

Necropolis 61

Chapter 61: He Who Sows the Wind Reaps the Whirlwind

Lu Yuanhou might still be out of sight, but his words were enough to make Qing Han and Mo Yi flinch.

Wanfeng's rescue had indeed been Lu Yun's goal, and no one could've fathomed that she'd been earmarked as one of the Sacrament's offerings. Lu Yuanhou had even reported it to the court, thus setting the decision in stone.

What disturbed Qing Han was that both Lu Yuanhou and Feng Li were backing House Ge. It hinted at a possible alliance between the great Feng and Lu Clans. And most of all, the head of House Ge had been very likely possessed by a member of the Exalted Immortal Sect.

"Oh." Lu Yun nodded slightly, seemingly unmoved. "It's her honor and fortune to be selected as a sacrifice. She will be glad to exchange her life for a century of peace in the province."

Everyone froze in stupefaction at his declaration, the hidden Lu Yuanhou included. What's this kid playing at now?

The Lu scion had previously noted the unusual attitude the governor showed toward his little maid. Hence, by way of retaliation, he'd designated her as a sacrificial good as soon as the 'Ge house head' had brought her back.

The governor himself was needed to start the ceremony. Therefore, Lu Yun's death had to be postponed until the end of the Sacrament, lest one wanted to risk an outbreak from the ancient tomb.

There was nothing wrong with a bit of revenge, however.

Lu Yuanhou and Feng Li cared little about the 'house head's' intentions, yet their simple presence had forced the man to act by himself and wait for Lu Yun alone in the copse of trees. Otherwise, he might've mobilized the entire house—no, he might've even sacrificed all of House Ge's cultivators to enhance his own strength.

"Lu Yun, what do you mean by this?!" Feng Li began to panic. This governor was too uncanny to be measured by common sense. Lu Yun had come for the maid, that much was certain, but he was completely indifferent to her fate now??

"I told you. It's her honor to contribute to Dusk Province's peace and prosperity!" Lu Yun declared self-righteously. "I can give up my only maid for the sake of the people, even though she's my only family in this world. By the same token, it is my duty as a loyal servant of Nephrite Major to exterminate traitors for the sake of peace and security!"

"House Ge is guilty of insurrection by attacking the Dusk Phalanx and massacring City Lord Mo Yi's people. Men, take them all! Those who dare to interfere will be deemed accomplices and judged guilty of the same crimes!"

A faint pressure radiated from him as his words echoed powerfully in the air, bearing down on Feng Li and the hidden Lu Yuanhou. It was nothing more than a slight flexing of the aura from the Tome of Life and Death.

Mo Yi and Qing Han were mostly unaffected, since it wasn't aimed at them. But to Ba Chuyi, the one closest to Lu Yun, it felt like a basin of ice water had been dumped on his head. He immediately sagged limply to the ground.

"Yes, sir!" Having received Lu Yun's orders, the one hundred soldiers hesitated no more. Weapons in hand, they began their assault on the Ba manor.

"Who dares!!" A terrifying pressure suddenly exploded from the mansion and sent two soldiers flying, their souls having departed this world.

This was the work of a House Ge nascent spirit elder. A charge of treason and rebellion was grave enough to ruin the house, so he couldn't afford to simply sit by and wait to be arrested. Poised to fight, the rest of the house's cultivators followed their elder's lead and charged into the soldiers' ranks.

However, unbeknownst to the elder, his victims were no ordinary warriors, but men of the Dusk Phalanx.

"How dare you criminals resist? Kill them all!" Lu Yun wouldn't show a single iota of mercy to a house that'd plotted his demise. They'd been a thorn in his side from the very first day he'd arrived in this world.

As the only one who could contend with a nascent spirit powerhouse, Mo Yi immediately grasped his intentions. But a palm-sized fox acted faster than her. The fox darted out of her embrace and climbed onto her shoulder. Miao's eyes sparkled like sapphires as she released a dreamlike glow that enveloped the entire manor.

Inside the courtyard, the raging nascent spirit elder suddenly became lost in thought and quickly lost his head to the soldiers' origin core leader.

Meanwhile, Feng Li and Lu Yuanhou stayed well away from the melee, afraid of drawing attention to themselves.

In Qing Han's hand, his identification shone like a miniature sun, its golden radiance releasing the full weight of a celestial emperor's aura. It was an authentic imperial token! To lay eyes on it was equivalent to seeing the emperor in the flesh!

"It's truly a token conferred by His Majesty..." a trembling Feng Li murmured as he looked down at the token in his hand. A dim glow was the most it could muster. Compared to Qing Han's, the difference was simply night and day.

As for Lu Yuanhou, he'd long evacuated from the scene. The imperial token possessed no real power in and of itself, but to defend House Ge in such circumstances would label him a true rebel.

In the presence of imperial prestige, House Ge had no choice but to submit and await the court's judgement. To resist was to walk a road of no return.

Yet resist they did, and the now-dead elder had ignited a wildfire that was impossible to extinguish.

The Dusk Phalanx had initially moved to apprehend House Ge's members for the governor to handle. But every soldier was now bristling with killing lust. Brave veterans of many battles against the North Sea monster spirits, they'd lost all reason. Nothing but slaughter could assuage their wrath.

Miao had dispelled his illusion and slipped back into Mo Yi's embrace.

"Governor, you go too far!" a pale Feng Li shouted somberly as he witnessed the rain of blood.

"One of the Dusk Phalanx's own lies dead at your feet," Lu Yun replied indifferently.

Feng Li fell silent. He and Lu Yuanhou had invested a great deal of effort into House Ge over recent days, but their plans now lay in shambles. They'd coveted the ancient lord's legacy, especially the Feng Clan. To that end, they'd needed to raise a new agent to the position of governor.

Their hearts bled, yet they didn't dare utter a single word. There might have been room for negotiation, if not for the death of the two soldiers.

Alas, all was too late now.

Ba Chuyi sprawled bonelessly on the ground, blankly watching the mighty figures of House Ge being cut down one after the other. Life core, origin core, and even nascent spirit heavyweights—no one was left untouched. A profound despair flooded his heart. Wouldn't House Ba be next, once House Ge was eradicated?

"Ba Chuyi, are you still House Ge's steward?" Mo Yi suddenly asked, her eyes falling on him.

"No, of course not! I'm not their man, House Ba has nothing to do with House Ge..." On the verge of tears, his pleading was almost incomprehensible.

"I shall be lenient, on account of your house being deceived by the criminals from House Ge," Lu Yun declared coldly. He'd quickly understood Mo Yi's plan after hearing her question; she wanted to establish her own faction in the city. For that, she needed a network. House Ba, a presence with deep local roots, would make for a suitable recruit.

"Praise be your mercy, Governor! Praise be!" Ba Chuyi banged his head repeatedly against the ground.

"The city lord is the one you should thank. She's aware of the ins and outs of your house, and knew you're not the type to rebel," Lu Yun coolly dismissed.

"Please accept my eternal gratitude, City Lord! My eternal gratitude!" Ba Chuyi kowtowed to Mo Yi again. The latter quietly nodded.

The slaughter gradually came to an end with the deaths of all hundred-odd House Ge cultivators. None had survived the bloodbath.

"Did all of them deserve to die?" Mo Yi quietly asked all of a sudden, a hint of distress in her eyes.

"I meant to capture them, threaten them a little, then take them in as my subordinates. But not only did the idiots resist, they even killed some of my men. The situation spiralled too far out of control for me to rein in the Dusk Phalanx." Lu Yun shook his head, his face expressing profound helplessness.

These soldiers were hardened men forged by year-round bloodshed. They killed, lest they be killed themselves. Once their battle instinct was provoked, they didn't stop until all of their enemies lay dead.

Miao's illusion was powerful enough to fool even an empyrean immortal, but it was powerless in the face of the Phalanx's terrifying killing frenzy.

House Ge had sown the wind and reaped the whirlwind.

Chapter 62: On the Banks of Dusk River

Lu Yun himself hadn't anticipated such a frightening, bloody outcome to today's confrontation. It was fortunate for House Ba that all of its members had been driven away, apart from the lone Ba Chuyi. Otherwise, they too would've been annihilated.

Their thirst for violence quenched by the carnage, the ninety-nine surviving soldiers formed orderly ranks behind Lu Yun again, fresh blood still dripping from their figures.

He'd brought one hundred and one soldiers with him: a hundred golden core cultivators and an origin core captain named You Tu. It'd been a stroke from You Tu's sword that'd felled House Ge's nascent spirit powerhouse. The latter might've been distracted by Miao's illusion, but cutting him down in a single strike was still proof of the captain's strength.

"Let's go." Lu Yun cast a meaningful look at the soldiers, his feelings conflicted. Had it been the right choice to make them his private army? They were a fearsome, double-edged blade that he couldn't carelessly unsheath.

Without a word, the men lifted their two dead comrades and fell in line behind him as they left.

"The Dusk Phalanx is well worthy of its reputation!" Lu Yuanhou finally came out from his hiding place, his complexion a bit ashen.

"It really is just a group of butchers!" murmured Feng Li. Being of noble birth, the two of them were no stranger to killing, but it was their first time witnessing such a bloodbath.

"With this group of warriors following him around, Lu Yun won't be easy to handle." Feng Li's face twisted in an ugly scowl.

"Lu Yun! I, Lu Yuanhou, vow to never rest until I see you dead!" the Lu scion vowed grimly. That painful beating back in Dusk City had been a fatal blow to his dignity. Lu Yun's maid was but an appetizer that far from mollified his hatred.

"Do you want to kill him?" a cold, ominous voice suddenly reached his ears.

"Fifth Uncle!" Lu Yuanhou's eyes widened.

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"What do we do now?" An unpleasant feeling welled up in Qing Han's chest at the sight of Lu Yun's obvious concern for Wanfeng. Is this... jealousy?

"Let's check the altar and see if we can save her." Lu Yun's current mood was nothing if not tense and glum. He hadn't even had time to count his spoils or rest after his adventure in the terrifying burial mound. There was simply no end to his troubles.

"You may return to the city lord's mansion for now. You won't be needed for the next part," he said, turning back to You Tu. Expressionless, the officer made an about-face and led the other ninety-eight soldiers away.

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Dusk River lay in its banks twenty-five kilometers away from Duskwater Prefecture's western gates. Somewhere around four kilometers wide, it originated from the ancient Dusk Tomb at the center of the province, and ran through half of the province's lands before flowing into the North Sea.

No living creatures populated its inky black waters, and not a single blade of grass grew within three kilometers of its banks. The Dusk River Sacrament altar stood on these very same banks, its appearance vague and hazy from afar due to the dark fog currently shrouding the river.

"Wanfeng!" From up close, Lu Yun promptly spotted his maid lying unconscious on the altar beside nine pairs of boys and girls.

Other than the nine pairs, the ceremony originally called for a hundred qi realm cultivators as well. But the sacrifice of Wanfeng and her empyrean-grade spiritual root had spared a hundred men and women from this dire fate.

In fact, every step of the ceremony should've been overseen by the governor, including the selection of the offerings. But everyone saw Lu Yun as a mortal without an ounce of cultivation. What gave him the right to preside over such an event?

Qing Han had been dispatched to this end instead, but three days ago, he'd gone off with Lu Yun, Li Youcai, Mo Yi, and the rest to Myriad Formation Summit and his whereabouts had been unknown ever since.

By the time Feng Li and Lu Yuanhou arrived, the figures of authority in Duskwater City and the prefecture at large were missing, giving them free rein to take control of the Sacrament, thanks to their imperial token. In exchange for the human lives, many would obtain tremendous blessings from the river god. For the two of them, it'd been too good an opportunity to pass up.

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"Stop!" Qing Han and Mo Yi rushed to prevent Lu Yun from approaching the altar.

"It's been activated, so the altar is surrounded by an invisible barrier. You'll trigger its defenses if you get any closer," Mo Yi hastily explained.

"But how can it be active? The required elegy is in my possession." Qing Han frowned at the dark light shrouding the altar. It should've been impossible to activate without that special funeral oration, yet there it was. The impossible conundrum thoroughly confused him.

The governor was the elegy's custodian in ordinary times, but rather than being passed down to Lu Yun following the previous governor's death, it'd been recalled by the Nephrite court.

Regaining his composure, Lu Yun suddenly asked, "Qing Han, don't you think this altar is rather familiar?"

"Hm?" Startled, Qing Han inspected it carefully. "It resembles the one in Truewater's ruins, only much smaller... wait! Are the two of them related?"

"I'm afraid the altar awoke because of us," Lu Yun murmured.

“What?” Mo Yi and Qing Han exclaimed.

“Truewater’s altar was suppressed by the Portrait of Emptiness, but came to life when we took the painting away. Coincidentally, this altar was also activated during the three days we spent inside the burial mound.”

Lu Yun had scrutinized the altar before them and discovered the same exact runes he’d seen on Truewater’s altar. Even the overall design and structure were more or less identical. Only, at more than thirty meters tall, the one in Truewater towered like a small mountain, whereas the present one was less than twelve meters tall.

“If my guess is right, with the elegy in my possession, I could’ve obtained the Portrait of Emptiness even without traveling to Myriad Formation Summit,” he whispered to himself, paying no heed to Qing Han’s and Mo Yi’s astonishment.

As an old hat at journeying through ancient tombs, he was well-versed in the structure of all sorts of burial sites. In particular, he specialized in extrapolation, allowing him to connect seemingly disjointed elements into layouts as exquisite as they were uncanny.

The same skill could be applied to everything in life. He could connect the dots and uncover the inexorable connections between seemingly isolated events.

For example, the connection between Portrait of Emptiness and the Dusk River Sacrament.

As for Mo Yi, she hadn’t cared at all when she’d learned of Qing Han obtaining the Portrait of Emptiness. Aloof by nature, she cared little for treasures and the like. Even an immortal item surpassing ninth-rank left her indifferent.

“Who goes there!” Lu Yun suddenly bellowed as he stared at the center of Dusk River. Unbeknownst to them, a giant vortex had formed on the surface, and the governor could discern a white figure slowly rising from its center.

“Is someone coming?” the startled Qing Han and Mo Yi asked. Neither of them could see the whirlpool, nor did they see the newcomer.

Chapter 63: Another Formation Orb

“What do you see?” Qing Han knew what Lu Yun was capable of. Back in the burial mound, the governor had brought an immortal ghost under his control, and seen the human form that Miao had dreamed up for herself.

Lu Yun shook his head, his eyes fixed on the center of the river. The figure in white had disappeared and a small island was slowly rising out of the vortex instead. The world around him seemed to shift in an instant. An enormous feng shui layout enveloped the premises, its influence covering a ten-kilometer radius with the island as the center.

“The two principles,” he murmured.

A layout of the two principles consisted of anything and everything in the world, deducing heaven and earth, yin and yang, and life and death from it. In such a layout, there was a fine line between heaven and hell. One misstep could lead to death.

Lu Yun had only ever read about the layout, but had never encountered it himself. It was much more opaque and complicated than feng shui influences found in natural landscapes. What a surprise to find one on the banks of the Dusk River!

“We’ve stepped into a formation.”

“Who did you see?” Sensing the change of their surroundings as well, Mo Yi’s face clouded over.

“A figure in white, but they’re gone now,” Lu Yun said quietly. “I’m certain that they’re alive.”

He’d activated his Spectral Eye in time to confirm that it was a living person, rather than a zombie or a ghost. They must’ve gone into hiding in the layout. I was able to see them because I can see through feng shui. Is all this their doing?

The layout was stripped of any extraneous sections, making it impossible for Lu Yun to tell what formation it corresponded to. Not even Feinie, in the Gates of the Abyss, had an idea. There was certainly a formation here, but the two of them lacked the knowledge to identify it.

If Feinie could digest all of the formations within the Formation Orb, she might be able to figure it out. But as it stood, she’d barely scratched the surface of the treasure. A connate-grade treasure that powerful wasn’t something a golden immortal could master.

“Shh.” Lu Yun hurriedly covered Qing Han’s mouth before he could say anything. “Someone’s coming!”

Swallowing his words, Qing Han shot the governor a glare and kept his mouth shut, struggling out of Lu Yun’s grip.

Having picked up on the changes in the air a while ago, Mo Yi looked around warily, but didn’t see anything. She’d only sensed the layout because of her powerful consciousness. All she and Qing Han could see was the island that had appeared in the middle of the river.

“Hahahaha, congratulations, Master Qi!” said a coarse and fawning voice. Lu Yun and the others held their breaths and stilled their tongues.

“His Highness the Crown Prince will reward you handsomely for retrieving the Formation Orb,” the voice said with great envy. “If His Highness grants you an opportunity, you’ll soon ascend to the golden immortal realm, Master Qi!”

“Once the mission is complete, the two of you will share in the merit as well. His Highness will reward you accordingly and you’ll become golden immortals in your own right.” This voice was more feminine. “What a powerful formation! It is indeed the last piece of work left by a great master.

“Today at noon is when yang energy will be the most potent in the past thousand years in Dusk Province. This great formation emerged to protect the pure yin Formation Orb from being contaminated by it. Fortunately, we have the treasure His Highness bestowed to us. We wouldn’t have been able to find our way around here otherwise.”

Lu Yun and the others had left the burial mound in the morning. After various hassles and other minutiae, it was now noon. The blazing sun scaled the sky, marking the peak of purest yang energy beneath the heavens.

The banks of Dusk River, however, were first covered by a layer of black mist, then a mysterious layout of the two principles. Obviously, this had something to do with the Formation Orb the mysterious man had mentioned. But wait, there was another one?

Lu Yun exchanged a glance with his companions and read the same confusion in their eyes. They'd retrieved the Formation Orb buried under Myriad Formation Summit. What was the one that this man was talking about?

And here, there was even a layout to protect this treasure when yang energy was at its peak. The group was baffled, but they didn't dare do anything reckless.

Three immortals came their way, one of them having remained silent the entire time. Lu Yun could tell that they were all at least august immortals, their cultivation too high for him to pin down any specifics.

Mo Yi wouldn't fear them, as an august immortal herself, but Lu Yun and Qing Han, on the other hand, were merely cultivators. They wouldn't be able to withstand an august immortal's presence.

"You've been listening for long enough," said the feminine voice. "Do you have anything to add, little friends?"

The three men suddenly appeared before the group. The leader of the trio was a beardless, middle-aged man with pale skin and feminine features. He was flanked by a stocky man in cyan armor and an old man in deep-red robes. They approached Lu Yun like they were taking a leisurely stroll through a garden.

Shock flashed through Lu Yun's eyes. The layout of two principles was extremely dangerous. One misstep meant an instant death, but the three of them were crossing it without any difficulty!

No, it's not them. It's whatever they possess that's protecting them from the layout. He noticed a faint white glow around their bodies.

"Who are you?" the man in armor demanded. "Identify yourselves!"

If there wasn't a strange formation in their environment that gave him pause, he would've crushed these three weaklings. Disguised by her treasure, Mo Yi seemed like an origin core cultivator in the man's eyes.

"It's been a while, Master Qi. How are you?" Qing Han scoffed at the feminine man. "I left the capital only a few days ago. Have you forgotten about me already?"

"Qing Han from House Qing! Why are you here? Are Qing Buyi and Chen Xiao here as well?" A trace of fear threw his expression into disarray when he uttered those two names.

Qing Han shrugged without a word.

"No, that's not right. Those two troublemakers were still arguing with the crown prince in the western palace when I left. They couldn't have come to Dusk Province." Realizing something, Qi Shenghui snapped, "Why are you here, Qing Han? Are you looking for the Formation Orb as well?"

There was no need for him to keep his intentions a secret, since Qing Han had heard their earlier conversation. They'd noticed the unwanted ears in the formation a long time ago; they just hadn't expected one of the eavesdroppers to be Qing Han.

"I am here as a special emissary of His Majesty the Celestial Emperor. I am to oversee the Dusk River Sacrament, and my two companions are the Dusk governor and Duskwater city lord. You tell me why we're here.

"If you're looking for the Formation Orb on the crown prince's behalf, Qi Shenghui, why are you here rather than the ruins of Myriad Formation Summit?"

News of the mountain's collapse had spread through Nephrite Major in half a day. Since the formations had remained on site, however, many believed the Formation Orb was still there. They simply weren't bold enough to venture into the ruins.

Qi Shenghui and his companions pulled an odd face at these words.

"I don't know if the Formation Orb in the mountain is real, but the one in the river certainly is." Qi Shenghui smiled. "If the three of you can help us acquire it, His Highness will reward you handsomely. Please do us this favor."

"This great formation is a strange one," said the old man in red robe. "Even with the treasure His Highness gifted us, I can't guarantee that we'll successfully break the formation and reach the island at the center of the river. We certainly stand a better chance with help from our little friends."

The armored man targeted the three of them with a terrifying aura.

"Dammit, Qi Shenghui wants us dead!" Qing Han thinned his lips. Or, more accurately, the man planned to use them as cannon fodder to test the formation. No matter if he acquired the island's Formation Orb or not, he would kill the three of them. Otherwise, he and his men wouldn't be able to return to Nephrite Capital alive.

Qing Han had two powerful protectors. If they knew Qi Shenghui had used Qing Han as cannon fodder, they would destroy him with every tool at their disposal. Not even the crown prince would be able to protect him.

Moreover, if news got out that Qi Shenghui had obtained the Formation Orb, he and his companions would be attacked and killed before they could leave Dusk Province.

The best case scenario was for Lu Yun and his two companions to die in the formation. Even if they survived, Qi Shenghui would still kill them himself.

Chapter 64: A Tomb For the Living

Mo Yi didn't respond to Qing Han's mumbling. The august immortals seemed powerful, but she was leagues above and could deal with them herself. What gave her pause was the strange formation in the area. The three august immortals possessed something that allowed them to navigate the formation freely, which was something she couldn't do....

"This governor is pleased to serve His Highness the Crown Prince." Lu Yun grinned. "I know a thing or two about formations, perhaps I can be of help."

His reaction bizarrely reassured Qing Han. There had been countless terrible monsters in the burial mound under Myriad Formation Summit. The undead hag and the nine bloodcorpses they'd encountered at the end of their excavation were particularly powerful.

But Lu Yun had still managed to get them out of there alive.

“You’re the governor?” Qi Shenghui paused to give Lu Yun a once-over, his feminine eyebrows quirking slightly. “Isn’t the Dusk governor a mortal who can’t cultivate? You’re in the qi transformation realm.”

“The Lu Clan from the capital gifted me an Aurum Openia Pill and many others,” Lu Yun said without missing a beat. “I became a qi transformation cultivator after taking them.”

Qi Shenghui’s question had informed Lu Yun that the man lacked knowledge of Dusk Province’s recent events, so he used the clan as his cover.

The man and his companions fell silent.

“I have heard that House Lu in Dusk Province is a branch of the Lu Clan, Master Qi,” the armored man whispered. “They snuck into the province a thousand years ago and planted their bloodline here.”

A conspiratory smile tugged at Qi Shenghui’s lips.

“How wonderful it is that you’ve become a cultivator,” he said. “It’ll be a great contribution if you acquire the Formation Orb for His Highness. Perhaps he’ll even help you keep your title in a fit of good mood.” He narrowed his eyes slightly, killing intent thickening.

“Don’t do anything reckless,” Qing Han silently transmitted to Lu Yun and Mo Yi. “Qi Shenghui is a eunuch and a valued official of the crown prince. The crown prince must’ve given him powerful treasure before sending him to locate the Formation Orb. We should play his game, for now, and see where that leads us.”

Mo Yi nodded slightly and withdrew her readied power.

“Trust Lu Yun,” Qing Han piped up. “This place isn’t going to stump him.”

That being said, he had his own plan. The longer they dragged this out, the more his strength would recover. He’d soon be able to use the two most powerful items in his possession: the starstone and the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals.

Using the starstone had serious ramifications for him, but it would be more than enough to deal with three august immortals. The Scroll of Shepherding Immortals had helped him recover half of his strength. Even better, it was gradually eating away at the thing in his body that terrified even the Qing Clan.

“His Highness can help me keep my position?” Lu Yun followed up with self-righteous zeal in his bright eyes, “Then I am his to command. This governor will do all I can to acquire the Formation Orb.” He said all that without batting an eye, an easy task given his degree of thick skin.

Qi Shenghui’s face twitched. He hadn’t concealed his intent to kill the trio when he demanded their cooperation. The threat couldn’t be more obvious without putting a knife to their throats, yet the governor had still announced his allegiance to the crown prince?

“That would be ideal!” The armored man broke into loud laughter. “The Lu Clan has spent a lot of resources on you. Soon, they’ll have you form a golden core and help them get what they want. With you serving His Highness, he’ll be able to interfere and steal the treasure right under your clan’s nose.”

Qing Han and Mo Yi exchanged a look and snorted at the same time. Lu Yun had said something similar to Qing Hongchen before. Then, he'd almost gotten Qing Hongchen killed. In fact, the young man was still missing, if not dead.

"Enough chit chat," snapped the old man in red. "Demonstrate your loyalty with action. Past noon, the Formation Orb, and this formation, will sink back into the river. Who knows when they'll resurface again."

Once the island returned beneath the waters, not even a dao immortal would be able to gain access. The water of the river was deadly poisonous. Nothing could stay afloat on it, and nothing could survive within it.

With a nod, Qi Shenghui waved his hand, casting a beam of white light from his body and carving a path to the Dusk River through the terrifying layout of two principles. The path of light dimmed and faded once it entered the water; it seemed there was something in the river that blocked it.

Immortals, Lu Yun sighed inwardly. A tomb raider and feng shui master like him could never break through a layout in such a way. This was something only the immortals of this world were capable of. Even if they couldn't identify a layout, they could destroy it with raw power, or use a treasure.

The six of them walked along the white path and reached the riverbank.

"You, follow the path onto the island and see what's there," Qi Shenghui ordered Mo Yi in a chilling tone.

The layout of two principles restricted anyone from soaring into the air. No one could take flight here, with or without a sword. They would have to rely on their feet to reach the island.

"Don't." Lu Yun grabbed Mo Yi and shook his head before she could say anything.

"What? Do you want to take her place?" Qi Shenghui's eyes shone murderously. He'd only allowed the three of them to live so they could be cannon fodder. He wasn't going to allow the governor to latch onto the crown prince's thigh.

"Take a good look at the river. She'll be dead if she walks into the water," Lu Yun scoffed. "Didn't expect His Highness to take a simpleton under his wing."

"What did you say?!" Qi Shenghui flew into rage, his fair face flushing beet red. How dare a qi transformation ant insult an august immortal?!

"Bodies! So many of them!" The old man in red looked down at the river reflexively, his expression changing drastically as a result. Qi Shenghui and the armored man followed suit.

Countless pale bodies floated in the river and moved with the waves, their eyes wide as the final moments of life slipped past them. Their empty gazes seemed to be fixed on the six of them.

Though the three of them were august immortals, they couldn't help but shudder from the cold that worked up from the bottom of their hearts. Corpses themselves weren't terrifying, but even immortals would be creeped out when countless bodies were staring at them.

“129,600 bodies.” Two dark shadows flashed through his eyes as Lu Yun activated his Spectral Eye. “That’s the number of the one principle in Taiji philosophy. This is when one principle is used in chronology. One era is 129,600 years, and the layout in the river is a layout of one potential.”

He abruptly lifted his head up to the sky and saw the sun hanging behind layers of mist, lifeless and dim. Lu Yun’s expression turned exceptionally dark.

“What’s wrong?” Qing Han asked, the first to notice Lu Yun’s change of expression.

“There’s a tomb for the living here,” Lu Yun looked at the island at the center of the river, “And we’ve stepped right into it.”

Chapter 65: Path of Ingress

A tomb for the living!

Lu Yun’s sect’s texts did have some records about this exceedingly mysterious type of tomb: it was generally protected by three types of layouts based on the one potential, two principles, and three essentials respectively. There was no layout that was purely based on any singular one of them.

The ten Taiji forces, from the single potential to the ten orientations, could be transformed individually into thousands of feng shui variations, or fused together into innumerable more. They represented the power inherent in heaven and earth, life and creation.

The layout that protected a tomb for the living was layered together from feng shui based on the one potential, two principles, and three essentials. Lu Yun had already seen the first two. As for the three essentials, they were heaven, earth, and man.

The two principles held infinite variations, and of the three essentials, heaven and earth were already visible right in front of them. I suppose ‘man’ has to do with the shadow I just saw.

His sect’s records had expressly forbidden entry into any tomb for the living. They were even more taboo than bloodcorpses. Although tomb raiders dared to raid tombs of any size, the text he’d read had specifically banned tombs of the living at the end of its account.

Granted, there were more characteristic features to these tombs than their accompanying feng shui layouts. However, every piece of evidence so far was pointing to his identification being correct. Right, Lu Yun was all but certain—the island at the center of the Dusk River held an empty tomb.

Can there really be another Formation Orb inside? Is there really more than one?

He’d already tried asking his second envoy, who’d taken a look at the orb in her hand and shaken her head in bewilderment.

“A tomb for the living? Who does it belong to, an ancient immortal?” Qi Shenghui demanded darkly. Murder flared in his eyes. Like most of his peers, the eunuch was particularly petty and vindictive. He was hellbent on killing Lu Yun for calling him a simpleton.

He was surprised at the young man’s declaration, but the revelation was reasonable enough. There were plenty of tombs in the world today. Rediscovering an ancient site could happen just about anywhere. And no one knew exactly who had erected these tombs for the dead immortals.

"If it really is an ancient tomb, that makes things a lot easier," Qi Shenghui mused.

Lu Yun's eyes were fixated upon the island. Opening his Spectral Eye, he saw the white figure once more.

It was a lithe, long-haired woman, dressed in alabaster robes. He was too far away to see what she looked like, but there was no doubt she lived and breathed. She was holding something he couldn't make out and stood very still, almost like she was looking back at the six of them on the shore.

"It's the tomb of an immortal indeed!" the old man in red intoned. "It spans the entire island." He was knowledgeable enough to make the correct judgment, but the woman in white remained invisible to him.

"No wonder the Formation Orb is here," Qi Shenghui took a deep breath. "You, go that way onto the island!" he turned toward Mo Yi. The Duskwater city lord was beautiful enough to charm any man, but Qi Shenghui was an eunuch and his first instinct upon seeing such a pretty fairy was to destroy her!

"No need," frowned Lu Yun. He flicked a soybean forward with his finger and conjured a golden soldier of about eighteen meters tall where it landed.

"Get over there and take a look!" the young man commanded.

"Yes, sir!" The black fire flickering in Lu Yun's eyes cowed the soldier into immediate submission. He walked into the Dusk River at the end of the white path.

"What exceptional skill in puppetry," the old man in red noted with surprise. The bean soldier Lu Yun had summoned was no different from a real living creature, yet it wasn't alive.

Splash splash splash!

Upon making contact with the river waters, the white path became a floating bridge. The moment the soldier's feet touched the bridge, the waters roiled with activity from the corpses below, who eagerly grabbed at their perceived prey.

The soldier had no time to react to the assault. He was pulled into the waters by his ankle, then torn to pieces in the next instant.

"Wah! Wah! Wah!" A sound like a babe's cries echoed across the surface, terrifying the people who heard it.

"The resentment of a thousand years of sacrifices has fused with the river water, bolstering the layout's power." Lu Yun's complexion clouded over. The young sacrifices couldn't become vengeful ghosts in their own right, but the special conditions here had still absorbed their accumulated emotions.

"What do we do?" The flummoxed Qi Shenghui instinctively looked at the old man in red for help.

This elderly expert was a true master of formations. He and the good-for-nothing Formation Thirteen were as different as night and day; the latter cared first and foremost about fishing for fame.

"Lay out a formation! We can take advantage of its power to weaken the river's own, then cross it!" The old man in red was very grave, as he could see the formation in the river as well.

The qi transformation realm soldier had been weak, but it'd been torn to shreds without triggering any of the river's power. There was no doubt that an origin core city lord would meet the same end.

The three august immortals here, on the other hand, valued their own lives too much to venture into danger.

"Hold on!" Lu Yun called out. "The formation here is quite complex and interlinked. It can change in an uncountable myriad of ways. With all due respect, mister, do you know what it is?"

He could see the one potential-based feng shui influence, but not the formation that corresponded to it.

The old man blinked, then shook his head slightly. "Alas, it's too strange for me to make out. It almost seems one with nature. I can see the formation, but not its true form."

"What formation do you intend to weaken the river formation with, sir?" asked Lu Yun.

"Ah..." the old man in red blushed with some embarrassment. He wasn't particularly upset at his own lack of answer, though, and instead responded with an eager question, "Do you have a solution, young man?"

Lu Yun's prior mutterings had tipped the elderly master off: there was more to this 'useless' governor of Dusk Province than the rumors suggested. When it came to formations, at least, he was leaps and bounds ahead of most others.

Though the old man had found some of the explanation mystifying, most of it had helped clear up many key points of confusion.

"I can't make out the formation here, either," replied Lu Yun, "but I can see that you have something with you already that can counter it. If you increase its output by ten- or a hundredfold, you'll be able to cross onto the island unhindered by the corpses."

"Aha, right!" The old man looked at Qi Shenghui.

"No! The Path of Ingress is too important. It's one of Nephrite's most important treasures. We can't possibly bring it out!" The eunuch staunchly refused.

"The Path of Ingress?!" Qing Han's eyes widened to the size of dinner plates. "That bastard Zhao Changkong... how dare he touch the Path of Ingress!"

The Path of Ingress was a treasure that could traverse any formation in the world. Nephrite Major relied on it to excavate ancient tombs for the heritages held within. Of course, it wasn't omnipotent; otherwise, Nephrite would've dug up every tomb long ago and used the spoils to conquer the immortal world. For example, the four ancient tombs surpassing emperor rank within the four provinces were utterly impenetrable.

"Shut up!" Qi Shenghui hurriedly shot back. "The path I've brought is only an imitation. The true article requires several dao immortals in conjunction to activate. How can an august immortal like me do anything with it at all?"

“Even an imitation shouldn’t be lightly made use of,” Qing Han harrumphed. “If an immortal from outside the major got ahold of its secrets, what advantage would Nephrite have over our rivals? Do you think that you alone can keep it safe?”

Qi Shenghui colored, but there was nothing he could retort with.

Only an imitation, eh? Lu Yun pondered. If an imitation lets us move freely in this two principles layout, how much more would the original do? It’d probably smash through the one potential here with ease.

The layouts here only constituted common feng shui influences, not grand ones that encompassed the world. In the latter case, the imitation would no doubt prove useless.

“We can destroy the imitation as soon as we get the Formation Orb within the tomb. As a connate-grade treasure, the Formation Orb can both create and destroy formations. If we can acquire it, Nephrite Major will have another powerful weapon in its arsenal. We are doing the major a great service!” The old man in red neutrally declared. “Now, I will set up a formation to boost the path’s power tenfold. Traversing the Dusk River will be a breeze.”

“Alright!” Qi Shenghui gritted his teeth. The white light around him grew more brilliant by the second, until a small, twisting band of luminosity appeared between his fingers. Even though it was only an imitation, the entire sky was still lit up by its radiance.

“Be on high alert, Situ Yun. Kill any newcomers who appear, no matter who it is!” Qi Shenghui’s voice was shrill and a little feminine, but his lethal intentions were clear.

“Understood!” The armored Situ Yun tensed as well and drew his sword.

“That doesn’t quite matter right now,” sighed Lu Yun. “We need to get rid of these corpses first, or we’ll all die.”

The corpses within the Dusk River had stealthily climbed ashore at some point, and were already very close to the party of six. Not zombies, nor hags, just cold, dead corpses.

Everyone had been so focused on the Path of Ingress. If Lu Yun hadn’t kept an eye on the river all the while, the others wouldn’t have noticed their arrival.

Chapter 66: Butchered Corpse

When his Spectral Eye was active, Lu Yun could glean information about the corpses from when they’d been alive. Their identities varied, but they’d all died within Dusk River’s waters. There were mortals, cultivators, and even immortals.

“How can these corpses walk ashore!” Qi Shenghui and the others paled and instinctively took several steps back. The horde of corpses had made them uncomfortable enough from the water. Now that the dead were so much closer, their eerie nature had only intensified.

“Careful, these corpses are intimately connected to the river’s formation. You can’t handle them with brute strength alone!” the old man in red shouted, warily watching as the corpses drew nearer. “Qi Shenghui, Situ Yun. You two hold off the corpses while I set up the amplifying formation for the Path of Ingress! We’ll force our way through!”

He urgently snapped out his words. They didn't have much time available to them, only two hours at most. Past noon, the island in the center of the river would sink back to the bottom, and no one knew when it would appear again.

As an intrinsic part of the formation in the river waters, the corpses were no ordinary bodies. They were impossible to clear away, so only the Path of Ingress could help the humans get through.

"Fine!" Qi Shenghui ground his teeth together. "Mister Qing, please hurry!" He handed the Path of Ingress to the old man.

The elderly master was only an august immortal, but his expertise had made him a valued guest advisor of the crown prince. Objectively, he was much more prestigious than the eunuch. Qi Shenghui only held the replica because he was a more intimate servant.

Taking the Path of Ingress, the old man produced a large slab of formation stone, upon which he began etching a formation.

Formation stone was a special kind of material in the world of immortals, used to boost the power of formations carved upon it. In fact, one of Lu Yun's late grand stewards had used its purchase as an excuse to pay the Skandha Range a visit to sell off Wanfeng.

Lu Yun gazed intently at the old man's etching technique as he worked. This old man is quite good. Much, much better than that Formation Thirteenth, but also much worse than Feinie. He moved his eyes away.

Just as the old man had said earlier, he was etching an amplifying formation that bolstered the power of treasures or combat arts. Immortal grade, to be exact. Despite its rarity, Feinie was more than capable of doing something similar.

Qing Han and Mo Yi protectively flanked Lu Yun, while Qi Shenghui and Situ Yun both hacked at the strange corpses who'd climbed onto land.

The corpses were individually pathetic, but the influence of the one essential layout and the formation linked with the feng shui made them quite formidable. The combination of two august immortals was, oddly enough, being pushed back. In fact, the fighting became rather dangerous for them at times.

"How can this be?! They're just corpses. Why can't I kill them?!" Qi Shenghui shrieked. His high-quality immortal sword slammed into a corpse, but was only able to beat it back rather than cut through its skin.

"Idiot," Lu Yun cursed under his breath. "How're you going to kill something that's already dead?"

Upon hearing this, what the eunuch wanted more than anything was to turn around and hack Lu Yun in two. Alas, the corpses kept too much pressure on him, occupying the fullness of his attention.

Situ Yun was completely quiet. He used his sword to continuously swat the corpses aside in great, sweeping strokes, keeping them away from the old man in red. He'd noticed that the corpses' true target was the Path of Ingress in the old man's hands.

Unfortunately, the number of corpses kept multiplying. It was as if all hundred-and-thirty-thousand corpses wanted to climb ashore. Qi Shenghui and Situ Yun were driven back, pushed to the limits of their strength.

“What are you three standing around for? Come and help!” The eunuch roared, gnashing his teeth together.

“If you two immortals can’t deal with these corpses, what can we cultivators do?” Qing Han snickered derisively. However, a hint of worry was hidden in his eyes. He snuck a glance at Lu Yun, who was similarly apprehensive. Qing Han’s heart rose back into his throat, and he readied both himself and his starstone.

Before he’d come to Dusk Province, Qing Han would’ve been scared out of his wits by a sight like this. But his experiences within Myriad Formation Summit had strengthened his heart and resolve. The corpses confounded and unnerved him, but he could unfalteringly stand his ground.

Likewise, Lu Yun was entirely unconcerned by the threat of the corpses. The Tome of Life and Death ensured that these walking dead could not hurt him.

Rather than them, he was worried about the unknown formation within the river. Someone was obviously controlling it, otherwise the corpses wouldn’t have begun their attack as soon as the Path of Ingress appeared.

“Could it have been that white shadow?” He squinted slightly. “The living person that resides within the tomb?” Two black flames lit up in his eyes as he stepped forward.

Fwoosh!

A dark ripple emanated from his body. The aggressive corpses instantly recoiled—even their movements began slowing. Sensing a brief respite in pressure, Qi Shenghui and Situ Yun hastily drew sword seals and covered everything within reach in a relentless wall of blade lights.

“Wah! Wah! Wah!” The baby they’d heard earlier suddenly began wailing again. The sound seemed to bolster the corpses. A black aura enshrouded each of them, serving as a shield against Lu Yun’s unique presence against the dead.

“Resentment given form.” Lu Yun furrowed his brows.

Countless lives had been sacrificed at the banks of Dusk River. If the waters hadn’t artificially soaked up their malice, there should’ve been a ghost here that was at least as powerful as the former Feinie.

The Dusk River Sacrament was a great conspiracy. Its victims had died for absolutely nothing, their body and soul both consumed by darkness. Therefore, their animosity was understandably intense. Just as Feinie’s ghost had resisted the authority of his Tome of Life and Death, so too did the corpses.

Still, he was much stronger now than he had been then. Attaining qi transformation had augmented the Tome’s capabilities; despite the fearsome acrimony, Lu Yun could keep the corpses at bay.

“Wah! Wah! Wah!” The crescendoing cries painfully pierced the ear in both pitch and volume.

A wisp of black smoke rose into the air, gradually transforming into a humongous skull. Its gloom cast a shadow over the skies themselves and caused the corpses to become even more frenzied as their ranks swarmed toward the shore. The two august immortals' thicket of sword light was shattered beyond repair.

Lu Yun coughed, forced back by the sheer energy.

"Resentment has congealed into malice. What a malignant aura!" The young man was very agitated by the black skull's appearance.

He'd seen very little of it in Myriad Formation Summit, which, logically speaking, should've been overflowing with malice. No wonder! This tomb of the living had absorbed all the resentment of the giant undead hag. If it weren't for that, the nine bloodcorpses wouldn't necessarily have beaten her.

"Wait a sec. This tomb is connected to that burial mound!" Lu Yun's scalp tingled with dread; he remembered the mysterious abyss within the mountain.

The group was currently at the site of the ritual, where all the power from the sacrifices was conducted to the floating peak in the abyss. In other words, the abyss was right beneath the river.

And what was at the bottom of the mysterious abyss in the burial mound? The tomb of the living!

The titanic undead hag had been sealed within the abyss, which meant that the tomb here had sucked up more than ninety percent of her resentment until now.

"But there's something that doesn't quite click. Myriad Formation Summit isn't far from here, but fifty kilometers is still quite a jump," the young man muttered. "There's no way the abyss is beneath us."

They'd entered Myriad Formation Summit through a transportation formation, but its disintegration and the subsequent release of the corpse flies indicated that the corpse coffin still remained below the ruins of the mountain. The formation had only carried them vertically down, nothing more. Unless...

A butchered corpse!

Perhaps Yueshen's corpse had been cut up and placed in various locations in the prefecture. The main torso was buried under Myriad Formation Summit, while the other portions were tied to it in an inexplicable manner.

Yes, that must be it. I found many grand layouts within the corpse coffin: the Ninefilia Specter Fostering, the nine sector eight trigram combo, and the certain death layout. All of those did double duty as spatial bridges!

The abyss was beneath the Dusk River. The head of the corpse coffin was directly beneath their feet, though the collapse of the certain death layout probably meant that that particular coffin was no more.

Thud, thud.

Two muffled impacts later, Qi Shenghui and Situ Yun were sent flying. Their swords had finally succumbed to the malignant air, losing their power and autonomy. The corpses' resentment surged, driving them forward in a hideous renewal.

“We’re done for!” Despair filled the eunuch’s eyes. Their august immortality wouldn’t protect them from being ripped to shreds here.

Boom!

A white burst of light erupted from behind them in the nick of time. The Path of Ingress widened to nearly colossal proportions, beating back the approaching corpse horde.

The floating bridge over the river became part of the pathway, finally providing free access to the island in the center.

“Done!” the old man in red laughed joyfully in relief. Qi Shenghui and Situ Yun exhaled with similar sentiments.

“Wah!” The black skull cut short the triumph with another inopportune wail. A number of white tentacles reached out from the waters, dragging the path slowly down into the depths. Its radiance began rapidly dimming, and the sinking surface threatened to take Lu Yun and the others with it.

“Corpsefish!” Qing Han recognized the large terror in the depths.

Chapter 67: Reversal of Yin and Yang

It wasn’t surprising that there were corpsefish in the Dusk River. It was a strange, yin river originating from that ancient, beyond-emperor-level tomb at the center of Dusk Province. It was only natural that there would be zombies and other monsters born of the energy and unresolved grievances.

The giant corpsefish didn’t surface, nor did its white tentacles form any trapping formations, which wouldn’t work on the Path of Ingress anyway.

However, the creature itself was so incredibly large—more so than the corpsefish in the burial mound—that it could physically grab hold of the path and slowly drag it into the water with the help of the feng shui layout of one potential.

“What do we do now?” Qi Shenghui panicked. They would be dead if they were dragged into the river along with the path. But if they left the treasure’s range of effect, they might fall victim to the strange formation on the riverbank. One careless move would get them killed either way.

“Impossible!” The old man in red robe paled. “What manner of monster is this? How can it possibly counter the Path of Ingress? The treasure’s power has been boosted tenfold!”

The bodies had stopped climbing ashore and floated about in the river instead, their empty eyes silently staring at the six of them.

“It’s a corpsefish,” said Situ Yun, his eyes filled with fear. “A thousand years ago, I was a general of the Sirius Battalion. My comrades and I travelled to this province to quell the unrest of the Dusk tomb, where I saw a fish monster with a human face. This one remains underwater, but it must be the same monster I encountered back then!

“I recognize these tentacles! General Xu Dingchi of the Sirius Battalion, a golden immortal, was torn to pieces and eaten by such a monster!”

A thousand years ago, at the beginning of the unrest from the Dusk tomb, there had been no restrictions against high-level immortals. Nephrite Major once sent reinforcements of thirty-six golden immortals with a million soldiers under their command.

All of them had died in battle, along with the then governor of Dusk Province.

Legend had it that the terrors from the tomb had feasted upon the immortals, so Dusk Province became a forbidden ground for high-level immortals. Like all tales, it wasn't entirely accurate, as what had devoured the thirty-six immortals weren't the terrors, but several giant corpsefish!

The terrors were only responsible for killing the dao immortals.

Situ Yun was reminded of his terrible past by the swarm of white tentacles.

"Take out another formation stone and follow my instructions! Quickly!" Lu Yun turned to yell at the old man in red when the Path of Ingress was mostly submerged in the river.

"Follow your instructions?" Qi Shenghui snapped before the old man could respond. "A qi transformation cultivator like you needs to get out of the way! Qing Han, get into the river and kill the corpsefish! Its tentacles may be powerful, but the monster itself is weak!"

He had recognized the creature by now as well. The calamity of a thousand years ago had shaken all of Nephrite Major. The corpsefish and other unnatural things that'd emerged in Dusk Province were all noted in the imperial record.

Qi Shenghui had done his homework before coming to Dusk River for the Formation Orb and knew what creatures might appear in the river. That was why he'd brought a formation master with him and Situ Yun, who'd fought here before.

He'd failed to recognize the monster at first, because it hadn't surfaced above the river. Only Qing Han, Situ Yun, and Lu Yun, those who'd seen such a monster before with their own eyes, had recognized it immediately.

"That won't do!" the old man boomed with a frown, taking out a formation stone. "There's a defensive formation of corpses within the water. Not even a golden immortal can hurt the corpsefish under these circumstances. We must do as the Dusk governor says."

Qi Shenghui's expression darkened after being refuted yet again by the old man. The old man might be highly regarded, but the eunuch was in charge of the mission. He stared at the governor and his two companions, his eyes shining with unbridled murderous intent.

Lu Yun had no time for consideration of Qi Shenghui's ego. He babbled out instructions, drawing on knowledge of formations he'd learned from Feinie's memories. Five thousand years ago, she'd been hailed as Formation King. It was a cocksure title that not only showed her confidence, but also her status in the dao of formations.

"What an intricate amplification formation; it can amplify the power of the Path of Ingress by a hundred times!" Shock flashed through the old man's eyes. He'd never seen such a formation. There weren't many strokes, but the formation was unusually complicated and delicate. By the time he finished, he was panting and drenched with sweat.

"I set up the formation under his guidance, but can't remember how I did it at all," muttered the old man. He looked at Lu Yun like he was seeing the young man for the first time.

The corpsefish was still dragging the treasure replica under with all it had. They were less than three feet from the river! Black water dampened their shoes and they would fall into the river in about a dozen breaths.

"Activate the formation!" snapped Lu Yun, breaking the old man out of his trance.

The old man hurriedly bit his tongue and spat a mouthful of blood essence on the formation. "Activate!" he yelled.

Rumble.

Like a dragon jerking awake from its slumber, a great tremor spread through the Path of Ingress, sending out shockwaves that broke the tentacles that were clinging to it.

The river was roiling and frothing as dead bodies pointlessly struggled in the currents, unable to climb onto the bank. Amplified by a hundred times, the treasure had managed to suppress the formation of one potential.

The black skull of malice continued shrieking relentlessly, but it couldn't do anything with the formation suppressed.

Qi Shenghui, Situ Yun, and the old man in red looked back at Lu Yun in shock. How could a qi transformation cultivator know of such a powerful formation??

Didn't the rumors say that he was an incompetent wastrel?

How could someone like him be questioned for his ability to be governor?

Did Dusk Province have different standards for labelling people as good-for-nothing trash?

"What are you waiting for? Let's go!" Noting the three immortals staring dumbly at him, Lu Yun prodded them to action. "The formation can hold for only an hour. Then it'll be destroyed, along with everything in it."

"That's enough time!"

The island would stay above water for only about another hour as well. The replica of the Path of Ingress had to be destroyed, since it'd been refined with the actual treasure's power. If it fell into someone else's hand, it wouldn't bode well for the Nephrite court.

It would be best to destroy the replica along with the formation, after they got what they came here for.

Destroy it? Lu Yun snorted inwardly. He wasn't going to do that. An hour later, the treasure would be teleported into the Gates of the Abyss by the portal he'd hidden in the amplification formation. It would only appear as if it'd been destroyed.

"Take point, you three!" commanded Qi Shenghui.

The old man in red opened his mouth to say something, but stopped short. Both the treasure and the Formation Orb had to be kept a secret. Therefore, the three youths still had to be silenced.

It's a bit of a pity about the young governor's impressive knowledge of formations though. Before he dies, I'll search through his soul to take his memories and acquire all his learning!

Lu Yun shrugged and stepped onto the Path of Ingress.

The river continued slamming into the treasure, but the bridge had become incredibly sturdy, its light keeping both corpsefish and bodies at bay. The three august immortals relaxed when they saw Lu Yun and his two companions cross the river safely, then trailed after the cultivators.

"Halt." Lu Yun stopped in his tracks as they approached the island. Before Qi Shenghui could say anything, he cast a golden soybean. After an explosion of golden radiance, a soldier in golden armor emerged and stepped onto the island.

"It's fine," the soldier said meekly, turning back to face Lu Yun. "There's no danger—"

Before he could finish, his body deteriorated at great speed. A soybean fell to the ground, dried and shriveled.

"The island can absorb the life essence of the living," Lu Yun said with a frown, staring at the drained soybean. "Is that a secret of a tomb for the living?"

With his limited cultivation, the soldiers he could summon were only qi transformation cultivators, serving no purpose other than scouting ahead. The soldier's senses were connected to Lu Yun's, so he could tell what had happened to it before his death.

"Absorb life essence?" The old man frowned slightly.

The island was protected by the layouts of one potential, two principles, and three essentials, but the Path of Ingress had forged a path through all of them. Nevertheless, there was another layout guarding the island.

Lu Yun recognized it as one that reversed yin and yang. It was derived from the formation of two principles. Again, he didn't recognize the formation the layout corresponded to.

"Reversal of the two opposites, so that's how it absorbs life essence." He spoke to the old man without turning around, "Give me a formation stone."

"What are you going to do with it?" the old man asked without thinking as he handed Lu Yun the stone.

"Yin and yang are reversed on the island, as are life and death," Lu Yun responded casually. "I'm going to set up another layout to reverse yin and yang again, countering the life-absorbing power."

The old man in red paused. He could see neither layouts nor formations. To him and the others, the life-absorbing power on the island must be coming from a terrifying, unknown creature, but Lu Yun said it was a formation.

"Stop daydreaming and help me!" Lu Yun turned to the old man. "We'll reverse the reversed yin and yang with a layout of the eight trigrams. The eight trigrams are composed of eight opposing forces." The

Dusk governor took out a spirit stone and started etching as he explained, "Heaven and earth, wind and thunder, fire and water, and mountain and pool. Carve them in pairs of two."

The old man gaped at him, at a complete loss.

Chapter 68: Formations and Feng Shui

"What's wrong?" Lu Yun frowned when he saw the old man gaping at him.

"I—I don't know what you're talking about," the old man responded, shamefaced. He could tell the governor was discussing the intricacies of formations, but he, Qin Xianhuo, a renowned formation master in the whole of Nephrite Major, couldn't understand what he heard!

Lu Yun rubbed his forehead. An eight trigrams layout was a little too complicated for contemporary formation masters in the world of immortals. Knowledge of feng shui must've been lost in the great war a hundred thousand years ago, so even Feinie might not understand what he was talking about.

Resigned, Lu Yun moved on. "I don't have time to teach you. Give me four formation stones."

Even more shame blanketed Qin Xianhuo. Though being reprimanded by a teen was humiliating, the desire to understand burned even more fiercely in his eyes.

Unfortunately, there wasn't enough time for a lesson, nor was there time for Lu Yun to give him detailed instructions, as he had before. They had less than an hour left, although the bolstering formation itself could stand for more than an hour under Lu Yun's control. But once the peak of yang energy dissipated after noon, the island, along with the tomb for the living, would return to the abyss beneath the river.

His sect's warnings about entering these kinds of tombs prickled in Lu Yun's mind all the while. He just couldn't wait to get inside and see what they were all about.

Qin Xianhuo handed the formation stones to Lu Yun, who sent them into the Gates of the Abyss.

"Give me a hand, Feinie. Heaven and earth, fire and water, wind and thunder, mountain and pool. They're not just forces, but rather eight different systems. Express them through formations and etch each pair on a stone."

He then relayed his knowledge of feng shui to Feinie through the Tome of Life and Death. Ever since she'd become Lu Yun's Envoy of Samsara, her experience was his. Similarly, Lu Yun could transfer his knowledge back through the book if he so desired.

Surprise and appreciation flashed through Feinie's expression. She bent her head and began working diligently on Lu Yun's instructions. From what she could understand, feng shui and formations were two sides of the same coin, but the dao of feng shui was much more complicated.

Both formations and feng shui tapped into the forces of everything in the world. Formations channeled forces to directly achieve their purposes, whether to kill, immobilize, protect, mislead, or trap.

Feng shui, on the other hand, used forces to influence the surroundings, exerting changes on living creatures, the environment, and even the most intangible of all, luck.

For example, the Enneawym Provenance Formation in the Dusk governor manor directly channeled the might of heaven and earth. Lu Yun had used it to kill immortals and give Lu Yuanhou a proper beating.

However, the corresponding feng shui to the Enneawym formation also impacted the environment, giving rise to the Enneawym Coffinbearers layout, which ended up destroying the fortunes of Dusk Province and would eventually lead to the province's decline.

The dao of feng shui had disappeared from this world. Immortals could only recognize formations, but failed to see their influence on the other side of the coin. Compared to the relatively straightforward formation dao, the possibilities and complexities were endless when it came to the subtle shaping of feng shui.

Lu Yun's way of destroying feng shui layouts was through destroying the source formations. He identified the feng shui, then traced its arrangement to its basic structure, which was composed of formations. Destroy those, and the feng shui influence they naturally exuded would be gone as well.

What he didn't expect was that Feinie would identify the relationship between formations and feng shui with her newfound knowledge and return her comprehension to Lu Yun, which further improved his own understanding of feng shui.

After digesting the new knowledge, the envoy began etching the formations at a speed ten times faster than Qin Xianhuo. Systems of the eight opposing forces emerged on the four stones, turning them into formation disks.

In only a hundred more breaths, her work was done.

Lu Yun retrieved the four disks through his death art of walking the two worlds and pretended to draw lines on them. Then he tossed them to the side.

Qin Xianhuo's jaw dropped when he saw the newly-carved formations. He might not understand what his eyes saw even if he gained the young man's memories! It was a ridiculous thought, but the formations were truly too complicated for him to comprehend.

"Is this... a formation of fire and water?" He picked up what seemed to be the simplest one and considered it carefully, his confidence suffering another blow.

"The elements of fire and water in a layout of eight trigrams aren't merely elements, but standalone systems. Every system encompasses all possible things in the world." Lu Yun was working on the last formation.

Qin Xianhuo's eyes slowly brightened; the enormous, insurmountable wall blocking forward progress in his dao was loosening.

Qi Shenghui and Situ Yun shared a worried look.

"We can't allow Qin Xianhuo to keep interacting with Lu Yun..." whispered Qi Shenghui.

Situ Yun agreed wholeheartedly. The formation master was a fanatic when it came to his area of expertise, and if this went on, it would be difficult for them to kill Lu Yun.

“Done!” Lu Yun rose to his feet and looked at the five formation disks on the ground with obvious delight. He then summoned five soybean soldiers.

“Shit, this man is heartless. He always summons us to die.” Grumbling, the five soldiers picked up the disks and stood in a special arrangement. With a leap, they all landed on the island at the same time.

They immediately morphed back into five shriveled soybeans, their spirits returning to the other world.

Five formation disks dropped to the ground.

Rumble.

A dramatic tremor rippled through the island, heralding the materialization of a giant, five-kilometer-wide vortex that enveloped it from above. It spun slowly, attracting all of the gray clouds in its vicinity. The formation disks slowly rose in the air and spun along with the vortex, each radiating a faint glow.

Gradually, the vortex morphed into a spinning graph of yin and yang, which flowed into the five formation disks below. Meanwhile, the formation disk directly under the vortex transformed into the same graph of yin and yang, but it was a mirror image of the bigger graph above it.

“Gah!” A ghastly scream rang out from the island. Something was angry.

“Someone’s there!” Qi Shenghui goggled with shock. Why was there a woman in white on the island??

“You, check it!” Situ Yun grabbed Lu Yun and threw him onto the island. Distracted by the woman, neither Mo Yi nor Qing Han reacted in time. They watched helplessly as Lu Yun’s frail form fell onto the island.

“Lu Yun!” shouted Qing Han as he leapt onto the island and landed beside the young governor.

Chapter 69: Defying Laws of Nature, Pilfering the Essence of All Life

Not a single blade of grass grew on this barren island. Dizzy from the fall, Lu Yun nevertheless saw Qing Han rush to his rescue without the slightest hesitation. That someone would readily risk their life for his sake, even in this unfamiliar world, gave rise to a strange, nameless emotion.

“You shouldn’t have come. It’s too dangerous.”

Qing Han or no Qing Han, the situation was still as helpless as ever. Here was a land where not even the grandmaster of tomb raiders would willingly tread. Lu Yun’s original plan had been to scout the area with a few armored soldiers, but he hadn’t expected Situ Yun to so mercilessly toss him onto the island.

“Too late, I’m already here.” With a decidedly Lu Yun-like shrug, Qing Han helped him up.

All of a sudden, Mo Yi also landed softly in front of them in a cloud of sweet fragrance.

“What are you doing here as well?” Lu Yun stared at her in confusion. He and Qing Han had gone through life and death together, so it wasn’t strange to see such a comrade come to his rescue. But Mo Yi? There was no deep relationship there, merely a contract and nothing more.

“The three august immortals would’ve forced me to come, in any case,” Mo Yi sighed quietly.

“Moreover, I promised to keep you safe, so keep you safe I shall.”

Lu Yun might've undone the inversion of yin and yang and dispelled the life-devouring force, but unknown threats were still lurking on the island. He and Qing Han were just cultivators. What if they were to encounter a creature strong enough to make escape impossible?

An august immortal like Mo Yi could help them survive in such a situation.

As for the three men on the Path of Ingress, they simply watched on indifferently. Lu Yun's group was nothing but cannon fodder, plus, there was nowhere for them to run. The path beneath their feet was the only way out of the island.

Meanwhile, Lu Yun's five formation disks were still floating in mid-air, producing an endless flow of energy that countered the reversion of the island. They couldn't stop for a single instant, else the life-absorbing properties of the island would make its return.

A girl stood quietly at the center, a breeze tugging lightly at her clothes.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" Mo Yi asked quietly, on high alert while she observed the girl standing not far away. The girl's robes had seemed white from the distance, but they were grey and worn out when seen from up close.

About sixteen years old, her features were elegant and graceful. Eyes tightly shut, her thin eyebrows were set in a faint frown that expressed vague resentment. Her skin was white like a pale sheet of paper, and straight locks of hair flowed all the way to the ground.

She held her hands in front of her chest, seemingly cupping something between them. As still and silent as ever, she ignored Mo Yi's question.

"Stay away from her." Lu Yun caught Mo Yi and stopped her from approaching the figure. Halting, the city lord looked back at him, but the governor's gaze never left the girl's closed eyes. His lips were tinged blue as they trembled uncontrollably.

There was a faint, bloody light overflowing from the girl's eyelids.

"I see. I should've heeded the grandmaster's warning. I really shouldn't have come here," he whispered to himself.

"What's the matter?" Qing Han and Mo Yi wondered, astonished by his words.

Qing Han, in particular, felt perplexed. Lu Yun had demonstrated complete poise and resourcefulness inside that terrifying burial mound, ultimately escaping from horrifying monsters against all odds. Yet he was having second thoughts here? And was that regret in his tone?

Not once had he previously expressed regret, despite having been caught in much greater danger. What made this girl different?

"Do you know who... or what she is?" Cautiously sizing up the girl, Qing Han immediately realized the truth. Despite the pretty face, the girl wasn't human. She was a dreadful monster in human skin.

"Defying the laws of nature, pilfering the essence of all life, overturning life and death.... It's a zombie king! That's what's buried in the tomb for the living," Lu Yun said, his voice hoarse as he stressed every syllable.

A zombie king was the greatest taboo among tomb raiders. Abandoned by heaven and earth, shunned by the living, and neither dead nor alive, zombies were creatures outside the three realms and six paths.

But in special circumstances, such as a tomb for the living, particularly strong specimens could defy the natural order and reforge a soul to come back to life, evolving into a zombie king. They were still a zombie, and their bodies were as dead as lesser kin, but they possessed a living soul. Those souls were trapped in a dead body and suffered torment, day after day.

Legends spoke of their eyes that shone crimson and brought devastation to whatever their gaze rested upon. A zombie king was a type of living dead, hence the Spectral Eye had failed to discern the truth, leading Lu Yun to mistake her for something alive.

“I was wrong. The phenomenon on the island isn’t caused by formations.” Lu Yun’s expression contorted. “This creature has subverted the laws of the heavens by its sheer power alone. It siphoned the life force away from every creature on the island, as well as those who have accidentally stumbled upon this place.”

When he’d previously gazed into the mysterious abyss with the Spectral Eye, he’d only seen too many dead bodies to count. In all likelihood, they were this zombie’s victims. Only an endless stream of vitality could fuel its rebirth and evolution.

“A zombie king?” Mo Yi’s face was grim. “Do these vile creatures truly exist in this world?” Needless to say, it wasn’t the first time she’d heard of such an existence.

As if she’d caught their conversation, the girl’s figure trembled lightly and she slowly lifted her eyelids. Light the color of blood instantly filled the scene before them.

“Fucking A!” Lu Yun swore. An enormous, black donkey hoof appeared in his hand. He’d prepared it before venturing inside Myriad Formation Summit, but it hadn’t been needed there in the end.

Now however, they faced a zombie king. The hoof could restrain ordinary zombies, but its efficacy against zombie kings was unknown.

Waaa—

The zombie king howled so loudly and shrilly that it almost ruptured Lu Yun’s eardrums. As for the hoof, the soundwaves shattered it on the spot. An intense crimson glow shrouded the entire island.

To Lu Yun’s eyes, the world seemed to transform into mountains of corpses and seas of blood, from which countless zombies crawled out to throw themselves his way.

“This isn’t an illusion!” The Dusk governor clenched his teeth. “But it’s not real either!”

The mountains of corpses, the oceans of blood, the countless zombies... everything was born from the light in the girl’s eyes. In other words, it was one of her arts.

“What are you three bastards waiting for?” The governor ran wildly for his life while swearing loudly. “The Formation Orb is in her possession. She’s going to get away if you still don’t act!”

Dragging Qing Han and Mo Yi along in his wake, he sped toward his formations. For the time being, the five disks were still holding strong, forcibly withstanding the zombie king's power. The sea of corpses and oceans of blood melted like snow the moment they approached the formations.

"What? She has the orb?!" The sudden onset of the light filling the sky over the island had startled Qi Shenghui and the two others, but Lu Yun's resounding shout goaded them into action.

"That's right, she seems to be holding a black bead!"

"Let's go!" Clenching his teeth, Qi Shenghui landed on the island, soon followed by Situ Yun and Qin Xianhuo.

Chapter 70: A Trace of Death

As soon as the three august immortals had landed on the island, they felt a sudden change in their surroundings. Mountains of corpses and seas of blood assaulted their senses, and an endless swarm of zombies lunged at them.

"What's going on?!" Scowling, Qi Shenghui gathered his power and warily scanned the surroundings.

"They aren't real zombies, but attacks from a combat art!" As a formation master, Qin Xianhuo's consciousness was more powerful than the consciousnesses of Situ Yun and Qi Shenghui and he immediately traced the changes to their source. "That woman is a powerful immortal. This is all her doing!"

His eyes blazed with avarice. "She activated the Formation Orb and created the terrifying formations on the riverbank. Ignore the zombies and kill the woman. Take the orb!"

At the center of the killing field stood a tranquil girl in white. Soft, windswept hair danced by the sides of her face, framing eyes that were now fully open. A fleeting trace of melancholy flashed through the violent crimson of her gaze. She seemed rather out of place amidst the gory battlefields of zombies and blood.

The combination of everything in the scene constantly hammered at the minds of the three august immortals.

"Kill!" shouted Situ Yun as he manifested a pair of rose-gold hammers. Thunder and lightning roared around the twin weapons as they rapidly expanded to the size of small mountains and hurtled toward the girl, flickering with golden light.

Meanwhile, Qi Shenghui and Qin Xianhuo also manifested their weapons of thunder and lightning. In the span of a breath, enormous bolts of lightning gyrated frenetically over the island in wild, fearsome capers while thunder clamored in a crackling din overhead. The terrible light of blood was diminished, and the zombies and gory illusions faded. Thunder and lightning could restrain all evil, and the zombie king's combat arts were no exception.

Suddenly, the young woman opened her mouth and let out a piercing shriek. The scattered crimson light instantaneously reformed, morphing into tidal waves of blood that slammed into the incoming hammers.

Bam!

Rose-golden thunder exploded and the two hammers bounced back, flying toward Situ Yun.

“No!” He widened his eyes and drew in a quick breath, inflating his body like an enormous toad. His arms grew exponentially thicker and burst through the armor plates covering them.

Crack.

He extended his arms to catch the giant hammers, lightning flashing and crackling around his body. The tremendous impact sent him flying backward, almost depositing him in the Dusk River.

The corners of his eyes and the flesh between his thumbs and index fingers exploded, scattering pearls of blood.

Splash!

The river behind him boiled over. Enhanced by an unknown force, the layout of one potential broke through the restraints applied by the Path of Ingress. Bodies upon bodies emerged from the water and climbed onto the island.

“Get away!” Situ Yun’s chest heaved violently like giant bellows. He adjusted his grip around the hammers and spun them at the river in a sweeping motion. Lightning coursed through the riverbank, sweeping the corpses back into the water.

“Once more!” he yelled. His body had now tripled in size and was wreathed by furious flashes of lightning. He looked like a warrior born out of heavenly thunder.

Leaping into the air, he slammed into the girl at high velocity. She slowly lifted her head, two explosive beams of crimson light shooting out of her eyes to block him.

Qin Xianhuo and Qi Shenghui made their next moves as well. The armored warrior rushed at the young woman spear-first, while Qin Xianhuo took out several disks to set up formations.

“She can’t move from where she is!” Lu Yun happened to notice the peculiarities about her condition while the zombie king fought the three august immortals. He activated his Spectral Eye and closely observed her.

Lightning and thunder furiously tangled with bloody light, and harrowing combat art clashed upon combat art. The monstrous shockwaves resulting from the clashes were almost enough to remake the entire island. At the same time, the corpses that Situ Yun had thrown back into the river lurched up again and rejoined the fray.

However, a bubble of peace existed beneath the five formation disks, thoroughly unaffected by the fight outside. The four formation disks synergized with the disk of yin and yang that Lu Yun had created, forming a great formation of the eight trigrams that isolated the area and countered the power of the tomb.

The formations of opposing forces on them had been personally created by Feinie. Although her current cultivation level was only at true immortal as of now, her mastery over formations was much more impressive. With the help of the Gates of the Abyss and the Formation Orb, the formations she etched could now rival those she’d set up in her peak.

“There’s still a trace of death about her. She remains one step away from becoming a real zombie king!” Lu Yun could tell that the girl was at a delicate tipping point.

For a zombie to resurrect and piece together its soul, it required a great deal of life essence and yang energy to offset the energy of death wreathed about it. Even a little hint of death would prevent the zombie from forming its new soul.

The tomb had emerged at the peak of yang energy so the girl could absorb it to drive out death. Once she cleansed herself and formed a soul, she would become a true zombie king.

With the endless supply of yang energy streaming into her body, there was only an indiscernible trace of death left within her—her soul was almost complete. She was one step away from returning to life!

In fact, she was in the midst of an evolution process. This was why she couldn’t move, and why she couldn’t directly attack the intruders. Otherwise, she would make quick work of even three golden immortals, let alone three august immortals.

“Even if she’s not a zombie king yet, she’s at least still a zombie. No wonder she destroyed my black donkey’s hoof first.” Realization flashed through Lu Yun’s eyes.

A zombie king would kill everything in its way and was the one thing tomb raiders dreaded the most. He wouldn’t allow one to be born in the weakened and poor Dusk Province.

“You two stay here and don’t move!” Lu Yun turned to Qing Han. His clear, chilling gaze sent a slight tremor down Qing Han’s spine.

The imperial envoy nodded.

Lu Yun stepped out of the formation of eight trigrams and made his way to the girl at the center of the island.

Boundless crimson light and tremendous shockwaves assaulted him, but a faint white glow kept them all at bay—the Formation Orb. He’d opened the Gates of the Abyss to channel the power that Feinie was sending him through the Formation Orb. Such was the white light protecting him.

Blinding crimson light rippled around the zombie king, countering the attacks from the three august immortals. The rose-gold lightning and Qing Xianhuo’s formations were all crushed by the crimson light.

Moreover, she activated the layouts of one potential, two principles, and three essentials through her Formation Orb.

Under the formations’ might, the three august immortals had to struggle to even move a muscle. If not for the thunder-attribute weapons they possessed, they would’ve long lost their ability to fight.

White flame burned outside of Lu Yun’s body as he approached the girl through the crimson light. With Spectral Eye activated, he observed closely and finally found the trace of death hovering between the girl’s eyebrows.

“As long as there’s death present, you’re still a regular zombie... I can kill you with a powerful black donkey’s hoof.” Black flame burned strongly in his eyes as he deployed the Tome of Life and Death to its limits and forged a path through the bloody light.

Finally, he came face to face with the girl.