

Necropolis 561

Chapter 561: A Woman

Lu Yun opened the Spectral Eye and strode forward.

Swish!

His figure disappeared from view before reappearing on the other side: Wandering Step, the brand-new death art born from the fusion of the Boundless Step with the Spectral Eye.

Now that he was using it like a combat art, Yu Hengluo's attacks couldn't even brush the hem of his clothes.

Despite the first successful usage of the art in battle, Lu Yun was rather glum at the moment. In the short instant Yu Hengluo had come near him, he'd sensed her pain as clear as day.

Such pain didn't simply come from the flesh. It wasn't the kind caused by flayed skin, gouged eyes, torn tongue, ripped nose, or severed ears, either. No, it was pain that strained upward from deep within the soul.

"She can still come back to life as long as her soul exists!" Lu Yun inhaled deeply. He hadn't given up on her yet.

The soul was a broad term that encompassed the combination of the three ethereal soul-parts, seven corporal soul-parts, and nascent spirit. It was something that every cultivator possessed after reaching the spirit realm.

Currently, Yu Hengluo's soul had yet to dissipate, but it was sealed inside her flesh and her body had been turned into some unknown kind of zombie, a condition Lu Yun was unable to cure for the moment.

The resurrection layout! As long as I can put her physical body inside the resurrection layout, there's a chance she can be brought back to life!

Whoosh!

He immediately went on the offensive, planning to use the faceless ghosts as a whetstone for his sword dao. At the same time, he had to be careful not to injure Yu Hengluo. Meanwhile, as Jing Huaci made her way to the cross, Lu Yun could clearly see her speed decrease after entering the peak's vicinity.

"Time... time flows slower in there!" Lu Yun started. "No, wait a second... It's more accurate to say that the flow of time returns to normal when close to the peak. The way out of this space should be right inside."

He once again immersed himself in his nascent sword dao, but his attention was currently divided in three. The first part monitored Yu Hengluo, while the second kept an eye on Jing Huaci. Therefore, it was impossible for him to wholeheartedly devote himself to cultivation at the moment.

"Sure enough, neither Yu Hengluo nor the faceless ghosts can see Jing Huaci." Lu Yun sighed in relief. Yu Hengluo was still hot on his tail, relentlessly raining down fearsome attacks and intent on tearing him to pieces.

“Wait, what the fuck?!” Lu Yun shook as the sword river wreathed around him shattered before he could react. Aghast, he stared at Yu Hengluo. From her mangled body, he could see the sudden growth of strands of red hair. They looked like tiny arteries extending from her flesh, but were in fact, a hair-like substance.

Not only that, but her body was also undergoing some sort of transformation. The long crimson hairs coiled around the complex of flesh and bones, breaking them down and reassembling them anew into something completely different.

“A crimson long-haired monster!” Lu Yun’s heart pounded. “She’s starting to give off the same presence as those black long-haired monsters. Don’t tell me this is how these monsters are born?”

He glanced at the mountain peak’s silver glow, fear flashing through his eyes.

Crackle!

Without delay, he retracted his sword and summoned hellfire around him, then punched Yu Hengluo square in the chest.

“Ah!!” A shriek pierced his eardrums as the blood-like hairs burned to a crisp the moment they came in contact with his hellfire.

“Sect Head... it hurts...” Yu Hengluo’s plaintive voice echoed in Lu Yun’s ears.

“Her skin and facial organs are all beneath the silver peak.” He hugged her mutilated body to himself and dashed toward the peak.

As he did so, hellfire relentlessly vied with the strange power inside Yu Hengluo in an effort to incinerate the newly-grown crimson hairs. Though Lu Yun’s efforts were successful, the mutilated girl’s aura grew steadily weaker.

She’s alive!

So not only her soul, but even her body was still alive?!

She wasn’t even zombified to begin with!

She... she’s been being tortured by this immense pain all along! Lu Yun’s heart twisted with pain.

He’d thought her dead up until now, believing that her body had turned into a zombie while her soul had been imprisoned inside her flesh... But now, the ramifications of his erroneous assumption dawned on him.

She’d been alive all along!

“Bastard! Whoever you are, I’ll have your head!” A deep growl rose from his throat. He promptly cleared a way forward with hellfire and barreled inside the silver peak’s confines.

Faceless ghosts threw themselves at him in endless waves, but hellfire kept them firmly at bay.

“Senior brother Lu, the flow of time here is different from the outside!” Jing Huaci couldn’t help but shudder at the sight of the bloody mass of flesh in Lu Yun’s arms.

"I knew it, the flow of time here is normal." Lu Yun let out a breath.

"That woman... she's right ahead of us!" Jing Huaci cautiously ventured.

"What woman?" Most of Lu Yun's attention was on Yu Hengluo, so he was a little baffled by Jing Huaci's words.

"You know, the one... who can turn people into faceless ghosts." Jing Huaci surreptitiously hid behind him. She had a sneaking suspicion that the woman could see her.

Lu Yun raised his head and looked directly in front of him. There was a green shadow quietly standing below the cross, and he could feel a line of sight focused on him.

"It's Emerald Mistfire... It's become sentient!" Lu Yun's expression stiffened somewhat at the sight.

He'd once taken a wisp of Emerald Mistfire and put it into a bronze lantern, then built a layout from it. The immortal fire had emulated Yuying's appearance when it took form. And now, that same wisp of flame had unexpectedly developed a fire spirit and become a separate existence altogether, just like the Tiger and Dragon Princes.

Crackle!

A ball of green fire ignited from the emerald-green figure the next moment, and shortly after, a skeleton walked out of the fire.

There was no flesh or blood on its bones, but in its fleshless eye sockets sat a pair of crimson eyes. There was also a pair of slight protrusions where the ears would have been, as if it'd grown a real pair of ears.

"Wayfarer?" Lu Yun gawked. "No, it's not Wayfarer... What the hell is that thing?"

He didn't dare budge as the blood-red eyes fixated on him with an intense stare.

"Senior brother Lu, it's a woman." Jing Huaci hastened to correct him when she heard him mention Wayfarer.

Wayfarer's name had resounded far and wide lately, especially after the Art Saint had verbally guaranteed Nephrite Major's safety following Zhao Changkong's demise, deterring factions far and wide from attacking the major.

Wayfarer, Dusk Province's governor from a thousand years ago, Art Saint of the world of immortals!

But he was male, and Jing Huaci could clearly see that the figure was a woman.

Lu Yun opened the Spectral Eye, but its feedback was vague and indistinct. It was impossible to discern the exact nature of what he was facing. However, there was one thing he was sure of: the skeleton burning with Emerald Mistfire belonged to Wayfarer.

As for a woman... he didn't see anyone.

"Senior brother Lu, she's coming this way."

Plip! Plop! Plip!

The sound of dripping water once again traveled into his ears.

Chapter 562: Ascending to Immortality Through the Void Realm

Though Lu Yun could hear the sound of dripping water, he didn't suffer from its effects. Thanks to the hellfire suffusing the air around him, he was impervious to these kinds of strange attacks.

What made his blood run cold was that Jing Huaci was seeing a woman coming their way, but Lu Yun's Spectral Eye didn't see her anywhere.

"She's... she's crying." Jing Huaci tugged at his clothes in shuddering apprehension. "She saw me. She's looking at me. Senior brother Lu, I'm... I'm afraid."

Plip! Plop! Plip!

The sound of dripping water grew ever louder, but also more indistinct. To Lu Yun, the sound didn't seem to register in the ears, but reverberated in the depths of the soul.

"Sh- she's coming... Senior brother Lu, she's standing right in front of you!" Jing Huaci suddenly blubbered. "Senior brother Lu, save me... She's going to take me away..."

Crackle!

Hellfire flared to life, enveloping her figure within.

"Show yourself." Lu Yun's voice was serene, but also contained a hint of frost.

His eyes saw nothing and his consciousness couldn't detect anything nearby. But the moment hellfire started burning, he clearly sensed a fleeting, terrified stroke of emotions.

Yu Hengluo's skin and facial organs suddenly rose into the air, as though something was draping her skin on itself and attaching her features to its face. And then, a naked Yu Hengluo stood in front of him.

"Sect Head, it's me." Her tones were ethereal, and her lovely eyes limpid as the autumn waters as she looked throbbingly at him. Tears flowed out of her eyes and landed on the ground. She was crying.

However, Lu Yun noticed that when her tears fell to the ground, they elicited very subtle ripples that further transformed into strange undulations.

"Sect Head, your servant hurts so very much." Her skin stood in front of the cross and looked forlornly at him. "Give me the small dragon behind you. I'll stop hurting after I eat it."

A shiver coursed through Jing Huaci's spine as she dashed behind Lu Yun and covered her face with the lower hem of his clothes.

Lu Yun looked down at the mangled hunk of flesh in his arms. Through the Spectral Eye, he could clearly sense Yu Hengluo's spirit, as well as the soul-parts deep within. Her soul remained complete and unbroken, and while her nascent spirit had been wounded, it maintained its integrity nonetheless.

He then looked at the existence in front of him that was wearing Yu Hengluo's skin; she was still looking pitifully at him. Her tearful gaze struck a chord with the deepest reaches of his heart, the softest part of him.

“Who are you?” he asked very gently, his emotions affected by her. “If you want to live, I can help you.”

“Help me? Live?” The voice was still Yu Hengluo’s, but there was now a hint of derision in those eyes swimming with tears. “Who will revive the countless immortals buried here? Who will revive all those lives refined into bone bricks? Who will revive that fallen era...?”

“Is that why you’re killing the people here? Is that why you’re turning the living into faceless ghosts?” Lu Yun scoffed.

The woman fell silent, shoulders shaking as she wept inaudibly. Each of her tears hit the ground with an audible plop, rippling outward in every direction and giving rise to faceless ghosts wherever they spread. Still, she said nothing.

“Take off Yu Hengluo’s skin. Use your real form to talk to me!” Lu Yun burned three karmic fruits and infused a gentle current of hellfire into Yu Hengluo’s body, smothering the strange crimson power inside her. After that, he jolted her soul with another wisp of hellfire and forced her to faint.

Making her lose consciousness was the only way to alleviate her pain. Otherwise, he couldn’t begin to imagine how excruciating her torment must be.

Crash!

The next moment, Yu Hengluo’s skin and facial features tumbled to the ground as well, nary a peep out of them afterwards.

“Senior brother Lu, she’s gone now,” Jing Huaci whispered softly.

“Good,” Lu Yun sighed softly in relief. As it turned out, the terrible art that could transform living creatures into faceless ghosts was nothing more than this woman’s tears. “Is she the same woman I defeated when we first arrived here?”

“Yes.” Jing Huaci nodded. “But her power wanes when she leaves the mountain’s peak.”

“The mountain’s peak...?” Lu Yun cast his gaze up at the tall, majestic mountain. The boundless swarm of faceless ghosts had returned to their perch. They huddled on the peak, fixated on him with their blank, featureless faces.

Lu Yun paid them no heed, since they posed no threat to him. Instead, he squatted down and collected the skin and facial organs, then sent them together with Yu Hengluo’s flesh into hell.

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After being incinerated by Emerald Mistfire, the only things left of Wayfarer’s body were a pair of crimson eyeballs and two blood-red ears, both lying motionless on the ground.

Wayfarer’s bamboo staff had been snapped and the bronze lantern refined by Lu Yun shattered, the tiny Emerald Mistfire flame inside about to be snuffed out.

“The Skinning Spike is also broken! Just what the heck happened here?” Lu Yun noted the fearsome Skinning Spike beside the cross. Just like the chains and shackles he’d obtained, the spike contained a

certain kind of hell's 'dao'. The shackles and chains were treasures of the human hell, used to restrain prisoners and apprehend yin spirits.

Likewise, the Skinning Spike was a treasure from the seventeenth layer of hell. Used as an instrument of punishment on those sentenced to flaying, it could strip any creature it punctured of its skin.

But now, this treasure of hell lay destroyed.

"This spike really is from the seventeenth level of the human hell!" Lu Yun picked up the broken item. With its runes destroyed, it could no longer serve its intended function, but he recognized its provenance at first glance nonetheless.

"Huaci, the woman just now, did you see where she went?" The subject of his questioning was clinging to him like a koala. Lu Yun ended up having to peel her off so he could set her down on the ground.

Terror lingered on Jing Huaci's face. In fact, she'd been scared witless after she'd heard the woman mention something about eating her. Still, she shook her head. "She wasn't there anymore as soon as she turned around."

"Is she behind everything that's happened here?" Lu Yun walked up to the cross. "Huaci, try refining this time treasure."

"Ah? Me?" Jing Huaci was taken aback. "You don't want it for yourself?"

"Nope." Lu Yun shook his head. This place was incredibly strange. He was already having a hard time protecting himself, to say nothing of guaranteeing her safety as well.

Yu Hengluo was currently neither human nor ghost, and Zou Longxiu's fate was unknown. Jing Huaci was Jing Dichen's younger sister, the treasured pearl of the six profligates. If she were to die again in this place, he didn't know how he would face the six of them.

More importantly...

The six profligates had come to the tomb in search of an immortal crystal mountain for him. There was a friendship he would always remember. For him, this kind of comradeship was so much more important than trivial treasures.

"With this thing, no one will be able to eat you in the future." Lu Yun grinned.

"There are still people who want to eat me...?" The silly little girl finally nodded in agreement. "But what about the faceless ghosts on it?"

"Get lost!!" All around Lu Yun, flames of hellfire erupted into a fiery ocean that churned toward the mountain peak.

The faceless ghosts screeched in fear and immediately scuttled down from the peak, then vanished from sight. The second they left, rays of iridescent radiance shot into the sky and bathed the small world in gleaming silver.

"You can start, I'll stand guard." Lu Yun smiled at Jing Huaci.

A tad embarrassed, she took a deep breath and sat down cross-legged in front of the cross, bending her mind to the task. Although it was a formidable item, she was a dragon; and one with a special constitution at that. Refining it was no trouble for her.

Why do I get the feeling this girl looks at me the same way as Yu Hengluo and the little nun does? Thinking of Yu Hengluo, Lu Yun's heart ached again.

Sadly, he couldn't return to hell right now. Qing Han, his envoys, and Ge Long had reached a critical stage in their research to create a deduction method for combat arts. At the same time, the immortal daos of both hell and the world were absorbing this new school of thought, using Lu Yun's body as a conduit.

If he were to return to hell, it'd immediately cut off the connection between the two worlds. With that turn of events, the method would become hell's local oddity, losing its chance to be engraved in the immortal dao of the greater world at large.

For that reason, he couldn't go back yet.

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Jing Huaci was knee-deep in refining the cross, but as soon as she began, Lu Yun saw a gigantic specter rush forth from it, roaring madly in an attempt to stop the refinement.

However, the specter couldn't see Jing Huaci's existence, so after a few moments of empty snarling, it returned from whence it came.

What a fearsome specter... Judging by the aura it emits, it's at least in the origin dao realm! Lu Yun goggled and fidgeted uneasily. This must be some kind of formidable ghostly being. If I'd been the one refining the treasure...

Even if hellfire and hell's aura could restrain ghosts, the specter's strength wasn't something he could withstand. Most likely, he would've been flattened in a second flat. Thankfully, it seemed that the specter couldn't see Jing Huaci, no matter how formidable it was.

Welp, it looks like she is the only one who can refine it. Lu Yun looked at her and sighed.

"Sir Lu... you have to leave immediately! Go now!" All of a sudden, a heavily wounded Zhang Shuo came rushing in. "An immortal who's experienced the void realm has come to claim the treasure here!"

Pfft!

He wasn't yet done talking when a beam of light pierced his back and disintegrated him.

Fangyang Xing's figure gradually came into view.

Chapter 563: Timelight Tower

"So you've ascended to immortality, Fangyang Xing." Lu Yun slowly called out the name of the newcomer, his expression tense.

A void-ascended immortal!

Fangyang Xing had ascended to immortality from the void realm!

Cultivators in the void realm could rival regular immortals, and many of them could in fact kill immortals with ease.

Void-ascended immortals, however, were a completely different story.

Lu Yun had felt most keenly how much more powerful void-ascended immortals were than regular immortals or void realm cultivators when Xing Chen became an immortal. The gap between them was as great as the distance between heaven and earth!

That one extra step bridged the gap between mundane mortality and magnificent immortality.

Prior to the emergence of the void realm, nascent spirit cultivators might stretch beyond their mortality and slay immortals if they were powerful enough. Wu Tulong was one such example, having killed a cultivation-suppressed dao immortal in the past.

Void-ascended immortals, however, were in a different league entirely. Even the most powerful of void realm cultivators wouldn't be able to defeat a void-ascended immortal. Lu Yun was no exception, either.

He could defeat regular peerless immortals, but he was no match for a void-ascended true immortal unless he had his replica by his side. Unfortunately, Xing Chen had been smashed by the golden scarlet ape and recovery wouldn't be achieved overnight. Moreover, Lu Yun couldn't return to hell until Qing Yu completed her deduction method and incorporated it into the immortal dao of both worlds, giving rise to a standalone school of thought.

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"Out of my way." A trace of pride shone through Fangyang Xing's mask of impassiveness.

A void-ascended immortal! He'd done it!

He would be the second void-ascended immortal after Mo Yi in the world of immortals if nothing went wrong in the interim. Well... he couldn't quite be considered a cultivator of this world, and was even less of a living being. His existence was difficult to categorize as he wasn't alive. He'd merely manifested here using another body.

Scanning Lu Yun briefly, he shifted his attention back to the silver summit.

"The Timelight Tower! It really is the Timelight Tower! That's the treasure of Empress Timelight! ...away with you!" With a wave of his hand, a great surge of force barrelled out of his hand and bore down on Jing Huaci.

Bam!

Lu Yun sprang to action as well, stepping before Jing Huaci and splitting the great force with Violetgrave. His body shook after the move and his hands trembled uncontrollably, but his lips were curled into a smile.

"Oh?" Fangyang Xing leveled Lu Yun with a cold stare. "You're a great talent, Lu Yun. As a disciple of the Firmament Palace, I don't wish to harm you."

He was a man with an iron will, and he never gave up once he'd made up his mind. When he'd sensed the existence of the void realm at peak transformed spirit realm and actuated the white path with his grasp of dao, he'd resolutely ventured onto the path despite the terrifying long-haired monsters.

Now, he had his eyes set on the silver summit—the Timelight Tower. It was the personal treasure of a great empress who'd walked the world before the death of the human emperor!

“Kill me? You can't do that yet.” Lu Yun flashed a grin. “You've ascended to immortality after the void realm, yes, but you haven't passed your immortal tribulation yet, have you? That means you aren't a true immortal yet, just a void-realm immortal at most.”

The true immortal realm was the first level of immortality. Baptism by heavenly lightning would temper dross into trueness, transforming one's internal energy into that of an immortal's. Although Fangyang Xing had ascended to immortality, he had yet to transform into a true immortal via heavenly tribulation.

Xing Chen hadn't passed a tribulation either, but he was a replica. Lu Yun himself wasn't an immortal yet, so naturally there was no immortal tribulation for him to face.

Moreover, Xing Chen had been propelled to immortality by the strength of the great lungs. The organ's previous host had been a powerful immortal in their own right, thus benefitting Xing Chen.

Lu Yun didn't fear Fangyang Xing, as there was a world's difference in immortality before and after overcoming that final obstacle.

“Hmph!” Fangyang Xing harrumphed. It was true that he hadn't overcome his tribulation yet. The celestial master tomb was so strange that it eluded the immortal tribulation's detection. If he was to become a true immortal, he'd have to leave the tomb first.

However, many treasures had emerged after the tomb had become whole again, including the one right before them. There would be no treasures left for him to claim after returning from his tribulation.

Moreover, he'd noticed many void realm cultivators in the tomb who were a hair's breadth away from ascending to immortality. They were just suppressing their cultivation with everything at their disposal, rather than allowing themselves to ascend like Fangyang Xing had.

“So what? I can kill you as easily as killing a dog.” Killing intent flashed through his eyes. “Although the Firmament Palace has taken note of you and decided to take you in as a disciple after your death, you must die for Empress Timelight's treasure.”

The tower was not only the personal treasure of the great empress, but also a potential container for her heritage.

A primeval great empress was a greater existence than even the primordial immortal emperor. Her heritage was far too valuable to allow fall into others' hands, and information about the treasure was too important to allow out of the bag.

Therefore, Fangyang Xing had killed every immortal outside, Zhang Shuo had been the last of them.

Swoosh!

Fangyang Xing's sword moved as soon as he finished talking, stabbing at Lu Yun's forehead with impressive precision, steadiness, and ruthlessness.

"So quick!" Lu Yun reflexively threw Violetgrave into the air to block the attack, but a second and third slash swept over him like tidal waves before he could even recover his breath.

Too quick and too vicious!

He had to rely on instinct to barely block Fangyang Xing's attacks. Caught on the back foot, he gave way defensively and his breathing grew labored. Blood streaked down his fingers.

Lu Yun had yet to meet an opponent like Fangyang Xing since his arrival in the world of immortals. The silver scarlet ape had simply overpowered him with raw power, while Fangyang Xing was not only more powerful, but also more skilled with the sword. Lu Yun's mind barely had any time to react to the motions.

Bam!

A mighty push smashed Lu Yun into the silver summit, splattering fresh blood everywhere.

"Sword dao. So you've touched upon the doorframe to the way of the sword." Fangyang Xing lowered his sword, his gaze flickering with unexplained emotions. "I really don't want to kill you, but... you must die today."

He moved again, his speed growing threefold. "I may not have weathered my tribulation, but the strength of a void-ascended immortal is still beyond your comprehension!"

A single slash descended upon Lu Yun with overwhelming, incontrovertible power. To his horror, he realized that he couldn't dodge the attack.

The slash seemed to have become one with the air. No matter where Lu Yun dodged, no matter how he blocked with his sword, he could neither stop nor evade the attack. He could only take it head on.

Clang!

The shadow of a golden bell emerged beside Lu Yun. Fangyang Xing's powerful attack slammed into the bell, triggering a burst of brilliant gold and knocking him a dozen steps backward..

"Ah, a dao immortal treasure refined by a false immortal." Lifting an eyebrow, he sniffed derisively.

The Arcane Golden Bell appeared in its true form beneath Lu Yun's feet. Ugly cracks snaked through the signature treasure of the Qing Clan, a sign that it'd been... destroyed.

Fangyang Xing had demolished a dao immortal treasure with a single slash!

Lu Yun's expression turned broodingly dark. If he hadn't summoned the bell at the last moment just now, he would've been killed.

I won't even have the chance to react once he passes his tribulation. I'd be dead as soon as the thought occurs to me. The gap between us is too great.

Lu Yun's heart still quailed from the destruction of the dao-grade treasure. The Arcane Golden Bell was a defensive item that should've been almost invincible. But it'd cracked so easily beneath Fangyang Xing's attack, even though he wasn't a true immortal yet.

His combat arts are flawless, the full strength of which can only be brought to bear by a void-ascended immortal.

More importantly, even though the Arcane Golden Bell was so powerful that it stumped even origin dao immortals, it was nothing but a false immortal treasure in the eyes of void-ascended immortals. It'd been forged by the Qing ancestor himself—a powerful man, but a false immortal nonetheless.

Ascending to the dao immortal realm meant nothing without experiencing the void realm, making the immortal dao within the bell incomplete.

Fangyang Xing stalked toward Lu Yun, sword raised at the ready.

"I will let you live if you erase this memory yourself." Fangyang Xing looked at Lu Yun. "You are an initiate in the path of sword dao. It is not your dao, but that makes you a rare talent even by the standards of the Firmament Palace. We highly value people like you."

Fangyang Xing's words hit a nerve and Lu Yun's heart skipped a beat. "There are other cultivators in the Firmament Palace who have discovered sword dao?"

"What do you think? Anyone who has trod the path of sword dao throughout history comes to the palace." Fangyang Xing smiled faintly. "Erase your memory, and I will guarantee your entrance to the Firmament Palace upon your death."

Lu Yun's expression darkened. "After my death?"

"Naturally, you will die." Fangyang Xing glanced at Violetgrave. "Not only because you're the owner of Violetgrave, but also because you're a genius. As the top genius of the world of immortals, your fate is already written. You will die."

"Of course, you will die here and now if you don't erase your memory of the tower, and your soul will be scattered, depriving you of a chance to reincarnate!" The sword in his raised hand glowed a faint blue. "I walk the path of sword dao as well—void sword dao!"

Chapter 564: The Skyturning Seal

Void sword dao, a sword that pierces the void itself!

Just now, Fangyang Xing's final strike had touched upon the domain of space. If not for the Arcane Golden Bell that Qing Han had loaned to Lu Yun, the attack most likely would've ended him for good.

"Sword dao of the void... This sword dao doesn't belong to you either, does it?" Lu Yun tightened his grasp on Violetgrave, mockery creeping across his face.

Though formidable, the attack had required Fangyang Xing's full power. Moreover, his comprehension of sword dao was shallower than Lu Yun's.

Lu Yun had already begun to fumble into his own sword dao thanks to Violetgrave's inspiration, while Fangyang Xing was still mimicking someone else. As such, he couldn't truly be called an initiate in the dao of the sword.

"It's enough to kill you." Fangyang Xing's sword hummed in his hand and released an azure beam of light that vibrated the surrounding space.

Hum!

He suddenly struck out once more. The firmament awash with azure light, his attack pierced forward with the momentum of rolling thunder, crowding the sky with a dense lattice of illusory swords.

Faster than one could blink, he stabbed forth a full eighty-one times, each thrust filled with monstrous power. Those eighty one swords assaulted not only Lu Yun, but also the meditating Jing Huaci, who was in the middle of refining the Timelight Tower.

Each of them is as strong as the attack from earlier! He really isn't pulling any punches! Lu Yun trembled in the face of the pressure bearing down on him. Whatever, let's do this! He gritted his teeth.

Boom!

Eighteen karmic fruits went up in flames and flooded his body with the colossal power of virtuous merit. Hellfire simultaneously erupted as well, its black flames setting his body aflame.

Hummm.

A peculiar violet sword light blossomed his hand as he slashed forward.

Vast Dragon Seaturner!

Peng of Kun!

Starstream Stroke!

Endless Cosmic Ocean!

Four sword forms blended perfectly into one, combining and fusing together to give rise to endless variations. And in that instant—

From one, the sword also became eighty-one as it collided with Fangyang Xing's swords. Violet and azure entwined together in the air before canceling each other out.

A terrifying energy deluged Lu Yun's body.

Puff!

Blood steamed out of his pores as he sagged to the ground, devoid of strength. Meanwhile, Fangyang Xing was sent flying by the impact. A Lu Yun who'd been boosted by the might of hellfire and eighteen karmic fruits wasn't something that could be withstood by a void-realm immortal that was yet to undergo their immortal tribulation.

Gurgle gurgle gurgle.

Strange noises emitted from Lu Yun's body as his wounds healed at an incredible rate, and it wasn't long before he slowly stood up again.

"It looks like I've underestimated you!" He gingerly moved his body about, a hint of relief on his face.

He'd used the Tome of Life and Death just now to steady his consciousness and protect his nascent spirit, so the injuries he'd sustained were merely flesh wounds. His soul remained unharmed, and the six paths of nascent spirit in his consciousness deployed the Tome of Life and Death to heal his injuries.

"What, this... this is impossible!" Fangyang Xing gawked in shock. He clambered back up painfully and swallowed a few pills, barely keeping his injuries under control. The attack he'd deployed just now was his strongest move.

"Why isn't it possible?" Lu Yun grinned. "I already told you, you can't kill me before you pass your tribulation."

He raised his sword and took step after measured step in Fangyang Xing's direction, blood glowing with a black luster dripping from Violetgrave's tip. Blood. Fangyang Xing's blood.

"Is that so?" Fangyang Xing suddenly smiled. He steadied his balance and spread out his right hand, calling forth a great seal that threw off a bright golden light.

Boom!

The aureate radiance slowly blossomed into dazzling light that mantled his figure, and a mild smile appeared on his lips. "I know that you have Lord Sugato's sword, but let me enlighten you right now, that sword is no match for the Skyturning Seal!"

The Skyturning Seal! Also known as the number one man-made treasure, it was the strongest weapon crafted by man!

A treasure without equal! Legends claimed it originated from the three founders of the immortal dao, and that it could shatter connate-grade treasures!

The Sugato Sword?

While also dubbed the number one man-made weapon, that was merely in reference to its own era.

Mmmm!

Inside Lu Yun, the Sugato Sword's howl of challenge sounded once again. When Fangyang Xing had last mentioned the Skyturning Seal, it'd reacted and seemed eager for a showdown. Now, it fiercely responded the moment the seal emerged.

Fangyang Xing's cultivation had initially been at peak returned void realm, quite a distance away from a void-ascended immortal. Then everything had changed after he'd obtained the Skyturning Seal. The treasure's prodigious strength had instantly propelled him into immortality.

Ideally, he would've preferred to suppress his strength and cultivation so that he could undergo his tribulation first. That way, the energy and minor world inside himself could've been fully reformed by the power of immortality.

Alas, he'd failed to contain the Skyturning Seal's immeasurable might and had directly broken through inside the celestial master tomb.

"The Skyturning Seal!" Lu Yun peered at the immortal treasure. Memories belonging to Xingzi and Luli surfaced in his mind, memories concerning this item.

"The greatest man-made treasure in the world! It once sealed a powerhouse as strong as the primordial immortal emperor and resigned him to death!" Lu Yun inhaled sharply, expression growing grave. He, too, spread out his hand and the Sugato Sword gradually materialized in his grasp.

Boom!

Faster than one could blink, illusory swords projected from the Sugato Sword formed a dense cover around Lu Yun, while his figure seemed to burn with dark cyan fire.

"The Sugato Sword? Nothing but the weapon of an ingress realm immortal from the Primordial Era. How can it be mentioned in the same breath as something created by the founders of the immortal dao?" A faint smile appeared on Fangyang Xing's lips, but inwardly, he wasn't as calm as he seemed.

Just like the Timelight Tower, the Skyturning Seal was the kind of treasure that represented a certain taboo. Once word of it got out, it'd throw the entire world of immortals and others beyond into chaos.

Thus, he'd killed all the dao immortals accompanying him after obtaining the seal. And were he not so eager to get his hands on the Timelight Tower, he never would've brought out the seal. The Sugato Sword's reputation paled greatly in comparison.

They say it'd once shattered a connate treasure?

Well then, that broken treasure had only been bottom-tier at best.

.....

Preempting Fangyang Xing's attack, Lu Yun waved his hand and the Sugato Sword disassembled with a boom. It transformed into a sea of spectral swords that stretched as far as the eye could see, all of which shot in the seal's direction.

"Hahaha! Lu Yun, you must have a death wish!" Fangyang Xing laughed boisterously as his Skyturning Seal flew into the air and transformed into a giant mountain.

"Maybe I do, maybe I don't. All I know is that you're dead for sure." A cold smile crept on Lu Yun's lips. Without warning, a full thirty weapons of war appeared in the air, their inky black cannon mouths pointed squarely at his enemy.

Fangyang Xing almost jumped out of his skin. "Weapons of war! You really do carry those around!"

Chapter 565: The Sugato Sword's Spirit

During his time inside the celestial master tomb, Fangyang Xing had asked extensively about Lu Yun. He'd indeed heard of supposed weapons of war, but thought that rumors of the youth carrying them on his person was just hot air and self-aggrandizement. He hadn't taken that nonsense at face value.

But now, Lu Yun really had brought thirty of them out all at once. Moreover, Fangyang Xing's consciousness could keenly sense the frightening energy stored inside them. A simultaneous barrage from all of them would engulf the entire area and leave him nowhere to hide. His bones would be ground to dust, his soul vaporized!

"Lu Yun, you were playing me for a fool!!" he screamed in despair. With a wave of a hand, he recalled the Skyturning Seal and turned into a stream of light that vanished from sight.

Why would Lu Yun even bother exchanging blows with me if he had those weapons of war in his possession? Just bring out the cannons. Would I have dared fight over the Timelight Tower? He's even made me expose the Skyturning Seal!

Humiliation, anger, regret, and fear churned furiously in his mind.

So the Timelight Tower is his for the time being. I'll return to the palace and think of another way! I might not have killed the demon sovereign this time, but I did obtain the Skyturning Seal. That's still a great accomplishment!

Consoling himself with that thought, he didn't dare tarry for one more second and immediately initiated a blood ritual, sacrificing his corporeal body and escaping in a hurry.

.....

Thump!

Lu Yun plopped down on the ground after Fangyang Xing's departure, wheezing as he tried to catch his breath.

Weapons of war?

The last of them had become junk after facing the endless hordes of corpse divines. These... were merely meant to scare his opponent. The thirty cannons could indeed generate terrifying energy... but with their mouths melted, they'd explode if he tried firing them.

If he'd truly been in a position to use their firepower, why would he have wasted so much time with Fangyang Xing? One cannon volley would've blown the man to pieces.

At any rate, Lu Yun was currently in terrible shape.

Burning eighteen karmic fruits, deploying hellfire, calling upon the Tome of Life and Death... handling all of that at the same time had pushed him to his limits. The energy inside him receded like the tides, leaving him sore and exhausted, while the internal injuries he'd done his best to suppress threatened to pick this moment to flare up.

Though his soul and consciousness had come out of it unscathed, his body was on the verge of breaking down. Had he continued fighting, not even his nascent spirit would've been able to heal the damage.

He immediately stuck several healing talismans on himself and ate a healing pill to slowly mend his wounds.

“Eighteen karmic fruits is my absolute limit right now,” he murmured. “The power I gain from burning eighteen of them is comparable to a void-realm immortal before their tribulation.

“That said, Fangyang Xing’s talent is second to none to begin with. He sensed the existence of the void realm thirty thousand years ago and had the conviction to set foot on that path. Now that he’s a disciple of the incredibly mysterious Firmament Palace, his cultivation methods and combat arts are all flawless specimens from the primordial times. Add to that him already ascending to immortality and equipped with a supreme treasure like the Skyturning Seal... it makes sense that he’s stronger than me.

“Once I become an immortal myself, he won’t be a match for me if we’re in the same realm.” Lu Yun sighed softly, opening his eyes a long moment later. The Sugato Sword was still by his side, having stood guard over him from start to finish.

“Don’t worry, the Skyturning Seal isn’t your opponent anymore.” He looked at the sword with a smile. “You’ve absorbed the power of hell and been tempered by hellfire, the Cosmic Sea, and other treasures, while the Skyturning Seal has been buried here for who knows how long. It’s power is no longer what it once was.”

Zing!

A metallic buzz came from the Sugato Sword, as if to say that the Skyturning Seal wouldn’t have been its match regardless, even if it hadn’t been buried in the tomb.

Lu Yun smiled wryly in silence. Treasures of this level had likely all spawned their own spirits. Although the Sugato Sword hadn’t become an existence like the Tiger and Dragon Princes, it possessed a modicum of self-awareness nonetheless.

This self-awareness had been dim and hazy at first, but running into the Skyturning Seal had thoroughly awakened it and made the treasure considerably stronger by roughly thirty percent.

Lu Yun had had to draw from his own energy to use it at first... but just now, he’d been surprised to discover that it had absorbed the energy from his immortal crystals on its own, resulting in a tremendous power boost that thwarted the Skyturning Seal!

“Another ace up my sleeve—a treasure with its own spirit!” Lu Yun gently buffed the Sugato Sword in front of him, the hint of a smile on his lips. “But this thing’s another glutton for immortal crystals. The more immortal crystals it takes in, the more powerful it is.”

In its brief clash with the Skyturning Seal, it had consumed close to ten million crystals. To leverage its full potential seemed to require as many crystals as his cannons.

Fangyang Xing couldn’t bring out the Skyturning Seal’s true power, but likewise, what the Sugato Sword had shown earlier was just the tip of the iceberg.

The Sugato Sword can become a god! The thought suddenly crossed his mind. With enough ritual sacrifices, the spirit inside can become a divine spirit.

“Hmmm, Dusk Province doesn’t have a guardian spirit yet.”

Rumble!

Just then, the silver mountain in front of him quaked, sending silver stones and boulders rolling down its slopes one after another.

“These stones...” Lu Yun picked one of them up. “They contain the power of time...”

He jerked his head up.

A silver pagoda floated into the air, shedding brilliance like that of the incandescent halo of a scorching sun. At that very instant, a sea of silver flooded his vision and caused temporary vision loss.

“What the heck!” His heart suddenly pounded fiercely, as if a wild beast had set its sights on him. All the hairs on his body stood on end.

“I have to leave!” He forced the Spectral Eye open and immediately shifted away from his position with the Wandering Step.

Boom!!

Like a giant foot had stomped on the ground, the entire area began to tremble. Even after moving away, Lu Yun still suffered heavy injuries from the violent vibrations.

Countless of his bones had been broken in that split instant, but even now, he didn't have the faintest what had just happened.

“Don't!!” Like a cuckoo crying blood, Jing Huaci wailed in extreme distress.

Chapter 566: Internal Demon

Lu Yun felt a giant foot stomping heavily on him.

“Am I going to die again?” A wry smile tugged at his lips. Xing Chen had ascended to immortality, and Lu Yun himself had reached peak void realm. Dusk Province was on the rise; he was on his way to greatness.

But here he was, on the brink of death.

There was no way for him to resist as the owner of the foot was too powerful. Their difference in power was as great as the distance between heaven and earth.

Bam!

Lu Yun's body was almost crushed into paste, and his consciousness and thoughts slowly blurred.

.....

“No!!” screamed Jing Huaci.

Hum.

The silver radiance of the Timelight Tower shot forth at the giant leg bone like an enormous mirror. Astoundingly, the foot that was about to complete its crushing of Lu Yun lifted up and reversed along its original trajectory.

Lu Yun's crushed body, broken bones and tendons, collapsed consciousness, and nearly disintegrated soul swiftly knit back together as well, as if someone had hit the rewind button for him.

The damage had been reversed; time had flowed backward!

Jing Huaci, who'd just refined the Timelight Tower, had reversed time with a powerful combat art!

The great tower slowly shrank and embedded itself into Jing Huaci's forehead with a streak of silver, while she collapsed to the ground, boneless and immobile.

Midair, the giant skeletal foot was still restrained by the silver light, its strength diminishing each second it was trapped.

"What in the blazes is this?!" Terrified screams rang from above the foot.

Bam!

The foot ultimately disintegrated into ashes and scattered in the air.

"That's... the foot of the Venerated Sacrosanct Demon Sovereign! It's the strength of his true form!"

Lu Yun slumped on the ground, dumbfounded at the sight of the disintegrating foot and not knowing what to say. He'd truly experienced death in that moment, and felt its shadow fall over him. He'd even heard the keening of the Tome of Life and Death and felt the netherworld tremble.

But suddenly, here he was, still alive.

"It really is a time treasure... It reversed time!" Lu Yun shuddered, then skipped over to look over Jing Huaci. She'd lost consciousness, but he could sense the changes in her.

Silver sparkles circled around her—not the color of stars, but time. Jing Huaci seemed to be spent. Her nascent spirit was weak, and the ripples of her soul shifted very weakly.

However, the Timelight Tower had protected her soul and injected it with its own power, replenishing her nascent spirit.

"The tower chose Jing Huaci beforehand!" Realization dawned on Lu Yun.

She was its preordained new owner, which was why she'd been able to move around the celestial master tomb freely as a nascent spirit cultivator and arrive here safely. Although the yin spirits and undead couldn't see her, there were far more dangers in the tomb that could've claimed her.

More importantly, Jing Huaci had managed to reverse time not long after refining the tower! What had happened had been reversed into something that'd never taken place! What an intimidating combat art this was!

Lu Yun had been incredibly close to death, but Jing Huaci had forcefully yanked him back from the cliff of oblivion! In doing so, she'd done something that not even the Tome of Life and Death could do!

"There must be a spirit in the Timelight Tower. It's impossible for her to do something like this on her own, given her cultivation." Lu Yun inhaled deeply. It was fortunate that he hadn't refined the tower himself, or he would've fallen under its control.

“But there’s a powerful specter in the treasure, who is probably why the treasure chose Jing Huaci.” He reached out to help her up, but a faintly protesting hum sounded from her body and a thick layer of silver radiance emerged to cocoon her body.

Lu Yun could draw infinitely close to her, but he wasn’t able to touch her.

“Time?” he said with a start.

“Time,” murmured a gentle voice. A woman with flowing silver locks clad in a silver silk dress emerged from Jing Huaci. She was stunning both in appearance and figure, much more so than any woman Lu Yun had ever encountered.

“Are you the treasure’s spirit?” Lu Yun allowed himself to relax when he sensed no malice from the woman.

She shook her head gently. “That spirit has been scattered, and the tower is close to its breaking point. I am the soul fragment of Timelight.”

Lu Yun paused. “Empress Timelight?”

Fangyang Xing had said the tower had belonged to Empress Timelight, who hailed from an era before the fall of the human emperor. However, it was a surprise that she’d told him her identity so easily.

The woman nodded. “I sense the presence of someone I knew on you.”

“Someone you knew?” Lu Yun paused. “Is there the heritage of another primeval emperor on me?”

He thought about the Sugato Sword, then Violetgrave, and even Empress Myrtlestar. Perhaps Myrtlestar was the reincarnation of a primeval empress.

“That, I don’t know.” Empress Timelight sighed. “Those I knew have either died or been crippled, and I’m left with only a shard of my soul. Once Huaci completely refines the Timelight Tower, I will disappear as well.”

Lu Yun looked at her without a word.

“My internal demon is in the tower, nursing my obsession to come back to life and planning to possess my successor,” she said with resignation. “I’ve searched for eighteen successors already, and they all died at her hands. That’s why I chose Huaci this time.”

“Why are you telling me all this?” Lu Yun finally broke his silence. “Simply because you sense a familiar presence in me?”

“No!” The empress shook her head. “I hope you can destroy my internal demon for me. I saw that you wield fire from the human hell. That’s the only thing that can defeat my internal demon! It won’t hurt Huaci after I disappear, but no one in this world is her match.”

A shudder ran down Lu Yun’s spine. The damaged soul fragment of Empress Timelight was suppressing her internal demon. Once she dissipated, the internal demon would run free.

“Do you really think a mere returned void realm cultivator like me will be able to defeat her?” Lu Yun’s expression wasn’t very pleasant.

Her internal demon might not be a great emperor herself, but it was close enough. Born of her immortal's heart, the internal demon was another side of her true self. She would retain all of her power even after the death of Empress Timelight.

She was in an entirely different league from the corpse of Empress Myrtlestar and the corpse divine transformed from Kui. Hellfire alone wasn't going to make Lu Yun powerful enough to defeat it. In fact, it was most likely that he'd be turned to ashes before he even got close.

"That is why I will offer you a great gift," Empress Timelight responded after a long pause. "This is where the world's lungs reside."

Lu Yun started. "You're not gifting it to me, are you?" He shrugged with disinterest. "The world's lungs have broken down. It'll take eons and countless tribulations for another to be born."

Empress Timelight shook her head. "The world's lungs are a place where heavenly qi is converted and therefore sustained. Before my death, I used some tricks to build an underground palace here and store some immortal crystals."

Lu Yun's heart pounded; not for the crystals, but for the Deaf Prince and his five other friends. They'd come here to acquire a crystal mountain for Lu Yun, and it now looked like they must've entered the underground palace that the empress had built. Despite the revelation, he listened quietly instead of responding with anything.

"After the endless passage of time, there must be an endless supply of crystals there..."

"What?" Lu Yun couldn't help himself. "Am I supposed to kill your internal demon by smashing it to death with immortal crystals?"

Empress Timelight shook her head. "Hellfire can protect you from my internal demon. Once you take Huaci to the underground palace, I will be able to destroy it there."

Lu Yun stopped and looked at Jing Huaci.

"Without the protection of hellfire, you'd be invaded by my internal demon as soon as you touched her. That was why I stopped you."

So that explained it. Hellfire could suppress her internal demon, but Lu Yun's fire wasn't powerful enough to kill it. He could at most keep himself safe during the trip to the underground palace, when aided by the empress' protection.

"Alright!" Lu Yun agreed readily.

The empress nodded, then disappeared back into the Timelight Tower within Jing Huaci.

Lu Yun picked up the girl's soft body.

"Oh?" His vision went dark as soon as he touched her. A stunning woman identical to Empress Timelight emerged before him, only she was dressed in black, and her hair and eyes were likewise pitch-black.

She levelled Lu Yun with a mocking gaze.

“Eating out of her hand just like that?” she said derisively, her voice chilling. “Do you really think it was she who reversed time and pulled you back from the clutches of death?”

Lu Yun’s heart skipped a beat.

Chapter 567: Swear Upon Your Internal Demons

“Are you the internal demon?” Lu Yun steadied his nerves. He wasn’t particularly worried, not with hellfire protecting him.

“I am.” The internal demon nodded. “If she is willing to die for someone else’s sake, why would I exist? She’s deceived you.”

Lu Yun nodded. “No one would willingly sacrifice themselves to help someone else.”

Back when Empress Myrtlestar had entered Qing Yu’s Scroll of Shepherding Immortals, she, too, had planned on possessing Qing Yu. But when Lu Yun had helped reforge her soul with the Tome of Life and Death, a new hope had dawned and she’d changed her mind.

Likewise, Lu Yun hadn’t trusted Timelight’s soul from the start.

Perhaps she’d been benevolent and kind when alive, someone who would’ve willingly given up her life for her people. But she was dead now. What was left of her soul was a yin spirit, and just like ghosts, yin spirits possessed an instinctive craving!

After moving on from this world and becoming a ghostly existence, even saints of great virtue longed to come back to life!

As the master of hell and the Tome of Life and Death, Lu Yun was naturally aware of the instincts of the deceased. In life, one feared death; in death, one wanted to live! Such was the instinct deeply engraved in the soul. As a result, a ghost was the last existence he’d trust.

“Then why did you promise to bring this possessed body to the underground palace?” The internal demon tilted her head to the side and looked at him in confusion.

For his part, Lu Yun was also baffled. Compared to the soul of Empress Timelight he’d seen earlier, this internal demon seemed much more like a living person.

“Because several of my friends are stuck inside that palace,” he answered truthfully.

“I see.” The internal demon nodded. “But I can’t let you go inside, or Timelight’s soul will have enough power to control the tower and erase my existence. Likewise, she’ll fully possess the little dragon in your arms.”

There was some perplexity in the internal demon’s gaze as she looked at him too. Just where did his courage come from? What made him confident enough to do the bidding of a dead empress?

Why wasn’t he afraid of listening to the dead? Wasn’t that just inviting trouble and asking to be schemed to death?

Hellfire?

The current level of his hellfire wasn't enough to deter the internal demon.

"I know." With a faint nod, Lu Yun no longer paid the internal demon any attention. He set his sights forward and strode toward the underground palace.

Earlier, the empress' soul had shown him the palace's location before taking her leave. Additionally, she hadn't seemed worried he'd be led astray by the internal demon and end up changing his mind.

The internal demon's complexion turned chilly at his attitude.

"Since you're so eager to die, I can lend you a hand." She waved a hand, condensing countless rays of gloomy black light and shooting them at Lu Yun. As if they themselves were so many other demons, the rays howled with anguish and despair, desperate to invade his body.

Crackle!

The hellfire raging around Lu Yun billowed furiously and incinerated them all. The internal demon shook, a slight paleness surfacing on her face.

"Die!" she suddenly snarled, her previous ethereal voice now as macabre as a demon's.

An imposing specter emerged behind her, similar to the one that'd appeared earlier when Jing Huaci had refined the cross. A boundless ghostly presence suddenly permeated the air, and the internal demon unexpectedly turned into a ghostly creature.

"Demons can see Jing Huaci, but ghosts can't... No wonder, no wonder!" Lu Yun snapped to attention.

Boom!

The specter's fist suddenly appeared from above. Even as it descended, it started burning with hellfire and scattering black ash everywhere, but it continued bearing down on Lu Yun with irresistible force.

Lu Yun once again felt the shadow of death looming over him. But this time around, he stayed unwavering and held his ground.

Boom!

All of a sudden, a silver column of light erupted from within his clothes and blasted the giant fist apart. The silver Timelight Tower was now an incorporeal structure that shielded him within.

Sighing in relief, he continued onward, Jing Huaci in his arms. He then came to a strange zone made from many folded layers of space, but he was still inside the celestial master tomb. This was something that Lu Yun couldn't begin to understand.

He saw many human silhouettes walking past him, and even saw Jiangchen Xie, who'd abandoned his zombie king body. He was in the middle refining many giant bones to perfect his Hadal Bone Art.

"He's about to become a void-realm immortal!" Lu Yun's heart shook as he observed the man from another plane. But there was nothing he could do other than helplessly look on as the man refined his bones and increased his strength.

Things aren't too bad, I suppose. At least he'll ditch the arts of the Corpse Refiners for the demon sovereign's bone arts, so he should stop creating zombies.... But the Corpse Refiners will grow more powerful in his wake. Lu Yun took a deep breath. Void-realm immortals were frightening existences.

There must be quite a few returned void cultivators who've entered the celestial master tomb.

Many void realm cultivators had appeared after the Sovereign Ranking battles, but back then, they'd still been quite far from reaching immortality.

However, the celestial master tomb was an authentic immortal tomb from the primordial times and contained a complete immortal dao, to say nothing of the many treasures and legacies waiting inside, including ones at the level of the Skyturning Seal or Timelight Tower.

Here, these void realm cultivators were very likely to run into an opportunity that would elevate them into void-realm immortals.

"A great era is truly upon us... Thankfully, I've already created the formation of heaven and earth and can distribute it in the immortal world as soon as I go back. Otherwise, Qing Yu..." Lu Yun sighed before proceeding forward.

Empress Timelight's internal demon followed him, never taking a step too far away. The internal demon's essence had been imprisoned inside the Timelight Tower, and as long as the empress' soul existed, the demon had no hope of breaking away from the tower.

.....

All of a sudden, Lu Yun stopped in his tracks. A giant palace stood in front of him that exuded dense immortal energy, but his attention was on something else.

There was a tall and stocky figure standing in front of the palace's gates; a man with an imposing figure, vigorous face, black hair that fell over his shoulders, arms that were slender yet strong, and a body clad in bone armor. His only flaw was the lack of a right leg.

The Venerated Sacrosanct Demon Sovereign!

"What a shame I didn't stomp you dead. To think you'd make your way here!" The demon sovereign looked at the approaching Lu Yun with a smile. "Give me the dragon in your arms and I will spare your life."

"So you've been resurrected!" Lu Yun looked at the demon sovereign and drew in a sharp breath. Too strong! This demon sovereign was definitely stronger than the silver scarlet ape!

The demon's gaze was cold and eerie, and though there was a smile on his lips, it was the kind of smile that made one shiver.

"Resurrected? I never died to begin with." Faint black dots of light danced in the demon sovereign's eyes.

"I have heard that an enduring true spirit's grievance and obsession can be too strong... that they all refuse to believe they're already dead..." Lu Yun murmured.

“Silence!!” The demon sovereign glowered ferociously. “This. Sovereign. Never. Died!”

Boom!

His bone armor combusted in the next moment, the flames churning into raging Hadal Bonefire and turning his tall figure to ash, leaving behind only his enduring true spirit and skeleton.

Solemnity took over Lu Yun’s expression. As the master of hell, he controlled hellfire and could restrain ghostly entities, but the demon sovereign’s power was too immense and far surpassed the limits of what he could withstand!

No matter how gifted a tiger cub was, it could never vanquish an adult wolf.

On the contrary, Lu Yun was desperately restraining hell’s aura with the Tome of Life and Death, afraid the demon sovereign might sense its existence. If he did... he’d doubtlessly take over Lu Yun’s body. Hell was the place most suitable for ghostly creatures, after all.

“Give me your little dragon.” The sovereign’s enduring true spirit flashed darkly inside his skull.

Lu Yun was certain that the sovereign couldn’t see Jing Huaci, yet he’d demanded her to be handed over...

“It’s you.” He turned back to look at the internal demon, who’d now discarded her spectral state and reverted to her internal demon self.

She nodded. “I can’t let you take the dragon inside, or it will seal my own death.”

An enduring true spirit nursed obsessions that bordered on the extreme. As such, they formed a kind of yin spirit that was almost impossible to extinguish. Even the primordial immortal emperor would find himself powerless against them.

In fact, the Firmament Palace had once tried subduing the demon sovereign, but the attempt ended in failure. However, that didn’t mean true spirits didn’t have their own bane... namely, internal demons!

Empress Timelight’s internal demon was supreme among all internal demons. For her, the demon sovereign’s enduring true spirit was nothing more than a ghostling she could control at will.

“Alright, I promise I won’t bring Jing Huaci inside, so send him away.” Lu Yun breathed in deeply before agreeing.

The internal demon froze for a second. “Swear upon your internal demons.”

“I swear upon my internal demons.” Lu Yun nodded.

A smile appeared on the internal demon’s lips and with a wave of her hand, the demon sovereign vanished without a trace.

Empress Timelight immediately emerged above Jing Huaci and fixed Lu Yun with a frosty glare.

“Do you want to die?” She was now of a mind to kill the young man.

Chapter 568: The Monster Celestial Master

The one who'd reverted the flow of time with the Timelight Tower hadn't been Empress Timelight's soul, nor her internal demon. Neither was capable of commanding the treasure's true power and accomplishing such a feat.

There was yet another existence inside the celestial master tomb that'd been quietly observing Lu Yun.

He could sense this presence exercising control over the entire tomb and stifling various treacherous dangers inside so that void realm cultivators could ascend to immortality. In fact, he was dead certain that his brief visit to the Timelight Tower's minor world was due to the presence overseeing the tomb.

That was why, secure in the knowledge that he wasn't entirely on his own, he'd been confident enough to travel here with Empress Timelight's soul and her internal demon, and to even swear an oath to the latter.

An ordinary immortal would never dare violate an oath sworn upon their internal demons, unless they were in a hurry to be devoured by said demons and become an empty shell. But with the guardianship of the Tome of Life and Death, such an oath was a simple joke to Lu Yun. In fact, if not for the empress' internal demon being too powerful, he wouldn't even have bothered with her.

But of course, the fragment of Empress Timelight's soul knew none of this. Therefore, she flew into a rage upon seeing Lu Yun swear his oath and rushed out of the Timelight Tower.

"Hypocrite." The internal demon snorted at the empress' soul fragment, a trace of contempt on her face that looked so much like the empress' own, and stepped in front of Lu Yun to shield him.

As soon as Jing Huaci completed refinement of the Timelight Tower, the empress' soul fragment would vanish and the internal demon would gain her freedom. So as long as Lu Yun didn't bring Jing Huaci inside the palace left behind by the empress, the internal demon wouldn't do anything to the pair.

"Depart from this place." Empress Timelight looked at the internal demon, her face like frost. Her killing intent was currently so strong that it'd taken material form, giving rise to terrible gales raging above their heads.

Lu Yun shook violently. He was but a small boat lost in the tempest, about to capsize at any moment. The internal demon stayed serene, a faint halo of black light covering her figure.

"You can't protect them," the empress' soul declared with cold indifference. "You are me. Our hearts and soul are interconnected, and I can read your thoughts like an open book."

"That's right, I am you, so I also know what you're planning." The internal demon smiled. "You want to devour me to mend your broken soul so that you can possess the little dragon and gain a second life. Did you think I'd be content to simply let myself be eaten and disappear in the wind?"

"You and I are one in the first place. The two of us becoming one is merely a return to our origin. Why do you speak of disappearing in the wind?" Empress Timelight's soul narrowed her eyes as she attempted persuasion.

By now, the internal demon's black light covered both Lu Yun and Jing Huaci, severing even the connection between the empress' soul and the Timelight Tower.

“Because you are no longer who you once were,” a gentle voice sounded out, followed by a white shadow slowly materializing from the void. As it came into being, the gales raging through the air immediately subsided.

“You are no longer your former self after dying. Even if you came back to life, you’d be nothing but a living dead,” gently explained the white shadow shining with cosmic radiance.

“Miao?!” Lu Yun looked at the figure, his mouth agape.

It was a man of peerless beauty with long silver hair and silver eyes, his figure blanketed by the power of the stars.

Miao!

She looked just like when Lu Yun had first met her beneath Myriad Formation Summit.

Miao!

The ancient monster spirit ancestor, the master of the monster spirits’ sacred land! But afterwards, the monster ancestor had lost part of her soul. Even Su Xiaoxiao had been helpless to deal with the situation.

By now, Miao had split into three parts. One as the little fox, the second as Lu Yun’s first disciple Liu Qingmiao, and the last as Xing Mou who’d become Qing Yu’s disciple.

However, Miao was once again in front of Lu Yun! The same appearance, the same aura, the same mannerisms and expressions!

“You... are both the monster sacred land’s ancestor and the celestial court’s Monster Celestial Master!” Overwhelmed by shock, Lu Yun stared at Miao’s figure in the air, frightened by his own speculations.

“That’s right, it’s me.” A smile appeared on Miao’s lips as she winked faintly at him.

Lu Yun shook violently. “So it was you all along?” His eyes widened even further, tone different from before.

“Yes, it’s me,” Miao repeated.

Both the internal demon and Empress Timelight’s soul frowned, nonplussed by the incomprehensible exchange.

“Senior.” Miao saluted Empress Timelight’s soul with a cupped fist salute. “This junior can help you reincarnate, so that you can shed the existence of a dead spirit and become human again.”

Empress Timelight was a great personage from the Primeval Era, after all. Humans had ruled the world back then, and the immortal dao had yet to be born. For contemporary immortals, she was an ancestor-level existence.

Therefore, Miao gave her due respect.

“Hahahaha—” Empress Timelight gave a long peal of laughter. “Reincarnate? By following the laws of reincarnation set by humans? Will I still be me then?”

The soul looked down at Jing Huaci lying in Lu Yun's arms, her eyes flashing with faint silver.

Roar!

A tremendous sound resounded from within the giant underground palace.

"Blasted tarnation, what is this!?" Loud cursing followed the roar. Beicang Qiong's tones, one of the six profligates, was immediately recognizable.

"Just like I thought, they really are inside!" Elation colored Lu Yun's face, but was soon replaced by intense dread.

Step after step, a giant monster plodded its way out of the palace. It was more than three thousand meters tall, its entire body was made from immortal crystals!

A crystal monster!

"You're not Empress Timelight!!" Lu Yun was aghast as he jerked his head up at the soul fragment. "Empress Timelight was one of the great emperors who died during the time of Emperors' Fall. She couldn't possibly have left behind this palace! You're not her!"

Immortal crystals were the solidified form of immortal energy, and immortal energy was a higher form of natural energy. But more importantly, immortal energy was born from the influence of the immortal dao!

However, there had been no immortal dao, back when Empress Timelight had fallen. Instead of immortal energy, there had existed yet another form of higher level natural energy.

"The internal demon! The internal demon's the real Empress Timelight, and this soul fragment's a fake!" Lu Yun exclaimed involuntarily. He hadn't noticed earlier, but everything had fallen into place with the emergence of the crystal monster.

The presence of this monster was clearly the damaged soul's doing, but it was purely composed of laws of the immortal dao. Meanwhile, Empress Timelight specialized in the dao of time!

Had she left anything behind, it definitely would've been related to time!

"Little fox, you need to act fast! Destroy the soul fragment! Senior, do everything you can to cut off her connection to the Timelight Tower!"

Crackle!

Faster than one could blink, the internal demon morphed into a dark gray fire that enveloped Lu Yun and the Jing Huaci he carried.

"I understand now!" Miao, or the little fox, turned grave. With a wave of the hand, buildings and edifices flashed into existence and formed a giant city. The highest realm of the dao of formations, Return to Origin!

Myriad Returns City!

"I didn't expect you to see through me... But what does it matter?" A second pair of eyes opened on the soul fragment, two crimson eye beams slicing straight at Lu Yun.

"It's you... you're the one who broke my bronze lantern!" Lu Yun inhaled sharply.

Chapter 569: Ghost Town

The soul fragment was the same woman whom Jing Huaci had seen at the foot of the silver peak. Instead of Empress Timelight's soul remnant, she was a mere fake.

Now standing in the grandly lavish Myriad Returns City, she glared at Lu Yun with icy eyes. Though Empress Timelight's inner demon had severed her connection to the Timelight Tower, she displayed no trace of fear.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Heavy footsteps traveled ever closer; the fearsome crystal giant had already entered Myriad Returns City.

Miao paled slightly. "So it seems something terrifying was born in the tomb while I wasn't paying attention."

With a solemn gaze, she observed the giant as she waved her hand and transformed Myriad Returns City into a giant maze. The entire world became a vast expanse of labyrinthine whiteness that swallowed the impostor.

All the same, Lu Yun could still feel her eyes pierce through the many layers of space and fall squarely on him, so much so that he could feel physical pain on his skin.

"I can't stop this monster. Hurry up and think of a solution!" Miao floated to his side as if out of habit, her fluffy tail winding around his arm like a puffed up balloon.

Lu Yun smacked his forehead. "Aren't you the Monster Celestial Master? She's just an impostor and a soul fragment, can't you bring her to heel?"

The oppressive feeling coming from the giant high above was a little hard for him to bear.

"This is all your fault. Who told you to wake me up?" Miao shot him a scathing glare. "If I'd stayed asleep inside the resurrection formation, it wouldn't have taken long for me to revive and rule over everything inside this tomb. But you just had to go and wake me up from my dream, so I've yet to recover."

Lu Yun scratched his head, slightly embarrassed. Miao had been a mere true immortal back when she'd woken up, one that couldn't even take human form.

Though he didn't understand how she could possibly be here, her current self had certainly reached an unfathomable realm. At the very least, she wasn't any weaker than the impostor.

"Didn't you just use the Timelight Tower to reverse time and bring me back from the brink of death?" Lu Yun smiled wryly.

"The tower is Empress Timelight's treasure. It was the empress herself who saved you," Miao snapped back, her complexion set in a grimace.

Waves of destruction crashed upon her Myriad Returns City. As an art that could create something from nothing, it wasn't an exaggeration to label Return to Origin the greatest art of the current age.

However, the crystal monster was so formidable that its strength was infinitely close to the great formation's limits. More importantly, the soul fragment was still present. For some unfathomable reason, she'd managed to turn Empress Timelight's soul into an internal demon and take her place, clear evidence of her abilities.

The combination of soul and crystal monster could easily destroy Myriad Returns City.

"Empress Timelight herself? The inner demon?" Lu Yun gasped in shock.

He'd been positive that the Monster Celestial Master had been the one who'd secretly deployed the Timelight Tower's power, but as it turned out, it was the inner demon!

But at this moment, that very inner demon was a stream of dark light winding around Lu Yun and Jing Huaci, cutting off the impostor from the Timelight Tower.

"Take her with you and leave!" Lu Yun suddenly opened his eyes wide and handed Jing Huaci to Miao.

"You want me to take the little dragon away? What about you then?" Miao blinked.

"I have my own ways to escape, of course. The Timelight Tower and Jing Huaci's physical body are the only things the soul's after. So if you take them away, it'll naturally follow you!" Lu Yun whispered. "This is your own tomb, your home turf. Don't tell me you can't run away in your own backyard."

"You're right... I can't beat these two things, but getting away won't be a problem." Miao smiled a little sheepishly, then remembered something and turned stern. "My main body's still in Dusk City. The me you see right now is but a dream, and I won't remember anything when I wake up. So keep in mind to never, ever mention anything that happened here when you return. Otherwise, the moment I recover my memories, Xing Mou and Liu Qingmiao will return to my main self, and all my arrangements will have been for naught!"

Lu Yun froze. "Are you saying that you'd planned to split your soul all the way back in the Primordial Era?"

"Correct!" Miao exclaimed. "The immortal court needed the Monster Celestial Master, the primordial monster spirits needed their ancestor, and the primeval monster spirits needed a monster emperor!"

"Were you the reigning monster emperor before Emperors Fall?" Lu Yun gawked.

"I wasn't... But after that period of time, on the eve of the multiverse's most magnificent era, the opportunity to become a true emperor was right in front of me. How could I not seize it? In this lifetime, I wanted to sit on an imperial throne at least once!"

Boom! Crash!!

The moment Miao's voice fell, another explosive rumble sounded from Myriad Returns City as the giant's enormous head broke through multiple layers of formations and peered out from the void.

“Hurry up and leave!” Lu Yun started violently when he saw the impostor standing on the monster’s head. He immediately threw Jing Huaci to Miao and disappeared from sight.

“Gone?” Miao started. Her consciousness had unexpectedly lost his trail. “Well, isn’t it bold of you to impersonate an empress from when the emperors fell... That title is quite an ominous one, after all.”

Seeing Lu Yun depart, she held Jing Huaci tightly but didn’t move to leave herself. Instead, her face gradually turned transparent. Gust by gust, an evil wind started blowing inside the minor world.

“What in the heavens are you?” Standing on top of the monster’s head, the damaged soul froze when she sensed the change. There was even a hint of fear discernible on her face!

“Hehehehehe—” Miao’s silhouette disappeared from sight, while the badly-battered Myriad Returns City began restructuring itself.

Instead of its former atmosphere of opulence, the entire city turned an inky black. One by one, evil ghosts crawled out of the city. A ghost city—Myriad Returns City had become a ghost city!

As for Miao, her figure turned increasingly spectral, evil winds swirling around her figure and her extraordinarily handsome face now suffused with wickedness.

Sizzle!

Two balls of ghostly fire suddenly flickered to life in her eyes.

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Inside the lungs’ layout, Lu Yun heaved a long sigh of relief.

“I can’t go back to hell, for now, but at least I can transform into gaseous sand and be immediately collected by the lungs’ layout.” He stood up to once again size up the peculiar layout.

“Sure enough, a true pair of lungs of heaven and earth must’ve been born in this place at some time. It’s on another level altogether, compared to the one Xing Chen refined, but someone must’ve taken it.

“Anyway, the palace built by the soul fragment is real.... I should be able to infiltrate that place from here.” With a flip of the hand, the feng shui compass and Treasurefall Coin appeared in his palm.

Chapter 570: The Giant Mouth

The palace itself was an enormous treasure, and it just so happened that the Treasurefall Coin could identify and pinpoint the existence of treasures. However, the fruitful bounty of treasures strewn all over the tomb threw off the coin’s judgment.

Therefore, Lu Yun also brought out the luopan. Using both of them in tandem, his scan of the tomb would be unobstructed and would fully pinpoint any valuables there were.

His initial plan had been to investigate the tomb and determine what was real or fake before proceeding further. Great prudence had to be exercised, lest rash actions alarm an existence he couldn’t afford to provoke.

But after meeting Fengbo, Empress Timelight, and the Monster Celestial Master... he'd more or less grasped the overall picture. Those three, as well as the impostor, should be the strongest beings inside. No matter how powerful any other entities to be found were, they'd be at a similar level at best.

"I... have a strange feeling about Miao... as if she..." There was something about her that felt a little off. "Well, this should be where the resurrection layout was located in the past... someone moved it to the burial mound beneath Myriad Formation Summit afterward!

"It probably happened five thousand years ago... When I met Miao in the burial mound, she still remembered some events before her death."

He still didn't know what Miao had gone through five thousand years ago. All he knew was that she'd been unexpectedly beaten to death and forced to use the resurrection layout, then narrowly escaped another insidious scheme.

But a moment ago, he'd sensed something terribly evil about her for a split second.

"She might not have run off with Huaci... In fact, she'll probably use the soul fragment to revive the ancient immortals here!" Lu Yun shook his head and set those thoughts aside. "Let's find the Deaf Prince and the others first, then the Skyqilin and Skyturtle Pearl. Can't forget the Path of Ingress, either... and then I'm off back home!"

Rays of golden light flashed from the feng shui compass, illuminating a path through the minor world.

"Hrm?" Lu Yun suddenly froze. "Coal briquettes? Or something else?"

Thanks to the compass' golden light, he could spot many passages connected to the outside world, and the Spectral Eye noted tiny grains of gaseous sand flowing along the small tunnels.

Once inside, the nascent spirit soil was quickly transformed by a marvelous force and converted into three currents of clear air. The first one fused with this minor world, the second one scattered into the air, and the last one left via the small passageways.

"Over there!" His eyes shone bright when he noticed the third current heading to where the underground palace was.

"But the three clear currents aren't made of the energies of the world. There must be another transformation process involved. I've got to go take a look!" He opened the Spectral Eye, deployed the Wandering Step, and followed the third current while shrinking his body with Size Manipulation.

The tunnels leading from the minor world to the outside were minuscule in size. He might not have spotted them without the Spectral Eye as they were even smaller than a human pore.

"There?" He turned into a mote of dust and entered another area that bursted at the seams with a chaotic airflow fusing with the third current. "It's the energy dissipated from the second current! So this is where it ends up..."

"The first current is the waste product of nascent spirit soil, and the second and third ones make up the underlying composition of the world's energy!"

Lu Yun could see the second and third currents converging inside the strange space before transforming into natural energy, then slowly moving in a certain direction with a unique tempo.

However, the rate of motion was much too slow. It would take at least ten thousand years for the newly-formed natural energy to leave this place.

“Something must be intercepting this flow of natural energy!” Inspiration struck, and he whirled around to see an enormous, wide open mouth protruding into the area. A prodigious suction force emitted from it and vacuumed away the newly-created natural energy.

“This giant mouth is made of immortal crystals! ...the crystal monster!” he identified at once. The mouth belonged to the crystal giant that the soul fragment had previously summoned.

Lu Yun inhaled sharply. “The crystal giant is alive, which makes the underground palace the inside of the monster’s belly! Who can that impostor be? Or is she...”

He used Size Manipulation a second time and shrank himself even further, then shot toward the giant mouth.

Boom!

As he tried gaining entrance, the crystal mouth suddenly sprayed a gust of turbid energy that blew him away. A pair of milky-white eyes slowly opened in midair. With a glint of derision, the eyes stared fixedly at the tiny particle Lu Yun had become.

“Yep, this thing’s alive, alright!” Lu Yun steadied his balance with some difficulty, then observed the eyes with a frown. “That being said...”

Bang!

He quickly transformed into something else and vanished into thin air. This time, he opted to become a current of natural energy.

It would’ve been far more difficult for him to do so before; almost impossible, in fact. But now, after witnessing the process through which natural energy was created, he could follow the same steps himself to transform into natural energy.

As soon as he did so, he sensed a formidable tearing force materialize in the air. One side dragged him toward the outside world, while the other tried to suck him into the giant mouth.

“Hmm?” a bewildered voice rumbled like thunder.

Shaken to the core, Lu Yun’s thoughts were in complete disarray and his now-gaseous consciousness was almost destroyed by the sound. Thankfully, the Tome of the Life and Death shielded his consciousness at the last moment. He strove to calm down, then propelled his transformed self toward the giant mouth.

This time around, nothing unexpected happened.

In the air above, the pair of eyes inspected their surroundings, but couldn’t find anything out of place. In the end, they gradually faded from view.

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“I’m in!” The moment he entered the mouth, he found extremely dense immortal energy enfolding him, and a feeling of extraordinary pleasure welled up from the depths of his soul. In spite of himself, he returned to human form.

So frighteningly dense that it was almost liquid, immortal energy poured relentlessly into him and began propelling his peak returned void realm cultivation even higher. The six paths of nascent spirit inside his consciousness rotated madly to circulate the energy inside him.

Boom!

A sudden rumble echoed through his consciousness, as if an enormous barrier had been blasted open. Though vague and hazy, he saw a great, formless path traversing the world, master of all between the heavens and earth.

The immortal dao!

“I’ve finally reached the threshold to immortality! Three months—my immortal tribulation will come in three more months! After weathering it, I’ll be a true immortal!” A revelation surfaced in his mind, upon which he forcibly cut off the endless flow of immortal energy pouring into him.

The energy here was too dense. If he absorbed too much of it, he’d directly bypass his tribulation and ascend to immortality. Had he done so, his tribulation would’ve descended as soon as he exited the tomb and with an intensity that was orders of magnitude stronger. The outlook would’ve been more than grim.

Fangyang Xing had run into this very problem because he couldn’t control the Skyturning Seal’s enormous power. Lu Yun was positive that when it finally did arrive, the man’s tribulation would be extraordinarily ferocious. Even with the Skyturning Seal’s protection, he’d suffer grievous wounds, if not die outright.

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“As I thought, this is a palace hall.” Lu Yun carefully observed his surroundings and noted that everything was made of immortal crystal—the opulent hall, the proud throne towering high above, and the many lifelike statues that dotted the premises.

“Statues?” He stiffened abruptly, a violent shiver running down his spine. “These aren’t statues, these are people who’ve been assimilated by immortal crystals!”

Crackle!

Hellfire surged around him, shielding him from harm. Immortal energy was extremely dense in this place. If one couldn’t stop absorbing it, one would soon be transformed into crystal. Immortal energy was a higher form of natural energy. Once natural energy reached a certain concentration, it’d evolve into immortal energy on its own.

“Many people have come here in the past, but all of them were crystallized by the energy here.” Lu Yun looked at a statue in front of him.

It was humanoid in shape, but more than thirty meters tall and sported a vertical eye in the middle of its forehead. It wielded a great crescent halberd, as if ready to do battle.

No living aura came from it and Lu Yun couldn't see the creature's death information. Without a doubt, this three-eyed being had become pure crystal; even its lifeforce had been assimilated.

"...wait a second! He didn't become like this because he absorbed too much energy. An external influence instantly turned him into crystal!"

"Blasted damnation! How long have we been going around in circles? Where did the bloody World Chest go?!" a crude voice suddenly sounded. "At this rate, I won't be able to suppress my immortal tribulation any longer!"

"Shut your mouth!" a chilly female voice rose in answer. "If you hadn't kept pointing us in random directions, we never would've gotten lost!"

"In my opinion, it'd be best to go back by retracing our steps," another loud voice commented.

"It's them!" Lu Yun's eyes shone. He recognized the voices of Beicang Qiong, Jing Dichen, and the Deaf Prince. But while he could hear their voices, neither his consciousness nor the Spectral Eye could locate their beings.