

Necropolis 591

Chapter 591: Phenomena of Ascension

Bam!

Two combat arts, one among the most powerful in the modern age, and the other a flawless art from the Primordial Era, merged together.

Bright moon, snowflakes; blade edge, sword energy.

The great power of heaven and earth was drawn to circle around the Xue youth. His figure grew incredibly strapping as he stood tall and powerful as the core of the world. Even the domineering heavenly tribulation seemed negligible by comparison.

Snow and moon sliced into the thunder kun, eliciting a death scream when its body was nearly cut in half. Its faint gold blood splattered all over the sky, emitting an oddly refreshing energy.

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“This kun is a manifestation of liquid thunder, it’s both a threat and an opportunity!” screamed a dao immortal. “Are such incredible opportunities what await every void-realm immortal?!”

He stared at the bisected kun with greed and jealousy, but didn’t have the courage to interrupt.

Heavenly tribulations were governed by the laws of the immortal dao. Anyone who dared intervene was destined for disintegration via tribulation. Case in point, when the Exalted Immortal Sect had interfered with Yuying’s tribulation to kill her, they’d paid the price with many of their elites.

Void realm cultivators in the area shared conspiratory looks.

“He can’t be allowed to pass the tribulation!” They could all tell that the thunder kun was the last test of the tribulation. Once the kun was slain and the tribulation passed, the Xue youth would truly become a void-ascended immortal!

Ninety-nine waves of thunder and lightning had drained the young man of most of his power. Now that he’d pulled out his last trick, the only thing keeping him upright, despite his powerful appearance, was his last dregs of inner energy and an iron will.

“You’re not ascending to immortality so easily!” Another young man shot a thread of sword qi containing the energy of the world at the Xue youth, catching him while he was fighting the thunder kun.

If it’d been anyone else going through a tribulation, those who interfered so openly would’ve suffered the worst kind of retaliation afterward. The Exalted Immortal Sect, for example, had chosen to sabotage Yuying’s tribulation only through subterfuge and the subtlety of having someone strengthen her tribulation. That way, everyone would attribute her death to her failure to overcome the trial.

The Xue youth had such no support, though. His clan was nearly erased and no one would avenge his death. This was why such boldness occurred to this cultivator and he dared launch a fatal attack outside the zone of the tribulation.

The Xue youth was at the end of his tether, one last strand of consciousness the only thing preventing him from collapsing. The thunder kun was thrashing in its death throes as well, its faint gold blood pooling in the air.

He stared at the approaching sword energy with frustration in his eyes. At his peak, the sword energy would've posed no threat to him, but now, it was enough to kill him.

Ding!

Something intercepted the attack before it could reach him, deflecting it with a crisp ring.

"Focus on the tribulation." Lu Yun stood outside the tribulation clouds with a large water jar, levelling a cold stare at the void realm cultivator who'd made the move. "I'll be sure to visit you when you're enduring your tribulation," he sneered.

Lips thinning, the void realm cultivator then flung back derisively, "You can barely keep yourself safe, Lu Yun. Mind your own business."

"Kill!" The heavenly tribulation was coming to an end, and void realm cultivators had seen enough to figure out how it would work. With reckless abandon, they charged at Lu Yun, gathering and releasing great heavenly power.

Boom!

A bolt of black lightning arced through the sky from a great distance and came crashing down on the Xue youth in the clouds. This wasn't part of the tribulation, but sword energy shaped like lightning!

At this point, the Xue youth was unconscious beside a pool of golden thunder kun blood after killing it.

"Piss off!!" Lu Yun swung the water jar fiercely at the bolt of sword energy. A ball of black light exploded from the container's opening, and the water jar swiftly grew in size until it was tall enough to reach the sky. A great aura rippled in all directions.

Bam!

The water jar crashed into the lightning-shaped sword energy.

"Sword Divine!!" snarled Lu Yun, his voice echoing through the skies. Void realm cultivators who wanted to pick a fight with him covered their ears and silently whimpered in pain.

Imbued with the demonic energy of the water jar, even Ding Lei, a void-ascended immortal, had been no match for him. These cultivators barely registered on his radar.

"Hmph," sounded a detached snort. "I await the day you ascend to immortality, Lu Yun."

Then, a faint cyan figure flickered out of existence. Lu Yun had yet to get a clear look at Sword Divine after all this time.

An unmoving Wu Tulong had been watching on the side. His golden spear twitched slightly before he turned to leave with a sigh.

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Everyone looked at Lu Yun with shock. He'd blocked the deadly sword lightning with just a simple surge of energy, proving his strength to all of them in the area.

Several void realm cultivators' hearts sank. Lu Yun absolutely wielded the battle strength of a void-ascended immortal!

"So powerful..." Lu Yun took a deep breath and gathered his internal energy to soothe the agitation of his body. Although he'd tapped into the strength of the water jar, he'd still suffered injuries from the black lightning. It looked like Sword Divine was already a void-ascended immortal.

"Oh?" Unbidden, Lu Yun turned to look at the Xue youth roughly fifty kilometers away from him.

Having regained consciousness, the young man was sitting cross-legged at the center of the golden pond. The liquid lightning quickly entered his body and healed his injuries.

And then, the young man began to metamorphosize.

His inner force gradually transformed into immortal force, tremendous energy of the world billowing out from him at the moment of completion and becoming one with nature.

Void realm cultivators nurtured their inner world and were able to unleash the power of heaven and earth with every move. Void-ascended immortals, on the other hand, were the bridge between their inner world and the outside world, becoming one with heaven and earth and drawing upon its vast, endless power with the might of their inner world.

Such was the true path to power.

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"What's that?" Lu Yun's eyes shot open as a silver moon emerged from the yet-to-dissipate tribulation clouds, scattering what it rose from. Snow fluttered and formed ripples of snowflakes, encircling the moon and the young man sitting beneath the bright wheel.

"That's a phenomenon of ascension," offered Ashu. Remaining in hiding all this time, he finally emerged beside Lu Yun.

"The immortals from a hundred thousand years ago weren't real immortals, either," he said with a sigh, staring at the moon and the snow. "Real immortals begin as mere mortals. Step by step, they defy the natural flow of the world, until one day, they ascend to immortality and bring forth such a phenomenon.

"Three essences take shape above the head, five energies gather in the chest, and clouds of good fortune emerge beneath one's feet—that's what heralds a true immortal. We've finally set eyes on the phenomena of ascension again after its disappearance tens of millions of years ago."

Chapter 592: Celestial Master Zhang

"Phenomenon of ascension?" Lu Yun looked at Ashu in surprise. Considering the latter's current nefarious appearance, no one would ever imagine that he'd once resembled a living man. His past golden radiance of a holy lord was nowhere to be seen.

With a profound gaze, Ashu looked at the Xue youth sitting fifty kilometers away, his eyes full of emotions.

“Indeed, an otherworldly manifestation due to reaching immortality.” Ashu nodded. “They vary from person to person. The stronger one’s strength and potential, the more intense the phenomenon will be. The final combat art the young man displayed just now—the projection of the moon and drifting snow—merged with the immortal dao to create this phenomenon. Accordingly, the manifestations we see now will evolve into a brand-new combat art and become his signature skill.”

Lu Yun started. He thought back to Mo Yi’s tribulation, when she’d blotted out the tribulation clouds with a single wave of the hand. In that instant, he’d seen a wall of purple energy whirling around her person.

But her actions had been too fast. She’d disappeared as soon as she’d become an immortal, so almost no one had noticed the purple energy. Now that he thought about it, that purple energy was likely her phenomenon of ascension.

He then recalled Ding Lei, the Admiral Turtle currently stuffed inside the water jar. The monster spirit’s Universe-Encompassing Palm was likely also an art born from his phenomenon of ascension.

He tried prying more details out of Ashu, but his new sidekick refused to explain further. Based on Lu Yun’s current theory, Ashu was a very, very ancient existence, someone who’d existed before the path of cultivation had been severed. He let the matter rest and tightly gripped the unremarkable water jar instead, remaining motionless as black ripples spread out from it.

Cowed, the immortals and cultivators nearby no longer dared leave. Roughly six hours later, when the sky gradually began to dim, the young Xue genius finally opened his eyes. Inside him, his energy had been entirely converted to immortal force.

Meanwhile, his phenomenon of ascension merged into his body and faded away. Now, each of his movements were marked by the energy of the land. This energy was a sign of the vast and mighty energy of nature following him wherever he went, rather than something from within.

“Is this what being a void-ascended immortal feels like?” The young man stared blankly at his palms.

Boom!

A sudden wave of his hand raised giant waves over the surface of the sea, ruining its newfound calm.

“Congratulations!” Lu Yun stowed the water jar and approached the young man with a smile.

“Thank you, senior brother Lu! Chujiu will forever etch your grace on my heart!” The young man turned around at Lu Yun’s approach and bowed from the waist.

“Oh no, don’t, please don’t!” Almost jumping in fright, Lu Yun hastily helped Xue Chujiu up. If not for the fervent goodwill he could sense from the young man, he’d really have mistaken the young man’s gratitude for lip service.

“Senior brother Lu, please take me in!” Xue Chujiu suddenly said in a strangled voice.

“Hmm?” Lu Yun blinked, then quickly grasped what was at stake.

The Xue Clan had been destroyed, but many of its cultivators and immortals scattered through the world of immortals were still alive. As one of the greatest clans in Witherdew Major, the clan possessed immeasurable wealth.

With almost no immortals of its own, they'd be an easy target for anyone in the world. Though he was a void-ascended immortal now, Xue Chujiu couldn't turn the tide all by himself. Therefore, he'd asked Lu Yun to take him in, not for his own sake, but for all of the cultivators of his clan!

"Alright." Lu Yun nodded. "Xue cultivators and immortals can move to Dusk Province and settle down there."

"You have my gratitude, senior brother Lu!" Overjoyed, Xue Chujiu immediately took out a communication slip to inform his fellow clansmen.

Dusk Province was now very different from what it'd once been; it was no longer a place anyone could come and go as they pleased. The various sanctions that had been imposed on the province were long lifted, and the weapons of war deployed at the provincial borders removed.

Not to mention, the Panorama Pavilion was about to hold an auction there. But even without that, Dusk Province had been acknowledged as a faction in its own right after Lu Yun had dealt with the yin spirit tide in Azure Province, showcasing the staggering means at his disposal in the process.

If a clan as big as the Xues and its innumerable cultivators wanted to enter the province in search of asylum, they needed permission from the province's master first.

After obtaining Lu Yun's nod, Xue Chujiu stuck to Lu Yun's side like a shadow. Truth be told, he really had no idea where else to go.

Revenge?

Who would he take revenge on? The heavens?

Multiple witnesses had sworn affidavits that the black lightning responsible for destroying almost all of Witherdew Major was the legendary chaos tribulation that not even the ancient immortal emperor would have survived.

What Xue Chujiu wanted now was nothing more than to protect the clan's descendents so they could one day reclaim their place as one of the greatest factions. As things stood, Lu Yun was the only one who could safeguard them.

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The East Sea was nigh boundless, so it wasn't easy for ordinary immortals to go from one end to the other. However, Lu Yun's Wandering Step could travel tens of thousands of kilometers in a single stride, so it took him no longer than three days to return to Nephrite Major.

The East Sea had been quite restless over the past three days. Many void realm cultivators had undergone their tribulations in that time, and the intense fighting the trials had inspired didn't let up for a single second.

Some successfully survived their tribulation and took their place as void-ascended immortals. Others died, either obliterated by their tribulation or killed on the spot by a nefarious ambush.

Lu Yun refrained from interfering with any of it; his time was precious. There were only fifteen days left until the Panorama Pavilion's auction commenced.

When he returned to Nephrite Major, he didn't go to Dusk Province, but first made a beeline for the capital Xiankan.

Ashu and Xue Chujiu were still with him. Strangely enough, neither Xue Chujiu nor anyone else could see Ashu. It was as if his existence was invisible to ordinary immortals, just like that of immortal ghosts.

Of course, there were exceptions to every rule.

When Lu Yun reached the Nephrite palace to meet with the Art and Zither Saint, the Art Saint stared at Ashu in horror, every hair on his body standing on end.

"Holy Lord Ashu of the underworld! How are you possibly here?!" The Art Saint retreated several steps in quick succession.

"Twelve hundred years ago, you were the one who entered the underworld and spread information about the Panorama of Clarity." Ashu nodded slightly at the Art Saint.

The latter fell silent. Lu Yun looked at the Art Saint, but kept his thoughts to himself. "Mmkay, I don't have time to listen to you folks chat about the good ole days."

Dong!

He took out the pitch-black water jar and released Ding Lei from it. "The Path of Ingress is with this turtle. Do as you see fit."

Lu Yun wasn't planning on keeping the Path of Ingress for himself. The thing came with immense karmic repercussions and was the remnant of a combat art from a formidable powerhouse.

"Easily done." The Zither Saint smiled gently and took out an ancient zither.

As strains of a melodious zither tune floated in the air, Ding Lei's head and limbs languidly stretched out of his shell like he'd been hypnotized, and he coughed out the sealed Path of Ingress together with another bead.

"In the world of immortals a hundred thousand years ago, you two were the celestial court's Celestial Master Zhang," Ashu suddenly interjected. "The Panorama of Clarity, the Portrait of Emptiness, the Profile of Harmony... and the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals they combine into. You were the ones who drew them.

"You killed the court's Divine Celestial Master and used his essence to draw this peerless treasure of the divine race."

Chapter 593: Ancestral Vein

Darting forward like lightning, Lu Yun grabbed the dull orb that radiated faint sword energy. A tremor passed through him as the Sugato Sword emerged to devour the pearl.

Moments later, a new pearl emerged on the unadorned hilt of the sword, plainly the weapon's crowning glory. Somehow, it'd been lost in the underworld at some point and then fell into Ding Lei's hands, where it'd languished all this time.

A silent cheer sounded from the sword's spirit. The pearl was the heart of the treasure, from which weapon spirits could be nurtured. Now that it'd returned to the sword, its spirit would become more mature as well.

"Finally, the Sugato Sword is whole again!" The weapon's power had grown by fifty percent with its completion. Only now did Lu Yun truly understand the sword's true power, and why it could rival even the Skyturning Seal.

"Hmm?" He finally realized how tense the atmosphere in the room was. His attention had been captured by the Sugato Sword earlier, and he'd completely ignored what Ashu had said.

They stood in the main hall of Nephrite Palace, where all important business was discussed. In addition to the Art Saint, Zither Saint, and imperial uncle, the senior council of the Nephrite court was in attendance as well.

If Lu Yun was to return the Path of Ingress to Nephrite Major, he had to do so with witnesses present. After all, the treasure meant a great deal to the court. However, there was a strange tension in the room instead of the expected jubilation.

"What? What's going on?" Baffled, Lu Yun noted the strange look on Ashu's face and how shocked Art and Zither Saint appeared. The late Zhao Changkong's uncle and other court members were visibly dumbfounded as well.

"Did you just say that he and I were Celestial Master Zhang of the human race from the primordial heavenly court?" It was Art Saint who broke the silence.

Ashu nodded. "That's right. You two were indeed Celestial Master Zhang."

That got a collective gasp out of the room. Ashu reeled in his ghostly energy and manifested in full, allowing everyone to see him.

"Celestial Master Zhang created the Panorama of Clarity with the divine celestial master's origin." That seemed to be addressed to Lu Yun.

Heart pounding, Lu Yun recalled what Empress Myrtlestar had once said, that the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals was the work of one of her friends. That friend must've been Celestial Master Zhang from the Primordial Era. Never in his wildest dreams did Lu Yun think that Wayfarer would turn out to be the human celestial master!

Wait wait wait... there's got to be more to it! Wayfarer is more than just a celestial master...

He'd scanned Wayfarer's shrivelled body with the Spectral Eye back in the celestial master tomb. Although he hadn't gotten a clear look, he was certain that Wayfarer had existed since long before the Primordial Era.

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“The immortal court has been destroyed and the immortal emperor reduced to ashes. What’s the point of mentioning Celestial Master Zhang?” Art Saint’s eyes glowed sharply. “Even the old man himself is left with just a piece of skin. Our ties and karmic relationship have long been cut. We are our own beings, we’re not him.”

Ashu nodded and obscured his figure again with ghostly energy.

While Art Saint was dismissive, the idea filled the immortals of Nephrite Major with great excitement.

The East Sea court hailed itself the legitimate successor of the immortal court simply because it’d acquired the heritage of the Monster Celestial Master. With Celestial Master Zhang, who’d survived from the Primordial Era to this day, personally backing Nephrite Major, wouldn’t that make the Nephrite court the true successor of the primordial heavenly court?

After all, Art and Zither Saint hadn’t denied who they were!

Moreover, Ashu had appeared abruptly and disappeared just as suddenly without a trace. Not even the peak arcane dao immortals present could sense him. He was clearly a figure of great power, and there was no reason for them to doubt what he’d said.

When one turned their thoughts to the two saints themselves, why, those two were personages who’d intimidated the entire world together. Nephrite Major remained safe under their guardianship, further proof of their identity.

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“Alright, this matter has been settled. It’s time for me to take my leave.” Lu Yun raised a cupped fist salute at the two saints, placed the giant turtle back in the water jar, and was about to leave when the Nephrite imperial uncle stopped him.

“A moment! Please accept this, master of Dusk Province.” A palm-sized orb of golden light was presented, within which lay a small, slumbering golden dragon.

“A dragon vein? No, an ancestral vein!” Lu Yun was shocked to see the small dragon. Ancestral veins were higher level than even dragon veins!

Earthen veins were where the energy of the world was nurtured, giving rise to heavenly and immortal qi. Various immortal materials, spirit veins, and crystal mines were born of them as well.

That was why Dusk Province had become so impoverished after the layout of Enneaworm Coffinbearers scattered its earthen veins. Ancestral veins were the most sophisticated category of earthen veins, outranking dragon veins, as their value was beyond the imagination of regular people.

The nine majors, ten lands, and four immortal seas were built upon their ancestral veins. These twenty-three heavenly courts were able to stand firm and superior to everything else precisely because of those twenty-three ancestral veins.

Among the other factions in the world of immortals, not even the East Sea court, who proclaimed themselves the most powerful of the world, possessed an ancestral vein. If they did, they wouldn’t fear the yin spirits rushing out of the underworld.

Witherdew Major had become a chaotic battlefield not only because of its natural resources or the great fortunes left by the top clans, but also because of its ancestral vein. And now, Nephrite's imperial uncle, a peak arcane dao immortal, was simply handing over Nephrite's ancestral vein!

Rooted to the spot, Lu Yun stared unblinkingly at the ancestral vein kept in the palm-sized ball of light. It was a rare occasion when he was overtaken by greed, but the fluctuation in emotion was quickly burned away by hellfire and his clarity restored.

"That will not do!"

"Imperial uncle, you can't do this!"

Before Lu Yun could say anything, the other immortals of the major voiced their disapproval with great urgency. This was the ancestral vein of the Nephrite court, the foundation upon which everything was built! Its importance was greater than even the heavenly mandate of the Nephrite celestial emperor.

Ashu stayed silent by Lu Yun's side, while Art and Zither Saint wordlessly collected the Path of Ingress.

"Shut up!" snapped the imperial uncle, keeping the arcane dao immortals in the room under control with a surge of great power.

"Nephrite Major is unstable, Lu Yun! Elites of the world of immortals have gathered to bicker over Witherdew Major, but who knows when they'll set their eyes on us in turn!"

"We cannot retain the ancestral vein in this state! If you still feel any gratitude for what Emperor Zhao Fengyang has done for you, accept the ancestral vein and leave us with a sliver of hope."

Thud!

The imperial uncle knelt down before Lu Yun, presenting the ancestral vein to him with both hands.

Brooding, Lu Yun glared at the old man with murderous intent in his eyes. He'd publicly offered Lu Yun this treasure so that trouble would be diverted to his doorstep instead!

Chapter 594: Chaos Lotus

Disorder ruled the world of immortals as the new normal, and Nephrite Major was severely weakened. It was now the weakest of not only the nine majors, but also the ten lands and four immortal seas.

She had no celestial emperor or crippled origin dao immortals, but a great many valuable treasures still. The Nephrite court wouldn't be able to protect their ancestral vein.

Art and Zither Saint only stayed on as the major's guardians because of the deal between Art Saint and Zhao Changkong. The late celestial emperor had set Art Saint free, so he would protect Nephrite for a century in return. He would take his leave after that, and Nephrite was certain to be consigned to the same fate as Witherdew Major.

Zhao Changkong had received his heavenly mandate from Zhao Fengyang. After his death, the heavenly mandate had returned to the origin of Nephrite Major, never to be recovered. Even if Nephrite selected a new celestial emperor, it would take the new ruler at least a thousand years to gather the heavenly mandate again.

Destruction was thus made inevitable; the major would be reduced to rubble long before then. Hence, as the seniormost member of the imperial family at present, the imperial uncle had no choice but to hand over the ancestral vein for safekeeping.

However, Lu Yun and Dusk Province would never know peace again after accepting such a reward.

Lu Yun knew full well what the imperial uncle was planning, but this was a proposal he couldn't decline. It was common knowledge that he had only gotten this far in the world because of Zhao Fengyang's original support.

"You're gifting me the ancestral vein?" Lu Yun mentally waved off his sudden flash of killing intent and looked at the old man kneeling before him.

"...yes!" Though slightly shamefaced, the imperial uncle's gaze flashed with resolution when he dwelled on Nephrite's impending doom a century later. "I believe the lord of Dusk will be able to protect the ancestral vein and tend to this spark of hope for the major."

"Fine," Lu Yun sighed and accepted the sphere of light. "By the way, Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi will return soon."

He then left the palace with Ashu, while the imperial uncle remained on his knees.

"Imperial Uncle..." The Yue patriarch looked at him and reached out to help him up, but the old man remained kneeling in the direction that Lu Yun had left in.

"Dusk Province has enough troubles as it is. Entrusting the ancestral vein to the province will plunge it in even greater danger." Downcast, the imperial uncle continued, "However, I have to do this, lest all of us be doomed."

With the restriction against immortals and the human demon in residence, Dusk Province possessed ample tools to protect the ancestral vein. Still, this development would paint an enormous target on their backs, and Lu Yun would be trapped in his territory. It would be difficult for him to expand his influence or build up his faction.

More importantly, once the new Nephrite celestial emperor refined a heavenly mandate after a thousand years, he would be able to collect the ancestral vein with the mandate.

Lu Yun would be left with nothing after all his efforts.

Art and Zither Saint didn't have any comments. Their guardianship of Nephrite Major for the next hundred years was just a promise they'd made to Zhao Changkong.

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"You're just going to take this hit for the Nephrite court?" Ashu asked in surprise as he followed Lu Yun. Although he was a holy lord in the underworld, he wasn't entirely oblivious to the happenings in the world of immortals. There were still means for the mausoleum keepers to keep up to date with the outside world.

"I can use the ancestral vein to help Dusk Province recover its vitality." Lu Yun nodded. "I would've asked to borrow it even if he hadn't made the offer." He shrugged; his reaction had been mere smoke and mirrors.

Ashu stared at the youth, dumbfounded.

"You do realize that your gnat-sized Dusk Province will never know peace again after accepting that ancestral vein? You've met people from the Purple Firmament already, and races that still thrive in primordial ruins like the fur seals have emerged as well.

"I'm following you around, but I'm not your servant," he remarked gravely. "I won't drive those people away for you."

He'd sealed off his core essence and, in turn, much of his strength. He was following Lu Yun because of the presence of hell luring him in, and because he was waiting for Lu Yun to perfect the breathing method so that he could automatically breathe in this world on his own.

Lu Yun glanced at Ashu, but didn't respond. He'd never expected the unpredictable holy lord to actually help him.

He had another secret weapon up his sleeve, and he wouldn't mind giving everyone a surprise. The new Nephrite celestial emperor was certainly welcome to try and take the ancestral vein back after a thousand years, but it would be Lu Yun's forever, barring the return of Zhao Fengyang.

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Xue Chujiu had been waiting outside Nephrite Palace for his new patron. Lu Yun took him and Ashu to the west after exiting the palace, planning on returning to Dusk Province through the transportation formation there.

Bam!

An enormous explosion came from the south of Nephrite Major, shaking all of the land.

"Phenomenon of ascension!" Ashu called out, staring at the southern sky in shock.

Expression matching the holy lord's, Lu Yun saw an enormous green lotus slowly blooming in the air. Its subtle fragrance wafted into Lu Yun's nose.

"That's the Chaos Lotus, the top of the ten connate spirit roots! It's the lotus' phenomena of ascension!" Ashu soared into the sky, watching the giant lotus from his vantage point thirty thousand meters above the ground.

In addition to Ashu and Lu Yun, everyone in Nephrite Major saw the great lotus as well, taking in the increasingly fragrant scent.

Quite a few cultivators had ascended to immortality over the past few days, thus the general public knew such ascensions were accompanied by unusual manifestations. However, they'd yet to see one big enough to cover the entire major.

"It's in the Ling Province!" someone shouted. "That's where the roots of the lotus are!"

Ling Province was the Ling Clan's territory!

After the former Nephrite celestial emperor executed the clan's origin dao immortal, they'd moved and settled down elsewhere, later becoming the top clan of Nephrite Major. So the newly ascended immortal came from the Ling Clan!

A great lotus projected into the sky, waves of profound energy oscillating out from it. Ling immortals all took flight to form protective circles around their newest immortal. A few peak arcane dao immortals even brought out connate-grade treasures of the clan to prevent any ambushes from finding their mark.

"That's... that's a real manifestation of ascension..." Xue Chujiu stood rooted by Lu Yun, staring at the behemoth of a lotus with defeat written over his face.

His manifestation had extended only fifty kilometers out, and he'd been so proud of himself when the void-ascended immortals he encountered in the East Sea had much less impressive manifestations. Witnessing the lotus was a tremendous blow to his ego.

"Do you know the difference between you two?" Lu Yun clapped Xue Chujiu's shoulder.

Xue Chujiu looked at him in confusion.

"Foundation," Lu Yun sighed when he looked at the lotus rooted to the sky. "The snow and moon you conjured were akin to a lotus without roots, while his is tethered to the sky. His foundation is very great. He must be someone like Jiangchen Xie, someone who sensed the existence of the void realm a very long time ago, but sealed himself away until the realm was restored."

There were many opportunities for void realm cultivators to ascend to immortality after the opening of the celestial master tomb, but they weren't the only chances. In this world, there was no shortage of primordial tombs containing the dao of their forebearers. Those inheritances had only laid dormant until the void realm was restored.

Chapter 595: Lu Yun's Brother

Lu Yun patted Xue Chujiu's shoulder in reassurance, who nodded back with a wry smile. The phenomenon of ascension slowly dissipated, and Ashu returned to Lu Yun's side.

"The Chaos Lotus, top connate spirit root of the world, is very likely in the hands of the Ling Clan." The holy lord looked at Lu Yun. "Aren't you going to take it for yourself?"

"There's a lot of bad blood between me and the Ling Clan, but this isn't the time to make a move against them. Let's return to Dusk Province first." Lu Yun sighed. Of course he wanted the spirit root, and the Skyturtle Pearl was also very likely to be in their possession as well. But he really had too much on his plate right now.

The manifestation of the Chaos Lotus took the world of immortals by storm. No one had fathomed it possible for a manifestation to span across all of a major. News about the void-ascended immortal spread not long after—the genius in question was Ling Rumeng, a brilliant young woman rather than some ancient heavyweight who'd sealed themselves away tens of thousands of years ago. Kept under close guard ever since the death of Ling Ruyun, very few in the world of immortals even knew about her.

The lotus manifestation when she ascended to immortality was a magnet for unwanted attention. The Ling Clan was already struggling with the aftermath when they discovered, to their further dismay, that someone had leaked her personal information.

Over the next couple of days, waves of mysterious elites launched suicide attacks against Ling Rumeng. Although the Ling elites managed to thwart them, the response still took a toll on the clan.

Fortunately for them, general attention was quickly redirected. Three days later, three more phenomena of ascension emerged and lasted for an entire day.

Shock and awe buzzed throughout the world of immortals. An era of a hundred flowers blooming together and a hundred schools of thought contending against each other had arrived!

Increasing numbers of void realm cultivators made their successful leaps to immortality, bringing about many dazzling manifestations.

“So the phenomena lasted for a day. So what?” sniffed a powerful arcane dao immortal. “Newly ascended, even a divine dragon is nothing but a child. There’s no telling if they’ll be able to fill out their wings!”

Killing intent colored his tone. Regular immortals, and even some aether dao immortals, were wary of the void-ascended immortals, while powerful arcane dao immortals dismissed them.

Not even void-ascended immortals would be a threat to arcane dao immortals in the short term. In order to safeguard their own interests, the arcane dao immortals were more likely to go on the offensive against the newly ascended immortals.

They’d done so in Destiny City before.

Growing attention gathered on Dusk Province. The upcoming auction in Dusk would be the saving grace for immortals of the old order if they didn’t want to be eliminated by the times.

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Seven days remained until the auction held by the Panorama Pavilion. Great crowds had returned to Dusk, which was almost deserted after its recent great disasters. The Qing, Chen, Lu, and slowly trickling in Xue Clan had made the province their home.

Dusk Province spanned only forty thousand kilometers, but each of the three hundred and sixty-five cities in the province contained pockets of space that could house billions of people. Any of the clans needed only one city to build a stable future.

Constantly bickering and raising a fuss because of the soul seeds, the Chen and Lu Clans finally behaved after the arrival of the Qing Clan. Only now did some realize that Dusk Province was on the rise as the future sacred land for immortal dao. Perhaps it’d finally cemented its position as where the future lay.

There were three hundred and sixty-five main cities in Dusk protecting the province, along with a terrifying formation in the shadows. However, most of the cities were sealed away at the moment. Only four were opened to welcome the Qing, Chen, Lu, and Xue Clans.

A week before the auction, construction projects sprouted all over Dusk.

The ancient tomb at the center of the province had been razed to the ground, and an enormous city built upon its ruins. It would be the three hundred and sixty-sixth city in Dusk. Strangely enough, its construction was ponderously slow, and only a crude shape could be seen after diligent efforts.

In addition, smaller cities had begun dotting the landscape.

Cultivators and immortals alike swarmed into Dusk Province as the auction approached, while dao immortals didn't dare do so anymore.

Due to the restriction against immortals in the province, anyone over the golden immortal realm had to seal their cultivation to the august immortal realm before setting foot on Dusken soil. However, to do so now was to flirt with suicide as the number of returned void cultivators grew by the day. Those cultivators could easily crush an august immortal like they would an ant.

The inheritance tower remained at the center of Dusk City, but visiting cultivators and immortals didn't dare enter it to cultivate. The image of Lu Yun activating the tower to crush everything that moved was burned into their minds.

.....

"What a surprise, the Zhu and Yue Clans sent cultivators with great potential." Lu Yun shook his head when he read over the jade slips the Panorama Pavilion had sent to him, reports that detailed what had happened in Dusk during his absence. The manifestation of the Chaos Lotus had marked a rise in assassination attempts against genius cultivators all over the world.

A bloodbath was brewing.

For many cultivators, Dusk Province was the perfect sanctuary. However, it wasn't easy to take up residence in the province with Lu Yun as its lord. The Zhu and Yue Clan had sent their geniuses to Dusk City through the Zhu Yan and Yue Longsha connection.

At the same time, the Panorama Pavilion shifted a portion of its resources to training servants for Lu Yun. Previously almost vacant, the governor's manor finally bustled with a full workforce.

Lu Yun's Envoys of Samsara and a few trusted Infernum had been his only subordinates to date. Due to the lack of manpower, the Panorama Pavilion had given Dusk Province a makeover in his three months of absence. His manor was now staffed with the necessary footmen, maids, and guards as befitting his position.

Smiles and frowns alternated through Lu Yun's face as he perused the jade slips.

"What?" His expression suddenly darkened. "Someone injured Lin Yu and Lin Xuan? No wonder I haven't seen them since my return..."

He'd been occupied with screening the servants the merchant guild had recruited and assigning them their posts. With his return, governance over Dusken affairs had been returned to Lu Yun. The Panorama Pavilion was quite unwilling to intervene, lest Lu Yun misunderstand their intentions.

That meant he hadn't had any free time until today.

Although he wanted to delegate all of his responsibilities to someone else, he had to take care of Dusk Province as its lord until his Envoys of Samsara emerged from their research.

“Since when did I have an older brother... Lu Feng?” Lu Yun’s brows knitted together. That brother of his had been the one to critically injure and almost kill the Lin brothers!

“Milord, there’s an emergency!” A servant of the manor rushed to Lu Yun with a report.

“Speak,” Lu Yun said coolly.

“It’s Sir Lu Feng,” the servant blurted out. “He’s gone to Sword Lake to make Master Yuchi Hanxing his concubine. Master Yuchi Hanxing rejected his demand and summoned the Dusk Phalanx and Black Tortoise to deter him!”

Chapter 596: Personalized Transmission

Lu Yun narrowed his eyes. The million-strong Dusk Phalanx were his first troops in this world, and Yuchi Hanxing his first confidante outside the Envoys of Samsara and Infernum.

She guarded the Sword Lake to the south of Dusk Province with the Dusk Phalanx, her duty to ensure the continuous integrity of the province’s lifeline. Within the Sword Pavilion by the Sword Lake lay Dusk’s transportation formation, a strategic chokepoint that had to be protected by a strong, loyal army.

Thus, Lu Yun hadn’t summoned Yuchi Hanxing back to the capital city in all this time. She was permanently posted to the lake to guard the transportation formation while making use of the Sword Lake—another sacred training ground similar to the likes of the inheritance tower in Dusk City.

Lu Yun’s older brother had appeared out of nowhere and run off to the Sword Lake to make Yuchi Hanxing his concubine! It was enough to make Lu Yun’s blood boil.

“Ge Long.” He didn’t allow himself to hare off recklessly. Someone who was able to critically injure Lin Yu and Lin Xuan would be no weakling.

He projected himself into hell instead and found Ge Long, who was helping Qing Yu and the nine envoys in developing their deduction method. He wasn’t fully occupied, since he only played an assisting role.

“Milord!” Ge Long jumped off the floating peak when he saw Lu Yun’s projection, standing before him with a fawning smile.

“Do I have an older brother named Lu Feng?” asked Lu Yun.

Lu Yun originated from Earth and had reincarnated into the world of immortals through the power of the Tome of Life and Death. The reincarnation made him one and the same as this world’s Lu Yun, but he hadn’t been blessed with the body’s memories.

Ge Long was once House Ge’s grand steward, which had been the dominant house of Dusk City. He must know House Lu like the back of his hand.

“You do!” Ge Long continued after a bemused pause, “However, he was adopted by the old Dusk governor rather than a biological son. Your Excellency was born when he was eighteen, so the old

governor sent him away then. I didn't know where he was sent off to, though." The old servant widened his eyes at Lu Yun. "Is the bastard back?"

"He is."

Ge Long calling Lu Feng a bastard and the reports of what he'd been doing in Dusk Province over the past few weeks told Lu Yun enough about what kind of man his erstwhile brother was. What surprised him was that his ready-made brother had been sent away by his ready-made father when he'd been born.

"You must be careful, milord... Your brother is not to be trifled with." Ge Long turned serious. "It's said that the old governor found Lu Feng in an ancient tomb. He was an infant back then, but the strong fragrance he emanated marked him as an unusual child.

"When the old governor sent him away at eighteen years old, his cultivation had already reached peak spirit realm. He was just a step away from ascending to immortality!"

"Mm, I understand." Lu Yun scattered his projection after a deep breath. It seems my knowledge of my own past is woefully inadequate. I didn't even know about such a powerful older brother of mine.

Upon further thought, he concluded this was only to be expected. His brother had been away for fifteen years when he'd reincarnated into the world of immortals, and he'd been too busy with the matters at hand to look into his past.

More importantly, he wasn't interested in that past.

.....

Trouble brewed above the Sword Lake. The million-strong Dusk Phalanx had formed up and assembled into the Heavenly Formation of the Black Tortoise. The projection of an enormous Black Tortoise soared into the air, threatening enemies from afar.

The actual Black Tortoise residing within the lake had been eager to make a move as well, but it retreated after the projection had punted it away.

On the other side of the Sword Lake stood an opulently dressed young man holding a gilded fan. He struck a flippant pose opposite Yuchi Hanxing, who spearheaded the great heavenly formation. A flighty expression on his face, he gave her a suggestive onceover.

A frivolous fop through and through!

From the way he dressed to the way he behaved, everything about him screamed vanity and opulence. A group of Lu youths surrounded him like stars would the moon.

"Tsk tsk tsk. Sooo.... an ancient Black Tortoise mated with a contemporary White Tiger and produced a child with a dao constitution. However, the Black Tortoise was a thing of the past. You may have the power and bloodline of that divine beast, but you're still a white tiger in essence." Lu Feng flashed a grin. "Don't worry, little white tiger. This big brother isn't being serious. Someone with as precious a dao constitution as yours shouldn't be a mere concubine."

The immortals and cultivators in the area could hear his voice, but strangely enough, they couldn't understand what he was saying at all. Only Yuchi Hanxing could clearly hear him and understand his words.

A personalized transmission!

Yuchi Hanxing brandished her lance and leveled its sharp tip at Lu Feng, her determination completely unfazed and her weapon as steady as ever.

"If you want a fight, then fight," she said coldly. "Cut the nonsense."

Heavenly power gathered about her and she became one with the world. Her formation of heaven and earth was active!

As one of Lu Yun's few confidantes not written into the Tome of Life and Death, it was only natural that she would be one of the first to obtain a formation.

Bam!

Frothing beneath her feet, the lake erupted as sword intent and corpses broke the surface to circle around the Heavenly Formation of the Black Tortoise. Meanwhile, a coupled mature Spiriteater Demon Frogs quietly emerged from the lake, eyes fixed on Lu Feng in preparation for an ambush.

"Feisty, aren't you?" Lu Feng smiled. "Become my disciple. You were born with a dao constitution, one of the most powerful in the world. I don't know who left you here as a contingency, but you shouldn't be wasted in someplace like this."

In the ears of others however, they heard only his flippant demand to make Yuchi Hanxing his concubine! Only Yuchi Hanxing could hear what he was actually saying.

"Shameless scum!" An immortal soared out from the Sword Pavilion with a snarl. "General Yuchi is the defender of the Sword Pavilion. She is not to be blasphemed by a fop like you! I'll teach you good-for-nothing a lesson on behalf of Sir Lu Yun!"

He manifested a giant hand and grabbed at Lu Feng.

"Oh?" Lu Feng turned to the immortal, but didn't make a move. Instead, the Lu youths escorting him did.

Bam!

One of the youths waved a hand and manifested a similar giant hand, knocking the immortal away.

"Teach Sir Lu Feng a lesson?" sneered the young man. "Not even Lu Yun would have the right to do that if he were here."

"Is that so?" interjected a steely voice.

Chapter 597: A Bunch of Trouble

Lu Yun walked out from the void and waved a hand, cushioning the defeated immortal to a soft landing. He then manifested a talisman out of midair that instantly healed the immortal's moderate injuries.

Lu Feng's delicate brows raised in surprise. The Lu youth who'd made a move looked awkwardly at Lu Yun. He was a void realm cultivator, alright, but he'd reached this level with the resources that Lu Yun had left for the clan.

"So you're that convenient little brother of mine?" Lu Feng called back the Lu youths and stepped before them.

"Convenient little brother?" Lu Yun shrugged and spread out his hands. "I suppose so."

On the way here, Qing Ruyan had told him everything Lu Feng had done since his arrival in Dusk Province.

Once known as Calamity Lu, the Lu Yun of old had been a subject broached with hushed whispers and utter dread across the land. Lu Feng seemed to have topped that, earning the nickname 'Big Calamity Lu' in just a mere month since his arrival in the province.

Bullying the weak and fearing the strong? Terrorizing the kind and cowering from evil?

He did all that before his daily breakfast. Lu Feng wrought havoc and bestirred mayhem wherever he went, looting and beating at the drop of a hat. He'd come with several powerful Lu cultivators who added to their leader's deeds by kidnapping whoever caught their eye.

The Chen and Qing Clans were no exceptions, let alone the immortals and cultivators who'd visited Dusk for the auction. No one was off-limits for him.

Unfortunately, since Qing Ruyan was merely a surrogate for Lu Yun, she hadn't imposed rules on Lu Feng after he identified himself. The Lus ruled Dusk Province, and while Lu Feng hadn't been born into the Lu Clan, he'd been adopted by Lu Yun's parents and bore the clan's surname nonetheless.

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"State your business." Lu Yun scanned the other immortals gathered to watch the show. Shuddering under his stare, they silently took their leave without hesitation. The Dusk governor had established his dominance in Dusk Province when he slaughtered invaders with the inheritance tower.

"My business?" Lu Feng's lips curled into a strange smile before he suddenly shifted forward and threw a punch at Lu Yun.

The sky trembled as an enormous pale golden hand crackling with purple lightning struck at Lu Yun. Both the sky and earth shook from the momentum. The overwhelming power of the world had been channelled to attack Lu Yun, something only a void-ascended immortal could do. Lu Feng was an immortal!

Lu Yun narrowed his eyes and answered back with a black ripple blossoming from his body. Great demonic power surged and rippled, followed by the manifestation of the giant water jar. He wouldn't be Lu Feng's match without some help, since he hadn't ascended to immortality himself, yet.

Bam!

He swung the water jar and shattered the golden hand. The recoil knocked him off balance, and he floundered several steps backward before steadying himself.

“Die!” Yuchi Hanxing sprang into action when Lu Feng attacked Lu Yun.

The lance in her hand glinted with light, and the Heavenly Formation of the Black Tortoise beneath her feet advanced upon waves in the air that were formed by enormous water energy.

Black Tortoise cries rang in all directions, activating all of the formations around the Sword Pavilion.

“Stand down!” Lu Yun snapped to stop her and activated the water jar again, shooting out a giant seal to stop the great Black Tortoise projection. “This is between the two of us. All of you, stay back.”

Lu Yun took a deep breath; his sharp instincts told him that he’d misjudged the situation. The water jar continued to shake in his hand and demonic energy blasted into the sky. The ‘Ge’ character etched into the water jar floated into the air and transformed into the character ‘mo’ for demon.

Lu Yun radiated roiling demonic energy, granting him a strength exceeding many immortals despite not having ascended himself. Resigned, Yuchi Hanxing retreated with the Dusk Phalanx.

“That’s the demon celestial master’s Demonic Sovereign Cauldron.” Lu Feng stared at the water jar in Lu Yun’s hand with a dark expression.

Swoosh!

He put away the gilded fan and balled both hands into fists, purple lightning crackling around them. Before Lu Yun made his move, Lu Feng seized the initiative. Drawing very close to Lu Yun, he threw a series of lightning-imbued punches.

Lu Yun huffed, completely unfazed. Hoisting the water jar with one hand and pointing with two fingers with the other, he met Lu Feng’s attacks head on.

By now, their battle was growing beyond the usual bounds of clashes between immortals. They’d opted out of immortal techniques and combat arts in favor of the simplest and most direct hand-to-hand combat.

Every move—every punch, kick, and swing of the water jar—contained enough might to fell the sky and split the earth.

Sword Lake exploded and the mountains in the area were razed to the ground. The feng shui layouts Lu Yun had set up here were blasted to pieces as well. They moved as they fought, slowly brawling out of Dusk and nearing the neighboring Outré Province.

Bam!

A tremendous explosion shook the land as a mushroom cloud rose in the air. Both hands clenched around the water jar, Lu Yun had blocked a deadly punch from his brother. A towering mountain was now a giant crater, and the two were at the center of a valley.

“Not bad.” Lu Feng pulled back suddenly and nodded. “Father told me to keep you safe and at least alive before he passed away. It looks like his worries were unfounded.”

Lu Yun frowned, worse for wear from the fight. He wasn’t as unaffected as Lu Feng. In fact, he’d been on the losing side just now.

“I removed some hidden threats in the province for you over the past month, which I’m sure you’ve noticed as well. No need to thank me,” he said in a narcissistic tone. “I have to take the woman with the dao constitution away. She’s trouble. Copulation between the past and the present is in itself a taboo. Moreover, a group of diisgusting fur seals have tampered with her. Once activated, your little province will be blown sky high.”

There was no one present within the fifty kilometers due to their violent battle, so Lu Feng spoke candidly without concern for unwanted ears. Although he was able to conceal the true meaning behind his words with his unusual combat art, it didn't work on everyone—Lu Yun being a good example.

“You’re leaving?” Lu Yun fidgeted with discomfort.

The earlier battle had done him a lot of good. It wasn’t so much a fight, as a sparring session to help Lu Yun acclimate to his current cultivation level and control his strength. He’d been wary of the coming heavenly tribulation, but now he was much more confident in himself.

“Leaving? Why would I?” Lu Feng shook his head. “Zhao Fengyang asked me to help protect Dusk Province. The woman with a dao constitution is trouble. So is the little fox, the ancestral vein, and the human demon in the ancient tomb. If I leave, they’ll get you killed sooner or later.

“You sure know how to pick them... Ah, I forgot about that little dragon. That’s an extraordinary piece of trouble as well.”

Chapter 598: Heart

Lu Yun cracked a wry grin. In the month since Lu Feng had arrived in Dusk Province, this older brother of his had figured out pretty much everything there was about him. The people he’d robbed or carried off during this time were actually either under the influence of soul planting, or undercover agents of other factions.

The Sal Tree of Life and Death had gained many wondrous abilities during its evolution. He could now use it not only to sense goodwill from others, but also whether they meant him good or ill altogether.

As soon as he saw Lu Feng, Lu Yun felt benevolence radiating from his ready-made brother. Therefore, he didn’t really want to strain their relationship for no reason.

“Alright, I think I’ve said enough. It’s time for me to head back.” Lu Feng stretched with languid narcissism. “You’ve got me to back you up now. Do whatever you’d like, don’t mind the scary monsters under the bed.

“However,” he paused seriously, “I came to protect your life and well-being, not to be one of your goons. I won’t intervene unless the situation is critical.”

Fwoosh!

Lu Feng unfolded his gilded fan, then waved it a few times with a stylish flair to cool himself.

Lu Yun shrugged. He wasn’t counting on his newfound brother to do much for him anyway. Sleeper agents and snares from the world’s other factions were of no concern to him, even without Lu Feng here. The truly surprising thing was that Lu Feng had come here at Zhao Fengyang’s behest!

“How is Senior Zhao Fengyang doing? Has he successfully reached the ingress realm yet?” Lu Yun asked hesitantly.

“Zhao Fengyang?” Lu Feng frowned slightly. “His business is out of your hands right now. You might be able to help after you reach origin dao realm, but not before. Enough.” He waved off his little brother’s further questions. “We’ll talk more after we return.” He turned and disappeared on the spot.

Lu Yun furrowed his brows; he smelled something off about all of this. Zhao Fengyang and the others were absolutely not trying to break through to the ingress realm. Otherwise, the previous celestial emperor of Witherdew would have stepped forward during his major’s catastrophe.

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As the auction neared, Dusk Province further bustled with activity. Its capital’s luxury surpassed even that of the Nephrite capital, Xiankan.

Many factions sought Lu Yun out in private to gain formations of heaven and earth for their juniors. Lu Yun turned none of them away and accepted their gifts without giving a clear answer in response. The immortals involved were both anxious and hopeful after their audiences.

After all, the thousand formations planned for the auction had all been settled beforehand. The few that had been recently freed up had belonged to the Witherdew factions that’d been so freshly destroyed.

After some time and convincing from her master, Yuchi Hanxing ended up becoming Lu Feng’s follower and publicly conducted the master-disciple ceremony. His appetite for further mischief unsated, Lu Feng could only scowl inwardly and put away the lecherous act in front of his new disciple.

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“Lin Yu and Lin Xuan were among Lu Feng’s victims. Is there something wrong with them?” When Lu Yun visited the Lin brothers’ residence, he was somewhat upset by the severity of their injuries. But no matter how hard he looked, his Spectral Eye came up with no problems. Moreover, the formation geniuses didn’t wake up no matter what he tried.

“Lu Feng seems like a troublemaker, but he’s actually very sharp and stays within the bounds of propriety. He must have his reasons for doing this.” It was probably better for Lu Yun to leave the brothers alone for the time being.

It was at this time that Zhao Zhicheng brought back Ling Jing’s head.

As a Ling Clan powerhouse, Ling Jing had an incredible amount of lifesaving tricks. After he fled the underworld, he’d scurried about the world of immortals for two months before finally running out of luck.

Zhao Zhicheng was far stronger than the last time Lu Yun had seen him; the formation of heaven and earth had completely merged with him. Every gesture he made was followed by an endless amount of heavenly power, which he could control at will.

“This is yours. From this day forth, you are the city lord of Dusk capital.” Lu Yun lazily tossed a seal to Zhao Zhicheng.

Stunned and preoccupied with staring blankly at Lu Yun, the seal almost hit the peerless immortal on the head. City lord of Dusk capital?

What did that mean?

Anyone could see that Dusk Province was well on its way to becoming a sacred land once more, and its capital was its beating heart.

The city lord of the capital would indubitably possess great power and receive boundless benefits. The holder of the title would have absolute authority in the province. How could Lu Yun so casually confer such a grand position to him?

Zhao Zhicheng couldn't believe it.

"Please reconsider, milord!" He stepped out of the way with his hands at his side.

"I'd like to, but I don't have many people I can make use of right now." Lu Yun tilted his head. "I lack the time and energy to administrate the province. Aside from you, I have no other trustworthy options. So, take it."

He sent the floating seal into Zhao Zhicheng's palm with the wave of a hand.

The Dusk Province seal granted control over the natural energies of the entire province. Moreover, it could open a portal to summon the million soldiers of the Dusk Phalanx.

Though Yuchi Hanxing had become Lu Feng's disciple, she continued to command the province's heavenly army. Against his own wishes, Lu Feng was forced to settle down at Sword Lake.

"Yes, milord." Zhao Zhicheng was a decisive man; Lu Yun's words convinced him to take the seal.

"If anyone wants to join us in the next while, you can accept or reject them however you'd like." After saying this, Lu Yun got up and left.

Transferring Dusk Province's administrative burden to Zhao Zhicheng allowed him to breathe a sigh of relief. Finally, he had time to take in and digest everything he'd found inside the celestial master tomb.

The smashed 'Xing Chen' replica needed some repairs, too. After fusing with the Arcane Yin Fruit, the replica had gained an autonomous soul. Lu Yun now had two bodies.

"I didn't expect that to fall into your hands." Holy Lord Ashu appeared at Lu Yun's side quite suddenly. He glanced at the summoned heap of flesh on the ground with clear surprise. "I'd be careful of it if I were you. A truly great master kept these lungs on the altar. You taking them away will result in some karmic effect down the line."

Lu Yun felt no malice from Ashu. Evidently, he had no interest in the lungs. The only obsession for the dead was resurrection. If the holy lord were alive, perhaps he would think differently.

"Where have you been lately?" He turned toward Ashu and transmitted improved breathing techniques at the same time.

Ashu was delighted by the gift. Sitting down cross-legged on the ground, he adjusted his mental state before making use of it. The ghostly aura upon him faded ever so slightly more with the improved method's circulation.

"Your conveniently-existing brother called me over for a fight." Ashu opened his eyes, which flashed with faint gold.

"Oh, is that so? Who ended up winning?" Lu Yun pulled an exaggerated expression.

Ashu rolled his eyes and harrumphed. "If I could use the essence of my power, I wouldn't necessarily lose to him."

"What?!" Lu Yun gasped at the unexpected answer. "You're not his match?"

Because of personal reasons, Ashu had to seal away his power. Less than a tenth of his actual strength was available to him right now... but even that was enough to crush anyone in the present world.

Yet, from what it sounded like, he'd lost to Lu Feng. What kind of monster was Lu Yun's purported brother?

"Don't underestimate that brother of yours," sighed Ashu. "He's more peculiar than the lord of the underworld. Of course, there's no shortage of people like him in the present world... The lord of the underworld has returned to a living state, but even he dares not set foot in the world of immortals."

Lu Yun fell silent.

"Refining these lungs into your replica can only spell trouble. It's quite possible that some entity too powerful for you to handle may arrive out of the blue someday, then kill you with a simple flick of their fingers." Ashu didn't seem too keen on carrying on the subject from earlier. He produced a small ember in the palm of his hand; at the heart of that ember was a tiny, thumping heart.

Lu Yun trembled with incredulity. No doubt about it, the heart was a product of the Fire Altar. It was the same kind of existence as the huge lungs refined into Xing Chen!

How could Ashu simply be carrying such a thing around?

"You're giving it to me?!" Lu Yun frowned dubiously. Having given him the Key of Life already, Ashu was now giving him an even greater treasure! Just what was the holy lord up to?

Although he sensed no malice from Ashu, there was no benevolence either. He was like a stranger passing by on the street.

"The karmic repercussions of life and death are too great. If I return to life because of you, I'll be marked with your brand by the experience. Eventually, I'll be forced to give everything I have to repay the debt." Ashu tossed the ember-wrapped heart to the youth. "You'll be quite strong on your own by then. No matter what I do, it won't be enough for me to get rid of that brand. It's better to give you some valuable baubles while you're still weak and needy so that when I'm resurrected, we'll be even."

There was no emotion in his voice. He sounded like he was talking about something unrelated to himself.

“Alright then.” Lu Yun nodded and accepted the heart. It’d evidently already been refined by someone. Though its true form was humongous, it didn’t seem so extreme in size as the lung.

“Where’d you get this thing?” he asked offhandedly.

“These organs were born in the underworld to begin with. As one of the strongest holy lords of that realm, it’s very normal for me to possess a thing like this.

“Besides, don’t celebrate just yet. Fusing this heart into your replica will mask the aura of the lungs, but fire and metal are opposing elements. Your replica will actually be weakened because of it.

“The only solution is for you to find the three other organs corresponding to the remaining elements and thereby complete the cycle. Only then will you be able to enact a true microcosm inside yourself.” Ashu doused Lu Yun with a bucket of cold reality.

“You better find the five related altars as well and refine them too. The altars are the real sources of creation! I highly doubt your replica will be able to bear the burden of five elemental organs, otherwise.”

Chapter 599: Lunatic

“The Water and Fire Altars are in the underworld. As for the Wood Altar and its related liver, those should be with the Ancient Tree of Life.” Ashu suddenly smiled slyly. “I wonder if you’re brave enough to go there.”

“Maybe some other time,” shrugged Lu Yun. “I haven’t dealt with everything on hand just yet.”

Setting the holy lord aside, he inserted the heart into Xing Chen’s body, then waved him into hell for further repairs. He needed to prepare for the Panorama Pavilion’s auction.

The thousand formations of heaven and earth were merely the highlight of the show, he had grander plans for the auction at large. It was an opportunity to spread the notion he had long harbored to the wider world.

Supplemental paths as king.

Several of the Panorama Pavilion’s similarly-sized peers were invited to the auction. Three months of time was plenty for anyone to prepare, whether they be merchant guilds or attending factions.

After disaster visited Witherdew Major, other factions of the world had gathered there to vie for the resources and riches left behind by its various factions. However, a mutual understanding between all parties involved meant that there was no all-out war, despite numerous conflicts.

Everyone was waiting for the auction’s arrival. It would indubitably be the greatest one of its kind over the past eighty thousand years.

.....

The day of the highly-anticipated auction arrived with great fanfare. To everyone’s surprise, it didn’t take place inside the Dusk capital, but a newly built city at the heart of Dusk Province instead.

The ancient tomb had been leveled, and a new shining city stood as a palatial complex that dominated over the rest of the province. The black waters of the Dusk River were diverted around it in a protective moat, astounding all who came.

“This doesn’t look like the blueprint for a mere city at all... a sect could be based here!” one immortal reacted immediately upon entering. “Does Lu Yun intend to found his own sect?”

The post-divine world only had a history of eighty thousand years, and most factions remained organized by race or clan. There were the courts of the twenty-three facets and the monster spirit equivalents of the other four oceans, but they were in the minority. Many more factions were tied together by blood alone, similar to olden times back on Earth.

However, immortals weren’t primitive humans just barely venturing out of their caves. Sects had come about long ago. Though they weren’t the main driving forces in the world, they remained forces to be reckoned with in their own right. Exalted Major’s Exalted Immortal Sect and Enlightened Major’s Immortal Martial School were both the strongest factions subordinate to their respective courts.

For as long as sects had existed, conflict between them and clans had never ceased. The many immortals who understood what Lu Yun’s intentions were with the new city snickered to themselves.

Most permitted his continued existence out of a desire for his formations alone. Once the secrets behind the formations of heaven and earth were bared to the world, he and his province would become public enemies once more.

The world did not need saints—especially living ones.

On the eve of the auction’s commencement, Lu Yun wasn’t in the best of moods. The Yellow Springs Land’s delegation was in attendance, but Zou Longxiu hadn’t come with them. His heart sank at the development.

The monster emperor should know that Zou Longxiu has become my second disciple... So why is he confining my disciple?

Zou Longxiu had messaged Lu Yun upon first arriving at the court, but no news had come after that. Lu Yun was definitely not in a good mood.

Boom!

Heaven and earth shook as a loud crash rumbled through Dusk Province. Everyone turned their heads to the sky. Four savage draconic shadows of faded gold spiraled in the air, then charged down into the new city.

Four enormous dragon veins!

“Lu Yun!” A deafening roar accompanied their appearance—the golden scarlet ape of the North Sea’s Levitating Island. “As per our agreement during the Sovereign Ranking in Destiny City, I must bring you four dragon veins upon the successful release of my dao partner. Today, I make good on my end of the bargain!”

The ape’s voice swept through the entire province, its words clearly reverberating in every immortal’s ears.

“Agreement during the Sovereign Ranking? Inside Destiny City?” Someone blinked. “Lu Yun was at the Sovereign Ranking?”

“That Xing Chen who stirred up so much trouble for the ranking... that was Lu Yun, wasn’t it?” sneered someone else. “So that’s it! No wonder Scarlet Ape protected Lu Yun back then. They’re in cahoots with each other!”

“Wait, wasn’t there proof from the Dusk Province battle that Lu Yun and Xing Chen are two different people?” yet another asked in puzzlement.

“They’re two separate people, sure. But who knows who the shitstirrer in Destiny City really was?” This seemed to silence the entire audience.

Well, actually... none of that was important right now. Lu Yun was on the verge of auctioning off a thousand formations of heaven and earth. Why provoke him at such a crucial moment?

“Hahaha!” The young lord of Dusk Province laughed heartily from within the city. “The monster ancestor of Levitating Island is faithful indeed. Many thanks for the dragon veins!”

Boom!

A loud crash rumbled from within the city as a golden hand reached out, dragging in the almost-berserk dragon veins. No matter how they struggled, they couldn’t escape from the giant fingers’ grasp.

“I have a question, Lu Yun.” Scarlet Ape appeared in the city’s airspace. With the fiery cape wrapped around its shoulders and firm grip on its iron staff, it stared down the youth perched atop the highest tower within the city.

“You took the North Sea’s dragon vein, the one on the verge of becoming an ancestral one, and now Nephrite Major’s ancestral vein is yours as well. Today you receive four more dragon veins... what do you intend to do with them?”

Five dragon veins and an ancestral vein! The crowd of immortals collectively trembled at the revelation. The North Sea’s nearly ancestral dragon vein was a treasure that most factions lusted after as well.

Dragon veins were exceptionally rare in the world of immortals; only the strongest races and clans were qualified to possess them. Moreover, their spirited natures meant they would have a mind of their own, rather than docilely remain in the ground. If an immortal received their approval, he would be able to make use of them without suffering backlash from the world.

Scarlet Ape clearly didn’t meet that qualification, but its brute strength and sheer durability were sufficient to overcome the recoil from the dragon veins. Sealing itself to august immortal level made no difference.

That made for five dragon veins and an ancestral one currently in Dusk Province! Greed flooded many people’s minds—such wealth was fit for a heavenly court!

“I have my own plans for them.” Lu Yun’s voice cut cleanly through the air. “If I may humbly ask, I remember a flawless origin dao immortal coming from Levitating Island last time. How’d you manage to raise someone like that?”

Everyone held their breath—a flawless origin dao immortal!

Most origin dao immortals in the world were crippled. Their origin dao fruits were shattered to the point of near disintegration, and they dreamed every day of restoring themselves to a perfect state. It would seem that Levitating Island had such a method!

Those who knew the late golden lion knew that it, too, had been crippled once upon a time. After joining Levitating Island, its fruit had been repaired.

“Are you picking a fight with Levitating Island, Lu Yun? Attempting to plumb our secrets?” Scarlet Ape’s expression dropped ominously and its eyes pulsed with a brutal light.

The old lion had died beneath the blade of the Dark North Sword sect head. Unable to help, Scarlet Ape had only been able to demand an exchange of dragon veins. In essence, the dragon veins had been paid for with the lion’s life.

Lu Yun mentioning the lion again had understandably incited the ape’s wrath.

“Uh huh.” Lu Yun nodded. “My use for these dragon veins has nothing to do with Levitating Island. Why, then, are you making a pass at Dusk Province’s secrets?”

He snorted humorlessly before continuing. “Today is the opening ceremony of the Panorama Pavilion’s great auction. If the monster ancestor of Levitating Island comes as a participant and guest, then you are welcome. But if you’re here to make trouble...”

Clang!

Hundreds of kilometers away, the inheritance tower in the middle of the Dusk capital quavered. Keen sword aura blasted into the sky, and Scarlet Ape’s face changed color several times before its colossal body shrunk to human size. It sheepishly landed in the city, as it, too, had come for the auction.

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Undiminished by the brief interruption, the event continued bustling with activity. The atmosphere rose to a new fevered pitch.

“Thirteen merchant guilds have joined together to host this auction. Aside from the formations of heaven and earth, there’s many more treasures to be found. Moreover, the merchants have also set up a sprawling market, one even greater than the old Myriad Returns Market of the North Sea!”

“What the, that’s a fortress ship! A ship stronger than those produced by the Ling clan is on sale here?!”

“Weaponry, Tai, Yu Talismans... these are all ancient talismans lost to time. How can Lu Yun be peddling them here?!”

Fortress ships and ancient talismans were both Lu Yun’s trademark products! No wonder thirteen of the greatest merchant guilds in the world had abandoned their grudges to come together for this market. Either type of treasure was worthy of being the grand finale to any auction.

“Lunatic... he’s a raving lunatic!” one immortal shrieked in astonishment at a jade slip before him. “This is a void realm method. That lunatic is selling these too?”

He seemed almost mad himself as he foamed at the mouth.

While the void realm had appeared, there remained very few methods for it. The top factions of the world had a monopoly on the few that did exist. Any weaker clan or sect that wanted access to them had to consign themselves to the patronage of their larger peers.

Before the Dao Flower dispersed, the strongest experts in the world had mobilized to find every void realm cultivator who'd created their own method. Any who resisted were killed on the spot, their methods confiscated regardless.

Void realm methods were unbelievably precious, yet Lu Yun was selling them with reckless abandon on the open market! His actions shocked and stunned, but also encroached on the top dogs' profits.

Chapter 600: Lot Number One

Lunacy, sheer lunacy!

Only an absolute madman would do what Lu Yun had done, and the countless cultivators and immortals arriving at the unnamed city were infected by his madness as well!

Although the void realm had been restored, void realm cultivators existed in only various powerful factions. No regular cultivators had made the ascension from being part of the general population!

They always ended up at a bottleneck upon reaching peak spirit realm. At best, they were able to ascend to the perceived void realm, thanks to some lucky accident. Improving further, however, was next to impossible without a void realm cultivation method.

But now, such a method was being openly sold in a market!

The auction held by the Panorama Pavilion wasn't accessible to the general public. Only factions who'd received an invitation were permitted attendance. This marketplace, on the other hand, imposed no such restrictions. Anyone could enter, and with enough crystals, they would be able to buy a flawless void-realm method!

Although the price was astronomical, all of the cultivators and immortals here would be willing to bankrupt themselves in exchange for a method. It was the very definition of priceless!

Immortals didn't dare sever their cultivation and start anew after the Dao Flower had dissipated, but the cultivation methods here granted them enough courage to take the risk. Even without the formation of heaven and earth, the so-called 'false' immortals now had a chance to catch up.

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"What is Lu Yun trying to do?!" The heads of the large factions refraining from visiting Dusk Province were stunned by the news.

"Isn't the world chaotic enough as it is right now? If the smaller factions are allowed to rise in power, everything will be turned upside down!" In a fit of anger, an arcane dao immortal flattened a small hill with a shake of his hand.

“Those ancient talismans and fortress ships are all critical in war!” exclaimed a Ling immortal. “Even the Ling Clan doesn’t dare put them on the market now, but he’s selling those things in public!!”

Amid the chaos in the world, the Ling Clan was poised to make a killing in the markets, due to their monopoly over refining fortress ships. Biding their time and setting opportunities in motion, they were just about to cash in on their patience.

However, Lu Yun was selling his fortress ships at fifty percent of the price of Ling ships. Only fools would choose Ling products now!

“He’s the one starting all this, so don’t blame us for answering in kind!” sneered the Ling heavyweight.

This was the perfect chance to reverse engineer Lu Yun’s fortress ships. Once they grasped his secrets, the clan would take another great leap forward in strength. After all, their foundation stretched back eighty thousand years. Lu Yun’s little province couldn’t even begin to compare!

The man immediately contacted his fellow clan members in Dusk Province and told them to obtain several fortress ships.

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Now a patchwork of green and yellow, the Sal Tree of Life and Death quietly floated above Lu Yun’s head. Sensing gratitude intertwining with malice, and goodwill knotted with retribution from the city, his lips curved into a smile.

A great amount of goodwill collected on the tree, manifesting as bright yellow karmic fruit hanging among its branches.

“Aren’t you worried that letting the Lings learn your techniques will end up biting you in the rear end?” Qing Yu stood beside Lu Yun as her true self. All her energy had settled within her, and her cultivation had reached the turning point of ascension. She could sense that her tribulation would strike in half a year.

With the collective efforts of the nine Envoys of Samsara, the little nun, and Ge Long, Qing Yu had completed her deduction method. However, she temporarily prevented the method from joining the immortal dao by calling upon the combat arts of its founders.

Meanwhile, she herself could communicate with the immortal dao as its dao sovereign. The void realm methods currently being sold in the marketplace were basic methods she’d deduced, and as such, they held no particular attributes. Anyone could practice them, and those with great wisdom would be able to develop their own from the great varieties of possibilities contained within.

Of course, they would gain even greater results with less effort if they learned Qing Yu’s combat art deduction method.

Lu Yun chuckled in response. “It doesn’t matter if they learn my techniques. If they can do that, other factions in the world of immortals can as well.”

Qing Yu gave him a questioning look.

“Fortress ships are critical to the Ling Clan’s influence, but not ours.” Lu Yun put his hands behind his back, smiling as his Spectral Eye took in the specks of light drawn to him by the Sal Tree of Life and Death. “Once techniques to build fortress ships are popularized throughout the world, anyone who utilizes them will think of me. The Ling Clan will be no exception!” He would essentially be educating the entire general public, earning him great virtuous merit!

The Sal Tree of Life and Death was evolving, and in urgent need of merit. Once his idea of supplemental paths as king spread throughout the world, Lu Yun would be able to earn monumental goodwill from all beings who benefited. Concentrated and absorbed by the Sal Tree of Life and Death, the merit would fertilize the tree.

Lu Yun was quite curious what the ancestor tree that had once taken root in hell would further develop into.

Qing Yu shrugged and didn’t have a response to his bold claim.

Lu Yun was also entertaining another thought—if her curse remained unresolved when it came time for her tribulation, then he would transplant the Sal Tree of Life and Death into her.

There was no way that the ancestor tree that was more powerful than the ten connate spirit roots wouldn’t be able to resolve her poison.

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Dong! Dong! Dong!

Three mighty bell tolls heralded the start of the widely anticipated auction. The auction proper was held in an enormous venue that seemed more like a minor world than any sort of structure. Floating summits dotted the premises—private booths for the guests.

The summits didn’t seem that impressive on the outside, but space was expanded within them and they could easily accommodate hundreds or even thousands of immortals. They surrounded a resplendent floating island, upon which various formations and talismans interlaced to form a brilliant barrier of light.

Only foremost factions of the world were allowed entrance. Although some arcane dao immortals stayed away, due to unwillingness to seal their cultivation to enter Dusk Province, their faction’s greatest successors were sent in their stead—void-ascended immortals! They didn’t have to seal their cultivations upon entering Dusk.

A young woman in an emerald dress walked on air and landed gracefully on the floating island.

“A void-ascended immortal! She’s one as well!” The guests were surprised to see the young immortal. They’d expected Qing Ruyan, the Panorama Pavilion’s representative in Dusk, would host the auction.

“I recognize her! She’s Wanfeng, the disciple of the mysterious expert!” called out an immortal. “She was in Destiny City during the Sovereign Meet and took a stand for a holy girl of the Star Demon Sect!”

“Wanfeng? Isn’t she Lu Yun’s personal maid? Even a maid of his has ascended to immortality from the void realm?!” Heated discussions broke out on the various summits.

Wanfeng seemed completely unfazed by the attention. She'd ascended to immortality, and Wayfarer had brought her back as per his agreement with Lu Yun.

"Well met, our most distinguished guests." She lowered her head and dipped in a proper greeting curtsy.

Quieting down, everyone waited with bated breath for the auction to reveal its secrets. The formations of heaven and earth wouldn't be the only things sold here; other treasures were sure to be found as well. Considering the marketplace outside sold even fortress ships and cultivation methods, they couldn't help but wonder what great treasures awaited.

"Let us forego further pleasantries and begin the auction." Waving a hand as her lilting voice sounded out, she summoned four returned void bean soldiers carrying a giant iron cage.

Thud!

The cage landed on the island with a heavy thud. A veil embossed with strange glyphs covered the cage, obstructing scans from immortals' consciousness.

"Lot number one: a void-ascended stone turtle!"

Swoosh!

At Wanfeng's gesture, the black veil rose and revealed a giant stone turtle crouching quietly in the cage. It was Ding Lei, who Lu Yun had defeated in the celestial master tomb.

Bam!

Golden fire blazed from one of the floating summits. Scarlet Ape shot to its feet, its eyes shooting fiery daggers at Wanfeng.

Ding Lei had been an admiral of the North Sea court! Although he'd later betrayed the North Sea, that didn't change the fact that he was a member of the North Sea monster spirits.

Selling Ding Lei was clearly a crisp slap at the face of the North Sea sacred land, especially with Scarlet Ape in attendance.

"Face me, Lu Yun!" snarled Scarlet Ape as it stared at seemingly nothing in the air.

"Hahaha, mad, are you?" snorted a mocking voice. A young man in blue rose to his feet with a derisive expression. "Are you going to disrupt the auction with all of us as witnesses, great monkey forefather of the monster spirits?"

Bam!

Great waves fanned into existence behind him to form a powerful manifestation.

"Those waves... he's the one who ascended to immortality in the Unsullied Sea not long ago!"

A few days ago, a terrifying phenomenon of ascension had become one with the Unsullied Sea. Great waves had risen thirty thousand meters tall, rivalling Ling Rumeng's manifestation of the Chaos Lotus.

The young man was one of the strongest void-ascended immortals in the world, and hardly feared a Scarlet Ape with its cultivation suppressed.

Most importantly, the sacred land of Levitating Island viewed the dragons as its greatest enemies. Thus, it was natural for the crown prince of the Unsullied Sea's dragons to take a stand against Scarlet Ape when it wanted to cause trouble. Besides, it'd been Yuying's Soul Restoring Pill that'd resurrected their young princess. The faction was therefore very friendly to Dusk Province.

"Gentlemen, please allow me a moment," Wanfeng interjected, her voice as pleasant as a babbling creek. "Sir Lu Yun captured this stone turtle in the ghost realm of the East Sea. If the forefather of Levitating Island would like to help this turtle, please explain why it attacked Sir Lu Yun for no reason."

A stick of emerald bamboo emerged behind her as she spoke, her stare at Scarlet Ape direct and unrelenting.

Scarlet Ape's chest heaved violently, but in the end, it sat back down.

"Let us continue." Wanfeng cast it a final sidelong glance. "This stone turtle was once the admiral of the North Sea court and thus knows many of its secrets. After ascending to immortality from the void realm, it acquired a powerful combat art—the Universe Encompassing Palm!

"We start at a billion immortal crystals. Bidding will now commence!"