

Necropolis 501

Chapter 501: Doom

Nephrite Major was in utter chaos. Previously fertile and thriving, Azure Province had become a living hell with billions of living souls dying agonized, anguished deaths. It was one of the worst catastrophes that'd taken place in the world of immortals over the past eighty thousand years.

Every immortal in Nephrite Major had been watching. They'd allowed themselves to relax when Lu Yun and Qing Han joined hands to seal the crack in the tomb, believing that to be the end of this time's disaster. However, Qing and Feng immortals had suddenly intervened and triggered an explosion in the tomb, eliciting a likewise detonation of ire from all of Nephrite Major.

Nephrite Celestial Emperor Zhao Changkong drew upon the power of Xiankan and placed the city under lockdown, imprisoning the immortals of the two treacherous clans.

"You can't do this, Zhao Changkong!" the Feng forefather shrieked and hollered like a man gone mad, nine arcane dao fruit emerging from his body and merging to attack the light barrier around Xiankan.

Meanwhile, the Qing forefather retained his equanimity. "Qing Yuezhe committed a grave mistake, so we must pay for it."

Qin Sheng and Art Saint had yet to arrive, but the old man had already personally captured the thirty-six greatest dao immortals and three hundred and sixty-five peerless immortals of his clan. Keeping them firmly under suppression, he pushed them to the front doors of the clan's paradise.

"Forefather!" The immortals taken into custody stared at their forefather in disbelief.

"The Qing Clan is rotten to the core. Even without this calamity, something would've happened sooner or later to destroy us," sighed the Qing forefather. "Take the rest of the clan to Dusk Province, Taxian. Qing Han is a good child, and Lu Yun has been showing us mercy all along. He never once moved to wipe us all out. They won't turn you away."

Qing Taxian, made patriarch in order to sire a child with a cosmic constitution, fell to his knees before the forefather and kowtowed heavily. He was also a peerless immortal, but his cultivation and potential were mediocre, at best, when compared to the three hundred and sixty-five chosen ones.

"Our fate today was sealed the moment we accepted House Donglin's conditions all those years ago." With that, the forefather wordlessly waved a hand, sweeping the agitating immortals off their feet and strengthening his control over them. Then he summoned an orb of faint gold luster and sent it into Qing Taxian's body.

The majority of the clan's immortals looked on in despair.

The Arcane Golden Orb was a connate-grade treasure that held the clan's fortunes. It was one of the greatest contributing factors to the Qings' rise to the top among the factions in the world of immortals.

With the orb passing into Qing Taxian's hands, he was no longer a puppet patriarch, but the true ruler of the clan.

Once they lost thirty-six dao immortals and three hundred and sixty-five peerless immortals, the Qing Clan would no longer possess any elites. This peak faction would tumble from their tremendous heights to the bottom of the pecking order in the world of immortals.

The Qing forefather appeared to be a young man. It'd been him who'd sat outside the Lu paradise and prevented Lu Daoling from going to Lu Yun's rescue.

"Please permit us this course of action, Your Majesty." He bowed in Zhao Changkong's direction.

"So granted." Zhao Changkong nodded. "No one is to obstruct the Qing Clan from making their way to Dusk Province. Those who dare violate Our order... will see their clans exterminated."

His voice boomed throughout Nephrite Major, giving pause to the factions stirring to intercept the future remnants of the Qing Clan.

Although the former celestial emperor, Zhao Fengyang, had passed down the throne, no single faction in Nephrite Major could rival the heavenly court, despite their lack of an origin dao immortal monarch.

This was due to previous Nephrite emperors ruling with an iron fist and prohibiting any origin dao immortals from appearing in the major. Compared to the other eight majors, where many peak factions had staged various rebellions or coups, Nephrite Major was the most stable of all.

All of Nephrite quieted down after Zhao Changkong gave his order.

Meanwhile, the Feng Clan was still struggling to break out of Xiankan and escape their impending doom. Powerful formations and restrictions isolated all of the capital. No matter how hard the Feng forefather and elites attacked, they couldn't resist the might of the great city.

Immortals in the capital watched with apprehension.

The Feng forefather was among the greatest in Nephrite Major, second only to the celestial emperor. However, he was like an ant trying to topple a tree, unable to even scratch the barrier.

Onlookers were reminded of when the Ling Clan, the biggest clan of Nephrite Major, had moved out of Xiankan tens of thousands of years ago. They must've foreseen then that something like this would one day happen. Execution of their origin dao immortal had merely been an excuse for them to make a move.

The Feng Clan didn't have the slightest chance to escape when Nephrite Major was determined to destroy it. In fact, their forefather couldn't even ensure mutual destruction in the face of the city's blinding immortal light.

"Give it up, old friend," the Qing forefather sighed. "Our two clans have committed a grave sin, and the world itself has cursed our people. The Feng Clan would die out even if you manage to escape. It's better for us to make amends with our blood and grant our descendants a chance to live."

"Shut up!!" the Feng forefather snarled. "With that madman Zhao Fengyang away, this is the perfect time for me to pluck an origin dao fruit... I'm only a step away from my goal, just one step! I can soon enter the void and pluck the fruit, becoming an unrivaled heavyweight! I can't stop here!"

Bam!

His howl was interrupted by a beam of immortal light shooting down into Xiankan, knocking him to the ground.

Art Saint and Qin Sheng had arrived. They stood outside the city, leveling cold looks at the immortals of the Feng and Qing Clans.

“Any last words?” Art Saint’s eyes glowed crimson and his body was enveloped by demonic energy. He didn’t look at all like an immortal, but a fiend through and through.

A pang struck Qin Sheng’s heart. Whatever had the eyes seen to lead him so far down his cultivation deviation? The body of the eyes had even devoured Qin Sheng’s body, breaking out of the seal in the Azure Tomb.

The Qing forefather shook his head slightly.

With a wave of his hand, Qin Sheng deployed the power of Xiankan and swept away the two forefathers, along with their dao and peerless immortals.

Zhao Changkong stared at their departing forms, his expression flickering through a myriad of emotions. He’d promised to help Art Saint devour the other replicas, but it seemed from that singular move that Qin Sheng could easily defeat Art Saint.

The Qing Clan made preparations to move out of their paradise and Xiankan entirely, setting a destination for the transportation formation at the border of Life Province. As for the Feng Clan... their forefather hadn’t said anything to them before he’d been whisked away, so the Feng immortals refused to leave their paradise. From this, one could see the writing on the wall for them.

Zhao Changkong’s lips curved the faintest hint upward.

He’d ascended to the throne not too long ago, and his grasp of his empire wasn’t yet fully consolidated. Destruction of the Feng and Qing Clans played perfectly into his desires; he now had a firmer foothold in Nephrite Major.

Next to follow was strengthening his own clan and those who’d been supporting him all along, raising a new group of peak factions loyal to him.

Chapter 502: Interment of Heaven and Earth

Wayfarer rested, regaining some of his vitality. Under Lu Yun’s orders, he reshaped the landscape and shifted the earthen veins in an effort to set up a new layout; it was impossible to seal the crack with the immortal burial layout now.

Sixty-four dragons formed from earthen veins created a sprawling layout that protected Lu Yun and the others within.

However, the scarlet yin spirits seemed to be actively commanded. Aside from their persistent assault on the Azure capital, they directed part of their attention to the well-protected Lu Yun.

There were still roughly two hundred Feng and Qing immortals left in the province. Aside from Feng Wuxian and Qing Yuezhe, six more dao immortals stood among them.

Picking up chunks of earth, Lu Yun used the ultimate technique of equipment dao—forge of earth and sky—to refine that many coffins, then buried all of them alive. He needed everything he'd ever learned to resolve this crisis.

Interment of heaven and earth!

Rather than a single tomb, this feng shui layout was for a mausoleum, one for all of the Feng and Qing immortals to come. Only something as complete as a mausoleum could possibly bury this devastating breach.

Yes, 'bury' was the right word.

His Spectral Eye saw the will of death in the great fissure. It was as if the world beyond had already died, and putting that to rest had to come before anything else. The interment of heaven and earth was the strongest layout for a mausoleum there was, and was the only way the will of death could be buried at all.

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Art Saint and Qin Sheng brought the Feng and Qing immortals soon enough.

Lu Yun had heard Zhao Changkong's words loud and clear. The Qing Clan was Qing Han's family and now that her father was patriarch in deed, as well as name, he had no reason to refuse them.

The Feng clan? He didn't give a shit about them.

The two clans' immortals glared at Lu Yun with alternating looks of rancor and terror, but he ignored them and soldiered on.

"Hold on. These immortals have too much resentment in them, and I don't know where the other end of this breach connects to. The aura of death is so thick... if I bury them in ordinary coffins, they'll probably become corpse demons and cause more trouble in a thousand years."

Lu Yun clapped his hands together. The coffins he'd refined shattered to pieces, dumping their new inhabitants into heaps onto the ground.

"Prepare five thousand tons of bronze for me, Yuying," he messaged his envoy.

As acting governor of Dusk City, the white-robed pill fairy immediately contacted Qing Ruyan. Gathering so much bronze on such short notice required the help of the Panorama Pavilion.

At present, the merchant guild was Lu Yun's staunchest ally. In addition to refining the Tribulation Traversing Pill and lending a dao weapon to its lord, Lu Yun was also the master of the Pavilion's future hope—Liu Qingmiao. Any request he made would be fulfilled immediately.

Bronze wasn't an expensive material, but it carried exceptional meaning. In the world of immortals, many symbolic treasures and ritual implements were forged from bronze. The metal definitely wasn't cheap, either, especially when compared to some immortal-grade materials.

Nevertheless, the Panorama Pavilion managed to gather up five thousand tons in a very short time. Yuying sent it into hell immediately thereafter.

Drrrrr!

The ground trembled under the newfound weight as a colossal mountain of bronze appeared in front of Lu Yun, who chopped off a tenth and began refining coffins anew with hellfire.

Bronze coffins and outer-coffins were widely known among tomb raiders as objects of great misfortune. Encountering them during the tomb-raiding line of work was the worst development possible, as these burial vessels often contained terrifying zombies or corpse demons, and for good reason.

They were widely employed by tomb-builders who realized that a tomb's feng shui would corrupt its owner. Bronze, hanging, and netherwood coffins were very common methods of restricting the corpse demons that ensued.

Though these coffins generally turned into personal weapons of those they contained, thus strengthening the dead, their mysterious power also permanently trapped the corpse inside the tomb. That way, no disaster would befall the outside world.

As an experienced tomb raider and feng shui master, Lu Yun was perfectly capable of refining bronze coffins. Calling upon 'forge of earth and sky' a second time, he gathered an incredible amount of natural energy once more. The yin spirits around the sixty-four earthen dragons were scattered.

Stretching upward to three hundred meters tall, the embittered bamboo bathed him in viridian light. Lu Yun was at the apex of his power.

A huge forge of earth and sky stood like a translucent, dark-gold mountain in the heart of Azure Province. The immortals in the Azure capital could easily see the spectacle, even from several thousand kilometers away. This was the ultimate achievement for equipment dao, something countless refiners could only dream of.

Boom!

Several hundred bronze coffins and outer-coffins flew out of the forge, encasing the Feng and Qing immortals once more.

The Qing forefather approached Qing Han with sincere frankness.

"Child!" he said.

"Mm." Qing Han couldn't do much more than nod slightly. The pain of the mixed venom inside of her threatened to consume her, but she remained steadfast in her control of the embittered bamboo.

Realizing the condition she was in, the forefather hastened his message. "In truth, the Qing clan has two crowning treasures. I have already given your father the Arcane Golden Orb, but the other is even greater.

"Surpassing connate grade, it currently rests upon Cranecry Mountain beyond the East Sea. When you achieve immortality, you should seek it out for yourself, utilizing the blood in your veins!"

"Mn..." Qing Han nodded again. She didn't have any strength to actually speak, but her eyes radiated a deep sorrow. The Qing forefather hadn't done anything wrong. In fact, he'd even once saved her from the rimesnake venom.

Plus... he'd always known who she was.

Lu Yun heard nothing of the exchange. If he had, the mention of Cranecry Mountain would've stunned him senseless. On Earth, Cranecry Mountain was where Daoism had begun. Was there a place like that in the world of immortals, too?

Having said his piece, the forefather entered the biggest coffin of his own accord. It slowly sank into the ground.

"Interment of heaven and earth... Begin!" Lu Yun cried out.

Boom!

Crashing into each other as dragons, the sixty-four earthen veins exploded in a burst of natural energy that spread out in every direction.

Suddenly, the earth under Lu Yun's feet began roiling like waves, and the outer-coffins still left on the surface were swallowed whole. The forty-five hundred remaining tons of bronze melted and slowly morphed into a grand palace, then slammed down upon the breach.

The Qing and Feng forefathers' tombstones appeared at the center of the hall, while the dao and peerless immortals' tombstones surrounded them, forming an enormous yin yang.

It was the same yin-yang layout as before, but this time in the form of a mausoleum. Qing Yuezhe, Feng Wuxian, and several hundred other immortals were the burial sacrifices.

Such was the interment of heaven and earth.

Chapter 503: Taking the World By Storm

A bronze palace! Interment of heaven and earth!

Just like the immortal burial layout was the most sophisticated tomb, this was the most sophisticated mausoleum recorded in his sect's texts.

After the burial had failed in fiery glory, the incredible energy released by the Embittered Bamboo and shattered yin-yang graph had enabled Lu Yun to draft the framework for the interment and palace.

The now-enormous fissure a hundred kilometers across was sealed up again. Of course, the seal was still incredibly fragile and could be broken by the slightest bit of disturbance. If the bronze palace broke open, Lu Yun would truly have no recourse left.

After all, he was only a single cultivator. No matter how plentiful or strong his methods were, they weren't inexhaustible.

The immortals holed up inside Azure capital no longer dared come out. When the Feng and Qing Clans' intervention had caused the tomb to explode, more than eighty percent of the immortals outside the city had died in an endless tide of yin spirits.

The breach might be sealed now, but its impermanence gave them no reassurance. Only the Azure capital was left, anyway; it was far safer to stay inside to protect it.

The yin spirits weren't able to go anywhere else. Innumerable immortals were lined up on the province's borders, cutting down anyone that crossed over. The Nephrite court and East Sea monster court were both involved.

Azure Province bordered the East Sea, so if it was taken over by yin spirits, the marine neighbors wouldn't fare much better. Indeed, the entire coast was covered with monster spirit generals and battalions that charged at any spirit that tried escaping the province.

Under the yin spirits' repeated attacks, the Azure governor's veil of light was at its breaking point. Nephrite immortals from the surrounding provinces gathered at their adjacent borders, hemming the dead in. Immortals fought at every developing crack, filling the gaps with their own bodies and lives.

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"Have void realm cultivators come," an anemic voice sounded.

After setting up the tombs in the bronze palace—two main, seventy-two major, seven hundred thirty minor—all of the power drained away from Lu Yun's body. The faintest ember of hellfire burned inside him and Qing Han collapsed unconscious in his embrace.

The Embittered Bamboo returned to her body, suppressing the venom inside her once more. Empress Myrtlestar and the Azure Dragon King combined their ancient techniques to seal away the agitating poison curse inside her.

The interment of heaven and earth was now completed on a preliminary level. A heady energy of creation flowed forth from it, filling the gap beneath it with its potent essence. The nearby yin spirits were dispersed by the bronze palace; they dared not approach it.

However, the great hall that spanned fifty kilometers was still vibrating slightly; the mausoleum wasn't finished enough to defeat the terror on the other side of the breach. Whatever was there remained persistent in its battering against the new barrier.

Lu Yun was exhausted in both mind and body. The emptiness he experienced was incurable by any pill or herb.

"Void realm cultivators can draw power from heaven and earth... the power inherent in the world of immortals is anathema to the yin spirits." Lu Yun spoke quietly, but Wayfarer helped make his words heard throughout all corners of Azure Province and abroad.

"I knew you were always up to no good, Lu Yun! Even now, you want to kill the geniuses of the world!" Immortals on good terms with the Feng and Qing Clans instantly pointed accusing fingers. If dao immortals were dying left and right, what good would void realm cultivators do? Weren't they being sent to their deaths?

Lu Yun closed his eyes. He was speechless out of necessity. The words he'd spoken just now had robbed him of the last vestige of his strength.

Yuying, Feinie, Aoxue, Xuanxi, Huangqing, Cangyin, Su Xiaoxiao, and Xingzi; all eight Envoys of Samsara appeared around him in a protective circle. The pure energy of creation erupted from their bodies and rose to the heavens, eradicating the horrifying yin spirits swirling there.

“How can this be?!” The other immortals colored with shock when they sensed the envoys’ auras. The ladies radiated oneness with heaven and earth. In other words, they’d achieved immortality through the void realm!

Only those who’d progressed through the void realm possessed this quality. The entire world still remembered the power that Mo Yi had wielded after attaining immortality. She had done so as a void realm immortal.

“No, they’re all peerless immortals... I’ve seen many of them in Dusk Province before. The girl in the blood-red dress once blocked the Qing Clan’s door—she was already an immortal back then!” Someone recognized Aoxue among the octet.

As a peerless immortal, Aoxue emitted an aura as impenetrable as an ocean. She breathed in sync with creation, just like a new-generation immortal would.

“A formation of heaven and earth!” an immortal yelled. “He declared that he would invent one back in the North Sea. He said that it would let immortals attain the same level of strength as those who progressed through the void realm...”

“He actually succeeded!” the immortals murmured to themselves.

The possibility of a formation of heaven and earth had been a very popular topic, once upon a time. The entire world’s formation masters had gathered to research and discuss it. Alas, Scarlet Ape’s attack on Dusk Province had scattered them and their work to the winds.

Later on, it was apparently proven that a so-called ‘formation of heaven and earth’ couldn’t be incorporated into the body at all, which reduced it to a joke.

Many believed from then on that Lu Yun had made such an outrageous claim only because he’d wanted to save himself. A formation of heaven and earth didn’t—couldn’t—exist. That was why Dusk Province had been isolated, besieged, and systematically uprooted.

Today, the appearance of eight peerless immortals who carried the power of heaven and earth with them was a resounding slap in their faces. The formation of heaven and earth actually existed, and the proof was right in front of them!

The eight envoys arranged themselves into a formation around Lu Yun and Qing Han. On their master’s orders, they used their power to suppress the palace beneath.

The bronze palace instantly stopped vibrating.

Lu Yun opened his eyes. He’d returned to hell through the Gates of the Abyss as soon as he was able, and now that he was fully recovered, he was ready to fight again.

“One potential!” proclaimed Lu Yun. Countless formation stones flew out from his hands, settling into the shape of a magnificent formation that enclosed the bronze palace within.

“Two principles!”

Boom!

Another layout fell into place. The feng shui shapes that Wayfarer had arranged earlier were coming into effect. A light touch from Lu Yun's compass was all it took to activate them.

"Three essentials!"

"Four divisions!"

"Five elements!"

"Six directions!"

"Seven stars!"

"Eight trigrams!"

"Nine sectors!"

"Ten orientations!"

Ten layers of layouts simultaneously pressed down upon the bronze palace. All ten were ordinary feng shui influences, but they came together to form a grand influence over the world.

Finally, the interment of earth and sky was complete.

Chapter 504: Human Nature

At the precise moment of conclusion for the interment of heaven and earth and completion of the bronze palace, the scene grew dark before Lu Yun's eyes and he almost collapsed to the ground.

Having been baptized by the grand influence of heaven and earth, though, his will wasn't what it'd once been, and he managed to stay on his feet.

Survivors in Azure City hurried out of the capital and worked together with the immortals stationed outside the province to deal with the yin spirits. The Azure governor called upon his seal again, combing through every part of the land to flush out and kill all of the lurking yin spirits.

It took about three days for the province to be cleansed of evil.

As Lu Yun had predicted, however, the calamity had left Azure Province a desolate and barren land, most of those who called her home erased from existence.

Having completed clean-up, the Azure governor and his kin knelt on the bloodied land of the province, weeping silently. Foundations set up and painstakingly tended to over the past tens of thousands of years had been destroyed overnight.

Every living soul fell silent.

This was one of the worst disasters Nephrite Major had suffered in its history. Billions of lives in the province had been slaughtered. Even those who'd rushed from other parts of the major to help had suffered great casualties as well.

Those who'd survived were heavyweights of the world, or geniuses equipped with great treasures or fortune.

No one took their leave of Azure Province, instead making their way to the bronze palace, which was a bit of a misnomer since it was, in fact, a giant mausoleum. The structure was a hundred kilometers wide and covered the enormous breach beneath it.

It seemed like a single entity that contained enormous bronze tombs, each of them related to each other as a singular feng shui layout. The grand influence of the world buried the will of death beneath the fissure.

However...

A deep-seated horror prickled skins when everyone realized they could still hear the despairing cries and wails of the Qing and Feng immortals.

They hadn't died, but were instead buried alive—an even more chilling prospect. Many immortals who approached the palace could feel a cold air of malice and resentment from it.

“Don't you think you crossed a line, Lu Yun?!” demanded a Nephrite official.

Before his voice could reach Lu Yun, the soundwaves were dispersed by Feinie's casual brandish of a sleeve.

Lu Yun and Qing Han had come to and sat cross-legged on the ground, their inner energy circulating at great speed and their presences increasing in strength.

They were both already in the unravelled void realm. Exhausting their strength earlier had pushed them through their current bottleneck and broken another layer of shackles. Once they'd recovered, they'd ascended further to peak unravelled void realm.

With a wave of her hand, Fenie summoned the Formation Orb of Yin and Yang. Killing intent shining out of her eyes, her frosty gaze focused on the gathering immortals.

Their eyes glittered with greed, as they hadn't forgotten about the Embittered Bamboo that had emerged from Qing Han's body.

That was a connate spirit root!

More importantly, there was also the formation of heaven and earth here—one that could be incorporated into the body for an enormous boost in power. Acquiring the formation would allow current-generation immortals to compete with void realm cultivators, even after the latter ascended to immortality. Obsolescence was off the table for them!

Qing Han was right before them, and Lu Yun, who possessed the formation, was equally debilitated!

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“Away with you!” Aoxue took a step forward and manifested a crimson halberd, the tip of which glowed faintly with a bloody light.

“Oh? And where were you when the yin spirits tore through the land?” sneered the Nephrite official.

“Are you now going to raise your weapons against the heroes who helped counter the invasion?”

The aether dao immortal's high, thin voice grated on the ears. His clothes and hair were unkempt, and he'd seemingly gone through a deadly battle. His complexion, however, was ruddy and he glowed with health, in stark contrast to those who'd fought bitterly for their lives.

He had a point, though. Many of those present had risked their lives carving a way out of Azure Province and back again. Most of them were bathed in blood, and some had lost limbs. They'd clearly weathered a ghastly battle.

They, too, stared at Lu Yun and Qing Han with insatiable greed in their eyes. In this world, not even immortals were above emotional urges and selfish desires.

When the flood of yin spirits had struck, they'd stepped forward one and all as heroes, risking their lives to contain the invaders and safeguarding Azure Province and Nephrite Major at large. Once the danger passed, however, they had eyes only for the treasures. To that end, they would gladly kill Lu Yun and Qing Han.

Such was human nature, and the grayscale nature of the world. There was no clear-cut black and white, nor was there a definite right and wrong. It was simply a matter of conflicting perspectives.

Tensions were so thick in the air that one could cut them with a knife.

The shadows of a blood dragon, phoenix, and qilin took shape behind Aoxue, Huangqing, and Cangyin, foreboding crimson light threatening to flood the land.

Yuying then unleashed the three immortal fires, unnerving many with the great heat.

Not to be outdone, Feinie, Su Xiaoxiao, and Xingzi demonstrated their might as well. Roiling waves of formations, poisons, and shamanic methods emerged to hold the gathering immortals at bay.

"Witches!" The aether dao immortal official tensed at the great concentration of heavenly power originating from Yuying and other seven Envoys of Samsara. Theirs was the strength to crush aether dao immortals!

Those beneath arcane dao immortal couldn't possibly match peerless immortals who'd gained the power of heaven and earth.

"All immortals present are heroes who saved countless lives," exclaimed the official. "Are you going to set yourselves against the world of immortals?"

"Well said!" interjected a Lin dao immortal. "You didn't expend any strength earlier, but now attack immortals instead... You are as depraved as the yin spirits!"

The Lin dao immortal was a seven-fruit arcane dao immortal, just like Feng Xiao and Qing Long. Wayfarer was the only thing stopping him from taking down Lu Yun and Qing Han, their eight protectors be damned.

The envoys silently stood their ground, protecting Lu Yun and Qing Han.

"They did their parts," came a remote voice from the air. Zhao Changkong descended from the sky with a steely expression. "If these eight ladies hadn't protected the earthen veins of Azure City, it would've been destroyed as well."

Nephrite's emperor had been unable to enter Azure Province when the crack persisted. The heavenly mandate on him would've attracted even more powerful yin spirits if he did, and all would've truly been doomed.

The same was true of Art Saint and Qin Sheng, which was why they'd stayed high in the sky instead of joining the fray and killing yin spirits themselves.

As for Wayfarer... he appeared to be a regular man with no immortal energy whatsoever.

Chapter 505: Kui

Zhao Changkong's words made the assembled immortals shift uncomfortably.

Yuying and the envoys were the ones responsible for saving the provincial capital, thereby preserving the last embers of hope for Azure. Yet none of them had announced their tremendous contribution to the world. Neither that, nor the fact that they'd helped steady the grand influence over the land and complete the bronze palace.

"Your Majesty..." The dao immortal official colored, while the Ling immortals retreated to the side with a snicker.

The emperor steered the conversation in an expected direction. "However, the diagram for the formation of heaven and earth is crucially important. It pertains to all lives in this world. If you would, Dusk Governor, please surrender it for the public good."

Zhao Changkong called Lu Yun by his former title in order to pressure him with the mention of the previous emperor. After all, most people would agree that the young man's accomplishments today were owed in large part to the last Nephrite emperor's sheltering.

When the monster spirit emperor of the North Sea had arrived in Dusk Province in person, it was Zhao Fengyang who'd repelled him. The Sovereign Meet of Dusk Province also owed much to his specific patronage. It was during that competition that Lu Yun rose to meteoric prominence.

Using 'Dusk Governor' here was an attempt by Zhao Changkong to make amends by recognizing Lu Yun's status and rebuilding past bridges.

Unfortunately for him, Lu Yun was already lost in meditation. He'd cut off all his senses to focus on fully comprehending the grand influence over the world.

Currently, his own feng shui skills were only sufficient to create ordinary influences. Working alone, he wouldn't have been able to set up a grand influence over the world. The one he'd recently set up was owed in large part to Wayfarer and the eight envoys.

The power of the newly formed influence rushed into his consciousness, resonating and infusing him with an understanding of the grandeur of creation.

Right now, Lu Yun was nearly one with the world.

Grand influences of the world were born naturally out of natural things. Living creatures had imitated what they saw in the world around them to create the art of feng shui.

Feng shui formations, layouts, influences, and grand influences... these were the four increasing levels of sophistication in that replication. A grand influence over the world was the closest thing to nature there was. Any such influence naturally melded into its surroundings.

Lu Yun had created heaven and earth with his own hands. His eyes saw and his hands felt, partaking in the wisdom to be had here.

To put it another way, he was one with the dao.

This kind of meditation was odd, to be sure—he looked like he was resting or sleeping.

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Zhao Changkong darkened when he saw that he was being ignored. He'd never been a broad-minded person; his father wouldn't have allowed Qing Buyi and Chen Xiao to overshadow him otherwise.

Zhao Fengyang had wanted his son to become more composed and mild-mannered. Given Chen Xiao's praise that Zhao Changkong had the bearing of an emperor, the then-prince certainly didn't lack for intelligence; he knew the importance of mental and emotional cultivation.

Yet the humiliation he currently felt before all of Nephrite Major was too much to bear.

Lu Yun was in an utterly unique state. Not even Wayfarer's exceptionally sharp spiritual senses had noticed he was one with the dao. Everyone thought he was giving Zhao Changkong the cold shoulder on purpose.

The eight envoys surrounded him in a protective circle, like guardian spirits. As an arcane dao immortal, Zhao Changkong could easily defeat eight peerless immortals. The problem lay in that he'd just approved of them moments prior. Attacking Yuying and the others would only insult himself.

"Lu Yun, you'd better think this through... the diagram for your formation will only bring you death at your current strength!"

Everyone else thought the situation quite clear. Though Lu Yun possessed terrifying war treasures strong enough to repel Scarlet Ape and kill origin dao immortals, the world of immortals was a divided place right now. The tribes and clans of the nine majors and ten lands preferred to vie for dominance rather than focus on a single target.

If his formation of heaven and earth was on the table, that would be a very different matter.

Dusk Province spanned a mere forty thousand kilometers and could be destroyed with a single snap of a finger.

Lu Yun remained completely silent and looked like he was asleep.

"How dare you ignore His Majesty's words, treasonous cur! Guards, arrest him!" The dao immortal official roared before Zhao Changkong could.

Plenty of immortals had been waiting for just such a command. When they finally heard it, they rushed forward to get rid of Yuying and the others and capture Lu Yun—

Mooooo!

All of Azure Province shook a little. A gigantic bestial roar echoed through the air; it sounded a lot like an ox!

An unbelievable number of lightning bolts followed, flooding the province with the torrential discharge.

“No!” Zhao Changkong’s face shifted through several shades of color. He stretched out a hand, throwing forth a ball of azure light. In the next instant, all Azure Province—all of Nephrite Major—began feeding him their power.

Boom!

The energy of the land cloistered the province from the purple-golden lightning.

“Governor of Azure Province!” Zhao Changkong roared.

The governor cleaning up inside the capital raised his head. Flinging out his governor’s seal, he assisted his emperor with an additional portion of the province’s power.

Crack!

Rumble!

Snap!

Deafening noises boomed overhead. They didn’t originate from any thunderclaps, natural or otherwise. Instead, it seemed something was stomping upon Azure Province to assure its destruction.

The Art and Zither Saints reappeared at Wayfarer’s side above the bronze palace. The duo stood united in their defense of the mausoleum.

Yuying and the envoys grew somber as well, looking up at the towering creature hidden behind the lightning. No immortal in the province could see the monster’s full body. A foot that was a thousand kilometers across stomped repeatedly through the air.

The giant foot resembled an ox’s front hoof, but it was much too large for that to make sense. What size would an ox with a foot like that be? Many immortals could barely imagine such a thing.

Everyone could agree, however, that the foot was no projected image. No, it was part of a creature’s physical form!

Every stomp crunched upon the veil of light produced by Zhao Changkong and the Azure governor. The province teetered at every impact. The lightning over Azure Province was spreading to its nearby neighbors, and the crashing of thunder and lowing of oxen crescendoed through all of Nephrite Major.

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“It’s the Thunder God!” Su Xiaoxiao turned very pale. “The very same one from the primordial immortal court... Kui! Is it really still alive?!”

Chapter 506: Corpse Divine

The ancient Thunder God was a divine beast with an ox’s body, a single hoof, and lowed like a cow: the kui.

As a member of the divine race, its mastery of a myriad of thunders made it one of the strongest of its thunder god peers. It was no immortal emperor, but it came very close indeed.

In primordial times, there'd only been one kui in the world. Su Xiaoxiao had originally thought that it died in the war of immortals a hundred thousand years ago, but its sudden appearance overturned her assumption.

She was absolutely sure that Kui was here in its actual body. The Thunder God was real!

It was several orders of magnitude weaker than the primordial kui, but the special aura it carried was no different.

"How is this possible?!" The other immortals knew about the existence of Kui, but found the arrival of this primordial thunder divine even more shocking.

"Kui is dead." Two searching rays shot out of Art Saint's eyes. He looked up into the firmament, then down at Lu Yun. "Its corpse has transformed into a corpse divine. A kui has mastery over a myriad of thunders, but there's one type that's always eluded its grasp."

"The azure dragons' Yi Wood Cleansing Thunder." Wayfarer paid no attention to Yuying standing guard over her master. To him, the envoy wasn't the same woman she'd been twelve hundred years ago. The only thing his affections could linger upon was the painting he carried with him.

"This is because of Lu Yun again, isn't it!" Art Saint's words elicited indignant expressions from the others. If the Yi Wood Cleansing Thunder was where Kui's obsession lay, its use must've drawn the corpse here.

The tide of yin spirits had prevented it from visiting before. As an undead creature, it could only be subsumed by its more ephemeral fellows. Thus, it'd come when the tide dispersed.

Thump.

Thump.

Thump.

Kui's singularly gigantic hoof stomped furiously on Azure Province, as if it wanted to wipe the place from existence.

Zhao Changkong and the Azure governor were both aghast. Though Kui's corpse was infinitely weaker than its ancient self, it still retained power equal to a peak origin dao immortal.

Zhao Changkong hadn't even plucked a single origin dao fruit yet. According to his calculations, he needed at least a hundred years to do so. That was why he'd plotted to release Art Saint from his shackles.

Though Art Saint found that he was no match for Zither Saint, Qin Sheng, he remained faithful to his prior promise: he would protect Zhao Changkong for the next hundred years.

"In actuality, as long as we surrender Lu Yun, Kui will leave of its own volition. Or perhaps him passing on the Yi Wood Cleansing Thunder will have the same effect."

Art Saint's words were cool, but intense malevolence flashed through his eyes. He wanted to tear Lu Yun to pieces more than anyone present. He would've regathered Yuying's spirit and soul once he broke free, resurrecting her from the remains inside the tomb. However, Lu Yun had taken her as an Envoy of Samsara before he could commence with his plans, preventing him from ever being reunited with his love.

All eyes were on Lu Yun. This second disaster had come hot on the heels of the first. Azure Province—nay, the entirety of Nephrite Major—couldn't keep weathering the storm any longer.

Wayfarer and Zither Saint fell silent. They couldn't help in this situation. The only ones who could resist Kui were the two people able to wield the power of the land: Zhao Changkong and the Azure governor.

However, both seemed to be fraying at the edges.

"For the sake of the lives here in Nephrite Major, you should give up the diagram and the Yi Wood Cleansing Thunder..." The official was white as a sheet and his voice quavered in terror of the monster above Azure Province.

"Enough!" Qing Han suddenly stood up from Lu Yun's side. Starlight shimmered all about her, and her cultivation had now advanced a step to returned void.

Unfortunately, the accursed spirit root inside her had worsened as well. There was a distinct sliver of green inside her silvery pupils. If she became an immortal now, the poison curse in her spirit root would trigger immediately. Her death would kill anyone else who'd ever reached void realm as well.

"Is there a way to drive it off?" she whispered to the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals between her fingers.

"Kui is now a corpse divine... its obsession cannot be denied. Unless another yin spirit tide comes, there's no way to force it to retreat." The Azure Dragon King was incredulous. Having been Kui's mortal enemy once upon a time, he'd fought the ox on behalf of his tribe more than once to preserve the Yi Wood Cleansing Thunder.

He'd been the stronger of the two back then. If Kui hadn't been the court's thunder god, he would've slain it long ago.

Alas, Kui had only grown stronger after it was cut in half and disappeared due to its injuries. Before its death, it had reached peak principal realm and been infinitely close to emperor realm, stronger than the Azure Dragon King had ever been.

But ancient affairs were all in the past. Every grace and grudge was no more important than the dust left behind by the great war. Kui was long dead; this was merely a corpse divine born from its carcass.

Corpse divines didn't come about after the death of divines. They formed when a divine's corpse attained a sort of zombified sentience after death. A corpse divine kept all the combat arts it'd had in life and looked convincingly living, but was in fact a zombie.

'Corpse divines' and 'zombie kings' were two paths of evolution that headed in opposite directions. A zombie king tried its very hardest to return itself from death to life. A corpse divine, on the other hand,

consumed as much death energy as it could to turn from something half-alive into something completely undead.

There were more differences than that, too. A zombie king was sentient and rational, looking like any normal living being, but exclusively used zombie methods.

A corpse divine had no sentience whatsoever. As a zombie brought to life by a divine creature's lingering obsession, it wielded all of its living body's methods, but used them by instinct alone.

Right now, the corpse divine that Kui had become was doing exactly what one might expect: using Kui's powers to smash the protective veil over Azure Province.

More than five thousand kilometers tall, the zombie ox was millions of times stronger than any ordinary bovine. Every strike of its hoof sent tremors through the province.

The earthen veins within the ground were shifting little by little from the impacts, including those beneath the bronze palace.

They supplied the power to the grand influence over the world. If they were destroyed, the influence would instantly disappear, exposing the fissure in the depths of the earth once again.

Azure Province would really be done for then.

"It... it's no ordinary origin dao immortal!" Zhao Changkong shrieked in despair. "Kui... has gone through the void realm!"

Splurt!

The heavenly mandate hovering protectively over the young emperor's head quivered violently, sending him flying down into the dirt with blood spewing from his mouth.

An origin dao immortal who has gone through the void realm...

Kui was an ancient immortal, one born naturally into its power, and was thus the equivalent of an immortal that progressed through the void realm. The Azure governor was likewise sent flying, and the barrier of light that he and Zhao Changkong maintained was cracking fast.

Chapter 507: Destruction

Kui had died and become a corpse divine while retaining all of its fighting instincts in life.

The Azure governor had set up a barrier with the power of heaven and earth from the province, amplified by Zhao Changkong with the might of all of Nephrite Major.

The barrier could not only isolate the province and prevent yin spirits from escaping, thus containing the invasion, but it could also defend against outside forces.

However, the zombified kui had managed to attack the celestial emperor and the governor through the light barrier, employing a method of the ancient immortals that was on par with the strength of void-realm immortals today.

Bam!

The dark azure barrier trembled and broke apart with a roar, followed by an enormous foot a thousand kilometers across stomping down toward the bronze palace.

At its center was Lu Yun and Qing Han. The defense put up by the eight Envoys of Samsara collapsed like a house of sticks beneath its might.

Even with the power of the blood qilin, dragon, and phoenix combined along with Yuying's immortal fires and Feinie's Formation Orb were no match for the kui's one single stomp.

It was too powerful.

Qing Han's eyes turned silver as she drew upon the power of the Fire Starstone and Big Dipper Starstone; the aura of a dao immortal radiated from her.

Swoosh!

A stream of stars streaked out of her hand. Cosmic Skycarver! The connate-grade immortal sword exploded with light and brought a trail of stars down upon that giant foot.

Rumble!

It was as if the sky itself had fallen in. The resulting shockwaves were so powerful that all immortals in the vicinity were knocked off their feet, Zhao Changkong and other dao immortals included.

Qing Han paled, the skin between her thumb and index finger bursting open in bloody glory, but her grip around the Cosmic Skycarver remained tight. The Scroll of Shepherding Immortals turned into a strand of white fabric and circled around her.

Within the scroll, the Azure Dragon King and Empress Myrtlestar worked together to offset the terrifying counterforce—the only reason she was still in one piece.

Lu Yun remained seated, unmoving. Endless heavenly power suddenly gathered around him, protecting his body. His eight envoys had been flung out as well, but they entered hell the moment they flew backwards and immediately returned to Lu Yun to protect him.

Lu Yun had risen to his feet, but his eyes remained closed. His aura slowly became one with the bronze palace beneath his feet.

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Qing Han had managed to knock the behemoth kui away, but it made a neat turn in the sky and landed heavily back on the ground. Heavenly lightning crackled, gathering around it and taking shape as a great combat art.

Tremendous thunder and lightning poured down onto Azure Province and the other neighboring provinces, cascading downwards like the ocean. Such was the power of a peak origin dao immortal... from the Primordial Era!

Despair weighed heavily on everyone, even Zhao Changkong had given up on resisting.

Qing Han's bun had come loose, spilling her long silver hair down past her shoulders. Her robes had turned silver as well. Despite her injuries, she held tightly onto the Cosmic Skycarver.

“Give it up... the corpse divine is too terrifying,” sighed the Azure Dragon King from within the scroll. “Even the empress and I together may not be its match. Lu Yun has his secret weapon, so the zombie kui may not be able to hurt him.”

“I can just go, and I can take Lu Yun with me... but he will blame himself once he regains consciousness,” Qing Han’s voice sounded coolly. “I know he’d rather die than let countless lives suffer because of him.”

Lu Yun wouldn’t blame Qing Han. He would only endlessly blame himself, and for a long time.

Kui had come to Azure Province because Lu Yun had deployed the Yi Wood Cleansing Thunder, which was the Azure Dragon King’s personal technique. Everything that had happened after that was on him.

Lu Yun wasn’t the sort to look for excuses or shift blame on others. He would take full responsibility for this matter. If he were conscious, escape would be the furthest thing on his mind. He would deploy the corpse puppet and attack the zombie kui.

As it were, though, Lu Yun’s consciousness was currently monopolized by heaven and earth, becoming part of it to understand the grand influence of the world.

Empress Myrtlestar remained silent, while the Azure Dragon King sighed. Qing Han made another stab at the sky.

A giant ray of sword light pierced through the air like a shooting star, smashing squarely to Kui. It brayed and shattered the sword energy with powerful lightning.

Qing Han threw up a mouthful of blood as her body slammed into the bronze palace, but at the same time, she’d managed to shatter the kui’s lightning combat art with the attack.

A pained, conflicted grimace overtook Lu Yun’s face as he seemed to sense what had happened. However, the grand influence wasn’t something that one could exit at will.

Dark cyan emerged once more between Qing Han’s brows. That was the poison from her accursed spirit root.

She had to avoid getting hurt, or her accursed spirit root would root even deeper. But now... she’d suffered a serious injury.

Lu Yun’s envoys anxiously sprang to action. Su Xiaoxiao, Xingzi, and Xuanxi rushed to her. Xuanxi spontaneously drew numerous talismans to heal her, while Xingzi and Su Xiaoxiao placed medicines they’d refined into her body.

Bam!

There was a sudden explosion of sound in midair as the giant kui was thrown off course and smashed into the ground next to the bronze palace. The very earth of Azure Province trembled violently, toppling half the walls of Azure City a couple thousand kilometers away.

Fiery clouds zoomed through the sky as a pitch-black iron rod landed on the ground with a heavy thud. Wrapped in a fiery cape, Scarlet Ape opened its red eyes and seemed to transcend space with just a few steps from the North Sea, arriving straight in Azure Province.

“Scarlet Ape!” Zhao Changkong stared in shock. The ape had knocked the terrifying kui down to the ground with a singular swing of its staff. The enormous monster spirit who’d boldly established its own sacred land and fractured the monster spirits was more powerful than he had expected.

Swoosh!

Scarlet Ape ignored Zhao Changkong and summoned its weapon back.

“I may not like the human race, but I will not allow a dead divine like you to run amok in the world of immortals.” Its head snapped up, followed by its gaze.

Mo Yi’s senior sister hovered above the clouds, showing no willingness to intervene. Next to her, a livid Mo Yi showed clear frustration, but in her eyes was a deep resignation. She’d made her way here back when the yin spirits invaded, but her senior sister had prevented her from doing anything.

Although Mo Yi was powerful, she was extraordinarily wary of her senior sister.

Her senior sister nodded when she saw Scarlet Ape scowling at her.

“According to the rules, I can only move against living beings,” she responded calmly. “Kui has been wreaking havoc in the world of immortals. You’re free to intervene. I won’t stop you.”

Kui had risen to its feet and charged headlong into Scarlet Ape.

“Compared to the human race, I hate the divine race even more!” Scarlet Ape raised its iron rod and swung it at the dead divine’s head.

Rumble!

The very earth of Azure Province burst open, splattering earth and stones everywhere. The already scarred land was completely destroyed.

Chapter 508.1: Demise of the Emperor

“Moooooooooooo,” lowed Kui. When standing at full height, its five-thousand-kilometer tall body appeared as if an awe-inspiring mountain. It, however, was far from Scarlet Ape’s match in close-quarters combat.

In Scarlet Ape’s eyes, the giant kui was nothing but a standing target. Its enormous iron rod stretched into the sky and rammed hard into Kui, knocking the ox away.

Caught off guard by Scarlet Ape’s speed, Kui didn’t even have the time to summon lightning.

Only when it’d been sent flying did it reveal its entire body. The behemoth bovine was covered in violet-gold fur and surrounded by crackling electric currents of the same color. Protruding out of its giant ox head was a single fifty-kilometer-long horn. It didn’t seem to be a regular horn, but more an immensely powerful immortal treasure.

Scarlet Ape had only managed to keep it in check, but not actually hurt it.

Although the zombie Kui was just a peak origin dao immortal, its physique could rival that of an immortal emperor. Moreover, Scarlet Ape’s rod was damaged to begin with, preventing it from deploying its full power.

The two giants viciously tore into each other in a berserk frenzy, with Azure Province as their battleground. Gradually, Kui began regaining its initiative and entered a stalemate with Scarlet Ape.

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“Royal uncle!” Zhao Changkong heaved a heavy sigh as he watched the fight play out. “The Ingress Path!”

“You mustn’t, Your Majesty!” the emperor’s uncle stilled and hurriedly interjected. He knew what Zhao Changkong wanted to do.

“I must get these two monsters out of here! If we allow them to keep fighting, Azure Province will be completely destroyed and the seal will break again.”

The province was now barren and almost completely lifeless; Azure City was the only exception. With its fertile land and natural resources, however, the province would recover to its former self if given enough time.

There would be no yin spirit invasions in the future with the ancient tomb sealed by the bronze palace. In fact, the province would be more prosperous than ever. But if the two beasts kept fighting and razed all of the terrain and earthen veins, Azure would be the next Dusk Province.

Dusk Province’s decline hadn’t begun when the Art Saint set up the layout of Enneawyrm Coffinbearers in Dusk City a thousand years ago. Rather, it’d started when the great burial mound fell from the sky five thousand years ago, crushing the main vein of the province and changing its fortunes for the worse.

The governor of the province then had been a peerless immortal, and her immortal cities governed by golden immortals. Yuying, who’d been the Dusk governor twelve hundred years ago, though, had been merely a transformed spirit realm cultivator.

Azure Province was currently going through the same events that Dusk Province had weathered five thousand years before. There was no mountain falling from the sky, but the battle between two behemoth beasts would destroy everything in the province all the same.

Dusk’s downfall had already been a devastating blow to Nephrite Major. If Azure Province was left in shambles as well, Nephrite Major would fall to the bottom among the nine majors, or even be surpassed by the ten lands.

What had befallen Dusk had been a calamity that no one could prevent. Not even the former celestial emperor, Zhao Fengyang, could’ve done anything then.

Meanwhile, events taking place today would have even greater repercussions. If the earthen veins were destroyed, the bronze palace would follow and the crack would be torn open again.

Then the yin spirits would return to the province. All of Nephrite Major might be overwhelmed by the tide, since the barrier around Azure Province was broken.

Zhao Changkong would not tolerate that happening.

“Your Majesty!!” the emperor’s wizened uncle called out with red eyes. “Your cultivation is too low to activate the Ingress Path—”

“I am the Celestial Emperor of Nephrite Major!” roared Zhao Changkong. “Hand it to me!”

A shudder ran down his uncle’s spine. With tears in his eyes, he shakily handed a key to Zhao Changkong, who took it into his body with a wave of his hand.

Rumble!

The expansive Ingress Path shook as piercing dragon howls rang through heaven and earth. A dragon brandishing fangs and claws morphed from the white path, soaring into the sky and becoming one with Zhao Changkong.

“Zhao Shengguang is to be Celestial Emperor of Nephrite Major upon my death... Although he himself is a useless piece of trash, Qing Buyi and Chen Xiao will ensure Nephrite Major remains protected.

“Please continue protecting Nephrite Major for a century as you promised, senior!”

The dragon lunged at Kui and Scarlet Ape.

Thud!

The imperial uncle dropped to his knees and kowtowed resoundingly in the direction Zhao Changkong had left in.

“What just happened?” someone asked in befuddlement. The Ingress Path was the greatest treasure of Nephrite Major, and the greatest weapon wielded by her celestial emperors throughout history.

However, it’d seemed like Zhao Changkong was marching to his death just now.

“Activating the Ingress Path requires the power of Nephrite’s heavenly mandate. Zhao Changkong hasn’t plucked all nine of his origin dao fruits, so he can’t activate the treasure at will.” Crimson light dissipated from Art Saint’s eyes and he sighed with lamentation. “There’s only one way for him to call upon the heavenly mandate—soul sacrifice.

“That was Zhao Changkong sacrificing himself. He’s... dead.”

Art Saint’s body trembled slightly as he stared at the great dragon in the sky.

“I’d thought that Zhao Changkong was a selfish, petty man, but when push came to shove in the face of the greater good, he gave up his life with no hesitation whatsoever...” Zither Saint sighed as well. “Zhao Fengyang didn’t make the wrong choice, nor were Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi wrong in their assessment of him.”

With a wave of his hand, he summoned a black zither and took a seat, drawing forth strains of wistful song from its strings.

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In an ancient, nameless land somewhere.

Zhao Fengyang’s eyes shot open, tears streaking down his face.

“My son, you protected the people and stayed true to your duties in the end...”

Rumble!

The dark land bereft of a sun trembled as a scarlet hand shot out from the ground. There seemed to be a giant trying to break out.

Nine peak origin dao immortals rose at the same time, assembling a strange formation to push the giant hand back.

“Kekekeke... How long do you bugs think you can keep me underground? The day this seal breaks out of this seal is the day I tear you nine into pieces.”

.....

Zhao Changkong was dead. He'd sacrificed his flesh and blood, along with his soul, the moment he entered the Ingress Path.

The Nephrite heavenly mandate had flared with light and activated the Ingress Path, propelling it into Scarlet Ape and Kui with the last of Zhao Changkong's will.

The two beasts were completely preoccupied by their fight.

Scarlet Ape would spare no effort to protect human territory. In fact, there would be nothing better than if Azure Province was crushed and Nephrite Major greatly weakened. Naturally, it didn't know that the newly-formed bronze palace would fall apart as soon as the earthen veins of Azure Province were destroyed, either.

Given some time, the palace would stabilize and the interment of heaven and earth would become part of the world. Then the grand influence of the palace would keep the province protected. Not even a resurrected great emperor from the human dao era would be able to damage the earthen veins then.

Meanwhile, Kui's sole purpose was to kill the ape standing in its way and take the Yi Wood Cleansing Thunder for itself.

Neither of them pulled their punches as they fought on the heavily scarred land.

Bam!

Suddenly, a white path descended from the sky and slammed into the two beasts.

“The Ingress Path!!” Scarlet Ape growled at the same time as the zombie Kui roared.

Under the great might of the Ingress Path, the two beasts didn't have any time to react before they were knocked straight into the East Sea.

A mushroom cloud arose from over the sea's horizon after some time.

Chapter 508.2: Demise of the Emperor

All of the world mourned, and thick sorrow permeated Nephrite Major.

The celestial emperor was dead.

His life officially marked its end as the last of his true spirit scattered. The Nephrite heavenly mandate returned to the major as well.

“Your Majesty!!” the old uncle bawled, kneeling weakly on the ground. The other officials mirrored his reaction; it was as if the very sky had fallen.

The demise of the celestial emperor was an enormous blow to the major. Factions from the other eight majors, ten lands, four immortal seas, and the East, West, South, and North Seas might seize this opportunity to destroy Nephrite.

Zhao Changkong had appointed Zhao Shengguang the next celestial emperor, but the prince had gone missing with Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi. No one had heard from them for years. There might be civil unrest within Nephrite before Zhao Shengguang returned, or even before other factions attacked.

It was possible that peak factions like the Ling, Zhu, and Yue Clans would stage a coup like the peak factions in other majors had.

Moreover, Zhao Changkong had exhausted himself to activate the Ingress Path in order to throw Scarlet Ape and Kui out of Nephrite. The treasure was now gone, and not even the imperial uncle could collect it.

Only the next celestial emperor could retrieve it after gaining the power of the heavenly mandate. If anyone else found the Ingress Path first and acquired its key for refinement, Nephrite Major might very well lose the treasure forever.

“If anyone dares make a move against the Nephrite Court before the next celestial emperor ascends to the throne, I’ll kill them and exterminate their clan!” Art Saint slowly took flight, his voice ringing through the world of immortals. “I don’t care about the rules. If you dare stop me, I’ll detonate myself. I’m the only one in the world who can deal with my real body.”

He was addressing Mo Yi’s senior sister up in the sky. Her brows furrowed slightly, but she nodded in the end.

Art Saint still retained his sanity, while the eyes had gone completely mad. None aside from Art Saint could keep it under control. If he died, the demonic taint in him would become part of the eyes as well, and they would deviate entirely. There was no telling what they’d be capable of then.

Various clan patriarchs who’d entered Azure Province tensed when they heard the man’s declaration.

They’d recognized Art Saint as the mysterious man by Zhao Changkong’s side, and the one who’d solved many of the late emperor’s problems. He’d even killed peak arcane dao immortals who’d attempted to assassinate the celestial emperor and throw Nephrite Major into chaos.

No one knew exactly how powerful Art Saint was. Some suspected him of being a crippled origin dao immortal as well.

“Count me in,” Qin Sheng stilled his hands over the zither and added calmly, “I’ll kill whoever dares cause trouble for Nephrite Major.”

Rumble!

Pure origin dao immortal strength radiated from him. Qin Sheng was an origin dao immortal, and one with flawless dao fruit!

High above the sky, Mo Yi's senior sister watched with a scowl. Her duty was to enforce the rules of the world of immortals, but there were many she couldn't afford to make enemies of. The Art and Zither saints were two such examples. Chen Xiao, Qing Buyi, and Wayfarer were others.

They all came from incredible backgrounds and roots. Even Mo Yi was someone she wouldn't be able to discipline, if they didn't share a master.

Silence descended upon the world of immortals.

Zhao Changkong was the first of the newly-acceded celestial emperors to pass away. Many factions had already summoned their people to arms for a Nephrite Major invasion to lay claim to it in its entirety, or at least parts of its territory.

However, their plans were foiled in their inception by the Art and Zither Saints.

No one could afford to antagonize them, as there was no shortage of people who knew about the two. Everyone had taken notice when a mysterious heavyweight had fought Art Saint and sealed him in the Water Altar under Dusk Province a thousand years ago.

Art Saint had demonstrated his power to the world then.

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"With those two freaks protecting Nephrite Major, there's nothing we can do for now... However, Nephrite's greatest treasure, the Ingress Path, has sunk into the East Sea. We should go there!! If we can find the treasure and refine it before anyone else, our clan will be able to establish a heavenly court ourselves!" a crazed voice clamored.

As Nephrite Major's foremost weapon, the Ingress Path was more powerful than many connate-grade treasures and its value was undeniable.

Countless immortals charged to the East Sea in search of the path.

Scarlet Ape and Kui were in the East Sea as well, and there was a possibility that they were with the Ingress Path. The treasure might have seriously injured them, making it the perfect time to take them out. Scarlet Ape had two great treasures in its possession as well!

A sudden frenzy took over the world of immortals, and many elites converged upon the East Sea.

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Seven days passed before Lu Yun slowly came to.

Wayfarer, Art Saint, and Qin Sheng had left, while Qing Han and the eight envoys kept close to Lu Yun.

Seeing Lu Yun regain consciousness, the late celestial emperor's uncle came up to him.

"Governor of Dusk!" He looked pleadingly at Lu Yun.

The crowd understood what had happened to Lu Yun by now. He'd been unresponsive even when Kui attacked and hurt Qing Han, which made it plain he'd entered a strange state and been unable to move.

"Save your breath, I understand." Lu Yun waved a dismissive hand. "The late celestial emperor went to his death for the greater good. Whether out of emotional reasoning or rational concern, I will not continue to be at odds with Nephrite Major at this time."

He'd ascended to the returned void realm. More importantly, his mastery over feng shui had improved, and his understanding of heaven and earth had progressed to a new level.

Although he still couldn't set up grand influences on his own, his next attempt would be much less taxing. Moreover, he'd furthered his understanding of the Dragonsearch Invocation and Dragonshift Method.

It would also be much easier for him to search for the dragon, pinpoint direction, and determine location in future tomb raiding jaunts.

"Dusk Province will continue to serve Nephrite Major if the heavenly court would have me as her governor," Lu Yun said seriously. He hadn't liked Zhao Changkong, but the man had earned Lu Yun's respect in his last moments through his heroic act of self-sacrifice.

"This old man has another favor to ask!" the wizened imperial uncle continued after a hesitant pause. "Please bring back the Ingress Path for the major, Governor of Dusk! If we lose the treasure, we will no longer be Nephrite Major."

His face flushed red from the request. As a peak arcane dao immortal, he was several times more powerful than Lu Yun. However, he couldn't leave the heavenly court; he needed to hold down the fort after the death of the celestial emperor and ensure everything remained stable.

While Art Saint and Qin Sheng had declared their support for the court, they could only serve as a warning and intimidation.

Dao immortals from different Nephrite factions had gone off in search of the Ingress Path, but the late emperor's uncle didn't think they were doing it for the heavenly court. Those factions would all claim the treasure for their own; the only one he could trust now was Lu Yun.

"As it should be." Lu Yun nodded. "I happen to own a branch of the Ingress Path and can use it to track down the Ingress Path proper."

"Um..." Lu Yun's decisive response left the old man off-kilter. The other Nephrite officials were dazed as well.

"The former celestial emperor showed me great favor, and I wouldn't have betrayed Nephrite Major had I a choice. Now that the new celestial emperor has sacrificed himself for the people of the major, I, Lu Yun, will naturally keep the greater picture in mind." He took a deep breath and continued, "As long as the heavenly court stops painting me out to be the enemy, I will naturally continue to serve as Dusk's governor."

The old man bowed to the youth. "Our thanks and gratitude to the Governor of Dusk for following the call of loyalty and righteousness!"

“Hmph, what a mouthful of pretty words!” mocked the immortal dao official with a pinched voice. “If you’re truly grateful for the former celestial emperor’s imperial favor, why do you not hand over the formation of heaven and earth?”

The immortals in the area perked up; now they were touching upon what was important! They’d stayed and awaited Lu Yun’s awakening because of that formation.

“Ha!” Qing Han gave a bark of laughter before Lu Yun could say anything. “If we gave you the diagram now, do you think you’d be able to walk out of here alive?”

The official’s heart skipped a beat, a sentiment echoed in the expressions of others. It was as the dao sovereign had said—the current Nephrite Major couldn’t protect something like that!

The moment it fell into the heavenly court’s hand would be the moment of its decimation. Immortals about to be eliminated by history would stop at nothing to maintain their status. Not even Art Saint and Qin Sheng would be able to stop them!

Dusk Province had gone into a lockdown mode with more than a hundred weapons of war aimed in all directions, and more than one dao immortal had already been killed. That and the Ingress Path that’d been lost somewhere at the edge of the East Sea were the only things preventing the immortals from attacking Dusk.

As for Azure Province... no one dared enter it.

Mo Yi’s senior sister had defeated a flawless origin dao immortal all on her own. With her hovering in the sky, many immortals were scared away from approaching.

“Moreover,” Lu Yun suddenly raised his voice, “the formation must be customized to every immortal’s constitution. Everyone needs a different diagram.

“The auction that the Panorama Pavilion will hold in Dusk Province three months from now will sell off a thousand formations of heaven and earth. I will personally draw a diagram for each of the thousand immortals!”

His voice rang throughout all of Azure Province. There weren’t many survivors here, but most of them were informants of the major heavenly courts and factions.

After his declaration, transmission talismans covered the sky. The Panorama Pavilion had issued invitations ten days ago, but no one expected formations of heaven and earth to be auctioned then!

A thousand formation diagrams weren’t a lot, but with the announcement, Lu Yun effectively sent out a message: he wasn’t going to keep the formation for his own use. It would be public knowledge before long!

The world rejoiced at the good news, and many factions made a mad dash to prepare all kinds of valuables and crystals. Those who acquired the formations first would gain a first-mover advantage with the power granted to them.

After all, Mo Yi was still the only person in the world of immortals who had ascended to immortality from the void realm!

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The vast East Sea was much more fertile than the North Sea. Lu Yun and Qing Han followed the currents in a small boat.

Lu Yun had planned to come in search of the skyqilin and skytortoise pearls anyway, as well as rescuing another scarlet ape along the way. With Scarlet Ape thrown to the end of the East Sea by Zhao Changkong, though, there was no telling what would happen now.

“Are you really going to find and take back the Ingress Path for the imperial court?” Qing Han asked with a frown.

“I am.” Lu Yun nodded. “Dusk Province’s future is closely linked with Nephrite’s fate. If the major grows unstable, Dusk Province will have no peace, either.”

The province had suffered a few disasters, but her attackers had always refrained from using their greatest weapons to destroy the province completely, out of consideration for the Nephrite heavenly court.

“Dusk Province is too small, and there’s that restriction against immortals. The Chen, Lu, and Qing Clans cannot reside in Dusk for the long haul, or they’ll soon fall into mediocrity. By lending a helping hand while the heavenly court is in danger, these three clans will have a chance to survive,” Lu Yun said gently.

“Have you... ever thought about becoming the celestial emperor yourself?” Qing Han asked hesitantly.

Lu Yun chuckled and scratched the bridge of Qing Han’s nose. “I yearn for a life free of restraints and worldly concerns... become the celestial emperor? I’d die of irritation from paperwork and admin and other crap quickly enough.”

Qing Han shook her head with a laugh. “That I’ve noticed. Dusk Province would be a mess if not Yuying and the others.”

“Someone’s here.” Lu Yun rose to his feet in the skiff, his smile dripping.

“Might I inquire if the two ahead are Sirs Lu Yun and Qing Han?” a personable old man said respectfully.

Lu Yun frowned. “A divine?”

Chapter 509: A Delicate Balance

The old man in dark blue robes was stout and short. He had a kindly look and a humble smile, but Lu Yun’s Spectral Eye easily revealed a well-hidden glint of pride.

Evidently, the old divine was a very important man.

“Honored gentlemen, I have come at my master’s behest to request a brief meeting. We would be honored if you would accept.” The old man landed on the ship’s bow as he spoke and made an inviting gesture.

Despite the courtesy and modesty his words extended, they carried a weight of obligation. The old man was a peak arcane dao immortal. If the two youths refused, he would kidnap them forcibly.

“Ai...” Qing Han sighed suddenly. “We thought the North Sea monsters or House Donglin would be the first to act. I didn’t expect it to be you.”

“Oh?” The old divine blinked, somewhat taken aback. “Perhaps you recognize me, Sir Qing Han?”

“You’re just an ordinary divine who’s disguised the source of your power... but I can still see it quite clearly. You’re of the azure dragon tribe,” Qing Han replied.

The old man’s face colored. He’d done all he could to feign normality, going so far as to fake an aura similar to Sword Divine’s, but Qing Han had identified him instantly anyway.

“Sir Qing Han, Sir Lu Yun. As expected of the ancestor’s heirs. I see that I can hide nothing from you.”

The divine nodded. “Indeed, I am a retainer of the tribe’s current patriarch. Though I am not of the tribe’s bloodline myself, I owe much and more to the imperial line. The Yi Wood Cleansing Thunder is vital to our race’s continued survival... Please, hand over the heritage.”

Nine arcane dao fruits manifested outside his body, enveloping the youths’ skiff within their aura. It was as if they were in a microcosm separate from the East Sea.

“You decided to come on your own, didn’t you?” Lu Yun remained entirely composed and flashed a smile. “The Azure Dragon King definitely wouldn’t send anyone for me at this moment. Even if he did, they wouldn’t dare meet me alone.”

His words drained the blood from the old man’s face and cold beads of sweat dripped down his brow.

Boom, boom, boom!

A storm of potent attacks smashed against the barrier the divine servant erected. The old man spat out a mouthful of blood and his body cracked like a porcelain vessel.

“I declared a quota of a thousand formations of heaven and earth to ensure that all powers in the world would be held in check by each other. No one faction would dare attack me alone right now... and you come running up to me? Pretty much suicide.” Lu Yun shook his head slightly.

The availability of a thousand formations of heaven and earth was a matter of paramount importance for the world of immortals. Even some experts who’d gone into the depths of the East Sea to search for the Path of Ingress were heading back.

Numerous imperfect dao immortals had even set up a personal detail for Lu Yun and Qing Han, following them to the East Sea in order to prevent him from being kidnapped.

Aside from his truly intractable enemies, no one wanted anything to happen to him right now. It was because of this that no one dared confront him in person. Doing so would only cause every other faction to lash out at them.

A delicate system of checks and balances was thus being maintained.

As for whether his formations of heaven and earth were real and effective, the Panorama Pavilion had vouched for the veracity of the announcement.

The formation was indeed too complex, and living creatures too unique and disparate, for one singular diagram to be applicable for everyone. Right now, the only path forward was to have a formation tailor-made for each person.

The Pavilion's authority was unshakable in this. Several of its immortals had already come forth to exhibit the newfound formations of heaven and earth incorporated in their bodies, shocking the entire world with their immense strength.

Their existence pacified any overeager troublemakers. Furthermore, the Panorama Pavilion's perpetual neutrality and focus on wealth over dozens of millennia prevented them from becoming a public target.

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The experts following Lu Yun couldn't sit still at the sight of his imprisonment and struck at once.

As a nine-fruit arcane dao immortal, the old divine had set up a particularly potent barrier. It blended so cleanly into the surroundings that barely anyone was able to detect it at all. However, it was as fragile as an eggshell before a pack of crippled origin dao immortals. The barrier shattered within moments.

The old man's body disintegrated alongside his barrier. His nine dao fruits protected his soul and spirit, which stood confusedly above the surface of the East Sea.

"Scram!" a harsh rebuke came from the void.

Shivering in realization, the intangible divine fled upon a streak of light.

Eyes glittering, an origin dao immortal glared at the direction the divine had disappeared to, but held back in the end.

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"It's too bad. I wanted to bait Donglin Taihuang too." Lu Yun smacked his lips regretfully.

House Donglin's ancestor, Dong Lin, was dead, and their foremost genius was now their strongest member. The current aristocratic house was forced to adopt a much more low-key style.

"Donglin Taihuang must've gone to the Endless Desert." Qing Han felt the same.

After its recent calamity, House Donglin was little better than one of the world's weakest factions. As they were mortal enemies, Lu Yun would hardly sell a formation to them. It was thus very likely that Donglin Taihuang would try to imprison or murder him—or alternatively, force him to etch formations for Donglin immortals.

"Donglin Taihuang is pretty cowardly. The hundred billion bounty on his head from Destiny City is still valid. If he appears anywhere, he'll be walking to his own early grave," Qing Han laughed.

Lu Yun frowned, feeling like he'd shot himself in the foot somehow.

Having done their job, the crippled origin dao immortals returned to their concealed positions in the void.

At the same time, the skiff beneath Lu Yun's feet sped up. It left Nephrite waters in no time at all, entering the vastness of the East Sea proper. The East Sea's monster spirits were already assembled, waiting for them.

Their court was descended from the primordial xiangliu bloodline, and retained the ancient Monster Celestial Master's heritage. As a whole, they were the ones with the closest connection to the primordial immortal court.

Many human immortals were quite displeased with Lu Yun's strong rapport with the East Sea's monster spirit court, but they couldn't do anything about it.

The East Sea court was now one of the youth's staunchest allies. The one who'd come to receive Lu Yun was the arcane dao immortal he'd met in the ancient skydragon tomb: Xiangliu Ting.

Chapter 510: Tomb of the Celestial Master

Although Xiangliu Ting was here to meet him, the monster court wasn't brave enough to invite Lu Yun into their midst.

The East Sea and Dusk Province were allies, but the former would lose any possibility of peace if Lu Yun were to step foot into their court. The fallen Path of Ingress at the end of the East Sea was attractive in and of itself; if Lu Yun were to speak with the court privately, they would definitely be turned upside down.

Xiangliu Ting and Lu Yun spoke under the watchful eyes of the public.

Lu Yun mentioned his willingness to draw formations of heaven and earth for the East Sea's immortals, but Xiangliu Ting refused. Instead, the general had a different request: he wanted the young man to head to the end of the East Sea to save Xiangliu Hongzhen.

The Deaf Prince had been lost for a very long time with no news at all. According to the East Sea emperor's speculations, he and the other five profligates had gone into the celestial master tomb at the end of the East Sea.

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"Celestial master tomb?" Lu Yun blinked. Back in the North Sea, the Deaf Prince and his five buddies had left in quite a hurry. After that, they were nowhere to be found.

"Yes, the celestial master tomb." Xiangliu Ting chuckled drily. "Several years ago, they adventured into the tomb and returned with mountains of immortal crystals. The very same ones you're familiar with, I'm sure. When they came back from the North Sea... they went in there a second time."

The celestial master tomb was the foundation of the xiangliu bloodline. Every heritage of the East Sea court came from there—from the Monster Celestial Master.

"The crystal mountains came from the celestial master tomb... I understand!" That revelation warmed the cockles of Lu Yun's heart.

In the North Sea, he'd shown a great need for immortal crystals. That was why he'd taken all of them from the North Sea monster palace. The Deaf Prince and his friends had seen and remembered it, hence

their hasty return and entry into the celestial master tomb. They'd gone in to look for crystal mountains for him!

Some accident must have happened in the interim, though. Even today, the prince and the others were stuck in there still.

The celestial master tomb was a complicated place that even the current East Sea emperor could lose himself in. More than a dozen dao immortals had already been lost to it, and the emperor's own attempt had ended in severe injury.

When Xiangliu Ting had gone to Dusk Province to reinforce it, he'd wanted to ask Lu Yun for this favor. However, Lu Yun had been too occupied by the province's affairs, not to mention being ostracized by the rest of the world, for him to be able to mention it.

The young man's appearance in the East Sea was the perfect opportunity, and Xiangliu Ting was the ideal ambassador for voicing their urgent appeal.

"Don't worry, senior. They went in there because of me. I'll see them safely out." Lu Yun sounded rather more serious than usual.

"This is the map for the ghost realm at the end of the East Sea." Taking out a jade slip, Xiangliu Ting handed it gravely to the human youth.

The desolation at the end of the East Sea was a zone of death and a ghost realm. It was positively huge in size—bigger than nearly the entirety of the sea. The East Sea monster court hadn't seen its other side in eighty thousand years of exploration.

What they had seen, however, was a detailed topography of the place. Xiangliu Ting knew that Lu Yun had come for the Path of Ingress; that was why he'd given the map to the human youth in the first place.

"Is the kunpeng nest also here in the East Sea?" Lu Yun asked suddenly.

"Yes!" Xiangliu Ting blinked and nodded. "The celestial master tomb swallowed up both the kunpeng nest and the spirit turtle nest—qilin tomb combination."

"Hmm?" Lu Yun widened his eyes. "The celestial master tomb swallowed them up, you say?"

"Yes!" Xiangliu Ting nodded. "The turtle nest and qilin tomb don't belong to the ghost realm at the end of the East Sea. Just like the kunpeng nest, they were drawn there by whatever lies within."

"When the kunpeng nest, turtle nest, and qilin tomb fused into one, the nearby celestial master tomb consumed them as well."

"Heaven and earth shook that day throughout the East Sea... but the Sovereign Battles were progressing to their most heated moments then, so no one paid it much attention," explained the general.

Lu Yun nodded imperceptibly to himself. He'd noticed two key points in Xiangliu Ting's words: turtle nest and qilin tomb!

The dragon and phoenix nests had fused into a seal that cursed both races and locked the Scarlet Ape within. Since that was the case, the turtle nest and qilin tomb definitely corresponded to another curse and seal. Spirit turtles and qilins were likely cursed to keep another Scarlet Ape bound.

Lu Yun had always wondered why the desolate waters at the end of the East Sea was called a 'ghost realm'. What kind of place was it?

When the Path of Ingress had taken Kui and Scarlet Ape into the ghost realm, his consciousness had been fused into the grand influence over the world. He hadn't had the freedom to leave that state, but nothing in his surroundings had escaped his senses.

Zhao Changkong's idea had been to use the Path of Ingress to slam Kui and Scarlet Ape into the East Sea, then bring it back to Nephrite using the last dregs of his will.

However, a strange power had come out of the treasure to dispel the will he'd left to do so. The then-masterless path had plunged into the ghost realm seemingly on its own initiative.

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The immortals tailing Lu Yun were glad to see him departing after speaking very briefly with Xiangliu Ting. They really wouldn't have known what to do if he'd followed them to the monster spirit court.

They tolerated the Panorama Pavilion's formations of heaven and earth, but the East Sea monsters could not be allowed to have the same.

The East Sea possessed the primordial Monster Celestial Master's heritage and believed themselves the true heirs of the world because of it. They'd never given up on their ambition of conquering the entire world.

If they were allowed to have formations of heaven and earth ahead of everyone else, they'd be the first to start a war in the nine majors and ten lands.

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"How are they going so fast?!" Suddenly, the origin dao immortals colored in worry. In the blink of an eye, Lu Yun had completely disappeared from their collective consciousness.

"After him!" A crippled origin dao traversed five million kilometers in the blink of an eye. Nevertheless, it still took him several movements to find a trace of where Lu Yun had gone.

Upon the small skiff, the young man was enveloped in a shimmering black light. In his eyes, the concept of space was no longer important.

In a single instant, Lu Yun, Qing Han, and the boat beneath them traveled five hundred thousand kilometers. They really weren't much slower than the origin dao immortals at all.

He was able to accomplish this with a new death art he'd learned after reaching returned void: Boundless Step.

With it, he was no longer fettered by any concept of distance. All locales were only a few steps away to him, and a single step could cross five hundred thousand kilometers. This was an excellent ability for both escape and travel.

As for whether it could break through formations and traverse layouts... that remained to be seen.