

Necropolis 341

Chapter 341: Water Ghost Grasp

Jin Heyi and Qing Han turned to Jiangchen Wushang as well, freezing on the spot when their eyes registered the same sight.

Jiangchen Wushang's entire arm was completely soaked through, and eerie wet patches were slowly spreading through the rest of his body. Half of it was already drenched, and his uncovered hand was pale and wrinkled, as though it'd been submerged in water for quite some time.

He shook his head and once again circulated his inner energy to evaporate the water and dry himself.

Upon ascending to the void realm, a cultivator's power transmuted from mystical force into true inner energy. It was much stronger than its predecessor on a fundamental level, and could rival the immortal energy of some true immortals.

However, Jiangchen Wushang's sleeve was soaked through with water again soon after he'd dried it with his dense inner energy.

"What's going on?" Frowning, Jin Heyi rushed to Jiangchen Wushang and used his own immortal energy to dry the strange, wet spots.

"Don't touch him!" Lu Yun pulled his enemy to the side and shook his head. "He's doomed."

Jin Heyi's expression darkened. "What?"

"Leave him. He's going to die." Lu Yun stared fixedly off to Jiangchen Wushang's side. There was a mysterious subspace there—one that consisted completely of water. A black arm had extended from it and taken Jiangchen Wushang's hand, slowly pulling him into the realm of water.

"What do you mean?" Alarmed, Jin Heyi followed Lu Yun's line of sight, but didn't notice anything amiss.

"Water Ghost Grasp.... Why is there a thing like that here?! Come on, let's go! Once it consumes Jiangchen Wushang, it'll come after us!" Hair all over his body stood on end. He grabbed Qing Han and made a speedy escape toward the heart of the tomb.

"Water Ghost Grasp? What's that?" Jin Heyi was a golden immortal with hundreds of zombies by his side; naturally Lu Yun's words wouldn't faze him.

"Why did he run... hic...." Jiangchen Wushang couldn't seem to think straight. He belched and threw up a mouthful of black seawater.

"You...." Jin Heyi took three big steps backward, eyes wide as his powerful consciousness scanned the area around Jiangchen Wushang's body, but once again came up empty handed.

Water Ghost Grasp?

Jin Heyi took a closer look at Jiangchen Wushang's left hand; it did seem like it was being held by something.

“An immortal ghost? No, that’s not it. I’ve gained the body of a zombie king and I’m only half a step away from coming back to life upon the extreme of death. Immortal ghosts wouldn’t be able to escape my detection....”

Back in the tombs of yin and yang, Jin Heyi had refrained from killing Beigong Chonglou because he’d sensed the immortal ghost possessing the prince. However, he detected no traces of immortal ghosts here.

Gurgle gurgle gurgle.

Strange noises emitted from Jiangchen Wushang’s mouth. In fact, he sounded like a drowning mortal. Then, clear water pulsed from his seven orifices.

“Senior brother... I don’t feel so good....” Anguish flashed through his face.

Jin Heyi felt a tightening of his scalp. He stared at Jiangchen Wushang and muttered, “You’re doomed, you really are doomed... I’ll take those!”

Clenching his jaw, Jin Heyi reached out and took the Bag of Corpse Refinement and Great Formation of Corpse Refinement when his questing hands found them. With another wave of his hand, he collected the crowd of zombies around them into the bag and disappeared on the spot.

Gurgle.

Jiangchen Wushang remained oblivious to his senior brother’s movements. He tipped his head up and flailed in the air, like a drowning man trying to find purchase on anything to keep him afloat.

“Senior brother... help....” He lowered his head. He was completely soaked, and the parts of his body that weren’t covered by clothes looked bloated and pale, like he’d been immersed in water for days.

An eerie smile spread over his face and he wobbled off in the direction that Jin Heyi had fled.

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Lu Yun ran for a great distance, pulling Qing Han behind him, before slowly coming to a halt. He panted heavily, expression still tinged with shock and fear.

“What’s a Water Ghost Grasp?” It was the first time Qing Han ever saw Lu Yun flee in such a panic and it’d caught him by surprise too.

“Remember the Tiger Prince and the Dragon Prince?” Lu Yun panted. “It’s like them, but so much worse!”

Back in the burial mound, if the two princes hadn’t noticed the energy coming from the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals and allowed it to collect them, Lu Yun wouldn’t have been able to deal with them.

Water Ghost Grasp was so much more deadly than the two princes. It was a feng shui layout like Ghost Yanking Feet, which could pull people into water to drown them. However, the layout here had given birth to real water ghosts, unlike the living layouts found in the burial mound.

Water ghosts were formed from natural yin energy. Similar to zombies, they didn't belong to any of the three realms and were beyond the five elements, treading the line between life and death. In other words, the water ghost layout was something that mashed together immortal ghosts, zombies, layouts, and other mysterious existences.

Lu Yun had never expected to find something so devious in the tomb.

"Dragon Prince? Tiger Prince? Who are they?" a familiar chilling voice sounded at Lu Yun's ear. He didn't have to turn around to know that Jin Heyi had caught up with them.

"Those you cannot afford to make enemies of either." Lu Yun turned around, his face tightening.

"Dammit, you led it here!"

"What?" Jin Heyi turned and flinched, finding Jiangchen Wushang's body staggering its way toward him.

"Senior brother... save me...." Thick goop oozed out of Jiangchen Wushang's mouth as he approached ever closer.

"Wushang!" Jin Heyi took several steps back.

"Why didn't you save me... senior brother..." his haunting voice seemed to be whispering right into Jin Heyi's ear.

Jin Heyi narrowed his eyes as postmortem spots emerged all over his body, marking the disappearance of his vitality as he turned into a zombie.

"Hehehe—" Jiangchen Wushang's eyes bulged, then almost fell out of his skull as he stared mockingly at Jin Heyi.

Chapter 342: Dragon Ghost

Lu Yun grabbed Qing Han and scuttled far away from the danger.

Jiangchen Wushang's target was Jin Heyi. Even though the now-undead Corpse Refiner was imitating a zombie king to conceal the ripples of life, Jiangchen Wushang's eyes were still fixed on him. Jin Heyi's ugly expression marked how he felt the situation was slipping out of his grasp.

Perfect, maybe I can get this Corpse Refiner killed once and for all then.

Zombies weren't confined by the restriction against golden immortals in Dusk Province. In other words, Jin Heyi would be able to tap into his full power in the incipient sacred land. With the large group of deadly zombies under his command, he would pose a great threat to Lu Yun.

But honestly, I don't have to do anything. This thing here will do it!

As the two Corpse Refiners faced off against each other, Lu Yun turned both him and Qing Han into dust particles and disappeared.

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Gurgle!

As the sound of bursting bubbles filled the air, Jin Heyi's rotten face went unnaturally pale.

“How should I deal with him, junior brother Lu? ...junior brother Lu?”

He whirled around to find neither Lu Yun nor Qing Han beside him. Outrage translated into angry jabbering as he vented his frustration at his circumstances. However, his rage cut off when he realized with a shudder that something had a firm grasp on his left hand. His entire arm was soaked by chilly water.

“Water Ghost Grasp,” Jin Heyi mouthed shakily. An intensifying chill consumed him, like he was submerged in an icy pond. A zombie king’s body was naturally cold to begin with, so he shouldn’t feel like this. However, even with his special constitution, he was chilled to his very soul.

“Wait... a second. Lu Yun set me up.... If I’d saved Wushang earlier, the water ghost wouldn’t have been able to do anything. I was its target to begin with....”

That was his last thought before his eyes slowly closed and he lost consciousness.

When he next opened his eyes, they were all black without any white. The rotten patches and postmortem spots on his skin faded away at observable speed.

Thud!

Jiangchen Wushang toppled to the ground, lifeless.

‘Jin Heyi’ lifted his left hand and formed a fist, a smile playing at his lips. “You’re right. If you’d saved him earlier, I’d have no choice but to retreat.

“Jin Heyi? Corpse Refiners? Looks like he cultivated the zombie method as a human and turned himself into a zombie king....

“No, he didn’t turn himself into a zombie king, but refined a zombie king’s body instead. The zombie king stumbling into the dragon nest that time was his target, wasn’t it?” As he murmured, black light flashed through his body and transformed him inside out.

“I am the ghost of a dragon come back to life in the body of a zombie king. From now on, I am Ghost Dragon. Crown Prince Ao Lin of the North Sea no longer exists.”

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Truespirit Palace.

“Dammit!” A red-haired young man’s eyes snapped open, unleashing a terrifying power that barrelled through multiple layers of formations and restrictions in a palace. By his side knelt a young woman in a crimson dress.

“This servant deserves death, Your Highness,” the girl said fearfully. She was a peak aether dao immortal, yet she remained on her knees, trembling in fear and avoiding a direct look at the young man.

The young man waved her away. “This has nothing to do with you. You’re dismissed.”

The girl sighed in relief and made a quiet retreat from the hall.

“What happened, Jiuying?” asked a bodiless voice. “What angers you so?”

“My replica, Jin Heyi, has just been stolen by someone else! I put in so much effort to refine it into a zombie king, but a mere ghost has gone and benefited from it instead!” Hatred and bitterness burned in the red-haired young man’s eyes.

“You mustn’t get reckless, Jiuying,” the voice sounded once again. “You’re currently at peak arcane dao immortal. If you make any careless moves, the dao fruit tree will draw you in.”

“I know.” Yin Jiuying nodded. “But I need a new replica. Capture Yue Longsha and Zhu Yan, the two treasures of Nephrite Major, for me.”

“Yue Longsha? Zhu Yan?” the voice rose an octave and a middle-aged man donning a black imperial robe shot out from thin air, his expression incredulous. “If I bring those two little girls here, Zhao Fengyang will hunt me down!”

Yin Jiuying lowered his head thoughtfully. “Yue Longsha isn’t an easy target since she’s hiding in Xiankan, but Zhu Yan is in the North Sea. Just send some people after her. Someone will stop Zhao Fengyang for you.

“Oh, and Jiangchen Wushang—the Jiangchen old freak’s precious darling—has died as well. You need to find him another body to possess.”

The man in black imperial robes was the sect head of Corpse Refiners and the new celestial emperor of Truespirit Major. A wry smile adorned his face as he heard the young man speak; he knew he couldn’t turn his back on Yin Jiuying and the Jiangchen Clan just yet. The throne of Truespirit Major was a target painted on his back.

The Corpse Refiners needed Truespirit Major to back it up in order to keep expanding.

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Lu Yun and Qing Han rushed through the dragon tomb as two insignificant particles, riding two flashes of sword energy.

“There, at the heart of the chamber,” Qing Han came to a sudden halt and transmitted to Lu Yun. “It’s Qing Quan!”

“What the hell, it really is him!” Lu Yun stopped to take a look as well.

They hadn’t gone deep into the dragon tomb yet. Who would’ve thought a dao immortal of the Qing Clan would still be on the fringes of this mausoleum?

Back when Lu Yun and Qing Han had first arrived at the North Sea, Qing Quan had ambushed them with a group of allies. Who would’ve thought that the dao immortal would enter the dragon tomb as well?

Through the half-opened stone door, they could see Qing Quan sitting cross-legged on the ground, absolutely covered in injuries. He seemed to be resting for recovery, and the torn body of a zombie by his side bore mute testament to where his wounds originated from.

The light of a treasure twinkled from the outer-coffin behind the Qing elder.

He appeared to have been through a bloody battle, only killing the zombie after exhausting himself. His serious injury demanded his full attention, thus he didn't have any energy to spare for the burial goods in the coffin.

Chapter 343: The Star Demon Sect

"Don't!"

Sensing Qing Han's intention to sneak up on Qing Quan, Lu Yun hurriedly yanked him back from flying into motion.

"Qing Quan's actually dead. His body is just being used as bait by a mysterious monster to lure other immortals here," Lu Yun carefully transmitted. "There's a powerful layout in the room that would kill even Bing Ling and Bing Xuan if they were to enter."

Bing Ling was the rimesnake king that had become a three-fruit arcane dao immortal after consuming Bing Xuan's power. Although her power came from the former North Sea subject, she was more powerful than him, as she was the snake king.

Other than the emperor corpse puppet in Violetgrave, the two of them were Lu Yun's greatest assets.

However, in Lu Yun's eyes, this room was the gaping maw of a vicious beast. Even arcane dao immortals would be devoured and picked clean upon entrance.

"Dead?" Disappointment creased Qing Han's face.

There was no love lost between him and the Qing Clan. What little attachment he had for the clan came from his father's branch of the family, but they'd long become the clan's puppets. Qing Taxian, the Qing patriarch, was the scapegoat for every atrocity they committed, while the benefits were divvied up by everyone else.

Qing Han didn't want Qing Quan to die so easily. It was one of his dearest wishes to kill the Qing dao immortal with his own hands.

"He's dead." Through the Spectral Eye, Lu Yun could see how lifeless Qing Quan's body was. A cold consciousness had entered the corpse and become its careful puppetmaster.

Whatever it was, it'd noticed Lu Yun and Qing Han, and was observing the two particles they'd turned into in its own strange way. However, it wasn't interested in two mere cultivators. It thus remained within Qing Quan's body and ignored the two humans.

Not long after the humans left, a faint shadow stepped into the room and walked up to 'Qing Quan', who looked at the newcomer with surprise and delight.

"Your, Your Royal Highness...." Eyes wide, he shot to his feet and grabbed Ghost Dragon.

"The crown prince of the North Sea dragons is dead. I am Ghost Dragon." Ghost Dragon's voice was calm as still water. "Will you follow me... for revenge, Wuming?"

"This subordinate is at your service!" Wuming said without hesitation. "I will destroy the cretin of the Untroubled Sea!"

“Untroubled Sea?” Ghost Dragon shook his head. “A mere Qi Clan of the Untroubled Sea wasn’t powerful enough to go against our imperial clan.”

He tipped his head back, allowing two beams of black light to burst from his eyes and penetrate the firmament to reach a sky beyond the sky.

“Was it... them?” Wuming shuddered. “But... they’re dead as well.”

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There was no water on the outskirts of the tomb, but as Lu Yun and Qing Han continued deeper inside, the air grew increasingly humid. They started to run into other immortals who’d entered to explore the tomb.

“You’re looking a bit off, Lu Yun. Is everything alright?” Qing Han looked worriedly at Lu Yun’s paling face. He was in constant communication with the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals. If anything happened, he could summon the Azure Dragon King at the drop of a hat.

“Oh? Aren’t you two Lu Yun and Qing Han?” A golden immortal came up to them out of the blue and scanned them with a derisive look. “Tsk, tsk, great timing. I just found a chamber filled with treasure that can only be opened by human sacrifice. You two will come with me.”

Before the two of them could react, the golden immortal whisked them away with a wave of his hand.

Many around them had witnessed the ‘invitation’, but didn’t dare do anything about it.

“I was among the spectating crowd back on Immortal Sky Island, but I never asked anything of him,” muttered a peerless immortal as he looked at the direction the golden immortal had disappeared in. “I don’t have to risk offending the fiend from the Star Demon Sect for him.”

“It’s better this way! The two of them restored the path of cultivation and caused the obsolescence of us immortals. We owe them nothing, so why should we save them?” scoffed another immortal.

“If that demon hadn’t taken them away, I would’ve torn the unruly brats apart myself.”

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“My young lords!” After traveling a great distance, the golden immortal plopped down on the ground with his face as pale as a sheet. Pouring with perspiration, cold sweat soaked his clothes to the point that it looked as if he’d just gotten out of water.

“What did the two of you enter this tomb for? If I hadn’t reacted quickly enough, those immortals would’ve skinned you alive!” The golden immortal panted heavily, casting Lu Yun and Qing Han an exasperated look.

“Um....” Lu Yun paused. He’d been poised for a fight and didn’t know how he should react now. He’d sensed the malice of the immortals around them earlier, but why would this golden immortal protect them? He hadn’t refined anything for this man back on Immortal Sky Island.

“This subordinate is golden immortal Situ Yun from the Star Demon Sect, young lords.” He bowed to Lu Yun and Qing Han.

“Eh, ah... ah. Demon? You have something to do with the Skandha Range?” Lu Yun looked at him in surprise. He didn’t remember such a sect being under the Skandha Range’s banner.

“That’s right.” Situ Yun nodded. “My sect was established by the five lords of the Skandha Range as a secret weapon. Even the honored Willow God doesn’t know.”

There were no secrets about the Skandha Range that hadn’t been plumbed by the major factions of the world. Even Wellspring, an old recluse, was known to the world. If anything were to happen, the forces that the Skandha Range had planted across the world would be eliminated in full. This was why the leaders of the Skandha Range had established the Star Demon Sect.

However, this had been kept a secret from the desolate willow. It was suspected that the Skandha Range had spies among them, so not even the followers of the desolate willow could be trusted.

Situ Yun was patently a core member of the Skandha Range as well, or he wouldn’t have known about the truth of the sect.

“The five forefathers received news that you two are the real masters of the Skandha Range. That’s why—”

“The real masters of the Skandha Range?” a chilling voice interrupted Situ Yun. “Well isn’t this a delightful surprise. So the Star Demon Sect serves the Skandha Range as well!”

Chapter 344: Dragon Whelp

“Who’s that!” Every hair on Situ Yun’s body stood up at the sound.

This safe spot was the handiwork of a Star Demon Sect dao immortal. Without the sect’s specialized techniques, outsiders wouldn’t even notice this place’s existence, much less be able to enter. And without that assurance of security, he wouldn’t have spoken his sect’s secrets so plainly. An unwelcome guest was unfathomable and most alarming!

Turning, Situ Yun caught sight of a deathly pale man in a black robe. The stranger stalked toward him with a deliberate, malicious smile.

Blood immediately drained from Situ Yun’s face, and he extended his arms protectively, standing in front of Lu Yun and Qing Han. The man in black was an aether dao immortal, but even that was more than enough to overwhelm him.

“Don’t worry.” Lu Yun patted Situ Yun lightly on the shoulder.

Fire flashed across his palm, accompanied by something’s pained shriek. Situ Yun felt a great weight lift from his body, like a sinister cloud had departed from him. He recovered his composure in the next instant and looked inquisitively at his savior.

“Don’t worry, he’s already dead. No living person can cross that barrier,” Lu Yun intoned calmly.

“What did you say?!” The black-robed dao immortal blinked in surprise, then snorted. “Are you mad, Lu Yun? Have you started raving in your delirium?”

“Some people have a hard time realizing they’re dead... somehow, they’ve fooled themselves into thinking they’re still alive.”

Gazing thoughtfully at the dao immortal, Lu Yun exhaled wistfully. A tiny, pitch-black dragon whelp lay upon black-robe’s back. Even as he spoke, it was sucking the dao immortal’s soul and spirit out of his body, little by little.

Although a dao immortal had a refined true spirit that could persist beyond the disintegration of his soul, the black dragon whelp’s unchecked consumption of the entire essence of his being was going completely unnoticed. Much like a greedy parasite, its work would cease only when its host had nothing left to offer.

A person’s entire existence hinged on the persistence of their true spirit, along with their three ethereal and seven corporal soul-parts. What would happen once those were gone?

A similar whelp had been latched onto Situ Yun earlier, but the attachment had clearly been rather recent: only one ethereal and two corporal soul-parts had been affected. After Lu Yun burned the parasite away, the soul-parts had returned to their rightful owner.

The remaining whelp glared at Lu Yun through its blood-red eyes, clearly wary of the human youth. It had seen the death of its comrade beneath his fingers all too clearly.

Two black embers flared from Lu Yun’s eyes, eliciting a violent tremor from the whelp. With a meal-finishing slurp and a flick of its tail, it vanished into the void.

“You....” The dao immortal was interrupted mid-sentence as he felt his consciousness sink into an endless darkness.

Thump!

The man keeled over to the ground, unmoving and unbreathing.

Situ Yun’s eyes widened. An aether dao immortal had died without so much as a whimper... and he had no idea how!

Qing Han glanced at his friend.

“Take this talisman.” Lu Yun handed over a crystal talisman. “It involves my greatest secret,” he transmitted. “If anyone else gets their hands on it, I won’t have a single safe place left in the world.”

His Spectral Eye could see through life and death; no ghost or specter in the world could hide their existence or identities from him. If anyone at all knew about his power, he’d become the target of countless immortals from all over the world of immortals.

Qing Han faltered a moment, then crumbled the talisman in his hand.

“When we both have enough strength... then, and only then, should you tell me everything. For now, you just need to protect me!” he replied with equal gravity.

Chuckling helplessly, Lu Yun could only nod.

The young governor's ability to revive dead immortals was already placing tremendous pressure on Qing Han's mind. Accidentally leaking that detail alone would be enough to put Lu Yun's life in danger. And now his friend wanted to give him a talisman with an even greater mystery? There was no way he'd take that!

Lu Yun's secrets were best kept to himself.

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"What... what in the world happened here?" Situ Yun asked incredulously.

"It'd be easier for you to understand that he was possessed by a special kind of immortal ghost," explained Lu Yun. "The same happened to you as well, just now."

Situ Yun shuddered involuntarily.

It wasn't his first time inside an ancient tomb, so he knew what immortal ghosts were capable of. They could cling to the living undetected, affect their actions, and sometimes, even devour their soul and spirit.

As such, habitual tomb explorers often carried treasures meant to counteract their influence. This was especially true for immortals from large factions like himself. He hurriedly pulled out a jade talisman from his clothes.

Craaack!

The jade talisman fissured as he held it, its power dissipating.

"You're right... what a terrifying ghost that was!" Situ Yun gasped. "My Principal Nineheavens Talisman should be able to fend off peerless immortal ghosts... but it was demolished in that encounter."

"Principal Nineheavens Talisman?" Lu Yun took the broken talisman to examine it. "What an interesting talisman! It does have the power to ward off ghosts. I guess it makes sense. A hundred thousand years is a long time, after all, so weird gadgets like this are bound to have turned up."

He studied it further before drawing a copy of the talisman in the void.

"Your Principal Nineheavens Talisman was created by a dao immortal and his dao fruit. The talisman I drew just now only resembles the real thing... it might do the job, alright, but it's a lot weaker." Lu Yun shook his head in mild displeasure and Situ Yun's jaw dropped even further.

The talisman he had was a find from an ancient tomb, not a senior's handiwork. The method to draw it should've been lost! Yet Lu Yun had transcribed one right before his eyes!

"This is a real Principal Nineheavens Talisman!" Situ Yun received the new talisman with trembling fingers and wide eyes, still incredulous of what he'd just witnessed. "As expected, drawing a lost talisman is no problem for our young lord!"

The connection seemed to assure and inspire him, and his expression changed to one of obvious confidence. Lu Yun was the true master of the Skandha Range. For the great demon sovereign to speak personally on his behalf... of course there had to be something more to this young man!

“Young lord!” The Star Demon member abruptly sobered up. “You can’t tell anyone about your ability to draw the Principal Nineheavens Talisman. Its ability to restrain ghosts, combined with its present extinction....”

“Why can’t I?” Lu Yun raised a puzzled eyebrow. “If the technique for it is extinct, doesn’t that mean there’s a business opportunity here?”

Chapter 345: Cosmic Skycarver

Although his plundering of the North Sea court had made him probably the richest man in the world, his wealth was a far cry from any one of the leading races or factions’. The North Sea court was a relatively young faction, barely ten thousand years old, and its accumulated fortune simply wasn’t comparable to its older, more illustrious peers.

Plus, Lu Yun would never complain about having too much money. If he didn’t figure out how to generate revenue, his two trillion crystals would still eventually be exhausted. Dusk Province’s development demanded investment everywhere.

The poison Qing Han was afflicted with had distracted him from these considerations, but now that the thought struck him, it couldn’t be dismissed.

Indeed, Situ Yun’s words had inspired him with even more ideas. It wasn’t just the Principal Nineheavens Talisman; the Weaponry, Yu, and Tai Talismans he’d used before were also good candidates for a line of merchandise. Add some combat art talismans to the mix, and he’d have quite a lineup.

Lu Yun dared not undertake such a venture alone; certain ancient factions wouldn’t take the disruption of their monopoly well. However, having the Skandha Range and Panorama Pavilion as backers permitted him to be a bit more daring.

Formations and layouts aside, the most fearsome features in an ancient tomb were its immortal ghosts and zombies. If he could market and distribute a product designed to counteract them...

Every immortal everywhere would remember his name. He would harvest an endless amount of goodwill!

No, it went even beyond that; such a gesture would grant him considerable virtuous merit!

He’d only been a guardian of the Dao Flower’s bloom, which meant the incredible amount of virtuous merit generated from that event had largely passed him by. There was more to the idea than simple profit, too. Lu Yun’s greatest dream was for his tomb raiding sect to flourish in this world. His forebears’ knowledge deserved prestige, renown, and the greatest of glory.

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What he heard flabbergasted Situ Yun. He couldn’t understand the young lord at all. Sell... the Principal Nineheavens Talisman... for money?

They were talking about the same thing, right? A treasure that could suppress immortal ghosts? Having something like that when delving tombs increased one’s survival rate by at least thirty percent. In other words, it was priceless!

Whoever owned such a technique would keep it to themselves, no doubt, and use it to develop a new faction worthy of competing at the very top.

Hum.

The barrier shimmered, opening to accommodate the entry of a dozen harried individuals from the outside.

An old man in red led the pack. Blood trickled down the corner of his mouth, and he had a few rather prominent holes in him. Evidently, he'd been ferociously assaulted before fleeing here. The others behind him were also injured to varying degrees.

"Master!" Situ Yun's expression changed drastically and he rushed forward to support the elder.

"Don't touch him!" Tensing, Lu Yun jumped between Situ Yun and the old man.

"Out!" The black embers in his eyes and the verbal command combined to send a rattle through space.

A pack of fearful wills beat a hasty retreat as they scrambled in the other direction through the barrier. Clearly, the dozen cultivators here had borne the same ghostly dragon whelps from earlier.

Lu Yun produced a jade bottle in his hand and crushed it, filling the entirety of the barrier's interior with an emerald light filled the entirety and bringing color back to the harassed refugees' faces.

It was healing mist Su Xiaoxiao had left behind before her departure. Far more potent than most pills, it had the additional advantage of not requiring oral consumption. Instead, it acted instantly upon the wounded's injuries.

"Thank you for saving my life, young lord... but, if I may ask, why are you here?" Situ Yun's master's expression shifted in an inexplicable way. Without Lu Yun's intervention, he would've died within the hour.

Alas, the young man's presence was also cause for a different concern. Multiple great clans—Dongling, Qing, Feng, and Ling among them—were baying for his blood. The Ling Clan had even put a dao-grade treasure as a bounty on his head. The Exalted Immortal Clan could also be added to that list.

For Lu Yun to come here, into the skydragon tomb, was tantamount to suicide. The tomb alone held dangers that were lethal to any cultivator, and Lu Yun and Qing Han's status as infamous celebrities meant they'd be recognized on sight.

"Heh heh heh... so the Star Demon Sect has a hideout here, eh? Shatter that barrier!" A smug laugh sounded outside, followed by an intense barrage of blows. The barrier began to crack and quaver under the stress.

"Give up the Cosmic Skycarver! If you relinquish that connate treasure, I'll consider letting you go once." After a brief pause, the same voice uttered an ultimatum.

"Fine, you can have it!" The master named Situ Zong glanced worriedly at Lu Yun, then clenched his teeth in resignation.

“Hahaha... I changed my mind again. Every criminal from the Star Demon Sect deserves to be exterminated. You’re going to die here no matter what you do!” The arrogant voice grew to a maddening crescendo as despair crept onto Situ Zong’s face.

“Cover the young lord’s retreat at all costs!” The old man’s order was a little impotent. There were two arcane dao immortals outside! He’d managed to safeguard these disciples’ previous flight only by using everything at his disposal. There was no more he could do.

“Hold on,” Lu Yun shook his head in disapproval. “Show me that Cosmic Skycarver.”

He ignored the immortals outside. There were two arcane dao immortals of his own in hell, and the two outside had only plucked one fruit each and were no match for Bing Ling and Bing Xuan.

Although he was momentarily taken aback, Situ Zong did as Lu Yun asked and handed over an odd-looking sword. Precisely one-and-one-tenth meters long, the sword glittered with sparkling starlight. It was as if the blade had been forged from pure star stuff.

“That is the real Cosmic Skycarver! The divine sword formed from the limitless power of the cosmos!” Empress Myrtlestar and the Azure Dragon King shouted in unison from inside the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals.

The connate divine sword was well known even in the ancient world. Wherever it went, a trail of blood was sure to follow.

“Young lord....” Situ Zong was rather upset with the young man’s fixation on treasure. This really wasn’t the time for that, was it?

“Don’t worry. I didn’t come here to be scared of a few pieces of trash.” Lu Yun handed the Skycarver to Qing Han. “Take the sword for now. Give the Pelagic Orb from before to Situ Zong. It matches his constitution well, so it’ll be strongest in his hands.”

Qing Han’s eyes had been glued to the Cosmic Skycarver as soon as the starry sword appeared, and he was overjoyed to be given something he liked so much.

The Star Demon Sect’s other members shared in their senior’s visible displeasure.

Although Lu Yun and Qing Han were the sect’s young lords in name, its ordinary immortals didn’t particularly respect them. If not for the five ancestors’ orders, those outside the inner circle would pay no heed to the two youths.

Watching the treasure they’d risked life and limb for being given to someone they had nothing to do with... it just didn’t feel right. The Pelagic Orb? What the heck was that? How could it be more precious than a connate-grade treasure?

Situ Zong smiled weakly.

“This is the Pelagic Orb, a connate-grade treasure good for both offense and defense. It’s no match for the Cosmic Skycarver, but it suits you the best.” Qing Han handed over a greyish-looking orb.

“This! This is a water-attribute treasure! And connate-grade, did you say?!” Situ Zong’s pupils dilated in shock.

Despite having a rather unassuming color and appearance, the Pelagic Orb contained intensely concentrated water energy. To wield it was to command the power of connate water.

Situ Zong's spirit root and methods were uniformly of the water attribute. Skycarver had been far too unique for him to communicate with, despite trying with everything he had, but using the Pelagic Orb came naturally to him.

"Hahahaha!" The old man roared with unbridled laughter. "With this treasure, what do I have to fear from the Witherdew rabble? Situ thanks the young lord!"

His fingers practically scrabbled for the orb. As soon as he had it in his hands, he began refining it—the mild annoyance from earlier had vanished without a trace.

The more junior members traded confused glances with each other.

"Ingrates, the lot of you! The treasure the young lord used to save your lives just now was worth at least ten thousand times as much as your worthless hides!" Situ Yun snorted.

The other immortals reddened with awkward embarrassment.

Outside the barrier, the Witherdew immortals' attacks grew ever fiercer. By then, the two arcane dao immortals had joined the fray.

Boom!

Roughly a hundred breaths later, the previously sturdy barrier was finally shattered.

"Hahaha—demon leaders, prepare to die!" A group of uniformed immortals charged in.

"Hmm? What is this place?" An immortal clad in gold armor paled. He swiveled his head at his surroundings in bewildered disbelief. They'd entered a world of endless water. Its elemental purity was stretched in every direction they could see.

"This is the Pelagic World." Situ Zong's voice echoed slowly through the void.

Chapter 346: Young Masters

The Pelagic World. The Pelagic Orb contained a real minor world!

Situ Zong could unleash it right after completing an initial refinement of the treasure. The power of a standalone world rendered even arcane dao immortals helpless, and the treasure seized them without difficulty.

Nevertheless, Situ Zong hadn't fully refined the Pelagic Orb yet. He could trap the Witherdew immortals, but not kill them. After all, there were still two arcane dao immortals among them.

Initial arcane dao immortal came right after peak aether dao immortal realm, but the differences between the two were night and day. Only by fully refining the Pelagic Orb could Situ Zong kill arcane dao immortals.

"Young lords!" With a wave of his hand, Situ Zong scattered the world of pure water and handed the greyish orb back to Qing Han with both hands, his longing gaze firmly glued to the treasure.

“Keep it,” Qing Han said with a smile when he noted Situ Zong’s expression. “I’m not taking the Cosmic Skycarver from you without giving you something back.”

Situ Zong then glanced at Lu Yun. Only when he received a nod of approval did he put the orb away with great delight.

“Don’t use it in public, though,” Lu Yun cautioned solemnly, “or you’ll be in a world of trouble.”

“Hahaha!” Situ Zong laughed heartily. “Don’t worry, young lord. We of the Star Demon Sect fear no trouble!”

He was a peak aether dao immortal and he’d gained a treasure that perfectly fit his abilities. He’d never felt more confident than he was now. A little trouble didn’t seem to warrant any consideration at all.

“Was the treasure acquired through unscrupulous means?” he asked in sudden realization.

Lu Yun and Qing Han shrugged in unison.

“Hehehe, the young lords worry too much. The Star Demon Sect is the greatest demon sect in the world of immortals. Not even the leaders of the nine majors, ten lands, and four immortal seas can do anything to us!”

Self-satisfaction percolated through his expression. He’d even just kidnapped the two arcane dao immortals from Witherdew Major without hesitation. Once they left the dragon tomb, he planned to make the Witherdew court ransom the two of them.

The sect was currently the greatest demon faction in the world. Even the Skandha Range, the so-called demon sacred land, paled in comparison.

The Skandha Range was a loosely-organized group, with the mountain range in Dusk Province being its only semblance of a homebase. It wasn’t a sect, per se. Despite the great solidarity it inspired, it wasn’t as powerful as the Star Demon Sect.

That was, of course, if one didn’t consider the fact that the sect was actually part of the Skandha Range itself.

“That’s good.” Lu Yun nodded. “It seems that I’ve worried too much. Considering the sect’s power, you aren’t going to fear the North Sea court, are you?”

“That’s right. Just a North Sea—” Situ Zong widened his eyes and turned to Situ Yun in confusion. “Wait, the North Sea court?!”

Situ Yun and the other disciples exchanged befuddled glances as well. A bad feeling about all this was creeping up on them.

“Did you take the Pelagic Orb from elites of the North Sea court, young lord?” Situ Zong asked delicately, pushing aside baseless speculation.

“I raided the North Sea palace,” Lu Yun said bluntly, “and found it in their vault.”

Situ Zong and the others felt as if the rug had been pulled out from beneath their feet.

The Pelagic Orb suddenly felt scorching hot in Situ Zong's hand. He wanted to thrust the treasure back to Qing Han, but the perfect match between the treasure and his own power made him more than a bit reluctant. Conflicted emotions clashed against each other in his chest as his heart pounded in involuntary excitement.

Meanwhile, Situ Yun and other younger immortals looked at Lu Yun with strange expressions. Though they'd been exploring the dragon tomb, they weren't completely cut off from the outside world. Communication talismans still maintained a connection with those outside, and news about the North Sea Palace happenings had reached them over the past few days.

The plaque that read 'North Sea, Home of Worms', the raid on the North Sea palace... and then the theft of the entire palace itself.

Emperor Beigong Xuan, who'd reached the heart of the dragon tomb, had just about lost his mind. He'd sent his trusted subordinate Bing Xuan to deal with the issue, but the arcane dao immortal had then gone missing as well.

Hearing the two youths admit to their crime, Situ Zong could barely keep himself upright.

"Are you really responsible for that, young lords?" Situ Yun's eyes lit up.

"Why should we lie?" Qing Han understood Lu Yun's intentions. When Witherdew Major asked Situ Zong for the Cosmic Skycarver in exchange for leniency, he'd agreed immediately. It wasn't that he feared death, but that he wanted to protect Lu Yun and Qing Han.

Therefore, it wouldn't do them any harm to tell Situ Zong and the others the truth. In fact, it would enable Situ Zong to have the sect prepare for coming danger.

Lu Yun didn't think he'd be able to keep the secret for very long. The North Sea court would find clues leading them to him, sooner or later. Even if Beigong Xuan couldn't find the real perpetrators, he'd pin the blame on Lu Yun anyway, using it as an excuse to invade Dusk Province.

There were signs that the North Sea was already prepared for such an invasion. Even Ingress Island and the Dark North Sword Sect had similar plans.

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The sudden emergence of the two young lords had been met with skepticism from some of the disciples of the Star Demon Sect, but now all skeptics were looking at Lu Yun and Qing Han with eyes shining of hero worship.

Only now did they truly accept the two youths. They were no regular young lords, but their most venerated masters, their most revered on high! They had the grit and strength to raid the North Sea court!

The Star Demon Sect venerated the powerful. Even though Qing Han had restored the Dao Flower, and Lu Yun had protected it, they considered it blind luck for the two to have stumbled upon the flower.

Lu Yun being the top youth sovereign meant nothing to them. Without ascending to immortality, all cultivators were mere ants.

Now, their attitudes went through a complete reversal. No one questioned Lu Yun's words. What they'd just admitted to would make them an enemy of all the North Sea monster spirits! No one would touch the crime with a ten-foot pole, let alone admit to being the ones responsible.

"Where else in the North Sea are you going to find such connate-grade treasures?" Qing Han remarked with a smile. "Alright, refine the Pelagic Orb. You'll be of use later!"

Chapter 347: Buying Loyalty

In Qing Han's eyes, Situ Zong's lack of finesse was clear as day. The Pelagic Orb wasn't fully his yet; he needed more time.

Although the Star Demon senior could make use of some of the orb's functions, other dao immortals were perfectly capable of taking it from his hands.

"Young lord," Situ Zong replied with a helpless smile, "the Pelagic Orb is a connate-grade treasure. I need at least a hundred years of hard work to properly refine something like this."

His current state was a far cry from complete ownership. A completely refined connate treasure meant that the treasure recognized the wielder as its master, who could then deploy it as effortlessly and fully as an extension of their own limbs.

Currently, Situ Zong was merely injecting his own power into the treasure to empower it. Wielding the orb was actually a considerable burden on him.

Qing Han glanced at Lu Yun, who quickly shared Situ Zong's expression in turn. His friend seemed to think he was some kind of omnipotent deity. Perhaps he was even a little worshipful of Lu Yun?

Shaking his head, the young man began to draw talismans in the void.

"That's an ultimate skill, talismans from the void!" Situ Zong's pupils dilated in mesmerized fixation as he watched Lu Yun's fingers dance in the air.

After a hundred breaths or so, a stack of that many talismans appeared in Lu Yun's hand.

"Here, some Treasure Refining Talismans—a hundred, to be precise. Each is worth a year of effort. If you use all of them at once, it should help you fully refine the treasure... in theory," he said calmly.

Xuanxi had invented this talisman ten thousand years ago as a helpful tool, useful for immortals who were in a rush to refine their treasures. After she became the Dusk River God, its method of manufacture was slowly lost to history.

Of course, her original version hadn't been capable of assisting with a connate-grade treasure; the Tome of Life and Death's power had filled that particular gap.

"Treasure Refining Talismans? The very same ones lost for ten thousand years?!" Situ Zong was astounded. As an old man who'd lived for twenty thousand years, he'd certainly heard about the existence of such a thing, but had never been lucky enough to see one personally... until now.

Lu Yun had drawn a full hundred of them on the spot!

“Young lord, these talismans are too valuable!” Situ Zong hurriedly put the stack away. “They’re both extinct and incredibly potent. Showing them off would only attract unscrupulous eyes! I recommend being more discreet in the future...”

“Master.” Situ Yun tugged at his teacher’s sleeve. “I don’t think they’re worth much to the young lord. Just now, he drew a Principal Nineheavens Talisman for me!”

Situ Zong’s face froze in the middle of his best goldfish imitation, and he looked at Lu Yun like one would a monster. No wonder the sect’s five heavyweights had issued orders to respect the young lords’ authorities. There was a very good reason after all!

The two youths’ raid on the North Sea monster palace earlier had benefited from expert help covering any trouble that arose from their actions, but Lu Yun’s unbelievable show of skill just now was all his own.

When Situ Yun transmitted the young lord’s plans to his master, Situ Zong’s face ran through the purple gradient before he let out a long sigh. “You have a big heart, young lord. Your ambition is grand indeed.”

Taking the talismans back out, he began to use them straight away.

Xuanxi’s talisman skills were unmatched, even when compared to many of her ancient peers. In addition, the Tome of Life and Death had bolstered her talents, allowing her latest invention to apply to connate-grade treasures as well.

Indeed, every envoy across the board had grown stronger, thanks to the book. Their frequent internal discussions in research and development had even sparked several inventions unseen in the ancient world.

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The hundred talismans helped Situ Zong get through the initial stages of complete refinement very quickly, and the connate treasure finally recognized itself as his. However, the old man ultimately decided against killing the trapped immortals from Witherdew.

If the two arcane dao immortals died here, the Star Demon Sect would make an unmitigated enemy of Witherdew Major and its government would spare no expense in eradicating them. Not exactly a good idea, considering the sect headquarters was there.

No, it’d be far better to claim a ransom for those people’s lives. Any treasures gained wouldn’t burn their fingers nearly as much.

Judging from their equanimous demeanors, the two dao immortals from Witherdew Major thought the same thing.

Lu Yun wasn’t the least bit interested in the prisoners. He was already facing the full power of Nephrite Major; doubling that stress would be utterly foolish.

“Take me to where you obtained the Cosmic Skycarver!” Qing Han pounced when Situ Zong opened his eyes. “The sword isn’t quite complete—there’s a crucial component missing!”

“Of course!” Situ Zong answered readily. “Disciples,” he turned to the other sect members, “You are free to look for treasures elsewhere in the tomb. Situ Yun and I will accompany the young lords to that place.”

The dragon tomb was enormous and treasures could be found around every corner. The Star Demon Sect had made their foray here to acquire loot and train the younglings; it wouldn't do for them to follow Situ Zong around the entire time.

Plus, sticking together made them a much bigger target. As a group, they were vulnerable to being annihilated all at once. In fact, that was the reason they'd been detected by the Witherdew dao immortals in the first place.

Strength and luck were both important factors in raiding a tomb.

“Hold on,” Lu Yun called out to the departing juniors. “Take these Principal Nineheavens Talismans with you. They'll spare you from the threat of the immortal ghosts here.”

Lu Yun passed out a dozen of the talismans around the room. He'd drawn the lot of them himself. They weren't quite duplicates with the strength of the original, since he wasn't a dao immortal himself, but the hellfire he added to his own version arguably made them better at repelling ghosts.

The recipients gasped with uniform astonishment. They were Star Demon's core disciples in their own right, but Situ Yun far outranked them. None of them were remotely important enough to carry something as nice as a Principal Nineheavens Talisman.

Lu Yun's kind gesture was reciprocated with a flood of goodwill, flowing back into his body.

“Accept what the young lord is offering you!” Situ Zong laughed at his juniors' hesitation. Lu Yun's attempt at buying loyalty was proving to be quite effective!

“Thank you very much... young lords!” The dozen disciples knelt to the ground. At this moment, all of them, including Situ Zong, finally wholly accepted the ‘young lord’ before them as their own.

Chapter 348: Rumormongering

The Star Demon disciples were a mix of peerless, arcane, and golden immortals. As long as the group didn't delve too deeply into the tomb, they would be quite safe. It was Situ Zong's overconfidence that had led to their encirclement by the Witherdew immortals.

Or rather, it was fairer to say the Witherdew immortals had waited for them to find the Cosmic Skycarver before tightening the noose.

With Lu Yun and Qing Han in tow, the old man took much more care in leading their group for a return visit. He'd brought his disciple along for somewhat selfish reasons; if his disciple became closer to the two young lords, he would surely increase in status in the sect as well!

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Traveling without much event through the tomb, the quartet came to a broken formation. Designed to protect the tomb's depths, it had only been broken at the cost of three dao immortals' lives.

This was the only path that led further in.

“Halt, intruder!” Two aether dao immortals appeared out of nowhere to block off the entrance.

“The Donglin Clan paid dao immortal blood to tear this formation open. If you wish to pass, the fee is a hundred million premium crystals!” announced a woman with a coolly aloof expression.

Just like Situ Zong, she was an aether dao immortal. However, she had an edge over him in having a preliminary understanding of arcane dao. Strictly speaking, she needed only to pluck an appropriate fruit to immediately achieve arcane dao immortality.

She wasn't quite strong enough for that right now, but still.

“What's going on here?” Situ Zong colored slightly. When he'd been here earlier, there had been no checkpoint. The Donglin Clan's new lockdown was cause for concern.

“A treasure must've appeared inside,” murmured Lu Yun.

“The North Sea court has also lost a dao immortal. If you wish to enter, you must pay us the same amount,” the other aether dao immortal chimed in.

“I don't mind paying Fairy Biying here, but who do you think you are? Your pathetic little snake nest just got turned upside down only recently, how dare you lord yourself over the rest of us!” an arcane dao immortal disagreed angrily; he was already preparing to force his way through. He'd arrived later than the others, drawn by the news of a valuable treasure emerging and a request for backup.

He wasn't the only one; the other surrounding immortals looked similarly eager to hack their way in.

“Hmph!” the North Sea aether dao immortal brooded. “You are very much right. The North Sea court is fighting tooth and nail for our own survival. Therefore... His Majesty is no longer concerned with civilities. If you don't pay up here, don't expect to leave with your life!”

Everyone knew that the North Sea Emperor was an absolute powerhouse with eight arcane dao fruits. Immortals with nine were all working very hard to suppress their cultivation; they rarely fought or put in an appearance.

Without their intervention, Beigong Xuan could be considered one of the strongest in the world. He was more than capable of crushing everyone in the tomb.

The blatant threat from the North Sea dao immortal caused a flurry of commotion from the others.

The North Sea court was on the brink of collapse. After the ransacking of his palace, Beigong Xuan's temper was more unpredictable than ever. Who could possibly defy him?

“Moreover....” Suddenly, the peak aether dao immortal from the North Sea looked past Situ Zong's protection. “Lu Yun! His Majesty has said that you may take our treasure and palace, but you must return the dragon vein. If you do that, he will grant you safe passage out of the North Sea... this time.”

It was as if the monster immortal had dumped a bucket of icy water on Lu Yun's head. He hadn't expected Beigong Xuan to figure everything out so soon.

The gathering instantly focused their attention on him. The one who'd looted the palace was Lu Yun? Really?!

Is he bluffing? Maybe this is an excuse to attack Dusk Province in the near future.... Lu Yun's head spun with racing thoughts. Where had he gone wrong? ...Xue Daozi!

His heart sank upon the realization. Before the palace treasury raid, Xue Daozi had fought Beigong Xuan without concealing his identity.

Lu Yun's Shapeshifting Talismans were ineffective on his ghostly servants. Xue Daozi's earlier appearance on Immortal Sky Island—stomping a number of Ling Clan immortals underfoot—had helped him intimidate onlookers at the time. However, that ended up becoming his downfall in the end.

Alas, Lu Yun hadn't had any other options at the time. Failing to daunt the potential criminals there would've only made him a joke.

At the end of the day, he was still too wet behind the ears. His two lifetimes added together, plus the time spent in hell, were barely a fraction compared to some of the oldest immortals. He was maturing with the passage of time, but his plans were rarely perfect.

"Hahaha—" The young man walked out from Situ Zong's protection with a confident laugh.

Ray after ray of killing intent instantly locked onto him. Even Donglin Biying, standing off to the side, made no attempt to veil her murderous inclinations for him. Her clan's last patriarch had died in Dusk Province under Lu Yun's machinations.

"The North Sea court? We already have a bitter grudge between us. Why should I return your dragon vein to you?" Lu Yun's words caused another wave of gasps.

Many in the audience had initially been doubtful of the North Sea's claims. Had Lu Yun really robbed their palace blind?

What the young man had said just now was a much clearer admission.

"The North Sea and the Donglin Clan both lost a dao immortal. Is that your reason for collecting a toll? Should the faction who lost their own dao immortal to the tomb's restriction outside do the same thing, then?"

Lu Yun didn't care about the Donglin Clan or the North Sea court. Both were his enemies; it was even quite possible the former hated him more than the latter.

"Ah, I get it now. You two just want the treasure inside all to yourselves. You guys aren't stupid enough to believe Beigong Xuan won't kill all of you just 'cause you paid up, right?" he cackled to the crowd.

"I'll let you all in on a little secret. Beigong Xuan's already picked his ninth arcane dao fruit without anyone realizing it! He's even figured out how to pluck an origin dao fruit, too!

"Make no mistake, he'll get there as soon as he's strong enough. I just wonder, which major—which land—or which immortal sea will lose its heavenly mandate to him?" The young man spoke in an even tone, clearly articulating his words into everyone's ears.

There was an involuntary shiver from the audience.

“Absolutely absurd!” The aether dao immortal reddened with anger. Lu Yun was rumormongering! This was slander, pure and simple!

“Absolutely absurd?” Lu Yun shook his head slightly. “Plucking an origin dao fruit involves fighting those strange, long-haired monsters. Tsk tsk, I’ve fought them myself, you know! When I met Beigong Xuan, I sensed a power from him that could counter them.

“What reason have you to doubt my words? Beigong Xuan had a replica inside the palace. That’s how he knew it was me! How else would we come face to face?” His last statements served as the final nail in the coffin. “Beigong Xuan must need the dragon vein for plucking origin dao fruit. Why else would he only want the vein back?”

Chapter 349: Might of the Black Emperor

Lu Yun might be rumormongering, but he was doing so with solemn sincerity. There was great conviction behind his tone, and everything he said hit a nerve.

Although the aether dao immortal from the North Sea Court knew Lu Yun was blatantly making things up, it didn’t stop a seed of doubt from being planted in his heart. Had His Majesty really discovered the way to pick an origin dao fruit?

His hesitation didn’t escape the attention of the onlooking immortals. Donglin Biying, especially, took note of his strange reaction. Lu Yun is probably telling the truth! That Beigong Xuan really has found a way to pluck an origin dao fruit!

“You are right, Lu Yun.” The voice of the aether dao immortal of the North Sea shifted into a low and booming timbre. Even his presence underwent a complete transformation.

Beigong Xuan!

The North Sea emperor had descended upon the aether dao immortal and temporarily replaced his consciousness. His sudden emergence alerted the other immortals and they backed away, readying themselves for battle, worried that the monster spirit emperor would go on a sudden killing spree.

“We have found a way to pluck origin dao fruit.”

Silence rang after that admission. Lu Yun frowned, but didn’t say anything.

“Wouldn’t you like to know what it is?” Beigong Xuan smiled faintly. “It is to infuse the Divine Seaward Iron—Our clan’s treasure—with the power of the dragon vein in order to leverage the might of the four seas and form a heavenly mandate. With the mandate of the four seas as protection, one will be able to safely pick the fruit.

“However, you’ve stolen both Our dragon vein and Our clan treasure.” Beigong Xuan put his arms behind his back, his smile dropping from his face.

The celestial emperors of the nine majors were able to ascend to the origin dao realm because they were protected by heavenly mandates, which allowed them to pluck their dao fruit. With heavenly mandates tamed by past celestial emperors, all new celestial emperors gained their mandate’s

recognition and protection as soon as they assumed the throne. Cultivation thus became the only prerequisite for their ascension.

Nevertheless, in order to become real celestial emperors, they would have to pluck nine origin dao fruit and inspire them to resonate in unison before the immortal could attract a heavenly mandate and refine it.

Of course, Lu Yun could tell Beigong Xuan was blowing hot air as well. He'd just made up rumors about Beigong Xuan, and in retaliation, Beigong Xuan had set him up.

A complex mix of expressions passed through the crowd's faces as they listened to the back and forth. They couldn't tell who was telling the truth. However, they had to take the claims seriously no matter their validity. Neither Beigong Xuan nor Lu Yun were the harmless sorts.

"Lu Daoling of the Lu Clan is one who's plucked nine arcane dao fruit," Beigong Xuan sneered. "With the foundation he built for himself, he'll pluck an origin dao fruit immediately after gaining the heavenly mandate of the four seas."

"Are you saying that my clan's ancestor is going to refine the heavenly mandate of the four seas with the Divine Seaward Iron?" Lu Yun smirked.

Thud!

With a wave of his hand, a black cannon clonked portentously to the ground, sending a tremor through the skydragon tomb.

The Black Emperor!

Lu Yun had melted the Divine Seaward Iron and refined the cannon based on the structure of various weapons of war.

Beigong Xuan's pupils contracted violently. "You... you destroyed Our clan treasure!!" he raged, eyeballs almost popping out in his fury. The Divine Seaward Iron was the divine treasure of the blackwater snakes, and all of the North Sea monster spirits. He instantly recognized the material used to refine the strange treasure before him.

"Hahaha!" Lu Yun broke into loud laughter. "Are you insulting your own intelligence with these lies, Beigong Xuan? Plucking origin dao fruit with the heavenly mandate of the four seas? The four seas are four spatial fragments identical to the vastless cosmos outside the world of immortals. They possess no heavenly mandates!

"So dragon veins are the key to you picking your origin dao fruit! If you've ever lost a dragon vein, folks," proclaimed the human youth, "it must have been stolen by Beigong Xuan!"

Beigong Xuan was already charging the youth with no holds barred. His true self wasn't here, but he was able to unleash the power of an arcane dao immortal with his consciousness attached to the peak aether dao immortal.

Situ Yun was ready to activate the Pelagic Orb, but Lu Yun reacted before he could. No sooner had Beigong Xuan moved a single muscle than Lu Yun burned a sum of three billion immortal crystals!

A beam of ghastly light shot out of the Black Emperor.

Bam!

The world fell silent.

“Fucking shit, this again?!” Deep within the dragon tomb, Beigong Xuan caterwauled with fury.

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“A, a weapon of war!!” someone screamed in terror. Lu Yun carried a weapon of war on him!

Didn’t those things need to be connected to an underground vein, and weren’t they immobile?! Why did Lu Yun have a weapon of war as part of his personal possessions?!

Everyone turned to him with dread. That one shot had been enough to kill an arcane dao immortal!

The peak aether dao immortal Beigong Xuan had possessed had evaporated under the attack and entered hell as Lu Yun’s Infernum. Even Donglin Biying, who’d been standing nearby, had suffered the same fate as well. The small crack they’d been blocking was now a giant hole three hundred meters across.

Situ Zong gaped, at a loss for words. Now he understood why Lu Yun and Qing Han had dared venture into the skydragon tomb on their own. The weapon of war alone was enough to kill anyone and anything!

“Alright,” Lu Yun said casually. “The opening’s big enough now, everyone may come and go freely. I’m not going to charge you anything.”

He flashed a warm smile—at least, he thought it was warm, but to others, it looked like the leer of a devil.

A heartbeat later, Lu Yun realized with resignation that he hadn’t gained any goodwill from the immortals around him. Clearly, he’d scared them out of their wits with that demonstration, and they scattered immediately.

Lu Yun rubbed his nose. “Am I really that scary?”

Situ Zong nodded blankly, not yet recovered from the shock.

“Not scary,” Qing Han responded with utmost seriousness, “but mighty!”

“Yes, the young lord is mighty!” Situ Yun agreed, excitement dancing across his face. Only someone who could kill dao immortals without any hesitation could be the young lord of the Star Demon Sect!

“Mm, yes, well said!” Lu Yun sent the Black Emperor back into hell.

“Young lord...” Situ Zong spoke up. “The weapon of war should be your secret weapon. Now it’s known to the world...”

“It’s what I used to destroy Beigong Xuan’s replica,” Lu Yun shook his head and continued, “so he knew about it already. I can at least get the most out of it by using it again. After all, I have you. Don’t use the Pelagic Orb without a good reason, it’s our real secret weapon!”

Situ Zong was momentarily overwhelmed, but then his expression froze. After a moment's thought, Lu Yun had taken the Black Emperor out again and rested it on Situ Zong's shoulder. The unwitting weapons bearer staggered and almost toppled to the ground.

"Keep this with you," Lu Yun said gravely, "and no one will come after us."

"So heavy..." Situ Zong agreed with a wry smile. The weapon really was too heavy. If his cultivation hadn't reached peak aether dao immortal realm, he wouldn't have been able to carry it.

Of course, Lu Yun didn't think the Pelagic Orb would be able to kill Beigong Xuan either. The Black Emperor was still his real trump card. The last attack had only burned three billion immortal crystals, but its maximum capacity was ten billion!

In other words, he'd only tapped into thirty percent of the cannon's full power.

Chapter 350: The Same Eyes

Lu Yun had noticed something unusual just now when unleashing the Black Emperor. Some of the North Sea's power seemed to have gathered on the cannon and amplified its might by roughly five percent.

Is it because of the Divine Seaward Iron?

Lu Yun had speculated that the cannon would be different from the other weapon of war replicas he'd refined even before it'd taken shape, but he was still pleasantly surprised by the result.

Layers upon layers of layouts and coiled mountains protected the North Sea skydragon tomb, preventing the power of the land from entering. And yet the Black Emperor had still managed to draw upon some of the North Sea's power to boost its own might.

If he were to use it outside the tomb...

What would happen then almost didn't bear imagining. Perhaps the Black Emperor would become a true weapon of war, capable of killing with the power of heaven and earth.

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"What's going on here?!" Lu Yun, Qing Han, and the two members of the Star Demon Sect came to a surprised halt when they entered the heart of the tomb.

Before them lay a world of shifting silver, layers of iridescent starlight isolating it from the outside. Thick, mist-like veils prevented them from seeing more than thirty meters away. Not even Situ Zong's sharp eyes could see through it.

"What's... what's this?" Hauling the Black Emperor on his shoulder, Situ Zong stared dumbly ahead. It felt as if he'd exited the tomb and entered a different world. "It wasn't like this last I came, there was no starlight."

"This is it, it's really it!" Qing Han exclaimed in excitement. "It's the Cosmic Sea, companion treasure to the Cosmic Skycarver!"

He looked at Lu Yun with sparkling eyes and cheered in a delighted tone, "You've hit a bottleneck in your sword dao, so further improvement will be challenging. However, with the help of the Cosmic Sea, you'll be able to make the leap!"

Qing Han was no less endowed with talent than Lu Yun. The Tome of Life and Death pushed Lu Yun's talent to incredible heights, while Qing Han enjoyed the blessings of the Dao Flower.

He could observe Lu Yun's progress in cultivation and identify the problems his friend faced. Lu Yun's sword dao had stagnated since he created his three personal sword techniques, and it was all because of his sword aura!

His sword aura had reached the realm of great perfection, but his customary sword ocean was now restricting and confining his intent from the pursuit of true freedom.

However free the deep blue was, it could never go beyond the parameters of itself. Such a narrow definition of freedom would naturally be restricted. When it broke free of the ocean, his sword aura would fall apart.

This completely obstructed his progress in sword dao.

In order to overcome those challenges, Lu Yun's sword aura would have to transcend itself and reach a higher level. The third of his personal techniques, Starstream Stroke, had long shown him the way.

A field of stars!

He would expand his sword ocean to encompass the cosmos!

Every star was in itself a world, and the countless stars of the firmament were symbolic of endless worlds which formed the greater whole of the cosmos. Such was the structure of all living beings in the universe, and the mindset of a freedom that transcended everything.

The Cosmic Sea was a connate-grade treasure born of the concentrated essence of the starry sky, a complement to the Cosmic Skycarver. Within it resided the truths of the universe.

Situ Zong had discovered only the Cosmic Skycarver the last time he was here. When he took the weapon, he'd lifted the restriction on the Cosmic Sea, which had then unleashed its power and flooded the heart of the tomb with starlight.

The immortals in the area had been alerted to the treasure's presence and were doing all they could to collect it.

"Follow me!" Qing Han grabbed Lu Yun's hand and led him away before he could react.

Hoisting the Black Emperor with one hand and grabbing Situ Yun with the other, Situ Zong hurried after them, lest the two young lords encounter some danger.

"Here we are!" Qing Han stopped after some time.

In the eyes of the others, there was nothing different about the shimmering world around them. However, the disguised girl had refined the Cosmic Skycarver with Treasure Refining Talismans while

Situ Zong was refining the Pelagic Org. He could easily sense the Cosmic Sea by activating the blade with his starstones.

“Careful! We’re in the skydragon tomb!” Lu Yun suddenly yanked Qing Han back, shielding his friend with his own body. His eyes turned pure black as he activated the Spectral Eye.

“What... what’s wrong? What do you see?” The question tumbled from Qing Han’s lips when he noticed Lu Yun’s suddenly veiny hands and tense muscles.

“Who are you?” Lu Yun asked instead of responding to Qing Han, looking into the unexplored space ahead of him. There was a pair of white eyes hovering there that looked human, but were completely devoid of emotion. Moreover, they stared back at Lu Yun like he was already dead.

“Not gonna talk?” He narrowed his eyes. “Aim the cannon at your eleven o’clock, Situ Zong!”

The pair of eyes gave Lu Yun so much pressure that he accidentally blurted out an expression used only on Earth.

Situ Zong paused. “My... my eleven o...?”

“That way.” Lu Yun pointed with his right hand.

“Understood!” Situ Zong turned and pointed the cannon at his eleven.

Mockery flashed through the eyes before they closed and disappeared; the haze of silver mist seemed to be their eyelids.

Those looked just like the ones in the depths of hell. They aren’t the same pair of eyes, but they belong to the same kind of people.

Nothing in hell could forever elude its overlord’s senses, and he’d learned of the pair of eyes that’d emerged when he was finished studying the talisman formations.

“Alright, we’re safe now.” Lu Yun waved a hand and secretly sighed in relief, sweat having drenched his clothes.

Situ Zong cast a surprised look at Lu Yun, the Black Emperor hefted by one hand and Situ Yun in the other. He was still wrapping his head around what had happened.

"To seek a dragon of mountains coiled,

Those deathly cliffs with mysteries roiled.

If danger lurks behind the doors closed,

Yin and yang a road to heaven rose."

Luopan manifesting in hand to spill forth a vibrant golden light, Lu Yun directed the radiance to form a beam of light that split apart the silver veil and forge a path of intertwining gold and silver fifty-four meters wide. It led to the half open room at the heart of the tomb.

There were many immortals along the path who were gradually finding their way toward the chamber.

“It’s Lu Yun! What’s that in his hand? It split the silver starlight here!” The immortals looked upon Lu Yun with greed when they saw him and the compass in his hand.

“Situ Zong, aim forward and blast anyone who dares make a move!” Lu Yun said impassively. “I’ve killed two of Beigong Xuan’s replicas already. This scum is nothing.”

“...understood!” Jaw tightened, Situ Zong hoisted the cannon ahead and growled, “If you don’t want to die, scram!”

“Situ Zong! Since when did the Star Demon Sect become Lu Yun’s lapdog?!” The immortals panicked when they saw him.