

## Necropolis 531

### Chapter 531: Skinning Spike

The seventeenth level of hell: Hell of Skinning! Although this hell was also a copy, similar terrors existed here.

Back in the copy of the Avici Hell, Lu Yun only barely escaped after deploying the Yi Wood Cleansing Thunder that the Azure Dragon King passed onto him. Stepping into the seventeenth level of hell made his hackles raise.

He was the owner of the Tome of Life and Death and the overlord of hell, but hell had been destroyed, leaving behind only a carcass of what it'd once been. This place had been modeled on the original Hell of Skinning by some powerful immortal, which meant it didn't fall under Lu Yun's jurisdiction, and he too could fall into a trap if he wasn't careful.

Is this really the tomb of the Monster Celestial Master? He began turning over that question again.

The celestial master had been but a primordial realm immortal. Would someone really go to the lengths of building a Hell of Skinning just to bury him?

Can it be... that the celestial master tomb was drawn by the Hell of Skinning just like the tortoise nest and qilin tomb? This Hell of Skinning is incomplete, a pale imitation of the one recorded in the Tome of Life and Death... Perhaps the ancient tombs were drawn here in order to improve this hell.

It must not have taken shape yet when the East Sea court visited, and the boundary of life and death in the celestial master tomb was broken. Then came the qilin tomb, turtle nest, kunpeng nest, and the Ingress Path. Thus, the Hell of Skinning came to be, and the boundary of life and death was restored.

If that's the case, that'd explain everything. Lu Yun's brows relaxed. This incomplete hell had some great flaws, which he could exploit to break the layouts here.

"Look, sir!" Zou Longxiu and the Scaled-Dragon King shrieked. "It's Fangyang Xing and Jiangchen Xie!"

Lu Yun saw the two men's skins as well when he walked over.

"So if their skins are here, where did they go? How about the demon sovereign? Where did he head off to?" Lu Yun looked around. His Spectral Eye told him that the owners of the skins hadn't died, but instead gone somewhere else, leaving their skins behind.

The layout of this room was simple: a sarcophagus in the center and piles of skins on the floor, nothing else.

"What's the thing that dragged the arcane dao immortal back?" Lu Yun's gaze was drawn to the sarcophagus. "Let's open the coffin and see what's buried inside!"

The thief's tunnel Lu Yun had dug was a feng shui layout in and of itself. Every shift in its nine twists and eighteen turns acted as a node, piercing space and extending the tunnel to the depths of the celestial master tomb.

Thus, they'd arrived not on the fringes of the tomb, but at its core. Though this wasn't the main chamber, it was still an important burial room.

Rumble.

Lu Yun and the Scaled-Dragon King bent their backs to push open the lid of the six-meter-long sarcophagus. A pungent metallic smell permeated the chamber as scarlet blood overflowed from the coffin.

Startled, Lu Yun summoned the Ingress Path and grabbed both of his followers.

"What's all this blood?!" Zou Longxiu cried out.

In no time at all, the agitating blood filled the entire room. Skins that it soaked slowly ballooned back to their former size and rose to their feet.

"Where's my flesh? Where's my flesh..."

"Have you seen my flesh, Sir Lu Yun?" The arcane dao immortal's skin stood up as well, tilting his head to stare at the governor on the Ingress Path, an eerie smile tugging at his empty lips.

Lu Yun's attention, though, wasn't on the skins, but the open sarcophagus. Fresh blood oozed out of the coffin into the chamber, and there was something that was a shocking shade of red wriggling within the stone container.

Lu Yun narrowed his eyes. It... seemed to be flesh without skin. There's human skins everywhere, but the thing buried here has no skin... His eyes darted around.

Moreover, his branch of the Ingress Path told him the treasure was in this room, but there was nothing noteworthy here other than the skinless flesh in the coffin. It seemed that all of the blood in the chamber was from the ball of flesh.

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The skinless body slowly shifted to a seated position, and a pair of pale, pupiless eyes stared at Lu Yun.

Hum.

Vast crimson light exploded in the next instant.

A pair of giant scarlet hands hurled a strange serrated weapon at Lu Yun, Zou Longxiu, Scaled-Dragon King, and the two cocoons housing the little nun and Yu Hengluo.

Studded with minute hooks, the strange weapon looked more like a torture device than anything else. There was only one of it, but everyone felt as if the weapon was aimed at themselves.

"Dammit, get out of the way!" Lu Yun yelled, having no time to think. "It's the device used to skin people in the Hell of Skinning! Don't let it touch you!"

Though only a small fragment remained of hell, Lu Yun was able to access records of what it'd once been as his cultivation improved, thanks to refining the Tome of Life and Death.

The Skinning Spike was the torture device of the seventeenth level of hell. Anything hit by the spike, be it living creature or formless horror, would have their skin peeled off. More importantly, the spike was a dao instrument born of hell, which resonated with the great dao in the Hell of Skinning and could ignore the power of most combat arts and treasures.

What's going on? Is the corpse in the coffin the previous master of the Hell of Skinning? If that's the case, then the Tome of Life and Death should be able to stop it.

Lu Yun pushed the treasure to the limit, attempting to stop the Skinning Spike with its power. However, it didn't show even the slightest sign of slowing down.

"Ah! Help, sir!" Zou Longxiu wailed as his skin suddenly sloughed off as a complete set, swinging on top of the spike.

Pfft!

His flesh vanished in a puff of black smoke.

"Out of my way!!" Lu Yun raged. The Tome of Life and Death manifested in his hand as hellfire blazed and swept over the skinless corpse in the coffin.

Rumble!

The lid closed, instantly retracting the flood of scarlet light and blood in the room.

Zou Longxiu's skin fell onto the floor, slowly decaying, while the reanimated skins leaped through the crack Lu Yun had created and ran off elsewhere.

A darkly brooding Lu Yun and the Scaled-Dragon landed on the ground again.

"He's not the former master of the Hell of Skinning," Lu Yun said with a frown. "He's someone else."

"Master..." Yu Hengluo, floating in a cocoon behind Scaled-Dragon King and trapped in Ghost Deceives Divine all this time, murmured softly with tears streaking down her face.

### **Chapter 532: Yin Realm Tomb, Yang Realm Tomb**

"Hm?" Hearing Yu Hengluo's murmuring, Lu Yun reflexively turned around with surprise. Protected by the light of Lu Yun's talisman, she continued muttering unintelligibly, tears wetting her cheeks.

"Ah, so she hasn't woken up from Ghost Deceives God yet," Lu Yun sighed with relief.

The current circumstances were too bizarre, and he was worried that the girl suddenly waking up would lead to unforeseen consequences.

He'd failed to protect Zou Longxiu from being skinned, even with the Tome of Life and Death, because the Skinning Spike had struck too quickly. There was too much going on for him to be able to readily react to every development.

Yu Hengluo's expression tightened with pain and her lashes fluttered slightly as she struggled to regain consciousness. A ghostly shadow took shape on her, keeping her consciousness under control. This was the true form of Ghost Deceives God; victims could only rely on themselves to break out of its hold.

Lu Yun had the Scaled-Dragon King remain on the Ingress Path to protect Yu Hengluo and the little nun. He himself jumped off to observe the layout of the tomb again.

It was bereft of any items or decorations. There were no formation runes or anything that would form a feng shui layout. However, the strange darkness seemed to have merged with the room, thus giving birth to a layout.

“It’s not dark simply because of the absence of light. It’s... another world entirely?” Realization struck Lu Yun and his brain went into overdrive, connecting countless dots and coming up with numerous speculations.

“Another world, it’s another world! I get it, I get it now!” His eyes went wide. “It’s my bad, I made a mistake. I thought the thief’s tunnel would allow me to safely bypass the boundary of life and death, but the other people, Ingress Path, Scarlet Ape, Kui, and the qilin tomb, turtle nest, and kumpeng nest are all part of the separation.

“I’m in the yang realm, while those things are in the yin realm! Maybe there’s countless eyes watching me in the world of darkness parallel to this world, and I just can’t see them. We’re no longer in the same realm.”

“Yin and yang are two sides of the same coin, and the world shrouded in darkness is the yin realm. What a clever trick! The tomb has been divided into two straight down the boundary of life and death, being turned into a yin tomb and a yang tomb.

“Once skinned, the cultivators and immortals enter a special state of ‘death’, and their flesh is transported to the yin realm.

“It makes sense to dig a tunnel into a regular tomb, but the yang tomb of the celestial master tomb is empty, used solely to create the Hell of Skinning. The yin tomb is where the treasures are! I was wrong, I was completely wrong!

“Fangyang Xing must know the way into the yin tomb and let the Hell of Skinning skin him with its rules. He’s dead himself and only manifested with the aid of something else. He’s not afraid of being skinned.

“How am I supposed to enter the tomb in the yin realm, though?” Lu Yun looked closely around him. More immortals had entered the Hell of Skinning through the thief’s tunnel, all of whom he ignored. “I’m still missing something...”

Brows furrowed, he took out his luopan and checked the local feng shui again. He could identify the feng shui layouts here, but he couldn’t find the key to breaking them. Although every single one of the layouts seemed to be damaged, the power they generated was flawless.

“A powerful feng shui master separated the tomb into two realms... just like the Formation Orb of Yin and Yang! That connate-grade treasure was divided into two too! The same thing’s happened here with the feng shui layouts.

“If I can somehow bring the two tombs together and merge yin and yang, not only will I break the Hell of Skinning, but I can also ‘resurrect’ the immortals who have been skinned.”

Encountering the Avici Hell in the tomb of the Dao Flower had left Lu Yun rather unnerved, and getting a clearer look of the Hell of Skinning now further roused an urge to destroy the entire place.

He had a feeling that if he didn't destroy the tombs modeled after the layouts of hell, he would one day be buried in them with no chance of entering the wheel of reincarnation.

"This place must be destroyed!" Light flickered in Lu Yun's eyes. "To that end, I must travel to the end of the tomb. Both the yin and the yang tombs must originate from somewhere. The Hell of Skinning hasn't fully taken shape, which tells me the two haven't been completely separated.

"If I can find their common origin, I'll be able to destroy the layouts!" With a flip of his hand, he grabbed the luopan.

"Sir!" the Scaled-Dragon King yelled urgently. "Yu Hengluo has broken out of the talisman light!"

"What?" Lu Yun blurted out in surprise. He'd been preoccupied with studying the celestial master tomb and neglected his surroundings. Upon hearing his soldier's words, he whirled around and saw Yu Hengluo floating down from the Ingress Path like a spectre.

She'd opened her eyes, and her face was covered in tears.

"Master... master..." She came up to the sarcophagus and pressed her hands on the lid, calling out like she was possessed.

Lu Yun's scalp went numb.

Master! Yu Hengluo called the ball of skinless flesh her master! Who is it?

Yu Hengluo had two masters. One was one of the sovereigns from the Star Demon Sect, and the other was Wayfarer! The latter had taken her as a disciple after Wanfeng.

"Wake up!" Lu Yun snapped to wake her up, his voice thundering.

However, Yu Hengluo remained in a trance, pushing hard in an attempt to open the lid.

Lu Yun replaced the luopan in his hand with the Tome of Life and Death, but made no move to stop her. He wanted to see what she was going to do. Was she acting on instinct, or was she still under the control of Ghost Deceives God?

There was also another possibility—that the flesh buried inside was indeed her master's.

Rumble.

The lid opened once again. However, unlike the last time, there was no pungent blood oozing out, just a ball of desiccated flesh.

"Master!" Yu Hengluo cried out with great sorrow, throwing herself onto the coffin and bawling.

Lu Yun walked up to her and took a look inside the coffin. Therein laid a skinless, shriveled corpse. Rotten and dried tendons and flesh stuck firmly to the bones, but what captured his attention was the lack of facial organs.

The body had no eyes, tongue, nose, or ears. However, Lu Yun remembered the ball of flesh staring at him with pupiless eyes...

"This is your master?" He went up to Yu Hengluo and lightly patted her shoulder.

"Yes!" She'd broken out of Ghost Deceives God.

"He's..." Lu Yun paused for a good while before continuing, "Wayfarer?"

Yu Hengluo nodded. "Yes!"

Lu Yun sucked in a breath.

Wayfarer lacked the five senses; he couldn't see, hear, smell, touch, or taste. Just like the dried corpse here. It had no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, or skin, signifying a lack of the five senses.

Is this really Wayfarer? But why would he be buried here? Lu Yun's heart quailed.

Half a month ago, he'd worked together with Wayfarer to create an interment of heaven and earth and build a bronze palace of grand influences. He'd sensed the ripples of life coming from that Wayfarer then. Weak, but undeniably real.

This skinless corpse with no organs of the senses, on the other hand, had been dead for who knew how long... Its death could be traced back to at least before the Primordial Era.

Lu Yun could clearly glean its information. It looked just like Wayfarer before his death, but his real name wasn't Wayfarer. Unfortunately, Lu Yun couldn't see his real name clearly. One thing was for certain, though, the corpse was certainly who he knew as Wayfarer.

"Master is long dead." Yu Hengluo wiped away her tears and glanced at the cowering skins around them. "The master you saw is just like them."

"He's a piece of skin?"

Yu Hengluo nodded.

"His eyes, ears, nose, and mouth have all grown into separate entities. Only his skin retains who he was before death," she spoke softly.

"I... I'm going to take the corpse back with us. Once it's merged with master's skin, maybe he'll remember who he was before!" She was about to hop into the coffin and grab the corpse when Lu Yun quickly stopped her with a tight expression.

"Don't touch him!"

"Sect Head..." She gave him a pitiful look.

"This body remains one with the Hell of Skinning before the layout is broken. Just like the other skins here, it can't leave this tomb." Lu Yun took a deep breath. "Even if you take it with you now, it will still come back here.

"Only by breaking the Hell of Skinning layout and merging the tombs in the yin and yang realms will the other layouts here be breakable."

Lu Yun had identified the crux of the problem and needed to locate the origin of the tombs to tear down the Hell of Skinning. Only then would the tombs on the two sides of yin and yang come together.

The key parts of several layouts had been separated into the two parallel worlds when the tombs had been divided. However, this also kept them in a complete state, thus making it impossible to break them in their current state.

### **Chapter 533: Corpse Mutation**

To break the Hell of Skinning and recombine the tombs in the two realms, the origin of the tombs had to be found. Since the tombs hadn't been completely separated, there must exist a point where they intersected—where the celestial master tomb originated from.

Once the separation was complete, it would be very difficult for Lu Yun to break the layouts. He would have to summon Xing Chen and simultaneously place his consciousness in both the yin and the yang tombs to even stand a chance of resolving the celestial master tomb.

More importantly, the Hell of Skinning would come into maturity in that case, and its power might very well kill Lu Yun.

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"I want to stay here, Sect Head!" Yu Hengluo suddenly said with determination.

"Alright." Lu Yun nodded. "Do as you wish. Senior Wayfarer's body needs protecting as well."

He gave Yu Hengluo's bamboo staff a meaningful look. "But remember," his tone turned serious, "You mustn't let the body leave the coffin."

"Thank you, Sect Head!" Yu Hengluo cheered when Lu Yun granted her request, then quieted down, seemingly remembering something.

"I'm leaving this lantern here. Do not, under any circumstances, move it." Lu Yun manifested a bronze lantern with a flip of his hand and placed it before the sarcophagus. Within it burned a ball of green Emerald Mistfire, casting light over a circle eighteen meters in radius.

"No matter what happens, you are to stay within the circle of light and ensure that the lantern shines on the sarcophagus, understood?" Lu Yun's tone made clear the gravity of the situation.

Yu Hengluo couldn't help but tremble when she saw his expression and nodded gently.

The bronze lantern was no regular immortal treasure, but an arcane treasure that Lu Yun had created by combining equipment dao and feng shui. Where the light of the lantern reached, a feng shui layout would form to protect Yu Hengluo and the coffin. Moreover, the Emerald Mistfire fueling the lantern was no regular fire. The synergy between the fire and the treasure generated even greater power.

Lu Yun and the Scaled-Dragon King disappeared into the dark with the little nun.

The lantern created a small sanctuary of emerald light. When a gust of chilling wind came howling through the chamber, Yu Hengluo tightened her clothes around herself.

Whoosh whoosh whoosh.

The wind grew fierce, giving rise to eddies of black mist in the air. Under the force of the breeze, the Emerald Mistfire flickered and Yu Hengluo's expression tightened.

"Luo'er—" she heard a voice softly call out.

"Master?" Yu Hengluo turned to the sarcophagus with wide eyes, a chill going down her spine.

The skinless corpse with no facial organs slowly sat up, its empty eye sockets staring straight at Yu Hengluo.

"That light is too bright. Put it out."

Gurgle.

Sticky, wet noises came from the empty eye sockets, and a pair of pupiless eyes appeared to fill the void. Then, a pair of bloody ears grew out of its temples.

Yu Hengluo shuddered, taking an involuntary step back. She jerked her foot back in just before she stepped out of the light of the lantern, recalling what Lu Yun had said before leaving.

"That light is too bright, Luo'er," repeated Wayfarer's body. "Put it out."

Yu Hengluo tightened her grip around the bamboo staff and stayed firmly within the light, her eyes fixed on the corpse that was regaining its vitality.

"Master is here, Luo'er," said the body. "What are you afraid of?"

It had no lips or tongue, only an empty hole behind its sickly white teeth. But somehow, within the desiccated mouth emerged traces of blood.

"The coffin is too narrow, Luo'er. I am tired. Come and help your master stretch his legs." It extended an arm, waving at Yu Hengluo.

The Skinning Spike! She noticed the strangely-shaped weapon in the body's other hand.

Two dots of red slowly dyed the pale eyeballs, resembling pupils. Their unblinking gaze settled on Yu Hengluo, reflecting the crimson figure of a demonic fiend. It was similar to the one that she'd seen in the illusion created by Ghost Deceives God.

Yu Hengluo blanched, covered in cold sweat. It felt as if she'd returned to that realm of nightmare and illusions.

Clink!

The Skinning Spike shot out suddenly, stabbing at Yu Hengluo.

Swoosh!

Emerald Mistfire flared out of the bronze lantern before the coffin, blasting the strange weapon back.

"Grrrraw!!!!" The skinless body threw its head back with a howl, radiating scarlet light and threatening to escape the coffin.

Another burst of emerald flame exploded from the lantern. This time, a stunning woman in white emerged from the fire. Her features were as delicate as a painting, and her beauty could topple cities. However, hers was a handsome grace with a powerful presence.

It was Yuying, or someone identical to her.

She wasn't here in person. Rather, this was a manifestation of the feng shui layout in the bronze lantern. Emerald Mistfire belonged to Yuying, and with the residue of her power, the feng shui layout thus projected as her.

Bam!

'Yuying' hit the body with a palm strike, pushing it back into the coffin with the power of the Emerald Mistfire and the feng shui layout.

"It hurts, Luo'er. Help your master!" The body continued speaking, its compelling voice ringing in Yu Hengluo's head. Gradually, her eyes grew unfocused. She took great strides toward the bronze lantern.

Hum.

Her bamboo staff suddenly surged with emerald light, hitting the corpse in the coffin square in the chest. It grunted, forced back down.

"Old thing—" snarled the body.

"Concentrate your mind and calm your heart, Luo'er," Wayfarer said calmly through the bamboo staff. "Don't let it bespell you."

Yu Hengluo jerked out of her trance and called out with delight, "Master!"

"Quiet." The green bamboo staff trembled and morphed into a flash of green light, landing on the bronze lantern. The light of the lantern turned into a barrier, firmly isolating the area it shone upon.

Bam!

An explosion rang out as something hit the barrier with great force.

### **Chapter 534: Breathing**

The dark room filled with shadows that flitted about everywhere. Spirits slammed furiously into the bronze lamp's green light, intent on breaking through the light barrier.

Wayfarer's corpse struggled for freedom while Yu Hengluo sat cross-legged beneath the lamp, silently watching over the sarcophagus. The forms of Wayfarer and Yuying sat suspended in the void, one in front of the other.

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Behind the chamber was an realm of endless darkness. Lu Yun could only light up a ten-meter corner by using his Mistfire, Voidfire, and Skyfire in conjunction. The sound of heavy breathing seemed to approach from the distance.

As he advanced, it grew in volume—and in a lapse of concentration, he allowed his own breathing to overlap it in rhythm. Slowly, he began struggling to breathe. His lungs expanded and contracted like a huge pair of bellows, puffing up his chest to the point of bursting.

Lu Yun gasped. He tried using internal energy to control his lungs, so that he might free it from the breathing he heard. To his horror, the energy in his body was no longer his own to command. It gathered in his lungs, drawn by the force there that was running wild.

“This isn’t good.” He paled slightly. If he allowed this to continue, all of the energy in his body would be sucked into his lungs—perhaps even his spirit, as well. If that happened, they would explode with energy.

“Scaled-Dragon King!” He hurriedly glanced to the side.

The Infernum in question couldn’t reply as his own chest was as inflated as a bloated toad’s. Everywhere else on his body was the shriveled opposite. Not only his qi, but also his flesh and blood had been sucked into his lungs.

The Scaled-Dragon King’s lungs grew bigger and bigger, until all of his limbs retracted into his chest. He was now completely spherical.

Pop!

Before Lu Yun could react, the Infernum ruptured into a spray of fragments that scattered onto the ground.

“Nascent spirit soil.” Lu Yun noticed a tiny bit of black sand among the remains. The sand was identical to that found everywhere in the ghost realm.

What a potent layout! His heart trembled with awe. In the instant of the Scaled-Dragon King’s death, he’d finally seen the hidden layout for what it was.

The Scaled-Dragon King was stronger than Lu Yun in cultivation, and had a formation of heaven and earth he’d personally drawn for the ghostly soldier. In terms of raw power, the Scaled-Dragon King was equal to a void-realm peerless immortal—certainly many times higher than returned void cultivator.

His body and lungs were commensurately more durable and powerful too. When the breathing affected him, he’d sucked in his entire self and instantly detonated on the spot. In other words, the effect of the layout correlated to the strength of those that it affected.

Lu Yun noticed its effects on the little nun as well.

Slowly but surely, her chest cavity was expanding. The light of his talisman was insufficient to seal off the bizarre breathing’s influence. He waved her into the resurrection layout in hell as quickly as he could.

If she stayed around, the same thing would happen to her as had happened to the Scaled-Dragon King. It was trivial for Lu Yun to revive the latter; to do so for the nun would be a lot more complicated.

Finally, he produced the Tome of Life and Death with a flourish. Its black light calmed the perplexing force that acted upon him. As expected, the book could instantaneously dispel the breathing’s effects, and his internal energy and spirit went back to normal.

The breathing remained, but it could no longer do anything to him.

“What does this breathing belong to?” Lu Yun squatted down to pick up the sand left behind by the Scaled-Dragon King’s death for a closer look. The three specks of sand he found were much smaller than the rest, and weighed less than one tael.

However, he was extremely surprised to see the Scaled-Dragon King’s death information upon them. As the Infernum hadn’t been revived yet, he was considered dead right now.

“What in the world? Are these specks of soil part of the dead person’s body, too?” Lu Yun blinked. However, the other specks of dirt he could see all around him were utterly blank.

“Hmm?”

Suddenly, Lu Yun’s expression changed again. He noticed that the dirt in his hands was visibly transforming—not into natural qi, but a form of finer sand that was more gaseous than solid. The gaseous dirt didn’t carry any information on it.

“This is the sand I can see everywhere in the ghost realm... it’s undergone conversion already!” The discovery excited him. Moreover, the dirt in his hand evaporated along the same rhythm as the breathing in the darkness.

“Could the breathing in the tomb be the greatest secret of the ghost realm?” His heart raced eagerly at the prospect of treasure. Before now, he’d supposed the ghost realm was a lung of the multiverse, an organ that regulated the natural energy cycle of countless worlds.

“No! The gaseous sand the Scaled-Dragon King turned into is still being drawn in by the breathing.” Lu Yun frowned. The finer dirt had begun to drift away from him, apparently floating toward the direction of the sound.

This situation was far more serious than he cared to admit. Focusing his mind, he used the Tome of Life and Death to shield his body and locked on to the nearly indistinguishable wisp of dirt with his Spectral Eye.

The darkness stretched across a grand expanse that was as silent as it was empty. Nevertheless, he keenly perceived the presence of innumerable eyes fixated upon him from beyond the gloom. They lived in the darkness. For them, it was practically daytime.

Curiously, they seemed bent on staying out of the three immortal fires’ radiance. In fact, they were probably intentionally avoiding him altogether.

The further in he walked, the heavier the pressure he felt in the air. Dust began to permeate the space all around him. It carried a harsh energy that would destroy his respiratory system. If he breathed it in, he would lose his current body.

Having reached this point, the Scaled-Dragon King’s sand began slowing down, although it continued its journey deeper in. Other grains of gaseous sand had made their way here as well. Just like the Scaled-Dragon King’s sand, they moved deeper in of their own volition.

“All of this... is this all nascent spirit soil?!” Lu Yun lit up with comprehension. “Gaseous sand will gradually harden into a solid once again... Right, the darkness here isn’t because of any lack of light. It’s because the endless gaseous sand has dyed this place pure black!

“The gathered sand has covered the entire tomb with a lightless shell. No wonder even the Spectral Eye fails to clearly see everything here.”

Mounting pressure forced Lu Yun to discard any further idle thoughts. He poured everything he had into the Tome in order to resist outside influences. Here, the heavy breathing from earlier had grown thunderous.

### **Chapter 535: The Fifth Abyss of Divine Burial**

The heavy breathing was deafening here, and even the veil of black light formed by the Tome of Life and Death trembled under its noise.

Lu Yun’s three immortal fires flickered in the din, looking like they were about to go out at any moment. This wasn’t because the Tome or the fires were weak; he was the weak one and couldn’t make use of their true strength.

He could no longer pinpoint the Scaled-Dragon King’s dirt because nascent spirit soil was everywhere. Gaseous grains of sandy dirt surged forward on a torrent of currents.

The Scaled-Dragon King’s soil had been swept up by a much larger stream of its peers, but Lu Yun was finally at his destination. The source of the breathing was right in front of him.

“This isn’t where the celestial master tomb’s source is, though.”

A look at his luopan told him as much. Every indicator showed that the origin was deeper still. However, the source of the breathing was extremely close.

Flurries and eddies of dirt filled the air here. The immortal fires were blotted out, lending their light no longer to their surroundings. Without the Tome of Life and Death protecting him, Lu Yun would be dead already. Not even the celestial emperor corpse puppet could save him. Right now, he didn’t dare move a single finger.

The dirt here was cloyingly thick and bound his body tightly to the ground. Even so, the flying grains moved ever forward according to the rhythm of the breathing, carrying him upon their tide.

“Halt!” He flipped over the compass in his hand. It emitted a faint light, which he bolstered with the Dragonsearch Invocation and Dragonshift Method.

A moment later, the luopan burst into a translucent minor world in midair. The Tome of Life and Death left his fingers and took up a hovering position as well, actively backing up the projection.

A projected minor world was embryonic, at most. It would hardly be able to resist the dirt here, as thick as it was. The breathing? That was in another league entirely.

The minor world itself was far stronger than he was. When used as a conduit, it could also serve as an amplifier for the Tome of Life and Death. But at the same time, the embryonic minor world was quite fragile.

Lu Yun couldn't hold that state for long. Right now, he was firmly planted where he stood, and the nascent spirit soil couldn't shake him from his stillness. Inside the minor world, the structure that belonged to the compass began to spin. Heavenly energy gathered inside the world and a hazy figure slowly took shape within it.

The first thing he saw was a great abyss right in front of him, and his toes were barely half a step away from the precipice. Cold sweat beaded on his forehead. In this strange place, he was unable to fly at all. If he'd stepped out into the chasm, he would certainly have met a grisly demise.

He was a hundred percent sure that no matter how deep the abyss was, he would reach the bottom in a single instant. He wouldn't be able to react quickly enough to send himself to hell.

"What is this place?" Lu Yun drew a sharp breath and carefully fiddled with the luopan to begin the analysis.

The minor world created by the feng shui compass had the mysterious ability to copy, model, or outright project layouts, formations, and natural environments into itself. There, the luopan's power could act upon and evaluate the model.

"Hmm?" Lu Yun furrowed his brow suddenly. The miniature world created by the luopan projected a perfect reflection of the abyss, and what he saw there stunned him.

Desiccated corpses hung upon the sharp cliffs of the abyss, stuck in the uniform pose of an upward climb.

"Those are divine corpses. This is an abyss of divine burial!"

More pieces of the puzzle fell into place. Just like the one beneath Dusk Province, this abyss also buried countless divines.

The airborne dirt obstructed him from seeing the death information of the hanging corpses, but that didn't take away from his certainty: these really were all divine corpses.

Just like the abyss beneath Dusk Province, countless divines had been suppressed at the bottom of its depths. Still alive despite their condition, they'd followed the cliffs of the abyss and arduously made their way upward, hoping to feel the sun upon their faces again one day. Alas, these divines had also died upon the walls of the cliff in failure.

The invariability of their poses was an important factor. None of them had realized that death was upon them. In other words, the divines had been slain in a single instant.

The abyss of divine burial beneath Dusk Province was sealed off by the Water Altar. The localized fabric of spacetime there was exceptionally muddied and wrinkled, killing all the entrapped divines through exhaustion.

"The breathing... it also comes from beneath the abyss. The dirt is drawn here. According to legend, the Abyss of Divine Burial has existed since time primordial.

"A hundred thousand years ago, it was split into four; the pieces landed in Nephrite's Dusk Province, Crimson Province, Argent Province, and Azure Province, respectively." The thunderous clamor of the breathing filled his ears as he murmured, "But this place... houses a fifth!"

Ever since his first time in the abyss beneath Dusk Province, Lu Yun had pursued his investigation with considerable zeal. Several of his envoys had pertinent memories of the matter, including the primordials Su Xiaoxiao and Cangyin. Its existence was older than theirs, after all.

What was curious, however, was that the even older Xingzi carried no recollection of the Divine Burial Abyss.

“If I’m to figure out the meaning behind all this, I’ll need to go down to the ground of this fifth abyss.” Lu Yun spun the model abyss in the minor world with utmost care, intently examining its depths for anything unusual.

“Is that it?” He saw something hazy in the deepest part of the abyss. It expanded and contracted with an odd rhythm, as if it was breathing.

The luopan’s power couldn’t project the thing in its entirety. Evidently, its level was above what the compass could manage. If it was a feng shui layout, it had to be greater than even a grand influence over the world.

### **Chapter 536: Beneath the Abyss**

The embryonic minor world was one of the benefits Lu Yun had gained when he became one with the grand influence of the world. Even the peak of feng shui layouts could be projected into the minor world for further study.

Although it might not provide a solution, it could at least point to where the dangers were, enabling Lu Yun to avoid those places. However, the violently contracting thing deep within the abyss presented as a obscured ball of nothingness in the minor world.

He couldn’t tell what it was, but he was certain it’d exceeded a grand influence over the world. Such layouts must exist, but he’d never seen one before today. Who would’ve thought that he’d encounter it here beneath the celestial master tomb!

.....

Bam!

The embryonic minor world broke apart and reassembled as a feng shui luopan before falling into Lu Yun’s hand. The Tome of Life and Death that’d kept the minor world intact returned to hovering over Lu Yun’s head to protect him.

Down, I must go down there! I need to know what that thing is! A voice roared incessantly in Lu Yun’s heart. As a tomb raider, he could never resist the temptation to explore the unknown. He’d never once considered if he would be able to stay alive upon embarking on a quest. This was simply an unfathomable question; all he could think of was how to get down there.

Such was a tomb raider’s nature.

Incredibly dense nascent spirit gas surrounded him, and the unusual weight prevented him from using any combat arts. Flying was out of the question, too.

The closer he drew to the abyss, the greater the density of the gaseous sand. The gas and the thing in the dark were working together to pull him down. He would fall to his death as soon as he stepped into the abyss.

What if... I transform into a gas particle of nascent spirit soil? Lu Yun's eyes lit up with inspiration.

The dirt here was presented in gaseous form and rhythmically moved down the abyss, attracted by whatever was down there. Anything other than nascent spirit sand would be crushed if it took a tumble down.

Lu Yun activated his Spectral Eye and took a good look at the nascent spirit gas, analyzing its structure and properties. Although the dirt-sand mixture had turned to gas, seemingly mixed together completely, he could see how individual particles remained whole and distinct with his Spectral Eye.

The structure of the gaseous sand was highly unusual. To turn himself into one such particle, Lu Yun just needed to understand it inside and out. The death arts of the Tome of Life and Death were so incredibly powerful that he could turn himself into anything he understood the structure of.

Shapeshifting not only allowed him to transform into living spirits and things with a solid form, but gaseous entities were a very real possibility as well. However, the greatest hurdle was that the nascent spirit dirt was something entirely foreign to him.

"I've never tried turning myself into gas before..." Dark light shot out of Lu Yun's eyes as he observed the void closely. He wasn't looking at the minor world, but the nascent spirit dirt obscuring his vision.

"Heavenly qi! The gaseous sand shares the same structure as heavenly qi!" Lu Yun perked up.

He'd once observed heavenly qi and analyzed its structure with the Spectral Eye, attempting to synthesize it through other means to fertilize Dusk Province. In the end, though, he'd failed.

The content and structure of heavenly qi were just too complicated. Even though Lu Yun could see all of its components clearly, he couldn't replicate it.

"But there's something different between this gaseous sand and heavenly qi... Heavenly qi exudes power of great vitality, while nascent spirit soil is lackluster and lifeless. It's the same structure and components... the dirt is like batteries that have run dry!" Lu Yun finally settled on the proper analogy.

Once drained of all energy, heavenly qi turned into the gaseous sand around him.

"Solid nascent spirit dirt contains the energy of heavenly qi and slowly sublimates it. Once it reaches this place, however, all of the power is drained from the gaseous dirt, leaving behind only empty exhaust.

"The sand is everywhere in the ghost realm. Although the heavenly qi released from the sand isn't much, it should aggregate to a great amount and fill the ghost realm with an abundance of heavenly qi. Something is exhausting the qi and turning the soil into gaseous sand."

Apart from the transformed gas of the Scaled-Dragon King, all of the other gas had converged here from the outside world. The nascent spirit dirt wasn't the only source of such gas.

Once drained of all energy, heavenly qi transformed into this waste as well. It looked like there was something here converting the realm's heavenly qi and nascent spirit dirt into gas and delivering it into the abyss.

Under the Spectral Eye, the components and structure of the gas were revealed to Lu Yun.

Pop!

The sound of a bubble bursting filled the air as the patch of space where Lu Yun popped, but the youth was nowhere to be seen.

.....

"I did it!" Lu Yun was delighted that he'd successfully transformed into gaseous soil. He'd really succeeded in shapeshifting into everything with his death art!

Nascent spirit soil remained as individual particles even in gaseous form, ones smaller than those of the air. Lu Yun had once barely made himself as small as the regular particles with Size Manipulation, but still hadn't been able to elude detection from dao immortals. As a particle of nascent spirit gas, however, he was small enough that not even dao immortals would sense him.

Lu Yun had not only combined the Shapeshifting and Size Manipulation death arts, but had also burned a karmic fruit to assist himself.

"Thirty breaths. I can only stay in this form for thirty breaths!" Lu Yun was caught by surprise, but didn't panic.

He was moving far too quickly at the moment. If he hadn't turned into gas, his original body wouldn't have been able to survive the speed and he would've been crushed immediately.

In only half a breath, he and the rest of the nascent spirit gas had entered the abyss.

"Is it really a pair of lungs?!" Lu Yun was flabbergasted by the sight in front of him.

A pair of lungs lay before him, and they were breathing.

### **Chapter 537: Organ of the World**

A thin sheen of silver radiance was to be found under the fifth abyss instead of the same, weighty darkness.

When Lu Yun transformed back into human form, the Tome of Life and Death once again materialized to shield his body. He had to burn another karmic fruit to barely keep himself protected.

What came into view dumbfounded him.

A giant pair of lungs resembling a mountain thirty thousand meters tall hovered over a silver altar, respirating quietly. It was so big that it caused a great gale every time it breathed, drawing in gaseous nascent spirit dirt. It was then exhaled after being converted into pure qi.

"The Metal Altar!" Lu Yun shifted his attention from the giant lungs to the giant altar below, where the hazy silver glow came from.

He'd never seen it before, but he recognized it as the Metal Altar at first glance. Its presence was identical to the Water and Fire Altars he'd previously encountered.

"That's the qilin nest, turtle nest, and kunpeng nest... There's also another one..." Various sacrificial goods filled the altar beneath the great lungs—all precious items from different worlds that Lu Yun had only seen in the memories of some of his envoys. They were the greatest treasures between heaven and earth.

What drew his attention the most was the fourth nest.

"The fourth divine beast nest..." Lu Yun's eyes were glued to the nest.

He'd never seen it before, and none of his envoys knew anything about it. Still, he felt an enormous sense of danger creeping upon him, and the source of the danger came from the mysterious nest.

Before each of the nests was a giant statue portraying the qilin, turtle, kunpeng, and an unknown creature, respectively. The last had the head of a dragon, body of a tiger, tail of a qilin, six pairs of bat wings on its back, and eight legs under its belly. Taken altogether, it was quite a macabre creature.

"What is it?" Lu Yun rummaged through the memories of all nine of his envoys, but still didn't find any answers.

Other than the four nests, he also noticed that the other tribute goods placed on top of the altar were slowly being converted into a different kind of power for absorption by the giant lungs.

The lungs were still growing, albeit at a very gradual pace.

Lu Yun was certain that the lungs weren't real organs, but the manifestation of a feng shui layout greater than even grand influences over the world. They were infinitely close to becoming a real organ.

"The Metal Altar... Lungs are of the metal attribute. Is this the true purpose of the altars of five elements? Sacrificial rites are held in the world of immortals for mysterious entities in exchange for great power, is this another such example?"

Lu Yun had once sacrificed the soul of Beigong Chonglou, the crown prince of the North Sea, in exchange for the power to refine the Black Emperor. Did the practice of sacrificial rites originate from the five altars?

Raising his head to look at the giant lungs, he impulsively took out his luopan and projected the minor world again with the Dragonsearch Invocation and Dragonshift Method. He didn't try to copy the giant lungs into the embryonic world this time, but instead tapped into the power of the minor world to study his object of interest.

"It is indeed one single entity, and it's slowly making progress!" Lu Yun couldn't understand the giant lungs, but he could identify the feng shui layout exceeding the grand influence over the world. The qilin, tortoise, and kunpeng nests, along with the nest of the mysterious beast, were one with the giant lungs, forming an incomplete layout.

"It's infinitely close to a real pair of lungs... Can this layout be a layout of creation?" Lu Yun shuddered.

Creation!

Those lungs were patently the organ of a living soul. No humans, nor the power of nature, could create something like this. A layout of creation, on the other hand, could create life, or at least perfect imitations thereof.

“It’s missing two nests! The lungs are currently incomplete. If another two nests are brought here to create a complete layout of six directions, the lungs will fully take shape, growing independent from the layout as they become a real organ.” Light flickered in Lu Yun’s eyes.

A layout of six directions was one of the ten structural feng shui layouts. It represented a relationship of the world, embodying the synergy of all things and the intersection of heaven and earth.

Once the layout took shape, all of the tributes on the altar would be devoured by the giant lungs, transforming them into a bonafide organ.

“If there’s a pair of giant lungs on the Metal Altar... What about the Water and Fire Altar?” Lu Yun mused. “Have the rites there not started, or have they ended and someone already took the organs?”

According to his speculations, there should be a pair of kidneys on the Water Altar and a heart on the Fire Altar.

“What should I do now? Should I destroy this place, or... take the lungs with me?”

A feng shui layout exceeding the grand influences over the world approaches the heights of creation... As a feng shui master and a tomb raider, Lu Yun couldn’t help but covet such a treasure. Even if the lungs were the handiwork of a great powerhouse, that didn’t stop him from wanting them.

“Mi... milord!” called out the statue before the kungpeng nest. Its stone eyes shifted with great difficulty. “Go... Go now!!”

“Beigong Yu?!” Lu Yun started.

Beigong Yu had been sucked into the heart of the celestial master tomb, his true spirit turned into a yin spirit. Not even Lu Yun could resurrect him. He also hadn’t expected Beigong Yu’s yin spirit would be trapped in a stone statue.

“There’s... a yin-yang beast guarding this place! You must go now, milord!” Beigong Yu’s voice grew clearer. Lu Yun could sense his anxiety and nervousness like they were his own.

“A yin-yang beast? Do you mean that creature?” Lu Yun paused and turned to look at the unidentified beast.

The statue began to tremble and crack, and from the cracks came a faint glow. A terrifying presence was unleashed in the next second. Even under the protection of the Tome of Life and Death, Lu Yun couldn’t help but back away, chilled to the bone.

Bam!

“Grrrr!!” The statue suddenly exploded, giving way to an exotic beast of black and white. It looked identical to the statue, with patterns of black and white criss-crossing across its body hinting at a pattern of the world. It lunged at Lu Yun with a flash of light as soon as it emerged.

Bam!

Beigong Yu's statue exploded as well. He turned into a kunpeng and barreled into the yin-yang beast.

Bam!!

The beast turned and struck at Beigong Yu with its two front claws, knocking him off his feet.

"Grrr!!" It tilted its head and howled into the air, unfurling its six pairs of bat wings. Black and white light intertwined in the air, and Beigong Yu was torn to pieces before he could even scream. He turned back into a statue and returned to the spot before the kunpeng nest.

The yin-yang beast turned back and stared at Lu Yun, deep growls sounding from its mouth. Even the Tome of Life and Death trembled slightly under the beast's power.

"What is this thing? How is it possible for the beast to destabilize even the protection of the Tome of Life and Death?!" Shocked, Lu Yun burned another three pieces of karmic fruit. Black light burst forth from the Tome of Life and Death as hellfire circled around his body. He stared fixedly at the slowly approaching beast.

It wasn't too large, running only roughly nine meters long. However, the aura it exuded was far too overwhelming.

Lu Yun paled, his gaze fixed on the approaching beast and his heart heavy. The beast was even more intimidating than Scarlet Ape! He suspected that the yin-yang beast would be able to destroy Scarlet Ape with a single blow, like it had with Beigong Yu.

He wouldn't be its match even if he used the emperor corpse puppet.

The nest behind the beast isn't its nest! The yin-yang beast is the guardian of the Metal Altar. Lu Yun cursed himself for carelessly believing there was no danger here, thus being caught off guard by the guardian beast.

"Once completed, the lungs will be a great treasure more valuable than even the ten connate spirit roots. Of course whoever set up this altar would leave a guardian here. I can only run!" Lu Yun cursed under his breath. He had no other choice, despite his reluctance.

"Oh?" a lazy voice echoed in Lu Yun's head. "A yin-yang beast. How did you run into something like this?"

As Violetgrave the sword leapt from Lu Yun's body, Violetgrave the woman sashayed forth.

The yin-yang beast came to a sudden halt, its dark golden eyes shining with a trace of fear and began retreating.

"Don't worry, I won't eat you." Violetgrave gave the beast a serious once-over and smiled with a subtle gulp of saliva. "You're the last yin-yang beast in the world. Your kind will be truly extinct if I eat you, making that an act of horrific karma. I won't do something like that, even if yin-yang beasts really are very tasty."

The yin-yang beast lay prone on the ground, paralyzed by fear.

“So someone did succeed in copying an organ of the world.” Violetgrave looked up at the lungs, entranced. “One more step, just one more step is all that remains before it fully comes into shape.”

“An organ of the world?” Lu Yun blurted out in disbelief, overwhelmed by the revelation.

“That’s not something you should know about for now.” Violetgrave flicked Lu Yun a sideways glance. “You’re a bold little thing. You do know that only the most powerful beings in the world would be able to create something like this? A simple sweep of their consciousness would be enough to crush a little fellow like you ten thousand times over. And you dare covet this thing?”

Violetgrave naturally knew what the youth was thinking.

Noting her expression, Lu Yun perked up. “Do you have a solution?”

“Are you bargaining with me?” Violetgrave licked her lips, her gaze sending a shudder down Lu Yun’s spine.

“Forget it, I don’t need your help. I’ll think of a way myself.” Lu Yun shifted his attention back to the giant lungs with renewed interest.

“Alright, I’ll be going then.” Violetgrave vanished into the sword, and the sword returned to Lu Yun’s body. After a prolonged yawn, she fell silent.

Seeing her disappear, the yin-yang beast slowly got to its feet, scowling at Lu Yun. But then it froze when Lu Yun was replaced by the terrifying girl in a violet dress from earlier.

Violetgrave!

“Hm, I wonder what tastes better. Roasted yin-yang beast? Or beast stew?” Transforming into Violetgrave, Lu Yun cackled and mimicked her tone.

Having just awakened from its long slumber, the yin-yang beast’s wits weren’t that sharp. It whimpered and fled as soon as Lu Yun made the threat.

Lu Yun’s Shapeshifting art was masterful. He could replicate not only Violetgrave’s appearance, but also her energy and presence. Although he didn’t possess Violetgrave’s strength, it was sufficient to scare the gullible beast.

Mid-escape, the yin-yang beast seemed to realize something. It stopped and turned to Lu Yun, its eyes flashing viciously.

Swoosh!

Violetgrave’s sword form emerged in the air with a flicker of light, sending the yin-yang beast scurrying off with a terrified yowl.

“Tsk tsk, what a scaredy cat.” Lu Yun held the sword and shook his head, transforming back into himself.

“An organ of the world!” He turned back to the giant lungs, his heart pounding. “Someone has replicated an organ of the world... If I can incorporate it, won’t I become as powerful as heaven and earth?” Lu Yun muttered, staring at the giant lungs.

Clink!

Violetgrave hummed, jerking Lu Yun out of his trance. His clothes were drenched in cold sweat.

“It’s alive... it’s sentient!”

### **Chapter 538: Almost a God**

The giant lungs in front of him were sentient and could influence Lu Yun’s mind without him noticing. Even the Tome of Life and Death had failed to ward it off; he would’ve fallen victim to its power if not for Violetgrave’s warning. She hadn’t gone back to sleep yet, patently very interested in the lungs.

Lu Yun took a deep breath and burned another karmic fruit to amplify the power of the Tome of Life and Death. If he hadn’t gained a great amount of goodwill when he resolved the yin spirit invasion of Azure Province, he wouldn’t have had enough karmic fruit to deal with this problem.

“There’s something on you that I can’t see through.” Violetgrave emerged suddenly, her surprised gaze settling on Lu Yun. Troubled, she continued, “I guess I really won’t eat you, you’re too hard on my teeth.”

“You can’t see through it?” Lu Yun asked bemusedly, pointing at the book protecting his body.

Violetgrave gave the treasure a blank stare and shook her head. “I can’t, but I know it’s powerful. You actually stand a chance of taking the lungs with it.”

“Taking the lungs?” Lu Yun’s lips curled into a thin smile. “I was almost fooled by them just now.”

Violetgrave paused. “Oh?”

“The lungs matured a long time ago, and were already taken away by someone else before.” Lu Yun stared at the lungs with Spectral Eye, enunciating every word. “This thing once had a host, but the host was most likely killed and the lungs seriously damaged in the process, so much so that they almost fell apart.

“It’s not incomplete... it’s recuperating.” With the karmic fruit he’d burned, Lu Yun was able to see through to the truth with his Spectral Eye. They weren’t incomplete, but heavily injured.

He could tell the original grand-influence-exceeding layout had been a layout of six directions, and not one consisting of the qilin, turtle, and kumpeng nests, along with the unknown beast nest.

The layout he was seeing now had been set up after the fact to slowly repair the giant lungs. But one thing was for certain—the lungs had been born on the Gold Altar.

“The lungs are nearly a god!” Lu Yun stared at the organ and identified slowly. “All sacrificial rites give birth to divine spirits, whether the hosts intend to do so or not. Whoever attempted to restore the lungs didn’t want them to become such a spirit, so he sent both the lungs and the Metal Altar to this abyss of divine burial.”

Where divine beings are buried.

Here, all divine spirits slowly lose their mental faculties and their intelligence regresses. The lungs had nearly become a god, having gained intelligence and sentience. Being buried in this abyss was the only reason its transformation was incomplete.

Lu Yun was sure that if they successfully reached the peak of their existence, they would become a powerhouse the likes of primeval human kings, dominant and unrivalled between heaven and earth.

Whoever was trying to restore the lungs must have been at a similar level of power.

The human kings had been among the most powerful beings in the world. They'd only refrained from calling themselves emperors due to the fall of the human emperor.

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The yin-yang beast had turned back into a stone statue and lay meekly before the mysterious nest, but its stone eyes remained fixed on Lu Yun and Violetgrave.

"You're right." Violetgrave nodded. "But this place cannot keep the lungs under control."

Violet light shot out of her eyes, breaking apart the gaseous nascent spirit soil.

"This used to be a mausoleum, but it was divided by force," she muttered. "The lungs have been prevented from becoming a god because of the mausoleum. With the mausoleum divided, there's nothing that can stop them now."

"Huh? A mausoleum?" Lu Yun started. "Not a tomb?"

"That's right." Violetgrave nodded. "I know where we are, now. This is the underworld."

"The underworld?" Lu Yun remembered Fangyang Xing calling this place the underworld as well.

"That's right," Violetgrave responded slowly. "The underworld, the resting place of everything. All matters and every living soul enters the underworld upon their passing."

Surprised, Lu Yun widened his eyes at the woman. "That's the underworld? What about hell, then?"

He didn't think she was lying, but to his knowledge, hell should be the resting place of all things in the world. Only there could the dead enter the wheel of reincarnation.

Here in the so-called underworld, Lu Yun saw no hints of reincarnation other than the cycle of the nascent spirit soil. The method he cultivated was the Method of Life and Death, and his six nascent spirits represented the six paths of reincarnation.

Incidentally, the true wheel of reincarnation in hell had been damaged, and Lu Yun hadn't yet reached a point in his cultivation where he could recreate it.

"Hell?" Violetgrave snorted. "I don't know where you heard about that legend, but it's just that—a baseless legend. Hell doesn't actually exist."

After a pause, she continued, "Back when the humans ruled, they once poured forth all of their efforts into creating hell according to the legends. Just like..." She pointed at the lungs on the altar. "The lungs

were created through sacrificial rites and are based on the real organ of the world. The hell you heard about is probably the imitation.

“That was how humans were able to control the life and death of all living beings in different worlds and become the only rulers of the multiverse. Hell’s destruction thus marked the decline of the race.”

Lu Yun lowered his head, silent.

According to Qi Hai, Lu Yun’s hell should be the one humans had created, but Qi Hai didn’t know about the Tome of Life and Death. Plainly, the treasure existed outside of the human hell.

“Humans created the immortal dao and established a heavenly court,” Violetgrave sighed. “But then their hell was destroyed. They could no longer control the life and death of all living beings, and their immortal dao became the dao of all.”

“Are you so certain that hell doesn’t exist?” Lu Yun pointed at the lungs and said. “Someone created this based on an organ of the world...”

“Such organs don’t exist, either.” Violetgrave shook her head. “The so-called organs refer to forces between heaven and earth that serve the same function as the organs of a living being.

“Take the lungs, for example. They function like the organ we know. It’s a power that quietly breathes in the waste exhaust of the world and revitalizes it into heavenly qi. The cycle perpetuates ever onward in the underworld.

“Of course, waste exhaust refers to not only exhausted heavenly qi, but also the remains of the living souls after all matter falls apart. All of them are drawn to this place by the power represented by the lungs.

“Hell doesn’t exist... Perhaps there is some power that serves a similar purpose, but it’s not real.” Violetgrave’s tone made clear her certainty.

### **Chapter 539: Nether Fire**

Lu Yun nodded without a word and turned back to the giant lungs.

“Is there really no such thing as an organ of the world?” he couldn’t help but wonder. All animals, no matter their level of advancement, possessed five yin organs and six yang organs. Even plants grew similar organs at some point throughout the course of their evolution.

The desolate willow in the Skandha Range, for example, had developed a real face that wasn’t just an illusion. Like all other living beings, the desolate willow had nine orifices, five yin organs, and six yang organs.

Once ascending to the void realm, cultivators would be able to draw in the power of heaven and earth and create a minor world within their bodies that was identical to the real world.

Lu Yun didn’t think this ability was a coincidence, as the same was true of feng shui layouts. All layouts were based on something that existed in the world. Even man-made layouts set up by feng shui masters, such as Ghost Deceives God, had been created through combining the existing layouts in nature.

Therefore, hell must exist as well.

Lu Yun was sure that the hell he ruled over would become the hell of legends once it fully evolved. What, then, was the underworld?

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“Do you want those lungs?” Violetgrave asked after a brief pause, noting Lu Yun’s silence.

“Are you offering help?” Lu Yun shook his head. “I don’t dare take it.”

“Don’t worry, I’ve decided not to eat you. You’re too hard to chew.” Violetgrave rubbed her cheeks. “I wonder what the book on you is. I can still kill you despite its protection, but I can’t eat you.”

“Then why would you help me?” Lu Yun pursed his lips in suspicion, abruptly changing the subject. “Ah, you mentioned that this is a mausoleum?”

“That’s right,” Violetgrave explained. “The underworld is a mausoleum. This tomb is just one of the many tombs within it.”

“What about you?” Lu Yun blurted out. “What are you?”

“Me?” Violetgrave dimpled. “I’m Violetgrave.” She whirled around. “Violet meaning Violetgrave, and grave as in Violetgrave.”

Lu Yun shrugged. “That’s not an answer.”

“Alright. I’ll kill the divine spirit in the lungs, then you’ll be able to make them part of your own body!” Violetgrave’s tone turned serious. “I have an idea about who the lungs belonged to, and who killed him and left the lungs here. He must not be allowed to acquire the lungs, else the consequences will be unbearable.”

She stared gravely at Lu Yun. “You must take the lungs. If you refuse, I’ll knock you out and shove them into your body!

“The book won’t let them kill you. This time, it’s not me helping you, but you helping me! In this world, probably only you can refine the lungs without alerting their previous owner.” Faint flames burst from Violetgrave’s eyes like violet ghosts.

Lu Yun stepped back without thinking, gaping at Violetgrave with shock.

“It’s you!!” He stared at the flames in Violetgrave’s eyes. He’d seen the spectre-like flames before... in hell!

The first time he’d seen the flames, he was trying to combine Size Manipulation Talismans with formations.

The second time, Lu Yun had captured an inmate from the depths of hell, attempting to make it his Infernum. The fire had then appeared and reduced the inmate to ashes.

The third time... was in Violetgrave’s eyes!

This was the fire that'd destroyed hell, and it yet remained there, preventing hell from resurrecting. He was deathly certain that if not for the Tome of Life and Death, he would've been burned to a crisp by this fire that was more dreadful than hellfire.

"Me?" Violetgrave paused and considered Lu Yun. "What are you talking about?"

Lu Yun inhaled deeply to push down his agitation and asked tentatively, "Did you destroy the hell of the human race?"

"I didn't," Violetgrave said, shaking her head.

"Then why is the fire in your eyes the same as the one that destroyed the human hell?" Lu Yun had thrown all reservation out of the window.

Violetgrave had always been with him in sword form. Although Violetgrave the woman had been asleep, she must have noticed many of his secrets.

Hearing Lu Yun's question, emotions warred on her face. "Destroy the human hell... Has he grown that much?"

Lu Yun remained silent, waiting for her explanation. After all, he had refined the sword. With it, Violetgrave would hibernate in his body. He wouldn't rest easy until she gave him an answer.

"I know who he is." Violetgrave nodded. "The fire is indeed mine. The person who destroyed hell was the first to make a deal with me to acquire a wisp of Nether Fire. Then he gave me something else in exchange for his life, just like the Sword of Dao."

"Nether Fire?" Lu Yun nodded. "Is that what this kind of fire is called? It's more powerful than hellfire."

"The fire in you is hellfire?" Violetgrave started. "So the place that has been eluding my senses is a shard of hell from the Primeval human race. You're wrong, though. Hellfire is the most powerful flame in the world."

Fear flashed through her eyes in echo of a memory she'd rather not relive.

"If there's something similar to that fabled hell, then it'd be hellfire... The human emperor imprisoned hellfire by force back in the day in order to create hell.

"Alright, let's not talk about this further!" She inhaled deeply, schooling her expression.

It was the first time Lu Yun had ever seen a display of emotion from her. She was an enigma, something that didn't seem alive. With the glimpses that Lu Yun had caught, though, she also felt like a real person.

"You, eat the lungs! Or put them in your body!" Violetgrave demanded overbearingly. "Otherwise I'll show you what the Nether Fire is capable of!"

"Alright, alright..." Lu Yun agreed hurriedly. "But I'm not going to put the lungs in my own body. I'll put them in my replica, instead."

He didn't want someone else's organ in him. Moreover, the lungs would increase his cultivation and strength by leaps and bounds; however, he knew in his heart that he had to build a strong foundation and take baby steps in cultivating the Method of Life and Death.

If his strength exceeded his cultivation, perhaps something bad would happen. The connate cultivation method was tailor-made for Lu Yun and there were no shortcuts to be had. He had to improve himself step by step.

His replica, though, didn't share that concern. Lu Yun wanted to improve Xing Chen's strength as quickly as possible to make him his new secret weapon. The world of immortals was becoming ever more chaotic, and Lu Yun knew with absolute certainty that his trump card, the corpse puppet, would be used in the near future.

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"Alright." Violetgrave nodded. She'd regained her usual nonchalance. "Watch my sword."

Swoosh!

In sword form, she slashed at the giant lungs with a flash of violet.

#### **Chapter 540: Sword Dao**

At Violetgrave's suggestion, Lu Yun glanced toward the light and was promptly dazzled by the radiance.

The ray of ethereal sword light slashed toward the lungs with bewitching simplicity. There was nothing complicated at all about the attack, yet Lu Yun saw thousands of permutations hidden therein. This was no longer a sword art, but an exhibition of sword dao.

"How can this be?" His mind exploded with incredulity. Something surfaced within him, then was promptly reclaimed by a layer of mental haze. He didn't understand; how could such a straightforward stroke be imbued with so much meaning?

Even a pure sword immortal would be incapable of such a feat! This was beyond the realm of technique and, in fact, infinitely approached the dao.

Was this Violetgrave's true strength?

He opened his eyes as wide as he could, both physical and Spectral. He was completely fixated on the sword—it was paradoxically slow and incredibly fast all at once. The stroke was so powerful that it affected the flow of time around it.

"Aaaaaah!"

A pained shriek came from the giant lung as a monstrous face appeared upon the organ's surface. Contorted in an expression of immense fury, it bit down viciously upon the sword light.

Splort!

The sword pierced a gaping hole through the face's mouth, rupturing the lung in a shower of inky blood. The shrieking grew louder and shriller, sounding like a butchered animal's death cries. By now, the lingering violet in the air had all but dissipated, but the sword intent remained. Cut after cut soared toward the giant lungs with invisible determination.

"What kind of sword technique is this?!" Lu Yun's focus wasn't on the lungs anymore. He was completely absorbed in Violetgrave's sword dao instead.

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“Violetgrave!” an outraged roar cracked through the air. The yin-yang beast that had turned into a statue earlier returned to its original form and substance. It pounced with a frantic howl at a faint violet shadow in a certain corner.

“Hmph, I knew it was you!” Violetgrave delivered another slash with a small huff. The blow was identical to her last, but the yin-yang beast had become very different.

Gone was its cowardly behavior from moments ago. Another will seemed to be coursing through its body, granting it a new, terrifying strength.

It waved its four foreclaws around wildly, unleashing wave after wave of rippling black-and-white air. Miraculously, they managed to block Violetgrave’s attack.

Evidently, Violetgrave had recognized the yin-yang beast’s true identity long ago, but had held back earlier to avoid attracting the hidden person’s attention. However, her attack on the lungs was more than enough commotion to awaken this place’s master.

“Quick, do whatever you need to take away that lung! I’ve killed the divine spirit inside!” the sword’s voice filled Lu Yun’s head.

Unfortunately, her warning fell on deaf ears. The young man was still immersed in her sword dao. Her battle with the yin-yang beast had taught him many extraordinary lessons, several of which went far beyond the realm of mere swordplay.

“Tsk...” Violetgrave noticed his distraction with some annoyance. Lu Yun’s inopportune reverie and immersion in the pursuit of sword dao was definitely outside her plans. “Damn it, this yin-yang beast is only a replica of that one. If we stay here much longer, the actual person will notice, sooner or later.”

She became rather anxious, but there was nothing to be done now. She was quite strong, but the yin-yang beast’s original was stronger still. Right now, delaying it was the only thing she could do.

“I’m still sleepy... and so hungry... maybe I should eat the yin-yang beast...” Muttering to herself, Violetgrave snuck a glance at Lu Yun instead. “Can’t eat that, not that one. That’ll get stuck in my teeth...”

“What to do, what to do... This is the underworld, so that old thing can arrive at any minute. If he notices me, he’ll try to refine me for sure.” She turned around in circles as she deliberated with dismay through her battle.

Thrum...

The air suddenly began to hum. A set of ancient, battered doors rumbled open, allowing a pitch-black coffin borne upon nine dragon corpses to emerge.

The Enneaworm Coffinbearers.

Shff, creak—

The coffin lid opened with considerable noise and a giant skeletal arm reached out toward the lung.

“What is that?!” Violetgrave screamed at the sight.

The yin-yang beast battling it out with her was similarly terrified and screeched to a halt.

“He... he... he’s still alive!” it wailed. “Impossible! He’s actually still alive!”

“Who is ‘he’?” Violetgrave looked instinctively at the yin-yang beast, who wasted no time at all in re-petrifying itself. It fell to the ground with a resonant thump, bouncing a few times before coming to a complete stop.

The sword spirit bunched up her slender eyebrows, noting that the will upon the yin-yang beast had departed.

She peeked at Lu Yun again. The young man’s eyes were now screwed shut and he’d begun waving his hands maniacally in the air, mimicking her sword strike as best he could.

A second hand came out of the coffin, grabbing onto the lungs alongside the first. The ruptured organ was slowly dragged into the ancient doors, after which they slammed shut.

“Those... are the Gates of the Abyss of the human race,” Violetgrave murmured. “A fragment of hell lies behind them... so that’s where the Nether Fire is after all.

“But, it’s not really hell either... it’s something even scarier than that. Could he have been right? Is there really a Hell in this world?”

She shook her head, then melted back into the body of her sword. The blade then vanished into Lu Yun in a flash of light.

“Too hard, too tough. My teeth would hurt! There’s no way I’m eating him... for real this time!

“What a disaster, what a loss! He’s refined Violetgrave already, so I can’t leave... and I can’t eat him, either. Am I supposed to follow him around for the rest of his life?!” Violetgrave’s dismal wail echoed through the air.

After the lung was dragged into hell, the offerings upon the altar disappeared. The only things that remained were the four nests, and the depths of the fifth abyss of divine burial fell into complete darkness.

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“This is the essence of sword dao. Far more than just the sword, it embodies all things!

“One stroke divides heaven from earth. One stroke separates yin from yang. One stroke begets all things.”

Two sparks of steel flashed through Lu Yun’s eyes when he next opened them. “The sword methods I used to use... Vast Dragon Seaturner, Starstream Stroke... what a joke! A single stroke from Violetgrave can stomp the intent in all of them,” he laughed helplessly to himself.

“Wait a sec!” he gasped. “Where did those lungs go? The nascent spirit soil here is gradually disappearing, too...”

The daze of understanding Violetgrave’s sword dao had blinded him to everything else in his immediate environment. He was lucid now, but an improbably long amount of time had already passed.

“Eh?” A thought came to him and he went back to hell to find a huge pair of lungs suspended in midair. They respired with a calm indifference that he definitely did not share.

“How’d that get in here?” Lu Yun tilted his head in disbelief.

“Lu Yun!” Standing upon the resurrection layout’s floating peak, Qing Yu called out to him. “What happened just now? Why did the coffin drag these lungs inside?”

She pointed at the Enneaworm Coffinbearers at the center of hell.

“The coffin did it, eh?” Lu Yun shook his head, dizzy with the implication.

He tried to call upon Violetgrave, only to find the world inside the sword aglow with black sparkles. Just like Empress Myrtlestar and the others inside the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals, she was sealed off by the power of hell.

“Oh.” Blinking, he saw the little nun staring at him.

She’d woken up from Ghost Deceives God somehow, and excitement was practically written across her face. It seemed she’d already joined Qing Yu's study group.

"I dunno, really." Lu Yun rubbed his forehead gingerly. "You guys can carry on. I won't stay and bother you."

He ran—er, left—hell as fast as he could. The little nun pouted at Qing Yu, who giggled with a hand over her mouth.

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About an hour later, the gaseous sand beneath the Abyss of Divine Burial was no more, but Lu Yun still had no idea how to leave.