

## Necropolis 51

### Chapter 51: Soon To Die

Li Youcai's soft awe made the others react as well.

"What happened just now? Who was that girl?" Yuying asked as she stared blankly at the gaping hole in the cavern wall. It marked the direction of where the goddess had blasted the undead hag.

"No matter what happened, we must depart without delay!" a fretful Miao interjected. "The undead hag is an undying monster. She's only been shot through the wall, she'll be back soon."

"Right, we need to leave at once!" Lu Yun put all thoughts about the girl out of his mind and crawled up from the ground. The kick from 'Formation Thirteenth' had been hastily delivered and caused him no tangible damage.

"Are you alright?" He reached Qing Han's side and helped the young man up. After a glance at the Dusk governor, the imperial envoy gently closed his eyes without replying.

"What's... what's the matter with you?" Lu Yun jolted in shock when he touched the inside of the young man's wrist. As a member of a tomb raiding sect with deep roots in ancient Chinese history, he was naturally proficient in traditional medicine.

The imperial envoy's pulse was so faint that it was a real worry his heart might stop at any second. Each breath seemed to bring him one step closer to his grave. Lu Yun's heart clenched painfully as a foreboding feeling struck him.

Did I push him too hard earlier and end up hurting him? Or did something invisible infiltrate his body to steal his life force? He swung Qing Han onto his back. "In any case, let's get out of here first!"

"Leave him here, he isn't long for this world. He'll be nothing but a burden if we take him with us," Miao sighed as he floated to Lu Yun's side.

"We came together, so we leave together." Lu Yun shook his head.

Qing Han had saved him twice during their exploration, and it was due to one of those occasions that the imperial envoy was in his current predicament. For Lu Yun, abandoning him simply wasn't an option. Qing Han was a comrade-in-arms, a friend until death. His very first friend in the immortal world, as a matter of fact.

"I fear he won't live long at this rate. He probably won't persist until the exit—" Miao warned again.

"Shut up!" Lu Yun roared like a wounded beast.

"Do you really want to save him?" Miao asked after a moment's hesitation, gentle in the face of the Dusk governor's anger.

"Do you know a way?" Lu Yun asked immediately.

"I do, but the cost may be too much for you to bear," the fox whispered. He looked at the big hole in trepidation, afraid the giant hag would suddenly reappear.

She wouldn't have been able to harm Miao inside his dream world, but he was no match for the monster after waking up. The only possible outcome was to end up as food in the monster's stomach.

"Tell me," Lu Yun urged.

"The Panorama of Clarity, the Portrait of Emptiness, and the Profile of Harmony were all drawn by the same grandmaster a long time ago. The Panorama of Clarity encompasses all of nature's children, the Portrait of Emptiness represents life in its endless facets, and the Profile of Harmony symbolizes the laws of the world. A complete world can be formed by combining the three of them," Miao explained in a soft and unhurried voice.

"If you can create this world and let the ugly eyesore refine it, you'll be able to save his life." He rubbed his face lightly, somewhat puzzled. "Strange, why does he risk his life for such an ugly creature, but yell at a wondrous being of beauty like me? Humans are truly peculiar creatures. Well, the girl who appeared earlier was really pretty. Aiyaya, she's still somewhat lacking compared to me though."

The incessant gabbing made Lu Yun itch to stomp on the fox's face. "How do I combine them?"

The Profile was in his possession, the Portrait was on Qing Han, and the Panorama was Yuying's greatest treasure.

Well, correction, Yuying had silently placed the Panorama in his hand. As his envoy, she fully understood the place that Qing Han occupied in her master's heart.

"The three immortal fires stored within! Everyone believes the Emerald Mistfire, Lucent Voidfire, and the Daevic Skyfire are sealed within their respective scrolls, when in fact it's the opposite," explained Miao. "The fires entered the paintings in order to seal them. You need to extract the immortal fires before you can combine the paintings.

"But... there isn't enough time at the moment. His life will either run its course before you can complete the process, or the hag will return and eat us all. That being said, how do we take out the fires?" The fox sank deep into thought.

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Manifesting the realms of yin and yang, Lu Yun and Yuying entered the Gates of the Abyss together.

Time flowed differently beyond the gates. Ten thousand years could pass inside, while only the time it takes for a mere snap of a finger would pass outside. Unfortunately, the ruined world wasn't a suitable place for the living to cultivate, or Lu Yun would've waited until he reached immortality before exiting.

The only ones currently inside were his envoy, Feinie, and the Skyriver city lord, who was still squashed under the bronze outer-coffin.

"How do we separate the fires from the paintings?" Lu Yun asked Yuying and Feinie.

"Extract the fires?" Feinie blinked in surprise, then shook her head. "The Exalted Immortal Sect might know. They fought with me for centuries in order to seize the Portrait of Emptiness, so it stands to reason that they would know the secret of the three paintings."

"People from the Exalted Immortal Sect..." Lu Yun frowned.

“Sir, there’s one of them inside the burial mound,” reminded Yuying. She’d picked up on someone else having taken over Formation Thirteen’s body.

“But Qing Han probably doesn’t have that long,” Lu Yun replied helplessly. With his particular interest in traditional medicine, he could tell that Qing Han would soon breathe his last. There was no time to waste, which was why he’d rushed into his realm to make further plans.

Yuying apprised Feinie of the situation.

“I see. There’s a formation in the Formation Orb called ‘Nature’s Subsistence’. It can freeze the bodily functions of one who is fated to die for seven days. But if nothing can be done after those seven days, then even the Divine Exalted Immortal himself would be powerless to change the doomed one’s fate,” explained Feinie. She added after a moment, “There is... also the possibility of writing his name in the Tome of Life and Death, milord.”

“The Tome...” Lu Yun smiled ruefully. “Wouldn’t that turn him into my subordinate? Would we still be friends then? But I guess if he really dies, I’ll make him an Envoy of Samsara.”

He was now allowed one additional envoy after reaching the qi transformation realm, but this was an option of last resort that would forever sever the ties of fellowship between them. Even if Lu Yun were to still consider him a friend, Qing Han would see Lu Yun as his master and nothing else.

“There is another way,” Yuying suddenly offered. “Send out the floating peak and use its resurrection layout to prolong Sir Qing Han’s life.”

“That’s right, the resurrection layout!” Lu Yun’s eyes shone as he looked in the peak’s direction.

Qing Han couldn’t enter the Gates of the Abyss, since he was still alive, but Lu Yun could bring the peak to him.

“Feinie... you come out with me as well!” The governor made up his mind with a tightening of his jaw. “Let’s hope Dusk Province’s restrictions are targeted at those displaying a golden immortal’s strength, rather than their cultivation realm.”

“Understood,” Feinie acknowledged, her face serene. She’d once executed thirty-six peerless immortal kings in a row with the help of the Formation Orb. Though her strength had now decayed to true immortal realm, it should be enough to withstand an undead hag. And even if she were killed by the restrictions, the Tome of Life and Death would bring her back.

For Qing Han’s sake, Lu Yun was willing to throw caution to the wind. He’d always been a loyal man, even back on Earth. He could forsake riches and put his own life in danger, but he’d never turn his back on a comrade in need.

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Li Youcai and Miao gaped at the floating peak’s reemergence. Thankfully, they were currently standing in a space that was wide enough to accommodate the peak, despite its size.

Lu Yun placed Qing Han at the pole of life in the layout, then floated down the peak’s slopes.

“Feinie, stay here and protect him. Yuying and I will go after Formation Thirteenth.” Seeing Feinie remain safe and sound outside the gates was a relief.

The former Truewater city lord nodded gently. She’d altered her appearance to avoid unnecessary trouble, but the grief on her face was impossible to disguise. Otherwise, she was now impossible to recognize.

“Yet another one suddenly appearing out of nowhere. How many is that altogether?” Miao felt numb when he spotted her. Just like the newcomer, Yuying had also come out of nowhere. In fact, there had also been four other guys, but they were dead now.

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Lu Yun handed the Panorama back to Yuying as they raced forward, tracking Formation Thirteenth.

“Why did Qing Han’s condition deteriorate so suddenly? He was fine not long ago,” he suddenly wondered, half talking to himself and half asking Yuying’s opinion. “Could it be related to that girl?”

The possibility suddenly struck him, but he immediately rejected the notion. How could the two of them be connected?

Where did she come from? Who is she, and why did she save me? Numerous thoughts swarmed in his mind. Qing Hang, the young girl.... No matter how hard he tried, it was impossible to associate her beautiful face with the swarthy Qing Han.

Formation Thirteenth hadn’t gone far yet. The thick energy of death pervading the burial mound made it all the easier for Lu Yun’s Spectral Eye to follow the trail of living energy left behind by the man.

In a nearby tunnel, the imposter formation master had begun engraving a new formation. Lu Yun recognized it with ease, given that he’d assimilated Yuying’s memories. It was another means of random transportation.

Transportation usually involved transmission between a starting point and an endpoint. But with no destination formation available, random transportation was the only method for 'Formation Thirteenth' to leave the burial mound.

“Hm?” Suddenly noticing the newcomers, he frowned. “Governor of Dusk, that monster didn’t eat you?”

The imposter knew of Lu Yun’s identity thanks to assimilating the formation master’s memories, and the sight of the governor having successfully tailed him had caught him by surprise.

“Seize him!”

Yuying nodded. She unfurled the Panorama and let loose her seven swords and Emerald Mistfire on 'Formation Thirteenth'.

“The Panorama of Clarity!” ‘Formation Thirteenth’ stared at the painting, avarice gleaming in his eyes. He laughed heartily. “Great! Wonderful. Fantastic! Who would’ve thought I’d be able to obtain it before returning to the sect. This will be a contribution big enough to erase my previous failures!”

He'd been too preoccupied by the titanic undead hag to take note of Yuying, but she now held his undivided attention. The Panorama of Clarity, Portrait of Emptiness, and Profile of Harmony were utmost treasures that his sect had long dreamed of possessing. One of his objectives in entering the burial mound had precisely been Feinie's Portrait.

With a hand seal, he unveiled the full force of a true immortal. His own power was even greater, but this was all he could muster while limited by Formation Thirteenth's body.

Boom—

An explosion sounded from the formation master's body as an enormous eagle with golden wings materialized over his head to dive at Yuying.

"The Great Peng Spirit! He's from the Immortal Exalted Sect alright!" Hatred flashed in Yuying's eyes. It'd been the machinations of this sect that'd led to her death to her heavenly tribulation. Now that 'Formation Thirteenth' had used a signature combat art of the sect, she immediately saw red.

Her seven swords whistled through the air in seven rainbow streaks and assembled into a sword formation, unrelentingly churning at the Great Peng Spirit. The impact instantly shattered the image.

"What?!" 'Formation Thirteenth' flinched. Who would've thought this woman's blades would be this sharp! Although a millennia spent inside the tomb had whittled away at the Great Peng Spirit's strength, it was still a bonafide august immortal spirit!

In comparison, the woman was merely a true immortal. A true immortal's weapons destroying an august immortal spirit? No one would believe it if word of this got out.

Yuying was a genius from twelve hundred years ago. On top of refining pills, her strength was also uncommon. How else could she have held the position of Dusk Province's governor? Moreover, becoming Lu Yun's envoy had enhanced her abilities.

"I have to run!" After having been trapped inside the burial mound for so long, the august immortal had no other aces left up his sleeve besides his strong spirit and mental will. And the destruction of his bird spirit had left him too afraid to face Yuying head on.

His arms exploded without another word, releasing a highly intense scarlet light. His entire being turned into a blood shadow and vanished from sight in the blink of an eye.

"Do you think I'll let you get away?" A cold sneer appeared on Yuying's lips.

The last time, she'd let a member of the Immortal Exalted Sect escape from her own tomb in a moment of distraction. She'd taken the lesson to heart, and it would never happen again. The Panorama of Clarity drew a scene of mountains and rivers that enclosed the surrounding space.

In his panic, 'Formation Thirteenth' rushed headlong into the painting.

## **Chapter 52: To Be One With Dao**

"Don't," Lu Yun blurted out as Yuying trapped Formation Thirteenth with the Panorama of Clarity. "I'll kill him myself!"

Yuying nodded and unfurled the painting. Formation Thirteenth fell to the ground, his energy constrained. The fear on his face was replaced by surprise when he heard Lu Yun's words.

"You're going to kill me yourself?" He cocked his head derisively, despite the lingering fear in his heart. A qi realm cultivator wanting to kill an immortal? Hah!

Lu Yun ignored him and drew out a purple sword that glowed with an indistinct hue.

"Violetgrave!!" Formation Thirteenth cried out, stunned. Various situations up until now had made it plain that this sword was no ordinary ninth-rank weapon.

Swish.

Lu Yun slashed the man's body and soul apart, and the soul that'd taken over Formation Thirteenth was devoured by the Gates of the Abyss. With another wave of the Dusk governor's hand, a young man in his twenties, clad in green robes, reemerged to kneel before Lu Yun.

"Infernum Zhao Dianliang greets milord!" He was an unusually handsome and graceful man, manifesting utter nobility with every movement. His expression, however, held nothing but humility.

"How do I extract the immortal fires from the three paintings?" Lu Yun cut right to the chase. He'd opted to make the man a nether soldier so that the third envoy spot remained open for Qing Han. This was his final option, in case all other attempts failed.

Moreover, Lu Yun couldn't write Zhao Dianliang down in the Tome of Life and Death without his actual corpse. Given that, Lu Yun couldn't access his new soldier's memories and knowledge, so he had to settle for good old fashioned questioning instead.

"Draw the fires out with a more powerful flame!" Zhao Dianliang answered immediately. He was merely an august immortal, but he held a special position in the Exalted Immortal Sect. Thus, highly-regarded, he knew of even the top secrets in the sect.

"A more powerful flame?" Lu Yun frowned.

"There's an extremely powerful fire in your dantian, sir!" Yuying said.

Lu Yun was reminded of the strange black flame. "That's right!"

The black fire in his dantian came from the Tome of Life and Death, so it couldn't be anything but powerful. When he used his death arts, he wasn't tapping into his own energies, but the black flame instead.

The nine shadowy dragons surrounding the book had disappeared. They'd been crushed by the Tiger Prince earlier, and the pieces left behind were devoured by the black fire. That had fueled Lu Yun's qi and allowed him to break through in one fell swoop.

His mind made up, Lu Yun entered the Gates of the Abyss with Yuying and Zhao Dianliang. He needed the power of the netherworld to release the fire in his body.

Whoosh!

Black flames were suddenly burning furiously in Lu Yun's hands. Yuying and Zhao Dianliang stumbled backward, too fearful to look at the fire head-on.

The three paintings that exceeded ninth-rank hovered in front of the young man and unfolded in their entirety. The Panorama of Clarity was a traditional ink painting of natural landscapes, the Portrait of Emptiness sketched different walks of life, and the Profile of Harmony depicted a vast blue sky.

Setting his black fire near the three paintings, Lu Yun could sense the three immortal fires within. Emerald Mistfire, Lucent Voidfire, and Daevic Skyfire! They seemed to be sentient and clung to the paintings when they sensed the black flame, refusing to emerge.

"I wouldn't be able to do anything to you if I was outside, even if I exhausted all of my qi. Here on my home turf, however, my wishes are your command. Come forth!" he growled. Two black flames blazed in his eyes as ripples undulated throughout the netherworld.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Palm-sized flames of green, blue, and yellow burrowed out from the paintings and hovered in the air. Lu Yun exhaled lightly. "How long did that take?" he asked with a half-turn.

Yuying made some quick calculations. "Seven days."

Good thing we're within the Gates of the Abyss. Seven days had passed by in such a quick moment! With a push of his hand, he sent the three fires to Yuying. "You can have them."

"Thank you for your generosity, sir!" Yuying said, her eyes glowing.

Emerald Mistfire was why the Panorama of Clarity could be used to refine pills. What mattered to Yuying was the fire, not the painting. There were a great number of treasures in this world that could store living beings and inanimate objects, as well as create an isolated space, but flames were far more rare. She gladly transferred the three fires into herself.

Without the immortal fires sealing the three paintings, they began merging. Mysterious, glorious light radiated from them, illuminating the dark world within the Gates of the Abyss. They overlapped, their images superimposing and blending together.

After an indeterminate period of time, the light dissipated and an empty scroll fell into Lu Yun's hands. There was nothing but a blank canvas, and the scroll itself looked quite ordinary.

"This is what the three paintings turned into?" Lu Yun stared at it in confusion.

Yuying and Zhao Dianliang were at a loss as well, and neither of them could tell what the newly formed treasure was. Another quick time calculation showed that another month had passed.

Thankfully, five weeks within the gates were still a mere moment outside.

"Screw it," Lu Yun pressed his lips, "what have we got to lose?" Upon exiting the gates, they immediately ran back to where they came from.

“Shit!” Lu Yun cursed when they approached the clearing. As Miao had predicted, the titanic undead hag was back. She’d completely lost it and repeatedly slammed into the floating summit, desire flooding her eyes.

He shook his head at the hag. “An undead hag is a kind of zombie that’s stuck between life and death, abandoned by both heaven and hell. Even if you get the layout of resurrection, you won’t come back to life.”

However, the crazed hag only had eyes for the resurrection layout.

Feinie had set up layers of formations to protect the floating peak. What had seemed like an inert object, the Formation Orb had gained a life of its own in Feinie’s hands and enveloped the summit with its light.

No matter how hard the undead hag tried, she couldn’t break through the orb’s formations.

However, Feinie was also left vulnerable to the hag’s attacks. Her complexion paled and blood trickled down the corner of her mouth. She’d reached the golden immortal realm before her death, but having fallen to true immortal now meant a gap in strength existed, one that was as wide as the status difference between an emperor and a beggar.

“Slug it a good one, fatty!” Lu Yun yelled at Li Youcai.

“I—” In full control of his mental faculties, since Yueshen had left his body, the fatty hesitated at Lu Yun’s words. Slug it a good one?

The Dusk governor wanted him to put all his strength into his attack and fully tap into the Seal of Mountains and Rivers. The seal was a special eighth-rank treasure, and could rival a ninth-rank treasure when used at full power. However, if he deployed it to those depths, he would exhaust all of his strength—just like Qing Han—and wouldn’t be able to move.

“Okay, but you have to cancel my engagement to that male pig!” The fatty was still fretting over that.

“Deal!” Lu Yun agreed immediately. “But you have to leave Mo Yi alone from now on.”

“Deal!” Li Youcai grimaced. “Remember to get me out of here afterward!”

Bam!

The seal quickly grew into a towering mountain and slammed relentlessly into the undead hag.

The hag’s full attention was on the floating summit, so the sudden impact sent her flying and crashing heavily into the walls of the cavern.

“Break her limbs!” Lu Yun yelled again. The undead hag couldn’t die, but breaking her limbs would at least temporarily immobilize her.

His jaw set, Li Youcai tapped into his reserves of strength and attacked the monster’s arms and legs, breaking them in quick succession. The monster screamed and struggled, the ugly wounds healing at a visible pace.

Blood gushed out of Li Youcai’s mouth, then he toppled to the ground.



“Don’t leave me behind,” he muttered before losing consciousness. The seal automatically returned to him.

“Don’t worry,” Lu Yun said, relieved. “I won’t.”

Yueshen obediently attached herself to Li Youcai’s body and took over.

“This man is a rare talent as well. He somehow manages to preserve his vitality even after being possessed by the ghost of an immortal,” Miao muttered with a shudder. “All of these people are freaks. No wonder they could find my body and rescue me.”

Feinie opened up her formation and allowed Lu Yun to ascend the floating summit. Miao trailed after him.

“What should I do?” Lu Yun turned to Miao with the empty scroll.

“That’s it!” Miao’s eyes lit up when he saw the painting. As a fox spirit who had lived a long, long life, he had more experience than most. “So the legends are real. The most perfect of art is one with dao. This is a depiction of all things between heaven and earth. It’s the supreme division of the universe!” His eyes grew increasingly brighter.

“Cut the crap and tell me what to do with it,” Lu Yun said with furrowed brows. “The painting isn’t going to control Qing Han, is it?”

“It won’t. What possessed the true immortal wasn’t the Portrait of Emptiness itself, but the fire spirit within,” Miao explained. “The fire spirit became the spirit of the painting, but the painting itself wasn’t sentient.”

“Since he’s unconscious, we can only employ the most basic method—use his blood to bind the treasure to him. Cut his wrist and let his blood drip onto the painting. But you have to consider this carefully, kid.” The fox’s gaze at Lu Yun turned serious. “Even when the immortal dao was at its most prosperous a hundred thousand years ago, powerful immortals and daoists fought over this treasure. Are you sure you’re just going to give it to this ugly eyesore?”

“Treasure can be replaced, but a life is forever lost when someone dies.” Lu Yun nodded and cut Qing Han’s wrist with his finger, directing the young man’s blood to drip onto the empty painting. “In my eyes, a friend is much more important than this.

“Humans are sentimental and loyal. We’re the type willing to risk our lives for our friends, it’s why we reign over all beings in the world. Your kind may be intelligent and powerful, but your strength is still below the human race’s,” he sighed.

Both Earth and the world of immortals might be plagued with greed, but people would never lose sight of their humanity—their bond with one another.

With Yuying and Feinie’s memories and experience, he was far from the clueless novice he’d been when he first arrived. He knew there were races other than the human race in this world. The monster spirit race, for example, had always been at odds with the human race, and Miao was one of them.

“Humans are loyal and willing to risk your lives for others?” Confusion clouded Miao’s eyes. “So this willingness to sacrifice yourselves is how humans drove my kind out of the fertile lands?”

Power was the only thing that mattered to his kind. No one would ever consider the safety of the others. They cared only about themselves, and the strong fed on the weak. This is why Miao had continuously failed to understand Lu Yun's behavior along the way. An injured monster spirit would immediately be abandoned, or perhaps even eaten.

Lu Yun shifted his attention from Miao to Qing Han. A soft glow was wrapped around the young man like a blanket.

### **Chapter 53: Breaking the Layout**

Images slowly imprinted themselves upon the scroll. There were natural landscapes, living beings, and all other things between heaven and earth. When combined, the images conveyed a concept of utmost infinity, a notion too much for Lu Yun's eyes to take in. That was why it'd looked blank, at first.

Even now, he was struggling to come up with the right words to describe it. "The most perfect of art is one with dao?" he muttered.

Eventually, the light emitting from the scroll dissipated, and it sank into Qing Han's body. For a fleeting moment, Lu Yun seemed to see a familiar sparkle of starlight twinkle from Qing Han's chest. However, his sole focus was on the young man's safety, so he dismissed what he saw as a trick of the light.

Color slowly returned to Qing Han's pale face.

His skin seems lighter, and the scars less pronounced. He's easier on the eyes now. The changes made Lu Yun sigh in relief. Qing Han was no longer in a coma, but simply asleep.

"Time to leave!" When he helped the young man up, he realized that the imperial envoy's body had become softer—even more so than Wanfeng's!

What's going on here? He can't be a girl, can he? Lu Yun checked Qing Han's throat and found an Adam's apple. After some hesitation, he reached out to feel the envoy's chest.

"It's flat." Lu Yun smiled wryly. What am I thinking?

"What—what are you doing?" Qing Han asked in a weak, panicky voice.

"Nothing." Lu Yun immediately withdrew his hand to avoid any misunderstandings. He swung Qing Han onto his back and jumped off the floating summit.

"How, how am I alive?" Qing Han's voice was as quiet as a fly's, and his face was so red that tomato juice could be wrung from it. Heavens, he was touching my chest just now! Does he know?

He was even more exhausted than before. If Lu Yun hadn't touched his chest and triggered his natural reflexes, he wouldn't have regained consciousness. He fell asleep again before Lu Yun could answer.

"This brat—" Lu Yun noticed how sweet the imperial envoy's breath was. Is he really a man?

His mind wandered again and he had to stop himself from reaching for Qing Han's crotch. It'd be horrifying if he actually felt up a guy's junk. "I'm not gay!"

Stop being ridiculous. He told himself to snap out of it with a firm mental shake.

“Come on,” Miao urged. “The undead hag will recover if we wait any longer.”

With a nod, Lu Yun put away the floating summit and picked a tunnel to enter. Miao took point while Yuying and Feinie flanked Lu Yun, guarding him. Yueshen followed the rest in Li Youcai’s body.

“The layout of certain death!” Lu Yun stopped in his tracks. The tunnel ahead narrowed and his vision was obscured by a thick veil of mist, a sign that they’d returned to that particular layout.

“Leave through another path, you two,” he whispered. “You won’t be of any help here.”

Yuying and Feinie shared a look, then disappeared with a nod. Their master meant for them to return to the Gates of the Abyss.

“Go ahead with the fatty, Yueshen!” He raised his concentration to the utmost to avoid being tricked again.

He had a theory: what had deceived him the first time was likely the undead hag’s consciousness, which had been sealed in the corpse coffin. It was invisible and omnipresent in the burial mound, capable of exerting power over this strange layout.

Miao had already entered the layout, since, as a master of illusions, the layout was of no threat to him.

Lu Yun took a deep breath and stepped forward, brandishing Violetgrave in his hand. His surroundings suddenly changed. All manner of terrifying monsters lunged at him, some real and some fake. With his previous experiences, he was able to thread his way through much more easily.

“This is it.” He came to a sudden halt after some time. This was the spot where the layout had turned Qing Han into that beautiful girl. “As expected,” Lu Yun spoke to himself placatingly.

Qing Han had transformed again.

The young man’s tanned face became fair and his body turned soft. Lu Yun could feel supple breasts pressing against his back.

Qing Han woke up again when he felt his body undergoing those changes. He began trembling, and his face tensed with panic and uncertainty.

“Don’t worry, it’s all fake. The layout turned you into a girl, but it’s all a surface illusion. You’re still a guy.” Lu Yun gulped, aroused by the softness behind his back.

Qing Han tightened his jaw and made a sound of assent.

His voice got another reaction out of Lu Yun. “This is Qing Han,” he grumbled. “Not that beautiful chick! She must’ve come here before, so her image was recorded by the layout and became part of the trial.

“But how does it know she’s my type? Once I get out of here, I’m going to find her and make her mine!” Lu Yun was running his mouth to distract himself. “However, the layout’s been here for many, many years. What if the beautiful girl is an old hag now?” His voice ended on an uncertain note.

His thoughts were suddenly derailed by a sudden pain shooting from his ear. Qing Han had bitten him again.

The imperial envoy had recovered some of her strength, and the fury that rose at Lu Yun's words gave her enough energy to deliver a hearty chomp. The Dusk governor's compliment made her shy, but the mention of being an old hag had sent her into a towering rage.

"Let go, let go! How do you bite so hard in this state?" Lu Yun grimaced in pain and twisted a handful of Qing Han's ass without thinking.

She let go with a scream, staring at Lu Yun with misty eyes.

It's so round and soft! Hit with lust, Lu Yun almost developed a spontaneous nosebleed. "No, no, no, it's all fake! I can't believe my senses!" He hurriedly calmed himself and brutally strangled his rising desire.

"He's a guy! Stop being so horny!" He quickly withdrew his hand and hurried forward.

Qing Han stared at Lu Yun without a word, her eyes brimming with tears in a scarlet face.

"What's with that expression?" Lu Yun snapped when he noticed Qing Han's face. "Don't act like a girl. You ain't one!"

"How do you know the expression you see isn't an illusion as well?" There was a pleasant lilt to Qing Han's voice, but it sent a shudder down Lu Yun's spine.

"That's right. Nothing is impossible in the layout of certain death. I can't trust anything I see!" He shut his mouth and eyes, marching forward with his consciousness withdrawn.

A mischievous glint flashed through Qing Han's bright, round eyes, and faint smile tugged at her lips. The environment here makes the starstone malfunction.

She closed her eyes and checked the stone, her expression grave. Cousin said the stone can create disguises that not even a dao immortal can see through. This place, however, can nullify the stone. No wonder Lu Yun is so wary.

Having passed the eye of the layout and turned back into a man, Qing Han threw the Dusk governor a curious glance. Strange, I sacrificed my life to activate the starstone. I should be dead now. Why am I still alive? Befuddled, he struggled to come up with an explanation.

Did he save me again? He gave Lu Yun a conflicted look. But how?

He was too weak to check on anything but the stone around his neck. The strange painting had entered his body, but he couldn't sense it just yet.

"Qing Han, why do you think the girl suddenly showed up to save me?" Lu Yun asked.

The question derailed Qing Han's train of thought, and he floundered for a response. "Maybe you accidentally triggered some power she left there. That's why—"

"Who are you talking to?!" Lu Yun shouted in panic when he heard Qing Han murmuring.

"Heh heh heh, little girl. You've finally fallen for my trick." An enormous ghost face materialized and flashed Qing Han an eerie smile with a wave. "You're mine now, come with me."

Qing Han felt his eyelids grow steadily heavier. He was about to follow the face when an empty scroll emerged from his body with a thrum. A beam of mystical light drove the ghost face away, forcing a piercing scream out of it.

“The Scroll of Shepherding Immortals! Why is it on you?!”

The scroll hummed and the mystical glow bloomed into an explosion of light, sweeping over the entire layout, then the ghost face vanished with a final cry.

“Wait, what the heck happened?!” Lu Yun tensed as, shockingly, the layout was crumbling! “This isn’t fake, it’s real!” he shouted and sprinted away. When something as powerful as this layout fell apart, the wildly rampaging power would tear everything to pieces!

The tunnel—no, the entire burial mound—was trembling. Stones cracked overhead and dropped down; it seemed that the entire burial mound had started collapsing.

“We’re out!” Lu Yun turned around and saw that the layout of certain death was completely destroyed. The mist had dissipated, and a giant head probed out of the passage. Its white eyes were staring straight at him. It was the undead hag. It had recovered and was chasing after them again!

Lu Yun felt strangely lighter, like a weight hanging onto him had been lifted, but the undead hag caught up with him before he could dwell on it further.

“The ruins of Truewater City are ahead, and the bloodcorpse formation just after it. We can use the maggots inside to deal with the undead hag!” He clenched his teeth and ran.

“You idiot!!” a cantankerous Miao shouted. “The flying restriction has been broken. Fly on your sword! Otherwise, you’ll get crushed by the debris before getting eaten by the undead hag!”

#### **Chapter 54: An Immutable Rule**

Lu Yun ran for dear life, an undead monster hot on his heels and the enormous burial mound caving in all around him.

Wait a second! I can ride on the sword! he suddenly remembered. He’d slowly grown accustomed to the immortal world, but it was still difficult to adapt to his new status as a cultivator. When facing danger, his first reaction was still to use his legs to flee.

Buzz—

His figure shone purple as he muttered an incantation, then Violetgrave morphed into rays of sword light that surrounded him, lifted him in the air, and propelled him out of the collapsing tunnel.

Rather than turning swords into giant surfboards, so-called sword riding consisted of transforming the weapon into light that encircled its owner. When the union of body and sword was achieved, it allowed for near-instantaneous travel across thousands of kilometers.

Lu Yun himself had no experience with such a maneuver, but both Yuying’s and Feinie’s memories contained high-level sword riding arts. He’d selected one at random and immediately put it to good use.

“Does he... not need to refine the sword?” murmured the stupefied Qing Han on Lu Yun’s back.

Violetgrave was a potent weapon that not even he was able to forcibly commandeer, to say nothing of riding on it, yet it had submitted meekly to Lu Yun's control.

It seems the sword was meant for him. Qing Han softly bit his lip, lost in thought.

Boom—

Behind him, the giant undead hag was forcing her way out of the crumbling tunnel thanks to the sheer size of her unnatural body.

The ruins of Truewater City were now approaching him. The giant altar still had a dim glow, but the earth below the ancient city was cracked, with half of the city foundations sunken below ground.

"This burial mound is really falling to pieces!" Hurling through the air, Lu Yun flew over the ancient city and realized something about his surroundings at the same time.

I see, so the certain death layout was the pillar supporting the entire burial mound. Losing this core is leading to the destruction of all the other layouts, and the resulting energies are causing the burial mound itself to cave in.

His expression spoke of a multitude of emotions. The end of the burial mound will also erase the hag's consciousness; no wonder she's going batshit insane. Then again, without her consciousness, she's going to.... He couldn't keep a shiver from running down his body.

As long as she was conscious, the hag would forever remain within the confines of the burial mound, protecting her spirit and awaiting a chance at rebirth.

The typical undead hag was a mindless being, driven purely by the instinct to feed on living creatures. Possessing a self-awareness of her own restrained the actions of this particular specimen, but without it, she would certainly leave the burial mound and rampage through the entire province.

"Waaarghh!" the hag screeched as she picked up the pace of frenetic pursuit. Gelatinous flesh continuously fragmented from her body, exposing the black skeleton underneath. The only hope for her to survive the destruction of the burial mound was to obtain the resurrection layout from the human.

Coming back to life was impossible for an undead hag, but such wasn't the case for the strand of consciousness trapped in the corpse coffin. From the outset, the undead hag had been nothing but the puppet of the mind of her once owner.

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"We have to destroy that hag!" Lu Yun made up his mind, located the tunnel they'd previously taken, and darted back inside.

"What are you doing! Come back! There are other tunnels that lead outside!" Miao shouted at the top of his lungs when he noticed the governor was rushing toward the bloodcorpse coffin. In contrast, Yueshen followed Lu Yun without a word.

"Yueshen, Miao, find a safe passage and leave with Qing Han!" Lu Yun abruptly stopped and let the young man down from his back.

“No! I’m going with you!” Qing Han bit down on Lu Yun’s ear and refused to let go.

“Stop it!” Lu Yun was a bit fraught. He whipped a slap onto Qing Han’s butt to get the young man to let go, then callously dumped him onto the ground.

“Th—the painting you gave me can break the coffin formation. I can help!” Qing Han had realized by now that the blank painting that had suddenly appeared in his possession was the sole reason he was still alive. It used an incomprehensible method to preserve his life and even restore his vitality.

No one but Lu Yun could’ve given him such a treasure.

As the hag drew ever closer, Qing Han coughed violently. “I know you’re worried about the hag getting outside and harming others, but your strength alone won’t suffice. The bloodcorpses will eat you raw even without the help of their maggots. Take me with you, I can help!” he rattled off, cheeks red with urgency.

“Damn it!” Lu Yun clenched his teeth, a little hesitant.

There was an inviolable rule in all tomb raider sects. One could loot from the dead and plunder their riches, but nothing from the tomb could be allowed to walk free to harm the living.

Even graverobbers had their own code of ethics!

In the case that zombies, monsters, or energies harmful to the living were to be unleashed upon those living in the vicinity, the one responsible needed to do everything in their power to limit the damage as best they could. If unsuccessful, they would accompany the victims in death, then be posthumously expelled from the sect.

Of course, Lu Yun was the only such sect member in this world, but the rules set by his masters were ironclad. Disregarding them was simply unthinkable.

“Without you, I’d already be dead. I owe you my life.” Seeing Lu Yun’s ugly expression, Qing Han hastened to add, “Take me along. We don’t have much time left!”

“Yueshen, Miao, you two find another exit. Qing Han and I will be enough,” Lu Yun decided grimly. Since Qing Han’s blank painting could destroy the certain death layout, the bloodcorpse coffin formation would certainly be child’s play as well.

“Yueshen, I know the bloodcorpse was once a body meant for you, but you can no longer control it now that it’s turned into that thing. Plus, there are somehow nine of them now, since there’s actually one in each coffin!”

A single snort from her had been enough to scare one of them away, because they were bodies originally meant for her to inhabit. But transforming into bloodcorpses freed them from her authority while inside the coffin formation. Given the chance, they’d even eat her to restore themselves. Hence, though she was unwilling, she ultimately left with Miao.

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“Waaarghhh!” The undead hag had reached their tunnel by now, half of its flesh worn away from its dark bones. Its black hair seemed to come to life as it snaked toward Lu Yun and Qing Han.

“Let’s go!” Instead of carrying Qing Han on his back, Lu Yun lifted the young man in his arms while stepping on Violetgrave and taking off into the air. With the hag in hot pursuit, he didn’t want to risk its hair latching onto the imperial envoy.

“Are you man or woman? Why do you feel even softer than my Wanfeng?” he shouted hoarsely.

“Now’s not really the time for this, don’t you think?” Qing Han responded weakly. But then he saw the blood seeping from Lu Yun’s wide open eyes. The governor was obviously babbling in an attempt to soothe his frayed nerves.

### **Chapter 55: Escape By the Skin of One’s Teeth**

Lips pursed, Qing Han rested his head on Lu Yun’s chest, listening to the strong heartbeat echoing beneath his ear. The burial mound was crumbling around them, and a terrifying creature out of their worst nightmares was chasing them.

However, he felt strangely at peace

To him, this is a time of life and death, but to me.... Qing Han sighed faintly. I’ve never felt as safe as I do now. Not even my cousin or big brother ever helped me feel this much security.

Qing Han looked down at the starstone on his chest. The empty painting may or may not be able to break the coffin formation, but the stone could certainly do it.

Even if it won’t hurt the undead hag, it’ll break the formation. Qing Han closed his eyes and quietly gathered his strength to activate the stone. If I use it again, will that weird scroll be able to save me this time?

If it can’t, the starstone will become an unclaimed treasure after my death. He’ll see my true form then. What will he think? Will he still call me an old hag?

“Here it is!” Lu Yun suddenly stopped. Nine pitch-black coffins sat at the center of the tunnel, obstructing the way forward. Sensing danger, the gargantuan undead hag came to a halt and growled deeply.

“Scared now?” He curled his lip. “Too late!”

They were near the outer fringes of the burial mound. Although the structural integrity of this area was also compromised, the tunnel remained intact, for the moment. As he approached the coffins, the undead hag screamed crazily, seemingly having figured out his plan. But Lu Yun didn’t budge.

“It looks like you don’t dare come any closer.” He smiled and stepped into the formation. The layout of nine sectors and eight trigrams activated, and his surroundings changed.

At the same time, Lu Yun felt a tremendous force emanating from the young man in his arms. He quickly called out, “Wait! If you destroy the formation now, we’ll be eaten by the bloodcorpses!”

After a pause, Qing Han nodded and tamped down the stone’s power.

Lu Yun sighed in relief and quickly jumped out of the formation in a few leaps and bounds. He’d been here before and still remembered his past experience, immensely speeding up his escape.



“Now—” Qing Han spoke up.

“Don’t do anything yet!” Lu Yun interjected, frowning in deep thought. He could see the undead hag’s venomous glare of resentment from across the formation. The coffins were set up to allow only one escape route, which meant the undead hag had to walk it herself in order to get to Lu Yun.

Rumble rumble, crack!

An enormous rumble deep within the tunnels presaged to the walls cracking around them. The undead hag shook dramatically, ready to charge. The burial mound was falling apart around them; the moment it was completely destroyed and took with it the corpse coffin, the consciousness trapped within would be gone as well.

“Aha!” Lu Yun’s eyes lit up. “We’ll have the undead hag break the formation herself!”

“What do you mean?” Qing Han blinked in confusion. The undead hag was plainly too afraid of the formation to come closer.

“She may be afraid of the bloodcorpses, but the consciousness in the corpse coffin isn’t.”

Bam!

A giant floating summit emerged in the tunnel, filling the narrow path almost to the brim. On one side was the lifeless death pole; on the other side, the lush life pole. Combined, they formed the layout of resurrection.

The undead hag hollered unintelligibly at the sight and dashed toward the peak with reckless abandon.

Crash!

The undead hag’s giant body rammed headlong into the black coffins and reduced them to splinters. Bloodcorpses crawled out of the debris, strange and chilling smiles splitting their faces.

“Where are the ghostface maggots?!” Lu Yun tensed when he saw only nine bloodcorpses, but no maggots. However, he almost threw up in the next moment.

The bloodcorpses opened their mouths wide to bite the undead hag, revealing gaping maws teeming with maggots. The maggots were residing in the bloodcorpses’ stomachs!

The undead hag shrieked with terror as her skin, flesh, and even her bones were relentlessly devoured by the bloodcorpses. She struggled to climb the floating summit, but the bloodcorpses overpowered her and pinned her down.

“Ehehehehe!” They broke into spine-chilling laughter as they fed on the undead hag, then, one by one, looked in Lu Yun and Qing Han’s direction.

“Shit, we’ve taken the undead hag out, but the bloodcorpses are even worse!” Lu Yun’s stomach lurched. “Let’s hope they’ll stay in the burial mound, like most zombies.” He put the floating summit away with a wave of his hand and turned around to bolt.

From behind came the hellish cacophony of bloodcorpses masticating flesh and bone, and the undead hag’s tormented screams.

“Don’t look!” Lu Yun hurriedly covered Qing Han’s eyes before the imperial envoy could look back. “If you do, the bloodcorpses will follow us!”

“But they’re already following us,” Qing Han replied in a shaking voice, his eyes fixed somewhere above Lu Yun’s head. Nine crimson shadows floated over his head, and he could even make out dark red eyes glinting coldly within the shadows.

“Doesn’t matter. Just ignore them!” The noises behind them had died down, the bloodcorpses having devoured the titanic undead hag at a stunning speed.

“Are they corpses, or ghosts?” Lu Yun flew outside via Violetgrave, but the nine bloodcorpses doggedly chased after him, hovering above him.

“You... have... destroyed... me!” a chilling voice slid into Lu Yun’s ear.

“You’re... just... a... fecking consciousness without a soul!” he sneered. “Stay down!”

He knew what the voice was; it was the consciousness sealed in the corpse coffin. It wasn’t a ghost, nor was it a zombie. It was just an untethered consciousness that would dissipate as soon as it left the burial mound.

There was no need to fear it.

“Take me with,” the voice sounded again, but with pleading tones this time. “Let me inside. Let me in, let me in!”

“In?” After a brief pause, Lu Yun summoned the Gates of the Abyss, opening up the way to the other realm.

Swoosh!

Something seemed to have entered the gates.

“Hm?” Both the consciousness and the nine bloodcorpses had entered, which was rather mystifying. Still, the world within the gates was his territory and the nine bloodcorpses wouldn’t be able to get up to any trouble.

He kept his guard up and sped through the burial mound. Something else had been awoken amid the destruction. Something terrible.

The corpse flies!

They were attached to the meridians of the corpse coffin. As the burial mound collapsed, damaging more and more of the corpse coffin, the walls fell apart and awakened the flies.

Palm-sized flies lunged spitefully at Lu Yun, and he could see the crimson venom in their mouths. That was the flies’ most terrifying weapon, as one bite would reduce their victim to a zombie.

Every one of the flies could rival a core realm cultivator, while Lu Yun was only in the qi transformation realm. He could deal with a couple of them, but not an endless swarm of flies.

Hum.

A soft white light emitted from within Lu Yun's arms, keeping the cloud of flies at arm's length. Qing Han had finally succeeded in activating the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals, and the white glow acted like a barrier in keeping the flies out, but it couldn't kill them either.

"I don't know how to use it," Qing Han said nervously, his face a shade paler. "This is the best I can do."

"It's good enough!" Lu Yun sighed in relief and flew toward the exit with Violetgrave.

The first pond they'd encountered was in shambles and the giant corpsefish was nowhere to be seen. It might be dead, or simply fled.

"Finally!" Miao and Yueshen, who was controlling Li Youcai's body, had waited a long time in the ruins of the palace hall. They hurried to Lu Yun when they saw him arrive, Qing Han in his arms.

"Let's get out of here! The flies are coming!" Staring at the swarm of flies, Lu Yun destroyed the tunnel with a flash of his sword, blocking the path. The palace hall was losing bits and pieces as well, and wouldn't hold for long.

"This was where the formation was etched!" Miao hurriedly pointed out.

"Don't use that. Use this!" A transportation formation disk emerged in Lu Yun's hand.

"Uhh..." Miao paused.

The Dusk governor placed the formation disk on the portal they'd come through earlier, lining up the etchings on both. A rumble later, and no more figures could be seen in the hall.

Boom.

After twenty breaths of time, the palace toppled, buried under a landslide of mud.

In the outside world, great disturbances were rumbling from underground.

Mo Yi watched incredulously as Myriad Formation Summit sank. The mountain that had stood tall in Duskwater Prefecture for five thousand years had abruptly vanished from the face of the earth.

Every living soul in the prefecture was compelled to look in the direction of where the mountain used to stand.

"It's gone," muttered Mo Yi. "Did he really get the Formation Orb?"

Though Lu Yun had long taken the Formation Orb, it hadn't affected the formations outside the mountain, since they'd formed a complete system themselves after five millennia. That was why the grand formation of the mountain had remained intact until this very moment.

Mo Yi had left the outskirts long ago. Ge Long stood by her side with a transportation formation disk, anxiously awaiting his master. It abruptly flashed, then some figures fell from midair.

Buzz buzz buzz.

A stream of palm-sized corpse flies swarmed out of the ruins and spread out in the vicinity.

## **Chapter 56: The Fox is Female**

“What are those?” Mo Yi knitted her graceful brows together and gestured at the cloud of flies obscuring the sky.

“Corpse flies. We stopped the undead hag and the bloodcorpses, but those things came out to play instead,” Lu Yun said with a rueful smile, resignation in his eyes. He sagged weakly to the ground, hugging Qing Han tightly.

“Corpse flies?” Mo Yi’s face fell as her consciousness studied the creatures zipping in the sky. She soared into the air and summoned a sword with a flick of the hands.

“Brightstar Snowrend—” she enunciated gently.

Whoosh—

Terrible sword brilliance rained down over the ruins of the mountain like a tempest of snow, mincing the bugs the moment they emerged from the mountain. They had formed a considerable swarm, but each one was only equivalent to a core realm cultivator. For an august immortal like Mo Yi, they may as well have been ants.

Mo Yi was also far from being an ordinary august immortal.

“Brightstar Snowred, the most lethal of the Seven Stars Formations of the ancient world.” Leaning against Lu Yun’s chest, disbelief colored Qing Han’s eyes as he watched sword qi flutter down like snowflakes. “She turned the sword formation into her own combat art!”

“Ah, over there.” Floating in mid-air, Mo Yi swept her consciousness across the ruins of Myriad Formation Summit, plunging into every single hole and finally locating the exit used by the flies.

It was the very passage that Lu Yun’s group had dug to make their way inside. The burial mound’s collapse had connected it to some still-intact tunnels, thus creating a way out for the insects.

Mo Yi’s hands pushed lightly downwards.

Boom—

The small thieves’ tunnel disintegrated quicker than one could blink. She thought for a moment then arranged a powerful restriction around it, sealing it thoroughly closed.

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“Damn, luckily for us she stayed outside. We’d really have been done for otherwise.” Lu Yun sagged with relief when he saw her dispose of the foul creatures. Had she followed them inside, she likely would’ve had the same sorry experiences as Li Youcai, all things considered.

He’d always preferred having multiple strings for his bow whenever possible. Before departing for the mountain, he’d readied a formation disk to allow for a quick exit. The layouts inside would interfere with it, of course, but there were always weak spots to be found. Zhao Dianliang’s formation had used one such weakness to send Qing Hongchen away. Lu Yun could likewise spot similar openings.

He’d had Ge Long and Mo Yi stay outside so they could move the formation disk to safety and stand guard over it. After all, back then, his thinking was that since the great formation around Myriad

Formation Summit owed its existence to the Formation Orb, removing the treasure might trigger a cascade collapse and cause the mountain itself to fall to pieces.

Hence, he'd taken extra steps to ensure that nothing would go amiss.

Mo Yi couldn't make her way through the misdirection layouts by herself, so Lu Yun had purposefully sent Ge Long away to guide her once everyone else had entered the burial mound.

And surprisingly, it was the collapse of the layout of certain death that had ultimately toppled the mountain, not the Formation Orb's removal.

In actuality, chaotic fluxes generated by the burial mound's destruction had disrupted Lu Yun's transportation disk. It'd been the connection with its counterpart on the outside that'd sent the group safely out.

Tomb raiding teams always left someone outside as a precaution, and it had paid off this time. Mo Yi had not only protected the transportation formation, but she'd also prevented disaster by eradicating the corpse flies.

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"We're finally safe." Lu Yun slumped on the ground, gasping for fresh air with a wide-open mouth.

"You! Put me down first, will you?" Qing Han feebly protested atop the Dusk governor.

"No need. I still have to carry you back." Lu Yun was equally strengthless, all tension having left his body.

"Duskwater's city lord should have restoration pills on her. I can make the return journey by myself." Qing Han was reluctant to leave his arms, but unlike before, there were now onlookers present.

"Oh... that's right." Lu Yun chuckled awkwardly. "Mo Yi, can I borrow a few pills?"

Mo Yi nodded. She took out a golden pellet and placed it in Qing Han's mouth. Eyes shut, he began absorbing the pill's medicinal qualities.

"Are the few of you the only ones left?" Mo Yi was a bit mystified by the current situation. Before the group entered the burial mound, hadn't Qing Han wanted to somehow consign Lu Yun to death, while the governor wanted to use the former as cannon fodder?

Yet, here they were, cuddling and seemingly inseparable. Lu Yun even wanted to return to the city with Qing Han on his back? What on earth had happened down there?

Mo Yi glanced at the others.

Li Youcai was sprawled supine on the ground, his condition unknown. Yueshen had scurried back to the Gates of the Abyss the moment they'd surfaced. Even for an immortal ghost like her, the yang energy in the outside world was too much to bear.

"Don't worry, the Skyriver city lord is dead. As for Li Youcai, I guarantee he'll no longer bother you," Lu Yun said with a wave of his hand when he noticed Mo Yi's expression, finally easing her worries.

"Eh? What a cute little fox!" Mo Yi suddenly reached for Miao, delight sparkling in her eyes.

“Ah?” Seeing a girl suddenly run his way and call him cute took Miao aback. “Shouldn’t she say beautiful instead...?”

Tap!

Mo Yi extended two slender fingers and lightly flicked them between his eyebrows. Like a bubble popping, the gorgeous man so handsome that he could topple cities vanished, replaced by a palm-sized white fox. Watery blue eyes gleaming with innocence looked back up at Mo Yi.

She promptly gathered him in her arms with a smile. “Little fox, who are you trying to fool?”

Miao was on the verge of tears.

“So it was an illusion all along. No wonder I always thought there was something off about this fellow.” Qing Han rubbed his brow. Now that he’d recovered some of his physical strength and energy, he tried to lurch to his feet. However, his wobbly legs soon gave way and sat him back down.

Lu Yun caught him before he crashed into a heap on the ground.

“You better let me carry you.” Lu Yun shook his head and squatted down. “One pill isn’t enough for your current condition.”

“Do, do you actually like men?” Revulsion floated onto Qing Han’s face. As for whether it was feigned or genuine, only he knew.

“Oh, let Ge Long carry you then.”

“N-no!” Qing Han shuddered violently after one look at Ge Long, then meekly climbed on Lu Yun’s back.

Mo Yi cast suspicious glances their way, goosebumps forming in spite of herself.

“Are there really men who prefer men?” Gently petting the little fox, she lifted its hind legs and glanced at its crotch. “You’re female, so why did you project yourself as a human male? I wonder who you learned that from.”

The fox looked back innocently. Though Qing Han’s face was buried in Lu Yun’s shoulder, one could still spot the bright red tips of his ears.

“A female fox, you say?” an astonished Lu Yun asked as he sidled up to Mo Yi. He, too, pried Miao’s hind legs apart and looked between them. “Sure enough.”

Miao yipped furiously in protest at the top of its lungs. Sadly, she couldn’t speak human languages in fox form.

“No wonder the guy looked so beautiful. He was almost on the same level of the pretty girl who saved me. A man can’t possibly be this good looking, eh?” Lu Yun smacked his lips. As for the fox’s gender... it made sense once he thought it over.

The burial mound belonged to a female immortal, and the corpse coffin was Yueshen’s previous incarnation, also a female immortal. Likewise, all of the layouts inside the burial mound were yin attributed, hence the presence of so many undead hags.

By the same token, the dragon inside the bronze outer-coffin should also be female. Five thousand years ago, Feinie had been buried inside as a funerary offering. She, like the others, was also a woman.

Lu Yun had previously wondered why Miao was an exception to the rule, but the fox also turned out to be female in the end. A male fox wouldn't have been able to make use of the resurrection layout.

Finally, burial grounds need to strike a balance between yin and yang. As males, the Tiger and Dragon Princes were strong enough yang representatives to offset the extreme yin.

"Yip! Yip yip!" The fox continued protesting, probably trying to say that the mystery girl couldn't match his beauty.

Hearing Lu Yun's words, Qing Han pursed his lips, his mouth imperceptibly curving with pride.

"As for this little fox, if I'm not mistaken, she should be a supreme-grade immortal beast, the 'Nine-Tailed Mirage Fox'. They were rarely seen, even a hundred thousand years ago in the ancient immortal world. She needs to reach the peerless immortal realm, at the very least, to attain genuine form shifting," Mo Yi ascertained as she inspected the tiny ball of fur. "But she's only a true immortal right now. It'll be many moons before she can reach that stage."

As always, the fox was a picture of guilelessness.

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Though Qing Han had regained some of his strength, it wasn't enough to unlock his storage ring and retrieve the fortress. He took his usual ride on Lu Yun's back as he rode the sword to Duskwater. Tied to a rope, Li Youcai trudged forward, dragged along by Ge Long.

"Here, this belongs to you." Landing outside Duskriver City, Lu Yun handed Violetgrave back to Qing Han.

"Keep it, it's yours." Qing Han shook his head in refusal.

"What? This is a ninth-rank treasure we're talking about." Lu Yun said, a little incredulous. Even regular peerless immortals would fight to the death over such an item, but Qing Han was just giving it to him like this?

It also gave Mo Yi pause. What had transpired between the two that they'd gone from plotting each other's death to gifting such lavish presents?

Something unusual had definitely taken place inside the giant burial mound.

"Well, you gave me the painting," Qing Han responded in a voice as tiny as a mosquito. It would seem that the sword meant just as much to him, making it a fair trade in his eyes.

"Alright." Violetgrave was quite to Lu Yun's liking. Spirit weapons, even ordinary swords, were a challenge for him to use, not to mention immortal-level swords. Yet Violetgrave felt like an extension of himself. He could use it at will, almost like the weapon was made to be his.

"Then you have my thanks." He hung the sword at his hip. He couldn't store it inside his body until he refined it.

"I don't understand you two." The baffled Mo Yi shook her head.

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Lu Yun had spent three full days inside the burial mound. "A bath first, then some food and drink, and then I'm off to dreamland!"

He could finally truly relax and release all of his tension after returning to Mo Yi's mansion. This was where he, Ge Long, and Wanfeng had resided before his departure for Myriad Formation Summit.

"Wanfeng, Wanfeng!" he shouted weakly as he made his way back to the small courtyard Mo Yi had reserved for him, Qing Han on his back.

"Eh? Where is she?" He frowned. Something felt amiss. The maid should've been waiting by the door from dusk to dawn during the past three days, so why was she nowhere to be seen?

An ominous premonition arose in his heart as he set Qing Han down in a recliner in the yard.

Mo Yi appeared just then, her expression livid.

"Wanfeng has been taken," she said, her charming face a picture of wrath.

"What?" Lu Yun paled. Someone with an empyrean-grade spiritual root like Wanfeng was probably abducted to be used as a cultivation cauldron.

"It would seem that they all think of me as a pushover they can bully at will!" What made Mo Yi the angriest was the complete lack of regard that certain people showed her. Barging in when they felt like it, abducting her guest, and completely dismissing her authority?

Come what may, she was still the master of Duskwater City!

### **Chapter 57: Fighting with Immortals**

"Who did it?!" Lu Yun could barely contain his anger.

Mo Yi shook her head. "A number of my servants were killed, but they kidnapped your maid instead of killing her. It's obvious that you're the target."

It was six days until the Dusk River Sacrament, and various factions within Dusk Province had been flooding into the city to prepare for the event. This year, there was to be a new governor appointed. There were a myriad of conflicting interests at play, attracting a good many parties that all shared the same target—Lu Yun.

"Could it be Lu Yuanhou?" His expression darkened. That would be very much less than ideal, if true. He'd given the young man a good beating with the Enneawym Provenance Formation and killed four of Lu Yuanhou's followers, turning them into Infernum. The Lu scion must bear a bone-deep hatred for him.

"Lu Yuanhou?" Mo Yi frowned. "From the Lu Clan in Nephrite Major? A great disaster weakened the clan, and it wasn't until a few centuries ago that they recovered, why would they get involved in this?"

"What are you referring to?" Lu Yun tensed, he just knew there must be something more to the situation.



Yes, the Dusk governor was a member of Nephrite Major with great status and power, but Dusk Province itself was dirt poor, and there was a terrible restriction scaring off almost all immortals.

Lu Yun hadn't suspected anything when he'd only possessed Yuying's memories, but with the addition of Feinie's, he'd realized something was afoot.

Dusk Province was a far cry from what it'd been five thousand years ago. At that time, even the city lords were golden immortals, and the governor had been an arcane immortal. If there were to be a change in the governorship, powerful cultivators from all over Nephrite Major would flock to the province. Even if unique Dusk requirements mandated that only locals could be candidates, many would be eager to befriend the new governor.

Now, however, it barely had two spirit stones to its name, and there was a mighty restriction that killed any golden immortals who entered. Over the past thousand years, no governor had lived longer than a hundred years, and the people couldn't care less about who occupied the position. Who cared about it now?

But this time, the celestial emperor had suddenly decreed that Lu Yun must become a cultivator in half a year. After he went into closed door cultivation, the crown prince further amended that there was to be a tournament to select the new governor.

No matter what, even if Lu Yun remained in his seat half a year later, he would have to entertain challenges from other cultivators. Nothing made any sense; even a fool could see there was something amiss.

"It's simple enough." Mo Yi noted that Lu Yun's expression had calmed down. "The sudden interest in this forgotten province is because of a treasure that will soon appear."

"Treasure?" Lu Yun paused. "The Formation Orb? Those paintings?"

"None of them." Mo Yi shook her head. "It's called the Sword Pagoda. It used to be widely known, a hundred thousand years ago."

"Is it more powerful than the Formation Orb?" This was a rather surprising tidbit for Lu Yun. Many had figured out that the Formation Orb lay somewhere within Myriad Formation Summit, but it still hadn't attracted much attention.

"You'd better keep the Formation Orb a secret, or I can guarantee that you'll meet with a terrible death." Mo Yi had guessed his new acquisition from the burial mound. Lu Yun trembled and kept his mouth shut.

"The Formation Orb is a connate-grade treasure. Of course it's more powerful than the Sword Pagoda. However, the mountain's protections prevented anyone from getting their hands on the orb—even dao immortals couldn't find it. The Sword Pagoda is a different story, as the Dusk governor can easily command it to come forth by channeling the power of the land with his seal."

Lu Yun frowned slightly.

“The Sword Pagoda is more than an ancient treasure,” Qing Han interjected, still resting on a nearby recliner. “According to an old text excavated from an ancient tomb, it was a lord’s signature treasure in the ancient times. After his death, he sealed his lifelong heritage into the tower.

“You have to keep in mind that the path of cultivation itself was broken a hundred thousand years ago. There’s a large gap in the knowledge and heritage of our world. The immortal dao was only restored because of artifacts that were discovered in ancient tombs. Most of what people have uncovered, however, are mere fragments.

“The Sword Pagoda, on the other hand, contains the full heritage of an ancient lord. According to the ancient texts, he was more powerful than a dao immortal. It’s a mystery if such an immortal can even exist now!

“Treasure can be priced, but heritage is invaluable. It’s the latter that’s most precious.” The explanation further lightened Qing Han’s face as he was still recovering, and it also left Lu Yun slack jawed.

“Can I surrender the province seal to you now and just have your people take over?” Now he understood what a difficult position he was in, and how the enemies he’d made before were basically just a bunch of kids picking a fight.

This was a brand new world built upon the ruins of the old civilization after a great catastrophe. Everything was in its infancy, and progress was only inching forward thanks to artifacts dug up from the ruins.

Currently, there were more mortals and cultivators in the world than immortals. The immortal dao had been intact a hundred thousand years ago, and there were no such things as cultivators or mortals. Every being was born a true immortal, a stark contrast with the present, where even a celestial emperor’s children started their journeys off as mere mortals until they finally ascended to immortality.

Of course, the passage of sufficient time would enable the immortal dao to recover, and the world return to its former glory. But they were still far from it, at least for now. A hundred thousand years was too short a period of time.

Under these circumstances, the complete heritage left by an ancient lord was fatally attractive to all immortals. Whoever acquired it would benefit from it greatly and progress far beyond their peers. Lu Yun, however, was too weak to weather the coming storm.

He wasn’t on Earth anymore. Here, immortals could control the very elements that made up the world, and killing Lu Yun would be as easy as exhaling.

An unbidden gratefulness rose in him for the province-level restriction placed by the ancient Dusk tomb. If it hadn’t kept high-level immortals away, someone would’ve pinched Lu Yun to death a long time ago.

“The Lu Clan has joined the game, and you’re their bargaining chip.” Qing Han shook his head. “They won’t let you off the hook if you dare give up.”

“I attacked Lu Yuanhou. That makes me an enemy of the clan,” sighed Lu Yun.

“An ancient lord’s heritage is much more important than a mere Lu Yuanhou,” Qing Han refuted. “The Lu Clan has only just recovered, so they’re in dire need of the heritage. They’ll try to control you and prevent you from turning on them.”

Lu Yun remembered the control art attached to the Aurum Openia Pill. That had been the clan’s true intentions. However, Yuying had seen through the trick, and Lu Yun ended up not taking the pill.

“Even if you surrender the province seal now, no one else can use it without a decree from the Nephrite court. Everyone has to play by the rules. But don’t worry, I’ll protect you.” Qing Han’s tone grew increasingly strange. Not even he himself knew what he was talking about in the end.

Lu Yun nodded with a wry smile. The court’s rules?

Without rules, there would be no prosperity. Over the past hundred thousand of years, the immortals had worked hard to establish a set of laws and form a heavenly court, thus creating a society.

They wouldn’t allow the rules to be broken just for the heritage of an ancient lord. One exception would become a precedent for others, then the world of immortals would dissolve into chaos again.

Lu Yun had been contemplating rebuilding his tomb raiding sect and propelling it to new heights in this new world filled with tombs. Unfortunately, this mess had descended upon him before he could commence his grand venture.

“Then I’ll claim this heritage!” he suddenly bit out. “I’ve never been intimidated by anyone in my life, and even an immortal’s burial mound is one of my conquests. What’s an ancient lord’s heritage worth, huh? I’ll take it! Let’s see who can stop me!”

Uttering this declaration drove away the invisible fears that had been weighing him down—fear of this unknown world, fear of facing those lofty and untouchable immortals. The grandmaster of his sect had once claimed that battling the heavens and earth provided endless exhilaration. Well then, I, Lu Yun, will face an entire world of immortals head on!

### **Chapter 58: The Exalted Immortal Sect**

Mo Yi and Qing Han both scowled in disapproval. How dare a trivial qi transformation cultivator like Lu Yun challenge a host of immortals? They ascribed it to the naivete of a man who knew little of their world beyond the tiny Dusk Province.

As a matter of fact, Lu Yun really did know next to nothing about this brand new world. What little he’d grasped was courtesy of Yuying’s and Feinie’s memories. However, both of them were Dusk Province natives and had rarely ventured into the world at large, whereas Lu Yun came from Earth. For him, the immortal world was a source of both deep awe and unease. It was an unfathomable ocean, as mysterious as it was bottomless.

However, he was able to face it with confidence, thanks to the Tome of Life and Death in his dantian. Thanks to it, he could turn the ancient immortals unearthed from age-old tombs into his envoys and acquire their talents and experience.

In short, nothing but exercising the same talents he’d had in his former life.

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Mo Yi used her mansion's great formation to reconstruct an image of what had happened in their absence.

"It's not Lu Yuanhou or Feng Li, so who is he?" Lu Yun narrowed his eyes when he saw the black-robed man inside the formation. Although it was only a reproduction of the scene, he could sense extreme danger projecting from the man's eyes.

"Milord, milord, this old servant's back!" Ge Long ran inside just then, huffing and puffing as he dragged Li Youcai along like a dead pig.

"Why are you soiling my property with his presence? Throw him out." Profound aversion colored Mo Yi's face.

The fatty had made her life difficult from the moment she arrived in this city. He'd even betrothed her to another city lord! Lu Yun might've solved the matter, but it'd done nothing to lessen her loathing.

"Throw him out. He takes up too much space." Lu Yun smiled wryly at her vindictive expression.

The fatty was quite strange. Being possessed by an immortal ghost would've damaged any regular immortal's lifeforce and ruined his cultivation, at the bare minimum, or perhaps even scattered his soul and turned him into the living dead in the worst case scenario.

Yet this fellow was just fine and dandy. Other than spending all of his strength in a final attack, no great harm had befallen him. He now lay deeply unconscious, snoring loudly in his sleep.

"Sigh, alright!" Ge Long dragged Li Youcai by the foot as he made his exit. But when he looked up and saw the image in the sky, he froze before shouting in alarm, "Eh? Isn't that the head of House Ge?"

"What?" the stunned Lu Yun exclaimed. "Are you sure?"

"This old servant served him for many a decade. I could never be mistaken!" Ge Long stated confidently. "But yes, another soul has taken over his body..."

"Servants, find out House Ge's whereabouts!" Mo Yi wore a somber expression. House Ge was one of the prominent Dusk aristocracies. As a nascent spirit cultivator, the head of the household was one of the province's leading figures. To her, however, he might as well have been an ant.

She'd always kept to herself in Duskwater City, hiding her strength behind the facade of an origin core cultivator, a level similar to that of the other city lords in the province. Her men were no powerhouses either, being all qi or core realm themselves.

How else would Li Youcai have infiltrated her mansion with such ease?

As a result, it'd been child's play for a nascent spirit cultivator to force his way inside and massacre nearly everyone, leaving no more than a dozen of the weakest alive.

Both the head of House Ge and the one now inhabiting him saw the city lord's mansion as nothing more than a playground, where they could come and go as they pleased. And because Lu Yun had been overly relaxed after his return, he'd failed to notice that anything was amiss.

“There’s no need to look for them. If I’m his target, he’ll use Wanfeng as bait to lure me out of the city!” Lu Yun said, unexpectedly calm despite the circumstances.

Sure enough, someone came in and handed him a jade slip as soon as he’d spoken.

“A copse of trees fifteen kilometers north of the city. I’m to go by myself?” He narrowed his eyes as his consciousness scanned through the slip’s content, then turned to the messenger. Where a man had stood now lay a tiny paper charm, clearly a sophisticated puppet talisman.

“This is Exalted Immortal Sect handiwork.” Mo Yi frowned as she studied the charm, now devoid of life.

The Exalted Major was another of the nine majors in the world of immortals. It surpassed Nephrite Major in strength, and that one of its sects had dared use the major’s name for its own sect clearly bespoke of its strength and status.

“The majors rarely step on each other’s toes. Why is the Exalted Major suddenly trespassing on our lands?” Mo Yi drew her elegant brows together.

“Ah, I see. It must be him. What a clingy cockroach,” Lu Yun mumbled under his breath. He’d immediately guessed his foe’s identity at the mention of the Exalted Immortal Sect: the black-robed man who’d been the only escapee from Yuying’s tomb.

“A copse of trees fifteen kilometers outside the city? I’m going with you,” Mo Yi coolly asserted. “Killing my people in my own mansion? As the city lord, I need to take a stand.”

“I-I’m going as well,” Qing Han weakly said.

“Given your condition, it’s better for you to stay here.” Lu Yun gently shook his head. He’d been expressly told to go alone, but it wasn’t right to forbid Mo Yi’s presence. A right and proper city lord like her couldn’t possibly let such an affront go unanswered.

As for Qing Han, Lu Yun would have to give him a piggyback ride again.

“I...” Qing Han worried his lip, then finally nodded.

With a gentle wave of Mo Yi’s hand, the mansion’s great formation rumbled to life. “The active Seven Stars Formation will stop all but the strongest immortals. He’ll be safe here.”

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Mo Yi and Lu Yun frowned when they reached the fringes of the verdant woods located fifteen kilometers to the north of the city.

“It seems like there’s more than one person after you,” the city lord whispered, smiling mirthlessly at Lu Yun.

“I count a total of eighteen formations. They really think something of me, huh,” he exhaled loudly. His previous self would’ve simply seen a mass of feng shui layouts blending together, but thanks to Feinie’s expertise, he could discern all of the formations within as well.

Isn’t that a little excessive to deal with little ole me? Not even an immortal would come out of that alive. Lu Yun frowned. Unless... Qing Hongchen is here as well!

That young man had once seen the immortals suddenly emerging at the governor's side, and these formations were laid out precisely to counter those very immortals.

"Feinie, go inside and rescue Wanfeng," Lu Yun transmitted. Somewhere inside the Gates of the Abyss, the envoy nodded and vanished from her spot.

### **Chapter 59: The Real Target**

As an Envoy of Samsara, Feinie could freely come and go through the realms of yin and yang.

Lu Yun couldn't cultivate within the gates because he was a living creature, but his two envoys had no such limitations. Since their names were written in the Tome of Life and Death, they were under its influence and could gather the netherworld's energies to expedite their cultivation.

However, the passage of time within the gates was based on Lu Yun. It came to a stop outside when he personally entered the realm, then allowed him to return to the same moment after exiting.

Lu Yun's observational stillness was mirrored by Mo Yi, who stood quietly nearby without speaking. Those eighteen formations could kill empyrean immortals, but Feinie still found them trivial to crack.

"Sir, there's no one inside the formations in the copse of trees." The sorrowful envoy's voice crept into Lu Yun's ears; she'd already returned to the gates.

"What?!" The young man grew rather upset.

"What's the problem?" asked Mo Yi.

"There's no one inside these formations." Lu Yun ground his teeth angrily. "Wanfeng isn't here, and neither is the person behind all this."

He'd been deceived by an empty threat. There were only killing formations here, but no Wanfeng to be found. If not for Feinie's scouting, he would've had to brave the dangerous formations himself. But... where is Wanfeng then?

The possibilities were fraught with danger and anxiety.

"There's no one here?" Mo Yi sank into thought.

"Let's go back." Lu Yun said a little distantly, then he and the city lord turned right around.

"Leaving just like that? So you don't care much about your little maid after all," a sinister voice cut through the air.

Lu Yun placed it back to Yuying's tomb. Its owner had nearly killed him! Are the formations actually targeting my first envoy? That person had nearly died at her hand back then; only his soul had escaped.

Qing Hongchen isn't here, then. That guy's biggest goal is Yuying, not me.

There was no way the missing scion of the Qing Clan would show up here again so quickly, much less ally himself with someone from the Exalted Immortal Sect. Indeed, no one from Nephrite's major factions would willingly do so.

Lu Yun raised his head and saw the emergence of a pallid, middle-aged man dressed in black robes. It was the head of House Ge, who'd been projected by the Duskwater city lord's formation. The house head was rather upset, since he'd wanted to trick Lu Yun and Yuying into the trap for free.

The governor had come, but rather than Yuying, he was accompanied by the Duskwater city lord. Moreover, it seemed that the young man had noticed something. He'd been about to leave after looking around a bit outside the formation, which annoyed the house head to no end.

"So he's left the formation, eh?" Mo Yi sneered at the newcomer. "How dare a member of the Exalted Immortal Sect intrude upon Nephrite soil!"

Starry points of light scattered from her body, forming a luminous river of celestial radiance that she hurled at the man in black.

"An august immortal!" shrieked the man in black. He'd confidently shown himself in order to take Lu Yun hostage and lure Yuying out for her painting; the revelation that Duskwater's city lord was an august immortal was unwelcome and mind-boggling.

How can this be?! The restriction that'd appeared in Dusk Province a thousand years ago meant that golden immortals and above dared not enter. August immortals were the strongest combatants who could remain safe on Dusk soil, and there just so happened to be one in front of him!

Bam!

His arms detonated the moment Mo Yi's starlight touched him, creating a dark cloud of bloody mist and marking his disappearance as a crimson shadow.

"Go!" Mo Yi's slender brows furrowed slightly in concentration. She flicked a finger, summoning a sword that shot through the air.

"Ahhhh!" A second painful yowl sounded out, this time an indeterminate distance away.

"He's very good at running away. There's an unknown force inside him that helped him survive a hit from my sword." A little miffed, Mo Yi returned her sword to its sheath.

The man in black was at the nascent spirit realm, at most. Her strength as an august immortal should've been decisive, yet that mysterious force had kept him alive.

"You can say that again," Lu Yun barked out a humorless laugh. "He once conducted a soul sacrifice with all his fellow sect members that'd come with him. That unknown force is probably what he got out of the deal."

"A soul sacrifice? Someone from the Exalted Immortal Sect did something so vile?" Mo Yi was a little taken aback, as such things were expressly forbidden in the world of immortals. Anyone who dared trespass upon this rule would be relentlessly hunted down by the public at large.

Well, not everyone would believe a disciple of such a large sect would do something so depraved.

Lu Yun nodded in affirmation. "Anyway, it's no big deal that he got away. The more important thing is, where's Wanfeng?" His heart sank.

“Why don’t we check where the other members of his house are?” said Mo Yi. “The house head can’t be the only one in attendance for the ritual.”

This, at least, was easy enough to figure out with a little information gathering. House Ge would most likely be hailed as the top of Dusk aristocracy right now. It was pretty much guaranteed that the seat of governor would fall to one of its members.

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“House Ge has about a hundred people present. They’ve occupied a large estate in the south of the city.” Lu Yun had found out that much with little effort. “Shall I charge over there?”

The young governor was pacing back and forth in the residence Mo Yi had assigned to him.

“Okay, well, why not!” Although only the House Ge head was culpable for the assault on the city lord’s residence, the house was at least guilty by association.

“I’ll help.” By now, Qing Han had recovered most of his strength.

Although he’d exhausted his life essence to the brink of death, the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals had brought him back to the land of the living. It had healed his injuries, and certain other conditions, too. Aside from a little superficial weakness, he was mostly fine again.

“It’s a capital crime to trespass upon a city lord’s residence, much less kill and kidnap. We have the House Ge head’s recorded image, which is more than enough justification,” he commented quietly. “I am a special emissary of His Majesty the Celestial Emperor. House Ge might scorn a governor and a city lord, but they would never dream of disrespecting me.”

Qing Han had stepped forward because of certain considerations.

As the foremost house in Dusk Province, House Ge had more than its fair share of bootlickers. Although Lu Yun and Mo Yi had justifiable cause, a counter-accusation was far from out of the question.

Qing Han, on the other hand, was the real deal as the celestial emperor’s envoy. Every faction in Nephrite Major had to at least pay lip service to the emperor, which generally meant they were on their best behavior in front of him.

Lu Yun nodded. He would’ve asked Qing Han for help, regardless. Their adventures through life and death within the giant burial mound had smoothed over any initial unpleasantness between them.

“That’s very good,” smiled Mo Yi. “House Ge’s roots in this province are very deep, and I’ve no doubt someone has taken control of it. Your help will make things a lot easier.”

Her primary goal this time was to preserve the city lord’s authority. If she ignored this slight, the immortals in her prefecture, and the rest of the province, would take her even less seriously, causing no end of future troubles. She had to act, and fast.

Still, if that guy from the Exalted Immortal Sect is after Yuying, that means I can’t let her out for a while. The fact that I’ve fused the three scrolls together, and that Qing Han has refined the resulting product, must be kept secret, Lu Yun internally warned himself.



## Chapter 60: Sacrificial Goods to the River God

The estate in the south of Duskwater City was owned by a local cultivation family. Its head was a golden core realm cultivator, which made him reasonably influential in his district.

Before a giant like House Ge, however, his cultivation and connections were meaningless. In fact, he'd willingly given up his own home and time to serve the number one house in Dusk Province.

A chance to do that didn't come by often, after all.

When Lu Yun, Qing Han, and Mo Yi led a sizable force of people to the residence in question, they were intercepted by a clearly prepared group.

"Who comes? Identify yourselves!" A man in green strode out from the front door, blocking Lu Yun's way. He cast a look of proud scorn at the approaching crowd.

"Do you not recognize the face of your own city lord, Ba Chuyi?" Mo Yi's tone was chilly.

The middle-aged man's cocksure attitude made it very clear that his ignorance was feigned. Though she'd expected to have trouble getting through the door, she hadn't expected House Ba's head himself to be the doorkeeper.

"Oh? The city lord! So it is, so it is." Ba Chuyi turned to face Mo Yi directly. Her beauty momentarily stunned him, despite her masculine outfit; it couldn't hide the incredible beauty beneath. "If I may, for what reason has the city lord come calling today?"

Before House Ge had moved in, he would've spared every effort to curry favor with the city lord. Now, however, his status was different. He was an outer circle steward of House Ge, and the whole of his house had become subordinate to it. Their future was limitless and bright, so a mere lord of Duskwater was no longer worthy of his attention.

In fact, if Li Youcai hadn't betrothed Mo Yi to the Skyriver city lord, Ba Chuyi would probably be considering whether or not he could use House Ge's clout to get his hands on her.

"You've latched onto House Ge's thigh, then?" A derisive smile played at the corner of Mo Yi's mouth.

"Precisely!" Ba Chuyi proudly confirmed without so much as a blush. "They've rewarded me with the position of a steward in their outer circle."

"An outer circle steward of House Ge." Qing Han took a weighty step forward. "You are Ba Chuyi, head of House Ba?"

"Indeed, it is I. And who are you?" Ba Chuyi peered at Qing Han, then puffed himself up even more.

The recuperating youth was ugly, swarthy-faced, and looked rather feeble. Ba Chuyi had no reason to pay attention to someone so insignificant. If Qing Han hadn't come with Mo Yi as one of the 'troublemakers' House Ge had warned him about, he would've disregarded the speaker altogether.

"This emissary is here on behalf of His Majesty the Celestial Emperor. House Ge is guilty of treason and rebellion, first in attacking the Dusk Phalanx, and secondly in trespassing upon the Duskwater city lord's

residence. I have come to apprehend the criminals in question." A shiny token had appeared in Qing Han's hand; it was none other than the identification for his status.

Ba Chuyi paled, then took several steps backward. A special emissary of the emperor? Treason and rebellion? House Ge?

"Impossible! House Ge is the foremost house in Dusk Province. Its head will soon become the next governor, how could they possibly be planning rebellion?"

"The next governor?" Lu Yun laughed. "The current one is standing right here. You shouldn't be saying that to my face, should you?"

"It's public knowledge that House Ge attacked the Dusk Phalanx, and that the head of House Ge barged into the Duskwater city lord's residence. If House Ba is subordinate to House Ge, and you're a steward in their outer circle.... What, has House Ge's head said that he'll make you the governor? After he becomes the celestial emperor, of course," Lu Yun accused with a half-smile.

"Th-this is complete nonsense!" Ba Chuyi's legs shook with fear. He didn't doubt Qing Han's identity for a second. There'd long been rumors circulating about the arrival of an envoy from the celestial emperor that even the prefectural prefect had to dance attendance upon.

That the special emissary was here to arrest some rebels was quite a shock, though. His anxiety made him nearly incoherent. Ba Chuyi was only a golden core realm cultivator, unimportant even in Dusk Province. Rebel? He wouldn't dare dream of it.

"Nonsense? You've decided to resist to the last, then. Soldiers! Apprehend him immediately." Lu Yun barked a sudden command. The hundred black-armored soldiers behind him surged up like a flood, ready to comply with his order.

These soldiers were men that Yin Xuantian had sent to him. Every soldier was a golden core cultivator, and their leader was at the origin core, the same as the Dusk's city lords.

Normally, they would've taken a bit of time to arrive, considering the complicated logistics of an army. Lu Yun didn't have that much time, which was why he'd summoned them after contacting Yin Xuantian directly through the command token.

The general of the Dusk Phalanx couldn't refuse orders from Dusk Province's standing governor. Yin Xuantian had acquiesced by sending over a hundred soldiers for now.

Because Lu Yun's aggression was completely justified, he made sure that every action he took was also perfectly aboveboard. The hundred soldiers backed him with pressure and momentum.

"All of you, stop!" A soft cry came from beyond the threshold.

Feng Li was dressed like a dandy, as usual. However, his serious demeanor was a radical departure from his typical flippancy. A number of cultivators streamed out from behind him, obstructing the Dusk Phalanx soldiers' way.

"Governor, haven't we resolved the misunderstanding about House Ge's accidental attack on the Dusk Phalanx?" Feng Li only spared a glance for Lu Yun before he shifted his attention to Mo Yi. His eyes

nearly popped out of their sockets as he did so; drool pooled at the corner of his mouth and almost dribbled out.

“You’re chasing skirts like always, Feng Li. Careful, my cousin might actually castrate you sometime.” Qing Han couldn’t resist a snicker.

Feng Li shivered violently when he noticed his old acquaintance. “Why are you here, Qing Han? Is your cousin here too?!”

“My cousin isn’t here, but I’m more than enough. I am a special emissary of the celestial emperor, here to assess and survey Dusk Province on His Majesty’s orders. Why else do you think?” Qing Han snorted. “You call House Ge’s attack on the Dusk Phalanx a misunderstanding? You’re as much of a bastard as I expected. Ignore him! Arrest Ba Chuyi and his accomplices.”

“Hold on! I’m a special emissary as well. I’m an envoy too!” Feng Li breathed a sigh of relief when he heard that Qing Han’s cousin was absent. A token appeared in his hand that was almost identical to Qing Han’s.

The only difference was that his was from the crown prince, while Qing Han’s had come directly from the emperor. Given the crown prince’s present status as regent, however, the two envoys held similar positions.

“Back off, I say, back off!” The token in Feng Li’s hand emanated a faint golden light, making the Dusk Phalanx soldiers color with hesitation.

They’d been assigned to Lu Yun as his personal guard, effective until the end of his term. They were no longer troops in active Dusk Phalanx service, which denied them the privilege of openly opposing the will of the emperor’s envoys.

“You must be here so aggressively because of your maid, Lu Yun.” A different voice traveled out from the Ba residence. “Her empyrean-grade spiritual root is remarkable indeed. She’s the best sacrifice for the Dusk River Sacrament one could ask for.

“I’ve already informed the imperial court of her suitability. She’s been sent to the altar for the ritual and will be sacrificed at its commencement in six days. Isn’t the Dusk governor usually the one who presides over the ritual? You’ll have to personally sacrifice your maid in six days, Lu Yun!” The source of the mocking was none other than Lu Yuanhou.