

## Necropolis 521

### Chapter 521: Betrayal

More than three hundred cultivators from the Ling Clan had traveled to the ghost realm. Black flashes gleamed in unison from their eyes, and the strange patterns they wove increasingly sharpened into focus.

The immortals in the area moved out of the way, reluctant to be involved.

The Lings were the top clan of Nephrite Major and held a monopoly over refining fortress ships—one of the greatest tools in the world of immortals. Fortress ships were both flying vehicles and war assets. Due to the clan's stranglehold over this treasure's refinement, they were able to keep many factions in the palm of their hands.

Thus, their influence was great, despite not having an origin dao immortal among their ranks. None of the heavenly courts from the nine majors or ten lands dared offend them.

If it'd been any other faction going against Lu Yun, many immortals would've stepped up to protect him, if only to get on his good side and secure a formation of heaven and earth. Facing the almighty Ling Clan, however, they didn't have the courage to do so.

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"You... you killed Ling Zhen?!" Zhao Zhicheng widened his eyes. He hadn't heard what Ling Jing said afterwards, but he did hear the part about the clan tearing Ling Zhen to pieces and digging into his soul loud and clear.

Ever since leaving the dragon tomb in the North Sea, the hundred and eight peerless immortals often met up to discuss their cultivation and had long become close friends. In fact, when Scarlet Ape of the North Sea invaded Dusk Province, they'd made their way there as a group to help Lu Yun fight off the North Sea monster spirits.

Ling Zhen's cultivation was the greatest among them.

Zhao Zhicheng had thought Ling Zhen was in closed door cultivation after plucking an aether dao fruit, but it turned out he'd been slaughtered by his own clansmen! His body and soul had been butchered, and his power of the world extracted.

The bizarre patterns that Ling Jing and the other Ling immortals were creating came from Ling Zhen. Combined with some other techniques, they were able to counter the combat arts powered by the formation of heaven and earth.

Every step Ling Jing took embodied a special rhythm; it was as if he were treading on Zhao Zhicheng's very soul. He retreated again and again, blood seeping out of every pore of his body.

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"Aha, here it is." Meanwhile, Lu Yun was searching for a weak spot of the tomb with the Dragonsearch Invocation and feng shui compass in order to dig a thieves' tunnel. The mountain of white bones had become part of the celestial master tomb, and together, they formed a terrifying layout.

“Oh?” He paused and put the luopan away, seeing the standoff between Zhao Zhicheng and Ling Jing. “Those Ling bastards killed some of the champions I handpicked!”

Lu Yun’s expression darkened ominously.

He could sense eighteen strands of weak energy of the world wreathed around Ling Jing, which meant that eighteen of the hundred and eight peerless immortals that’d created the Formation of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Demons had met their deaths at the hands of the Ling Clan.

The clan had then used that power of heaven and earth to create another formation to counter the Formation of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Demons.

The power of the world that Zhao Zhicheng and the others possessed didn’t come from heaven and earth, but from the Formation of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Demons that Lu Yun had left on them.

That formation had been a prototype then, and couldn’t grant them the full power of heaven and earth. Although the hundred and eight champions were more powerful than regular peerless immortals, and might even rival origin dao immortals, they had many weaknesses.

Once spotted, they were easily killed.

The Ling Clan had clearly found a way to counter the Formation of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Demons, and they were able to extract the power of heaven and earth left in the hundred and eight champions.

“It’s those formation masters from the Ling Clan.” Lu Yun’s hands balled into fists of their own accord.

When he’d gathered masters of supplemental paths to help create the formation of heaven and earth, formation masters from the Ling Clan had answered his call as well. Those formation masters had then fled when Scarlet Ape invaded Dusk, taking with them the unfinished work-in-progress.

Lu Yun hadn’t paid attention to that, since the unfinished formation wouldn’t be of any use as it stood.

However, it’d bequeathed insights into the Formation of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Demons to the Ling Clan, which they’d then utilized to kill eighteen of the hundred and eight peerless immortals!

“Damn them!” Lu Yun hadn’t expected the clan to be so brutally ruthless. The peerless immortals hailed from different clans and factions all over the world of immortals. How dare the Ling Clan go after them, risking the ire of the entire world! So far, they’d killed only eighteen of them, though, so no one had taken notice.

Lu Yun put away his luopan and came up to Zhao Zhicheng, putting his hand on the man’s upper back.

Hum.

Zhao Zhicheng shuddered as waves of energy from the world gathered from all directions and barreled into his body.

Rumble!

Tyrannical power radiated from him, scattering the patterns created by the Ling Clan. Zhao Zhicheng wanted nothing more than to throw his head back and crow with glee.

“Shut up!” Lu Yun snapped. “Refine the combat art I gave you, or you still won’t be their dao immortals’ match!”

Zhao Zhicheng hurriedly brought himself back under control.

Lu Yun had just etched a formation of heaven and earth into Zhao Zhicheng, granting him the power of a void-realm ascended immortal. Like Yue Longsha and Zhu Yan before him, though, he couldn’t wield the power of his newly improved realm without the corresponding cultivation methods and combat arts.

Lu Yun didn’t have the time to replace his cultivation method with a primordial version, but he could inject a combat art into Zhao Zhicheng’s nascent spirit, thanks to the Formation of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Demons that remained there. It was effectively a back door, allowing Lu Yun quick access for the exchange of information.

The primordial combat art Lu Yun gave him had come from Empress Myrtlestar. Highly approving of his plan, she’d etched all the combat arts in her memory onto jade slips and given them to Lu Yun. He’d taken a long time in hell to categorize and sort through the vast assortment of them.

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“Bastard!!” Ling Jing had also been knocked away by Zhao Zhicheng’s abrupt explosion of energy from the world. When he recovered his balance, his opponent had already begun digesting the flawless combat art that Lu Yun had transmitted to him.

Though Ling Jing didn’t know what Lu Yun was up to, his instincts told him he was in danger.

“He’s etching a formation of heaven and earth for Zhao Zhicheng!” Realization struck him, moments before he unleashed his full power as an aether dao immortal in response. His two dao fruits slammed into Lu Yun and Zhao Zhicheng like shooting stars.

“Stop him,” Lu Yun ordered coldly, his hand remaining on Zhao Zhicheng’s back and eyes fixed on the incoming dao fruit.

“Ah?” The little nun and Yu Hengluo were at a loss. They’d both ascended to the returned void realm, but there existed a great gap between them and dao immortals. It’d be suicide for them to intercept Ling Jing.

Before they could scramble for what to do, a low, rumbling dragon howl hummed through the air.

Bam!

An explosion ripped through the void as a dark green figure resembling both a crocodile and a dragon barrelled into existence, smacking Ling Jing and his two dao fruit away.

“Don’t kill him,” Lu Yun called out when he saw the Scaled-Dragon King close in for the finishing blow.

The Scaled-Dragon King morphed into a human and stood behind Lu Yun with pike in hand. Ling Jing had been slammed deep into the ground, unable to crawl back out.

Silence descended. Everyone recognized the Scaled-Dragon King, the second most powerful monster spirit king in the North Sea!

Rumor had it that the scaled-dragon had betrayed the North Sea and become Lu Yun's follower. It'd been him who acted as a guide when Lu Yun raided the North Sea monster palace. Now he'd emerged again, the power of a void-realm ascended immortal at his fingertips and defeating the Ling elite with a simple attack.

"The formation of heaven and earth! There are indeed immortals who have incorporated the formation among Lu Yun's followers!" Struggling out from underground, Ling Jing ignored the hard-hit Ling immortals and escaped in another direction as a streak of light.

"Kill him," Lu Yun said faintly to Zhao Zhicheng. "Then go to Dusk Province with his head and wait for me."

After a pause, Zhao Zhicheng looked visibly delighted, but then lowered his head, his face pale.

"I... I cannot betray my sect..."

"The Exalted Immortal Sect isn't my worst enemy, but sooner or later, there will be a battle between us," Lu Yun said calmly. "If you don't betray them now, I will have no reason to show you mercy later."

He was blunt, and many of the onlooking immortals had heard him clearly.

Zhao Zhicheng trembled slightly with the force of his internal struggle, then knelt facing the direction of the Exalted Immortal Sect and heavily kowtowed nine times. He rose to his feet and turned to Lu Yun. "I hope you'll keep your word, sir."

"Go on." Lu Yun cracked a smile.

Swoosh!

Sword energy radiated from Zhao Zhicheng before he vanished into the lifeless air of the ghost realm.

The lurking immortals scowled when they saw Lu Yun compelling Zhao Zhicheng to betray his sect with a few choice words.

The Exalted Immortal Sect was one of the top sects in the world of immortals, rivaling the greatest clans. They even counted a crippled dao immortal among their ranks. However, Zhao Zhicheng had chosen Lu Yun over his sect without hesitation, an indication that he believed that Lu Yun could one day destroy his sect.

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"Start here and dig at a thirty-nine degree angle from the ground. I want a tunnel of 435 meters, 9 feet, 6 inches, and 5 centimeters. No margin of error is allowed." Lu Yun ignored the gazes on him. After making the calculations for the tomb-raiding tunnel, he ordered the Scaled-Dragon King to get to work.

Incredulous gazes shifted from the human to the scaled-dragon. The second most powerful North Sea monster king was... digging a hole? With clear enjoyment, and even pride on his face?

## **Chapter 522: Nascent Spirit Soil**

The Scaled-Dragon King was Lu Yun's Infernum, rather than an Envoy of Samsara, so he couldn't sense his master's sentiments. Thus, he was extra careful in digging the tunnel, lest he make any mistakes.

The thief's tunnel played a very important role in the grand scheme of things. Not only was it a passageway to sneak into an ancient tomb, but it also created a flaw in the originally complete feng shui layout, granting tomb raiders a spark of hope for survival.

The front doors and tombstone of a tomb acted as a boundary, demarcating the realm of yang and world of the living from the realm of yin and world of the dead. Without outside intervention, those who entered through the front entrance of the tomb would surely die.

Entering through the front door while the tomb layout remained whole was akin to walking from the living world to the netherworld.

History was replete with immortals who'd made harrowing journeys in ancient tombs because they didn't understand the division between the two worlds. Some tried forcing their way in through the front doors, while others stumbled upon thieves' tunnels by chance, sneaking in without triggering the boundary between life and death.

The boundary for the celestial master tomb remained immaculate and pristine, and there were no other tunnels in the area. Lu Yun had to dig one himself.

This would be the first thief's tunnel into the tomb, so Lu Yun's calculations had to be exact. No deviations could be tolerated; the tunnel was also a feng shui layout in and of itself.

The layout of the tomb was too powerful, approaching a grand influence over the world. Within it lurked sinister beings that even Lu Yun didn't understand. He wouldn't have dared take the risk if he hadn't broken through in Azure Province and brought his usage of the luopan to new heights, enabling him to project a world and replicate the layout of the tomb for study in the compass.

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The pike in the Scaled-Dragon King's hand had turned into a giant shovel, and he was carefully digging through the earth beneath his feet as per Lu Yun's instructions.

"Something's wrong here, milord!" He abruptly stopped his motions and knelt down to examine the black soil, expression grave.

Lu Yun went up to him. "What is it?"

"This black soil isn't dirt." Color slowly drained out of the scaled-dragon's face.

"It isn't sandy dirt?" Lu Yun activated the Spectral Eye for a closer look. He didn't see any information about the dead from the dirt; it wasn't formed from the remains of living beings.

"It's from nascent spirits!" The Scaled-Dragon King shuddered. "Nascent spirits of dao immortals turn into material like this after being crushed... This soil isn't composed of bodily remains, but rather, of nascent spirits."

Lu Yun paused. "Of nascent spirits? Aren't they part of the body?"

After forming their golden cores, cultivators steadily improved upon them until a nascent spirit formed. Nascent spirits were the core of cultivators and immortals, containing a record of one's communion with

dao and learned combat arts, as well as being a bridge of communication between immortals, the world, and all things in nature.

Contemporary immortals couldn't incorporate the world and refine themselves into nature, like the ancients could, but they could still communicate with heaven and earth and call upon the world's power.

"It's not!" Scaled-Dragon King said with great certainty. "Cultivators form nascent spirits through communicating with the world. Once disintegrated, their nascent spirits dissipate as qi. However, dao immortal nascent spirits are refined to an almost physical level and cannot return to the world. Some residue remains upon their death."

He glanced at the 'soil' beneath his feet. "This is the nascent spirit residue left after dao immortals die."

The Scaled-Dragon King hailed from the Unselfish Sea and had defected to the North Sea due to his refusal to fully metamorph into a dragon. Traveling between the two seas, he'd explored his fair share of tombs and had accumulated a wealth of knowledge.

Parts of his wisdom were secrets not even Su Xiaoxiao and Xingzi knew.

"After death, an origin dao immortal leaves behind roughly three taels of black nascent spirit soil... Here..." The Scaled-Dragon King looked up.

The ghost realm was covered in vast swaths of black soil, enough to pile up as great mountain ranges in some areas. The thirty-thousand-meter-tall mountain above the celestial master tomb was made of this sandy dirt as well.

"If that's the case, then how many dao immortals died here?!" Lu Yun closed his eyes to open his Spectral Eye. All he could glimpse within five thousand kilometers of himself was nascent spirit soil and nothing else.

An origin dao immortal would only leave behind three taels, and nascent spirit soil was much heavier than regular soil, meaning three particles would weigh roughly three taels.

"Forget about that for now, keep digging." Lu Yun took a deep breath and pushed away the discomfort nagging at him.

Not only was there nascent spirit soil on this continent, there was also an immeasurable amount of bone powder. Upon entrance, his first impression of the place was a once greatly thriving world that had been destroyed with raw violence.

The tomb of the Venerated Sacrosanct Demon Sovereign had been set up afterward, which was why it stuck out like a sore thumb in the ghost realm. All signs pointed to the ghost realm having existed in the Primordial Era, or even before that period of time.

As for the celestial master tomb, Lu Yun didn't yet have an explanation. The Scaled-Dragon King calmed himself down from the discovery and continued digging with his giant shovel.

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The immortals in the area hadn't drawn too close, out of wariness of the scaled-dragon. Thus, they naturally didn't hear the conversation between the scaled-dragon and Lu Yun. However, they'd committed the youth's words to memory: do not enter a tomb through its front doors under any circumstances, or else face deadly consequences.

Clang!

The large shovel in Scaled-Dragon King's hand vibrated as it knocked into something with a crisp clank. He quickly took a step back, feeling the vibration travel up to his teeth.

"What is that?!" He did a double take at the sight of a giant crimson skeleton at his feet. It was unusually dense and hard, chipping the shovel he wielded. The Scaled-Dragon King had dug about three hundred meters underground, but the enormous skeleton blocked off his intended route and was preventing him from continuing.

"What's wrong?" Hearing the disturbance below, Lu Yun walked down with the little nun and Yu Hengluo.

"Look, milord," the Scaled-Dragon King hurriedly transmitted. "The skeleton has a similar presence to Ladies Huangqing, Cangyin, and Aoxue!"

Lu Yun's eyes lit up. He tamped down his excitement and once again dismissed the little nun and Yu Hengluo. "Keep them protected, I'll take over here."

Though the two girls were reluctant, they couldn't decline Lu Yun's orders. The Scaled-Dragon King sent them outside with a gentle swell of power.

"The remains of a blood turtle..." Lu Yun murmured, reaching out to caress the crimson skeleton.

### **Chapter 523.1: Lungs?**

Blood dragon, blood phoenix, blood qilin, and blood turtle!

The birth of any of these four demons heralded disaster for the world and suffering for its inhabitants, and each was backed by an evil coffin.

The Enneaworm Coffinbearers, Nine-Phoenix Casket, Enneaqilin Coffinbiers, and Ninefooted Turtle Cist!

According to legend, those coffins had originally been the bodies of the four sacred beasts—four grand existences turned into vessels of burial. As for what exactly they were intended to inter, nobody knew.

Three of those evil coffins rested in hell, but Lu Yun had no desire to crack them open. Whatever was interred within them had apparently broken free of their restrictions, and curiosity wasn't a good enough reason for him to provoke them.

His Spectral Eye immediately identified that the crimson rack buried in the nascent spirit soil belonged to a blood turtle. This demon had risen and died countless eons before.

Should I make it an Envoy of Samsara? Lu Yun was very much tempted to. He had a blood dragon, blood phoenix, and blood qilin as envoys already. He was very close to collecting all four!

When he'd encountered a blood qilin corpse before, his cultivation and mastery over the Tome of Life and Death hadn't been strong enough to turn the blood demon that'd melded with its past identity into an envoy.

This time, he was a returned void cultivator. The wisdom he'd gained from the grand influence over heaven and earth had taught him many new things about the Tome of Life and Death. He was now more than capable of reviving a blood demon and taming it on the spot.

"In you go!" Placing a hand on the turtle skeleton, Lu Yun sent it to hell. A moment later, he dashed in himself as well.

All eight of his envoys were sitting together with Qing Yu in the center, heatedly discussing ways to analyze and research the combat arts of others. The floating peak of the resurrection layout was carved full of runes and derivation methods.

To Lu Yun, they rather resembled the math formulas he knew from back on Earth.

"Lu Yun!" Qing Yu stood up immediately when she saw him, face flushed with excitement.

"Sir!" Yuying and the others followed suit.

"Carry on with what you were doing, don't mind me." Lu Yun waved with a smile.

"Lu Yun, Lu Yun, you need to figure out how to get some more geniuses in here. There's only a few pieces of the puzzle left, and we can't figure it out with our current group!"

After some consideration, Qing Yu didn't suggest releasing Empress Myrtlestar and the Azure Dragon King. The two ancients had taken good care of them, but they needed the two youngsters to help them recover and eventually bring them back into life.

In other words, it was a fair exchange.

If the ancient lords found out about the Tome of Life and Death and the existence of hell, it might incite their greed.

Qi Hai had been suggested earlier as well, but Su Xiaoxiao had vetoed that idea.

In her words, if Qi Hai knew they were trying to figure out a method like this, he would immediately take it for his own and do everything he could to prevent its propagation.

In the Primordial Era, he'd been the foremost pill master of the world, but he'd also been the only person privy to the majority of pill dao's secrets. After his 'death', pill dao had pretty much disappeared overnight.

He'd schemed against Su Xiaoxiao because of her attempts to spread the fruits of her research into medical dao; she'd wanted more immortals to grasp the healing arts.

Qi Hai's pettiness and narrowmindedness festered a deep-abiding hatred for this action. Thus, he came up with an idea to force Su Xiaoxiao's hand in killing several worlds' worth of denizens, then destroyed her cultivation and banished her.

She only learned of all this a very long time afterward. If Qi Hai's knowledge of medical dao had been complete in the past, he probably would've killed Su Xiaoxiao on the spot.

Lu Yun had seen all of this in his envoy's memories, hence marking his first impression of Qi Hai.

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"Don't worry, I'll have someone with you straight away!" Lu Yun grinned. "Ninth Envoy, take your place!"

Fwoom...

A resonant hum later, a several-dozen-meter-long crimson bone floated into the air. All of hell's power concentrated upon it. Within the span of a breath, endless scarlet flooded the world as a slender shadow paced out from the void.

"Ninth Envoy of Samsara, Luli, greets the master." The light faded, revealing an ivory figure that slowly knelt down before Lu Yun.

She continued the tradition of envoys being stark naked at their first appearance. Lu Yun didn't dare look much; in fact, he fidgeted awkwardly while sneaking a glance at Qing Yu.

The young woman's pout was painfully visible.

Lu Yun conjured a blood-red dress for Luli with a flick of his fingers.

"You may rise."

"Thank you, master." Luli's voice was frigid and emotionless. Even when speaking respectfully to Lu Yun, her tone was devoid of passion.

"Over there is your mistress!" Lu Yun pointed toward Qing Yu. "Treat her as you would me from now on, alright?"

"Understood." Luli nodded, then curtsied to Qing Yu.

The ninth envoy was certainly a headturner, but her beauty was eclipsed by a fiendish malevolence swirling around her, one that threatened to annihilate all things. She was a pure blood demon through and through.

In the past, her sanguine self had combined with her identity in life to wreak widespread devastation, which made her different from Aoxue, Huangqing, and Cangyin.

Aoxue's blood demon body had been in an embryonic form, while Huangqing had only just developed hers when she'd become an envoy—it hadn't merged with her identity yet. As for Cangyin, she'd only become a blood qilin through bloodline modification by Su Xiaoxiao and Xingzi.

Though Luli had the same 'Lu' character as Lu Yun for her surname, she was an undeniable blood demon. That hadn't changed even after becoming an envoy.

In fact, Lu Yun barely found anything useful in her memories. There was only death and destruction. There was no shortage of demonic arts and methods, though, and she was particularly skilled at murder and slaughter.

Luli will be useful as a dagger in the darkness. She can take care of the dirty work! Lu Yun instantly settled on a purpose for his latest addition. As a killing machine, Luli's superb intelligence couldn't be applied to researching combat arts or cultivation methods. Rather, she had no interest in them whatsoever.

"Ge Long!" he roared suddenly into the darkness.

"Yes, yes! I'm on my way, milord!" A yawning old man jogged out of the depths of hell into his master's presence, all the while trying his utmost to convey fawning attention.

After gobbling down the cultivator-killing restriction... thing last time, Ge Long had fallen into a deep sleep. He'd managed to wake up only recently.

Time practically stopped inside whenever Lu Yun entered hell. In other words, Ge Long had slept for at least a few hundred years. The old servant was still just golden core realm, but his gaze had become more enigmatic than ever.

"What are those?" The runes and formulae upon the floating peak caught his eye, turning his expression into one of thunderstruck disbelief.

"Go help your matriarch figure it out," said Lu Yun.

"Aye!" Ge Long pranced over joyfully. He was practically beaming with happiness; the inscribed work evidently interested him greatly.

A well-concealed look of terror flashed through Luli's icy eyes when the old man approached. Lu Yun noticed, but said nothing of it.

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As before, Lu Yun refrained from participating in the research himself. This opportunity belonged to Qing Yu; if he joined in, his presence would change certain things and he might end up stealing her fortune from her.

She was the dao sovereign anointed the Dao Flower, while he ruled over life and death. It wouldn't do for him to interfere in a matter outside his domain.

It was for that same reason that he'd so contentedly protected Qing Han and the others by the Dao Flower's side. If he'd intervened back then, the dao sovereigns never would've come into being—he would be the only one. He would have been the be all and end all of everything.

### **Chapter 523.2: Lungs?**

Taking out his luopan, Lu Yun abruptly invoked the Dragonsearch Invocation. The compass' three layers modulated into a miniature world at his side once more, recovering the projection of the celestial master tomb and the mountain over it, feng shui layouts, formations, and all.

“I missed a lot in my speculations just now. This nascent spirit soil is no ordinary soil—it’s formed from the crystallized energy of heaven and earth. I must take into account its corresponding effects on feng shui.” A handful of black earth appeared in Lu Yun’s palm.

The reinforcement of hell greatly amplified his speed of thought, wisdom, and strength. With the luopan’s help, he could analyze more than just feng shui layouts, and even the material in his hands was open for examination.

“Nascent spirit soil... a dao immortal leaves this behind after their death.” Frowning slightly, Lu Yun murmured to himself. “Was there once some sort of appalling slaughter in the ghost realm? Or perhaps this place was an ancient battlefield in its time?”

He looked closer at the soil between his fingers, carefully evaluating its structural composition.

“Yep, this is concentrated natural energy, alright. There’s a bit of something else there, too.”

Everything about the soil was laid bare to his eyes.

“If a nascent spirit is formed from the energy of the world... then an immortal’s nascent spirit absorbs immortal qi. In other words, immortal qi is a higher form of natural qi. So then, where does the qi in nature come from?” The question popped into his head.

“Cultivators have always relied upon natural qi. Before the foundation of immortal dao, there were cultivators of countless disciplines... yet, natural qi has yet to run dry since time primeval.

“Natural qi is born from heaven and earth, but there’s no way nature produces enough on its own for everyone to use... but what if there’s a circulation cycle?”

A karmic fruit inside his body ignited as hellfire flared in his eyes; the power of the Spectral Eye operated at its maximum.

“I knew it...” Lu Yun slowly uncreased his brow.

The soil in his hands was diminishing at a rate not visible to the human eye. Although he couldn’t determine the exact speed, it was definitely turning back into pure natural qi and rising into the void.

The rate of sublimation was so slow as to be unnoticeable, thus preventing anyone from realizing what the soil was, but it was definitely happening.

“The ghost realm... there’s very little heavenly qi there, and no trace of immortal qi at all. However, this kind of black soil abounds...”

“Can this ghost realm be the ‘lung’ of all the facets in the world of immortals? Wait, no, the whole multiverse!”

Lu Yun was reminded of the Amazonian rainforest back on Earth. Some called it the planet’s lungs, since it absorbed most of the carbon dioxide on Earth and turned it into oxygen.

“The nascent spirit soil that fallen immortals leave behind is sucked up by some unknown force and sent here. Gradual sublimation returns the resulting qi to the other worlds. But... why does the ghost realm

want to consume the world of immortals? It looks like it's already eaten more than one other world, too."

The more he thought about it, the more confused Lu Yun got. Some of his conclusions seemed to make sense, but their conflicts with each other made the grand scheme of things inexplicable.

Why was natural qi so thin in the ghost realm? How did nascent spirit soil from other areas end up gathering here?

...and where did all those yin spirits come from, anyway?

Now that he'd figured out what the soil was made of, and the rate of its sublimation, he could use that knowledge to recalibrate his judgments about the changes in the celestial master tomb's feng shui and formations.

Minutes later, cold sweat dripped down his forehead.

"I really was wrong! If I'd entered the tomb through the thief's tunnel I figured out before, it would be no different from entering through the front door. The same horrors would happen to me as to someone who tried to cross the boundary of the worlds." Lu Yun heaved a long sigh of relief.

Determining a tunnel from feng shui involved more than just assessing the environment. Even the kind of soil underfoot was important.

Back on Earth, it was customary for tomb raiders to use a luoyang shovel to dig up a cross-section of soils in order to appraise the time period the tomb was from. The typical tomb layouts of that period could then be used to speculate the appropriate placement of a thief's tunnel.

While that wasn't necessary in the world of immortals, any natural energy inherent to the soil would affect feng shui all the same. The minutest of errors often had the most disastrous of consequences.

The only saving grace to an incorrect tunnel was that it would still function as expected after the first unlucky sap entered and triggered their mishap. Most tunnels found in the present world of immortals were excavated and proved in that manner.

Lu Yun wasn't planning on sending a guinea pig down any tunnel. A living thing that died between the border of life and death turned into a ghost, at minimum. Sometimes, they became something much worse.

He returned to the ghost realm after charting out the new, correct tunnel. No time at all had passed between Lu Yun's departure and his return.

The Scaled-Dragon King dug a new tunnel according to his new calculations, one far more complex than the last. It coiled and meandered a half-dozen kilometers before finally pointing toward the tomb.

The black nascent spirit soil was the only kind of soil in this world. It was everywhere, even half a dozen kilometers underground. With the power of hell and the Spectral Eye, Lu Yun could see the sublimation of soil into natural qi with his own eyes. However, the qi thinned out the further he dug in.

He, however, grew surer of his hypothesis: an invisible hand was behind everything.

The Scaled-Dragon King spearheaded the expedition with shovel in hand. Lu Yun, Yu Hengluo, and the little nun followed behind him. Quite a few immortals trailed behind them as well, but Lu Yun didn't stop them. Instead, he drew runes in the air with an immortal crystal as they went, reinforcing the tunnel's integrity.

Small wisps of goodwill drifted slowly from behind him; the immortals following behind him had clearly noticed something was awry and were grateful for his leadership.

Tink!

Metal suddenly plinked against stone; the Scaled-Dragon King's shovel had hit a chunk of white rock.

"Stop!" Lu Yun commanded hurriedly. "Part the soil here."

The ghostly soldier obeyed with utmost care, conscientiously enlarging the tunnel and ferrying the soil out of the passageway. In no time at all, a white wall showed itself before them.

"This is the place." Lu Yun beamed with satisfaction. This point in the wall was a tiny flaw in the boundary between life and death.

Or rather, the tunnel that the Scaled-Dragon King had dug was a feng shui layout that'd connected with this point and broken the boundary open.

"This wall is really hard, huh... this... wall..." Lu Yun gawked at the sinister wall before him, one laid with white bricks. Tapping a sword against one resulted in no damage whatsoever; the material was durable enough to withstand most immortal weapons.

"More than a million death messages... in just one brick?" Shaking his head a little, Lu Yun closed his Spectral Eye with horrified realization. "These white bricks were made from the bones of immortals!"

The little nun behind him was pale as a sheet. She tried as hard as she could to curl up behind Yu Hengluo.

Is this really the primordial celestial master's tomb? Lu Yun suddenly wondered.

According to Su Xiaoxiao's memories, the four celestial masters of the primordial court were all gracious sages. Although the monster celestial master was a monster spirit and likely had the most blood on his hands, he wouldn't kill innocents for no reason whatsoever.

His tomb certainly wouldn't be built from the corpses of the dead. If this really was his tomb, he wouldn't find eternal rest after being buried here.

The information the bone bricks contained was very clear: the immortals whose bodies were used for them were quite ordinary. In the Primordial Era of the world of immortals, everything under the sun had been immortal in some way; but there were far more worlds than just the immortal one.

The messages the bone bricks contained were largely a jumbled mess. It was hard for Lu Yun to really make out specific ones. However, all of them were in consensus about the cause of their deaths: they'd been thrown into a forge of earth and sky, then refined into bone bricks while alive!

The forge of earth and sky was the ultimate achievement in equipment dao. In primordial times, a master of this technique had forged these exceptionally durable bricks from countless lives. The identity of the culprit was conspicuously absent, but there were only a handful of ancient masters capable of such a feat, regardless.

If I really want to figure it out, I think I can sooner or later... Lu Yun sank into deep thought. The Primordial Era was no more, and its immortals were largely extinct. For the most part, its ancient grudges were dead and buried.

On the other hand, it was a very good guess that quite a few of them lingered on in some form or another in period tombs. Empress Myrtlestar and Qi Hai were good examples, respectively persisting as a wisp of obsession or a soul fragment.

When modern immortals excavated these tombs, these scraps of residue could possess them and return to a form of life in the present.

"No, no... the art of burial was extinct before the Primordial Era. If this tomb really was built back then, who was its architect?"

"For that matter, who built all the tombs after the ancient war and buried all the dead immortals? There must be someone in this world who still knows feng shui and tomb layouts." Lu Yun shook his head to get rid of his idle thoughts.

"These bone bricks carry an incredible amount of resentment. It's their resentment that gives them their invincible hardness. The gathered resentment of life itself..." He lightly ran his fingers over the white wall, lost in thought.

#### **Chapter 524: Bone Bricks**

"Sir Lu Yun?" His daydreaming didn't go unnoticed by the immortals following behind. They mustered their courage to hesitantly come forward.

"Is the interior of the celestial master tomb behind this wall?" The immortal that was speaking was a monster spirit immortal of the ten lands, and he looked at Lu Yun with intrepid eagerness.

The young man nodded in confirmation.

"Aha! Please, feel free to rest for now. Leave the wall to us!" The monster peerless immortal peered at the human youth with a hint of ingratiating.

Lu Yun had drawn a formation of heaven and earth for Zhao Zhicheng with the most casual of gestures. If he could get the human in a good enough mood, perhaps he would also be given one.

"Leave the wall to you?" Lu Yun blinked twice in surprised succession. The thief's tunnel was only a few meters wide, but several hundred immortals were crammed in the small space.

"All of you should leave for a moment, you won't be able to get through. Come back in when I open the wall up, alright?" He shook his head.

"I may not have experienced the void realm, Sir Lu, but a wall really shouldn't be much of a problem..." The peerless immortal was a little miffed.

He was a monster spirit with several millennia of reputation, a renowned monster king of the ten lands. He was every bit as famous and strong as the Scaled-Dragon King, and Lu Yun's dismissal ignited his competitive spirit.

The young man shrugged, then gestured toward the wall invitingly.

Grinning dashingly, the monster king produced a silver halberd. A flash of cold light later, an icy tempest slammed into the wall of bone.

Boom!

The entire tunnel trembled at the impact. If Lu Yun hadn't reinforced it during the Scaled-Dragon King's digging, the attack probably would've collapsed it outright. And yet, the wall of bone seemed completely unharmed. There wasn't even the smallest scratch on its surface.

The monster spirit reddened.

"I, ah, I was worried I'd destroy the tunnel, s-so I held back there," he stuttered.

"Don't worry, give it all you've got this time! With my formations in place, even a dao immortal would have a hard time destroying the tunnel," Lu Yun said through a half-smile.

"Alright!" The monster king took a deep breath and his halberd began glowing with the light of a combat art a second time. This time, a blurry image manifested behind the monster spirit; it looked like a huge beast made of snow and ice.

The temperature in the tunnel plummeted quite a few degrees when the image appeared, and frost crept over the surface of the ground.

"Open up!" the monster king roared.

Gleaming steel stabbed viciously into the wall of bone, sending ripples of energy outward. Some of the weaker immortals were sent flying by the mere aftershocks. A pale green light appeared upon the Scaled-Dragon King, extending out to guard Lu Yun and his two fans.

He's about as strong as Jiangchen Xie, I think. Lu Yun gave his judgment after close scrutiny. A peak returned void cultivator looked to be as strong as a peak peerless immortal.

Unfortunately, the bone wall was just as unharmed as before, its smoothness almost mocking. The monster king gaped at the sight. The wall looked rather flimsy, honestly, so why...

"Why isn't it budging?" He'd put all of his strength behind the attack just now; it was powerful enough to annihilate a city!

"Anyone else want to try?" Turning, Lu Yun glanced at the rest of the immortals.

Complete silence answered his question.

"Well, then. Out, please!" Lu Yun waved a hand. "Scaled-Dragon King, bring the girls outside too."

"Yes, sir!" The monster Infernum obeyed every command to the letter and ushered the little nun and Yu Hengluo out.

The other immortals didn't want to leave, but the Scaled-Dragon King's example meant they didn't have a choice. Lu Yun was probably going to use a secret technique that he didn't want anyone else to steal!

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When the tunnel was finally cleared, Lu Yun summoned an aura of enveloping hellfire. He put a hand on the wall of bone once more.

Fwoosh!

The wall instantly caught fire. The immeasurable resentment it contained became fuel for the inexorable hellfire.

Ker-chunk!

The barrier of bone bricks—one so sturdy that even dust hadn't been shaken loose earlier—crumbled into a heap of fragments.

Fweee—

The moment it did so, a terrifying gust of yin wind surged forth from the other side. It condensed into a vicious current of black air that only grew stronger with each second. Lu Yun was well prepared, and a mantle of hellfire descended over him and protected him from the black wind as well.

The wind howled past him and filled the tunnel, then followed it to the outside world.

Thump.

The whole mountain trembled, and immortals outside the tunnel saw a pillar of black smoke blast out from the tunnel entrance, billowing into the sky.

Some who were too close to the entrance, instead of keeping their distance, were disintegrated by the wind's touch. Astounded, the survivors scuttled further back right away. Now they understood why Lu Yun had told them to exit the tunnel.

After more than a hundred breaths, the wind finally began to calm.

"Alright, all of you can come back in now." Lu Yun's voice boomed through the tunnel back to its entrance.

But now, reluctance dogged the crowd's footsteps. Perhaps... Lu Yun was dead? That blast of yin wind looked far too scary for anybody to survive; it'd scoured multiple peerless immortals in the blink of an eye.

"Cowards." The little nun stomped in with a harrumph, followed by the Scaled-Dragon King and Yu Hengluo.

The bone wall blocking their progress had been replaced by a pitch-black hole. The entire tunnel was filled with an indescribable chill, a breeze that constantly whispered past them. The two girls wrapped their clothes more tightly around themselves.

“Aaaaaah!” the nun shrieked suddenly. Shivering, she dragged Yu Hengluo away with a hop backward. Yu Hengluo gasped when she realized why.

“Are... are you d-dead or a-alive?” she stammered at the Scaled-Dragon King.

The Infernum’s body was all rotten and half of his face had become frightening bone. There was an inky green liquid clinging to his form, almost like some sort of lethal venom...

This was what he had looked like before death. Back on Levitating Island, Lu Yun had killed him and his army using poison and Ghost Yanking Feet.

The Scaled-Dragon King paused for a moment. He touched his body gingerly, then saw a reflection of his appearance in the girls’ eyes.

“This is all an illusion,” he sounded perfectly calm. “The formation here depicts and manifests my greatest fear.”

As Lu Yun’s ghostly servant, the Scaled-Dragon King existed through the Tome of Life and Death. Even if he died, Lu Yun could revive him instantly if he so wished. Deep down, his greatest fear was death—it was both his greatest flaw and limitation. Thus, he was being shown the first time he died.

There was great tempering and horror to be found at the precipice of death. As for exactly which one ended up being the case, that depended on the person. The Scaled-Dragon King didn’t have Lu Yun’s mental fortitude, so he only experienced the latter.

The nun and Yu Hengluo remained mildly suspicious and didn’t dare get any closer to the Scaled-Dragon King. The trio slowly inched forward in the tunnel.

“Uoooooh—” A muffled groan from the Scaled-Dragon King caused him to disappear in a puff of smoke.

The thief’s tunnel plunged into darkness.

“Heheheh...” Malicious laughter echoed through the space. “You two fell into my hands in the end, after all.”

### **Chapter 525: Ghost Deceives God**

Shuffling footsteps sounded from the darkness. A ball of dim light floated up, illuminating a deathly pale Jiangchen Xie as he strode out of the abyss with a strange smile.

It seemed that they’d departed entirely from the tunnel the Scaled-Dragon King had dug. On the alert, the little nun and Yu Hengluo fixed their eyes on the approaching enemy.

The man had changed into a smoky long robe, and a streak of blood dribbled down the side of his mouth. Moreover, there was an enormous hole between his brows, through which one could glimpse his frothing brain. His eyes dripped with even more malice than before.

“Again, Jiangchen Xie?” Unfazed, Yu Hengluo raised her bamboo staff and broke the darkness with an expanding glow of emerald light.

From behind the little nun rose a sword atlas. Three hundred and sixty-five immortal swords circled around her, unleashing solemn killing intent.

“You aren’t Jiangchen Xie, but a zombie!” she cried out, her eyes suddenly afflicted with fear. She hurriedly stopped Yu Hengluo from making a move, seeming to have fallen into a waking nightmare as debilitating fear weighed heavily on her.

Increasing pinpoints of dim light dotted the darkness as out shambled more copies of Jiangchen Xie. All of them bore eerie smiles on their faces, and the same large hole was between their brows. They looked identical, like statues poured from the same mold. Even their expressions were the same.

The thief’s tunnel had disappeared, leaving them in a vast world of pitch black. An endless line of Jiangchen Xies shuffled out from the depths of darkness. Outside of the fist-sized hole between their brows, they all looked entirely normal. However, the little nun’s keen senses told her they were all zombies.

“We can’t attack them! These are all a really strange kind of zombie. If you attack them or come in contact with them, you’ll get turned into one as well!

“A few years ago in an ancient tomb, my senior brother... he turned into a zombie like this right before my eyes.” The little nun shuddered dreadfully, her voice suffused with fear that sent a shiver down Yu Hengluo’s spine. These Jiangchen Xies were those strange kind of zombie?

“What about the Scaled-Dragon King? He can’t really be dead, can he...?” Yu Hengluo was at a loss for what to do. She tightened her grip on the bamboo staff, palms sweating, and forced herself to calm down. Looking around, she muttered, “What is this place?”

The little nun tensed, the lost look in her eyes clearing.

“I know where we are now... Be careful, I’m very likely to suddenly disappear like the scaled-dragon. Remember, everything you see here is fake.”

As soon as she finished talking, her face went white and her body began rotting, emitting a pungent smell of decay. In only a few breaths of time, she turned into a zombie.

Bam!

After another five breaths, her body exploded, splattering Yu Hengluo with thick, dark yellow slime.

At the same time, Yu Hengluo noticed that the zombie Jiangchen Xies had disappeared as well. The sky slowly dimmed to a dark red as a fiendish shadow slowly appeared from the void and towered over everything.

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“Ghost Deceives God... Why is this here?” Lu Yun smiled wryly at the frozen Scaled-Dragon King, little nun, and Yu Hengluo. Ghost Deceives God was even more terrifying than Ghost Hits Wall.

The latter blinded only one’s vision and perception, while Ghost Deceives God could evoke the fears buried deep in the living soul, combining them with reality to create a deadly killing layout.

This was a true killing layout that feng shui masters used as a weapon. A natural layout it was not, but one formed when powerful feng shui masters forcibly combined various layouts into a new whole.

Fortunately, this particular one wasn't all that powerful. It must've been damaged before.

His three companions had stumbled upon Ghost Deceives God when they returned, and their consciousnesses were thus taken in.

It was a realm of illusion. Once trapped, the only way to escape was to break through the illusion with one's own will. Failing to do so would result in one falling completely into the realm of illusion, never to return. Physically, victims would turn into a walking corpse.

The Scaled-Dragon King wouldn't be a problem. Lu Yun could wake him up through the Tome of Life and Death if need be. However, he couldn't offer any help to the little nun or Yu Hengluo.

Unfortunately, Lu Yun had only two months at his disposal. At the end of the two months, he had to return to Dusk Province no matter what the results of the exploration were. He couldn't possibly stay here and keep watch over the two girls.

"Wake up!" Lu Yun snapped, his eyes flickering with black light.

The Scaled-Dragon King shuddered, jerking out of the overwhelming fear between life and death. Cold sweat poured down his body in rivulets.

"Milord... milord..." he panted heavily.

Lu Yun nodded, then created two talismans out of thin air and attached them to the little nun and Yu Hengluo. Dark light rose around them and transformed into protective cocoons.

"Guard them well. Let's go." Lu Yun believed the two were strong-willed enough to escape the damaged layout themselves.

Bobbing after the Scaled-Dragon King, the two cocoons rather looked like two balloons. The scaled-dragon smiled wryly. He'd first been summoned to do manual labor, and was now a nursemaid. Nevertheless, he didn't dare complain.

Once activated, Ghost Deceives God became a realm of illusion for the consciousness and attached itself to its victims. Unless its victims could shake free of the illusion, they would stay trapped even if their bodies moved away.

If only the little fox was here, she'd be able to easily break the layout. Lu Yun stepped into the celestial master tomb with the Scaled-Dragon King and two cocoons in tow.

### **Chapter 526: Where's My Flesh?**

As soon as he entered the celestial master tomb, Lu Yun found the darkness to be even deeper than in the thief's tunnel. Next to the Scaled-Dragon King, the cocoons of light carrying the little nun and Yu Hengluo dimmed as well.

Gusts of chilling wind sent involuntary shudders down his spine. He felt like something behind his head was blowing into his ears.

Hesitant immortals had followed him inside and gathered around him. Their consciousnesses remained fully functional, despite their obstructed vision.

The monster king from the ten lands skittishly approached Lu Yun. "Why is this tomb scarier and more sinister than other ancient tombs, Sir Lu Yun?"

"The ghost realm is a realm of the dead," Lu Yun explained. "A tomb set up within this realm will naturally be more foreboding than the ones in the world of immortals."

"This lowly one is Zou Longxiu, a monster king of Yellow Springs Land." The monster spirit suddenly fell to his knees before Lu Yun. "I am willing to serve, Sir Lu Yun. Please take me under your wing!"

The crowd instantly stilled.

Zou Longxiu was a renowned monster king from Yellow Springs Land, and enjoyed great acclaim. His true form was an ice mo, an extremely rare mutated immortal beast. That earned him a greater status than even many dao immortals.

However, the widely-respected monster king had just openly betrayed the Yellow Springs court and declared loyalty to Lu Yun! If the human turned him down, Zou Longxiu would never be able to return to court and would even be hunted down.

"Oh?" After a pause, Lu Yun opened the Spectral Eye and scanned the monster king, his gaze penetrating the darkness and taking in every minute change in Zou Longxiu's expression.

He appeared to be a handsome young man, his long, snow-white hair impeccably groomed. However, his eyes were heated and his lips curved in a servile smile, putting a frown on Lu Yun's face.

"What do you want? Do you want me to create a formation of heaven and earth for you?" Lu Yun asked calmly rather than giving him a clear answer. "Considering your background and status, the Yellow Springs court would've fought for you to gain a spot among the thousand who will be granted a formation."

"That's not it!" Zou Longxiu shook his head, his lips tightened. "I owe everything to His Majesty, but I must leave Yellow Springs Land!"

"Explain," Lu Yun schooled his expression and asked coldly.

"If I don't leave, one of the formations of heaven and earth the court acquires at the Dusk auction will be mine, but I don't want it."

Half a month ago, when Lu Yun revealed what he would be auctioning, the major factions of the world of immortals had convened to negotiate how the one thousand formations would be allocated.

The implications were just too great. When the item of auction was too important to be left to chance, the leaders of the nine majors, ten lands, four immortal seas, and four regular seas would come together and negotiate a deal.

This time, the North Sea court hadn't joined in the conversation. The remaining twenty-two courts, on the other hand, had struck a deal to allot ten formations to each court. The rest would be left for the countless factions and immortals in the world to fight over.

The world of immortals was in utter turmoil. Factions were on the rise, attempting various rebellions and coups to topple the rule of the heavenly courts. Thankfully, the courts of the nine majors were able to keep their territories under strict control.

The courts of the ten lands, while not as powerful as their counterparts in the nine majors, possessed great influence as well. Standing among the most powerful factions in the world, they were able to call dibs on their fair share of the formations.

Of course, this wasn't an agreement that the courts officially negotiated with the Panorama Pavilion, but part of the rules they'd formulated themselves—rules that had an eighty-thousand-year-long tenure in the world of immortals.

Zou Longxiu would be one of the ten to get a formation among the Yellow Springs court, but apparently he didn't want it.

The Scaled-Dragon King walked up to him and clapped him on the shoulder, then transmitted a message to Lu Yun.

Lu Yun paused, then nodded. "Alright. You may join me... I'll create a formation of heaven and earth for you after the auction in Dusk."

It was an unusually complicated process to etch the formation. Lu Yun had only been able to set one up for Zhao Zhicheng earlier because of the pre-existing Formation of Heavenly Spirits and Earthly Demons in his body. The same couldn't be replicated in Zou Longxiu.

"Many thanks, sir!" Zou Longxiu knelt on one knee and raised a cupped fist salute at Lu Yun, his eyes bright with gratitude.

"Actually," Lu Yun commented suddenly. "I think your strength would double if you severed your maternal bloodline."

"I would rather die!" Zou Longxiu responded with great determination.

Like the Scaled-Dragon King, he'd betrayed his own faction because he was unwilling to sever his own bloodline. His true form, a mutated ice mo, came with great talent and combat arts, but he wasn't a pureblood. There was a trace of another bloodline from his mother's side in his body.

Although the Yellow Springs Land emperor highly valued him, he'd also been pressuring Zou Longxiu to purify his bloodline, which he was unwilling to do because of its connection to his mother.

The emperor had one again given the order to excise the secondary bloodline when he bestowed a formation spot to Zou Longxiu. That'd planted the seed of defection in the monster king's mind.

In fact, he'd come to the ghost realm of his own accord, planning to fake his death and leave the court. He'd simply adjusted his plan when he saw Lu Yun.

Lu Yun nodded noncommittally.

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News of the thief's tunnel spread far and wide as many immortals warned their peers via transmission talismans. Increasing numbers of immortals opted for the tunnel over the uncanny front gates of the tomb.

When they entered the large, lightless cavern, many immortals tried, and failed, to illuminate the environment with fires, luminous pearls, and even combat arts. Moreover, their consciousnesses were increasingly restrained the further in they went. In the end, they could only sense roughly nine meters around themselves.

"Do you know where my flesh is?" sounded a haunting voice by a peerless immortal's ears.

"What?" he asked without thinking.

"My flesh—"

Swoosh!

Something seemed to drape over him, suffocating him like he was drowning.

"Help... me..." He was silenced before his cry for help could escape his mouth.

Silence permeated the air; the darkness was unrelenting. No one noticed that a peerless immortal had died soundlessly.

A sheet of human skin slowly rose to his feet in the dark.

"Where's my flesh...?"

### **Chapter 527: Fangyang Xing**

The indistinct sound of bubbles bursting echoed through the darkness and more immortals fell into silence. When they stood back up again, they were no more than human skins, wandering among their living peers on the hunt for their flesh and blood.

In this void, an inscrutable force exerted its influence upon the immortals' senses. Their consciousnesses couldn't leave their body, and even Lu Yun's Spectral Eye was prevented from seeing his surroundings clearly.

Many immortals carefully stumbled along in the lightless expanse, projecting their consciousnesses over their bodies to guard against sneak attacks. Alas, the mystery in the darkness transformed them into skins all the same.

"There's light here?" Lu Yun's heart skipped a beat. There was a white dot in front of him. It didn't look too bright, but it lit up a circle about three meters wide. Those who saw it felt a glimmer of hope dawn in their hearts. Quite a few immortals sped up their footsteps toward it.

"Don't go, it's a trap!" Lu Yun gasped when he sensed the flurry of air currents denoting movement. His voice was muffled by the mysterious power lingering in the air, so no one heard him at all.

Thirty or so of the stronger immortals were the first to reach it; there were even two aether dao immortals among them.

Fwoosh!

When they drew near, the light suddenly burst into a sinister, stark-white flame.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

It exploded several times with deafening noise, igniting something with the energy it gave off.

A pillar of flame surged into the sky, lighting up everything within several hundred meters and showing the thirty-odd immortals that they were ensnared in a misty formation. Soon, they shrieked in pain and anguish.

“The Corpse Refinement Formation and Hadal Bonfire. ...Jiangchen Xie!” Lu Yun blitzed backward, dragging the Scaled-Dragon King, Zou Longxiu, and the two cocoons floating in the air with him.

The ashen firelight of the Corpse Refinement Formation lit up the endless darkness, illuminating everything as far as the eye could see. Jiangchen Xie’s form appeared atop it. His cultivation had reached peak returned void, and the presence he emanated was as terrifyingly impenetrable as an ocean.

His zombie king body was no more. Instead, he was covered head to toe by pure bone arts—the Hadal Bonfire had fused entirely into him.

The vessel that had previously contained it—the gargantuan bone monstrosity—had been turned into a Corpse Refinement Formation. Hadal Bonfire seemed to have the power to drive back the darkness, as its burning flames weakened the intense malice in the air.

The immortals’ senses gradually returned to them.

“Junior sister... what happened to you?!” a shrill cry filled with incredulous fear rang out.

One unfortunate immortal was aghast to find the junior sister about to become his dao partner no more than a sheet of human skin. Her bones, flesh, nascent spirit, and organs were nowhere to be found.

“Have you seen my flesh... senior brother?” came the creepy question from the hollow mouth in her pretty skin. It slowly expanded, then wrapped her senior brother within. With a soft pop, he turned into a skin as well.

“Junior sister, my flesh is missing too.” The senior brother’s skin slowly puffed up. Its blank, sunken sockets focused on its ‘junior sister’.

“Let’s go find our flesh together, senior brother.” The bizarre pair ‘glanced’ at the nearby immortals with their eyeless cavities. “Look... so much flesh...”

The onlookers trembled. More human skins were mixed in among their number, and they now opened boneless arms to pounce upon their former comrades.

“Die!” someone screamed. Blades began flashing in resistance against the strange human skins.

The immortals couldn’t deal with the amplified Corpse Refinement Formation right now; they were too busy defending themselves against these skin horrors. In addition to all their strength in life, the skins had a newfound durability that prevented the immortals’ swords from leaving much more than light scratches.

The immortals began to be overwhelmed and converted to skins as well.

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“What a bunch of fools.” Atop the Corpse Refinement Formation, Jiangchen Xie twisted his mouth into a sadistic sneer as he looked down on the chaos. “Those human skins are now part of this formation. The formation is the one killing people, not the skins.

“If you want to live, be good and come into my formation willingly. I shall leave your wills intact.”

The genius’ voice was filled with malicious cajoling and incited some of the immortals to recklessly dash headlong into the formation, only to be instantly turned into zombies.

Jiangchen Xie cackled with great satisfaction and turned his gaze toward Lu Yun in the opposite corner.

A black glimmer shimmered around Lu Yun’s body, shielding the Scaled-Dragon King and the others inside. The human skins swarmed around him, but all of them passed his group by. It was as if they didn’t exist.

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“Disgusting wretch!”

A blazing pillar of light erupted from the thief’s tunnel that they’d entered through. Any human skins caught in its path were instantaneously disintegrated as the light blasted toward Jiangchen Xie’s Corpse Refinement Formation.

Boom!

The incredibly durable Corpse Refinement Formation convulsed, and a number of recently refined zombies were destroyed on the spot.

A sword-wielding youth in blue robes floated in from the tunnel.

“Corpse Refiner scum, prepare to die!” He pushed off again when his toes touched the ground, propelling himself airborne toward the formation. The sword in his hands flared with the same indescribably keen light that had comprised the light pillar, and it sliced into the formation with a vicious vengeance.

Jiangchen Xie’s face turned several shades of purple.

“Fangyang Xing of the Fangyang Clan! How are you still alive?!” he choked.

Just like Jiangchen Xie, Fangyang Xing was an unparalleled genius of his clan. They hailed from the same era of thirty thousand years ago.

However, Fangyang Xing was technically a generation older than Jiangchen Xie. He’d comprehended the void realm before Jiangchen Xie had, and communicated with the blood-soaked path forcibly through his own strength.

More importantly, he’d publicly and resolutely stepped onto the path in the face of the black long-haired monsters. No one had seen him since then.

It was only after Jiangchen Xie had noticed the void realm himself that he understood where Fangyang Xing had gone.

What did Fangyang Xing's reappearance now mean?

The pillar-thick sword light was his combat art, and a single strike was enough to destroy Jiangchen Xie's formation.

### **Chapter 528: Firmament**

Fangyang Xing's dashing trajectory through the air and flourishing blue robes painted him with quite an air of chivalrous heroism.

The moment the Corpse Refinement Formation collapsed, every zombie inside was destroyed and their master collapsed heavily onto the ground in a heap. If not for the Hadal Bonfire that burned upon him, Fangyang Xing's single attack would have been sufficient to kill Jiangchen Xie.

Fangyang Xing curled the corner of his mouth coldly at the struggling Jiangchen Xie.

"The zombie king methods of the Corpse Refiners are a right and proper tradition of immortal dao, aimed at returning from death into life. Though refining the living into zombies is far from benevolent, still it has the immortal dao's approval.

"Why, then, have you given up what is right for that old skeleton's knowledge instead? What have you turned yourself into? You're neither human nor ghost, just a grotesque amplification of personal anguish." Fangyang Xing's eyes were filled with scorn and disdain; he recognized his opponent.

Jiangchen Xie had risen to meteoric prominence as a young genius in the age of Fangyang Xing's own fame, the later arrival touted as the brightest cultivator of the younger generation.

Though the Fangyang Clan then secluded themselves from the world just like the Corpse Refiners had thirty thousand years ago, Fangyang Xing and Jiangchen Xie were still well-remembered among the reclusive factions.

Furthermore, the Fangyang Clan and the Corpse Refiners were mortal enemies. Though the Primordial Era had long passed into history, their grudge had continued into the present. The two factions knew each other's secrets well.

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"Heheheh, Fangyang Xing... so you were a coward as well!" Crawling up from the ground, Jiangchen Xie wiped away the blood on his face with a sneer. "I thought you actually set foot on that path back then, but you went into hiding too, huh?"

Fangyang Xing blinked a few times in uncertainty, then broke into sudden laughter.

"You're Jiangchen Xie, the then-rising star of the Corpse Refiners. So you sensed the void realm too, did you?" Though Fangyang Xing's cultivation was also at returned void, he was significantly stronger than his opponent. Apparently, he'd reached the limit for his realm and was very close to ascending to immortality through the void realm.

A blue light glimmered upon his body from time to time, immortal radiance that was exclusively found on primordial immortals. The last step in the returned void was refining one's own immortal light and ascending in radiance.

"The Corpse Refiners practice a traditional dao, but their actions are corrupt. Your study of that old skeleton's bone arts means you are doubly deserving of death!"

His sword flared with a spray of sword light. Forming a lethally ensnaring net in midair, the luminous blades slammed down upon Jiangchen Xie.

Clatter!

The bones scattered about on the ground flew into the air with a flurry and structured themselves into a gigantic human skeleton. As soon as it appeared, the skeleton jabbed a fist toward Fangyang Xing's attack.

Boom!

An invisible ripple of power pulsed out, and the immortals who'd managed to live through the recent disaster were sent flying into the walls of the tomb.

Fangyang Xing paled and was forced to fall back several dozen meters to diffuse the force of impact.

"Venerated. Sacrosanct. Demon. Sovereign!" he blurted the name out word by word. "So your true body has come here. Are you still unsatisfied? Do you still want to refine that treasure?!" The blue-robed genius turned strangely solemn. "If so, I will not allow you to continue existing!"

Shoom!

He produced a bluish medallion with a flip of his palm. Blue smoke roiled over the medallion, and the word 'Firmament' was written upon it in ancient script. The characters used were extraordinary in themselves, and dated back further than even the Primordial Era. However, anyone who saw it knew what it meant.

"A Firmament Medallion. You're a divine spirit of the Firmament Palace!" the Demon Sovereign's incarnation shrieked. He grabbed the stupefied Jiangchen Xie and fled into the darkness. "How dare a Firmament spirit interfere in the world of immortals!"

By now, the seal had covered Fangyang Xing in a veil of blue light. His eyes glinted with a shadow of the same color. "Interfere in the world of immortals? We stand on the soil of the underworld, not the world of immortals."

Hum...

In the next moment, the Firmament Seal released a blade of light with a sharp tremor that sailed straight into the Demon Sovereign's back.

There was a grunt from the darkness, but no more than that. The Demon Sovereign and Jiangchen Xie had disappeared.

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“He’s just a returned void cultivator, master. Aren’t you an ingress realm expert? Why did you run away from him?”

In a shadowy chamber in the tomb, the Demon Sovereign’s bones were strewn about on the ground. A small ember of floating white flame was the only indication that he was still there.

“That boy isn’t alive, he’s a yin spirit.” In the firelight, the Demon Sovereign’s skull expressed shock with a slackened jaw. “The Firmament Palace... it has returned to the world!”

Jiangchen Xie fell silent. Fangyang Xing was a yin spirit? What was a yin spirit, exactly? Were they a kind of divine?

“The Firmament Palace... hah. I only learned about that place after I died. It recruits only the dead. Most geniuses who die have their true spirits taken away by the Firmament Palace and converted into yin spirits.

“I nearly met that same fate... but my revenge was more important than that. How could I allow myself to be beholden to another? I turned myself into an enduring true spirit and broke free from their call. We became enemies then.

“Heheheh... they’re just a bunch of sanctimonious hypocrites,” the Demon Sovereign continued murmuring to himself, “If I am captured, I will almost certainly be destroyed. The Firmament Palace doesn’t meddle in the world of immortals, but this place is not of that world. After I obtain the Skyturning Seal, I must hurry there!”

“Dead geniuses... so Fangyang Xing died after all. He didn’t run.” Jiangchen Xie was fixated on something completely different.

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Splurt!

Fangyang Xing coughed up a mouthful of blood, and his entire person took on a shade of malaise.

“That Venerated Sacrosanct Demon Sovereign... he managed to hold onto the primordial dao! No wonder the palace head told me to keep an eye out for him.”

The strike just now had inflicted a grievous injury upon him; he’d stayed standing only through sheer force of will.

As a renowned demon sovereign in the Primordial Era, the Demon Sovereign’s enduring true spirit alone was ingress realm. Despite being a mere replica, the skeleton just now had contained far more power than Fangyang Xing could resist.

Publicly brandishing the Firmament Medallion and scaring him off was the only thing the primordial genius could do.

**Chapter 529: A Great Sum**

The Demon Sovereign retreated with Jiangchen Xie and was followed by the Hadal Bonfire, leaving the chamber in vast, endless darkness. The human skins that Fangyang Xing had scared away popped out again, their eyes shifting around as they scanned the surroundings.

“Scram!” Dark cyan light exploded through the air. Startled, the human skins darted away like headless flies.

The Firmament Medallion slowly rose into the air and released rays of iridescent radiance; the strange layout permeating the chamber broke without further ado.

“All of you should leave,” Fangyang Xing said slowly, hand pressed to his chest. “This isn’t a place for people like you.”

The immortals exchanged nervous looks, but no one wanted to retreat.

“Immortals who haven’t acquired the power of heaven and earth will die if they set foot in here,” Fangyang Xing continued, wiping away the streak of blood at the corner of his mouth as he looked even more wan.

“You’re a member of the Fangyang Nobles!” exclaimed a dao immortal.

Fangyang Xing didn’t deign to respond to that. His eyes remained fixed on where the Demon Sovereign had retreated into, his complexion turning another shade paler. “Dammit, that demon’s begun refining the Skyturning Seal. If he acquires this greatest man-made weapon, the consequences will be dire!”

Hum!

Following that statement came the howl of a sword from within Lu Yun. Strands of sword energy abruptly erupted—the Sugato Sword!

Known as the most powerful man-made treasure under the heavens, the sword had once cut down connate-grade treasures and possessed great sentience. Hearing another treasure bestowed with the title of ‘greatest man-made’, the sword emerged of its own accord, seemingly ready to prove its superiority against the Skyturning Seal.

“The Sugato Sword!” Fangyang Xing called out in surprise. “It hasn’t been destroyed yet?”

“Of course not.” Lu Yun extended his right hand and casually splayed his fingers. A nine story tower emerged on his palm.

“It really is the Sugato Sword!” Fangyang Xing inhaled deeply. “I was wrong, the Sugato Sword can rival the Skyturning Seal.” He finally gave Lu Yun a proper look and asked, “Who are you?”

“Just a random nobody.” Lu Yun could tell Fangyang Xing held less-than-friendly intentions toward him, so he didn’t want to waste his breath.

Although Fangyang Xing had driven away Jiangchen Xie and the demon sovereign, saving countless immortals by breaking the Corpse Refining Formation in the process, he maintained an unapproachable air about him. It was as if the immortals here weren’t people in his eyes, but some random trash beneath him. He was merely fulfilling his mission.

More importantly, Lu Yun noticed that Fangyang Xing wasn't alive. Their savior was a yin spirit that had manifested here through something else. A special combat art had been deployed over him, making it impossible for Lu Yun to influence him while his internal energy was contained.

Fangyang Xing was a great genius of his time as well. It was only natural for him to feel challenged when he saw Lu Yun, another stunning returned void realm cultivator who wielded the fabled Sugato Sword. He nodded and paid Lu Yun no mind.

"I won't force anyone to leave, but right now I need thirty-six dao immortals to stop the demon sovereign with me and prevent him from acquiring the Skyturning Seal." After a pause, Fangyang continued, "That treasure rivals the Sugato Sword, and I won't claim it for myself. Once we stop the demon sovereign, it will belong to whoever manages to acquire it. And after that, the Firmament Palace will also reward you handsomely!"

Fangyang Xing upped the stakes when he sensed the crowd's hesitation, which drew an immediate response.

"The Venerated Sacrosanct Demon Sovereign induced a reign of terror in the world during the Primordial Era. It is the duty of us immortals to eliminate demons like him. Since Sir Fangyang has requested our assistance, we will not back down!"

"Then," said Fangyang Xing, "I would like to thank you all on behalf of the countless lives in the world of immortals."

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Soon, thirty-six dao immortals were gathered around Fangyang Xing.

Although the primordial genius had yet to ascend to immortality, he'd reached peak returned void realm and could rival some initial aether dao immortals. Being surrounded by dao immortals that lacked the power of the world wasn't going to intimidate him.

Fangyang Xing threw a thoughtful glance at Lu Yun and the Scaled-Dragon King, but didn't say anything.

"Wait," Lu Yun sighed before Fangyang Xing could lead the dao immortals into the chamber to the rear. "Here's thirty-six Principal Nineheavens Talismans. Take them with you."

He knew that the immortals were after the powerful Skyturning Seal and the promised rewards, but he also knew that the chances of the immortals surviving the next room were slim to none. Some of them had given Lu Yun goodwill before, so he didn't want to see them march to their deaths—hence the talismans.

Principal Nineheavens Talismans could suppress immortal ghosts and counter all manner of evils. Wearing one would increase their chances of survival by at least fifty percent.

"Principal Nineheavens Talismans!" a peak aether dao immortal exclaimed, overwhelmed. "This is a real talisman! The warding power within it exceeds the one in my clan's vaults!"

He accepted Lu Yun's gift with trembling hands, his gaze brimming with gratitude.

There were countless ancient tombs in the world of immortals, and most factions had only risen to power by raiding them. One such talisman was enough to be the greatest treasure of a clan, its value rivalling even a connate-grade treasure.

The latter was meant as a form of intimidation to strengthen a faction's dominance. They were rarely used until a danger that could destroy the entire faction presented itself. On the other hand, Principal Nineheavens Talismans were practical items that could protect dao immortals when they were in ancient tombs.

The one Situ Zong had brought with him that time was damaged, containing little power. But now, Lu Yun handed out thirty-six Principal Nineheavens Talismans in one go, and whole ones at that. His generosity stunned everyone; even Fangyang Xing was visibly shocked.

"These same talismans will appear at the auction in two months. They won't be auctioned—instead, anyone can buy them as long as they can pay," Lu Yun said with a smile. "Good luck with your mission. I have come to the celestial master tomb in search of the Ingress Path for the Nephrite court, so I'll leave you be."

He raised a cupped fist salute at Fangyang Xing and left in another direction with the Scaled-Dragon King and Zou Longxiu.

### **Chapter 530: The Seventeenth Level of Hell**

The celestial master tomb seemed to be shrouded in an enormous black veil, one that continuously plagued Lu Yun and his companions even after they'd left the first room. Their senses and perceptions remained sealed within their bodies.

Shadows bustled around them, and many human skins passed them by. However, none of the eerie creatures noticed the group, thanks to Lu Yun's cloak of hellfire concealing their lifeforce.

Behind them, several dao immortals followed Fangyang Xing to another chamber to wrest away the Skyturning Seal that the demon sovereign was refining. The regular immortals had either left the tomb, or were meandering around, reluctant to call it quits.

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"Sir, why don't we help Fangyang Xing stop the demon sovereign from refining the seal?" Zou Longxiu asked tentatively, following closely behind Lu Yun. "That supreme man-made treasure will also make you stronger."

A small formation had taken shape around Lu Yun to separate the group from the endless darkness, allowing soundwaves to travel freely through the air.

"Fangyang Xing?" Lu Yun shook his head. "He's nothing but a hypocrite, no different from that demon sovereign. It's just that the demon is more honest about his true nature, while Fangyang Xing puts up a front."

"Come on, let's not dwell on this nonsense. There are too many unusual dangers in this tomb. That Skyturning Seal was destroyed a long time ago, so what's left should be its treasure spirit. Any living thing will be possessed the moment they touch it."

“If the thirty-six dao immortals don’t keep my Principal Nineheavens Talismans on them, they’ll probably turn into thirty-six human Skyturning Seals.”

Zou Longxiu’s eyes shot wide with shock.

Wasting no further time in explanation, Lu Yun opened his left hand to permit something white to flicker on his palm: the branch of the Ingress Path in his possession. Since he’d successfully slipped past the boundary between life and death in this tomb, the branch’s close connection with its original was unhindered and would lead him to the rest of the treasure.

With a wave of his hand, Lu Yun sent the branch floating in a certain direction.

“Let’s go.” He quickly followed behind it.

Its dim light illuminated the unusually narrow tunnel; there was only room enough for one person to pass at a time. Fortunately, Lu Yun had some Shapeshifting Talismans with him. He diminished the physical size of his entire party before hopping on the branch of the Ingress Path forward.

The layouts of the celestial master tomb were exceedingly complicated, and the feng shui compass identified many layouts he’d never seen before, which combined to create even stranger novel layouts.

Lu Yun noticed more than one instance of Ghost Deceives God along the way, but didn’t see any other living souls.

Outside the tomb, he’d seen the human skins of Situ Zong and the others through the minor world projected by his luopan. Once inside, however, those immortals were nowhere to be found.

“Strange, there’s only one entrance into the tomb. How did the East Sea monster spirits survive crossing the boundary of life and death to gain the heritage of the Monster Celestial Master?” Lu Yun shook his head, a confused look in his eyes.

According to the speculations of many immortals of the East Sea court, the Deaf Prince and his friends were in the tomb as well.

“Oh?” The path beneath Lu Yun’s feet came to a halt. Before him was another wall built from bone bricks. According to what the branch of Nephrite’s treasure conveyed to him, the main form of the Ingress Path was on the other side of the wall.

“A dead end? There’s no door here?” Lu Yun stepped down from the path and reverted to his regular size. Carefully feeling out the smooth wall with his hand, hellfire burst out of his palm and disintegrated the wall in a quick instant.

As before, a terrifying yin gale rushed out of the opening. However, the Scaled-Dragon King and others remained unharmed, thanks to their position on the Ingress Path.

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“There’s an exit! Run!!” As soon as Lu Yun broke the wall, he heard terrified wails changing to the relief of escaping death.

A powerful arcane dao immortal wailed and shrieked for mercy as he scrambled through the crack, but barely half of his body was through before something grabbed his lower limbs and dragged him back.

“Help, Sir Lu Yun! Help!” The immortal’s eyes were a startling scarlet and he wore a flickering Principal Nineheavens Talisman on him. He was one of the thirty-six dao immortals Fangyang Xing had just picked, and the most powerful among them.

Yet now he now lay prone on the ground, some unknown terror having latched onto his lower body and dragging him back in. Despairing howls rang and lingered in the darkness.

“Beware, beware of Fangyang...” He vanished into the shadows before he could finish.

“Lock!” Lu Yun hastily activated the Ingress Path. White light shot into the dark, attempting to lock onto the arcane dao immortal’s body, but all that was left was a sheet of human skin.

Lu Yun walked into the room and extended a hand, brightening the surroundings with a ball of Emerald Mistfire above his palm. The immortal fire was at the same level as the Hadal Bonfire; only such fires could pierce through the darkness here.

“What’s going on here?!” The Scaled-Dragon King and Zou Longxiu felt their scalps go numb when they got a good look at the macabre scene before them.

The room was six hundred meters across, and had a giant sarcophagus at its center. Countless sets of skin were piled around it, including those of humans, dragons, phoenixes, and other exotic immortal beasts and monsters.

The arcane dao immortal had become a human skin as well, his lower body torn like a wet paper bag and empty eye sockets still looking toward the crack Lu Yun had created. He’d been so close to escaping.

“These have all rotted away.” Zou Longxiu screwed up his courage and walked up to a set of human skin, caressing it lightly. “This belonged to a princess of the West Sea. She entered the ghost realm before me... I didn’t expect her to die here...”

“No, they aren’t dead.” Eyes blazing black, Lu Yun scanned the skins and saw no confirmation of their deaths, despite having their epidermis separated from their bodies. These beings were still alive, but their skins had been peeled by some strange force.

“It’s the Hell of Skinning!” Realization struck at once.

The ancient chamber interring the Dao Flower had been modeled after the eighteenth level of hell, the Avici Hell, while the layout of the celestial master tomb was based on the seventeenth level, the Hell of Skinning!

If the eighteenth level of hell had laid the Dao Flower to rest, then what was buried in the seventeenth level...?