

Necropolis 381

Chapter 381: Human Demon

The chaotic brawl between the five heavyweights lasted for a full month before coming to a gradual end.

The pair of large hands and sword immortal in grey respectively returned to Ingress Island and the Dark North Sword Sect, sealing their factions off from the outside world, while Ghost Dragon and the nine-headed phoenix vanished completely.

The North Sea court was rebuilt with Beigong Xuan as the emperor still, but the North Sea was now forbidden grounds for humans. Any human cultivators who dared enter the sea would be killed on sight.

Scarlet Ape, the enormous, golden-furred beast, joined the North Sea court as its greatest patron. At the conclusion of the chaos, the North Sea monster spirits had abruptly reversed their downward trajectory as laughingstock and vaulted to the top of the most powerful factions in the world.

Tales were regaled about the beautiful woman who'd appeared on Levitating Island and frozen the North Sea to save billions, but the fantastical story was soon forgotten when another piece of news broke out: Lu Yun invited the world's formation and talisman masters to visit Dusk Province, so as to complete the Great Formation of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Demons!

It shocked everyone that Lu Yun had truly proven his promise with action, rather than simply paying lip service to grandiose claims.

Immortals who'd fretted about becoming obsolete were overjoyed. The formation wasn't truly completed yet, and Lu Yun hadn't found a way to incorporate it into an immortal's body either, but it was still enough to impart hope to the despairing masses.

Void realm cultivators, on the other hand, burned with hatred and wanted to tear Lu Yun a new one. Back on Immortal Sky Island, his declaration had placed many of them in dire danger. They'd been forced to run back to their sects with their tails between their legs and go into hiding.

The future may be yours, but it's not yet the future!

To take things a step further, Lu Yun then invented a formation that could destroy the future in which void realm cultivators would reign supreme.

By now, those cultivators were conveniently overlooking the fact that it was Lu Yun who had protected the bloom of the Dao Flower and helped restore the path of cultivation, thus returning the void realm to the world of immortals.

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In the month after Lu Yun made the announcement, not a day passed in which new formation masters didn't come calling. The layout of heaven and earth held a fatal attraction for them.

He didn't hold anything back and fully shared everything about the formation with the formation masters. Lu Yun was wholly unconcerned that this joint invention with Feinie might be leaked to the outside world.

Two heads were better than one, after all, and completing the formation would be a great boon to the world of immortals. There was causality involved in this, and only by tapping into the collective intelligence of the world could the feat be achieved.

Lu Yun couldn't help but think of Mo Yi during the process. If she were here, she'd be able to easily solve their problems. She'd modified Brightstar Snowrend, a deadly killing formation from the ancient times, into her own combat art, combining combat arts and formations.

However, no one could find her. She'd disappeared after depositing two troublemakers in Dusk Province—Zhu Yan and Yue Longsha, the twin jewels of Nephrite Major. Someone seemed to be after them to refine them into replicas, so Dusk Province was the safest place for them to hide in the world of immortals.

Regarding the formation itself, Lu Yun had considered experimenting with talisman formation dao. Perhaps he could etch the formation runes into talismans, or set up the formation with talismans. However, the Great Formation of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Demons was too powerful for normal talismans to bear. Talismans crafted from premium materials were required, which went against what he wanted, which was to make the formation accessible by all and resolve the retribution falling on Qing Han's head.

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The Skydragon and Skyphoenix Pearls were now in his possession. He'd planned to search for the Ancient Tree of Life in the Ancient Desert west of Nephrite Major after obtaining them, but changed his mind after speaking with the nine-headed phoenix and Xingzi in the North Sea.

All four of the pearls were required to diffuse the poison curse. Without the Skyturtle and Skyqilin Pearls, obtaining the Ancient Tree of Life wouldn't do any good.

Thus, he pivoted to searching for clues about the remaining two pearls. The ghost realm in the East Sea was a distinct possibility, but that was just empty speculation for the moment. That was a risk he'd take only if he couldn't find any clues of the pearls elsewhere.

Xingzi and Su Xiaoxiao got on like a house on fire as soon as the two girls met. One was an ancient poison doctor and the other a genius shaman. Though their talents lay in different fields, there was a remarkable overlap between their interests—studying strange herbs, concocting potent poisons, and conducting experiments that regular people couldn't even imagine.

With their combined efforts, they managed to assist in Cangyin's full transformation by successfully devouring both the bloodline and potential of the bloodqilin!

The transformation raised her cultivation to peerless immortal realm, and the memories she'd lost to the time manipulation art slowly came back to her, in turn entering Lu Yun's mind through the Tome of Life and Death.

Finally, ancient secrets that were previously inaccessible had revealed themselves. What delighted him the most, however, was that the two girls had managed to suppress the poison curse on Qing Han even further.

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“Kid, when are the supplemental paths going to take over the world like you’ve said?” Canghai Chengfeng hadn’t returned to the Dark North Sword Sect after his tomb raiding jaunt, but instead followed Lu Yun to Dusk Province with Canghai Chengkong.

The arcane dao immortal clung to Lu Yun like a pest, hoping to personally witness the future Lu Yun had sketched out. After Lu Yun had rescued a good number of his peers in the Dark North Sword Sect, Canghai Chengfeng released his remaining hostility for Lu Yun.

“After the completion of the great formation.” Lu Yun thought for a moment and asked, “Who’s the sword immortal in your sect that can rival a celestial emperor?”

“Hehehe, that’s our ancestor, the ancient Dark North Sword Immortal!” Canghai Chengfeng declared with a pleased expression. Their ancestor had made himself known to the world, so it wasn’t a big deal for Canghai Chengfeng to reveal his identity now.

The ancestor of the Dark North Sword Sect was a sword immortal who’d survived the ancient war. What shocked Lu Yun even more was that the sword immortal was a disciple of the head of Ingress Island. The two factions were actually joined at the hip!

Rumble!

A dramatic tremor passed through Dusk City as a tremendous beam of white light slammed into the city walls. Even with the reinforcement of countless formations that Feinie had set up, the walls immediately collapsed under the great power.

“What’s going on?!” Lu Yun started. He took to the air and looked to the north, just in time to see another beam of light coming his way. “This is Nephrite court’s weapon of war! Why would they possibly risk the ire of the world in attacking Dusk City now?!”

By now, there was no stopping Dusk City’s development. Immortals from all factions around the world flooded into Dusk Province on a regular basis to cultivate. The inheritance tower at the center of Dusk City, especially, saw many visitors.

To attack it now meant making enemies of the entire world, in a time when many previously hostile factions were refraining from going after Lu Yun because of his new formation. Some even attempted to mend their ties with him. It was clear that Lu Yun had no intention of selfish gain, not after he invited formation masters in the world to study the formation together.

Yet Zhao Changkong was attacking the city now?! No one could believe their eyes when they saw the weapon of war in the seaside stronghold taking shots at the province.

“What’s going on here?!” An immortal general had snuck into Dusk Province and was waiting for his turn to cultivate in the inheritance tower. He yelped when the weapon of war shot at the city.

“Who activated the weapon without my permission?!” Cultivation sealed to august immortal realm, the general took flight and rushed toward the seaside stronghold.

Bam!

Suddenly, a giant iron rod swung down from the sky and crushed the immortal.

“Grrrrraawl!” A tremendous howl rang throughout the sky. Scarlet Ape stalked out from the seaside stronghold, already in three heads and six arms form and advancing on Dusk City with a brandish of its giant iron staff.

It was now three thousand meters tall and resembled a giant mountain sparkling with golden light. It traveled a couple kilometers with every step, rushing toward the city at great speed.

Hum.

The power of the province surged and a pair of enormous eyes opened in the sky, levelling a cold stare at the ape.

“So this is the so-called Dusk Restriction?” Scarlet Ape leered and snarled at the giant eyes, swinging its iron rod at the restriction.

Rumble!

Earth cracked and fissured from the point of impact and the energy of the land churned into violent currents that rushed out in all directions. Unlike the North Sea, Dusk Province was protected by a heavenly mandate since it was part of Nephrite Major. Therefore, it didn’t react as violently as the North Sea had.

However, the province spanned only about forty thousand kilometers and hadn’t yet fully recovered to its peak. To Scarlet Ape, it was nothing but a muddy pond it could destroy with a kick of its foot.

The Dusk restriction was plainly furious and formed a giant human face in the air, somehow flinging Scarlet Ape back the next second.

Bam!

Another beam of light blasted the giant face of the restriction. This was the power of a real weapon of war—the pure power of heaven and earth!

Half of its face collapsed from the impact, infuriating it so much that its eyes nearly spat out tangible rage.

“Kill!” Tall waves rose from the North Sea as countless monster spirits rode the waves and rushed into Dusk Province.

The weapon of war in the seaside stronghold had been taken over by the North Sea court. It was currently taking shot after shot at the province, turning all forty thousand kilometers of Dusken soil into an ocean.

General astonishment reigned amongst the land’s denizens. No one had expected the giant ape from the North Sea dragon tomb to invade Dusk Province now!

Many immortals took flight and stared in horrified stupefaction at the Dusk restriction fighting the giant ape that was bolstered by a fiery cape.

Bam!

A giant figure clad in crimson armor that towered into the sky materialized to stomp on Scarlet Ape.

“Human demon!!” Scarlet Ape’s hair stood on end as it growled with widened eyes. “So this is the resting place of the human emperor!

“Good, fantastic! I will destroy the foundations of humanity by destroying this place!!”

Hum!

The iron staff in Scarlet Ape’s hand burst with black light and turned into a mountain range, knocking away the foot keeping it down.

Chapter 382: The Last Thing They Wanted To See

Human demon.

Scarlet Ape, an entity from the Primeval Era, elicited considerable bafflement when it suddenly spoke that term. Its other declaration of the ‘resting place of the human emperor’ caused further confusion in the crowd.

Was Dusk Province a place where an immortal emperor of old had fallen? But then, why had the ape spoken specifically of a human emperor?

However, this question was but a mere fleeting thought.

Countless North Sea soldiers had ridden the waves and made landfall in Dusk Province. The seaside fortress supposed to stop them was now fully in enemy hands, its weapon of war now the enemy’s spear that fired a constant barrage that helped Scarlet Ape contend with the giant clad in crimson armor.

The armored giant wasn’t the same Dusk Province restriction that Lu Yun had once met in the Sword Barrow. At the very least, this one’s strength was greater. But against a Scarlet Ape gone berserk, he seemed as vulnerable as before, inexorably falling back step after step beneath the giant iron staff’s blows.

While the human demon, or the province restriction in other words, was kept busy by the giant ape, the monster spirit invaders were free to unleash all of their strength and blitz through the land.

Even then, Lu Yun didn’t rashly show his hand. He remained atop a section of city wall that yet remained intact, the Yin and Yang Formation Orbs hovering over his head as he guarded the capital city that’d lost its fortifications.

One hundred and eight dazzling stars abruptly appeared and positioned themselves in a marvelous formation that stopped the rampaging army’s advance. These were the hundred and eight peerless immortals Lu Yun had instructed in the Great Formation of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Fiends. Though some of them hailed from factions hostile to him, they’d nevertheless come when Dusk Province found itself in peril.

The Star Demon Sect’s disciples also came. Shouldering a large, black cannon, Situ Zong immediately charged into the massive horde of monster immortals and laid waste around him. They were followed closely by a contingent from the Panorama Pavilion. Immortal sword in hand, a young woman sporting a pregnant belly hacked her way through the monster spirits—the Pavilion Lord’s disciple Qing Ruyan was leading her men in person.

But even with these reinforcements, the enemy's numbers seemed endless. It was simply impossible to kill them all.

Shortly thereafter, the immortals rescued by Lu Yun in the North Sea also made their entrance, adding their numbers to Dusk's defense. Xiangliu Ting, Canghai Xi—yet to return to the Dark North Sword Sect—and the rest also came.

However, even more chose to watch the show from the sidelines.

Nephrite Major amassed troops in Outré Province, but made no move to enter the fray. Powerhouses from various factions also gathered around the borders of the province, adopting a wait and see attitude. Some entered Dusk to protect the disciples of their organizations, but refrained from taking part in the battle.

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"If that's how it's going to be, I won't feel the slightest bit guilty when I destroy your foundations in the future." Lu Yun's lips curved into a cold smirk.

He hadn't made a move yet because he wanted to see what the vultures waiting on the sidelines, or those salivating over his formation, would choose to do. They didn't join the attack, but weren't willing to help either. They merely looked on in cold-hearted indifference.

"Are you sure you don't need me to fight?" Qing Han looked at Lu Yun a little tensely. With the help of Su Xiaoxiao and Xing Zi, he'd gradually begun to rein in the poison curse in his body.

"It's fine. That's nothing but a monkey, it won't be able to stir up too many waves." Lu Yun smiled and subconsciously reached out to stroke the disguised girl's hair. "I just wanted to see how the world would react to this. They've shown me everything I wanted to see, so I'm going to show them something they don't want to see."

Qing Han gently ducked his head and tried to avoid Lu Yun's hand.

"Awooo—" An earthshaking roar sounded from the southern direction of the province. Walking on air, two giant divine Black Tortoises appeared on the horizon.

One was a genuine Black Tortoise, turtle and snake bodies intertwined as it rode the waves. The other was an image condensed from the Formation of the Black Tortoise. Valiant and heroic, a silver-haired girl stood on the incarnation's head and surveyed the crowd of immortals from high above: Yuchi Hanxing and the Dusk Phalanx under her command!

As divine beasts of the cardinal north, the tortoises' presence immediately disrupted the momentum of the North Sea monster immortals, distracting their minds with pressure and confusion.

Shortly after, the giant image of a water god also emerged. A human face paired with a snake's body and framed by scarlet hair, it was no other than Gonggong's avatar.

Even the Scaled-Dragon King emerged with his Scaled-Dragon army, followed shortly by Beigong Yu and his newly reorganized Kunpeng army. Covering the sky with its immense wingspan, the kunpeng's image was even more formidable than Gonggong's own!

After all, Kunpeng King Beigong Yu was the true number one monster spirit king of the North Sea.

Then the elite monster soldiers Lu Yun had looted from the North Sea, as well as the various monster kings, dao immortal monster spirits, and the like all showed themselves.

However, the appearance of Bing Xuan and Bing Ling was what truly rocked the invaders to the core and sent countless monster spirits plunging into the depths of despair. Bing Xuan had once been an arcane dao immortal of the North Sea, the monster emperor's right hand man! He, too, had surrendered to Lu Yun and was helping the human kill his own kind?!

"Just what did Lu Yun do in the North Sea? I thought he only took away the palace? How did he bring back these monster spirit soldiers and immortals as well?" Hidden in the void and constantly looking out for Beigong Xuan's arrival, the Pavilion Lord gaped with incredulity.

To many, it seemed this was no longer the North Sea attacking Dusk Province, but somehow a civil war between denizens of the North Sea that just so happened to be taking place inside the province?

Particularly of note were the number one and number two monster kings of the North Sea, Beigong Yu and the Scaled-Dragon King, respectively, slicing through monster immortals like hot knives through butter with nary an eyeblink.

"If I don't get rid of Lu Yun, he'll become a mortal threat to me sooner or later!" Zhao Changkong whispered to himself in alarm. He'd also reached Dusk Province's shores and was witnessing the strength at Lu Yun's disposal.

"Quite a few formation grandmasters have already obtained a copy of his formation, which means that even without Lu Yun, other formation masters of the world can also perfect it...." Of course, he'd also sent the Nephrite court formation masters court to Dusk Province.

"Your Majesty, shall we...." Standing at Zhao Changkong's side in the shadows, Wayfarer drew a light gesture across his neck.

"Go and see if there's an opportunity to do so." Zhao Changkong nodded faintly.

Wayfarer smiled and faded into nothingness.

However, the next second saw him bouncing back in a bedraggled heap, his sorry figure trembling slightly and his eyes shrouded in shadows of reluctance.

An expressionless young man holding a bamboo pole stood quietly atop a mountain, a girl clad in green standing beside him.

"Wayfarer!" Wayfarer gnashed his teeth.

Zhao Changkong's face also darkened when he spotted Wayfarer, but there was nothing to be done. This other Wayfarer was the bane of the one by his side.

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"Lu Daoling, how dare you still show yourself!" A purple-robed man was about to enter Dusk Province, only to be stopped by a young man in white.

“Old geezer Qing, remember when you stood outside my clan’s doors and prevented me from rescuing Lu Yun? Now it’s my turn to stand in your way.” Facing the purple-robed man, Lu Daoling remained expressionless.

In Xiankan, Lu Yun had been caught inside a formation deployed by House Donglin, House Qing, and immortals of the Exalted Immortal Sect. Lu Daoling had wanted to help, but the man in front of him, House Qing’s old forefather, had blocked his way.

Face dark, House Qing’s forefather turned on his heel and stalked off.

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A radiant silver star streaked in from the west and hurtled toward Dusk Province.

Bang!

Seven resplendent shooting stars descended from above and sent the silver star careening back, resolving itself as a short and plump silhouette tumbling awkwardly from the sky.

“Donglin Taihuang, they call you the number one genius, but if you dare enter Dusk Province, I’ll turn you into the number one dead man.” A girl in men’s clothes walked out of the emptiness, glowering frostily at her opponent.

“Mo Yi!” Donglin Taihuang trembled. “You, you crazy... you're crazy!!”

This wasn’t his first time seeing her. He’d traded blows with her before she’d begun her cultivation anew, so he knew full well how terrifying she was.

In a few other places, the Feng and Ling Clans, House Donglin, the Exalted Immortal Sect, as well as the Corpse Refiners were also halted by the five powerhouses of the Star Demon Sect. If allowed inside Dusk, these people would undoubtedly start a blind slaughter of friends and enemies alike, razing the province to the ground.

Lu Yun was the creator of the Great Formation of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Fiends and a beacon of hope for immortals all over the world. But at the same time, once completed, the formation would turn Lu Yun into a figure of worship. It would make him larger than life, and in fact, it would make him a saint.

However, he was merely a cultivator. Yes, he wasn’t without influence, but nothing outrageous. Dusk Province’s sacred land was nothing but a future prospect, while men lived in the present. In the eyes of the ancestors of the greatest races, sects, or clans, he was merely a tiny bug.

However, the power he now displayed filled them with apprehension; he’d broken free from his leash! Such a person absolutely could not be allowed to become a living saint, to be revered as an object of worship through the world. Sainthood was only for the dead!

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“We already have the formation diagram. Don’t mind those people, attack Dusk Province with everything we have! It’s only forty thousand miles wide, a hand wave can erase it all!” the Feng ancestor growled.

“Try erasing Dusk Province and see if I won’t slaughter your clan’s bloodline to the last.” The Star Demon’s first sovereign grinned coldly. “Just try it if you don’t mind seeing your clansmen cowering in a hole for the rest of their lives, never daring to take half a step outside.”

The Feng ancestor paled.

“Be my guest and give it a try if you don’t believe him,” added the fifth sovereign of the Star Demon Sect—the silver-haired woman. “If Dusk Province falls, we’ll extinguish your bloodline, even if we have to risk the destruction of our sect!”

“You demons!” House Donglin’s ancestor gritted his teeth.

“Why, thank you for the compliment,” the fifth sovereign sneered. They were demonic cultivators after all. For them, to be called demons was music to their ears.

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Meanwhile, back in front of Dusk City, Lu Yun boarded the Divine Glory. The ship cut through wind and wave, finally arriving at the battlezone where Scarlet Ape and the human demon fought.

Chapter 383: Utterly Stunning

The human demon was the physical body of the province restriction, brought here a thousand years ago by Chen Xiao. Qing Buyi and Mo Yi had captured the celestial emperors of Exalted Major and Nephrite Major so they could sacrifice the heavenly mandates of two majors to the human demon and help him recover his strength.

The human demon’s power, as well as the power of the restriction, had grown dramatically with each heavenly mandate sacrificed.

A heavenly mandate wasn’t a tangible item. It was something of the will, a conceptual energy born from the immortal world and its many facets. Although the previous Exalted and Nephrite Emperors hadn’t truly reached the celestial emperor realm, they’d still been strengthened by the mandates’ protection.

Once dead, the power of their individual protections would also dissipate. As long as the immortal world and its facets lived on, the heavenly mandate would be born anew for the next celestial emperor.

In short, sacrificing two celestial emperors to the human demon was also sacrificing two heavenly mandates.

After obtaining the power of the second mandate, the human demon’s strength had risen to an entirely new level. Even so, Scarlet Ape didn’t cede an inch, so much so the restriction couldn’t spare the energy needed to control Dusk Province and eradicate all of the invaders surpassing golden immortal realm.

“Yo, big monkey!” On the Divine Glory, Lu Yun walked to the bow and shouted, “I freed you from the dragon phoenix seal. Is this how you show your gratitude?”

“Die, humans!” The ape’s eyes burned at the sight of Lu Yun. It’d noticed the heavy black cannon at the bow of the ship at first glance. It was refined with a severed section of his companion weapon, the Divine Seaquell Staff!

As it happened, the principal reason why he'd led an invasion into Dusk Province was to take the staff! So he immediately cast all thought of the human demon out of his mind and brought his staff down on Lu Yun's ship.

Black Emperor was very important to Scarlet Ape. After the month-long fighting in the North Sea, it'd barely arranged for any reconstruction before leading the monster spirits to Dusk Province.

Seaquell wasn't only its lifelong companion treasure, but also the item through which it'd realized the dao. As long as the staff remained incomplete, the ape wouldn't be able to recover its cultivation, so retrieving the severed section was a necessity.

The previously mountain-sized Seaquell was now a towering pillar that held up the dome of the sky. When it swung down at the Divine Glory, the specter of death once again loomed over Lu Yun's heart and mind. This creature was truly too terrifying!

"Fire!!"

A white beam exploded from Black Emperor, origin-level firepower howling through the air toward the pillar of a staff.

"Aughhhhhh!!!" The ape lost its mind when it saw Lu Yun use its own weapon against itself. Its golden fur rippled scarlet and its frame swelled to ten times its original size, becoming an ape thirty thousand meters tall that roughly matched the human demon's height.

Both arms wrapped around the immense staff, the ape resisted Black Emperor's pillar of light inch by crushing inch, slowly advancing on the Divine Glory.

But then the human demon's colossal frame charged forth and sent a massive kick at the giant ape.

"Shove off!!!" the ape thundered. Its build now a full match for the human demon's own, it turned around with a jab at its opponent's leg.

Boom!

Boom!

Boom!

Another eighteen beams shot from the Divine Glory.

Eighteen auxiliary cannons thundered in concert in a continuous, no holds barred barrage. Merging with Black Emperor's light pillar, they worked to push back the giant Seaquell. Newly reforged, the cannons all exploded at the same time after the devastating strike, leaving nothing but fragments behind. As for Black Emperor, the mouth of the cannon had also begun to melt.

Even so, the pincer attack was still too much for the giant ape to face head-on, so its giant figure shot in another direction.

"Kill!!!" the human demon growled. A pair of silver eyes slowly opened in the sky—the dragon empress' Cosmic Eyes.

After returning to Dusk Province, Lu Yun had gifted the treasure to the province restriction. After all, the restriction was his greatest leverage in making sure that Dusk Province could stand on its own two feet in the world. The stronger the restriction's power grew, the safer Lu Yun would be.

As soon as the Cosmic Eyes opened, a million rays of piercing starlight descended from the heavens and churned toward Scarlet Ape's giant figure. Sharp as swords, the rays of celestial radiance brought with them a prehistoric atmosphere similar to the Cosmic Skycarver.

"Aaaahhh—" Scarlet Ape's staff had been knocked away, but the fiery cape remained draped over its shoulders. It ignited and blanketed the ape's scarlet fur in a layer of flames that deflected the keen rays of starlight.

The Cosmic Eyes was a peerless connate treasure of resounding fame in the ancient times, but it'd also been stymied by the fiery cape's protection.

Rising back to its feet, Scarlet Ape summoned Seaquell back into its hand, metamorphosed into its three-headed six-armed form, and rushed wildly at the human demon. Caught off guard, the human demon was knocked to the ground by an even more frenzied opponent.

Swish!!

At this time, a tremendous hum suddenly sounded and the entirety of Dusk Province became a land of black and white. There seemed to be a giant fish of yin and yang slowly swimming through the sky.

All of the local power of the land was now active, and even the energy in neighboring provinces surged wildly in Dusk's direction.

"Motherfucker, I could've immediately ascended to the void realm if not for you bastard! My surname isn't Lu if I don't skin you alive today!" Lu Yun jiggled savagely on his fortress ship.

After a month of exertions, he'd collected a total of seven goodwill fruits. But now, all seven were burning as they merged into Feinie's body, propelling her strength to an unfathomable realm. Taking control of the Divine Glory, she unleashed the full power of the two Formation Orbs and enclosed the entire province in their energies.

At the same time, the ship's hull glowed with an increasingly bright, black hue. The light increased in intensity until, in the end, the enormous fortress ship that had marveled the world transformed into the mouth of a giant cannon that was fully three hundred meters across.

The formation energies of the two Formation Orbs, along with the infinite energy of the land, filtered into the cannon's mouth.

A Formation Orb was merely a formation item. It could radiate with blinding formation light or shape formation after formation, but all of them would crumble at the first blow from the berserk monkey's staff.

But now, Lu Yun injected all of this formation energy and the power of the land into his ship-cum-cannon. This one was a true bonafide weapon of war, not an imitation. It could not only fuel itself with the energy of the world, but also compress the chaotic formations from the Formation Orbs into tremendous energy.

One breath.

Two breaths.

Three breaths...

As the seconds ticked by, the undulations emanating from the cannon grew more and more foreboding and the aura emanating from it increasingly appalling.

“Is that a war treasure? When did weapons of war become this terrifying?!” Lurking at the borders of the province, numerous powerhouses stared at the giant cannon formed by the Divine Glory with pale countenances.

If a run-of-the-mill weapon of war could threaten peak arcane dao powerhouses like them, then the one they were now witnessing would simply reduce them to ash!

“Lu Yun... must die!! How can a trivial cultivator wield the power to threaten people like us? He has to die, even if it means giving up the Great Formation of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Fiends,” roared a powerhouse.

“Demon sovereigns of the Star Demon Sect, are you so certain you want a figurehead like him? Aren’t you afraid he’ll bite the hand that feeds him?” shouted the Feng Clan’s ancestor. When the Star Demon Sect had publicly announced Lu Yun as their sect head, everyone had thought they’d simply wanted a puppet, a public front.

“The sect head is the sect head, not a figurehead,” the first sovereign responded coldly.

“Then don’t blame us for showing no mercy. Kill!” the master of the Corpse Refiners ordered, frosty ruthlessness on his face. More than ten arcane dao immortal realm zombies by his side immediately threw themselves forward, abruptly heralding the start of a great battle.

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“Roar!!” Inside Dusk Province, Scarlet Ape had also perceived the incoming danger. It promptly broke away from the human demon and charged at Lu Yun while the big cannon was still gathering energy.

“Keep it busy for ten breaths,” Lu Yun sighed softly. While the human demon’s fighting prowess was extraordinary, due to the power of the province restriction, he had no peerless treasures to rely on. The Cosmic Eyes, although mighty, couldn’t break through the fiery cape.

“Are you still not going to use the strength of my dread zombie even at this stage?” Empress Myrtlestar appeared beside Lu Yun and held her hand aloft, ensconcing their surroundings in violet starlight. Indeed, she’d called upon the power of the Imperial Star.

Scarlet Ape’s giant frame immediately slowed down to a crawl, as if it was suddenly trapped in quicksand. Despite that, its staff and the cape on its back glowed anew, irresistibly cutting through the violet starlight. Clearly, even Empress Myrtlestar’s strength couldn’t stop it for long.

“The cannon’s not ready yet.” Lu Yun gritted his teeth, his eyes fixed on the ever approaching ape.

Bang!

All of a sudden, a pair of giant arms snaked out from beneath Scarlet Ape's armpits and wrapped themselves around its body, locking it firmly in place and preventing it from taking a single step forward.

"Let go!!!" Scarlet Ape snarled, its six hands gripping Seaquell and raining a frenzy of blows on the human demon. The latter vomited mouthful after mouthful of dark red blood, yet tenaciously clung on to the creature.

"Die," the human demon snarled menacingly, eyes bloodshot.

Chapter 384: The Hell Flower Blossoms

The strength of the fiery cape had merged with Scarlet Ape, enhancing the giant ape's strength to the greatest it could currently manage. Under the new strain, the human demon's arms shattered like porcelain, and even the rest of his body began to crack.

Scarlet Ape had lost all reason and become a beast of undiluted savagery as it struggled to break free. Ten breaths were a very short time, but also very long.

"Die!!!" Lu Yun suddenly howled.

BOOM!

The world suddenly became exclusively black and white; every other color was eclipsed from the onlookers' field of vision. Such was the power of this mind-blowing attack, one that could bring down the celestial emperors themselves.

As the horrifying beam of light landed squarely on Scarlet Ape, it smashed through the red flames surrounding its body. Even the connate fiery cape couldn't cope with such terrifying power.

Not only did the beam contain the energy of the Formation Orbs, it was also augmented by the power of the land and seven goodwill fruits.

Helplessness and dread filled the giant ape's eyes as it sensed its very life under threat.

Ping!

A streak of sword light as bright as snow suddenly originated from a distant unknown, crossing time and space to land on the human demon. Withstanding Scarlet Ape had already brought the human demon's body to its limits. The sword light wasn't particularly formidable, but it was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Bang!

The human demon exploded at the same instant the beam of intertwining black and white reached Scarlet Ape. The giant ape reacted with extraordinary speed and moved to the side almost simultaneously. It managed to avoid the terrible attack by a hair, but—

"Ah—" A blood-curdling wail soon followed.

While it had indeed dodged the attack, the pillar of light had nevertheless brushed past half of its body, and that half vanished with the light. Scarlet Ape keened with pain from the destructive wound. Too

spooked to spend one more second in Dusk Province, it vanished on the spot in the form of a crimson blur.

In the sky, the silver Cosmic Eyes opened bit by bit and the power of the restriction took control of the province again.

While the human demon's body had indeed been destroyed, the root of its existence was the power of the restriction. As long as the Dusk Tomb existed, the human demon would never die.

As a result, the entire province ran with blood before anyone could react—the restriction churning countless monster immortals to pieces. Meanwhile, Lu Yun's men were all ghostly servants from the netherworld. After Scarlet Ape's escape, they quietly returned to hell.

"What just happened?" By Lu Yun's side from beginning to end, Empress Myrtlestar looked in the direction where the sword light had originated from, incomparably aghast. While not all that powerful, the sword strike had been extremely strange. It'd come at the perfect time for the final blow on the human demon.

"The Sword of Chaos." Lu Yun's expression was unreadable. Under his feet, the cannon shone once more and reverted back to a fortress ship. However, the vessel was now a wreck, its hull almost entirely broken. The tremendous energy from the Formation Orbs had overloaded it beyond its limits.

"The heir to the Sword of Chaos has appeared again," he murmured.

Appeared again.

The last time, the Sword of Chaos had fired a sword light at Dusk Province's border and destroyed the black, long-haired monster that had almost made its escape. But this time, it'd come to rescue Scarlet Ape instead.

"I wonder about the identity of this heir." Lu Yun looked down, lost in thought.

.....

The curtains slowly fell on a great battle that shocked the immortal world.

Northern part of the North Sea, on a deserted island.

Scarlet Ape's missing half had already grown back. It gripped its iron staff in one hand and Beigong Xuan with the other. Bent forward, it gasped for air, trying to catch its breath.

"Human, why did you save me?!" it demanded in its hoarse voice.

"I am a divine." Sword energy surrounded the silhouette from head to toe.

Scarlet Ape's head snapped up as it stared intensely at the figure with burning eyes. "A lowly divine?" Frostiness curved the ape's lips.

"Lowly? A thing of the past. We overturned human rule and pulverized their immortal dao with our divine dao. We built a golden era of unsurpassed glory and reduced the humans to slaves. We are the favored children of the heavens, the most noble existences in the universe," the figure responded leisurely. "Many, too many things have happened after you were sealed away."

“You know who I am?” Scarlet Ape started.

“I do.”

.....

The seaside fortress had been destroyed, along with the defensive barriers protecting several great provinces in northern Nephrite Major.

By the time the floodwaters retreated, Dusk Province had become a land of scarlet. Scarlet for the color of blood spilled by the hundreds of millions of living beings who’d died in its lands. It was a scene of utter devastation and loss.

Lu Yun stood atop Dusk City’s walls as information about the deceased floated up one after another in his Spectral Eye.

“This isn’t what I wanted.” His shoulders were hunched and his voice dejected.

“Don’t blame yourself. It’s not your fault.” Standing by his side, Qing Han looked at his friend’s desolate figure, uncertain how to comfort him.

“No, I’m the one who freed the big monkey and also the reason why it came here....” Lu Yun himself had trouble sorting through his emotions.

Despite assimilating to a great degree after his transmigration, he still came from Earth at the end of the day. Even though he ruled over hell now, and controlled the power of life and death, it was impossible for him to make peace with everything that’d happened.

Hundreds of millions of lives had been lost, all because of him.

He’d known Scarlet Ape would come, but hadn’t expected it to come so fast. He hadn’t had time to complete any of his preparations before the ape’s sudden arrival.

Dusk Province.... Most of its denizens were ordinary people or run-of-the-mill cultivators. They weren’t even immortals! When the waters of the North Sea had come crashing upon the province, there hadn’t been any chance for them to fight back.

It hadn’t been long since he’d returned the power of the land to the province and brought back hope for these ordinary people, these ordinary cultivators. But in the end, the ape had destroyed it all.

“I’m going to kill that monkey and obliterate Beigong Xuan. Revenge will be had!” He suddenly clenched his fists tight.

Nothing drove home the need for strength more firmly than recent events. He was in a very real world of immortals, where ‘dog eat dog world’ wasn’t just an empty platitude. Without domineering strength, one would always run the risk of being crushed underfoot like a bug.

“Revenge!” Qing Han agreed with a furious nod.

Hum...

All of a sudden, a scarlet flower blossomed in Dusk Tomb at the center of the province. The blood drenching the earth and flesh littering the ground transformed into nutrients for it, and soon enough, the flower's radiance spread from one end of the province to the other and bathed the land in the light of blood.

This light then took root in the earth, from which grew tiny scarlet copies of itself: Flowers of the Dead.

In next to no time, these clusters of flowers breathed new life into all of the souls on the verge of forever vanishing from this world, and all of those who'd lost their lives in the disaster were transformed into new soul entities.

Su Xiaoxiao and Xingzi came into view and hummed many a pleasant, yet melancholic tune as they guided the souls along the path paved by the Hell Flowers, slowly ushering them through the ethereal Gates of the Abyss.

Chapter 385: They're All Dead

Mournful songs of melancholy and loss reverberated across the world. The Gates of the Abyss opened, welcoming a path lined with Hell Flowers into the netherworld and accepting those who'd died in the disaster.

Most people couldn't see any of that, though. Only spirits, ghosts, and a few select humans were the exceptions. Everything remained normal to those not in the know.

"That's...." Qing Han gaped at the flowers and the ancient looking gates. Reflexively, he severed his connection to the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals.

"Don't worry. If I didn't want anyone to see that, not even a reborn Empress Myrtlestar would be able to see anything, even if she'd ascended beyond immortal emperor realm." Lu Yun exhaled deeply.

Everyone who'd died here, be they monster spirits, Dusk cultivators, or immortals who'd come to help, then died for their efforts, would be reborn in hell and become the first batch of indigenous natives.

The living and the dead belonged to different worlds. The living possessed their own world and would be born again in the netherworld upon their deaths.

Lu Yun's Infernum lived in hell, but they were his subordinates. Their lives were completely under his control, and they had no freedom. The spirits that had entered hell this time, though, would live in hell under nobody's rule.

"Is this... your biggest secret?" Qing Han turned to Lu Yun in shock.

"It is." Lu Yun nodded, a mountainous pressure lifting from his chest. A great sense of relief washed away the suffocating gloom that'd always plagued him.

With his thoughts and will as one, all of the inner energy in his body converged into a stream of black luminescence and soared into the sky, guiding the dense power of heaven and earth into his figure.

It seemed to gradually disperse a thick layer of fog that'd always been unknowingly wrapped around him. The world had never felt so clear to him before; he could plainly see the mechanisms of its movement and the way the heavenly energy circulated.

So this is the perceived void realm. Perceive the void with the nascent spirit to gain insight into the secrets of heaven and earth...

At that thought, the shadow of the Dao Flower bloomed slowly beside him. His perception of the world became even clearer, and every minute movement of his brought about great heavenly might.

“Heaven and earth, heaven and earth....” Lu Yun fell into deep spontaneous thought. He was reminded of how he’d felt as he wielded the power of a peak origin dao immortal when he’d become one with the emperor puppet.

That’d been the pinnacle of utmost freedom, of limitless liberty, as if he’d escaped from an enormous mud pond and achieved true autonomy.

Upon sharing his secrets with Qing Han, the shadow of a long-held burden lifted and he ascended to the void realm. The blessings of the Dao Flower brought him once again to that transcendental realm.

“The world is incredibly vast, but we’ve been struggling in a large, muddy pond. Cultivation... ah, cultivation. The purpose of cultivation is to lift us out of this mud pond.” An inkling of enlightenment dawned on him.

The void realm was the last realm for cultivators. It allowed them to see the world for what it truly was and understand its limitations, setting a clear goal for the future of their cultivation—to escape the pond.

The best way to do so was to draw upon the power of heaven and earth!

Continuous absorption of the power of the land and incorporating oneself into heaven and earth would enable one to transcend their limitations. They would thus be able to break out of the mundane world.

.....

“The Dao Flower has dispersed.” Faint fragrance emitted from Qing Han’s body as a slight shadow became a part of him. The Dao Flower in the sky had disappeared, but the real one had taken root in him.

All of a sudden, he blanched as color drained from his face.

“What’s wrong?” Lu Yun asked with a frown.

Face pale, Qing Han said slowly, “Dead... they’re all dead.”

“Who?” Lu Yun asked with an apprehensive expression, but he already had an inkling as to who he was asking about.

“Wu Tulong, Mo Qitian, and Zi Chen... are dead.” Qing Han trembled. “The Dao Flower should’ve entered all four of us, but my body contains the entire flower....”

Qing Han shook. He was deeply afraid.

He wasn’t afraid because their three friends were dead, but because the Dao Flower had entered him and found a home on his spirit root. An invisible hand seemed to be pulling the strings behind everything to use Qing Han as a curse to kill every living soul in the world!

The Dao Flower was the medium connecting him to the cultivators of the many worlds. Previously, while Qing Han was the great dao sovereign of cultivation, there were still Wu Tulong, Mo Qitian, and Zi Chen beneath him. It never would've fallen to the disguised girl to acquire all parts of the Dao Flower. Now, however, with the other three dead, the entire flower had taken root in him.

Fear and helplessness erupted in Qing Han.

"Don't worry. We already know how the curse can be resolved, and we've found some clues regarding the whereabouts of the Skyqilin and Skyturtle Pearls." Without thinking, Lu Yun reached out and caressed Qing Han's long hair.

The action brought a new source of unease to Qing Han. Lu Yun had set foot in the void realm and was one step closer to immortality, but Qing Han wasn't ready yet. However, his friend was already treating him like Qing Yu.

.....

Within Dusk Province, hundreds of millions of dead spirits were brought into hell by the Hell Flowers.

When the task was complete, the flowers scattered across the landscape converged into one and flew into Su Xiaoxiao's hand. After all was said and done, there was only one real flower. All of the others in Dusk were merely replicas.

After the last of the dead entered hell, the air in Dusk Province seemed to grow a little clearer.

"Don't you resent them for this?" Qing Han asked. "If the heavyweights of the peak factions had intervened, Dusk Province wouldn't have suffered such a great loss...."

"Why should I?" Lu Yun shook his head. "The battle caught everyone by surprise and was our own business besides. It would've been kind of them to lend a hand, but it's perfectly reasonable for them to stay on the sidelines."

Qing Han nodded. He wasn't really troubled by this; he simply wanted to change the subject.

"Something must've happened to the Deaf Prince and the others, though," Lu Yun sighed. "Otherwise, given who they are, they wouldn't have stayed out of Dusk Province."

The East Sea court had come to help when the North Sea monster spirits invaded, but Lu Yun hadn't seen the Deaf Prince. The rest of the profligates had been absent as well.

Chapter 386: Nine Divine Vaults

Reconstruction efforts began in Dusk Province in a bid to restore the cities, mountains, and rivers ravaged by the fires of war. The province that'd formerly been on its way to prosperity was now a land of ruin and desolation, more than sixty percent of its inhabitants dead.

Moreover, the world had witnessed firsthand how fearsome the monkey was. It'd gone against the restriction and gotten the better of its opponent! Though it had fled back to the North Sea for now, its eyes were still set on Dusk Province.

Immortals of the world had never been afraid of Lu Yun.

True, his meteoric rise was paved with blood. He'd killed too many immortals to count, but the path he walked was an upright one, fair and aboveboard. Unless provoked, he didn't commence a slaughter for no reason.

No, they were afraid of that big monkey.

Dusk City itself would likely be destroyed when the beast came again. Everyone had seen the Divine Glory almost destroyed in the wake of the final attack launched in its cannon form. Out of the nineteen cannons aboard, only the main cannon had survived. All of the auxiliary cannons had been destroyed, along with the physical manifestation of the province restriction itself.

A victory it might have been, but one with a bitter price. If the giant monkey recovered and came back even stronger, the outcome would be impossible to predict.

Dusk Province was now a shattered land, a taboo territory that various faction leaders ordered their members to avoid. Most of the inhabitants left belonged to the Lu and Chen Clans, the Star Demon Sect, or Skandha Range.

The latter was the one silver lining in the great battle that'd just rampaged through the province. Both Scarlet Ape and the human demon had instinctively been afraid of the place and avoided it during combat.

As for the monster immortals of the East Sea, and the other human immortals who'd come to help, they left after the invaders withdrew. They had no desire to go a second round against the monkey that defied common sense.

.....

Hell.

A giant palace towered somewhere in the netherworld. The Yin and Yang Formation Orbs hovered in the sky above, casting rays of formation light that illuminated a palace that was almost five thousand kilometers wide.

Known as the North Sea Palace, it was the true abode of the previous rulers of the northern waters. After entering the netherworld, Lu Yun had manipulated the power of hell to release all of the spatial folds in the palace.

This was the ancient dragon palace, after all, the lair of ancient dragons. After their disappearance, the palace's true nature had been thoroughly concealed. Even the dragons ruling over the North Sea ten thousand years ago had been unaware of its true form.

Now, thanks to the energy of the netherworld, Lu Yun had returned it to its original self.

"Wha..." Lu Yun trembled violently at the sight of the giant edifice, his eyes filled with disbelief. He wasn't the only one; his envoys were likewise given a scare.

"This was modified from the corpse of a Black Tortoise... A true Black Tortoise, a natural-born divine!" Yuchi Tianhuang, one of Lu Yun's ghostly subordinates, murmured from the side.

His dao partner's body had contained the bloodline of the Black Tortoise and had been a powerhouse of the tribe, so he was intimately familiar with this presence. Furthermore, the Black Tortoise in front of them was a divine beast born from nature itself, rather than one that inherited the bloodline of the tribe.

"This divine beast was killed three hundred million years ago by a dragon expert and then refined into the Dragon Palace!" Thanks to the Spectral Eye, Lu Yun could see straight through to the palace's past.

He hadn't obtained a new death art after breaking through to the void realm, but an unexpected energy had emanated from the Tome of Life and Death, strengthening his already-existing death arts.

As a result, the Spectral Eye he now used was an enhanced version. Thanks to that, even creatures dead for three hundred million years couldn't escape its detection, and that wasn't all. Once only useful for garnering information about the dead and living, it now possessed a certain offensive potential. At the same time, an attack from the Spectral Eye's pupil art was only useful against those around Lu Yun's own level.

In addition, he'd also discovered that he could deploy some of the death arts through the Spectral Eye. The Judgment of Life and Death, for one, or the art of Resurrection.

"Wait a second!" He frowned and took a closer look at the palace with the Spectral Eye. "It's not just a Black Tortoise. I feel the presence of another unknown divine beast inside its body... The dragon expert killed at least two different kinds of divine beasts and used their flesh and bones as building blocks for the palace!" Lu Yun's mind buzzed with the ramifications.

As it turned out, even the power of the Tome of Life and Death couldn't revive these two divine beasts and turn them into his envoys. The dragon expert had used a power akin to creation itself to distill their dead bodies into pure materials and avoid the cycle of life and death entirely.

"How powerful was the one who created this palace?" Lu Yun breathed in deeply. "Then the real treasure vaults inside..." An intense glint flashed in his eyes. "They must be the divine vaults of the beasts making up the palace!"

Divine vaults!

Immortals who'd transcended the dao immortal realm could create a world within themselves. This major realm above the dao immortal realm was called the divine dharma realm and consisted of three subrealms: ingress, primordial, and principal. As for the so-called immortal emperor realm, it was the realm above the divine dharma realm.

Upon becoming a blood qilin and surmounting the time barrier, Cangyin had imparted her memories and some understanding of the ancient secrets to Lu Yun, as well as the classification of the age-old immortal dao.

As a matriarch of the water qilin tribe, Cangyin's knowledge was even more comprehensive than peers at her level.

"Refining divine vaults into treasuries, to do something like that..." Lu Yun hissed in surprise. How strong exactly had the dragons been three hundred million years ago? To casually prey upon divine beasts born from the power of the cosmos like the Black Tortoises....

“But gaining entry into a divine vault won’t be so easy.” He took out his luopan and silently chanted the Dragonsearch Invocation. The treasure vaults hidden within the dragon palace should be located at its lifepoints. He couldn’t perceive them with his naked eyes, but the compass could pinpoint their locations.

“What the... there are nine divine vaults here!” Lu Yun’s pupils dilated with shock. In other words, this place had been refined from the bodies of nine formidable natural-born divine beasts!

Nine!

He’d only seen two of them, but the luopan couldn’t lie. The palace had been crafted from the bodies of nine divine beasts.

“Too bad. If only I could resurrect them all.... Hmm, then again, they’d probably come back as only peerless immortals. They wouldn’t be all that useful.”

He recalled Xingzi. Once a powerhouse who could singlehandedly kill a blood qilin, she was merely a peerless immortal after becoming his envoy. Lu Yun shook his head and dismissed the random thoughts; then, guided by the compass, moved toward one of the vaults.

Chapter 387: Humans

The luopan’s golden light sectioned the dragon palace into nine parts, each with a divine vault at its center.

“This is....” Lu Yun suddenly halted his movements. He could discern the dragon palace’s true structure through the compass’ light—a giant feng shui layout, one not even he could recognize!

In fact, he couldn’t discern the gaps or weaknesses of this layout, even with the help of the compass.

“What the hell is this!” Shock creased his face. With a tight frown, he began frantically deducing the layout’s structure.

So the era three hundred million years ago was the golden age of feng shui! Such was the eventual conclusion he arrived at. This layout is wholly different from the palace’s architecture, and there are no signs of draconic involvement within it. Perhaps the palace wasn’t built by a dragon expert after all?

He suddenly registered the absence of the usual telltale signs associated with dragons. Although the era three hundred million years ago was vastly different from present age, dragons were powerful, long-lived creatures with unchanging habits.

As a proud race, they were wont to leave racial marks on their formations, combat arts, pills, formations, and treasures, so that everyone would know they were dragon-made. However, there were no such marks in the feng shui layout in front of him, a detail that ran entirely contrary to draconic custom.

“So the one who left the dragon palace behind wasn’t a dragon after all?” Lu Yun mumbled to himself.

“Of course it wasn’t a dragon.” A voice, alien yet familiar, reached his ears.

He didn't turn back, nor was he surprised. The merging of the Cosmic Sea with the netherworld had reinforced his connection to hell and greatly increased his control over the world of the dead.

A pair of white eyes had appeared behind him. It was just the pair of eyes and no other body parts, as if someone had punched two holes in the void and lined their eyes up with the openings to look at the other side.

Lu Yun had seen similar eyes before. He'd once injured such a pair of eyes while perfecting his sword art in the depths of hell. Afterward, a similar pair had appeared after he'd fended off Donglin Taihuang inside the North Sea skydragon tomb.

And now, this was the third pair.

This time, however, the voice sounding from the owner of the eyes sounded somewhat familiar to his ears.

"I had thought you'd turned traitor, but it turns out it's the world that has changed considerably." The voice suddenly turned helpless and world-weary. "Immortal dao? What is the immortal dao? Ah... so everything's long gone. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust..."

Two lines of clear teardrops trickled down from the white eyes and landed on the ground on the other side of the void.

"You're the existence within Qi Hai's spirit." Lu Yun took a deep breath, his tone unhurried as he continued, "So can you tell me just what is going on? The curse on the dragons and the divines, the great immortal war a hundred thousand years ago, the severing of the immortal dao, the withering of the Dao Flower.... Was everything the doing of your people?"

He fired off a quick barrage of questions in a single breath, voicing all of his accumulated doubts.

"Do you know why current monster spirits, dragons, divines and other races take on human form? Why divine spirits born from nature appear in the shape of a human?" The master of the eyes said after a long moment of silence.

"Because humans embody and are the shape of the dao?" Lu Yun answered subconsciously. Such was the mainstream assumption in the current world of immortals. Humans were the form of the grand dao, the shape most suited to cultivation. Therefore, all other races chose to take on human form.

"Humans embody the dao?" The owner of eyes burst out in hearty laughter. "The shape of the dao? Do you know how the character 'dao' is written?"

The energy of hell suddenly began flowing in a certain way and solidified in the air as the 'dao' character.

"This is the embodiment of dao! The form that all non-connate creatures ought to take!"

This 'dao' character was identical in appearance to the members of the Exalted Divine Tribe Lu Yun had previously seen. A human head and a serpentine tail!

“Due to humans shattering the dao, they are the masters of the world and sovereign over every other sentient race! What divines, dragons, phoenixes, and qilins? Preposterous, they all kneel in front of their human masters and cower in fear!

“Between heaven and earth, humans are the one and only truth! Human dao is the only grand dao revered by all living things! That is why the human form is the most noble form in the universe, why every creature transforms into a human, why they venerate humanity!

“Once upon a time, this world, this entire universe... even the netherworld beneath your feet belonged to mankind.” The voice grew more impassioned the longer it spoke, its booming tones reaching every corner of hell.

Those imprisoned inside the unknown void deep in the netherworld all quavered with apprehension, and the three giant coffins inside hell shone with dazzling light, resonating with the voice.

“But in the end, humans were dethroned,” Lu Yun observed.

“Yes.” A hint of sorrow flashed deep inside the eyes. “Humans were vanquished in an utter rout, a thorough defeat.”

“Is that why you people cast malicious curses against the dragons, phoenixes, qilins, turtles, and divines?” Lu Yun’s brow furrowed tightly.

“Hahahaha!” The eyes swiveled with the crazed laughter. “Cursed because they defeated the humans? No, because they are traitors, one and all!

“Humans once consecrated the dragons, phoenixes, qilins, and turtles as the four true spirits—auspicious symbols of good fortune and beings to be worshipped by all beneath the heavens! As for the divines... mankind elevated them to supreme beings second only to humanity.

“But in the final war, they turned on their human masters. They slaughtered the weak among humanity, the old, the women, and the children... they almost extinguished the human bloodline!

“We do not hate those who rose in rebellion. Human civilization was rotting from the inside and decline was inevitable. But we can neither forgive nor tolerate the existence of those sinners!”

Dragons, phoenixes, qilins, tortoises, and the divines were all traitors?

“Do you know?” The voice softened gradually. “Back when human civilization and dao ruled the world, these so-called true spirits were still ripping off pieces of raw flesh and making food out of blood inside their dens, and the divines were naught but nebulous spirits worshipped by primitive tribes in the remote corners of the world.

“The dragon and phoenix nests you visited are nothing more than primitive, backwater dumps!

“This dragon palace came into being as a result of a human king who killed nine Fiend Beasts rampaging through the lands. With the assistance of ten human grandmasters of the supplemental paths, he refined this palace for the dragons to guide them to the light of civilization.

“And yet, those same dragons butchered nearly all human descendents.”

Lu Yun fell silent. What was the appropriate response for a revelation like this? What should he say, how should he feel? Those who'd never lived through that era would never understand the deep-seated hatred burning within the voice.

"Then what about the severing of the immortal dao or those long-haired monsters?" he suddenly asked. "What about the poison curse inside Qing Han? Did you people also do that?"

Chapter 388: Mastermind

Lu Yun could extrapolate many things from the eyes' words.

First, the shamanic race.

They were absolutely a branch of the ancient humans dating back to the Primeval Era. They'd ushered in the golden age of the shamanic dao at a later date, but for one reason or another, they'd ultimately vanished in the sands of time.

Corpse coffins were a shamanic art, and weren't tombs, but curses.

The shamans had reappeared in the ancient times and used the corpse coffin art to curse the primeval dragons. Eighty thousand years ago, they'd struck again with the same method and buried two divine kings—Ruyi and Yueshen—to curse the fortunes of the divine dynasty.

And now... the poison curse also originated from the shamanic race!

Lu Yun looked deeply at the white irises, stressing each syllable. "Did your people cast the poison curse in Qing Han? Answer me!"

"I don't know...." A sense of deep powerlessness filled the eyes. "I was ambushed by dragon and phoenix experts and eradicated from the world. Someone reformed my true spirit and facilitated my rebirth, so I reincarnated as Qi Hai. If it weren't for you breaking the layout inside the dragon and phoenix nests, I wouldn't have awakened at all."

Hum.

A droning sound reverberated in hell's atmosphere as a tall figure emerged from the other side of the void and stepped into the netherworld. Impressively enough, the master of the eyes was none other than Qi Hai!

But plainly, this wasn't the same Qi Hai that Empress Myrtlestar and Su Xiaoxiao had known. No, this was someone else, a peerless human powerhouse from the Primeval Era.

"To think that hell, humanity's last hope, has also been destroyed." The man looked at the shattered world around him and sighed quietly in spite of himself. "Are you not surprised by me?" 'Qi Hai' glanced at Lu Yun, somewhat puzzled.

"Why should I be?" Lu Yun replied, tilting his head to the side.

"Since I can visit hell, I naturally have my ways of killing you." 'Qi Hai' narrowed his eyes. "Hell belongs to humans. If I wrest it away from you, then perhaps there's still hope for mankind to ascend to those historic peaks once more."

“You can give it a try if you want.” A smile floated onto Lu Yun’s lips and he snorted, “Did you think you could enter this world without my permission?”

Soon after, a simple and unadorned book emitting a faint black glow slowly materialized in front of him.

“The Book of Life and Death?” Paling slightly, ‘Qi Hai’ took two short steps backward. “Wait, this isn’t the Book of Life and Death! The book has been destroyed, so what is this?”

Seems I’ve been overthinking things. Lu Yun sighed softly, “The primeval humans weren’t in full control of hell either, it seems. At least, they didn’t control the Tome of Life and Death.”

“Tome of Life and Death?” Bewilderment appeared on ‘Qi Hai’s’ face at the mention of a name he’d never heard of.

However, Lu Yun immediately changed the subject. “There’s another pair of eyes there, as well as many prisoners.... Who are they?” He pointed at the unknown void in the depths of the netherworld.

“Those are traitors.” ‘Qi Hai’ followed the direction of Lu Yun’s finger, scathing hatred shooting out of his eyes. “The eight regiments of ghostly servants protecting hell also betrayed humanity in the end and handed hell over to our enemies.”

Qi Hai looked all around. Noticing Lu Yun’s many ghostly servants and Envoys of Samsara, he couldn’t help but mock, “Bold of you to accept other races. Aren’t you afraid they’ll end up betraying you?”

Among Lu Yun’s envoys and ghostly servants, very few were humans. Most were monster spirits or divines.

Paying the man no heed, Lu Yun took out several formation stones with a flip of the hand. Using the same method as the last time, he carefully engraved formation runes on the stones, combining formation and talisman dao.

“Are you... sketching the origin of the universe?” ‘Qi Hai’ murmured, looking at Lu Yun’s fingers.

Huff!

A ball of purple fire suddenly erupted and destroyed everything on the formation stones. This time, the purple flame made a full circle in the air before slowly vanishing, rather than going on a rampage like last time.

“What’s this?” Lu Yun asked, then continued, “It’s this kind of fire that destroyed hell.”

Blood drained from ‘Qi Hai’s’ face. His blank gaze remained on the spot where the fire had been and his body began to tremble. It took a long time to recover his calm. “There are some things....”

“Then don’t. I’m not strong enough yet, so I’m not qualified to know!” Lu Yun interrupted. “I just need to know what I need to know so I can make the right preparations beforehand!”

“In the month since I’ve awakened and dwelled in the North Sea, I’ve learned many things and gained some understanding of the current era.” ‘Qi Hai’ didn’t reply directly. “Ten thousand years ago was the battle that marked the end of the Aos, the North Sea’s last dragon rulers. Do you still remember it? The same selling out, the same betrayal, and the same... mastermind!

“That was just a simple reenactment of mankind’s fall,” ‘Qi Hai’ chuckled.

“Mastermind?” Lu Yun froze.

“That fire belongs to one of the rulers of the world. As for his name, it’s better for you if you don’t know it.” ‘Qi Hai’s’ expression turned visibly aloof. “To think he’s also involved....” He then plopped down on the ground, clearly not intending to leave.

“You should forget about the items stashed inside the dragon palace’s nine divine vaults. Those belong to.... Hmm, to use this current age’s terminology, these are treasures of the primeval dragons. They’re of no use to you right now.”

“You’re going to stay here?” Lu Yun asked ‘Qi Hai’.

“Yes.” The man nodded. “In here, I can still feel the presence of human dao, while outside....”

There had been no immortal dao back in his time. Human dao had ruled the world, then. It hadn’t been until the end of his era and the destruction of human dao that the current immortal dao had been born.

However, Lu Yun had a feeling that immortal dao had also been pioneered by humans. Even the Scarlet Ape sealed inside the dragon tomb had cultivated immortal dao.

As for the ‘Qi Hai’ in front of him, this wasn’t a case of body possession. His true spirit had reincarnated generation after generation and he’d ultimately regained his previous talents after his incarnation as Qi Hai of the ancient times. Then, he’d dazzled the world of immortals with his brilliant feats.

Ultimately, Qi Hai had entered the dragon tomb due to a call from his spirit’s instincts and leveraged the power left behind by the primeval humans to nourish himself. However, the two-headed zombie in the tomb had eaten him whole. Or rather, the creature had gathered him inside its body and used its own energy to repair his true spirit.

Otherwise, Lu Yun likely would’ve been powerless against the two-headed zombie, even with the Great Formation of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Fiends.

In any case, after the zombie’s death, Qi Hai’s true spirit was freed and he’d fully recovered his original identity from the Primeval Era.

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Frustration assailed Lu Yun when he thought of the divine vaults he couldn’t touch, but Beigong Yu then told him something that struck him like a bolt from the blue.

The Skyqilin Pearl!

Beigong Yu knew where it was located.

Chapter 389: Demon Fetus

The seaside stronghold had been destroyed by the North Sea monster spirits. Once they retreated, Lu Yun took over the ruins of the fortress.

Several major construction projects commenced all over Dusk Province, raising city after large-scale city. Lu Yun even buried a hundred billion premium immortal crystals to bolster the land's damaged underground vein and network of spirit veins.

Su Xiaoxiao revitalized the seed of the Violet Orchid Fruit she'd obtained from the vault of the North Sea Palace and planted it in the province. Soon, tiny violet flowers bloomed one after another across the lands of Dusk.

In only a few short months, Dusk Province became a true land of fantasies and fairytales, rivaling even Xiankan of Nephrite Major.

Nevertheless, there were still only a few million people in a province that was forty thousand kilometers across, and all of the inhabitants lived within, or near, Dusk City. The other parts of the province could only be described as completely barren and desolate; immortals and cultivators from outside the province didn't dare visit anymore.

While Dusk Province rebuilt over the next few months, the North Sea monster spirits didn't give up their plans for invading.

Gone was the seaside stronghold, along with the barrier protecting the northern point of Nephrite Major. Meanwhile, countless monster spirits called the marine waters home. Although Lu Yun had captured several million soldiers, and hundreds of millions more had died in Dusk, there was still no shortage of oceanic inhabitants.

North Sea monster spirits who hadn't thrown themselves under the banner of the North Sea court responded to Scarlet Ape's call to action. They gathered on Levitating Island and slavered over Dusk Province. Worse yet, groups of them frequently came ashore to wreak havoc on land.

However, they were merely pests that didn't warrant concern in Lu Yun's eyes. What he really cared about was the Skyqilin Pearl, and Beigong Yu knew where it was.

The kungpeng nest!

The Scaled-Dragon King verified the location; back in the day, he'd immediately raided the nest with his troops after Beigong Yu's death. The many layers of real and illusory traps and barriers within had claimed many monster immortals before they were able to break the outer layer of energy guarding the nest.

There, the Scaled-Dragon King found the Skyqilin Pearl and the unhatched kungpeng egg. However, he didn't actually acquire the egg. As soon as he touched it, the kungpeng nest kicked all living souls out, almost like it was a living being, and disappeared without a trace.

It'd been the traces of energy left on the scaled-dragon that'd misled Beigong Yu into thinking his erstwhile colleague had acquired a kungpeng egg.

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"Is the nest still in the North Sea?" Lu Yun frowned. To be honest, he was very reluctant to travel to the North Sea now; that big monkey was too much of a threat. If the human demon hadn't trapped it, Divine

Glory's cannon wouldn't have been able to hit it. Even with half of its body blasted away, it'd fled Dusk Province with great agility.

Moreover, Scarlet Ape had only just broken its seal then, and hadn't yet recovered from the month-long battle it'd fought over the sea. There was no telling how powerful the primeval ape would be after having recovered some of its energy.

However, Lu Yun would still risk his life without hesitation if he crossed paths again with the monkey, for Qing Han's sake if nothing else.

Qing Han's disguise might still be impenetrable to him, but he was no fool. Various nudges from his intuition had constantly filtered through to his mind all this time, leading to a dawning conclusion of crystal clear clarity. However, if his friend insisted on keeping his secrets, Lu Yun wasn't going to point them out. He so looked forward to the day he ascended to immortality.

"It's not in the North Sea, but in the east!" Beigong Yu declared with great certainty. "I recently sensed the reappearance of the kungpeng nest—it's now somewhere to the east of us, most likely the heart of the East Sea."

"The East Sea!" Lu Yun's eyes shone with intent.

"The Sovereign Meet will commence a month from now, sir," Yuying reminded him. "That will have many implications."

Lu Yun nodded. "Then we'll go to the East Sea after the Sovereign Meet." He couldn't not participate in the tournament.

Three years ago, the five youth sovereigns had ambitiously declared that they would ascend to immortality in Dusk Province after three years. Much had happened during the intervening years.

The path of cultivation had been restored, and the void realm recovered. Four of the five youth sovereigns were youth dao sovereigns. However, Qing Han later discovered that the other three had been killed. Yet, the three factions they belonged to didn't show any signs of their losses. It was as if the three of them yet lived on.

That just didn't make any sense. Lu Yun had to plumb the depths of their current situation for the matter of Qing Han's safety.

"Immortals and cultivators may not dare enter Dusk Province now, sir," Yuying said with some hesitation.

"Oh, don't worry, they'll come." Lu Yun smiled. "That monkey will be courting death if it dares stir up trouble during the tournament."

"Lu Yun, Lu Yun... Fairy Ruyan is giving birth, but something's wrong!" Qing Han's urgent call came from outside the door.

"What? She's delivering now? Ahead of her due date?" Lu Yun was caught off guard.

Qing Ruyan had elected to stay and deliver her child in Dusk after coming to the province's aid with the immortals of the Panorama Pavilion a few months ago.

After consuming the Heaven Descent Pill, her child was bound to be a powerful figure rivaling the celestial emperors. However, the peak factions of the world would never tolerate that possibility coming to pass. If Qing Ruyan had remained in the pavilion's headquarters, some old heavyweights would've made a move to kill her.

That was why she'd temporarily moved to Dusk Province under the guise of aiding them in battle against Scarlet Ape, then stayed afterward.

According to the calculations of the pavilion head, Qing Ruyan should give birth in three months, not now! It was clear from Qing Han's anxious look that something was gravely wrong.

"Xiaoxiao, Xingzi, go check on her!" Lu Yun summoned two of his envoys and made his way to Qing Ruyan's residence.

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Qing Ruyan resided in a manor in the southeast of the governor residence complex. Surrounded by nature, the manor was peaceful and tranquil. Lu Yun had even set up a placid feng shui layout to create the perfect environment for a pregnant woman.

However, the manor of ten kilometers wide was currently enveloped by roiling darkness. Strange shrieks and howls echoed from the depths of the black smoke, and Qing Ruyan's impressive presence had already weakened considerably.

"Demon fetus!!" Su Xiaoxiao and Xingzi exclaimed when they saw the dense, black smoke.

"Why would the fairy be pregnant with a demon fetus? What is going on?!" Su Xiaoxiao blanched.

Chapter 390: Akasha Ghosts, Again

A demon fetus!

Su Xiaoxiao was scared witless by what she saw—Qing Ruyan's child was a demon fetus! That was the only explanation for the omens manifesting here.

Once born, the demon baby would wreak havoc in the world.

"Formation!" declared a clear voice, ushering the instant appearance of a great formation over the area. Feinie had taken over the protective formation of the governor's manor to conceal what was happening in its premises.

If any other immortal saw this scene, rumors would run rife through Dusk Province and the authority Lu Yun had worked so hard to build would be destroyed overnight.

"It really is a demon fetus!" Lu Yun and Qing Han were stunned when they arrived at the manor.

The roiling smoke above the premise had turned into a giant infant's head. It was smiling, an uneerie hatred quirking its lips. It was as if the baby bore strong resentment for the world before it had even been born.

"Xing Mou and the little fox are still in there..." Qing Han was looking on with great concern. The situation in the manor was too frightful, and now Qing Ruyan's life force had vanished entirely.

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“Qing Ruyan entered Dusk Province when too much blood was being spilled. The resentment of the immortals who died there concentrated on her, turning the immortal fetus she carried into a demon fetus. We didn’t even have to risk our own karma by moving against her!”

Outside Dusk Province, a few grim-looking elders were looking into the province with strange smiles on their faces.

“She fancied herself so clever, sneaking into Dusk Province during that Scarlet Ape’s attack. All the malice and resentment in the air from the violence raging in the province... someone pregnant with an immortal fetus was the perfect target. Besides, she even killed a few people while she was at it... tsk tsk, how foolish.”

There was an eerie presence of death about them, but they were still alive. Their auras were even greater and more powerful than the various leaders of the major factions; they were all origin dao immortals!

They were those who’d reached peak arcane dao immortal realm and entered the void under the origin dao fruit’s guidance, and were lucky enough to pluck their dao fruit. During the process, however, they’d suffered great injuries. Those injuries constantly ate away at their life force and forced them to go into closed door cultivation to fight their wounds.

They hadn’t appeared when Scarlet Ape invaded Dusk Province. Now that Qing Ruyan was going to deliver her child, they’d emerged at the border to take in what was happening.

Clearly, it was their doing that Qing Ruyan had so easily entered Dusk Province and participated in the earlier battle. Gleeful delight punctuated their lighthearted conversation as they watched the demon fetus arrive in the world.

“That little fellow in the Panorama Pavilion is about to be guided by the dao fruit tree, isn’t he?” chuckled an old crone with a cane.

“Soon. Another hundred years.... I do hope he’ll succeed in plucking the origin dao fruit and become inhuman beings just like us... hehehe...” cackled another voice.

“Origin dao? Hehehe, we’re the real origin dao immortals, the true powerhouses of the world of immortals. The nine celestial emperors are nothing but free-range pigs. Pigs are to be slaughtered and roasted once they grow fat enough. How foolish of those nine poor bugs to think about working together....”

“Silence!” the other origin dao immortals hectored when they heard the old crone bring that up.

She laughed awkwardly and stopped talking.

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“Qing Ruyan is dead,” Lu Yun suddenly muttered.

Blood drained from Qing Han’s face when Lu Yun made that declaration.

Qing Ruyan hadn't been sitting idle over the past few months, and had frequently given pointers to the group in Dusk. Even Lu Yun's envoys had many weaknesses and insufficiencies, Qing Ruyan had helped them shore up many of their failings and progress past bottlenecks.

Empress Myrtlestar and the Azure Dragon King were more experienced than she was, but they cultivated the ancient methods, which weren't necessarily suited for today's immortals. Xing Mou and the little fox, especially, had made great progress under her guidance.

Now, however, she was dead.

"Don't worry, I'll take care of it," Lu Yun said stiffly. "Stay here and guard the place. Kill anyone who dares draw close."

He subconsciously threw a glance to the west, his lips curled into a cold smile. Bringing out the Formation Orb, Feinie set up a great formation to seal off the manor without missing a beat.

Upon setting foot into the black smoke, Lu Yun was immediately met with incessant howls and wails. Even he, the overlord of all things spooky, felt a little unnerved by it all.

I was wondering why there were lost spirits but no resentment after hundreds of millions died in Dusk. So it all went into the fetus... Lu Yun's expression was dark.

"Old man, what's the deal with your Heaven Descent Pill?" He manifested an image in the dragon palace in hell to pose the question. "Why did it concentrate all of the malice and resentment in Dusk on her?"

"Heaven Descent Pill?" Qi Hai looked around blankly.

He was indeed Qi Hai, but the Qi Hai from the Primordial Era possessed only tens of thousands of years worth of memory. Compared to his lifespan of millions and millions of years, or his knowledge from the Primeval Era, that Qi Hai had been but a drop in the bucket.

"Search for the memory and find it, or I'll kick you out!" snarled Lu Yun.

Qi Hai smiled resignedly and closed his eyes, searching through the memories of the ancient times recorded in his soul.

"Heaven Descent Pill... you refined that too?" Qi Hai opened his eyes and frowned. "It's nothing good and not something you should touch. If my guess is right, the three who originally benefited from the pill all met a terrible destiny in the end."

"With the ancient world of immortals destroyed, even those who didn't take the pill have all suffered terrible ends too," Lu Yun huffed. "Tell me what's going on."

"The Heaven Descent Pill intercepts a heavenly opportunity to create a natural-born immortal, and the heavenly dao takes from those who have too much to share with those who have too little." Qi Hai looked seriously at Lu Yun's projection. "Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"She's suffering the envy of heaven?" The connection quickly came to Lu Yun and he briefed Qi Hai about Qing Ruyan's matter.

“No wonder.... It was beyond reckless of her to come to the emperor’s resting place after taking a Heaven Descent Pill! She was courting death!” Qi Hai shook his head and sighed. “If my guess is right, an akasha ghost has taken possession of the fetus she bears. That’s why the delivery is occurring three months early, and is causing damage to the mother.”

“Akasha ghosts again!” Lu Yun scowled.