

Necropolis 311

Chapter 311: A Curse of Poison

Su Xiaoxiao remained silent, plainly unwilling to recall past events. Lu Yun saw some other things in her memories, things having to do with the foremost ancient pill master, Qi Hai, and quietly formed some thoughts of his own as a result.

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Rumble, rumble, rumble.

Lu Yun and Su Xiaoxiao emerged from the gates to a series of rumbling noises in the air. Spatial tears had formed in the void and were rampaging through the place of extreme yin, frightening Yuchi Tianhuang and the other two out of their wits. They scrambled from one spot to another, trying to avoid the rips in space.

As a brainless zombie, their two-headed opponent was ripped to pieces the moment the openings had formed. Though it was at peak peerless immortal realm and many times stronger than the White Tiger's physical body, the zombie had been as fragile as a piece of paper in the face of the rips in space.

"What the hell, we have to get out of here!" Aghast, Lu Yun reflexively recalled his Infernum.

Tugging the young man in one hand and Diexi in the other, Su Xiaoxiao pelted out of the cavern.

"Get over here!" The piercing cosmic radiance around Qing Han wrapped around them as soon as the group rushed out of the place of extreme yin.

Crackle crackle crackle!

When the pitch-black spatial rips hit the starlight, each collision produced teeth-numbing scraping noises. Violently trembling a few times, a long streak of cosmic radiance protected the group's retreat from the corpse coffin. When it dispersed, Qing Han looked a little wan.

"What was that just now!" A trail of scarlet blood dribbled out of his mouth as he turned around and looked askance at the corpse coffins.

The two bodies had been dead and refined into corpse coffins for an unknown eternity, but were now slowly stirring to motion! Their decayed eyeballs were slowly shifting, and the spatial rips continued destroying the space within them.

The two corpse coffins were... coming back to life!

Seeing that Qing Han had been hurt by the backlash from the rips in space, Lu Yun quickly took out a few pills to feed them to his friend.

"Don't!" Su Xiaoxiao quickly stopped her master's motions. "He's heavily poisoned, and the venom has set in deep. He can't take any pills right now!"

Lu Yun jerked to a stop.

An inky-green sparkle flickered through Su Xiaoxiao's eyes while she looked over Qing Han. Her voice trembled when she spoke again. "Vicious, how... incredibly vicious! Who set up such a callous scheme in him, planning to use him as a catalyst of poison to kill all living things?!"

"What?! What do you mean by that? Speak clearly!" Horrified shock seized Lu Yun and Qing Han, and even Empress Myrtlestar wore an ugly expression in the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals.

Though Lu Yun now possessed Su Xiaoxiao's memories and experiences, which included her terrifying skill in both medicine and poison, he wasn't well versed enough in them to give such a quick diagnosis.

"This is a poisonous mutation of an accursed spirit root!" Su Xiaoxiao took in a deep breath. "Once the poison activates, it will be a curse of poison and kill everyone that has to do with him!"

Color drained from Qing Han's face; he was as pale as a sheet. Everyone to do with me?

The Qings? No, he'd cut all ties with that heartless clan a long time ago. So that meant Lu Yun would die from his curse?

A despairing stroke of gray appeared in the disguised girl's eyes.

"Sir Qing Han repaired the void realm and is the Youth Dao Sovereign. There's too many people connected to him!" Diexi exclaimed.

Every living thing in the world of immortals, and all worlds beyond, in fact, had sensed the Dao Flower's bloom. Though Diexi was a zombie king, she too had seen Qing Han beneath the flower.

"...is it possible... that everything... and I mean everything... that's happened so far... is all because of someone's scheme?" Lu Yun's lips were white from the implications.

If someone had set up a plot with the Dao Flower as the bait, that was too... too... absurdly horrifying to take in. That meant this plot had begun the moment the path of cultivation had been severed, been aimed at all of the ancient era, culminated in the birth of Qing Han with an accursed spirit root, and set in motion by the Qing Clan poisoning him!

"Can you undo this poison?" Lu Yun swiveled hopefully to Su Xiaoxiao.

"I can!" She quickly responded, sensing her master's nervousness. "There's two ways! The first is to collect all ten connate spirit roots in the world and plant them in him. That will naturally defuse the poisonous mutation of the accursed spirit root!

"The second is to make use of the fruit of the Ancient Tree of Life, a Skydragon Pearl, and Fusang Purewood, ranked third in the spirit roots!"

Her two methods were the same as the ones postulated by Lu Yun and Yuying.

"However..." The sparkle in Su Xiaoxiao's eyes gleamed ever more brightly. "I can sense that there are already two major spirit roots in his body keeping the situation under control. But one of them has been conquered by the poison, so the fruit alone won't be enough and we'll need the entire tree, instead. However, he can't die during this time, nor can he be seriously injured. The second that happens, the curse within him will take immediate effect!"

"I..." Qing Han's Adam's apple bobbed up and down as he struggled for words. He'd never thought that the poison within him would be so terrifying that it would kill all living beings! He'd always planned on, if worst came to worst, just killing himself and dispersing the poison within him that way.

"We'll head to the North Sea for the skydragon pearl, then go to the Endless Desert in the western reaches of Nephrite Major for the Ancient Tree of Life!" Lu Yun declared decisively, then manifested a talisman rippling with light and stuck it onto Qing Han.

Cerulean luster flashed by, healing the injuries caused backlash from spatial tears. The current Qing Han could no longer take any pills, given that the medicinal effects contained within would only worsen his internal poison.

"Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi have already gone off in search of the tree and should be fine.... The skydragon tomb is about to unearth itself, so once we get the pearl, we'll be able to resolve the curse within you. Don't worry..." Lu Yun hastened to comfort Qing Han when he noticed his friend's expression.

Qing Han remained silent, and Lu Yun wasn't feeling so optimistic, either. If the curse of poison within him was truly a scheme set up by some unknown, terrifying existence, it wouldn't be so easy to get rid of it.

The Deaf Prince couldn't hear their conversation, nor did he care to. "Those, those two things called corpse coffins are alive!"

Pop!

Immense yin energy squeezed the purifying light from the Celestial Exorcism Armor to pieces.

"Return... my..."

"Soul... to... me..."

Two dreamlike murmurs sounded in everyone's ears, including even the Deaf Prince!

Chapter 312: Hell Flower

"Return..."

"My soul..."

Two eerie voices echoed in their ears.

Concern about Qing Han's curse swiftly evaporated, replaced by a deep-seated fear of what was happening. The two corpse coffins really had come to life! They were vomiting mouthfuls of yin energy that shattered even the golden radiance of the Celestial Exorcism Armor.

In the blink of an eye, darkness descended over the group and restricted their consciousness. They remained perfectly still, floating in the water.

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Complete chaos gripped Levitating Island. There were still many immortals who'd refused to leave, as they'd built a life here during the island's millenia of development. To their horror, the inner sea of the island turned black on this day.

Countless terrible monsters swarmed from the dark waters and attacked the immortals on the banks, dragging them into the water and eating them.

Outside Kunpeng Palace.

House Donglin had sealed off the premises; they were here for Xin Mou.

Beigong Yu, Aoxue, Hongxiu, and Lü Cho, a peerless immortal serving Beicang Qiong, joined hands in a group defense to prevent House Donglin from entering.

However, circumstances didn't allow them space to fight over the girl now. Waves of human-headed octopi and other chimeras of humans and marine creatures emerged from the black inner sea. The Donglin immortals struggled to keep the monsters at bay, and ended up allying with the defenders of Kunpeng Palace to deal with their common enemy first.

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"Dammit, don't force me to pull my trump card!" Lu Yun pulled Qing Han behind him. Though his arms weren't particularly strong, they were unwavering. The sudden motion sent Qing Han's heart racing, and his face flushed a pretty red.

Pop!

Emerald light flickered through the air, making way for a seed to sprout in the void. A pink flower slowly unfurled, sweeping away the yin energy around it. Lu Yun, Qing Han, Diexi, Su Xiaoxiao, and the Deaf Prince stood on top of the stamens, while the little fox had fallen unconscious from gibbering fear.

"Thank heavens I retained my seed storage even after dying." Su Xiaoxiao patted her voluminous chest in relief. Realizing she'd said something she shouldn't, she cautiously turned to check the reactions from the group.

The Deaf Prince hadn't heard anything, while Qing Han and Diexi bore no reaction whatsoever. Su Xiaoxiao stuck her tongue out. These people didn't seem to care that she'd been raised from the dead.

Seed storage was a powerful storage technique. Unlike storage treasures, which could be robbed or destroyed, a seed storage was a special space created by oneself, accessible only by the owner.

After Su Xiaoxiao's return to life, her seed storage had come back as well. Many of her treasures were within it, including a seed she'd counted as one of her most precious possessions, one that had yin-countering properties. It quite surprised her to see the seed sprout and grow into a leafless flower.

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"Wow, so many yum-yums!" exclaimed an ecstatic voice. A figure rushed into the vast ocean of yin energy, making it boil over. Various piercing screams rang out underwater, stirring up powerful waves that turned the ocean into a frothy mess.

"I should've called Ge Long over earlier, things would've been so much easier." Lu Yun seriously contemplated the need to bring Ge Long on his next tomb raid. The second his servant had charged into the miasma of yin energy, the looming pressure bearing down on them dissipated.

"Let's go!" Lu Yun turned to his new envoy.

"Hm? Ah!" Su Xiaoxiao sprang into action after a befuddled pause, activating the pink flower beneath their feet. Its color deepened from pink to violet as it exploded with blinding light and blasted a hole into the great dome of yin energy.

With a hand seal cast by both hands, the violet flower grew at tremendous speed and took them up into the air.

"Return to me..." came the whisper again, followed by an enormous, sinister hand grabbing at the now dark purple flower.

"Such potent corpse poison!" Su Xiaoxiao's eyes turned pale green with excitement. "It mixes soul venom with the poison of yin energy. I've never encountered this kind of poison before!"

As a master of both medicine and poison, all things poisonous fascinated her. She forcefully met the giant black hand with her porcelain one.

Bam!

A great collision sounded underwater.

"My... soul!" the whisper grew into a hoarse roar. A giant face roughly five hundred meters wide raged madly.

"You!" Su Xiaoxiao immediately recognized the face of the corpse coffin. "You two failed to execute your plot against me, so you turned into corpse coffins to suppress me, then stole my soul!"

Snarling softly, she soared into the air and manifested an agile, emerald sword. It burst into thousands of strands of sword energy and slashed at the giant face.

"Grawww!!!" the face screamed with pain and shot back into the thick clouds of yin energy.

"You're not going anywhere!" exclaimed Su Xiaoxiao as she ran after it.

"Come back!" Lu Yun hurriedly stopped her. "This body of water is going to transform into a Great Formation of Corpse Refinement soon. Forget it and get us out of here!"

A chill running down her spine, Su Xiaoxiao unleashed twin beams of violet and cyan radiance. In response, the rooted flower sprouted thin petals and sent crimson light soaring into the sky.

Ignoring the laws of gravity, the strange flower barrelled out of the sea.

Bam!

A detonation set off in the black waters as a five-hundred-meter-wide violet flower with thin petals bloomed at the center of the inner sea. In that moment, every zombie in the sea howled with fear and frantically rushed toward the shore.

Hum.

The violet flower hummed, emitting rays of crimson light that isolated the great inner sea, clearing its inky depths at a speed visible to the human eye.

“Flower of the dead... the Hell Flower...” Lu Yun murmured, staring at the flower beneath his feet that was slowly morphing from violet to crimson.

Chapter 313: The Exalted Divine Tribe

A Hell Flower!

The yin-countering seed that Su Xiaoxiao had acquired in the ancient times was the seed of a Hell Flower!

Found on the banks of the River of Forgetfulness in hell, the flower bloomed and wilted in cycles of one thousand years. It went through nine forms in one day, and its flowers and leaves never met each other. While the flower bloomed, the leaves wilted. When the flower withered, the leaves grew.

There were only two kinds of plants in hell—the Sal Tree of Life and Death, and Hell Flowers. Hell Flowers possessed a strange power that could rival the ten connate spirit roots, and were only a hair less powerful than the Sal Tree of Life and Death.

After the destruction of hell, all of these flowers of the dead had wilted and disintegrated. Su Xiaoxiao having one of its seeds was truly a delightful surprise.

There was no shortage of yin energy and vicious intent in hell, and Hell Flowers were used to an environment thick with such energies. Being native to the banks of the River of Forgetfulness, where souls came to wipe clean the slate of all grudges and regrets in their past lives, anywhere else seemed like nothing in comparison.

Su Xiaoxiao had acquired the seed back in the ancient times, but couldn't make it sprout. Now, she'd become Lu Yun's envoy and gained the aura of hell, as well as having the overlord of the netherworld standing right next to her.

As a result, the flower bloomed in an instant and radiated a crimson light that wrapped around the inner sea of Levitating Island, destroying all of the zombies and ghost zombies in the area, and even refining the yin energy in the waters.

Bam! Bam!

Two towering waves swept from the inner sea as two giant zombies, fifty kilometers tall, charged out from the ocean.

“Don't run, my yum-yums!” roared Ge Long. “Let me have a bite. Just one bite!”

Dark light flickered all over his body as he ran after the two rotting zombies, waving curled hands and opening his mouth in anticipation of a delicious snack. The snarling zombies mounted a furious, joint counterattack.

Immortals who'd just sighed in relief watched the scene play out in stunned silence. They hadn't expected such terrifying zombies to reside within the inner sea. They, were, gigantic! Every single movement they made created powerful waves that savaged the shore.

By now, no one dared contemplate remaining on Levitating Island. Dao immortals might be able to fight such behemoths, but with the emergence of the skydragon tomb on the horizon, all of them had made their way to the imperial seas.

Even the immortals in Kunpeng Palace made their hasty escape. The formations outside the palace weren't strong enough to withstand the inevitable fallout from the massive clash.

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"They aren't human!" Lu Yun finally got a full look at the resurrected corpse coffins.

Their heads were about half a kilometer wide, while their bodies ran about fifty kilometers long. Instead of legs below their waists, there were snake tails! However, their tails had rotted away, revealing black bones beneath the flesh.

"They're divines! The Exalted Divine Tribe!" Su Xiaoxiao nodded heavily as a black vortex appeared in her hand. She'd extracted some of the venom from the poison zombie.

Lu Yun nodded as well. With her memory, he naturally knew what had happened with the two corpse coffins.

'Exalted' referred to an eternal freedom above all else. The Exalted Divine Tribe consisted of beings with human heads and snake bodies, and embodied the dao in all of their movements. Their status and prowess back in the ancient times was thus self-evident.

Tinglan and Guanqing's true identity was a part of that tribe. Back in their time, they'd once crossed paths with Su Xiaoxiao and attempted to kill her for the Hell Flower seed, but Su Xiaoxiao had successfully fended them off.

However, she had then died in her sleep for some reason, and her body and spirit were buried separately in corpse coffins refined from Guanqing's and Tinglan's bodies. The three ethereal and seven corporeal parts of her soul had also been extracted and devoured.

Tinglan's immortal ghost claimed that she and Guanqing were Su Xiaoxiao's maids, because she was a chang ghost, one of the ghosts that helped their killer claim their next victim. Chang ghosts were great liars, and Lu Yun had seen Tinglan for what she was when he'd gotten a clear look of the tombs of yin and yang.

Many believed that chang ghosts were ones of those who'd been eaten by tigers and lured people into the mountains to be the tigers' next meal, but that was a misconception. Chang ghosts were those who'd died of great terror, such as mortals who'd been eaten by tigers, or, in this case, divines who had been turned into corpse coffins!

As such, they harbored great trepidation in their hearts, and concealed their fear by lying. Meanwhile, the ghost zombies that fed on fear within the corpse coffins had been raised by Tinglan.

“Exalted Divine Tribe... Exalted Immortal Sect...” Lu Yun suddenly connected the dots. According to Su Xiaoxiao’s memories, the Exalted Divines were the imperial clan of the divine race back in the ancient times, which put them above the four cardinal tribes.

The Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird, and Black Tortoise patriarchs were all primordial realm immortals, similar to the four celestial masters of the heavenly court. However, the divine emperor from the Exalted Divine Tribe was of the principal realm, far more powerful than the four divine kings.

As for the divine beasts themselves, the ancestors of the four cardinal tribes, no one knew what their cultivation was, and they’d never concerned themselves with matters of the world.

The Exalted Immortal Sect was unusually interested in the three paintings derived from the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals, a treasure of the divine race. There had to be a connection between the sect and the tribe. Originally, Lu Yun had thought the sect was named after Exalted Major, but that didn’t seem to be the case anymore.

More importantly, the first group of Exalted Immortal Sect cultivators that Lu Yun had encountered had used the same techniques as the Corpse Refiners. That meant that the sect was not only related to the ancient divine tribe, but also the Corpse Refiners.

It couldn’t be a coincidence that the ghost zombies in the corpse coffins were able to set up a Great Formation of Corpse Refinement through their movements. Unbidden, he remembered one of the manifestations of the Dusk restriction—the Exalted celestial emperor!

Chen Xiao had sent the celestial emperor into the Dusk Tomb, who’d then become a servant of the restriction. Then Mo Yi threw in the fake Nephrite celestial emperor, an inhabitant of the Blood Sea who’d taken the Nephrite heavenly mandate.

Lu Yun shook his head briskly. This was no time for him to dwell on the matter.

Ge Long’s fight with the two zombies continued to intensify. They stirred up tidal wave upon tidal wave from the inner sea that crashed mercilessly into Levitating Island. The boundary created by the Hell Flower could prevent the spread of zombies and yin energy, but it couldn’t contain the impact of the battle itself.

Thankfully, the powerful shockwaves didn’t threaten the flower. It stood tall and strong at the heart of the inner sea.

“Crush them with your immortal crystal, Your Royal Highness!” Lu Yun transmitted to the Deaf Prince.

The prince perked up and burst into hearty laughter. “Hahaha, two Exalted Divine zombies huh? Time to crush them all!”

The East Sea monster spirits were rumored to be descendents of the Monster Celestial Master of the ancient heavenly court. Thus, he knew about the Exalted Divine Tribe.

“Hahaha! Voila! Eat my crystal!” A silver box appeared in his hand and burst into a pillar of silver light that illuminated the sky. Within the luminescence, a cream-colored crystal mountain roughly thirty thousand meters tall materialized into solid form.

“Go back, Ge Long!” transmitted Lu Yun.

“M-mommy!” Ge Long screamed and fled through the Gates of the Abyss as soon as he saw the crystal mountain looming overhead.

Bam!

The mountain smashed down with finality.

Chapter 314: Monster Ancestor?

A crystal mountain thirty thousand meters tall whistled through the air and smashed down on the two giant zombies. The inner sea shook as well, but in a different way from the last time.

When the floating isle had previously moved, it'd been when the six unholy terrors had displayed their prowess with their crystal mountains. Innumerable formations on the floating peak, together with the formation that'd returned to its origins, had borne the brunt of that power. Though it had indeed crashed into the inner sea in the end, it hadn't been too affected otherwise.

This time around, the Deaf Prince unleashed the mountain's full power. Dazzling white light blossomed on its surface, illuminating the entire inner sea. Unimpeded by formations, the crystal mountain rammed into the ocean with irresistible force and momentum.

Massive waves arose from the impact, washing all directions with immense surges of water. They quickly converged into a mighty flood, submerging all of Levitating Island. Compared to the moment of the floating peak's demise, the crystal mountain's impact was a far more cataclysmic happening.

The floating peak, Levitating Island, and the inner sea formed a single whole, so no lasting damage had been inflicted on the inner sea the last time. However, the crystal mountain being used to attack now was a different entity entirely. Refined into an immortal treasure, its exceptional weight had been augmented by the inexhaustible energy of heaven and earth contained within.

But its power didn't stop there. On top of that, it could also bestir the local power of the land.

Their bodies far too enormous to dodge in time, the two giant zombies were sent howling piteously into the water. Before one could even blink, Levitating Island was no more.

When he'd smashed Jiangchen Wushang's great formation, the Deaf Prince hadn't called upon his crystal mountain's true power. He hadn't summoned the power of the land, either, but simply used the weight of the treasure itself to flatten a dao realm zombie.

However, not daring to run any risk against two zombies born from corpse coffins, the prince had immediately deployed the strongest force available to him. A gentle radiance shone from the silver box in the prince's hand, shielding Lu Yun and company.

“The power of the world.... This is the World Chest!” Inside the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals, Empress Myrtlestar recognized the swell of tender energy: the World Chest.

According to legend, the chest contained an entire world inside. It was a peerless, legendary treasure even in the ancient times. The empress herself had never come into possession of it, but she could still recognize its signature energy.

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It took an interminably long time for quiet to finally return to the vast inner sea. In contrast, Levitating Island was certifiably, completely ruined.

All of the cities on the island and various congregation sites had been reduced to broken chunks and worthless scraps. Thankfully, all of the island's inhabitants were either cultivators or immortals; there had been no ordinary mortals embroiled in the battle. Caught in the deluge, the cultivators had all escaped via sword flight, so no one had been too severely injured.

In contrast, the island itself had been wrecked. The underground veins, mountains and rivers, flora and terrain, including mines and life points, had all been destroyed by the flood. The island's life force and immortal energies were scattered, making it inhospitable even after the waters receded.

When Lu Yun's group finally struggled back to the island, all they saw was ruin and devastation.

"The sacred land of the monster spirits was destroyed, just like that?" The little fox poked her head out of Qing Han's clothes, her watery blue eyes full of shock and confusion.

"Miao?" Su Xiaoxiao said subconsciously, a little startled by the sudden sight of the creature.

"You know me?" the fox asked, blinking at her with puzzlement.

Lu Yun glanced at the little creature, astonishment writ large over his face. He flipped through the relevant part of Su Xiaoxiao's memories, at long last grasping the identity of this fox that was missing part of her soul and liked to act silly and play cute all day long.

"I do." Su Xiaoxiao nodded, a little thunderstruck. "In the past, I received orders from the immortal emperor and visited the sacred land of the monster spirits to heal their gravely injured ancestor."

She carefully examined the fox in Qing Han's arms, then unequivocally declared, "You haven't changed at all after all these years. Even the way you look at me is still the same."

"Who am I?" The fox slipped out of Qing Han's arms, but looked back reluctantly, as if unwilling to leave the disguised girl's embrace.

Qing Han couldn't help but smile wryly, then steal a glance at Lu Yun. Sure enough... there was a hint of jealousy in the young man's eyes. Empress Myrtlestar is right. Although Lu Yun hasn't yet noticed I'm a woman, his subconscious is fully aware of that fact and he treats me like one.

Su Xiaoxiao looked around her, making sure there was no one else in the barren surroundings before murmuring, "Who would've thought that the monster ancestor who founded their sacred land would be a small fox that can never grow old..."

"Wha?!" The fox stared agog, while Qing Han and Dixi were similarly stunned.

Monster ancestor? This little fox was the ancestor of the monster spirits?!

The ancestor whose secrets could allegedly be found on Levitating Island, the one the fox persistently chased after... turns out to be herself? Wait, so this means the monster ancestor's still alive?

Well, the fox had indeed died at one point. Not during the ancient era, but after the great immortal war! In fact, the past events that the little fox could vaguely remember were all from the current era, and not from the far-flung past.

Empress Myrtlestar also found this hard to swallow. She'd met the monster ancestor in the past, since that august personage had been one of her rare peers in the world of immortals. But she remembered the ancestor as a stunningly handsome man. Clad in white, a longsword rested on his hip as he loftily surveyed the world. He'd captivated and entranced countless women. Meanwhile, the little fox in front of her... was female.

"You're saying that... I'm the ancestor of monster spirits?" the fox asked weakly, her eyes blinking rapidly.

"Correct." Su Xiaoxiao nodded gently. "But it appeared that you'd suffered an attack from a time manipulation art. Your life and cultivation both regressed, and it was impossible for you to ever grow older. When I first saw you, you were a golden immortal, just like you are now."

In the past, she would've never divulged the ancestor's affairs so carelessly. But the ancient age was just a distant memory now. Everything was just words inked in history books. The monster ancestor, together with the ancestor's friendships and enmities, were all long buried in the long river of time.

The fox looked vacantly at Lu Yun, but he gently shook his head.

"Then what's the deal with the ancestor's tomb?" The fox swiftly darted on top of Lu Yun's head and looked very solemnly at Su Xiaoxiao.

According to many records unearthed from ancient tombs, the tomb located in the monster spirits' sacred land was said to be the resting place of the monster ancestor, after his death in the ancient era before the immortal war.

In those times, the monster spirits were one of the major races at the top of the immortal world. However, the tribe sharply declined after their ancestor's passing, ultimately devolving into evil and untoward degenerates.

"One part of your ethereal and corporeal soul is buried inside." Su Xiaoxiao thought for a moment. "You buried it yourself. As for what happened after that, I'm not sure either. It must have happened after my d—hmm."

She'd almost reinforced the fact that she'd come back to life. It was better for such things to remain a secret.

In fact, Myriad Returns City had been born from the Myriad Returns Formation that the small fox had created back in the day. She'd combined the dao of illusions with that of formations, refining the illusory into reality.

Chapter 315: The Celestial Mistfield Banners

The monster ancestor's tomb contained part of the ancestor's soul, and as it happened, the little fox was missing part of her soul. That explained why she was so cowardly, despite being a golden immortal. She was as timid as a mouse, jumping with fright from the slightest scare.

“If the tomb is indeed on this island, then it’s definitely in Myriad Returns City.”

The city at the center of the monster spirits’ sacred land was where the monster ancestor had once resided, but now... it’d crashed into the inner sea, its whereabouts unknown.

The small fox wanted to burst into tears.

“There was no tomb on the floating peak.” Lu Yun declared with perfect timing and great certainty. “I’d already scoured Myriad Returns City and the rest of the floating peak, and saw no tomb.”

He’d expressly used his luopan when visiting the floating peak, but didn’t find the existence of an ancient tomb.

“Strange, the floating island’s gone now.”

Levitating Island was now a barren ruin and the inner sea had recovered its serenity, but the floating peak was nowhere to be seen. The small fox’s Myriad Returns Formation was on the isle, so Lu Yun had originally planned to take it with him and store it in hell. If Feinie could study the formation and understand its inner workings, it would perhaps help her achieve a breakthrough.

But the peak had disappeared, as if it’d never fallen into the inner sea to begin with. Even the two zombies had vanished.

They were born of the corpse coffins and had once been members of the Exalted Divine Tribe. Incomparably powerful when alive, they’d touched the limits of the dao immortal realm. Though hit by the crystal mountain, their bodies hadn’t been destroyed. The impact had merely sent their giant selves to the bottom of the sea. Yet somehow, they were now impossible to find.

Even if they were dead, there should’ve been bodies left behind, but all of the zombies seemed to have vanished from the inner sea.

“The inner sea is connected to the skydragon tomb in the North Sea,” Diexi interjected. “I first met Xiaoxiao inside the skydragon tomb, but we somehow made our way to Levitating Island at some point in time.”

Lu Yun looked at Su Xiaoxiao. He’d obtained her memories in life, but not those she’d acquired after death. However, his new envoy looked confused as well.

“I don’t know what’s going on either.... That tomb is indeed connected to the skydragon tomb, but I haven’t the faintest idea how I got there, or how I came back.”

Lu Yun sighed softly. “Looks like there’s truly something afoot with this Levitating Island. The emergence of the skydragon tomb must also be related to this place.”

He brought out the luopan, employing the Dragonsearch Invocation and the cosmic feng shui method to survey the land. A sense of normalcy had returned to the island, but each and every layout related to the tomb had disappeared into thin air.

The formerly thriving Levitating Island, once a harbor of easy wealth for the entire North Sea, was now nothing more than a barren, ring-shaped island that held no value whatsoever.

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“Levitating Island, Levitating Island is ruined!” A desolate scream reverberated in the sky. “The island is a key North Sea location, a symbol of our glory. How have things dissolved to this?!”

Gripped by the throes of insanity, Beigong Chonglou looked at the island in sheer disbelief. “Who are you people? How dare you destroy our island?!”

Lu Yun’s group was the first party he laid eyes on. Staring widely with fury, he arrived in front of them and loudly interrogated them.

Even after the floating peak’s destruction, the North Sea court’s foundations wouldn’t have been shaken as long as Levitating Island itself still stood. However, the island was now nothing but worthless rubble.

Next to Beigong Chonglou, a crowd of Corpse Refiners coolly observed the situation. Inside the ancient tomb, the prince had attacked them when possessed by an immortal ghost. Given the sect’s frequent dealings with the dead, they’d quickly realized the presence of ghostly involvement.

Once the ghost had been dispersed, they halted their attacks against Beigong Chonglou. It hadn’t been the prince who wanted to attack them, after all, and they needed his authority to enter the North Sea and explore the skydragon tomb.

“Beigong Chonglou!!” The corners of the Deaf Prince’s eyes split as soon as he saw the speaker. Dark red blood flowed out, a show of how enraged he was to see his adversary still alive and kicking. “You bastard, how are you still alive?! Go. Diiiiieeeee!!!”

The crystal mountain he’d put back appeared once again, whistling through the air and crashing down onto Beigong Chonglou.

“Damn it!” Jin Heyi’s face fell.

Black mist shrouded his figure and eighteen pitch-black banners appeared around him, hovering in the air. Faster than one could blink, a dense, black fog sealed off the local section of space. The great crystal mountain collided ruthlessly with the fog, and then... rebounded back high into the sky!

Jin Heyi blanched, a trail of greyish-yellow blood visible at the corner of his mouth.

“Wh-what?!” The Deaf Prince stared in disbelief. How could an all-out attack from the crystal mountain be unable to pierce the strange, black fog?

“Again!!” he roared in fury. The crystal mountain crashed down once more, leaving a long trail of fire behind.

“Hehehe....” A sinister curve appeared on Jin Heyi’s lips. His skin turned grey as the eighteen banners shook lightly in the sky, quickly repositioning themselves while something alive seemed to flicker in and out of sight inside the black fog.

Bang!

When the mountain connected with the fog, a strange sound rang out. Then, the spiritual nature of the mountain seemed to vanish and it thudded to the ground in a cloud of dust.

“How is this possible?!” Flabbergasted, the Deaf Prince fell back several steps in succession, a violent shudder coursing down his spine.

“Those are Celestial Mistfield Banners!” Su Xiaoxiao turned grim. “One of the ten greatest defensive treasures of the immortal court... Wasn’t that supposed to have been destroyed? What’s it doing here? There’s a formation between them that’s turning the banners’ energy into dense eeriness....”

A member of the once ancient immortal court, a single glance was enough for her to recognize one of the court’s precious treasures.

“The banners have indeed been destroyed....” Lu Yun scowled as he looked at the eighteen banners flapping inside the black fog. “Or rather, they’ve become zombies.”

Zombies!

Even immortal weapons and treasures could turn into zombies in this world! For example, there’d been the countless zombie swords surrounding the Sword Barrow. The eighteen flags, like those swords, were indeed zombies as well. Lu Yun just couldn’t tell whether the change had occurred long ago, or if it’d been a recent development at the hands of Jin Heyi and the Corpse Refiners.

Thankfully, the full set of Celestial Mistfield Banners numbered one hundred and eight banners in total, but there were only eighteen of them at this moment. If all one hundred and eight were deployed.... No one in the entire world, not even the nine celestial emperors, would be able to breach their defenses. One of the greatest defensive treasures of the ancient immortal court wasn’t something that contemporary immortals could contend with.

Despite only eighteen banners deployed on the field, being augmented by a Great Formation of Corpse Refinement made the combination extremely potent.

“Lu Yun.” Jin Heyi didn’t press on after neutralizing the crystal mountain. “I said I’d wait for you to become an immortal, but your people had better not keep provoking me, or I might lose my patience.”

Clad in embroidered robes of satin and a jade belt, his skin had recovered its normal color and he was the picture of a noble scion from an opulent house.

Chapter 316: Setting Out, Imperial City

Jin Heyi looked like a typical scion from a rich family, but his tone dripped with malice and his expression radiated an eerie energy.

He would wait for Lu Yun to become an immortal?

He scanned Lu Yun like he was staring at a growing plant. Once it matured and bore fruit, he would pick the fruit and devour it!

Donk!

There was a flash of white before a delicate fist slammed heavily into one of Jin Heyi’s eyes. He screamed and flew back off his feet, neck elongating impossibly long until the rest of his body followed.

“Anyone who offends Sir Lu must die!” Killing intent had replaced the sunny smile on Su Xiaoxiao’s face, hardening her charming face.

“Such strength!” Disbelief colored Jin Heyi’s expression as he was thrown back. Although he was only a golden immortal, he was no ordinary golden immortal. He’d cultivated the zombie method as a human and turned himself into a zombie, so he could tear apart even a peerless immortal.

Though Su Xiaoxiao was a peerless immortal, she hadn’t seemed particularly powerful. Jin Heyi might have stowed away the Great Formation of Corpse Refinement and the eighteen Celestial Mistfield Banners, but no regular peerless immortal should’ve been able to draw close to him.

Yet Su Xiaoxiao had knocked him off his feet with a single punch!

“Dammit, we need to go!” Panic overtook his expression as he brandished the eighteen banners again. Meanwhile, the Great Formation of Corpse Refinement swept over his companions and shot them out of Levitating Island.

With a wave of her hand, Su Xiaoxiao cast a handful of inky-green smoke. The zombies closest to her spontaneously disintegrated into pieces of rotten flesh and flopped to the ground.

Jin Heyi was scared witless because he could sense that the dark-green smoke was a poison specialized for taking down zombies. He’d turned himself into a zombie through practicing the zombie method and this poison would cripple him, if not outright kill him. Even the dao immortal zombie under his command had deteriorated upon contact, fully dead with no chance of resurrection!

“You’re not going anywhere!” With a scoff, Su Xiaoxiao manifested a giant palm and grabbed at Jin Heyi.

Now he panicked—the poison glinted a terrifying green from the enormous palm! Jaw tightening, he threw out the eighteen banners, having them burst into black smoke in midair and block the palm strike.

A grayish-yellow bag appeared in the lull and released mighty corpse energy, whisking him, Jiangchen Wushang, and Beigong Chonglou away to safety.

“The Bag of Corpse Refinement!” Su Xiaoxiao now had the eighteen banners in hand, but her expression was dark. She’d never fathomed that she would encounter this treasure in the current world of immortals!

She’d crossed paths with the Corpse Refiners back in the ancient times, and they were the reason why Su Xiaoxiao had committed genocide in eighteen major worlds.

There had been a Corpse Refiners during her time, one that was far more powerful than the sect today. Known as the foremost evil sect in the world of immortals, they’d wreaked havoc everywhere they went.

No atrocities were beyond them.

Su Xiaoxiao had been a golden immortal, but her mastery over both medicine and poison granted her unfathomable strength. She’d even invented a poison specifically for killing zombies, which almost annihilated the Corpse Refiners overnight.

In retaliation, they’d set a trap for Su Xiaoxiao.

They rained terrible corpse poisons onto eighteen major worlds, turning all of the denizens into half zombie and half human chimeras. If any of them had made their way to other worlds, the poison would spread and more worlds would fall to it.

Therefore, Su Xiaoxiao had to do what they expected her to do, even though she knew full well that it was a trap. She poisoned to death every living thing in the eighteen worlds, leaving them barren and lifeless.

That earned Su Xiaoxiao her notoriety, and Qi Hai had crippled her cultivation and kicked her out.

She'd tried to explain herself, but her master, the person she respected the most, refused to believe her. All hope had withered for her on that day. Since then, she became a true Doctor Poison, one who drifted across the lines of good and evil in a whimsical manner and was only known for her eccentricity.

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"What happened? Why wasn't the bag destroyed? Why has this demonic treasure been passed down?" Confusion flashed through Su Xiaoxiao's gaze as she turned to Lu Yun.

"Don't ask me," Lu Yun smiled wryly. "The Corpse Refiners are a mysterious bunch. All I know about them comes from you."

The Bag of Corpse Refinement was undoubtedly a powerful treasure. Lu Yun would've killed Jiangchen Wushang long ago, if it weren't for the bag, and it'd now taken Jin Heyi and his companions to safety. Not even Su Xiaoxiao could stop them.

"The current Truespirit Celestial Emperor is the leader of the Corpse Refiners," Qing Han said suddenly, his expression tinged with excitement. "Why don't we go to Truespirit Major and pay their new celestial emperor a visit?"

"We'll go once your poison is cleansed," Lu Yun solemnly declined.

Qing Han pouted with resignation.

"Bastard Chonglou's gone!" the Deaf Prince said with great dejection. "When are we going to kill that Beigong little shit?"

Since he couldn't hear their conversation, all he could think of was Beigong Chonglou, murderer of the young princess from the Unsullied Sea.

"We'll go now!" Lu Yun perked up. "Set out for the capital of the North Sea!"

With a wave of his hand, he summoned his almost offensively extravagant fortress ship. Levitating Island had been destroyed, along with Kunpeng Palace. They would have to take to the waters to navigate their way to the capital.

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Once the pirates plaguing the North Sea were either flushed out for execution or ran away, the six princes gathered again.

Beicang Qiong hadn't ascended to the void realm, but he was very close. The others sucked in a breath when they heard that the Deaf Prince had run into Beigong Chonglou and almost killed him.

"Good thing he's still alive," coldly remarked Jing Dichen, the third princess of the Unsullied Sea. "It'd be too merciful to crush him with a crystal mountain!"

"That's right! I'm gonna skin him alive and make snake stew out of his flesh!" Beicang Qiong grinned wolfishly. "Come on, let's follow senior brother Lu to the imperial seas!"

"We'll kill Beigong Chonglou and turn the North Sea court upside down!" The six of them whooped and hollered in high spirits.

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The fortress ship took flight and made its way toward the capital of the North Sea. Before their departure, Lu Yun had Su Xiaoxiao scatter potent poison all over the ruins of Levitating Island. It would never rise again.

Chapter 317: Shapeshifting

The ship had been remodeled through Huangqing and Feinie's joint efforts.

During the fight against Jiangchen Wushang's skeletal ship in Dusk Province, Lu Yun's fortress ship had suffered devastating damage and become all but unusable. But Huangqing and Feinie, one a master refiner and the other a formation grandmaster, had used the old ship as a foundation to build an even more powerful vessel.

Now named Divine Glory, it boasted three times the volume of its predecessor, and all formations and armaments onboard had been reinforced as much as possible. Emulating the ancient weapons of war, Huangqing had even installed a main cannon. Though it wasn't as powerful as a genuine immortal siege weapon, it was nevertheless enough to threaten dao immortals.

The remodeled ship looked more magnificent and arrogant than ever, and possessed unrivaled speed. When operating at full strength, it could cross five hundred kilometers in the blink of an eye.

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The North Sea was hardly the picture of peace at the moment.

All sorts of fearsome maritime beasts, including leviathans whose bodies possessed strength enough to match dao immortals, crashed relentlessly against Divine Glory in an attempt to overturn the giant ship intruding on their domain.

However, the fortress ship was simply too powerful. Genuine dao immortals themselves might not be powerful enough to rock this vessel.

Meanwhile, the six princes kept themselves busy aboard the mighty vessel. Now and then, they would reel in enormous fish-shaped creatures, then toss them back into the sea, seemingly never tiring of the sport.

As for Lu Yun, he was busy refining pills. More precisely, he was refining Tribulation Surrogate Pills!

Panorama Pavilion's lord had delivered the necessary ingredients long ago. The three catalysts and the skyqilin blood had been provided by Cangyin, while the Pavilion Lord had provided the skyphoenix blood.

As for the skydragon blood... he had Jing Dichen! The third princess of the Untroubled Sea was a skydragon!

A different level compared to normal dragons, skydragons were a bloodline that anyone could gain. Any dragon could transform into a skydragon when breaking through the dao realm to reach the ingress realm.

Jing Dichen was a very rare exception as she possessed the skydragon bloodline from birth. Not only was she the pearl of the Unsullied Sea, but she was treasured by every single dragon, the pride and joy of the entire race.

None of the six from the alliance of profligates were ordinary cultivators. They either possessed heaven-defying bloodlines, like Jing Dichen the skydragon or the Deaf Prince, a pure-blooded xiangliu; were exceptional prodigies, or possessed extraordinary abilities.

In fact, none of the young men and women on the ship could be called ordinary.

There was no need to mention Lu Yun and Qing Han, the overlord of life and death and the first of Dao Sovereigns, respectively. Diexi was a zombie king come back from the dead, a one of a kind existence in all worlds, while the little fox was purely and simply the monster spirit ancestor.

After realizing Jing Dichen's constitution, Lu Yun had shamelessly asked her for a drop of blood essence.

Over the past couple of days, he'd become a part of their circle, to the point where they now called him brother, and was practically the seventh profligate. Therefore, Jing Dichen had naturally agreed to his request.

As soon as he'd obtained the skydragon blood, he'd begun refining pills—the Tribulation Surrogate Pill in particular!

This pill allowed one to endure tribulations, or more precisely, withstand a tribulation in someone's stead. Within forty-nine days of ingestion, it would help surmount all kinds of trials and tribulations. Even if dead, one would immediately come back to life. Therefore, taking this pill made one invincible for forty-nine days!

Qi Hai, greatest pill master of the ancient world of immortals, had refined no more than three such pills. He'd gifted them to three celestial emperors, helping them overcome their death tribulations.

But afterward, he'd refused to refine them again no matter the reason, not even for his own tribulations.

The recipe itself had been preserved and passed down, entering the hands of quite a few pill masters after Qi Hai's death. Even so, only one among them had successfully refined the pill. However, after refining the Tribulation Surrogate Pill, his entire being was destroyed by a horrifying pill tribulation, while the one pill he'd left behind caused untold carnage throughout the world.

All of this had come from Su Xiaoxiao's memories. Her master had crippled her cultivation and expelled her from his doors, but she hadn't died from it. She'd faked her death, concealed her identity, and lived incognito thereon, which was why she knew of many subsequent events.

To refine a Tribulation Surrogate Pill, one needed to endure a tribulation consisting of four hundred eighty million lightning strikes!

It was similar to the Heaven Descent Pill, in this regard, except that the pill tribulation was even more intense and violent. And now, this lightning tribulation was precisely what Lu Yun required.

His journey across the North Sea would be extremely perilous, as many of his enemies had gathered in the imperial waters of the North Sea. Recklessness would only cause him to be dismembered by those fearsome dao immortals.

Therefore... he needed to be prepared ahead of time.

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On the eleventh day of their sea voyage, in the midst of his pill refining, Lu Yun suddenly sensed an enormous vitality coming from the pill cauldron.

"Eh? What's going on?!" His cheeks reddening from the surge of energy, his originally calm inner energy suddenly erupted and violently converged toward the nascent spirit inside his purple manor.

Boom!

In that split second, his cultivation broke through from peak refined spirit realm to transformed spirit realm.

In the transformed spirit realm, one's nascent spirit could take all kinds of shapes and forms. Even if the body died, one could possess another body and come back to life, as long as their nascent spirit hadn't been destroyed. One could even reincarnate and cultivate anew.

Lu Yun hadn't planned on breaking through. In fact, he'd rather have stayed in the refined spirit realm. He'd already perfected his nascent spirit, but the refined spirit realm was a crucial step in tempering the nascent spirit and integrating it with the body and the heavens.

But now, the dense energy feedback from the Tribulation Surrogate Pill had forcibly pushed him into a breakthrough!

The Tome of Life and Death shone with a black glow. Whether in Dusk Province or in hell, his Envoys of Samsara likewise flared gently with bright radiance. Apart from Feinie and Su Xiaoxiao, everyone else had broken through to the golden immortal realm.

Prepared for such a situation, seals descended upon them the moment they ascended to bottle their cultivation back to the august immortal realm. After all, there was a restriction stopping golden immortals from stepping into Dusk Province.

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A new death art floated to the fore of Lu Yun's mind. Shapeshifting! It was a transformation art this time!

His eyes sparkled in delight. The world of immortals had its own transformation arts, but those were closer to illusions. They masked one's appearance, but left their true natures untouched. Those with profound cultivation could still see through these disguises with ease.

However, the new death art allowed one to genuinely transform into something else, taking on the new form's shape and properties alike!

For example, if Lu Yun turned into a stone, he'd become a real stone through and through, while retaining full possession of his powers even as a stone.

"With this art, I don't have to worry about my disguise being seen through on this trip.... It'll also be easier to trick people, too!" A smile crossed his lips.

Bzzzz—bang!

A powerful buzz exploded from the pill furnace, soon followed by the finely-crafted furnace's loud implosion as three dazzling, golden pills shot into the sky.

Chapter 318: Too Fast, Didn't See

The Tribulation Surrogate Pill refinement was a success!

Thanks to the Sal Tree of Life and Death, Lu Yun had first simulated all of the medicinal properties required by the pill, then practiced inside hell for a full decade. After returning to the real world, a mere eleven days had been enough to successfully craft the pills on his first try.

Wreathed in a mysterious aura, the three golden pills came to a quiet stop in the sky. Ray upon golden ray blazed from them and rushed toward the horizon. Soon after, thick tribulation clouds swiftly clustered around them, racing in from every direction.

Rumble...

The princes, Qing Han, Diexi, and the small fox were idling their time away by fishing out the giant creatures in the sea, when...

"What's that?" House Lin's third young master, Lin Yan, peered up at the sky in bafflement. Dense, heavy tribulation clouds had appeared over the fair, clean-cut young man, stretching as far as the eye could see.

Divine Glory continued gliding above the ocean, crossing thousands of kilometers in a split second while tribulation clouds continuously collected over it and gave mad chase.

"Milord has successfully refined the pills!" Su Xiaoxiao's eyes sparkled. Naturally aware of Lu Yun's undertaking, she'd immediately realized he'd succeeded when the tribulation clouds appeared.

"I hear that senior brother Lu once refined a Heaven Descent Pill in Nephrite Major's capital and summoned a lightning tribulation that involved four hundred eighty million lightning strikes..." Jing

Dichen murmured, observing the tribulation clouds. "I wonder if he can refine the 'Soul Restoring Pill' as well."

The Soul Restoring Pill was another immortal pill inherited from the ancients. It could bring the dead back to life, or so the legends went, if a strand of the deceased's soul had been preserved before their death.

"He can," Su Xiaoxiao assured with great confidence. "With the young master's current level of expertise, the Soul Restoring Pill won't be an issue."

For someone who'd refined pills like the Heaven Descent Pill and Tribulation Surrogate Pill that'd resulted in cataclysmic lightning tribulations, a simple Soul Returning Pill would be child's play. Not to mention, Su Xiaoxiao remembered the pill's recipe.

But she herself wasn't a pill master in the truest sense of the word. Though she could refine a few pills here and there, it wasn't her domain of expertise. Her speciality lay in prescribing a variety of spirit herbs and immortal medicines to treat diseases, or kill with poison. In this world, medicine and pill dao were two different fields of study.

"Really?" Jing Dichen's eyes lit up and her cheeks flushed in excitement. Likewise, the other profligates were also visibly thrilled. Clearly, her younger sister wasn't entirely dead yet. A strand of her soul had been preserved, allowing for her revival with a Soul Restoring Pill.

"As long as you can gather the necessary ingredients, milord can immediately refine it for you." Su Xiaoxiao thought it over for a moment. "In fact... we might not even need milord to do so himself. There's another formidable pill master in Dusk Province who can do the task."

Yuying!

When it came to pills, she was Lu Yun's equal. Any pill her master could refine, she could as well. Their talents were equal in this area, her only disadvantage being that she couldn't use the Sal Tree of Life and Death to simulate medicinal energy and practice in hell.

The six princes' eyes shone like twelve small lanterns. Each of them were backed by formidable factions, so gathering the ingredients was as easy as requesting a cup of tea.

"I'll make the arrangements immediately and have someone deliver the ingredients to Dusk Province!" the Deaf Prince preempted Jing Dichen, taking out a communication talisman as he spoke. The profligate alliance had long gotten into the habit of transmitting their voices to the Deaf Prince at the same time as they chatted amongst themselves.

Su Xiaoxiao nodded gently before apprising Yuying of the matter, using the connection between the Envoys of Samsara. It was but a small matter in her eyes, so she'd simply made the decision herself.

Moreover, the group's goal was the skydragon tomb in the North Sea. Even if Lu Yun were to refine a Soul Returning Pill right this minute, he wouldn't be able to immediately deliver it to the Unsullied Sea. Therefore, she might as well trouble Yuying instead.

"Heavens, this Lu Yun is insane, and his followers are also crazy. Refining the Soul Restoring Pill..." the small fox groaned weakly.

Qing Han stuck out her tongue as a sudden thought came to her unbidden. If I die one day... will I also be able to revive thanks to this pill, as long as a strand of my soul survives?

Boom!

A bolt of silver lightning smote from the sky, lashing ruthlessly at the three golden pills, and was immediately followed by a surge of giant waves in the surroundings. The surface of the entire sea was astir beneath the sublime power of the heavens.

“What’s going on here?!” On a small, emerald islet a few thousand kilometers away, a man’s eyes snapped open. Confusion flashed through a face with silver eyebrows as a trail of blood appeared at the corner of his mouth.

“A heavenly tribulation! Which bastard is it?! How dare they summon a tribulation within the jurisdiction of my Whale Island! Servants!!” Named Xue Daozi, this man was the overlord of this region, and his cultivation was at peak aether dao immortal realm.

When the Dao Flower had blossomed three months ago, he’d witnessed a hint of the grand dao’s cadence. In that flash of inspiration, he gained a vague conceptualization of the next realm—the arcane dao realm—and thereby entered a meditative state.

But now, the tribulation had startled him out of his meditation and destroyed this rare opportunity. His seclusion had been an entirely impromptu affair, so he hadn’t laid down any protective measures beforehand. As a result, the tribulation had easily shaken him out of the profound, mysterious state he’d found himself in.

How could he not be livid with rage?!

“Ruin my enlightenment, will you!? I will not suffer living under the same sky with whoever did this! Men! Find out who’s undergoing a tribulation in my territory!” he roared, beside himself with anger. Even so, he didn’t lose his clarity of mind, making sure to swallow a pill to cure the injuries caused by the shock.

“Your Grace, it’s too fast, I can’t tell!” Soon enough, a pageboy came in running, his face full of confusion.

“Say that again?” Xue Daozi blinked.

“It’s too fast, I can’t tell,” the boy mumbled.

“Your Grace, a great patch of tribulation clouds just skimmed past over the surface of the sea. It seemed to be chasing something, but whatever it is, it’s too fast for this humble one to discern.”

Xue Daozi stared into space, then narrowed his eyes. Can it be the old monster on Tigershark Island? Maybe he noticed my epiphany and interrupted me on purpose?

A series of emotions flashed across his face before his figure shifted and vanished in a blur.

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Lu Yun slowly rose into the air. He lifted his head and gazed calmly upon the bolts of tribulation crashing down on the water's surface. There were a full four hundred eighty million bolts of lightning in the cloud, and their momentum was at least twice as powerful as the tribulation that'd been brought by the Heaven Descent Pill.

Even so, he didn't try to absorb the lightning with the Thunder Palmstrike.

The Tribulation Surrogate Pill's function was to endure tribulations. Hence, such a pill needed to overcome a tribulation itself as well. If this calamity wasn't neutralized, it would be passed onto whoever ingested it.

By then, even if one survived their tribulation thanks to the pill, they'd be met with a second death tribulation forty-nine days later. Therefore, after coming into existence, Tribulation Surrogate Pills had to be baptized by a lightning tribulation.

Chapter 319.1: Weathering the Tribulation

With his Spectral Eye, Lu Yun could clearly discern wisps of black smoke coalescing over the three Tribulation Surrogate Pills. Despite their transient nature, the smoke didn't dissipate after forming.

It seemed to contain the energy of death, but there was also something else in it he couldn't put his finger on, as if... one would be plagued by misfortune if the smoke clung to them.

Like raindrops, endless lightning bolts mercilessly struck the pills. A tiny part of the black smoke scattered with each rumble of thunder.

"A Tribulation Surrogate Pill is both a pill to weather tribulations and to summon them!" Lu Yun's brows furrowed tightly. He now understood why Qi Hai had refused to refine the pills a second time.

Even though one could weather an immediate tribulation with the pill, one couldn't avoid the tribulation that came with the pills themselves.

The pills were simply unable to endure such dreadful lightning strikes via their own virtues. Before the lightning could disperse the smoke that represented tribulations, the pills themselves would be destroyed.

In the distant past, Qi Hai had likely used a special method to block the thunder and lightning, keeping the pills intact. Even so, the three celestial emperors who'd taken the pills probably hadn't escaped their preordained fate in the end.

"Unless..." realization struck Lu Yun, "unless someone can take the pills' place and bear the brunt of the tribulation for them!"

In a daze, he suddenly recalled that there'd been someone else after Qi Hai who'd managed to refine a Tribulation Surrogate Pill. But that pill had ultimately bitten the refiner in the rear... as well as caused carnage throughout the immortal world.

"If someone uses a life to block the pill tribulation, then the pill will no longer be a Tribulation Surrogate Pill, but a 'Tribulation Traversing Pill'." Lost in thought, Lu Yun considered the increasingly intense tribulation in the sky.

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“A pill tribulation! Someone’s refining a heaven-defying pill!” Xue Daozi’s jaw dropped almost clear to the ground.

As a peak powerhouse who’d plucked nine aether dao fruits, he was extremely perceptive and had immediately realized what the tribulation clouds racing past represented.

A pill tribulation!

In the world of immortals, pills that could cause such a phenomenon were as rare as hen’s teeth. The more intense the tribulation, the more earth-shattering the pill.

Lu Yun had once shocked the world by refining the Heaven Descent Pill in Xiankan and summoning a lightning tribulation, so much so that he was honored as the greatest pill master below the dao immortal realm.

But he’d then disappeared for fifteen months afterward. Adding the machinations of some folks to that, it meant the furor had gradually died down and Lu Yun’s influence was thereupon forgotten.

By the time he’d reappeared, it’d been in the capacity as guardian of the path of cultivation. In comparison, being the foremost pill master below the dao immortal realm seemed insignificant. After all, the true pill refining powerhouses of the world were all mighty dao immortals.

Upon realizing the nature of the tribulation that’d disrupted his enlightenment, Xue Daozi’s previous resentment vanished into thin air, replaced by irrepressible greed.

“Four hundred eighty million bolts of lightning have converged above the tribulation clouds.... It’s at the level of a Heaven Descent Pill, at least!” Agog, his figure turned incorporeal as he traveled through the void and slowly approached a fortress ship, one flamboyant to the point of cockiness.

Divine Glory might be fast for a ship, but it was nothing to speak of for a peak aether dao immortal.

“That’s... Lu Yun and Qing Han!” Xue Daozi immediately recognized the two of them on the deck. Their figures had appeared on the Dao Flower. Probably every living creature in the world of immortals, nay, the entire universe, knew what they looked like.

“Lu Yun is the enemy of our North Sea. The King of Southern Subjugation and the Kunpeng King both died because of him, and he’s also insulted His Majesty the Monster Emperor....” Xue Daozi’s eyes narrowed faintly, killing intent welling up in his heart in spite of himself.

The North Sea was vast, and rich in natural resources, but it abounded with unusual dangers. Native cultivators tended to band together in large groups and rely on each other for survival.

Xue Daozi’s true form was a giant silverbrow whale who’d inherited the bloodline of divine beasts from times immemorial. It was all thanks to the North Sea court that he’d managed to transform into human form, as well as set foot into the dao immortal realm.

Hence, an intense desire to kill instantly flared up when he saw a great enemy of the monster spirit court.

Since the pill refiner is Lu Yun, and there's four hundred and eighty million bolts to the lightning tribulation... It must be the Heaven Descent Pill! Xue Daozi secretly pondered. Three Heaven Descent Pills must have emerged and are now going through their pill tribulation. I have no use for the pills, but I can make use of them as a favor to someone else. Three of them are enough to create three celestial emperors in the North Sea!

He wasn't a pill expert, thus he couldn't recognize the nature of the three sparkling pills. But because of the lightning tribulation and Lu Yun's presence, he made a connection with the Heaven Descent Pills that the young man had refined not too long ago.

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"Someone's coming," Lu Yun suddenly realized. He looked around, fully on the alert. "A monster spirit immortal, a peak aether dao immortal!"

His heart lurched. "It's the North Sea court's... hrm?" He blinked, perplexed at what he'd just done. Had he just seen through Xue Daozi's cultivation and origins with a single glance?

"Spectral Eye... a single glance to see through life and death!" He suddenly understood the full capabilities of this death art. With the rise in his cultivation level, his death arts had also begun to evolve.

The Spectral Eye could see through the heart of life and death with one glance, but thus far he'd been limited to the death portion and obtaining information about the deceased. Now that he'd reached peak transformed spirit realm, the nine death arts he'd learned along the way seemed to form a complete system among themselves, and the Spectral Eye had reached the realm of observing life as well.

No living being within a radius of five hundred kilometers could escape his notice now. Moreover, preliminary information about them would surface in his mind.

That sly old fox hidden over there definitely doesn't have good intentions, but he does have perfect timing. I can use him to defuse the tribulation! He took in a deep breath and turned his palm toward the sky.

The lightning bolts above converged on his hand and slowly blended into his body. Meanwhile, the people on the ship, though outwardly at ease, were secretly poised to spring into action.

"Hm? The tribulation is weakening.... It looks like Lu Yun's using a special method to neutralize it!" His gaze sharpening, Xue Daozi made himself even stealthier as he crept toward the ship.

"The tribulation is over, the Heaven Descent Pills are born!" A smile flashed across his lips.

Whoosh.

In the next moment, his figure erupted in a silver blur and landed on the ship a split second later.

Chapter 319.2: Weathering the Tribulation

When the Tribulation Surrogate Pills first formed, they'd blown through the ship's hull and flown outside the hold. Lu Yun himself had followed in their wake, so Xue Daozi almost instantly arrived beside him.

“Well well well, aren’t you the bold one, Lu Yun? You killed one of our monster kings and insulted our emperor, so don’t blame me for being ruthless now that you’ve shown your face around here!”

Though his mouth babbled on, it didn’t affect the speed of his other movements. He extended a hand toward the three golden pills upon revealing himself, viciously slapping at Lu Yun with the other at the same time.

“A trivial aether dao immortal? You really do have a death wish,” sounded a melodious and somewhat syrupy female voice.

“A, a trivial aether dao immortal?” Slightly dizzy from the excitement of immense greed, Xue Daozi couldn’t help but blink. A trivial aether dao immortal?

In the current world of immortals, dao immortals were the earth and sky, the overlords of all and sovereigns who dictated the existences of their inferiors. When had aether dao immortals become ‘trivial’?

In the next moment, a sweet, clean fragrance floated in from an unidentified location and wafted into his nostrils.

“How sweet! That smells so good...” Xue Daozi’s mind turned increasingly fuzzy, his body going limp and numb with pleasure. A thousand pairs of tiny hands of tiny hands seemed to be stroking all over him, and he almost groaned in bliss.

What a beautiful purple glow... was the immortal’s final conscious thought.

Puff...

Dark red blood splattered all over the sky as Lu Yun’s sword split his skull in two, destroying his nascent spirit and dao fruits. His blood dyed the three pills in the young man’s hand crimson, while the black smoke around them quickly vanished, as if willed away by death itself.

Plop!

Xue Daozi’s body keeled forward and sprawled on the ground. An aether dao immortal had been felled in a single strike!

“What a fearsome poison!” Lu Yun’s heart spasmed painfully.

There was still a contented smile spread across the two halves of Xue Daozi’s face. Even in his last moments, he hadn’t realized he’d met his end.

“That’s Xue Daozi of Whale Island!” the Deaf Prince suddenly exclaimed when he saw the corpse. “He’s a peerless powerhouse who picked nine dao fruits. Did senior brother Lu just... kill him with a single strike?”

Su Xiaoxiao dropped her hand and took a position behind Lu Yun. Her method of administering poison was extremely covert. Apart from Lu Yun and Qin Han, none of the other peerless immortals present on the scene had seen her act.

Therefore, they all thought that Lu Yun had killed Xue Daozi all by himself.

The young man smiled wryly, but didn't explain himself. Su Xiaoxiao was one of his trump cards. Her poison arts might be unrivaled, but even so, antidotes, and other things that could lessen a poison's effects, still existed in this world, so he didn't plan on unnecessarily revealing her capabilities.

Her poison had pierced through Xue Daozi's cultivation and turned him into an ordinary mortal; her master had merely struck the finishing blow. At any other time, Lu Yun's sword wouldn't even have scratched the flesh of a dao immortal.

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The Tribulation Surrogate Pills had been successfully refined. Or should they now be called Tribulation Traversing Pills? It seems that the commonly accepted name is the former.

Xue Daozi had touched the three pills when he was still alive and been tainted by the black smoke, so the tribulation target had transferred to him. Now that he'd died, the disaster was over, capping these pills as true Tribulation Surrogate Pills!

However, Lu Yun was painfully aware these were the only three he could ever refine in this life. If he tried a second time... the one to die would be himself. Such was the truth he'd realized after the pills' completion.

"Take it!" He stuffed one pill into a jar and shoved it into Qing Han's hand.

"Is this... a Tribulation Surrogate Pill?" Qing Han stared at the jar, his lips quivering.

"Right on the ball!" Lu Yun nodded. He felt an inexplicable sense of relief when he saw Qing Han accept it; only then did he hand the second pill to Jing Dichen.

"Junior sister Jing, this one is yours. I'm indebted to you for your blood essence. I wouldn't have been able to refine them otherwise!"

Jing Dichen's eyes turned round with astonishment. She'd naturally heard of the Tribulation Surrogate Pill's resounding name, but she could never have imagined Lu Yun would gift her one just like this!

She hesitated for a moment, but ultimately accepted the gift.

Pills like these were extremely strange existences and involved immense karmic repercussions. Since Lu Yun had borrowed her blood in order to refine them, she was due one of them.

Lastly, Lu Yun carefully stashed the last one inside his storage ring for safekeeping. This was the one he'd promised to the Lord of the Panorama Pavilion.

Although the others were shocked beyond words, their gazes were clear and devoid of avarice. These young folks might have been extreme degenerates, each of them a disgrace and troublemaker of the worst magnitude, but they heavily valued loyalty and comradeship. Otherwise, why would they have charged all the way to the North Sea to avenge the Unsullied Sea's youngest princess?

For them, Jing Dichen obtaining a Tribulation Surrogate Pill was as good as gaining one themselves. It made no difference whatsoever who held it. In fact, they were fully confident that any one of them would find this pill landing in their own palm if they were ever to face a dreadful, overpowering tribulation.

Chapter 320: The South Sea Gourmet

Helmed by Beigong Yu, the Divine Glory sailed through the boundless North Sea for another full twenty days before reaching imperial waters.

The North Sea was immense indeed. Even though the Divine Glory was more than ten times faster than its predecessor, it'd still taken a month to reach the North Sea capital from Levitating Island.

Currently, the imperial waters—a region one million kilometers across—was securely sealed off. No matter where they hailed from, any cultivator brave enough to approach would be met with a barrage of violent attacks.

Not even North Sea locals were exempt from the blockade, as the emergence of the dragon tomb no longer involved the North Sea alone. Many in the world of immortals had eyed it covetously for a long time as well.

The tomb had once surfaced ten thousand years ago, back when the Dragon Palace still ruled the North Sea. Later, successive generations of powerhouses from the Dragon Palace were buried inside.

Unlike other ancient tombs, this one wasn't chock full of dangers. Extreme danger did indeed lurk inside, but it was many times safer than other ancient tombs above the dao immortal realm.

Had the past Dragon Palace been willing to commit to a full-strength exploration, their tribe probably wouldn't have been entirely wiped out.

But for the dragons, the tomb was the resting place of their ancestors and a location that contained the direct legacy of their bloodline. Given their temperaments, it'd been out of the question for them to dig up the tomb of their own forefathers.

After being dragged into the Untroubled Sea's conflict, the Dragon Palace had ultimately been entirely exterminated, aside from the blackwater snakes. Of course, many factions that'd lusted after the dragon tomb had a hand in the dragons' downfall.

Unfortunately for the plotters, the tomb then vanished from the North Sea following the annihilation of the North Sea dragons. Another ten thousand years had to pass for it to reappear. And now, the factions that'd caused the dragons' downfall had once more converged in this place.

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"Who goes there!" An awe-inspiring voice reverberated in the air the moment the Divine Glory drew near to the capital's airspace, immediately followed by the overbearing appearance of a man in black armor.

Though he was still yelling his challenge, a giant wave crashed toward the Divine Glory as soon as his figure emerged.

"You must have a death wish!" A silver-browed man abruptly materialized on the bow of the ship and scattered the wave with a backhand, sending them churning back from whence they'd come.

“What?!” The man in black armor was a peak peerless immortal. Perhaps he wasn’t as powerful as the likes of Beigong Yu or the Scaled-Dragon King, but he was nevertheless an extraordinary powerhouse, so he blanched when he saw his own wave crashing back his way.

An enormous blade light flashed by and split the giant wave. The black-armored man trembled, a trail of blood dribbling out the corner of his lips.

“A dao immortal!” The man stiffened. “I am the Octopus King from the West Sea court. Identify yourselves, cretin!”

“Die!” With a chilly smile, the silver-browed man suddenly stepped forward and pushed another palm strike toward the Octopus King.

Boom!

When the silver-browed man neared the Octopus King, the latter’s frame suddenly enlarged, becoming a giant octopus about five hundred meters tall. The creature opened its mouth wide and sprayed continuous jets of black ink.

“West Sea’s Octopus King... how dare you not even know the name Xue Daozi!” Xue Daozi laughed heartily and simply disregarded the fearsome ink, steadily moving forward with his palm strike.

“What, you’re Xue Daozi!!” The Octopus King paled, but before he could react—

Puff!

Faster than one could blink, the palm pierced through his giant frame, destroying his nascent spirit, his soul, and everything else in a split second.

Plop.

The giant octopus’ corpse crashed violently into the sea.

.....

“Miss Su’s healing arts are extraordinary! Xue Daozi was but a hair’s breadth away from death just half a month ago, and now he can slap peerless immortals dead!” exclaimed the crowd on the boat, clucking their tongues as they witnessed the man’s prowess.

Xue Daozi had indeed been cleaved in two by Lu Yun’s sword, but that had turned him into an Infernum. At the same time, Lu Yun wanted the man to be able to openly stand by his side. To this end, he needed a legitimate pretext, so he’d seized on Su Xiaoxiao as the perfect excuse.

Hence, the explanation that Xue Daozi hadn’t been entirely dead made the rounds. Part of his soul had survived, and Su Xiaoxiao had taken out a pile of medicines to ‘revive’ him, turning him into a slave by the same occasion.

Or so the story went.

Lu Yun could share something like the Tribulation Surrogate Pill with the others, but... things like reviving the dead, the Envoys of Samsara, the Infernum, and the rest of his unworldly servants were his greatest secrets.

If people were to find out, he wouldn't be the only one to suffer. Everyone by his side would be obliterated. As for Su Xiaoxiao, she was indeed a poison doctor from the past, but it'd been too long since her death. In the current world, few ancient records mentioned her at all.

.....

"Woah—what a big octopus!" Just as Xue Daozi was about to extract the octopus' inner core, a ball shot in their direction from the distance, pouncing on the dead body.

"Oh heavens, heavens! This is the West Sea's Octopus King! I've been looking for this octopus for a long time... and I finally found it today!

As it turned out, this meatball was a man. He looked about thirty, and his rotund figure resembled an oblong tangerine stuck on an oval grapefruit. He wore a... something that looked like the uniform of a chef from mortal restaurants. Carrying a big black wok on his back, he had a cleaver on his hip that resembled a wooden door.

The meatball was currently dancing with joy, excitement written all over his face.

"Who are you?" Xue Daozi's expression grew solemn at the sight of the newcomer. He might have become a ghostly soldier, but he still possessed the cultivation of a peak aether dao immortal. Yet he hadn't noticed where this man had come from.

"The South Sea Gourmet!"

A sudden tremor ran through Bai Qi, the third prince of the South Sea.

"Eh? Does someone know me?" The meatball looked at Bai Qi, then shook his head. "Oh, so it's you, little bai ze.... The meat of a bai ze, hmmm. Pity there's nothing much about it."

Then, the meatball known as the South Sea Gourmet gulped hard as his gaze randomly scanned the various people on the ship. Apart from the humans, Beicang Qiong and Lin Yan, the other four profligates all paled with naked fright.

The South Sea Gourmet!

Self-proclaimed supreme food connoisseur, founder of the dao of fine food, and obsessive collector of delicious ingredients. He was, in short, a glutton.

Monster spirits all over the world, and even divines, had suffered at his hands.

He was a bogeyman for every nonhuman species. It was fortunate he'd been born as a human himself, or humans likely wouldn't have been spared either.

Never in his wildest nightmares had Bai Qi expected to suddenly run into this fiend in the North Sea. So there was nothing much to the meat of a pureblood bai ze?

Tasty or not, one couldn't possibly know without a previous taste.