented, this was the third, and strongest. The amplification of hell and the power from the Tome of Life and Death rendered the stroke invincible and irresistible.

“Waaaah!!” the akasha ghost wailed once more, sensing the threat of death. The resentment around it was cleaved in twain upon contact; the Starstream Stroke was nigh!

Rattle...

The rustling of chains interrupted the fight. A black chain extended out of the darkness, a set of shackles on one end.

## **Chapter 242: Fire of Hope**

Chains and shackles!

Every hair on Lu Yun’s body bristled with fear. He shifted out of the bindings’ way just in time, ducking right under the proverbial razor’s edge.

He'd seen these trappings before. When he'd been deceived by the Skandha Extinction Tomb's certain death layout, an akasha ghost had come. That ghost had used chains and shackles to lock him up; in fact, his soul had nearly been taken away from him. Without Qing Han's reckless aid, he might've died then and there.

If his soul was bound, he would be unable to use death arts or return to hell. He hadn't expected to see the chains and shackles again so soon, and from the nothingness in the depths of the netherworld itself to boot!

By now, Lu Yun was dodging about as quickly as he could. Alas, the shackles nipped at his heels in hot pursuit like a great black serpent. It didn't matter how he weaved and bobbed, the chains were relentless. The Tome of Life and Death was unresponsive; it wasn't blocking the bindings for him!

He had to face them alone.

"What are these things?" he gasped, pushing himself to go faster still. If those terrifying bindings touched him, he would truly be done for.

The akasha ghost ignored him outright. It diverted its efforts back to permeating hell with resentment; the peculiar summoning ritual continued.

Stroke after stroke of sword aura flooded from the Sugato Sword. The Vast Dragon Seaturner, Peng of Kun, and Starstream Stroke were all unleashed over and over. Alas, the blade aura that should've been indomitable melted away upon touching the black chains.

The Sugato Sword failed against them.

Clang!

Violetgrave gleamed in Lu Yun's hand, slashing out a stroke in amethyst that sent them flying back a short distance.

"Wait, that worked?!" Lu Yun's eyes lit up excitedly. Though Violetgrave was a ninth-grade immortal sword, there was far more to it than met the eye. A grand mausoleum was hidden within the sword, vast enough to bury an ancient immortal emperor's corpse.

Rattle!

The repelled chains and shackles shook themselves off before circling back in renewed assault. Lu Yun put away his Sugato Sword, drawing Violetgrave instead.

Hum...

The blade shook, discharging a meteoric shower of sword lights. They enshrouded the youth's body, turning into piece after piece of violet dragon scales.

Nineteen Cerulean Sword Dragons.

Lu Yun no longer made use of his own sword intent. Instead, he channeled Violetgrave's intrinsic power with this old technique. The violet dragons soared in hell's sky, silhouetted by the shadow of a monumental mausoleum.

When the bindings sensed the latter, they retracted into the dark void in a fearful hurry.

“The monster on the other end of those bindings is afraid!” Lu Yun immediately detected the emotion behind the action. “It’s afraid Violetgrave will bury it!”

Violetgrave could ward off the monsters in the depths of hell!

Sword in hand, he hurtled toward the akasha ghost. The violet dragons aloft lunged at their master’s target, responding instantly to his will. The ghost shrieked, exploding with a storm of resentment to ward off its assailant.

“Violetgrave can deal with that monster in the darkness, but not the akasha ghost,” Lu Yun frowned.

Clink, clank!

The shackles and chains jolted against each other in the darkness, ready for the very moment that Violetgrave’s shadowy mausoleum disappeared.

The akasha ghost was transforming! The girl-turned-vengeful-ghost was no more; its pale, ghastly face a horrible hybrid between grin and grimace. Will-o-wisps burned in its eye sockets and it was at least three times stronger than before. At the same time, Lu Yun detected the faintest sniff of karmic retribution.

“I’ve got it!” he exclaimed. The vengeful ghost the girl had become wasn’t an akasha ghost; it was being possessed by one! The akasha ghost was using the girl as a vessel, making use of her resentment to seal away its own bad karma. She’d been prepared as a ready container.

Could akasha ghosts have been responsible for the end of that civilization?

Were akasha ghosts behind everything in this tomb?

What were they, exactly? Why would they do all this?

All sorts of questions filled Lu Yun’s head.

Fwoom.

A sinister white streamer appeared in the akasha ghost’s hands. When waved, it released a terrifying power that collided with Lu Yun. Violetgrave’s sword intent was nearly shattered by the streamer’s strength.

Lu Yun coughed up a large mouthful of blood, a metallic aftertaste lingering on his tongue.

“Such strength! If we were outside, I would die from its smallest breath!” Hell’s fortitude restored his vitality, healing his injuries.

The akasha ghost had released some more of its full power, and was now superior to Lu Yun. However, it didn’t do more than that. If it went any further, its retribution would manifest, and the Judgment of Life and Death would then send it up in smoke.

“All akasha ghosts really do come from the same place! They remember me and what I can do!” Lu Yun’s heart sank.

The akasha ghost was clearly holding back because it didn't want to manifest all of its bad karma. It'd given up on summoning the monsters in the darkness, instead focusing on attacking Lu Yun.

There was already a crack in the seal wide enough to let out the chains and shackles. When Violetgrave's sword aura was disrupted, the monsters waiting in the wings would be able to steal away Lu Yun's soul without issue.

"I can't beat it with Violetgrave alone!" The young man's observation was a little pointless. All of his attention was on maintaining Violetgrave's sword aura and he had no energy to use the Sugato Sword or manifest his own.

The Yi Wood Cleansing Thunder had long dissipated by now.

"I'm no match for it right now... am I supposed to retreat from hell?" Lu Yun was unwilling to take this last resort.

If he did leave hell, the akasha ghost would be able to summon the monsters from hell's depths as it wished. When they were released, he'd be the first to die regardless. In fact, the akasha ghost's ultimate goal was possibly the Tome of Life and Death itself.

Back on Earth, the book had lain well-protected behind a certain death layout.

Hum...

All of hell trembled at this moment. It seemed that a gate to a distant place opened, allowing two colossal entities to descend into hell. Two auras of daunting pressure suffused the air: the Enneawym Coffinbearers and the Nine-Phoenix Casket!

These two frightening coffins certainly made an impressive entrance, eliciting incredulous shrieks of disbelief from the akasha ghost.

Opening all nine of its feathery heads, the Nine-Phoenix Casket breathed nine spurts of black-red fire that combined into a fiery river. The akasha ghost was its target!

Rustle rustle rustle.

The chains in the darkness scrabbled heedlessly toward the Nine-Phoenix Casket in a vain effort to imprison it.

At the same time, the Enneawym Coffinbearers cracked open its lid, freeing a humongous pair of skeletal arms to reach out in interception. Its bony fingers clasped onto the chains, then dragged them and their owner out from the darkness!

What emerged from the void was a monster that was several kilometers tall. It had two horns, a pair of wings, and was dyed an inky black all over its body. Painfully howling to high heavens the entire way, the aura it emanated struck deep fear into Lu Yun's heart.

Even though he was on home turf and bolstered by the power of hell, he felt an irresistible force from the monster's body. It defied his comprehension; the monster was even stronger than the akasha ghost!

Even more surprising was how the chains' other ends were locked on the monster's body. It was a prisoner, and the weapons it wielded were the bindings that'd originally been designed to keep it in place! Evidently, the inexorable passage of time had allowed it to struggle free and its former irons were now a fearsome weapon.

The monster shrieked and struggled against the skeletal hands that gripped it so tightly, as well as the remnants of the chains that bound it. Unfortunately, the chains glowed with a residual light that kept it from breaking free.

In the end, the horned and winged monster wailed as it was pulled into the coffin born by the nine dragons.

Crack, snap...

Carnivorous teeth crunching on bone and meat echoed from the Enneaworm Coffinbearers. Lu Yun shivered involuntarily before turning his head in the other direction.

The Nine-Phoenix Casket's reddish-black flames had set the akasha ghost ablaze. It howled and wailed with pain, the retribution on it intensifying, a mark of the greater strength it was releasing. However, it remained powerless to resist the Nine-Phoenix Casket's terrifying inferno.

"They show up now, of all times? And they're helping me fight a difficult enemy...?" The young man was incredulous.

He'd felt the Enneaworm Coffinbearers and Nine-Phoenix Casket disappear into his nascent spirit back in the Sword Barrow. No amount of searching had revealed a single trace of them after the fact, but their reappearance at this juncture proved they hadn't simply vanished.

After one of the shadowy monsters was eaten by the existence within the Enneaworm Coffinbearers, its fellows dispersed to whence they came. By this time, the akasha ghost had also been burnt to a crisp.

The girl in white rematerialized before Lu Yun, the infinite resentment wreathed around her dissolved away by the flames. Her new form was delicate and crystalline, almost as if it were made of dream-stuff.

In fact, she was growing more transparent by the second. As the instrument for the akasha ghost's appearance, she couldn't persist after its death.

Rrrrrumble!

The Enneaworm Coffinbearers and Nine-Phoenix Casket crashed onto the ground. All of hell quaked at the impact. Then, the two huge coffins made no further noise, strangely content to rest within their new home.

Around the premises, the envoys and Infernum poked their heads back out.

"Are they... guarding hell?" Lu Yun gasped in understanding. "But why would they do that? The two buried in those coffins are the creators of the blood dragon and phoenix. They want to wreak havoc on all life, so I don't understand...."

The girl in white remained in place as the final dregs of her existence trickled away. A serene smile flashed across her face and a spark of resolution glowed in her eyes.

Fwoosh!

Her body began to burn away, and the same airy, placid voice sounded once more.

"I am the last of an era, a beacon of hope for an entire aeon... Let my body kindle the fire of hope... that the Dao Flower may bloom once more. All of us... will live on... as part of the Dao Flower...." Looking at Lu Yun, the girl's smile widened even as fire consumed her.

"Father, mother, my love, my family... I miss all of you so much..." She craned her head toward the sky in melancholic reminiscence. Finally, there was nothing more of her but a handful of ashes. They glowed dimly, remnants of a past era that carried the hopes of a new one.

### **Chapter 243: Guardian**

Behind the bronze door of the ancient tomb.

All of the black paper ships on the crimson ocean spontaneously disintegrated. In the last instant of their existence, tremendous relief dawned on the spirit's faces as they faded out of existence, along with their vessels.

Gone was the serene, otherworldly girl. In her place was a small ball of fire, quietly burning away. Lu Yun silently stood there for a very long time.

"So it's hope." He considered the fire. "Living souls create and nurture civilization through the guidance of hope."

Only with hope could one see a light in the future and possess the motivation to move forward. With a heavy sigh, he tucked the fire away.

The Enneaworm Coffinbearers and the Nine-Phoenix Casket rested quietly in hell, archaic, striking, and desolate. They faced the boundless darkness of the depths of the netherworld, guarding the patch of tranquility here.

"Nine-headed phoenix... nine-headed phoenix.... Is this phoenix the one that created the phoenix tribe?" Huangqing's memory had allowed Lu Yun a glimpse into the race's secrets. In the memories of the tribe, they recalled that the very first phoenix born aeons ago was a nine-headed phoenix that'd later created the phoenix race that was known today.

Likewise, the nine dragons of the Enneaworm Coffinbearers must be more than mere dragon lords. They were more likely to be draconic ancestors.

Lu Yun approached the giant coffin and lightly knocked on it.

"You've swallowed the monster," he whispered, "but you still have its chains and shackles, don't you?"

He knew now that the Enneaworm Coffinbearers and the Nine-Phoenix Casket meant him no harm. The two beings could kill akasha ghosts and the monster sealed deep within hell. It would be easier than swatting a fly for them to kill Lu Yun and take the Tome of Life and Death.

He had an inkling as to what they wanted; they wanted him to become powerful enough to resurrect them!



Thud!

As soon as he finished, the coffin lid inched open, throwing out a black chain that ran eighteen meters long and was hooked to a pair of shackles, along with a tattered piece of clothing. Despite its ragged state and the passage of time, it still retained its original form. It was sturdier than any weapon or clothing Lu Yun had ever seen.

“What is...” Forgoing the chain and manacles, Lu Yun unfolded the shirt and laid it out. There was a strange character on it that he didn’t recognize. Even its intent had faded after years of deterioration, leaving behind only a single symbol.

He connected his consciousness to the Tome of Life and Death and attempted to deduce its meaning.

“Pawn!” After an indeterminate period of time, Lu Yun opened his eyes again and looked down at the character with shock.

Pawn! The lowliest of all soldiers!

“The monster emerging from the darkness exceeded dao immortal realm, yet it was merely a pawn!?” He goggled with disbelief. The thing that the Enneaworm Coffinbearers had devoured might be even more powerful than Lord Sugato.

How could it be a pawn?

When the akasha ghost had descended and corrupted the darkness to break the seal, Lu Yun had seen a swarm of the figures. The survivors, after so many aeons of being confined to hell, were... pawns?! How powerful must their commander be?

“Being weak limits my imagination. I have to work harder and become stronger.” With a sigh, Lu Yun carefully put the tattered shirt away before shifting his attention to the chain and manacles.

The chain was pitch black and radiated a dim, black glow. Fastened to it was a pair of shackles that brought to mind the image of a torture device. Cool to the touch, the chains weighed heavily in his hand. As soon as Lu Yun picked them up, the Tome of Life and Death hummed and transmitted information into his mind.

“Soultrapper Chain and Soulrestrainer Shackles! These are instruments used to restrain malicious spirits sentenced to the eighteenth layer of hell! Not even immortal emperors can break free from them. They’ve been refined with the principles of hell.” He took a deep breath, his expression dark.

The akasha ghost had possessed such a chain and manacles as well, and it’d almost taken Lu Yun’s soul from him—the new overlord of hell. Fortunately, akasha ghosts seemed unable to directly materialize in the world of immortals. They could only be summoned by the layout of certain death, or through a vicious ghost born out of endless resentment.

Pushing aside all his unanswered questions, Lu Yun returned to the outside world. Everything was the same from the moment he’d entered hell. Not even the expressions on his companions’ faces had changed. He, on the other hand, had been through a terrible battle.

“How do we destroy the tomb?” Wu Tulong turned to Lu Yun and asked in response to his earlier suggestion. “If we destroy it, whatever lurks behind the bronze door will escape.”

“That’s not necessary now.” Lu Yun shook his head and extended his right hand, unfurling his fingers.

A delicate flame burned quietly in his palm. There seemed to be a slim figure within the fire, looking hopefully toward an unknown future. As soon as the fire appeared, a strange power awoke in the Dao Flower. The shadow of a flower seemed to bloom from it, drawing the fire in.

White light washed over the entire chamber. The Dao Flower remained hovering in the air, seemingly unchanged, but all five of them could discern a pleasing fragrance. They didn’t so much smell it as sense it through the consciousness. They entered a trance, seeing a broken avenue between heaven and earth slowly repairing itself.

“The void realm,” said Qing Han. “The lost realm of the path of cultivation is called the void realm. Void refers to heaven and earth, or the heavenly dao itself. In pursuit of the heavenly dao, cultivators must merge themselves with heaven and earth!”

A white Dao Flower slowly bloomed in Qing Han’s eyes as the missing realm imprinted itself in his mind. He couldn’t resist sitting down cross-legged and immersing himself in the realm. His mind facilitated the repairs and bestowed a burgeoning structure to the new addition of cultivation.

“The first level of the void realm: perceived void.” Mo Qitian followed suit as well and murmured, “After spirit transformation comes glimpsing the void with one’s nascent spirit. One needs to attain an initial understanding of heaven and earth and nurture one’s body with the energy of the world.”

“The second level is unravelled void,” spoke Zi Chen. “After peeking into the void, one is to seek its understanding and unravel its mysteries. Nascent spirit synchronized with heaven and earth, it breathes with the world and moves freely throughout.”

“The third level is returned void.” Wu Tulong entered the same indescribable trance. “The spirit returns to the void as the cultivator becomes one with heaven and earth, forging a new world within themselves!”

One after another, Dao Flowers bloomed around them as they murmured information about the rediscovered cultivation realm. The dead cultivation realm within the flower was slowly rejuvenated under their concerted efforts.

Beside them, Lu Yun hadn’t entered the same trance. He saw a white, but blood-stained path leading to somewhere unknown. A black figure emerged from the other end and stalked toward him with great killing intent, radiating the power of the void realm.

“There have been many great geniuses in the world throughout the passage of time. Some figured out on their own that the cultivation path was incomplete and attempted to fix the gap in their own ways.” Lu Yun looked at the approaching black figure emerging from the illusions ahead. “In the end, they all failed, slain by this entity.

“This is the last obstacle in repairing the path.” He raised his hand and manifested the Sugato Sword before walking to the center of the path to block the black figure.

From head to toe, it was covered in black hair. Even its face was obscured by hair. Its hand tightly gripped a sharp axe dripping with blood. Crimson fluid pooled beneath its feet to become small rivulets.

“You shall not pass.” Lu Yun raised his Sugato Sword at the hairy monster. It came to a halt and looked up, raising a pair of steely eyes and boring into Lu Yun with a piercing gaze.

“A nascent spirit realm cultivator dares repair the path of cultivation?” said the monster. It spoke in a language that Lu Yun could understand! A deep, hoarse voice sounded out, like two pieces of wilted wood planks grinding together.

“Ah, not you, but the four behind you.” It’d noticed Qing Han and the three youth sovereigns.

“Not just four.” Lu Yun shook his head. “Seven.”

The unnamed girl, Lu Shenhou, and Dongfang Hao were dead, but they’d died for the restoration of the path. Qing Han and the others carried the hope of seven people, and he was their guardian.

“Go back to where you were, or die,” Lu Yun commanded, his eyes blazing with determination. The Sugato Sword surged with power and isolated the white path.

#### **Chapter 244: The Simplest Truth of Dao**

Lu Yun’s sword surged in power and manifested an ocean of sword aura. He stood at its heart, wreathed by endless sword energy.

“Ready?” grated the voice. “I can give you some time to prepare, or you may cultivate another thousand years.”

Frowning, Lu Yun looked over his shoulder before realization dawned. Just like in hell, passage of time on this misty white path was essentially frozen. A thousand years here would be but the blink of an eye outside.

“No need.” He turned back with a cool response. “I don’t need to make any preparations in order to kill you.”

He couldn’t comprehend what this space was; in fact, a sense of surreality had descended as soon as he set foot on the white path. However, that didn’t affect his intent to bulldoze all obstacles. He would kill this furry monster!

If he didn’t, the cultivation path would never be restored. Previous geniuses who’d attempted the fix had left their footprints behind as splatters of blood on the path, and they’d not yet dried!

Qing Han, Wu Tulong, Zi Chen, and Mo Qitian were all focused on repairing the void realm and couldn’t tear their attention away from the task at hand. They’d be lambs to the slaughter if the monster reached them.

Without another word, the hairy monster lunged at Lu Yun with its bloody axe, moving so quickly that it became a blur. There were no tricks or flourishes, just a simple and unassuming swing that seemed to embody some sort of heavenly dao.

The greatest dao was of the simplest form! One swing was enough to kill a man!

Sword energy churned and a giant dragon roared within the ocean of swords.

Vast Dragon Seaturner!

When the cerulean sword dragon met the axe head-on, the snarling dragon vanished in a silent puff while the black flash of the axe continued on without stopping, aimed at Lu Yun. Peng from Kun and Starstream Stroke followed up with their own blows at the black light.

The two sword techniques that'd so shocked the world of immortals and defeated all comers seemed incomparably fragile in the face of that simple axe attack. It was a swing that incorporated the dao itself.

Clink!

Clang!

The kungpeng and stream of stars simultaneously shattered as well. Moreover, the axe had split Lu Yun's sword ocean. Volatile power cascaded through the opening and bore down on Lu Yun with a torrent of great ferocity.

Clash!

He'd leveled the Sugato Sword in front of him to block the coming attack, and sparks sprayed from the sword in the brutal collision. Heat rising in his chest, he flew off his feet and crashed to the ground. However, the tower remained intact and the Sugato Sword still gleamed with light.

But when Lu Yun tried to struggle to his feet, he slumped back down to the ground. The attack had been so powerful that it not only hacked through his sword aura, but also injured him with the tremendous impact, preventing him from recovering his stance.

So powerful!

If he hadn't been tempering his body with a daily regime of elemental power after Qing Han's suggestion, that attack would've crushed him.

"You have taken one hit from me. That makes you stronger than those I've killed before," spoke the hairy monster, or not at all. The voice itself seemed to be an illusion. It moved again, raising its great axe for another swing. Still just a simple stroke, the move was three times more powerful than its previous attack.

An enormous mountain loomed over Lu Yun. At that moment, he didn't feel like a cultivator who could soar into the sky and dive under the earth. He was just a mere mortal, one that could die so easily.

"Open!!" Roaring ferociously, Lu Yun released the Sugato Sword and channeled all of his inner energy into the weapon. It rotated with a hum and expanded violently, transforming into a pagoda three hundred meters in height to shield its master.

Bam!

At almost the same time, the monster's axe clashed with the newly transformed sword. The pagoda trembled, flying out backwards as the sword intent it was comprised of scattered. Lu Yun was blasted away with the pagoda, his body covered in blood.

Bloodlust shone in the eyes covered by the monster's matted hair. How dare a nascent realm weakling survive two attacks?! It'd encountered cultivators with great defensive treasures before, but it was still able to kill them with a single blow, tearing through them with the impact of its hit alone.

“Roar!!” Snarling, its black hair shifted to a dark crimson and the hand around its axe turned into the claw of a beast.

Another axe stroke!

One that, despite its unbearable crudeness, contained an unstoppable force that pierced through the sky like a man chopping firewood. It was the strength of a cultivator rather than an immortal, of that Lu Yun was sure of. Yet this simple attack had already left him helpless and severely injured.

“Go!!” White shirt now stained red, he mustered his remaining energy and commanded the Sugato Sword to block the axe.

Once again, the sword hurtled away from the force of impact and Lu Yun suffered another serious wound. Nonetheless, he’d managed to get a clearer look at the monster’s attack with the help of the Tome of Life and Death.

“There’s something about the trajectory of that axe swing!” He perked up. Again, he was thrown off his feet and landed on the ground with a heavy thud, fresh blood splashing over the white path.

The Sugato Sword clattered to the ground beside him, Lu Yun’s brand of ownership on it shattered by the forceful attacks. He could no longer activate the sword to block the axe. Without sparing the weapon a glance, Lu Yun struggled to his feet and manifested Violetgrave.

“Grrrah!!” The monster was truly enraged after his third attempt to kill Lu Yun failed. Its axe burst into crimson light, here came the fourth swing!

Rumble!

The entire path trembled. It was again as simple as a swing to cut firewood, but it was ten times stronger than the first stroke and followed the same trajectory.

“There must be something special about it.” With the assistance of the Tome of Life and Death, Lu Yun’s senses were a thousand times more sensitive than usual. He could even picture the trajectory of the axe in his head.

He raised Violetgrave and slashed it through the air with no flourish or additional aura. The exploratory move was as simple as a child swinging a wooden stick in a mock fight. Looking closely, however, one could detect a trace of greater meaning in the motion.

Thud.

Axe and sword clashed, and Lu Yun flew backward, spitting out a mouthful of blood.

The greatest dao is one of simplest truth. It’s simple and pure! My attempt wasn’t completely stripped of other intent, I just haven’t reached the pure simplicity of the greatest dao!

He’d managed to block the monster’s axe with his own power, but at the cost of another great injury. More importantly, the imperfect riposte had drained eighty percent of his inner energy and he could barely move.

“Impossible...” The monster was stunned. The nascent realm human had imitated it and struck a blow that was infinitely close to the great dao! “Die!” Putting aside its shock, the monster strode to Lu Yun and swung again.

Clang!

Violetgrave made an arc that followed a special trajectory and blocked the attack, but just barely. Lu Yun had exhausted the last twenty percent of his inner energy; however, his eyes grew even brighter.

“You’re a cultivator, not an immortal. You’re not an ancient immortal with your cultivation suppressed, either!” he declared weakly, “Your weapon follows a strange trajectory, and it doesn’t exhaust you like mine does. Is that because of the void realm?”

The monster was a void realm cultivator! Its internal energy seemed endless, impossible to exhaust; such was the realm of heaven and earth!

“Die!” Refusing to grace Lu Yun with a response, the monster slashed downward again, but abruptly whirled around and finished the stroke in an arc behind him.

Clang!

It tore a soldier in golden armor to pieces. Another two soldiers appeared and rushed at the monster, then even more emerged. Every crimson sparkle of the axe that whipped through the air brought down another golden-armored soldier.

With the bought time, Lu Yun took pills to recover the inner energy he’d exhausted.

Whoosh.

At that moment, the monster swiveled around and ignored the bean soldiers’ attacks, scything its crimson axe at Lu Yun. It wanted to catch the human by surprise so that he wouldn’t be able to block it!

Bam!

A dramatic tremor passed through the entire path.

“How... is that... possible!!” howled the hairy monster, its covered eyes brimming with fear. “No origin dao immortal should’ve been able to enter....”

Its hoarse voice still grated on the ear, and it didn’t understand how the nascent realm human had suddenly become a peak origin dao immortal! This was the path of cultivators; no immortal could set foot on it!

Lu Yun rose to his feet. Violet light circled about him as the power of peak origin dao immortal coursed through his body. All of his injuries had healed, and he’d recovered to peak strength.

“I didn’t want to cheat, but like I said, I have to kill you.” Lu Yun had channeled the corpse puppet within Violetgrave to grant himself the power of a celestial emperor. No matter how powerful the monster was, it was a cultivator, a mantis in front of the charging chariot known as an origin dao immortal!

**Chapter 245: Just a Sacrifice**

The corpse puppet was Lu Yun's secret weapon, one that instantly granted him the power of a celestial emperor. He hadn't resorted to it even when he was surrounded by eighteen dao immortals and more than a thousand immortals. This time, however, he used one of his remaining two chances to protect Qing Han and the others while they deduced and restored the void realm.

He'd known he wasn't its match the moment the hairy creature appeared. Only by channeling the puppet's power could he stop it. If the creature's swings hadn't followed a trajectory that bequeathed glimpses into the heavenly dao, he would've flattened it with the corpse puppet early on.

By now, the Tome of Life and Death had recorded the trajectory and imprinted it in his mind. Without hesitation, Lu Yun fully released the power of an origin dao immortal and annihilated the monster.

"Ah, this is her power. No wonder you can walk the path of cultivators with the strength of an origin dao immortal. You are her chosen tribute. So what if you repair the path? You will still be sacrificed one day." Its dying words sent a chill down Lu Yun's spine.

Chosen tribute? Who was 'she'? The woman named Violetgrave within her namesake sword?

Lu Yun considered the weapon gravely. For some reason, he felt a blood connection to it, which made it impossible for him to be repulsed by it. It felt as if the sword was always meant to be his. He felt no negative feeling toward the woman inside, either.

"I'll burn that bridge when I come to it. Once I reach my peak and fully become the overlord of hell with the Tome of Life and Death, I'll control all lives in the world. No amount of scheming and plotting will work on me then."

Thinking of the book, his greatest source of power, eased his mind. There was also the Sal Tree of Life and Death in his dantian. It'd grown to about a foot in height with three yellow flowers adorning its branches, morphed from the goodwill that Lu Yun hadn't absorbed yet. Once the cultivation path was restored, he'd consume the flowers and break through.

For now, he picked up the black axe that the monster had left behind. It weighed at least six thousand kilograms. Whatever it was made of, it'd remained intact in a clash with origin dao immortal strength.

It was certainly no ordinary treasure.

Just as he was going to examine the white path, the entire space trembled and everything around him crumbled. He returned to the chamber where Qing Han, Wu Tulong, Zi Chen, and Mo Qitian sat crossed-legged on four Dao Flowers, a dense, calming, and refreshing fragrance wafting from them. Lu Yun's position and posture remained the same as before, as if nothing had happened.

"The Sugato Sword is still here and the consciousness brand on it is still intact..." He found the weapon was on him again, and the brand that should've been destroyed by the hairy monster was whole and complete.

"Was that all an illusion?" Lu Yun frowned. The axe he'd picked up had disappeared as well, like it'd never existed. "What's going on?"

Frowning, he sent his consciousness into Violetgrave and found only one seal left on the corpse puppet.

There were three seals put on the dread zombie, and one was lifted every time he used its power. After all three were exercised, the puppet would become a dread zombie again and gain its freedom.

“So it did all actually happen!” Lu Yun checked the purple manor inside his nascent spirit and found that the trajectory recorded by the Tome of Life and Death yet remained. “So it wasn’t the real world just now, but a spiritual realm.”

All existences on the white path were purely spiritual. If the monster had killed him, he’d become a mindless zombie in the real world. That was also why the monster hadn’t become an Infernum after its death.

Lu Yun kept his guard up, even though the monster was dead and couldn’t hurt his companions anymore. More threats might still arise; thus, he studiously guarded his friends.

The room billowed with the fragrance of the Dao Flower. Qing Han and the others had entered a trance of dao contemplation.

Hum.

After an indeterminate period of time, Qing Han shook and whistled, his body relaxing involuntarily. He’d completed the framework of the void realm, and Mo Qitian, Zi Chen, and Wu Tulong came to as well.

The perceived void, unravelled void, and returned void had become whole again as well. Finally, the formerly dead void realm was rejuvenated on the Dao Flower.

Qing Han, Mo Qitian, Zi Chen, and Wu Tulong each carried within them a complete void realm. Once they headed out of the isolated tomb, the resurrected Dao Flower and the restored cultivation path would settle back down in the outside world.

Then, the severed path of cultivators outside would be repaired as well.

Of course, they couldn’t repair the path solely by themselves, despite being the top cultivators of the world. Instead, it was the power of the Dao Flower that would repair the path through them.

“Our talent is nothing to write home about,” Wu Tulong opened his eyes and lamented. “There’ve been a good number of great geniuses throughout history who noticed the broken path after ascending to the transformed spirit realm. They pushed past the barrier that directs all cultivators straight to immortality and entered the void realm on their own!”

“And then they all died.” Lu Yun nodded. They’d all met their deaths at the hands of the creature.

“Heh, the celestial emperors hailed us as the youth sovereigns, but we pale in comparison to the real geniuses who came before us,” Mo Qitian sighed. He was a peak transformed spirit realm cultivator and had previously been one step away from ascending to immortality. However, neither he nor Wu Tulong had sensed that the cultivation path was incomplete. They’d all thought their next step was to soar to the ranks of immortals.

Throughout the process of reconstructing the void realm, they saw genius after genius from generation after generation enter the white path on their own and fight the black-furred monster, attempting to repair the cultivation path. They’d all died under its axe.



They were the true geniuses in Mo Qitian's eyes.

"It's not too late. At least the path is now repaired!" Zi Chen was frugal with his words. "Let us compete to see who can enter the void realm first!"

There were no cultivation methods left of the void realm. All records, methods, and combat arts related to it had been destroyed eras ago. Cultivators could only rely on their own power to bridge the gap and explore it!

"Alright, let's see who's the first to break through!" Mo Qitian's heart welled with anticipation.

"Let's leave the tomb!"

"We'll help the Dao Flower bloom in all realms!"

"And restore the broken path of cultivation!"

"Return the vanished void realm to the world!"

### **Chapter 246: Ten Thousand Leagues of an Ocean of Blood**

Time to exit the tomb!

The Dao Flower had divided itself into four parts to enter Qing Han, Wu Tulong, Zi Chen, and Mo Qitian. Only after the four of them left the isolated tomb would the flower once again bloom in the outside world.

.....

"It won't be as bad as when we entered the tomb, is it?" Mo Qitian shrank in on himself when he thought back on their journey through the tomb. It was the singular most terrifying exploration he'd ever conducted.

Lu Yun frowned and examined the area through his luopan. The four layers of coiled mountains are whole again! His heart quailed.

The four coiled mountains comprised the Door of Demise. On their journey inside, he'd destroyed the green lanterns, formation of coffins, foggy maze, and the Avici Cell, essentially deactivating the layout. It hadn't disappeared completely, but it shouldn't pose any threat.

Now, however, his compass told him the Door of Demise layout had been activated again, and the four coiled mountains had been repaired! Can the layout recover on its own? Wait, Huangqing and Ge Long are still outside!

Ah... no, they're dead. Lu Yun's heart sank. He'd left the two of them outside to guard the tunnel in case anything happened. However, a mysterious death had visited them while he was protecting Qing Han and the others.

They could be resurrected through the Tome of Life and Death, but the fact that they hadn't even managed to sound a warning meant that they'd been killed in the blink of an eye. How was that possible, when Huangqing was a blood phoenix who could rival Aoxue in power?

The governor's dark scowl alerted his four companions to the severity of their situation.

"There's no path for the living past the Door of Demise.... It looks like I underestimated the danger of the layout. Something must have happened outside as well." Lu Yun looked up. "We can't go back the way we came in, we have to keep pushing forward!"

"What?!" Wu Tulong started. "Push forward? You mean the third chamber isn't the end of the tomb?"

"That's right." Lu Yun nodded. "This tomb is an island in the Ten Yins Estuary. We have to cross the ocean of blood to get out of here!"

"The ocean of blood...." Qing Han couldn't suppress a shudder when his mind strayed to the waters behind the bronze door.

Suddenly, Lu Yun started; Aoxue had just returned to hell. She'd blocked the Qing entrance for an entire month, not moving an inch even on the day of Zhao Shengguang's coronation. That'd pushed the Qing Clan to the edge, but they hadn't made a move.

The Lu ancestor, arcane dao immortal Qing Ruyan of the Panorama Pavilion, and the mysterious Wayfarer all supported her actions as a blatant form of payback for them being prevented from rescuing Lu Yun. Moreover, another powerful faction had shown its face to take Aoxue's side.

The Skandha Range. Aoxue was the mistress of the Skandha Range!

Immortals following an unorthodox dao and otherkind cultivators joined in the fray, targeting not only the Qing Clan, but also the Feng Clan, the Exalted Immortal Sect, and even House Donglin in a show of savage violence.

A month-long blockade was a round of hearty face slaps and thorough humiliation to the Qing Clan. They were at their wits end in their search for a solution. In sheer fury, the clan listed Lu Yun as its foremost public enemy and issued a handsome bounty for his head. They then branded Qing Han as a clan traitor and exiled him.

The Feng Clan had even put aside their differences with the Qing Clan to form an alliance with them. Along with the Exalted Immortal Sect, the three factions sent their experts after Aoxue and defied the Skandha Range.

With his four hundred and eighty million lightning strikes, Lu Yun had killed, or severely injured, eighteen dao immortals and disintegrated fifteen hundred more golden and peerless immortals. That'd taken a heavy toll on the three factions.

However, they couldn't go after him, since he'd been missing for a year. Thus, they shifted their target to Aoxue and those dear to the Dusk governor in an attempt to force him to show his face.

Lu Yun frowned upon hearing his envoy's report.

A year. Time had unwittingly flown by beneath the Dao Flower's power. It'd taken Qing Han and the others a year to deduce the void realm and repair the path of cultivation. What Aoxue relayed next stunned Lu Yun even more.

Half a year ago, an ocean of blood spanning ten thousand leagues had crept into the southeast corner of Life Province, and nothing could survive there. The monsters emerging from the ocean devoured any living souls who dared approach.

Six dao immortals of the Nephrite court had ventured into the ocean, never to return. The spirit jade slips they left behind shattered as well, signifying their deaths. All six of them had died in the ocean.

"The estuary's balance of yin and yang have been disrupted, returning the ocean of blood to the real world. No wonder the Door of Demise reactivated, and Huangqing and Ge Long were killed without warning!" Understanding dawned on Lu Yun.

The ocean of blood behind the bronze door was a feng shui layout fostered by the Ten Yins Estuary. Now that the layout had become the real deal, the other layouts set up by the estuary had come to life as well.

Lu Yun had thought the bronze door was just a byproduct of the layout, but no... it was the Door of Demise itself, built in the image of the Gates of Abyss! Hell had been destroyed, and someone wanted to recreate it. This thus was a corner of the new hell.

"The ocean of blood is behind the bronze door. If we cross it, we'll be able to leave this place!" A sneer flashed over Lu Yun's face. Recreate hell? As the overlord of the real hell, a counterfeit was absolutely nothing to him.

"To draw the patterns of mountains coiled,

"Those deathly cliffs with mysteries roiled.

"Danger shies if mountains hide,

"Layers of locks do heaven and earth ride."

Rumble.

The luopan burst into golden light as it rotated, showing how the room had changed again. A hidden path emerged beneath their feet, marking a winding way toward a bronze door.

Endless corpses crawled over the path that was interspersed with giant coffins and a disorienting maze. Green lanterns floated in the air, sickly pale ghost faces howling and snarling within.

The coiled mountains that Lu Yun had destroyed had reemerged as one, creating this path. What he'd feared the most had come to pass. The full power of the Door of Demise had been unleashed with the synergy of all four layers of coiled mountains.

However, he perked up when he noticed the Dao Flowers blooming and shielding his four companions. The monsters on the winding path scattered and fled when they sensed the power of the flowers.

"The great dao protects us from all evils!" Mo Qitian laughed proudly. "We'll protect you this time, senior brother Lu!" He stepped onto the path, then immediately scrambled back, shrieking in fear, "Mommy, there's a ghost over there!"

"Man, that's embarrassing." Zi Chen looked away.

Wu Tulong and Qing Han exchanged a glance, pretending they didn't know Mo Qitian.

"I mean it!" Mo Qitian said with a trembling voice. "It's the ripped-mouth ghost that senior brother Lu dealt with before. She's at the end of the path again!"

### **Chapter 247: Traversing the Ocean of Blood**

"What?!" Lu Yun's expression clouded over.

The girl in white—the true form of the vicious ghost—had gone up in flames to form the spark of hope that resurrected the Dao Flower. Because of that, the ghost should've completely disappeared, along with its endless grudges. The ghost Mo Qitian had seen couldn't have been her.

An akasha ghost? Lu Yun's brows knit together tightly. That would be very troubling if true. He wasn't sure if he could compel the two powerful beings in hell to deal with it.

"I'll go check!" Outside the path, he could see only the monsters materialized by the coiled mountains. The area before the bronze door was covered by a layer of persistent mist, which prevented him from taking a good look.

"We'll go with you." Wu Tulong came up to his side. "The path of cultivation hasn't been repaired yet, and the power of the Dao Flower remains on us. With its protection, nothing but the thing that severed the path itself can hurt us."

"He's right." Qing Han nodded. "The spirits can't hurt us at all, unless someone destroys the Dao Flowers. In fact, the flowers will counter the spirits and kill even akasha ghosts."

"Alright then, we'll go together!" Lu Yun agreed immediately.

Destroy the Dao Flowers? No immortals at present could do that, nor could the akasha ghosts. If the thing that'd shattered the path of cultivation and withered the Dao Flower descended, its mere presence would render all of them into ashes.

Mo Qitian was reluctant; being possessed by the vicious ghost had greatly traumatized him. However, there was no backing down now. The five of them exited the chamber and took the winding path under the guidance of the luopan's light.

As soon as they set foot on the path, their surroundings shifted drastically. Previously well-lit by the compass' golden light, a dark haze blanketed the scene.

Sinister, disorienting mist enveloped them while ghosts and spirits wailed from the depths. It felt as if they'd ventured into a land of the dead. Shadows flashed through the mist, bodies and ghosts flickered in and out of existence. The only thing they could see clearly was the bronze door at the end of the path.

A ghost in white with a ripped mouth and bloody eye sockets stood by the door, its empty eye sockets fixed on the five of them.

It defied logic that the path should be obscured by a mist so thick that they could barely see more than a few steps ahead, yet the bronze door and the ghost at the end of the path remained clearly visible to the eye. They were a signpost, enabling the group to find their way despite the limited visibility.

Qing Han, Wu Tulong, Zi Chen, and Mo Qitian surrounded Lu Yun. The images of Dao Flowers blossomed over them and drove away the mist, dispelling the ghosts and corpses within as well.

The flower's more useful than hellfire. Lu Yun shrugged.

Here, there was no malice or rancor, so the ghosts and corpses weren't as invincible. He could've destroyed them all with a tongue of hellfire, but the Dao Flower had driven them away before he could.

The ghost in white remained by the door, silently watching them.

"Who are you?" Lu Yun demanded.

The rest kept some distance from the ghost, despite the protection of the flowers. Lu Yun had said the white ghost was the heart of the four coiled mountains and could tap into the traps' fullest power.

"The ocean of blood has formed and the bronze door is about to close. This place will soon cease to exist." There was a lilt to the voice that didn't sound anything ghostly at all. "I am her final wish, here to guard the door for you."

Lu Yun's heart skipped a beat.

Last of her era, the girl had not only ignited the fire of hope with her own body, but also left a trace of will behind that manifested as a vicious ghost and guarded the last egress of survival for them.

Previously, they'd been able to see the ghost and door despite the mist, precisely due to the efforts of the dead girl.

Rumble.

The bronze door slowly opened.

"The paper boats by the crimson cove will carry you through the ocean and back to the world of living. However, do not talk or turn around on your journey. Even the Dao Flowers won't be able to protect you if you do!" The ghost slowly faded away as the door shut behind them. The tomb and space itself blurred. As she'd said, this world was dissolving.

"Get in!" Lu Yun and the others hurried over the threshold and were greeted with an ocean of blood that spanned ten thousand leagues. Everything around them was dark red. They were standing on a giant skull of an island in the ocean that was quickly sinking.

Beside the shore were five paper boats, each hung with a stark-white lantern. In its grudge-filled state, the ghost had folded boats for the dead according to the ones it'd seen in the real ocean of blood. With its malice resolved, the boats and spirits on the ocean had disappeared, leaving behind only the five vessels it'd prepared for Lu Yun and his companions.

They followed the ghost's instructions and communicated only through eye contact, refraining from talking or mental transmission.

The group quickly boarded the black boats.

Rumble.

No sooner had they hopped in than the island completely sank underwater. Going down with the island was a white figure with a content smile.

Pale lanterns at the bow of their vessels illuminated the way to the other side of the ocean. Left in the wake of the vanished illusions was a winding path, twisting and turning through the depths of the waters and leading to who-knew-where.

This is a layout within a layout!

Lu Yun scanned the area in front of him. The ocean contained a power that was very similar to hell, but he couldn't control it. The hell under his purview was created by the Tome of Life and Death, while this ocean was someone else's doing. He fell into deep thought as he stared at the ocean.

Black light flashed through his eyes as the power of the Tome of Life and Death emerged, intertwining with his thoughts so he could quickly analyze what he was seeing.

The purpose of death fostered by the ocean resembles the decay that affected the Dao Flower. Did the villain destroy the path of cultivation and wither the Dao Flower... to nurture an ocean of blood with the properties of decay? Lu Yun frowned.

With the flower resurrected and its decaying qualities dispersed, the ocean of blood drew its shape from the layout of the Ten Yins Estuary. It was a stunningly remarkable and all-encompassing scheme to sever the path of cultivation for countless living souls in order to recreate this ocean of blood.

For Lu Yun, this was a sin that one could never be cleansed of, even after baptism by all the water in all realms. Where is the real ocean of blood, then? The girl said she saw everyone of her era floating through the ocean of blood in black paper boats.... Could the ocean still exist somewhere in hell?

### **Chapter 248: Help, Fellow Daoist!**

There seemed to be no end in sight to the expanse of dark crimson water. A thick, metallic tang burrowed into everyone's noses, inducing spells of dizziness despite their iron wills.

Lu Yun had slapped a Silence Talisman over Mo Qitian's mouth, which headed off multiple attempts to talk from the youth sovereign. They finally understood why the ghost in white had told them not to speak.

The lanterns on the ship radiated a special power that concealed the energy of a living being. If anyone spoke, the energy dispersing from their mouths and noses would attract the monsters in the crimson ocean. While the vast depths looked peaceful, within lurked terrible monsters the likes of which no one could begin to imagine.

They could glimpse the crimson humanoid lizards that'd devoured Lu Shenhou, as well as countless zombies and monsters made of bleached bones. They even encountered a skeletal dragon that spanned five thousand kilometers, will-o'-wisps burning in its head and wielding the power of a dao immortal. It twisted and flailed in the ocean as it fought another skeletal beast.

That was when Lu Yun had refined a Silence Talisman to shut Mo Qitian's mouth. The man was so much more talkative than he seemed, making him the polar opposite of Zi Chen, who was a man of few words.

Lu Yun didn't want him to alert the terrible beings in the ocean by running his mouth. The ghost was right; not even the Dao Flowers could save them, should the monsters notice them.

Bam!

Tall waves suddenly reared from the surface, sweeping aside the corpses and monsters in their path. However, the paper ships carrying Lu Yun and the others moved with the currents, unusually stable in face of the powerful waves.

A nine-headed skeletal dragon running three thousand kilometers long surged from the ocean, piercing howls sweeping through the air.

A nine-headed dragon!

This was a mythical dragon that existed only in legends! Even Aoxue thought of it as a mere story. Contemporary dragons themselves didn't know if such an ancestor had ever existed, but here was living proof that it did!

In the next moment, both Lu Yun and Qing Han shot to their feet, eyes wide with disbelief. Qing Han clapped his hands tightly around his mouth to prevent even a peep from escaping. Lu Yun went a step further and stuck a dozen Silence Talismans to his lips to keep a yelp from escaping his mouth.

The nine-headed dragon was fighting another behemoth: the bottom half of a blue-black dragon!

It was about as long as the nine-headed dragon, but its rotten, scaled body was dripping with yellowish grey corpsewater. Black bones were visible through its rotting scales and flesh, and its two claws had deteriorated to the point of non-recognition.

It was the other half of the Azure Dragon King!

Back in the ancient times, someone had bisected the dragon king and ferried its upper body to the eastern tomb realm of the Skandha Extinction Tomb, setting up a curse against its kin. Fortunately, it had encountered the dying Sal Tree of Life and Death hidden within the tomb realm. It'd fused itself to the tree and recovered with the tree's remaining vitality.

No one had expected to see the dragon king's bottom half in the ocean of blood!

The bottom half likewise emanated piercing vibrations and fought the nine-headed dragon, their floundering and grappling raising tall waves and pulverizing countless skeletal creatures in the boundless ocean.

Lu Yun turned sideways to Qing Han, who shook his head in response.

The Azure Dragon King peeked outside the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals with thick sorrow; its bottom half was dead. There was no use rescuing it now. It was just one of the dead in the ocean of blood, manipulated by the purpose of death. Once it left the ocean, it'd transform into a terrible monster and wreak great havoc in the world.

Lu Yun and Qing Han sat back down as the black paper ships continued on their leisurely path. The fight between the two titanic creatures didn't affect the ships at all.

As time passed, the crimson in the sky faded, and there were increasingly fewer terrors in the depths. Warm sunlight poured down from the sky, turning the dark red water almost amber.

“Mmhmrm!!” Mo Qitian’s gaze lit up with excitement as he shook and capered in place, but still couldn’t say anything due to the restraint of the Silence Talisman. He gave Lu Yun a pitiful look, but was soundly ignored; they hadn’t left the ocean yet and thus mustn’t talk.

In all this time, Zi Chen and Wu Tulong had remained cross-legged inside their boats. Dao Flowers surrounded them as they assiduously studied the void realm.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

From a distance traveled a cacophony of collision and battle. Something was fighting in the ocean. It wasn’t a clash between giant monsters, but of immortals and the monsters in the sea.

Lu Yun and the others looked up into the distance.

A dozen enormous fortress ships were passing through the sky, beams of light swept out from the ships to destroy the monsters rising from the ocean. Even more monsters had already climbed onto the ships and torn down their defensive formations to meet the immortals aboard in frenzied battle.

A few wrecked ships drifted on the surrounding ocean, slowly sinking. The earlier booms had come from the monsters tearing into the ships.

Isn’t the ocean forbidden ground after the dao immortals died? Confusion colored Lu Yun’s expression. He didn’t understand why anyone would sail into the crimson sea and pick a fight with these monsters.

The owner of one of the damaged ships glimpsed Lu Yun and the others and steered his vessel toward them.

“Help, fellow daoist!” A giant flesh mountain of a fatty stood on top of one of the ships. He wailed for help as he flung skeletal monsters away.

That’s... Li Youcai! Lu Yun could scarcely believe his eyes. What was he doing here?

He recognized the crew aboard the ship as well. They were no immortals, but cultivators!

Lu Yun’s heart sank. He quickly scanned the ships approaching them, his mood taking a further downward turn.

There was only one explanation for this.

### **Chapter 249: A Great Purge**

Li Youcai had been a wide and heavyset man, resembling a giant mountain of lard. Now, however, he appeared wan and deflated, his complexion a sickly shade of yellow. No longer a hale and hearty fat man, he was an exhausted and weary one.

Onboard his ship were Dusk’s cultivators, including the heads of the aristocratic families that’d attended the Dusk River Sacrament, and genius cultivators who had performed well during the governor reselection tournament. But now they were all here, struggling against the terrible monsters.



They were on the fringe of the ocean, so the monsters here weren't as threatening as those in the depths, but they were still too much for the cultivators on the ship to handle.

As Lu Yun watched, humanoid lizards crawled up and ripped apart a cultivator, dividing the parts for consumption. That genius had hailed from a Dusk aristocratic family, and had defeated a spirit realm cultivator in the Coretrial Arena.

"Help, fellow daoist! Help us!" Li Yuocai's hoarse cries for help were incessant.

What's going on? Why are they here?! Lu Yun's heart blazed with fury. According to Aoxue, the ocean of blood was forbidden grounds after the loss of dao immortals. No faction dared send anyone to explore the area. Yet here the Dusk cultivators were, flying in fortress ships and fending off the ocean monsters.

There was certainly someone behind all this!

He also saw Lu and Chen immortals on the other ships. "All of you remain in your boats and protect the Dao Flowers," he said to his tomb raiding group.

Puff!

The second he spoke, the white lantern on his ship exploded and went out with a final flicker.

"Don't follow me. You bear the weight of the world on your shoulders. It's your duty to revitalize the world." He slowly took to the air without looking back.

The ghost had given them two rules: don't speak and don't turn around. Speaking would put out the lantern concealing their life energy, and turning around would attract the attention of even more terrifying beings in the ocean.

Lu Yun had already broken one rule. He mustn't break the other, or his companions would suffer the consequences. As soon as his lantern had exploded, skeletal creatures and crimson monsters rushed out of the water to lunge at him.

Swoosh!

Black fire burst out of Lu Yun's hands and burned the monsters to ashes.

Hum.

Sharp blade lights swirled around him as he manifested the Sugato Sword.

Roar!

An enormous cerulean dragon soared through the air and shot through the ocean, tearing countless monsters into pieces. Their remains fell limply back into the ocean, creating space for Lu Yun to flash to Li Youcai's side.

Qing Han wanted to help, but Lu Yun's reminder about the Dao Flower changed his mind and made him slowly sit back down.

The Dao Flowers were the bane of all evil. The spirits along the winding path had shied away from the flowers because the path was a layout that'd been suppressed by the ghost in white. It hadn't yet evolved into the real Door of Demise.

These monsters, on the other hand, were real. The flowers could counter their power, but there were too many of them and their blood energy too potent. It was entirely possible that they could corrupt the Dao Flowers again with the power of the ocean.

That wasn't a risk the group was willing to take.

If the flowers were damaged, all of their efforts would've been in vain. The void realm fostered in the flowers would shatter again before it could be reincorporated into the path of cultivation.

Lu Yun landed on the fortress ship with powerful gusts of sword energy, enveloping the vessel in blade light that destroyed all monsters and skeletons it touched.

"What are you doing here, Li Youcai?!" he demanded.

"Your... your Excellency!!" Li Youcai's small eyes widened when they landed on Lu Yun. He threw himself at Lu Yun's feet and clutched the governor's thigh with loud wails and sobs. "Help, Your Excellency!!"

Bam!

Lu Yun kicked him away and snapped, "Speak, what's going on!"

"The Dusk Lord sent us here," Li Youcai whined. "That old bastard!"

Lu Yun frowned. "The Dusk Lord? You mean the desolate willow in the Skandha Range?"

"No," Li Youcai hurried out, "the new Dusk Lord appointed by His Majesty the Celestial Emperor!"

"Appointed by the celestial emperor?" Lu Yun's heart sank. "What about Mo Yi?"

"She's missing," Li Youcai said as he wiped away snot and tears. "The Dusk Lord declared her a traitor, and she's now wanted by the Nephrite court."

"Why are you here then? What's with the Lu and Chen Clans?"

The Dusk Lord must've sent them here to die. Once the cultivators of Dusk Province were dead, new agents could be planted. But why were the Lu and Chen Clans here too? They were among the top clans of Nephrite Major. Even if someone was to send them to die, there had to be a legitimate pretext for it.

"There are great treasures in the ocean!" Li Youcai exclaimed. "A month ago, a golden immortal returned from the ocean of blood with a connate-grade treasure, taking the world by storm! This isn't a forbidden ground anymore, but a place with opportunity and danger alike! Although a few dao immortals died here, a golden immortal managed to survive!" The fatty pulled a long face. "That's why the heavenly court sent us to explore the ocean."

"Well? What did you find?" With a flip of his hand, Lu Yun smote another wave of skeletal monsters.

Li Youcai put away his Seal of Mountains and Rivers with a dejected expression. "We were swarmed by the monsters as soon as we entered, and didn't have a chance to search for treasure!"

His ship was wrecked, as it was too low-level to defend against the monsters. Wreckage of countless fortress ships floated about, suggesting that the dozen ships present weren't the only ones that'd entered the ocean.

More ships and immortals had met their end here.

With a new emperor came a new generation of officials; it was only natural that a new emperor would purge those who didn't listen to him or those he couldn't trust. Zhao Shengguang was cleaning house!

What further enraged Lu Yun was that the emperor had booted the Lu and Chen Clans out of their respective paradises! Many members of the Lu Clan had already died in the ocean.

"Good. Very good," he sneered. The group had been floating on the ocean for three months, but to think so many unexpected things would happen during this period of time! "Zhao Shengguang is moving against the Lu and Chen Clans. It would seem that something's happened to Qing Buyi and Chen Xiao."

### **Chapter 250: Black Paper Boats**

Zhao Shengguang used to be Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi's sidekick, once upon a time. He'd managed to climb to the seat of celestial emperor only because of his connection to them. How, then, did he dare act against the Chen Clan?

A portion of Qing clansmen were being purged as well. Taking all of his actions together, it was evident that something had happened to Qing Buyi and Chen Xiao.

Lu Yun didn't have a particularly strong relationship with either of the two men, but they'd gone to the Endless Desert in western Nephrite to search for the fruit of the Ancient Tree of Life and he certainly hadn't wanted them to run into any danger.

If they still don't show up after I get the Skydragon Pearl, I'll make a trip myself! the young man decided.

Upon the blood sea, eleven fortress ships remained, aside from Li Youcai's. The rest had been torn to pieces by the monsters. The ships' passengers were immortals from the Lu and Chen Clans, and the strongest among them were golden immortals. The ships weren't of good quality; in fact, they were several steps down from the one Qing Han had sailed in the beginning. These were barely first-rank treasures.

Lu Yun couldn't just let these people die, though. The Lu ancestor had saved him from the Qing dao immortal, then backed up Aoxue when she blockaded the Qing Clan's doors. There was no further enmity between his clan and himself.

As for the Chen Clan... when Qing Han had been shunned by his clan, when he'd been viewed as a source of misfortune by the entire capital, the Chen Clan had still called the lad one of their own and taken him in. Plus, Qing Yu was there as well!

Boom!

Lu Yun summoned a large fortress ship with a wave of his hand. The ninth-rank treasures arrayed upon it roared their might, repelling endless waves of sea monsters with blast after radiant blast.

“Get on!” he called out. Using the ship’s spirit key, he unleashed the vessel’s manifold arsenal of weaponry to cut a swathe through the bloody sea. The passengers on the dilapidated ships took to the sky on their swords, eager to avoid a brutal death at the sea monsters’ hands.

They were at the sea’s edge. Though monsters teemed here as well, they were far fewer in number compared to deeper in, and weaker, as well. They were peerless immortals, at most!

In the depths of the bloody sea lived countless dao immortal monsters. There, peerless immortals were little better than ants. If Lu Yun had dared bring out his ship there, he would’ve been torn to pieces in an instant. Here, however, the fortress ship thrived.

At the same time, he sent out the nine bloodcorpses to form a Great Formation of Heavenly Fiends out of thin air, summoning a colossal shadow that rampaged amid the waves. However, Lu Yun astutely noticed that the fiend summoned this time exhibited a strange anxiety.

Indeed, the demonic shadow that could slay peerless immortals in a single strike was afraid of the bloody sea. In these waters, it fought at only two-thirds strength. If Feinie hadn’t been its summoner, and if the Tome of Life and Death hadn’t powered the formation, the formation wouldn’t have been able to call the shadow at all.

Still, a fiendish shadow that was at seventy percent was more than sufficient. His fortress ship sailed slowly through the air, headed toward the other eleven.

“That’s Lu Yun! It’s his fortress ship!” Upon a Lu Clan ship, Lu Qingshuang immediately recognized the friendly vessel. “Lu Yun disappeared for a year and three months. Everyone thought he was dead, but I guess this is where he’s been!”

Her pretty eyes flashed with gladness. Though she’d lost to him back in Xiankan, the lesson she’d received had helped her form her own sword intent and she was now a formidable swordsman in her own right. The heritage tower Lu Yun had left behind had increased her strength many times over as well, and she was now capable of defeating true immortals as a mere cultivator.

After being exiled to the bloody sea, she’d lost all hope. A sole exception in the form of a golden immortal had lived through the ordeal and brought back a connate treasure, but that was a one-in-a-million occurrence. There was no way they’d survive here!

Her ship wouldn’t have held on for much longer if Lu Yun hadn’t appeared in the nick of time. As they rode the ship that’d carved a path of corpses through Xiankan, the Lu and Chen immortals were filled with a new hope.

Rrrumble....

Wherever the ship went, the sea monsters shrieked in pain before disintegrating. More scattered in every direction in an attempt to survive.

This was the first time Lu Yun had fired the ship up to full power, and the amount of devastation it dealt had far exceeded his imagination. Of course, that had a commensurate price as well: twelve million immortal crystals were burned as fuel. The vast amount of wealth he’d accumulated from kills since he’d left Dusk Province had just gone up in flames.

“Steer your ships after me!” Lu Yun’s voice echoed through the air. He put his hands up to the sky, invoking bolt after bolt of Cleansing Thunder in all directions, scattering the regrouping monsters. The captains of the eleven other ships shook in disbelief, then directed their ships to break free of the bloody sea as best they could.

Qing Han and the others leisurely sailed on four black paper boats behind them. Under the radiance of the white lanterns, they remained unscathed by the battle.

Lu Yun’s face grew continuously paler after quite a few powerful monsters had broken through the formation and protective light shell to strike at his ship proper. Having refined the ship as his personal treasure, he felt physically ill whenever the fortress ship was attacked. Thankfully, the ship was too sturdy to actually cause him any injury from the aftershocks, and by now the coast was already visible in the distance.

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“Hmm? Why have they returned?” A great city was situated on the coast of the bloody sea. Originally built as a line of defense against a potential monstrous outbreak from the crimson depths, the city had become more and more bustling since that golden immortal’s serendipitous find. Particularly desperate immortals sometimes traveled here in a last-ditch attempt to turn their fortunes.

Upon the nameless city’s walls, a blond man furrowed his brows. He’d spotted the dozen or so fortress ships on their way out of the sea.

“This isn’t such a bad thing though,” the man sneered. “His Majesty wanted an excuse to strike against the Chen and Lu Clans, regardless. You’re ramming yourselves onto the tip of the spear!”

“That fortress ship must be the one Chen Xiao took from the Ling Clan. Lu Yun is here too, hmm? Excellent! I’ll kill him with the rest!” The blond man waved a hand, beckoning countless troops to his side.

“Eh?!” His face colored. “What are those four boats? The ones made of black paper? Why aren’t the sea monsters attacking them?! Do they have the ability to sail the Blood Sea?”

The twelve fortress ships were airborne, while Qing Han’s paper boats were drifting along the water’s surface.