

Necropolis 251

Chapter 251: Immortal Weapons of War

The blond man was shocked by his realization. Not only had the sea monsters not attacked the four paper boats, but the waves and light of those infernal waters didn't affect them, either!

I must have those boats! his heart roared fervently. So the Blood Sea did contain connate-grade treasures!

The golden immortal who'd survived the ordeal had been arrested by the Nephrite court, and the treasure he'd obtained was now in the emperor's possession. If he could get his hands on the four paper ships, he'd be able to hunt for treasure in the Blood Sea to his heart's content! The blond man burned with desire.

"Boundary!" he called out with another roar.

Boom!

A jadeite barrier flickered to life as soon as he gave the command. The entire sea coast was sealed off, leaving the nameless city as the sole avenue of exit. The power of the Nephrite emperor could seal even the long, winding coast of the North Sea, a shoreline that spanned multiple large provinces and trillions upon trillions of kilometers. In comparison, ten leagues worth of Blood Sea meant nothing.

The barrier's foundations had been set up only a short time ago, with a mechanism that very much resembled the North Sea's boundary. A formation laid down within the city proper served as its nexus; if the formation fell, the barrier would crumble with it.

If the sea monsters came ashore, the barrier would be far too weak to stop them. However, it would do a great job at stopping Lu Yun and the others.

"Hmm?" Lu Yun frowned at the sight of the barrier as its unexpected energy concerned him. "Who's in charge in that city there?"

As a formation grandmaster in his own right, he could construct formations without foundations. A single glance was enough to tell him that the city was key to getting past the boundary of light.

Unfortunately, the city's active formations, and the banners upon its battlements, were good indicators that its inhabitants meant them harm. Indeed, the army's battle formation image was already snarling in the sky.

"Someone important from the Jin Clan, but I don't have the right to know his name," Li Youcai answered hurriedly.

"The Jin Clan...." Lu Yun's brows bunched closer together. That was one of the Feng Clan's vassals. Back in outer Xiankan, its people had participated in his mobbing even after Jin Heyi and Jin Hexi's departure. As a result, many of their clansmen had died at his hand.

After he'd left the capital, the Jin Clan had similarly joined in the pursuit. Among the eighteen dao immortals, one had been theirs. That one was dead, of course, reduced to dust by four hundred and eighty million bolts of lightning and two terrifying formations.

Boom!

A pillar of light three hundred meters thick blasted from the nameless city, aimed squarely at Lu Yun's fortress ship. The enemy had opened fire without a word!

The photic missile came from an immortal weapon of war; his ship wouldn't be able to defend against it if it hit!

"Heh, heh, heh... the Jin Clan!" He sneered at the pillar of light blasting in his direction. "You're dead for sure..."

Behind the fortress fleet, Qing Han, Wu Tulong, Zi Chen, and Mo Qitian's Dao Flowers had recorded everything that was happening.

The Dao Flower carried a complete cultivation path with its return. However, though the path itself was repaired, the flower had yet to fully bloom. To do so required a record of all kinds of sights and sounds, as well as every trapping and experience of civilization. Only then could it truly integrate with the world.

Everything it encountered on its journey would be recorded, including the Jin Clan's attack against its bearers.

Lu Yun had returned from the boundless Blood Sea with a lethal trap that could be sprung at any moment. His fortress ship was five kilometers from the shore—no distance at all before an instrument of war. The consuming light was upon them in the blink of an eye.

"W-we really are done for this time," Li Youcai blurted out in a daze. "How can the Nephrite court be so merciless? Why do we have to die like this?"

The immortals on the ships behind them felt the same way. After escaping the maws of the Blood Sea monsters, they hadn't expected to leap right into the jaws of 'their own'.

"Too bad Lu Yun's caught up in all this... if he lived, the clan would've surely returned to its former glory..." a Lu golden immortal sighed in regret.

Boom!

The light pillar collided with the hull of Lu Yun's ship. Tons of seawater instantly evaporated away, vaporizing the monsters unlucky enough to be caught in them. The attack lit up the entire sky, temporarily blinding any immortal foolish enough to keep their eyes open.

"One shot of the Cloud Ray costs three hundred million premium crystals." The blond Jin Shikong kept his head down as the luminous explosion was too dazzling for even him to behold. Despite being a peerless immortal, he was forced to avert his gaze. "Even an arcane dao immortal would be seriously hurt by one of these. Evaporation by the Cloud Ray is more than dignified enough for the so-called number one cultivator in the world."

The nameless city's formation had momentarily ceased its operation and the army's image had disappeared. All the power of both had been injected into the war treasure. The light pillar it fired wasn't composed purely of energy; it also contained a fearsome formation that blasted anything it was targeted at into fine dust.

“The four paper boats are a fair distance away from the fortress ship. The Cloud Ray is very exact, so they should be fairly intact.” Jin Shikong raised his head once more, looking toward the Blood Sea with a devilish grin—that then froze in an astounded grimace.

Lu Yun’s fortress ship was completely unharmed, as were the eleven others behind it. They continued slowly sailing toward the nameless city.

“How is this possible?!” he screamed instinctively. How could Lu Yun have deflected better than an arcane dao immortal?

This was a weapon manufactured solely for war! The strongest kind of weapon anywhere in the world! How... how could a single fortress ship withstand its might?

Atop the deck of the leading ship, Lu Yun sneered back. Behind him was a rather pale Feinie, a thick trail of blood trickling out of the corner of her mouth.

The Formation Orb of Yin and Yang floated around her, glowing with a protective haze. In that moment just now, she had made use of the treasure’s power to create more than five thousand defensive formations. It’d taken quite a bit out of her to stop the light pillar short, and she’d suffered considerable injuries.

“Can... can Lu Yun have obtained a connate-grade treasure of his own in the Blood Sea?!” Jin Shikong gasped at the possibility. Surely, that was the most sensible explanation! Only a connate-grade treasure could soak an attack from a weapon of war!

“Let’s see how many times you can use that treasure of yours!” he scoffed. “Prepare the weapon for a second shot!”

“But milord, we don’t have many immortal crystals left...” his lieutenant replied hesitantly.

“Not a problem. What will these crystals amount to, compared to Lu Yun’s connate-grade treasure? Plus, we’ll be handsomely rewarded for exterminating the Lu and Chen Clans in any case! Ready... aim....”

The city’s formations began whirring again, and the hundred-thousand-odd soldiers formed their image once more.

The gigantic weapon was being reloaded.

Chapter 252: Demon from the Bloody Depths

Weapons of war, the pinnacle of the equipment and formation dao combined, were the greatest invention after the great war and one that had emerged only after the ancient times.

The nine celestial emperors weren’t the only reason why their courts held sway over the nine majors, winning out over the local top clans and sects. Ownership of these weapons played an even more important role.

Once targeted by such a treasure, even arcane dao immortals couldn’t dodge the blow. They could only brace to accept the attack head-on, then suffer the consequences. In some instances, they even died.

Madly burning through three hundred million premium immortal crystals, the great formation of the nameless city and physical manifestation from the battle formation of more than a hundred thousand heavenly soldiers powered the weapon.

After a dozen breaths, another brilliant beam of white light slammed at Lu Yun's fortress ship.

Golden radiance sparkled in Feinie's eyes, matching the glow that radiated from her body. She hovered in the air, unleashing the power of yin and yang from the Formation Orb in a swirl of black and white. Ten thousand formations burst forth from the treasure and solidified as barriers to shield the fortress ship.

At that moment, she ascended to the golden immortal realm.

She could've recovered her golden immortal strength much earlier, but she'd been suppressing her cultivation since golden immortals weren't allowed in Dusk Province. Once resurrected by the Tome of Life and Death, she was a true, living person and didn't enjoy the same exemption from the Dusk restriction as zombie king Diexi and the nine bloodcorpses did.

If Lu Yun's envoys appeared in Dusk Province as golden immortals, the Dusk restriction wouldn't spare them. It didn't seem to be an act of personal intent, but the inevitable execution of a rule.

Someone had set up a rule to stop golden immortals from appearing!

It was very similar to the power prohibiting immortals from entering the ancient tomb, which was carried out by executing any immortals that ignored the warning. The same effect was achieved in Dusk Province, but the rule was enforced by the Dusk restriction.

Lu Yun had connected the dots when he saw the characters prohibiting immortals back in the tomb. Nevertheless, now wasn't the time for him to worry about the consequences of Feinie's breakthrough.

The weapon was too powerful. Even with the Formation Orb, she wouldn't be able to take another hit as an august immortal. She had to ascend! As a golden immortal, she could channel more of the Formation Orb's power.

She wasn't who she'd been five thousand years ago, and the Formation Orb had changed as well. The merged Yin and Yang Formation Orb was more than the sum of its parts, resulting in an exponential leap in its power.

Bam!

White light seared the backs of everyone's eyelids. Instead of looking away, Jin Shikong stared into the light despite the almost blinding luminescence of impact.

He saw Lu Yun's fortress ship emerge once again, continuing its course toward the city and maintaining a steady speed.

"How is this possible?!" This time, fear flashed through Jin Shikong's eyes. "What kind of connate-grade treasure did he dig up? Or is there another dao immortal hidden in his ship?"

"Prepare another shot!" he roared. "Even dao immortals can't take three full hits from the weapon."

“We only have enough for one more shot, milord. If the monsters in the Blood Ocean were to crawl ashore....” His second-in-command shuddered; he didn’t want Jin Shikong to waste their resources on Nephrite cultivators.

“Shut your trap and do as I say!” Jin Shikong lifted the man off the floor by the collar and yelled so uncontrollably that he sprayed spittle in the second-in-command’s face. The subordinate had no choice but to pass down the order.

“Have you not given up yet?” Lu Yun looked over his shoulder at Feinie. The cannon at the city gate burst into white luminosity again, amping up for another shot.

Feinie took in a deep breath and called upon the Formation Orb. Light eddied through the smooth surface as formations flared to life within it, and blood trickled down from the corner of her mouth. Even as a golden immortal, she couldn’t survive too many uses of the treasure. After all, the orb was a connate-grade treasure, and she was, well, a golden immortal!

Hum.

Formations exploded from the orb and clashed with the giant beam of light, finally offsetting its terrifying might after all ten thousand formations had shattered. Feinie’s face turned as pale as a sheet and she collapsed. Lu Yun caught her, stuffing a few healing pills into her mouth.

“This servant is too weak, sir!” she said in a trembling voice. She couldn’t use the Formation Orb again, having exhausted her strength and inner energy, and was now suffering from the backlash.

“You’ve already done very well. Now go rest.” Lu Yun looked up. This time, the cannon didn’t charge again.

Fear drowned Jin Shikong at long last as he stood atop the city wall. Even arcane dao immortals would die after taking three direct hits, yet Lu Yun’s ship remained intact!

He didn’t even see what’d blocked the shots! A connate-grade treasure? Even so, whoever was wielding the treasure couldn’t have survived!

That was true enough. Feinie would’ve died after blocking the first shot, if it weren’t for the Tome of Life and Death.

“That’s not Lu Yun... but a demon. A demon from the Blood Ocean! Run!!” Jin Shikong suffered a mental breakdown at the thought of the terrors in the ocean. “All four of the boats carry demons! No wonder the monsters in the water don’t attack them, and they’re not affected by the power of the ocean. The monsters are coming ashore with the fortress ship as their vanguard.... Everyone, run!” He fled on the back of his sword.

All of the other immortals in the city were scared witless as well. Only celestial emperors could survive three shots from a weapon of war! They’d seen with their own eyes that there was only Lu Yun and a group of cultivators on the fortress ship. The most powerful among them was a mere golden immortal!

“Run! Lu Yun has been enthralled by the monsters in the ocean and he’s going to lead their army to slaughter everything in the world!”

“Run!” When Lu Yun and the others landed ashore, the immortals and all hundred thousand heavenly soldiers had fled the city.

The four black paper boats crumpled into ashes as soon as Qing Han, Wu Tulong, Zi Chen, and Mo Qitian pulled up to shore, and the stark white lanterns that were previously on their bow took flight and vanished into the crimson ocean in flashes of white light.

Chapter 253: Departing with City and Land

A unique power encircled the Blood Sea and isolated it from the outside world, which in turn isolated the Dao Flowers. However, the flowers didn't bloom immediately even after Qing Han and the others stepped ashore.

The spark of hope had resurrected it and repaired the path of cultivation it contained, but civilization's irrigation was required for the flower to bloom properly. In other words, it needed to absorb the different walks of life of this era.

“Where do we go now?” Lu Qingshuang asked timidly, approaching Lu Yun. “Back to Xiankan, or to Dusk Province?”

She, too, was terrified by her clansman. Although she and her companions weren't hurt, they weren't able to wrap their minds around what had just happened. Had they really survived three shots from a weapon of war?

Perhaps the monsters in the Blood Sea really have turned us into their puppets and we've become their vanguard. The returning group had naturally heard what the fleeing immortals had yelped when making their getaways.

“We're in no hurry.” Lu Yun stowed his fortress ship and approached the enormous weapon on top of the city wall.

Roughly three hundred meters in height, it was clear and translucent, like a cannon made of crystal. On the other end of the weapon was the deactivated great formation of the nameless city, clearly the source of its power. These weapons were capable of great destruction, and only the nine heavenly courts could activate them with special methods and formations. No other clans or factions were capable of owning, or using, such a treasure.

The last time Lu Yun had been ambushed, the Qing Clan and Exalted Immortal Sect had banded together with the Feng Clan, Jin Clan, House Donglin, and other major factions to set up two great formations that could potentially even kill dao immortals. Even then, they hadn't used any weapons of war, nor did they have the right to get their hands on one. Moreover, it was simply too much work. A grand formation would have to be set up to accommodate the treasure.

Dusk used to have such a weapon, set up in the seaside stronghold by the North Sea. However, it'd been torn down five thousand years ago, dismantled by the heavenly court and discarded as scrap in the ocean. Later, City Lord Fei Nie had established a great formation to prevent the North Sea monster spirits from invading.

Since the heavenly courts were the only ones who could use these weapons, layer upon layer of bureaucracy had to be waded through before one could be set up, and they could only be placed in strategically significant locations.

Given that their might was sufficient enough to threaten arcane dao immortals, they were on par with the nuclear weapons of Earth. Without the means to control the treasure, Lu Yun couldn't use it, even though it was right within his reach. If he misused it, the resulting explosion could raze everything within five hundred kilometers to the ground.

"You, you aren't thinking of taking it, are you?" The others tensed when they saw the way Lu Yun was considering the treasure. It couldn't be moved after it was laid down, or it would self-destruct.

"I do want to take it with me, but it's tied to the underground vein here... aha!" A closer inspection of the city and mountain ranges in the area had imparted further insight as to the situation here.

The treasure and great formation in the city were linked to the vein underground and had become one with the local terrain, allowing the weapon to tap into the power of heaven and earth.

No wonder it was so powerful!

In other words, the treasure didn't just rely on its inherent might, but also the endless supply of power from the land. It simply compressed the land's power to the limit of the world's physical laws, then released it.

"It's no surprise that even Huangqing doesn't know the secrets of this weapon," muttered Lu Yun. "She's a refiner, but she doesn't know formations!"

Weapons of war incorporated the peak of both formation and equipment dao. Very few in the world were skilled in both fields. Almost no one could master both, but the inventor of these weapons just so happened to be such a talent.

"...set up formations!" Lu Yun's face lit up with an enthusiastic light. He would set up formations to move both the city and the vein beneath it! He needed a formation that reached twenty-five hundred kilometers in radius!

Lu Yun returned to hell with his idea. Only Feinie possessed the ability he needed! She could set up a grand formation with the Formation Orb that would uproot all of the mountains, and the remaining terrain in the area as well.

Once he entered hell, time essentially froze for him, giving space for Feinie to focus on recovering. With pills refined by Yuying, she quickly returned to peak condition and left the netherworld to set up the formations.

A circle with a twenty-five hundred kilometer radius was bigger than China on Earth, but to golden immortals, a circle that big meant nothing. The highest level formations in the world of immortals could reach tens of thousands kilometers in radius.

Naturally, it wasn't easy to move a city along with its surrounding mountains, rivers, and underground veins. Veins, in particular, were especially tricky. Created by the condensed power of heaven and earth, underground veins included all sorts of mineral and spirit veins. A slight shift in their relative position

could cause a chain reaction. Many immortals who attempted to tamper with such veins had ended up dusted to ashes for their efforts. Even celestial emperors wouldn't make an attempt.

Feinie, however, was an exception.

The Formation Orb was a connate-grade treasure that contained countless formations. It could simulate the presence of the veins and dissolve nature's backlash. She completed the formations around the entire area in half a day.

"You... are... going to move both the city and the underground vein?" Qing Han asked in disbelief when he saw what Lu Yun was doing.

"That's right!" Lu Yun nodded. "The treasure is tied to the underground vein here, and will be rendered useless if the two are separated. That's why I have to take the weapon, the vein, and the local terrain with me."

More than just a mineral vein, the underground vein was a complete ecosystem that spanned the circle's radius.

"Don't worry about the crimson sea," he smiled, "it's completely isolated from the outside world. The monsters within it will turn into ashes as soon as they reach land, just like the paper boats."

Qing Han huffed without a word; he knew that. He was just worried that Lu Yun would be hurt by the energy backlash of what he was about to attempt.

Rumble.

A deep boom echoed through the land. Those who'd returned to their fortress ships goggled with surprise as the nameless city, the earth beneath it, and the mountains and flora in the area around it rose into the air and formed a floating island.

Hum.

The island vanished with the opening of an invisible door, leaving behind only an enormous, bottomless crater.

"Let's go." Once Feinie returned, Lu Yun waved his hand and commanded the fortress ship to set out for the transportation formation in Life Province, choosing to return to Dusk rather than Xiankan. As a mere cultivator, he couldn't do much to turn things around in Xiankan; Dusk Province was his territory.

Those aboard the twelve fortress ships gaped in shock, speechless. Had what they thought just happened... really happened?

1. Ahem, ya mean without the nuclear launch codes? Heh.

2. Poor lady, isn't she recovering...

Chapter 254: You Dare Use My Tower?

Within hell, the floating peak that was the resurrection layout released a wave of vitality that ensconced the new territory. Some life still remained in the soil there.

After the Blood Sea had come into being, the mortal towns nearby evacuated nearly instantly. Cultivators and immortal sects didn't dare linger much longer, either; all of them retreated more than five thousand kilometers away. Only common birds, beasts, insects, and such remained.

However, the flora and fauna were part of the system created by the earth vein. Lu Yun wanted to leave the ecosystem intact, if he could, and hell wasn't suitable for these creatures. Aside from his envoys and himself, any living being who entered hell would become a ghost. While Wushen Ruyi now possessed the Divine Spymirror, her true form was a divine obsession, not a living being.

The resurrection layout was the only place in the netherworld with any sort of vitality. The extremity of death was to revert to life, and the pole of life was enough to protect this relatively small patch of land.

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A great fleet of ships soared toward Life Province's transportation formation. Many cultivators glimpsed the fleet on its way there, including the particularly obnoxious lead vessel at the head of the procession.

"Lu Yun's back!"

"Wasn't he dismissed as the Dusk governor after failing to attend His Majesty's coronation last year? Since he's been stripped of his position, what's he doing here now?"

"Where did this fleet come from? Why... does it look so familiar?"

"I think it's the Chen-Lu coalition fleet that headed toward the Blood Sea a few days ago."

"Yeah, that's the one. It was much bigger before, right? Less than a third is left now."

"The Blood Sea is truly a scary place. It's not a place that's fit for the living, that's for sure."

Lu Yun had encountered little resistance along the way. Jin Shikong and the others had fled long ago. News should've made it back to the capital by now, but there'd been no attempts to intercept him. At this point, he was free game for any hostile dao immortal.

The entire way, he'd been poised to use the corpse puppet's last seal at any moment. However, everything remained quiet. It was almost too quiet.

During the journey, Lu Qingshuang and the others related what'd happened to the Chen and Lu Clans.

"The Lu Clan's Mauve Peace Paradise belongs to the Jin Clan now?" Lu Yun frowned.

"Yes. They laid claim to the inheritance tower you left behind, too, senior brother," Lu Qingshuang replied with clear suffering. "A lot of the clan's cultivators and immortals were cultivating inside at the time and were all driven out. Many of the brightest geniuses were inside the tower and killed on the spot. The Jin Clan lied to the world about that, of course, and said that it was because of a backlash from the tower."

The occupation of Mauve Peace Paradise naturally included taking over the inheritance tower. This couldn't be concealed from the world, but the Jin Clan had announced that the tower would be opened to the outside world after a hundred years. That was enough to calm everyone down; a hundred years passed in the blink of an eye for immortals.

“They dare use my tower?” Lu Yun sneered with derision. He could feel the inheritance tower through the Sugato Sword, as well as all twenty-thousand-odd Jin cultivators and immortals inside.

At the top of the tower was a strong dao immortal that exuded an aura as vast and magnificent as the seas, the same exact way Qing Ruyan did. Evidently, this was the Jin ancestor: an arcane dao immortal who’d picked his first dao fruit.

“The Jin ancestor was the most shameless of all. He gravely injured the patriarch with his superior strength...” Lu Qingshuang continued, sounding sadder still. “The Panorama Pavilion’s Fairy Ruyan saved the patriarch’s life, but his nascent spirit has shattered and he’s now an ordinary person.”

If Qing Ruyan hadn’t arrived on the scene, the rest of the Lu geniuses probably would’ve been massacred too.

Lu Yun fell silent. The Lu ancestor’s absence was most conspicuous in this story. He’d most likely been mired by opponents of the same level, no doubt. Every clan had an ancestor, and in a war between clans, people of similar strength were instantly pitted against one another. Lu Daoling had preserved the clan after the calamity a hundred years ago, but the clan hadn’t experienced a true renaissance and recovery of strength.

“Brother Shenhou, where is he? Why haven’t I seen him?” Nearby, Lu Qingshuang had made a frightening observation and turned deathly pale.

Lu Yun was quiet for a very long while, before finally mustering, “Shenhou... has given his life in pursuit of the dao.”

His spirits were quenched by the mention of his lost friend. He handed over the treasures Lu Shenhou left behind, including the three uses of arcane dao, to a pallid Lu Qingshuang.

The girl’s eyes turned an ashen gray. Every last spark of possibility had been extinguished from her eyes. Lu Shenhou had been the Lu Clan’s hope of revitalization. Once he matured, he would surely have led the clan to new heights. Was he... truly dead?

“Don’t worry. I’m still here, aren’t I? The Lu Clan isn’t done for yet.” Lu Yun’s answer cemented his acknowledgement and acceptance as part of the clan. Not because the Lu Clan was nearly extinguished, nor because the ancestor had once saved and protected him, but for Lu Shenhou’s sake alone.

The man had died, yet held onto life with gritted teeth, living through obsessive faith alone to bring out the cultivation path from that archaic, dusty tomb.

Lu Yun couldn't let such a man’s final wish remain a dream.

Restoring the Lu Clan and raising it back to its past position of prominence... that, too, had been Lu Shenhou’s wish.

Everyone who heard him gaped with shock. Qing Han, Wu Tulong, Zi Chen, and Mo Qitian were included; none of them thought Lu Yun would tie himself even closer than ever to his clan.

The Lu Clan had been discarded by Nephrite Major, and all of the other major factions were ridding themselves of this worthless connection. Anyone bearing any sort of relationship to the clan would be dragged down with it.

Deprived of its former glory, it was little more than a stinking quagmire. It wouldn't take long for it to be completely destroyed, and even the Lu ancestor would eventually be hunted down.

Yet here was Lu Yun, shouldering the responsibility of his clan's name.

"Lu Shenhou is a hero of the immortal world, and of all worlds and realms above. The Lu Clan doesn't deserve such ostracization and disaster!" Lu Yun sounded more resolute than ever.

He felt the goodwill emanating from the dozen fortress ships, but he'd spoken these words out of the purest sincerity in his heart. He'd felt a much bigger rush of goodwill when he'd saved them earlier, but nothing he was doing had anything to do with the pursuit of cultivation or selfish gain.

"The name 'Lu Shenhou' shall be remembered by every cultivator, everywhere! He will be recorded in history and his tale passed on for generations to come," he murmured. Qing Han and the others nodded in somber agreement.

"But right now, I think it's time to collect some interest." His tone sharpened to an ugly edge.

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Inside the Mauve Peace Paradise, before the clan meeting hall, the inheritance tower stood as it had for the past year. Glowing with brilliant power, its peak was hidden among the clouds and countless Jin cultivators looked upon it with rife expectation.

An inheritance tower!

No one had expected an identical tower to be here in the paradise, one no different from the one outside Dusk City! The Jins could already see their clan rising into the stratosphere with this new acquisition.

Currently, the clan's ancestor and a number of its best geniuses and immortals alike were inside the tower. As the initial shock troops sent in to claim the treasure for the clan, they'd personally slaughtered the best Lu geniuses within and severely injured its patriarch.

"As expected of an ancient lord surpassing the dao immortal realm.... In a hundred years, I'll be able to pluck my second arcane dao fruit!" The Jin ancestor sat at the very top of the tower, comprehending the dao with fastidious care.

Lord Sugato's heritage wasn't present at the top of the replica, which was why the ancestor could so easily reach this place. He was positively delighted; he could almost see the second dao fruit materializing before his eyes! Other images of Jin geniuses' breakthroughs accompanied it. With the drastic increase in strength to be found here, the clan's rise to the top was in sight!

Suddenly, his eyes shot open and terror flashed through them. A cool, mocking voice had made its way into his ear. In fact, it sounded within every one of the twenty thousand Jin ears inside the tower.

"So you have the gall to use my tower, hmm?"

Boom!

A moment later, the inheritance tower exploded.

“NOOOO!!” the Jin ancestor’s horrified shriek echoed throughout the paradise.

Chapter 255: Bringing Ten Thousand Formations to Bear

“So you have the gall to use my tower, hmm?”

Upon the Jin ancestor’s bleak howl, a voice more sinister than any devilish whisper echoed throughout the entire paradise. An endless wave of sword intent followed, enveloping the entirety of Mauve Peace Paradise in sharp keenness.

Lu Yun had refined the inheritance tower with a celestial emperor’s strength, using the Sugato Sword’s will fused with the power of heaven and earth. The tower’s detonation released all of that stored will, freeing it to rampage throughout the microcosm.

The paradise dissolved into chaos. Weaker cultivators were killed outright, while stronger immortals were grievously injured. Mauve Peace Paradise was utterly devastated; ranked sixth in Xiankan, it was instantaneously half torn to pieces by the steel tempest within!

“Down with you!” Despite the tower’s violent end, the Jin ancestor wasn’t dead. Covered in blood, he roared like a wounded beast and unleashed the power of an arcane dao immortal to quell the raging sword-storm.

Pff.

Blood streamed from his mouth as he wavered, then nearly fell. The arcane dao fruit inside of him, the fruit that he had risked his life to pluck, had cracked open!

Twenty thousand Jin core disciples inside the inheritance tower were largely dead. The other Jin scions who’d moved into Mauve Peace Paradise weren’t much better off, either. Their bodies littered the ground with blood and gore. Even the Jin ancestor had suffered a dreadful blow from the terrifying sword intent; the crack on his dao fruit meant that half his cultivation was crippled.

“Lu... Yun! I will pursue you to the ends of the world if it’s the last thing I do!” the Jin ancestor roared to the sky, his hatred for Lu Yun utterly implacable.

The Feng, Qing Clans, and other greats in Xiankan simultaneously colored when they sensed the disturbance.

“Thank heavens the Jins tried the tower before we did. Otherwise...” Many were secretly counting their lucky stars. As a mere vassal of the Feng Clan, the Jin Clan had occupied Mauve Peace Paradise solely due to their patron’s aid.

It was an open secret that the paradise held Lu Yun’s inheritance tower. The structure’s purpose as the foundation of a sacred land of cultivation meant that it was of paramount importance.

Nevertheless, the great clans and the Nephrite imperial court had agreed to give the Jin Clan a century of time with it. The reason for this, of course, was to make use of them as guinea pigs.

As expected, scarcely six months passed before the tower had exploded on the spot. Both the violence and the Jin ancestor’s roar struck deep fear into others’ hearts. Another piece of news made it into the

capital around the same time: the Jin Clan's Jin Shikong had fled from the Blood Sea coast with his tail between his legs.

After being gone for more than a year, Lu Yun had returned, charging out of the Blood Sea with his signature fortress ship. More shockingly, Jin Shikong accused him of having died and becoming a demon!

However, not many took the last part seriously. The Blood Sea had appeared nine months ago, and the fact that the sea monsters couldn't climb ashore hadn't gone unnoticed. The moment they left their crimson home, they disintegrated into fine dust.

Information about Lu Yun's itinerary flew into Xiankan on swift wings, keeping the court and the great clans continuously up to date. News that he'd emerged out of the Blood Sea with a connate-grade treasure spread far and wide.

No one bothered pursuing him on his journey, though, and Life Province's transportation formation didn't matter either. A perfect trap awaited him in Dusk Province, ready to be sprung as soon as he arrived. Nevertheless, the latest reports had driven Emperor Zhao Shengguang into raucous fury.

"Bastard! He took away the weapon of war? And the earth vein too?! Does he intend to rebel?! Our orders are thus: for the crimes of moving Our treasure and betraying the court, Lu Yun is to be killed on sight!

"Arrest the Lu and Chen Clans immediately, every last one! Lock them up in the imperial prison!" A weapon of war was of supreme importance to any imperial court. Indeed, it was nearly as important to Nephrite Major as the Path of Ingress. Zhao Shengguang had more than enough reason to be upset.

"Hmm? And who are you?" The young emperor blinked suddenly. A girl in men's clothes had appeared in front of him without notice. She wore a simple blue tunic and no makeup whatsoever, but her face was mesmerizing in its own right.

"The real Zhao Shengguang has gone to the Endless Desert with Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi," the girl asserted. "I should be the one asking you that question. Who are you?"

.....

Everything was very quiet on Lu Yun's route home. No one stood in his way, even as he reached Life Province's transportation formation.

Rumble!

The formation worked hard to move the twelve fortress ships to Dusk Province's Sword Pavilion. Once they'd arrived, Lu Yun and company didn't even have time to disembark before they were enveloped by a noisomely murderous aura.

An ambush had been set up here for the moment the ships sailed out of their destination formation. More than ten thousand killing formations crashed down from the sky to greet their arrival, wholly engulfing the contingent.

Boom!

The eleven ships behind Lu Yun's were destroyed on the spot, the pressure from ten thousand formations proving too much for the flimsy vessels to bear. Thankfully, the immortals and cultivators who'd sailed on them before were all inside Lu Yun's ship.

Each ship had carried ten thousand, but Lu Yun's flagship had plenty of extradimensional space for them to inhabit. It could hold the extra eleven thousand without feeling stuffy.

"Your craven appetites go too far, Lu Yun. For all the treasonous acts you've committed thus far, you must pay with your life!" came a frigid voice from afar: a Feng immortal.

Once upon a time, the younger brother of the Feng Patriarch, Feng Wujiang, had served as the warden of this place. During his tenure, he'd made countless arrangements to fortify this position against outside interference.

Lu Yun had been in too much of a hurry to deal with them last time, which had allowed the Feng Clan the freedom to make direct use of them with the Yue Clan in a joint deathtrap.

Pressure from ten thousand formations descending made the high-quality fortress ship creak in distress. The immortals and cultivators from the other ships blanched in fear; the weight of the formations alone enough to crush them!

Under the direction of the Nephrite court, the Feng Clan was able to bring its full strength to bear in their newest attempt on Lu Yun's life. That they hadn't struck in Life Province was purely out of worry for Wayfarer and Qing Ruyan's potential intercession.

"Die!" cried a Feng immortal.

Boom!

The simultaneous activation of ten thousand formations tore the earth and sky asunder. This time, even Wu Tulong and Zi Chen were appalled.

Rather than return to their respective clans, they'd come to Dusk Province with Lu Yun because of the Dao Flower. It'd required collaboration between all four of them. Since some sort of calamity was guaranteed at the moment of its full bloom in the outside world, they needed Lu Yun's protection. Regardless, Dusk Province was clearly an ideal place for the flower, and the ten thousand formations waiting here were an unpleasant and unwanted surprise.

"Deploy the formation!" Lu Yun called out.

Behind him, Feinie made a flurry of hand seals. The Formation Orb blazed with potent brilliance, summoning forth a bloody, fiendish shadow. The Great Formation of Heavenly Fiends!

Chapter 256: Tiger Roars and Dragon Howls

The Great Formation of Heavenly Fiends was the greatest killing formation Feinie could unleash at the moment. In order for her to deploy even stronger formations from the Formation Orb, she would have to improve her cultivation level.

Bam!

The crimson figure summoned by the formation surged in power and pierced into the ten thousand formations overhead. However, it only broke through the first formation before being crushed by the second.

The power of the combined formations was simply too great, far different from the ten thousand released by the Formation Orb. It created formations from light that could be retracted and shifted at will. Imbued with the strength of formations, but none of their weight, it was a method similar to the peak formation dao technique that set up formations without foundations.

On the other hand, the formations trapping Lu Yun and the others were anchored in the air with formation stones and disks, and their overlapping strength made each formation unbearably heavy. It wasn't so much a sign of the Feng Clan's power, as it was the foundation that the Nephrite Court had built up.

The combined formations were weaker than the Qing Clan's Arcane Goldenlight Formation and the Exalted Immortal Sect's Diabolic Formation of Soul Refinement, but only slightly. If the ten thousand formations had been used in the ambush last time, Lu Yun wouldn't have been able to break them all, even with his stored pill tribulation.

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"Again!" Feinie's body flickered with gold as she tapped into the core power of a golden immortal. One instance of the Great Formation of Heavenly Fiends broke, then another, and another....

Enormous shadowy fiends were continuously summoned and leapt into the air to tear at the weighty formations. More than a thousand were broken in roughly a dozen breaths, but that was still only a drop of water in the vast ocean.

The remaining nine thousand slammed down and instantaneously flattened Feinie's defensive formations. Everyone on the fortress ship felt a great weight crushing their chests.

"Open!" she screamed. She'd given up on breaking the formations and was instead channeling all of her power into the Formation Orb, unleashing five thousand defensive formations that barely shielded them from the great pressure.

Rumble!

The killing formations activated and surged, combining the terrifying power of nine thousand as one in that instant. Feinie's five thousand could withstand a blow from a weapon of war, but they broke under the nine thousand's combined power.

Blood seeped out the corner of her mouth.

"What should we do?!" Mo Qitian blanched. "There's at least a million heavenly soldiers at the ready. The Nephrite court's sparing no effort to kill you!"

Lu Yun's face shifted unsteadily. He'd known there would be traps, but this ambush had still exceeded his expectations. Ten thousand formations! The set up was enough to kill an arcane dao immortal! The court wasn't leaving him a sliver of hope and wanted to make his death a foregone conclusion, like a lion pouncing on a rabbit.

“Shit, I’m just a cultivator. Is all this really necessary?” Lu Yun gnashed his teeth. He hadn’t heard from Yuchi Hanxing and the Black Tortoise in all this time, so the Sword Lake was obviously under siege as well. The Dusk Phalanx and divine beast must be fighting to keep themselves alive.

The power of a heavenly court was too great, and a foundation accumulated over eighty thousand years wasn’t something a mere faction could rival. Even the Black Tortoise would have to bow down in submission in front of such a great entity.

Suddenly, a dragon’s howl and a tiger’s roar pierced through the sky, followed by the emergence of the two beasts.

“Protect us with formations, golden immortal girl!” said the dragon.

“Understood!” Feinie perked up and hurriedly channeled the Formation Orb to give them cover.

Here came the Dragon Prince and the Tiger Prince!

Back in the Skandha Extinction Tomb, the two had absorbed energy from Qing Han’s starstone and deterred the akasha ghost with the strength of dao immortals. That fight had left them severely injured, and they’d been resting deep within the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals ever since. Now that they’d finally made a full recovery, Qing Han had summoned them to help.

Neither the Dragon Prince nor the Tiger Prince were living beings. They were feng shui layouts that’d come to life replete with their own thoughts and autonomy, but they weren’t truly alive. Bolstered by Qing Han’s starstone, they shot out with the power of dao immortals, unaffected by Dusk’s restriction on golden immortals due to the nature of their existence.

Though the ten thousand formations were powerful enough to kill arcane dao immortals, Feinie pushed the Formation Orb to its limits in an effort to protect the group’s two defenders.

“Take these!” exclaimed Lu Yun. The Arcane Golden Bell and Skybearer Gates streaked into the two princes’ hands.

He’d returned Skybearer to the Lu Clan, but the Lu ancestor had turned him down and given it back to the boy. Perhaps he’d had foreseen the clan’s future then.

“Fantastic!” The Dragon Prince caught the gates with a piercing howl. Skybearer burst into blinding light and morphed into an enormous doorway in the air, its tremendous might expanding explosively to illuminate the heavens.

This was a dao immortal treasure that Lu Daoling had refined with his own power. Upon tapping into its power, the Dragon Prince opened up a portal leading elsewhere in the world. This was the real use of the treasure!

Clang!

Deafening tolls rang out with great violence, the tremendous sound waves filtering into Skybearer’s portal and barreling into the real world.

Clang!

The formation masters of the heavenly court, along with the innumerable heavenly soldiers maintaining the formations, were obliterated upon impact.

“What’s going on?!” The Feng immortal in charge gaped at the chaos. “That’s the power of the Lu Clan’s Skybearer! How is Lu Yun able to tap into its real power without being in the dao immortal realm?”

Every dao immortal treasure possessed by the top clans had its own unique abilities, but only dao immortals could deploy them. Immortals beneath dao immortal realm might be able to wield the treasure, but only to bludgeon enemies with its raw power.

“Destroy that door!!” screamed the Feng immortal.

There were a million heavenly soldiers here, in addition to the ten thousand formations. Although the soldiers were only true immortals, their numbers granted them an incredible combined strength. A million swords took to the skies in unison, whistling through the air as they targeted the portal created by Skybearer.

Clang!

The Arcane Golden Bell tolled again, once again directing the sound out of the portal hovering in midair. This time, a golden tiger shadow emerged as well and reduced the million sword slashes into broken shards with a brisk shake of its body.

“Impossible!” cried the Feng immortal. The golden shadow rippled with clanging bell tolls and tiger roars, patently formed by the treasure’s sounds!

So there were two dao immortals on Lu Yun’s ship!? What was worse was that they wielded the dao treasures of two top factions, personally refined by the ancestors of both clans!

Chapter 257: Formations Break

Roar!

A peal of tiger roar had shattered the swords of the million heavenly soldiers. Unanimous shudders filtered through them like a wave as blood gushed out of their mouths like rain.

A dozen more tigers created from soundwaves and rushed out with savage roars. The tremendous cacophony shattered the formation disks hidden in the air, breaking the formations in quick succession from the outside in.

From the inside, it would be difficult for even a dao immortal treasure to break the ten thousand formations; in fact, the treasure might be crushed instead. It was much easier to do so from the outside.

In fact, a treasure like the Arcane Golden Bell was meant for formation-breaking.

“I didn’t expect there to be two dao immortals at Lu Yun’s side.... Go to the Sword Lake and divert the great formation here!” commanded Feng Wuhui, the Feng immortal in charge.

“But the Dusk Phalanx and the Black Tortoise are still at the lake, sir!” The immortal by his side tensed.

“The Black Tortoise is but a peerless immortal.” Feng Wuhui narrowed his eyes. “His Majesty would’ve killed it a long time ago, if he hadn’t wanted to tame the beast! And the Dusk soldiers are all just cultivators. They pose no threat to us.”

He knew Zhao Shengguang didn’t actually want the Black Tortoise itself. The celestial emperor just wanted to know why the beast could use the power of a peerless immortal in Dusk Province without being targeted by the Dusk restriction.

“Go!” Feng Wuhui cast out formation disk after formation disk as he spoke, mending the formations that’d been shattered by the Arcane Golden Bell. His subordinate clenched his jaw and ran off to carry out his commander’s orders.

“Grrrawll!” As soon as the formation sealing the Sword Lake was lifted, the enormous Black Tortoise surfaced and rushed their way, bellowing with powerful howls.

“Stay down!!” growled Feng Wuhui.

Rumble!

Two mountains abruptly took to the air outside Sword Pavilion, pinning the Black Tortoise to the ground like two giant hands. That was a hidden card that Feng Wujiang had once set up to help the Feng Clan win the heritage of Lord Sugato, but now it was a weapon against Lu Yun.

The Black Tortoise struggled with all of its strength, but it couldn’t break free of the two mountains no matter what it did.

When the area had still been known as Cloudwater Township, the Feng Clan had secretly sunk their claws into it and turned it into a powerful killing formation. Even Lu Yun hadn’t noticed when he first came, his attention drawn by the coiled mountains of the noble’s tomb.

Black Tortoise once again under restraint, the formation sealing the Sword Lake shifted to clamp down on top of the ten thousand formations, suppressing the Arcane Golden Bell and shattering the dozen soundwave tigers.

The Nephrite officials present sucked in sharp breaths of shock. Even the returned Yue Cheng and Zhu Yu were alarmed; they hadn’t noticed before what terrifying formations the Feng Clan had set up here!

If Feng Wujiang had activated the formations when Lu Yun had first challenged them, the brat would’ve died a hundred times over. Unfortunately, the Feng immortal hadn’t taken the kid seriously and ended up dead before he could activate any of his traps.

Within the great formation, the Tiger and Dragon Princes grew wary as well. Their power was receding; Qing Han couldn’t keep this up for too long.

“Open!” The Dragon Prince channeled his remaining energy into Skybearer, which shone with brilliant, jadeite beams and slowly opened up an even bigger portal.

“Rrroar!!” The Tiger Prince used the opening to push the Arcane Golden Bell to its limit, the powerful soundwaves ripping out of a portal that had yet to stabilize.

Having exhausted their cosmic power, the two princes retreated to the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals. A trickle of blood streamed down from Qing Han's mouth while Lu Yun hurriedly fed him some healing pills.

Outside the formations.

A silvery tiger silhouette lunged out of the doorway, three hundred meters tall and bearing two silver wings that pulsed faintly. In that moment, a terrible killing power and the powerful tolling of a bell crushed countless immortals into bloody mist. Even Feng Wuhui threw up a mouthful of blood.

Zhu Yu and Yue Cheng backed away in shock.

"That's... the shadow of the divine White Tiger!" yelled Zhu Yu. The White Tiger was one of the four divine beasts, and the most lethal one at that!

The tiger shadow morphed from the bell's ring had taken the form and tempestuous power of the White Tiger, killing half of the immortals supporting the ten thousand formations!

A cascading effect took place: formation disks revealing themselves in midair and breaking after losing the energy sustaining them. In the blink of an eye, the Dragon and Tiger Princes had shattered half of the ten thousand formations with their all-out attack.

"You will break!!" shrieked a woman at this time.

Hum.

Ten thousand rays of formation light converged into a thick light beam three hundred meters in diameter.

Rumble!

It destroyed the rest of the formation stones and smashed the formations they'd anchored. A wistful and stunning smile tugged at Feinie's wan face as she slowly faded out of existence. She'd exhausted her core power with her final stand and the backlash from the Formation Orb destroyed her body!

Her soul returned to the Tome of Life and Death, awaiting her next resurrection. Even if she'd survived the attack, she would've been killed by the Dusk restriction the moment the formations broke. It hadn't appeared yet only because it was weaker on the fringes of Dusk Province, and was thus barred from appearing by the ten thousand formations.

"Kill!" Lu Yun's fortress ship broke free of its restraint once the pressure was off him. With a yell, he activated all of the built-in ninth-rank treasures on the fortress ship and launched wild attacks in all directions.

This time, Wu Tulong, Zi Chen, and Mo Qitian handed Lu Yun all of their crystals as well. Mo Qitian in particular, was especially wealthy. He had in his possession more than ten million premium immortal crystals!

Going up in flames, the crystals fueled the fortress ship. Blinding light enveloped the entire township and continuously churned their enemies to death.

“Form up into the Great Tempest Formation and stop him!!” Feng Wuhui shouted with an edge of insanity. The million true immortals behind him locked into formation, calling a giant divine beast into existence.

The Tempest Bird! This image was grander and more vivid than the bird that’d been created by Feng Wujiang’s troops, and there was even a hint of the bird’s true spirit!

Caw!

An enormous shriek rang through the area and brewed a powerful storm, shattering the iridescent light coming from Lu Yun’s ship. The heavenly soldiers had gained the soul of the Tempest Bird and could unleash the real power of the divine beast!

Then a long howl rang out.

The image of the Black Tortoise rose up from the Sword Lake with Yuchi Hanxing on its head, her hair, eyes, and armor a matching silver. With the formation lifted, the Black Tortoise wasn’t the only one that’d been released; the Dusk Phalanx could finally re-emerge as well.

Chapter 258: Dusk Lord?

Sharp as she was, Yuchi Hanxing had noticed the layers of traps as soon as the Black Tortoise and the Dusk Phalanx were sealed into the Sword Lake. Therefore, she didn’t immediately emerge after the seal was lifted, nor did she make a move when the Black Tortoise was restrained again. Instead, she waited until Feng Wuhui had climbed atop the manifested Tempest Bird to show herself.

Occupied with overseeing the formation, the man couldn’t activate the traps he’d set up against the Dusk Phalanx.

“Stop her!” growled Feng Wuhui when he saw the Black Tortoise; he had his hands full with Lu Yun’s fortress ship.

Without pause, Zhu Yu and Yue Cheng ordered their heavenly soldiers to fall into battle formations to intercept the Dusk Phalanx. It wasn’t the Feng Clan that wanted Lu Yun dead, but the celestial emperor himself! No matter how reluctant they were, they couldn’t defy the celestial emperor.

Croak!

Suddenly, a loud frog call reverberated in the surroundings. A mountainous black frog leapt out of the Sword Lake and flicked its tongue, catching Yue Cheng in the middle of guiding his army into a formation.

The man screamed pitifully as he became the frog’s lunch. With his cultivation suppressed, the talented peerless immortal was devoured in an instant.

“Run!” Reason and rationale fled Zhu Yu’s mind when the two large, amphibian eyes locked on her. Without even attempting to create a formation, she soared to the sky and fled as a crimson streak. Her soldiers scattered as well after their commander ran.

The frog ignored Zhu Yu and shifted its attention to Feng Wuhui, dousing him in an ice-cold bucket of fear. He hadn’t fathomed that the frog would come out of the lake to intervene!

Croak!

The frog's tongue shot out again, smacking ferociously onto the two mountains keeping the Black Tortoise down.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

Like a most tenacious hammer, the frog's tongue smashed the mountains into bits after several whumps!

"Grawwww!!!" The Black Tortoise howled as it broke free. Its giant body soared into the air and rammed into the Tempest Bird, joined by simultaneous attacks from the demon frog and Yuchi Hanxing.

The Tempest Bird quickly disintegrated under the triple-pronged attack from the frog, image of the Black Tortoise, and the divine beast itself. Yuchi Hanxing captured Feng Wuhui alive in the confusion, while the remaining Nephrite officials stood rooted to the spot, paralyzed by the fear of being devoured by the terrifying Spiriteater Demon Frog.

Yue Cheng's grisly end was still imprinted on their minds.

Thus marked the end of the ambush against Lu Yun, cut short by the demon frog's sudden interruption. It was a completely unexpected ending. Feng Wuhui had taken everything into consideration, except for the frogs in the swamp.

Not even Lu Yun had anticipated the turn of events. He'd thought there would be a difficult fight, ending in his pyrrhic victory. He might've even lost the fortress ship.

As for the last use of the corpse puppet, he hadn't even considered using it. These lowlifes didn't warrant him tapping into the power of a celestial emperor. Meanwhile, the Spiriteater Demon Frog had come to repay Lu Yun for rescuing it, the tadpoles, and the eggs from the underground volcano after the Sword Barrow had exploded.

Once Feng Wuhui and the hundreds of officials were safely under arrest, Lu Yun settled down in Sword Pavilion. The transportation formation was deactivated and sealed away; no one was to teleport into or out of Dusk Province!

The Dusk Lord residing in Dusk City remained a significant threat. Lu Yun had only survived this encounter with the demon frog's intervention, the Dragon and Tiger Princes exhausting their power, and Feinie's sacrifice. If there was another such an ambush in the city as well, he'd have no choice but to flee.

"What are you going to do with those people?" It was late at night. Qing Han sat face-to-face with his friend, considering the latter's troubled expression.

"Let the heavenly court ransom their freedom," Lu Yun sighed. "Today, I committed treason even if I didn't want to."

Qing Han nodded quietly. "So be it. We'll see what's going on with Zhao Shengguang once my brother and cousin return. Maybe there's hope yet."

“It’s not that simple. Zhao Shengguang hasn’t yet ascended to dao immortal realm, so he doesn’t represent the heavenly court.” Lu Yun shook his head. “This is bigger than what a couple people can turn around. Even if we kill Zhao Shengguang, the same thing will happen again when someone else takes the throne.”

Qing Han frowned and didn’t respond.

“How long until the Dao Flower fully blooms?” Lu Yun asked.

“Seven days.” Qing Han closed his eyes to check. “In seven days, the flower will be in full bloom. However, it seems to have merged with my nascent spirit. I think...” he opened his eyes with surprise, “I think I can delay its blooming.”

Lu Yun started. “The will of the Dao Flower has been incorporated into your spirits?”

“Not us, me,” Qing Han corrected. “It’s merged with my nascent spirit.”

Lu Yun’s eyes shot wide with shock. After the flower’s resurrection, Qing Han had been the one to repair the overall structure of the void realm, while Wu Tulong, Zi Chen, and Mo Qitian repaired its minor realms.

“Has the flower cleansed the poison in your system?” he asked hurriedly.

Qing Han was caught off guard by the governor’s unexpected gut reaction and an involuntary warmth blossomed in his chest.

“No.” Qing Han shook his head. “I can sense its power, but I can’t control it. It seems that I have to reach a certain height with my cultivation before I can do that.”

The two suddenly fell silent. After a little more than three dozen breaths, Yuchi Hanxing preceded her entrance into the room with an announcement that the Dusk Lord had arrived.

“What? The Dusk Lord?!” Lu Yun gaped at Yuchi Hanxing and the helpless man in her grip. It was Feng Li.

“Where’s the Dusk Lord?” Qing Han looked around, eyes wide.

“Well... that would be me.” Feng Li struggled to his feet after being thrown down by the dashing Yuchi Hanxing. He brushed off nonexistent dust with an embarrassed smile.

“You’re the Dusk Lord?” Lu Yun’s expression darkened. “You’re the one who turned Mo Yi into a fugitive and sent the Dusk cultivators to their death?!”

“That wasn’t me!” Feng Li hurried out. “I may be appointed the Dusk Lord, but I didn’t give the orders. I’m nothing but a puppet!”

“State your business,” Qing Han said slowly. “Aren’t you one of Zhao Changkong’s? Why hasn’t he taken you with him to River Province?”

Feng Li’s status in the Feng Clan was similar to Qing Han’s in the Qing Clan. Qing Han suffered because of his accursed spirit root, and Feng Li simply because of his uselessness. He belonged to the main bloodline of his clan, but his mother was a maid, which was enough to make him a pariah in the clan. He’d only survived to this point due to his limited talent and minor intelligence.

Thus, it greatly surprised Qing Han that he'd become the Dusk Lord.

"Zhao Changkong can barely keep himself alive. He has no time for me." Feng Li smiled ruefully. "I'm here to propose an alliance."

Lu Yun paused. "An alliance?"

"The Zhao Shengguang ruling over the Nephrite court isn't the real Zhao Shengguang," Feng Li announced dramatically. "He's a completely different person!"

Chapter 259: Crossdressing Girl

Feng Li made the best inscrutable face he could muster after he was done speaking and tried to sit down, but the three seats available were already occupied. Having no other recourse available, he remained standing with both hands behind his back, looking both proud and a little miffed.

The gasps of expected shock didn't come; Lu Yun and Qing Han were entirely unmoved, while Yuchi Hanxing was as dispassionate as ever. The Nephrite celestial emperor seemed to have nothing to do with her at all.

"His Majesty has been swapped out! The emperor right now isn't Zhao Shengguang!" Feng Li paused a moment before placing renewed emphasis on the former. "The emperor is an impostor!"

"And?" Qing Han tilted his head in apparent puzzlement. "The Nephrite emperor is an impostor. So what?"

Feng Li didn't know what to say in his utter bafflement. The things he talked about were enough to astound the entire world. The recently-crowned Nephrite emperor was a fake?! Yet these two... no, these three had barely reacted to the shocking revelation. They seemed to consider it no more interesting than idle mortal gossip!

"This was to be expected," Lu Yun nodded. "Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi pretty much beat Zhao Shengguang into submission, didn't they? After being their sidekick for so many years, he wouldn't possibly dare make any moves against the Chen clan, not to mention so quickly and ruthlessly. He should know how terrifying Chen Xiao truly is."

"Nothing about any of this has been right from the start. If he's an impostor, well, that makes a lot more sense."

"Exactly so." Qing Han gave a long exhale. Zhao Shengguang was a friend of his as well; he would've been unhappy to see his kin come to blows with him.

Feng Li nearly fell flat on his face.

"As for you? You don't have a tenth of the gall needed to betray your own clan." Lu Yun scrutinized the Feng youth more closely. "Out with it. Who sent you here?"

Feng Li was dazed for quite a while before he managed to recover himself. "A... a girl in men's clothes tossed me over here. She said it wasn't a good time for her to show up anywhere, so she wanted me to come invite you to Dusk Province."

He chuckled helplessly as he said this. He certainly wasn't here of his own volition! He would much rather have sat comfortably on his throne as the Dusk Lord, even if it was only as a puppet. The province was destined to become a sacred land of cultivation, after all.

Alas, Lu Yun had seen right through him.

"A girl in men's clothes?" Qing Han's expression looked a little unnatural.

"Mo Yi? So she's back, huh?" Lu Yun immediately realized who it was—that unbelievably beautiful girl who had a preference for men's clothes. Well, she did cut a handsome figure in them!

Li Youcai had said before that the Dusk Lord had deemed her a traitor, to be arrested on sight within Nephrite's borders. Perhaps some sort of rule was preventing her from appearing regardless?

Feng Li continued to laugh feebly. Who else could it be? Coming back by herself was one thing, but she'd brought along the fake Nephrite emperor to boot!

The capital city was pretty much hers, now, the Feng experts here having been single handedly crushed on her way back. They hadn't managed to get the news out, either. In fact, Feng Li was here only as an involuntary messenger. The matter of his 'cooperation' had been entirely a fabrication to help him save face.

The other three in the room were finally struck speechless by the latest developments. Feng Li was truly thick-skinned, but he was also very good at dealing with people. Someone of his blood and position wouldn't have survived so long in his clan otherwise.

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While the Feng clan remained Dusk capital's rulers on the surface, Mo Yi controlled the city's affairs from the shadows. Leaving the others behind in Sword Pavilion, Lu Yun and Qing Han secretly hauled Feng Li back to the provincial capital.

On the way there, Lu Yun burned all the goodwill upon the Sal Tree of Life and Death to revive Feinie and Huangqing. It was rather expensive to revive a golden and august immortal—fully depleting Lu Yun's stores of goodwill—but strangely enough, Ge Long remained dormant. He could feel the huge seal of life from the old servant, but there was no sign of the old man returning to life.

The anomaly astounded Lu Yun. If three goodwill flowers weren't enough, it would take a breakthrough in his cultivation that allowed him to release more power from the Tome of Life and Death. His name was the first one to be written in the book, could he be more important than even the envoys?

The young man frankly couldn't understand it. Ge Long's cultivation had always been a rather ho-hum golden core realm. Yet he'd beaten the crap out of an august immortal to save Qing Han. A golden core, doing something like that? In some ways, his servant was more incredible than he was!

Ah, forget it. I'll figure it out after he's back. Now that Feinie and Huangqing were restored to life, Lu Yun had all five of his envoys once more.

Dusk Province's waters were still too murky. Although Mo Yi was the shadowy master of the Dusk capital, the other provincial nexus—the seaside citadel—was still in the hands of the imperial court.

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Dusk City had undergone significant changes as of late.

The original city had been completely demolished, including every building, formation, and feng shui layout inside. Lu Yun was a formation master who could set up formations without the need for foundations, and him calling upon the city's formations as soon as he returned was a very valid concern.

Therefore, the old city was no more, and a greater one had been built in its place. The new city was constructed around the inheritance tower, its towers and walls spanning a fifty kilometer radius.

The ancient lord's tomb beneath the tower was sealed with a freshly created great formation.

This wasn't an uncommon or taboo practice. Ancient tombs were everywhere in the world of immortals, and many of them could be found beneath modern cities. Even Xiankan, Nephrite's capital, had an ancient tomb beneath it.

Mo Yi looked the same as she always had: long, black tresses, a slender figure, and a gorgeous complexion untouched by makeup. Though she wore only a casual blue tunic, her beauty wasn't the least bit lessened by it.

She sat in the great hall of the 'Dusk Lord's' residence, reading from a jade slip. In the center of the floor lay an imperial youth, sealed and immobile.

"A thousand years ago, Chen Xiao sent that old zombie into the ancient Dusk tomb to activate the restriction. Qing Buyi captured the fake Exalted celestial emperor and tossed him alongside soon after. That's why they can ignore... well, the restriction," the girl said coolly, having noticed Lu Yun's arrival.

The young overlord of hell shivered at her words. Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi were responsible for the restriction in Dusk Province? The Exalted emperor in the Sword Barrow had been a fake?

"The real Zhao Shenguang is with those two right now. This 'Nephrite emperor' here—who just refined the 'heavenly mandate', by the way—must've been intentionally left for me," Mo Yi continued.

Lu Yun swallowed apprehensively, while Qing Han's eyes widened.

"But the fake emperor has been swapped again. It's not the guy they originally left for me, I don't think." The girl's expression grew puzzled. "If I throw him in the ancient tomb and feed his heavenly mandate to that old zombie, I'll be allowed to exercise my actual strength in Dusk Province as well. But... where did this version of the celestial emperor come from?"

"Wait! I-I know where he's from!" Qing Han's eyes suddenly fixated upon the 'Zhao Shenguang' on the ground in recognition, speaking in slightly horrified tones.

Chapter 260: Conquering Dusk Province

"The Blood Sea!" Lu Yun and Qing Han blurted out nearly simultaneously.

A glint entered Mo Yi's eye, and Feng Yi contorted with horror. Though the Blood Sea was less than a year old, its infamy had spread far and wide as a zone forbidden to life. Its notoriety rivaled several of the most terrifying tombs in the world.

About a month ago, a golden immortal had come out of it alive, and with a connate-grade treasure for his pains! The Nephrite court had acted upon it immediately, forcibly inviting that immortal to Xiankan and dispossessing him of the treasure.

The emperor who'd done so wasn't Zhao Shengguang, but some 'celestial emperor' from elsewhere. That was why he'd been so bold and unbridled toward the Chen Clan and everyone else.

Now they learned that that emperor had also been swapped out, replaced by the person in front of them!

Lu Yun and Qing Han immediately sensed the unique aura from the man before them. He was just like the monsters from the Blood Sea! Others might not have been able to discern it, but they'd spent three months drifting in the crimson sea, encountering countless monstrosities of every variety. That aura was too familiar for them to miss.

"The Blood Sea... can he be that golden immortal who came out from there?" Feng Li yelled.

"Heh heh heh..." The 'Nephrite emperor' bound on the ground suddenly cackled evilly, his eyes shot through with red. "I didn't expect you to identify my origins. In that case, all of you will die... aaaaaah!"

Crunch!

Before he could finish, a swift kick in the face from Mo Yi turned his words into a painful scream. The bloody color in his eyes receded from the impact and was swiftly replaced with a look of incredulity. There were people in the world who didn't fear the Blood Sea's power?!

"I don't care where you came from. Now that you've refined a heavenly mandate of the nine majors, you're the perfect sacrifice. I'll be able to recover my cultivation in Dusk Province," Mo Yi's voice was as cool as before. She didn't seem to care whether this 'emperor' came from the Blood Sea or elsewhere.

"I'm taking him to the ancient tomb so I can sacrifice him to the restriction there. What happens next is up to you." She glanced at Lu Yun, her voice quieting. "I've dealt with everything here in Dusk City, but the Nephrite court has laid down an all-consuming snare everywhere else in the province. Be careful."

In the year and three months of Lu Yun's absence, the Nephrite court had taken over the province. Although the restriction forbade golden immortals and above from entering, controlling a province that spanned a mere eighty thousand kilometers in length was trivial for a government that could muster the full force of a major.

The Feng clan, in particular, had poured out its forces into Dusk, tightly gripping every city it could get its hands on.

Many had noticed that the earth vein in Dusk Province, previously damaged by some invasive force, had begun to recover. Ambient natural qi in the land, nearly depleted before, was also returning at a shocking rate. There were even traces of immortal qi being created.

More importantly, Dusk Province would become a sacred land for cultivation in the future. Aside from the ancient lord's inheritance tower, the Sword Lake behind Sword Pavilion was a place that countless sword cultivators dreamed of. It was a lake that bred sword intent.

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Just like Feng Li said, Mo Yi had only crushed the Feng experts in Dusk City, rather than the rest of the province. Lu Yun needed to tend to the other details himself.

News of the battle at Sword Pavilion had already spread to the capital. Though Lu Yun had captured Feng Wuhui and the imperial soldiers under his command, there'd been plenty of successful escapees. Some fled to Outré Province with Zhu Yu, while others made their way to Dusk City to seek help.

The entire province was astir with concern and suspicion.

Lu Yun's massacre in Xiankan with the Great Formation of Heavenly Fiends had struck fear into the hearts of many, and the four hundred eighty million thunderbolts he'd called down upon a group of dao immortals outside Xiankan had further shaken the world.

Even the coronation of the new Nephrite emperor had been outshone.

Knowledge of Lu Yun's return to Dusk Province sent a wave of terror through its inhabitants. Some lambasted him as a veritable demon, and the province was no longer its former self.

More than half of its native cultivators had been sent on suicide missions by the Feng Clan; to the Blood Sea, for example, or any of the multitude of dangerous tombs out there.

Nowadays, the province was occupied by outsiders who had plenty of cause to fear and resist Lu Yun. Although the newly-built Dusk capital was well-defended with formations and a dao immortal with their cultivation sealed, its residents nevertheless quavered with dismay. After Feng Wuhui's loss at the Sword Pavilion, the transportation formation there was completely sealed. The newcomers couldn't leave, even if they wanted to.

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Mo Yi flew into the distance with the fake emperor, while Lu Yun began straightening the city out behind the scenes.

"Heh... the Feng Clan's done a lot of big things, eh?" Derision danced on the corners of his lips.

They'd instituted a toll of a hundred thousand premium immortal crystals to enter the inheritance tower, having considered the structure their private property. It was something Mo Qitian and the others had joked with him about, but these bastards had actually done it!

The innumerable immortal crystals within their vaults blinded him with their brilliance. Of course, he accepted the unexpected gift without ceremony.

The next day, Yuying, Feinie, Xuanxi, Aoxue, and Huangqing descended from the sky, charging into the city with an endless stream of Infernum. Though Feinie was a golden immortal, she made sure to seal her cultivation back to august immortal realm.

The Infernum and ghostly servants, on the other hand, were the opposite of 'alive'. They retained the cultivation they'd reached in life and were unaffected by the power of the restriction. With peerless immortals like Beigong Yu and Lü Biao among them, they were utterly unstoppable for the Feng clan immortals.

A clean sweep!

The five envoys led ten thousand Infernum and ghosts on a sudden assault upon every key location in the capital. The city fell before its defensive formations could even be activated. Every outsider was sealed and imprisoned, regardless of their identity. The cultivators of various clans in the inheritance tower were likewise 'invited' out.

Nephrite Major trembled in consternation. No one had expected Lu Yun's response to be so swift, capturing the capital a mere one day after defeating Feng Wuhui's ten thousand formations!

After that, the envoys each led their own company of troops to fight elsewhere in the province. With help from the Dusk Phalanx, they seized every city in no time at all, though the Infernum suffered enormous losses in the process. Only the seaside citadel remained under the imperial court's rule, because a weapon of war had been set up there.

When news of the province's loss traveled to the imperial court, the Nephrite emperor flew into a towering rage. Yes, the Nephrite emperor! Strangely enough, a celestial emperor still occupied the throne.