

Necropolis 641

Chapter 641: Killing Intent

Zhao Zhicheng was the lord of Dusk City, but Wanfeng still wielded power over Dusk Province.

In the years she'd been with Wayfarer, not only had her cultivation improved by leaps and bounds, but she herself had become incredibly resilient as well. Having grown out of her youthful naivete, she was now an incredible leader. Apart from Qing Yu and his Envoys of Samsara, the one person Lu Yun trusted the most was Wanfeng.

Upon receiving her orders, Wanfeng sprang into action. The Skandha Range and factions loyal to the Star Demon Sect exerted their influence, spreading rumors like wildfire against the Sword Divine, Dongfang Hao!

It was common knowledge that Dongfang Hao had died a few years ago while attempting to restore the void realm. However, he'd then suddenly come back to life as Sword Divine, a development that instilled fear in the Dongfang Clan since the details were now being widely disseminated.

The Dongfang Clan ranked among the peak clans as well, possessing their own crippled origin dao immortal that held down the fort. But in Primus Major, where the heavenly court and Lin Clan dominated over all others, the Dongfangs would never be allowed to rise to power.

And yet the clan had seen great, inexplicable surges in power recently. Several of their talented cultivators had ascended to immortality one after another. While their phenomena of ascension didn't span an entire major, they were second only to those of the greatest geniuses.

At this point in time, their future seemed even brighter than that of both the Lin Clan and Primus court. Many had been speculating how it'd all happened, but recent happenings and the clan's sudden rise were in line with the rumors.

Some time before, many factions in the world of immortals had found soul seeds planted in their geniuses and lost their guardian spirits in a mass revolt. All signs pointed to the suddenly-emerging Sword Divine.

The Dongfang Clan wrung their hands with despair, as many powerful immortals were on their way to Primus Major to demand an explanation. The clan had their fair share of enemies, so even though Dongfang Hao was dead, everyone was quite willing to believe that a dead man was the Sword Divine everyone knew.

.....

Celebrations reigned jubilant as all of Exalted Major delighted in Zhao Wushuang successfully overcoming his tribulation. However, no one, including the prince himself, had a clue how he'd managed it.

After a long discussion, the Exalted celestial emperor and Zhao Wushuang concluded that the previous celestial emperor must have made a great many preparations, which ultimately helped him overcome his tribulation by a hair.

The celestial emperor threw open the court's vaults and hosted a great banquet, showering an astronomical sum of crystals on various ingredients, materials, and rare pills for the immortals in Exalted Major.

A joyous atmosphere permeated the major.

.....

Within a cavern in the rear mountain of the Exalted Immortal Sect were gathered the Exalted celestial emperor, Zhao Wushuang, Lu Yun, Qi Hai, Ge Yanxia, and Donglin Taihuang. In addition, the reclusive heavyweights of the major were in attendance as well, their grave expressions suggested that something momentous was about to happen.

Ge Yanxia played with a treasure with visible delight. This was the reward the celestial emperor had promised her.

"Can you make your second announcement now, Your Majesty?" Lu Yun had a small smile on his face and also toyed with a treasure in his hands—the Exalted Chart!

Not the one in the celestial emperor's possession, but the almost shattered one that'd protected Zhao Wushuang. That was the reward Lu Yun had asked for.

Although the treasure teetered on the verge of destruction, it was still incredibly valuable to him. He'd recognized its main material as the ingredient Qing Yu had said could be refined into a Yang Ten Orientations Stone.

That was why he'd used Thunder Palmstrike to absorb the lightning during Zhao Wushuang's tribulation—all for the sake of protecting the treasure.

Many of those present had jumped up and almost killed Lu Yun on the spot when he dared request the Exalted Chart as his compensation. Ultimately, Zhao Wushuang relinquished the damaged portion and emphasized that the Exalted Chart was the major's indispensable treasure. If Lu Yun wanted it, he could only have the damaged half.

The immortals only calmed down when Lu Yun happily accepted the offer. At the same time, they found his actions shameful. He'd been the first to 'flee' when the Diabolical Tribulation of World Refinement descended. How shameless of him to ask for the Exalted Chart when he hadn't done anything to deserve it!

Him asking about the second matter irritated them even further.

"Your Majesty!" a man with blue hair and eyes stood up and interjected when the celestial emperor was about to respond. "Lu Yun, Governor of Dusk Province in Nephrite Major, is highly intelligent and has great potential, but he is merely a cultivator, at the end of the day. This subject believes he has no place getting involved in this matter, considering his cultivation and status. You should reconsider this."

He looked to be in his twenties, but his eyes bore witness to the passage of many years. He was obviously an ancient heavyweight who'd been around for tens of thousands of years. Although he called himself a subject, his tone was hardly apropos of one.

It hadn't been long since the current Exalted celestial emperor had taken the throne and he had yet to earn everyone's respect, despite having ascended to the origin dao immortal realm.

The speaker with blue hair and eyes was Luo Ying, a peak arcane dao immortal elder of the Luo Clan, one of the top factions in Exalted Major. His clan had inherited the bloodline of the Exalted Divine Tribe, which granted them influence in the major that rivaled even the Exalted Immortal Sect.

"Senior Luo Ying is quite right!" another dao immortal voiced his agreement. "Lu Yun is a craven milksop with the courage of a mouse! Although he persuaded five peak factions to leave when Prince Wushuang's tribulation struck, he also made his escape at the eleventh hour. I worry that he'll be the first to run away as well if he becomes part of that mission!"

Lu Yun frowned at Zhao Wushuang and saw her looking back at him. However, there was a trace of confusion in her eyes. She didn't care about how the two immortals saw Lu Yun. In fact, she was curious and a little suspicious of him.

Has she noticed something? Frowning slightly, Lu Yun fiddled with the Exalted Chart in his hand. Well, he wasn't worried. Since the Exalted celestial emperor had invited him to this gathering, that meant he had to participate in whatever mission they were talking about.

Even if he couldn't take part in it, Qing Yu would be invited in his stead!

"Your Majesty!" Luo Ying exclaimed. "The Scroll of Shepherding Immortals is now in Exalted Major and so is Lu Yun... Please make your decision, Your Majesty!"

Killing intent surged as Ge Yanxia and Donglin Taihuang turned to Lu Yun with malicious leers.

Chapter 642: Exalted Immortal Reaper

This was plainly a deadly trap, one that'd been long in the making. The core elites of Exalted Major had circumvented the celestial emperor and Zhao Wushuang to reach an agreement with Donglin Taihuang and Ge Yanxia. Lu Yun was to die here, and everyone would claim what they wanted!

In addition to the two outsiders, there were ten dao immortals in the abode, all of whom were at least peak arcane dao immortals who'd plucked nine dao fruit. Three of them were actually crippled origin dao immortals!

The twelve rose at the same time and unleashed their auras in unison, bearing down overwhelmingly on Lu Yun and collectively sealing off the area like a wall of sturdy steel. Caught like an insect in amber, there was nothing he could do in response.

"Stop! What do all of you think you're doing?!" snarled the Exalted celestial emperor with a grave expression. Golden light flared from his body to protect Lu Yun, but a crippled origin dao immortal from the Exalted Immortal Sect pulled the golden light into a dao-grade treasure with a wave of his hand.

"You may be the celestial emperor, Zhao Luo, but at the end of the day, you are still a disciple of the Exalted Immortal Sect." The crippled origin dao immortal looked incredibly old, his gaze derisive as it settled on the celestial emperor. "As a disciple, you must always have the best interests of the sect in mind. The Exalted Immortal Sect put you on the throne, which means we can also drag you off of it!"

Crack crack crack!

The crippled origin dao immortal casually crushed the dao-grade defensive treasure, eliciting a brooding scowl from the celestial emperor. Golden spots of light flickered in the latter's eyes as the shadow of the Exalted Chart emerged over his head.

"Oh? Are you going to attack your senior from the sect, Zhao Luo?" Luo Ying sneered. "Don't forget where your bloodline comes from. The sect is the only master in Exalted Major!"

"Is this your idea of a coup?" Zhao Luo's eyes blazed with fury. He'd summoned the elites of the major to deal with their looming threat, but they'd gone after his helper instead. Adding insult to injury, they'd completely bypassed his authority as the celestial emperor!

Didn't they know how influential the boy had become?!

The Lin Clan of Primus Major, the South Sea court, the dragon palace of the Unsullied Sea, the Mo Clan of Lazuli Major, and the East Sea court—all of them had blood feuds with the Exalted Major, with death the only resolution possible.

The East Sea court in particular, a monster spirit faction that could rival Primus Major, had been at war with Exalted Major for a prolonged period of time. Either side would stop at nothing but the total annihilation of the other.

However, Lu Yun had convinced the five factions to retreat simply by bowing to them!

Everyone knew the Dusk governor was now in Exalted Major. If he died here, the consequences would be dire!

Although the five great factions couldn't destroy Exalted Major on their own, there was no shortage of opportunists in the world of immortals. Once war broke out, Exalted Major would become the second Witherdew Major.

.....

"A coup?" The crippled dao immortal of the Exalted Immortal Sect shook his head. "You are still the celestial emperor. This seat is merely demonstrating who is the real master of Exalted Major. Kill!"

All twelve dao immortals launched a fatal attack at Lu Yun at the same time. Though they weren't the best of the best in the world of immortals, their collective might would be enough to undermine a peak faction. Their attacks almost shattered the void, forming a black hole in the air.

"Bastard!!" Zhao Luo snarled, manifesting the Exalted Chart and tackling Lu Yun. The boy could die, but not in Exalted Major!

Zhao Wushuang made her move as well. The heart of the Sword of Chaos radiated sharp rays that cut through space, intercepting the attacks. However, she'd only just ascended to immortality, so she fell short when facing the old freaks who'd been around for tens of thousands of years.

As soon as the heart of the Sword of Chaos came into contact with the attacks, she was blown off her feet.

Wham!

The Exalted Chart brought Lu Yun under its protection to block the deadly attacks, causing the celestial emperor to throw up a mouthful of blood. He'd already been injured by the beast within Zhao Wushuang's tribulation; the blitz from the twelve dao immortals worsened them further and immobilized him.

"Why do this?" Lu Yun shook his head with a sigh. "Even you know that I must not die in Exalted Major. These immortals are no fools, they must know that as well."

The celestial emperor chuckled wryly. Their target had been him all along, not Lu Yun. However, he couldn't risk just idly sitting by. He was the celestial emperor of Exalted Major! He represented not only himself nor the Exalted Divine Tribe supporting him, but all citizens in his territory as well.

"You really are a fool, Zhao Luo." Crippled origin dao immortal Zhao Qin, one of the three venerated elders of the Exalted Immortal Sect, looked frostily at Zhao Luo. A ball of light emerged from his palm with a flip of his wrist, within which rested a slumbering miniature man.

A soul seed.

The Exalted celestial emperor's eyes shot wide open. Soul seeds were now an open secret in the world of immortals. Sword Divine Dongfang Hao was using them to control the peak factions of the world, but he hadn't expected a venerated elder of his sect to be in possession of one as well!

"Have you all... fallen to the control of Sword Divine?" Color drained from his face.

"Don't you see, senior brother?" Zhao Wushuang said dejectedly, lying bonelessly on the ground. The earlier attack had critically injured her. "The sea divines' betrayal of Exalted Major, Sword Divine infiltrating my tribulation... This is all part of their plan. They aren't enthralled by the Sword Divine, they've been working together since the beginning."

"Aren't you the clever one, little girl?" Luo Ying smirked at Zhao Wushuang. "Sword Divine is but a lone human agent. What right and ability does he have to control all of the divine spirits in the world, and even guide the exiled divines back to this realm? If not for the support of the Exalted Immortal Sect, how would he gain the heights he has today?"

The Luo Clan had been raised by the former celestial emperor as a check on the Exalted Immortal Sect. However, they'd thrown themselves under the sect's banner once the previous celestial emperor passed down the throne.

"Are you... betraying the heavenly court?" Jaw tightened, Zhao Luo reached out to the heavenly mandate with his mind to heal his injuries.

"Heavenly court?" Zhao Qin shook his head. "The court was under the Exalted Immortal Sect's rule from the very beginning. We are simply taking back what was ours. As a disciple of the Exalted Immortal Sect, you will not be forgiven for betraying us!"

He stalked toward Zhao Luo with a golden longsword in his hand.

"The Exalted Immortal Reaper!" Zhao Wushuang's heart quailed.

This was a divine treasure of the Exalted Divines, capable of destroying both spirit and soul! Zhao Qin was going to cut down the celestial emperor's soul and plant the soul seed into his nascent spirit!

Chapter 643: Demon God Fetus

The Exalted Immortal Reaper was a sword that severed the soul without harming the body. Exalted Celestial Emperor Zhao Luo possessed a powerful soul protected by the heavenly mandate, so the soul seed wouldn't be able to take root in his nascent spirit unless his soul was first cut down by the Exalted Immortal Reaper.

The jade-colored blade ran fifteen meters long, its scintillating finish making for an impressive weapon. Imbued with a unique killing intent, it shone painfully bright as Zhao Qin made a decisive swing, swinging at the celestial emperor's head with the sword's energy.

Hum.

Emerald fire flared to life on the celestial emperor—the Exalted Immortal Reaper's soul fire. It was a flame that would scatter the soul of even an origin dao immortal.

"Wait, what is this?!" Zhao Qin jumped back with the weapon in hand, his smugness fading away and shock creeping into his eyes.

His quarry was completely unfazed and remained staring fixedly at Zhao Qin and the others with a death glare. Slowly, the celestial emperor rose menacingly to his feet. The soul fire enveloping him dissipated, as did the critical injuries he'd suffered earlier.

A ripped and tattered humanoid-shaped talisman slipped out of his clothes and hit the ground in pieces.

"A Substitute Talisman Puppet... That's a legendary talisman that was long lost even in the primordial world of immortals!" blurted Qi Hai, who'd been watching the scene play out from the sidelines.

As its name indicated, a Substitute Talisman Puppet took the place of its owner and suffered all damage in their stead, effectively granting them another life. It did have its limits, however. The talisman puppet would cease functioning once the damage it'd taken exceeded the capacity of the puppet.

It hadn't been damaged beyond its capacity until the Exalted Immortal Reaper's attack, which would've killed the celestial emperor. The invaluable treasure was thus destroyed, and there was no need for the celestial emperor to further keep up the pretense.

A dull Exalted Chart came back to life and soared through the air to hover over Zhao Luo's head, throwing out bright radiance.

"Zhao Luo... You!" Color drained from Zhao Qin's face to see the celestial emperor return to peak condition.

"You planned this... you planned all of this! You allowed yourself to be injured during Zhao Wushuang's tribulation to lure us out!" Luo Ying's complexion matched his co-conspirator's.

With the Substitute Talisman Puppet, Zhao Luo hadn't actually been injured by the tribulation beast, but he'd used the Exalted Chart to paint the appearance of a gravely wounded celestial emperor.

These usurpers wouldn't have dared make their move if the celestial emperor hadn't been heavily injured during Zhao Wushuang's tribulation. Now, it turned out that all of them had fallen straight into his trap.

“It was just a gamble, one made with considerable risk. Simple bait for the ill-intentioned.” Zhao Luo considered the ten immortals with a frosty expression. “I’d always considered you my confidants, but it seems all of you betrayed me a long time ago.”

The Exalted Chart above his head shone with increasing brilliance as it revolved around him, imparting a uniquely imposing and sacred air to the man.

“Your Majesty!” Luo Ying dropped to his knees and kowtowed furiously into the floor, dull thuds echoing throughout the cavern. “Mercy, Your Majesty! This lowly one was swayed by Zhao Qin’s lies and almost committed a grave mistake. Please show mercy, Your Majesty!”

Lip curled, Zhao Luo turned to Zhao Qin.

“You truly are the greatest disciple the sect has fostered, Zhao Luo. Your shrewdness exceeds mine, this old man admits defeat!” Zhao Qin narrowed his eyes and tightened his jaw.

Boom!

His head exploded violently, reducing both his nascent spirit and damaged origin dao fruit to powder.

“What about the rest of you?” Zhao Chong turned to the eight remaining immortals. “Do you wish to follow that old man in death?”

The eight dao immortals fell to their knees and begged, “We swear fealty to Your Majesty!”

Other than the two immortals from the Exalted Immortal Sect, the rest were elites from various peak factions in Exalted Major. Their fate was not only theirs, but also tied to the survival of their factions.

“Good.” The celestial emperor nodded and sent nine talismans into Luo Ying and the other eight dao immortals.

“Puppet talismans...” The would-be rebels despaired as the talismans melded with the depths of their nascent spirits. They dared not show any resistance, lest they, their bloodlines, and even their clans be erased by their liege.

The man had only just taken the throne and ascended to origin dao realm. He hadn’t had the opportunity to establish his authority yet and was undoubtedly looking for prime opportunities to do so.

“You’ve been awfully calm during this time.” The Exalted celestial emperor turned to Lu Yun. “Weren’t you worried that We would’ve stood by and done nothing?”

Lu Yun spread out his hands and shrugged. “I wouldn’t have come to your Exalted Major if I was scared.”

The celestial emperor smiled in lieu of a response. There was certainly a reason for Lu Yun’s confidence. Someone who could emerge intact from the cursed manor wouldn’t have fallen for these men’s plot.

A numbing chill spread through Donglin Taihuang and Ge Yanxia’s limbs. All this time, they’d been oblivious that the traitors of Exalted Major were using them!

The two of them were simply after Lu Yun, and wanted no part in the unrest of Exalted Major. The celestial emperor knew that well. Besides, they both belonged to powerful factions, so punishing them wouldn’t be worth the trouble.

.....

“Since things are settled now, would you like to discuss the second matter?” Lu Yun carried on like nothing had happened.

Those who’d fallen under the celestial emperor’s control via the puppet talismans hadn’t lost their sense of self or autonomy. They almost leapt into killing strikes at Lu Yun when they heard his question.

“You traitors will receive your full punishment later,” scoffed the Exalted celestial emperor. “Mark Our words, a reckoning will be forthcoming.”

Although it’d been the ten immortals present who’d attempted to plant a soul seed in him, the implications of this plan were much greater than that. The Exalted Immortal Sect couldn’t possibly have been the only faction involved. In fact, all of the peak clans and lower tier factions in the major must have had a hand in this scheme as well.

To the celestial emperor, however, what he wished to bring up next was the important matter at hand.

“Allow me to explain,” said Zhao Wushuang. Her injuries were slowly healing with the pill she’d taken. “It has to do with the tomb of the gods under Mount Exalted—the divine tomb of the ancient divine court that once destroyed the immortal dao!”

She paused. Other than Ge Yanxia, no one reacted with any trace of surprise. The rest must have already plumbed the depths of the court and sect’s secrets.

“What about it?” Donglin Taihuang asked with a frown, having recovered from the shock of the earlier attempted coup. “Did you invite us here to enter the tomb and unearth whatever treasures were left behind by the primordial court?”

“Our court would’ve done so long ago if that were possible,” snorted the celestial emperor. “To speak candidly, the Profile of Harmony, Portrait of Emptiness, and Panorama of Clarity are the keys to opening the divine tomb... In fact, they can awaken the bloodline of the Exalted Divine Tribe within the tomb.”

Ge Yanxia and Donglin Taihuang turned to Lu Yun in shock.

The Panorama of Clarity had belonged to Pill Fairy Yu Ying twelve hundred years ago. But she was now Lu Yun’s follower, and the painting was in Lu Yun’s possession. No wonder the Exalted Immortal Sect had always been at odds with Lu Yun.

As for the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals... that secret was known to very few outside the senior council of the Exalted Immortal Sect. Holy Lord Ashu was an exception, of course; there seemed to be nothing in this world that he didn’t know.

Lu Yun nodded in tacit acknowledgement.

“So what?” Qi Hai spoke up in a hoarse voice, breaking his prolonged silence. “The power of the divine tomb can awaken the Exalted Divine bloodline. We will not help if that’s what you want.”

The Exalted Divines were too terrifying. Beings with human heads and snake bodies that moved in enlightenment of dao, the tribe had led the divines to topple the immortal dao and etch the race’s own dao into the Dao Flower.

If their bloodline was awakened, the world of immortals would once again be theirs to claim. Humans, monster spirits, and all other races would not be their match. The divine race at large would also return from outside the realm to rule over the world of immortals.

“I wouldn’t have invited you here if it was for this matter.” The change in self-reference suggested an attitude shift. He turned to Qi Hai. “I believe you must be Master Qi Hai, the greatest pill master of the Primordial Era?”

Qi Hai nodded in response. That was what he’d allowed to circulate about himself. After all, his legends still made the rounds in the current world of immortals, so the identity would benefit him greatly in modern times. In fact, he’d already taken many disciples under the name of Pill Master Qi Hai, cultivating his own force with Destiny City as his headquarters.

Donglin Taihuang and the other immortals gaped, deeply shocked by the quiet man’s identity. It was common knowledge now that some primordial immortals had awakened and come back to life through possessing new bodies. Upon assuming different identities, they gradually rose to power in the contemporary world of immortals. However, those assembled had never expected Qi Hai to be one of them!

“There exists a demon fetus within the tomb under Mount Exalted,” the celestial emperor declared gravely. “It will soon be delivered. Once it arrives in this world, it will bring about a great calamity that not even the former nine celestial emperors would’ve been able to subdue.”

Slowing his speech to punctuate his points, he said, “We have invited you here to kill it.”

“A demon fetus?” Lu Yun scanned Mount Exalted with the Spectral Eye. Unfortunately, the tomb under the mountain belonged to a vast, separate space beyond the death art’s reach.

“That is correct.” The Exalted celestial emperor nodded and waved.

Hum.

The abode suddenly turned transparent, revealing several great tombs around them, all of them blanketed by a layer of black smoke. Where the smoke was densest rang out a constant din of demonic shrieks and howls. A ball of black energy pulsed at the innermost reaches of the tombs, and a steady heartbeat could be heard from the images.

“There is indeed a demon fetus there,” Qi Hai said with a serious expression. “A fetus of a demon god. It’s already fostered the three ethereal souls and seven corporal souls. Once its true spirit forms, the fetus will descend upon this world.”

He shifted his gaze to the Exalted Immortal Reaper on the ground. The demon fetus was incredibly resilient and possessed great defensive capabilities. They would have to go after its soul, which was where the Exalted Immortal Reaper came into play.

Chapter 644: Treasure Tribulation

Qi Hai had experienced many lives and eons throughout his long life, accumulating a great wealth of knowledge and experience. That enabled him to discern the origins of the demonic energy and the fetus’ condition with a single glance.

“Seven days,” he identified with a frown. “In seven days, the demon fetus will grow into a demon god. All of Exalted Major will be transformed into demonic soil then.”

“Seven days?!” shrieked the Exalted celestial emperor. He’d thought he would have another few hundred, or even a thousand years of leeway, and he’d sought assistance just for a probing expedition. Cold sweat beaded his forehead upon hearing Qi Hai’s shocking prediction.

“Seal off this place again,” Qi Hai continued, “or the fiend in the fetus will notice us.”

The celestial emperor quickly concealed the abode with a gesture.

“The demon fetus has been nurtured in the tomb for at least a hundred thousand years. The energy emanating from it proves it’s reached late maturity and will soon descend upon the world.” Qi Hai’s tone turned serious. “It must be dealt with now, or the consequences will be dire. This intelligence also needs to be kept a secret... The demonic race would be very interested in the fetus if they learned of its existence.”

Qi Hai flicked Lu Yun a sideways glance. Lu Yun was the head of the Star Demon Sect, and the sect was even more devious than the demonic race.

“You aren’t going to work with the fetus and wreak chaos across the world, are you, sect head of the Star Demon Sect?” Ge Yanxia demanded coldly, killing intent flaring in her eyes. She’d done her research on Lu Yun.

“Do you have rocks for brains?” Lu Yun snorted. “The Star Demon Sect is an offshoot of the Skandha Range, the sacred land for the demonic dao in the world of immortals. Eighty thousand years ago, the Skandha Range shielded countless immortals beneath its wings. If the sect had ever wanted to plague the world, it would’ve become the world’s new master about eighty thousand years ago.”

Ge Yanxia shut her mouth.

The Skandha Range was located in Dusk Province. Though it was very much weakened, compared to its peak, it was still the world’s sacred land for demonic dao. However, the demonic race didn’t recognize it as such.

As one of the top races of the world of immortals, though the demons hadn’t occupied any of the nine majors, ten lands, four immortal seas, or the four seas, their members could be found all over the realm.

Cultivators of demonic dao were at odds with the demonic race when it came to the question of legitimacy. Both sides claimed to be the right and proper successor of demonic dao, a conflict that had brewed since the Primordial Era.

Ge Yanxia’s race was a successor of demonic dao as well. She could question the Star Demon Sect all she liked, but never the Skandha Range.

“Give me three days. We enter the tomb after three days.” Lu Yun paused bemusedly before continuing, “Qi Hai’s right. This matter must be kept a secret. We can’t afford to attract the attention of the demons.”

He recognized the fetus from Xingzi’s memory, and she knew how it could be dealt with.

“Three days? What are you going to do during this period of time?” Qi Hai frowned. Many things could happen in three days; this period of time was too long. In his view, they should immediately enter the tomb and exterminate the demon fetus.

“A tinkerer can’t do his job well without the right tools,” Lu Yun responded. “I need three days to transport some talismans and treasures from Dusk Province and refine a treasure to counter demons.

“As the foremost pill master of the Primordial Era, you should make some preparations in the interim as well.” He punctuated his next words with emphasis, “I know there’s a pill called the Demon Warding Pill among your recipes, which is capable of defending against demonic energy.”

Qi Hai nodded. “Demon Warding Pills? I can do that.”

“Everyone, the Governor of Dusk is correct. We cannot enter the heart of the tomb on our own like this. We need more manpower!” The celestial emperor had only planned to scout the tomb and check on the fetus. Thus, he’d invited only a few individuals. If they were going to kill the budding demon god, they needed more people.

.....

After leaving the cavern, they all returned to their respective factions to make preparations. Donglin Taihuang and Ge Yanxia were reluctant to throw their hats into the ring at first. The fetus of a demon god was incredibly dangerous and unpredictable; this could very well prove to be a suicide mission.

However, the tomb under Mount Exalted was a mausoleum of the ancient divine court, and the sacred land of the divine race before that. There was a wealth of treasure to be found, including connate-grade treasures.

The celestial emperor had promised that the contingent could keep whatever they found in the tomb, finally bringing Donglin Taihuang and Ge Yanxia into the fold. More importantly, Lu Yun would be part of the expedition as well... it’d be easy to kill him there.

Additionally, the Demonic Sovereign Cauldron—greatest treasure of the fur seals—was in Lu Yun’s possession, and Donglin Taihuang wanted Qing Yu.

.....

“This... this really is Exalted Silver Essence!” Qing Yu’s eyes lit up with delight when she saw the damaged Exalted Chart that Lu Yun handed to her. “I’ll be able to refine a Ten Orientations Stone of pure yang in a day with this!”

Lu Yun had immediately contacted Wanfeng to gather materials as soon as Qing Yu had given him a list of what she needed. With the aid of the Panorama of Pavilion and other twelve merchant guilds, everything had been procured but the Exalted Silver Essence, so Lu Yun’s unexpected acquisition was a very pleasant surprise.

To refine a Yang Ten Orientations Stone, Qing Yu needed to remain in the real world rather than do so in hell. Neither she nor Lu Yun returned to Dusk Province, opting to stay in Exalted Major instead. Whatever Lu Yun needed, his Envoys of Samsara could deliver through hell.

He did summon Xingzi for good measure, however, since she'd single-handedly killed an unborn demon fetus in the past. Having her around would heighten their chances of success.

.....

A day passed.

A fist-sized chunk of clear crystal slowly emerged before Qing Yu, purified by the heat of the faint silver starfire. Upon complete excavation, milky light seeped into the air and projected multiple minor worlds.

A Ten Orientations Stone of pure yang!

"Refine the stone into a feng shui luopan and combine it with the one you have. That will make the treasure complete, and it'll gain some unique powers as well." Immersed in her formula dao, Qing Yu's eyes gleamed with great wisdom.

"Understood!" Lu Yun took the stone and manifested three flames of different colors. He couldn't return to hell to refine the luopan either; he required the pure yang energy of the world.

When the flames leapt to life, they threatened the heavens and shook the earth. Giant balls of fire shot into the sky and projected the image of a great mushroom cloud.

"Lu Yun's finally started refining a treasure!" The celestial emperor swallowed hard at the pillars of fire soaring into the clouds.

He's refining a treasure with the Exalted Chart, Zhao Wushuang thought with a pounding heart. The enormous sea of lightning from the mutated tribulation disappeared right before the Exalted Chart could be destroyed...

She refrained from voicing her thoughts because she highly suspected that Lu Yun might have something to do with the disappearance of her tribulation and the sudden emergence of the kui.

Sword Divine's parting words couldn't have been complete lies. However, no one had paid him that much attention at that time. They all believed that Lu Yun had fled as soon as he witnessed the overwhelming might of the Diabolical Tribulation of World Refinement.

Hum.

A great rumbling rolled across the sky as the qi of the world furiously rushed in the same direction. An enormous forge slowly took shape in the firmament.

"A forge of earth and sky, the ultimate heights of equipment dao!" The Exalted celestial emperor stared at the giant forge with shock. It cast the entire major in brilliant light, and even the sun hanging high in the sky paled in comparison.

"Lu Yun made such a demonstration in Xiankan before and impressed Zhurong Cangshan, the master refiner of the Zhurong Clan," murmured the celestial emperor. "He obtained a Ten Orientations Stone during that auction."

Zhao Luo had been no one but the top disciple of the Exalted Immortal Sect at the time. Nevertheless, the former celestial emperor had already selected him as the next ruler of Exalted Major and imparted a lifetime's worth of knowledge and experience to him.

That was why he felt no loyalty to the sect, despite finding his beginnings there.

"What's he refining this time?" Phoenix eyes twinkling, Zhao Wushuang took flight and made her way toward the source of the disturbance.

The emergence of the forge of earth and sky rattled all of Mount Exalted, and numerous immortals congregated in its direction, whether they were from the Exalted Immortal Sect or the capital not too far away.

It was, after all, a demonstration of the greatest height of equipment dao, one of the primary supplemental paths. Many could go their entire lives without ever witnessing such a scene. Even those who knew nothing about equipment dao would benefit greatly from observing the forge of earth and sky.

It took an entire day for the second feng shui luopan to gradually take shape.

Kaboom!!

Explosive thunder boomed in the rapidly-dimming sky as violet-gold lightning crackled around dark clouds. It was a treasure tribulation!

The moment the second luopan emerged, a tribulation struck with powerful lightning, aiming to smite the white luopan.

Lu Yun splayed his fingers to collect the tribulation, but then decided against the impulse. He couldn't publicly devour the tribulation with the Thunder Palmstrike. Collecting lightning was one thing, but tribulations were known to be untouchable. If people knew he could collect even a heavenly tribulation, the repercussions would be unfathomable.

Lu Yun had collected a tribulation of four hundred and eighty million lightning bolts back in Xiankan, then unleashed some of its power to kill thousands of immortals in fell swoop. However, that could be attributed to a treasure capable of collecting lightning tribulations.

Such treasures were usually single-use. It was rare enough for someone to acquire even one, and the appearance of having multiples would only elicit trouble. More importantly, the milky-white luopan required baptism by lightning to become one with the heavenly laws of the world.

Lu Yun had proven unable to completely refine the treasure of all impurities during his process, which was where the heavenly tribulation came in. It would complete the last step of the refinement, thus perfecting the treasure.

Chapter 645: The Feet of the Cauldron

Soft white light flared from the luopan as it slowly incorporated the tribulation into itself. Gray flakes drifted to the ground—the last of the impurities of the feng shui compass.

Since Lu Yun was not yet an immortal, his current abilities were insufficient to refine perfect treasures, even with the help of the three immortal flames. The heavenly tribulation, however, could take care of that last step for him.

.....

The clouds dispersed following the conclusion of the heavenly tribulation, and the crystalline body of the luopan remained glowing softly in midair.

A supreme-grade treasure!

Lu Yun couldn't discern what level it was, but it was undoubtedly a treasure more powerful than some supreme-grade or dao-grade treasures!

In the eighty thousand years of history marking the current world of immortals, treasure rankings ran from first to ninth. Only treasures refined by dao immortals and supreme-grade treasures surpassed ninth rank.

Since the world hadn't yet had enough time to develop, and exceedingly few records on refinement had been unearthed from the ancient tombs, 'supreme-grade' was more of a general concept than anything.

Treasures that transcended ninth rank were collectively referred to as 'supreme-grade treasures', but differences in strength still existed. There was just no clear classification in the current world of immortals. Perhaps there had been one in the Primordial Era, but it hadn't been passed down.

"So this is the demon warding treasure that Lu Yun mentioned?" The Exalted celestial emperor and Zhao Wushuang stood side by side from afar, marveling at the compass that glowed with soft radiance. Although they didn't sense any demon warding abilities from the treasure, it did indeed exude a mysterious presence.

It even felt like they were looking upon a separate realm when they looked at the treasure, as if what Lu Yun had created wasn't a treasure, but the prototype of a world.

.....

Hum.

A ripple undulated through the void as an enormous black hand probed out from the center of the imperfection. Wreathed with dense dao immortal strength, it grabbed straight at the feng shui compass. The nearby energy of the land scattered as it moved, forming a perfect vacuum around the hand.

This was the might of an all-out attack by an ancient aether dao immortal!

Ge Yanxia!

She'd made her move right after the feng shui compass had passed its tribulation. So enormous that it blotted out the skies, the black hand swiped ferociously at the treasure.

"You must have a death wish." Lu Yun looked at Ge Yanxia's fleshy hand, a flash of viciousness streaking through his eyes. Black electricity crackled to life around him as he called upon the black thunder bead

hanging on the Karmic Tree. It was the mutated lightning he'd absorbed from Zhao Wushuang's tribulation, and it'd lain untouched after he smacked Dongfang Hao with a few bolts.

This thunder bead was different from the silver one he'd distilled before. The silver bead had constantly exuded a strange aura, even if Lu Yun didn't draw upon it. The black one, however, hung quietly on the Karmic Tree when not in use, emitting nothing to be detected.

But with Ge Yanxia unexpectedly intervening and wanting to make off the feng shui compass, Lu Yun activated the thunder bead without hesitation—it was time for a painful lesson!

"Leave it to me." Qing Yu laid a hand on Lu Yun's shoulder right before black thunderbolts ripped out with a fury. "That bead is your trump card, so now's not the time to use it... I've got this!"

Silver iridescence scattered from her as she spoke, instantly dying her long black locks silver. Stars appeared in broad daylight, and the boundless dazzle of the cosmos poured down upon her from the sky.

Qing Yu's eyes were now as resplendent as stars. She thrust her hand out, slamming an enormous palm strike at Ge Yanxia's great black hand.

Ge Yanxia had already seized the luopan, yet the white glow upon it resisted the pressure of her grasp. That alone bought enough time for Qing Yu's attack.

Bam!

One blow to dim the heavens and shift the seas.

"Aaaah!!" A ghastly shriek split the air, followed by a rain of black blood. The meaty hand of Ge Yanxia had been crushed by Qing Yu's palm strike, inspiring awe in all those present. As a primordial dao immortal, the fur seal was so domineering that even crippled origin dao immortals avoided provoking her. However, Qing Yu had shattered her arm with one blow!

What kind of great strength was this?!

The Exalted celestial emperor and Zhao Wushuang looked askance at one another.

Further away, Donglin Taihuang glowered ominously, but a hint of excitement glinted deep within his eyes. Without a doubt, Qing Yu possessed a cosmic constitution. She wouldn't have been able to fully deploy the starstones otherwise!

"You bitch!!" Ge Yanxia's swollen body slowly materialized in the void, rivulets of black blood gathering on her right arm to reconstruct her hand. She glared balefully at Qing Yu—floating in midair like a fairy of the cosmos—so balefully that she seemed one step away from spitting fire from her eyes.

Clang!

Ge Yanxia beckoned with her left hand, materializing three black short rods that looked like burning sticks, ones that emitted astounding demonic energy.

"Bitch, you meet your death toda—"

Wham!

A pillar of white light shot up from the ground and blasted her squarely in the chest as soon as she spoke. Another howl of pain pierced the skies as she vanished on the spot, with none the wiser as to where she'd been hurled off to.

"She's still alive after that?!" Lu Yun was astonished.

That strike had originated from the main cannon of a lord-grade fortress ship. It'd been a fully-powered shot of ten billion immortal crystals, but it hadn't annihilated the fur seal. Clearly, Ge Yanxia had some sort of ultimate defensive treasure on her—possibly even one at connate grade!

But...

Lu Yun waved his hand to summon the three short rods radiating demonic energy, hanging lost in the sky. They blurred into three streaks of light and arrived before him. With a flip of the wrist, the Demonic Sovereign Cauldron appeared in his hand.

Look at how these fur seals ruin great treasures. I thought the Demonic Sovereign Cauldron was broken, but it turns out they separated the legs from the body on purpose.

Without thinking, he moved to reattach the three legs to the cauldron's body. Off to the side, Qing Yu put away the crystal-clear feng shui compass. She knew Lu Yun wouldn't fuse the two luopans together in public.

"Don't!!" A great cry went up. Qi Hai flashed in front of Lu Yun to prevent him from making the treasure whole again.

"The legs of the Demonic Sovereign Cauldron can never be combined with its body!" Fear shook Qi Hai's eyes. Indeed, the city lord of the foremost city in the era of human dao was... afraid.

Chapter 646: Demon King

Terror!

When Qi Hai saw that Lu Yun was about to combine the Demonic Sovereign Cauldron's feet with its main body, unadulterated terror flashed through his eyes. Even his voice took on a strange inflection, as if it was going off pitch.

Stopping his movements, Lu Yun looked at the man.

"Three cauldron feet and one cauldron body... that still doesn't make for the complete Demonic Sovereign Cauldron. I'm short a pair of handles," he responded calmly. "What are you afraid?"

All present looked at Qi Hai, who let out the breath he was holding when he saw Lu Yun stop.

"That damned fur seal!" He gnashed his teeth. "It did this on purpose! It deliberately placed the three feet within your reach! The Demonic Sovereign Cauldron is no immortal treasure! In the Primordial Era, the immortal court's Celestial Master Ge slew a demon sovereign and refined his body into a great cauldron.

“But later on, the demon resurrected from the cauldron and became a horrifying existence, split between an object and a living spirit. In the end, Celestial Master Ge had no choice but to dismantle the cauldron. Thanks to that, he ultimately suppressed the demon’s true spirit.

“By making the cauldron whole again, you would bring the demon’s true spirit back to life. He could then summon the handles and fully return to life.”

A murderous glint flashed in the pill master’s eyes. His greatest desire right now was to rush to the West Sea and extinguish the fur seals to the last.

“Now that Celestial Master Ge is no more, there is no one in the world who can restrain this demon.” One thing Qi Hai left unsaid was that, if this demon were to come back to life, he’d be an even greater threat than the demon fetus beneath Mount Exalted.

“Is that so?” Lu Yun nodded. He’d already come in contact with a boundless, hair-raising demonic aura inside the cauldron’s main body. In fact, using that energy to strengthen himself could propel him to the realm of a void-ascended immortal.

But the energy found within was very pure, devoid of any thought or consciousness. He hadn’t sensed any true spirit or nascent spirit in them.

Qi Hai stayed silent, his eyes locked on Lu Yun. Nodding, the overlord of hell sent the cauldron feet into the netherworld with a wave of the hand.

.....

Inside hell.

“Feet, main body?” Looking at the two parts of the Demonic Sovereign Cauldron in his hand, Lu Yun frowned slightly. “And what are you doing here?” He turned around at the figure that’d appeared beside him—Qi Hai.

After the Sal Tree of Life and Death evolved into the Karmic Tree, Lu Yun now exercised absolute control over hell. In addition, the circle of light inside hell had grown to an unfathomable size—at least ten times bigger than in the past.

Therefore, it was almost impossible for Qi Hai to force his way into hell. If not for Lu Yun sensing his presence around the edges and granting entry, he wouldn’t have been able to come in.

“Believe me, I’m not fearmongering. It’s in your best interests not to combine the cauldron’s feet and main body.” Qi Hai’s voice was incomparably solemn. “Otherwise, this hell will have a new master!”

“Oh?” Lu Yun turned his head, his gaze piercing through multiple layers of space to search out the figure of Ge Long sitting at the edge of the abyss.

Ge Long met his gaze, but neither showed himself nor commented. He simply left everything in his master’s hands.

“This demon must have quite the identity. Who is he?” Lu Yun asked with a wide smile even as his fingers gently caressed the cauldron.

Blood drained from Qi Hai's face. Lu Yun was nigh-unassailable inside hell, but in order to stop him from reassembling the cauldron, Qi Hai had visited with his true body.

"A demon king from the era of human dao." He inhaled deeply. "One who survived that era all the way to the Primordial Era, the king of his race!"

After Emperors Fall, kings were the strongest powerhouses in the world. Human kings, shaman kings, demon kings, monster spirit kings, divine kings... Those were the true monarchs ruling over their tribes and the facets of the world.

In comparison, the so-called kings of the current era were simple titles conferred by a celestial emperor. Contemporary emperors or kings would've been puny insects back in the Primeval Era. In fact, Qi Hai, a man who'd lived during the most prosperous age of them all, could eradicate a huge swath of them with his bare hands alone.

A demon king from the era of the human dao would be invincible in the current age.

"You might increase your strength by calling upon the energy of this hell, but... you'd still be far from that level. If a demon king were to appear here, you'd be as good as dead." Qi Hai looked at Lu Yun and stressed every syllable.

"Then what of the Primordial Era? How did the demon celestial master refine him into a cauldron?" Lu Yun countered. The question caught Qi Hai unawares. The man mumbled inaudibly, unable to form a sensible reply.

"Alright, you may leave now." Lu Yun waved his hand, pushing the utterly powerless Qi Hai out of hell.

His fear wasn't pretense, but neither was his malice toward Lu Yun. If the man had stayed inside any longer, Lu Yun was afraid he wouldn't be able to resist the urge to squash the irksome pill master.

The man was someone of influence now, and Destiny City a force to be reckoned with. Moreover, he must have made preparations in advance before venturing into hell. Lu Yun didn't want to deal with the possible aftermath of his death inside the netherworld.

He wasn't invincible yet.

Fortress ships, crystal cannons... All these things required immortal crystals for fuel. And while he'd accumulated a decent stash of them, it was still far from enough. And he needed even more immortal crystals in order to attract the Ancient Tree of Life to Dusk Province.

"Ge Long, what do you think?"

"Milord, this cauldron is truly evil. And... with your current cultivation level, the cauldron's main body alone will suffice. Reattaching the cauldron feet would be of no additional use for you right now." After a moment of silence, the old servant added, "What milord lacks right now isn't another run-of-the-mill item, but a supreme treasure that can shelter a sacred land... And there's one right there below Mount Exalted!"

With a quick wave, four swords glinting keenly with frosty light flew out of the void and landed in Lu Yun's hand.

“These four swords are the keys to obtaining the supreme treasure I speak of. They can fuse with it and create a sword formation that can shield Dusk Province in its entirety...” A proud smile appeared on Ge Long’s lips. “Even if that so-called primeval demon king were to come, he’d be cut to pieces by ten thousand swords!”

Lu Yun silently rubbed his nose. As soon as he’d received the four swords, he’d sensed that here were another four crystal-devouring, bottomless pits of cookie monsters. Well, guess that’d make them crystal monsters.

Without a few trillion immortal crystals, it’d be impossible to power a sword formation that could span Dusk Province’s forty thousand kilometers. Not to mention he didn’t have the strength required to command such a fearsome formation, either.

As for the sword formation’s origins... He hadn’t even figured out what kind of existence Ge Long was yet, so Lu Yun immediately gave up looking deeper into the four swords or this so-called sword formation. Instead, he retracted the Demonic Sovereign Cauldron back into himself and left the cauldron feet inside hell.

After his departure, Ge Long’s expression slowly settled down into grave composure. When his eyes landed on the cauldron feet floating in front of him, a cloudy glint flashed through his gaze.

.....

Three days later.

Dongling Taihuang, Ge Yanxia, and the rest had brought their kin and clansmen to Exalted Major, totaling more than three thousand people. At the head of a group of newly-transformed fur seals, an unconcerned-looking Ge Yanxia watched Lu Yun with a smug expression, as if the youngster was a dead man walking.

Chapter 647: A Bounty for the Extermination of a Clan

Lu Yun ignored Ge Yanxia. The old hag was covered in so much retribution that it would be child’s play for him to kill her.

Who knew what she’d done to accumulate so much of it so quickly? It’d only been a day since he’d seen her last, but she’d almost condensed retribution fruits from all the bad karma about her! In fact, if she underwent her tribulation right now, Lu Yun was certain of a nasty and grisly death.

Lu Yun and Qing Yu were standing shoulder to shoulder, while Li Youcai, the Lin brothers, and the others lined up behind them. The little fox lazed comfortably on Lin Xuan’s head. For whatever reason, she found the top of his head safer than Qing Yu’s bosom.

Qi Hai had brought several dozen people as well. Lu Yun recognized nearly all of them—elites of Destiny City. A familiar face—the city lord’s first disciple, Xi Yingchen, was among them.

Exalted Major had sent far more people, with a full contingent of thirty thousand immortals. Since they were mobilizing in order to slay the demon fetus, the Exalted celestial emperor wouldn’t hold back here.

Over the last three days, he’d reformed his entire domain. Every faction in the major, including the Exalted Immortal Sect, was brought to heel—at least on the surface. This time, however, the emperor

wasn't placing all of his trust in the old guard. Most of the immortals he'd secretly trained since ascending to the throne had turned out as well. Of the thirty thousand, more than two-thirds were unquestionably loyal to him.

.....

"Why are so few of you here?" Donglin Taihuang colored when he saw Lu Yun's entourage. He'd planned to use this opportunity to secretly assassinate some of Dusk Province's true elites... but none of them were here.

Among the people before him, the strongest was a strange fatty... an arcane immortal?

Sure, he had the power of heaven and earth about him, which meant he had the appropriate formation etched within, but considering his foundation, it was obvious that someone had used special methods to raise him to his current level. What point was there in taking out trash like him?

The other two were even worse. Two void realm cultivators! What good were cultivators for? Was every cultivator in the world as absurdly strong as Lu Yun or Sword Divine?

And the one with the fox on top of his head, what in the heavens was he holding? A book??

Although it looked like a treasure, it was no more than a spirit weapon. In Donglin Taihuang's opinion, the tiniest flare of immortal energy would utterly destroy it. Why was the kid reading a book, anyway?

Immortals and cultivators only needed to extend their consciousnesses into jade slips to learn their contents. What need was there for books?

Only mortals used such baubles. Had Lu Yun recruited these two handsome cultivators from... the mortal world?!

Normally, Donglin Taihuang would've recognized the two formation geniuses of the Lin clan, but Lu Yun had altered their appearances and auras with Shapeshifting Talismans. Despite his nearly origin dao cultivation, Donglin Taihuang couldn't see through the veil.

"What, was I supposed to bring an army?" Lu Yun looked curiously at his rival and seemed to remember something. "I still haven't canceled the hundred billion bounty on you from Destiny City, have I? It's in effect even now."

As soon as his words fell, the atmosphere stretched taut.

Many immortals locked on to Donglin Taihuang, who immediately started sweating profusely. He was incredibly strong, and had many trump cards up his sleeve, but who knew what dangers the divine tomb held? Anything could happen in there. If someone wanted to stab him in the back, he had little defense against it.

Donglin Taihuang was sure that plenty would be moved by such an incredible sum. The only question was a matter of who.

"Hmph! Mind your own business." He swept Lu Yun and Qing Yu with a murderous glare, then focused on Qing Yu. "I know that you're that Qing woman with the cosmic constitution... you'll be mine, sooner or later."

Having said his piece, Donglin Taihuang peered at Qing Yu with undisguised perversion before turning to leave.

“One trillion immortal crystals. Ten lord-grade fortress ships. Whoever kills Donglin Taihuang and delivers his nascent spirit to me will receive these rewards.” Lu Yun’s voice cut through the air.

Boom—

Mass chaos now reigned at the foot of Mount Exalted.

Donglin Taihuang stopped sharply in his tracks. His face flickered between bleakness and pallor while fury burned in his eyes. How... how was he supposed to survive this?!

A trillion crystals? Ten lord-grade ships? That was enough to have the entire world baying for his blood!

He deeply regretted upsetting the madman here, of all places. Yes, Lu Yun was a madman! He was perfectly willing and capable of absolutely anything!

However, what happened next plunged Donglin Taihuang deeper into despair.

“From this moment forth, Dusk Province breaks all ties with House Donglin. Every Donglin beneath the sun is our enemy!

“As lord of Dusk Province, I hereby proclaim bounties for clan extermination. Anyone who slays a member of House Donglin may bring their nascent spirit or head back to Dusk Province for a reward!” Lu Yun called out into the dazed crowd.

“The life of a Donglin cultivator merits ten thousand premium crystals! The life of a Donglin void-realm immortal, one hundred million!”

“For ordinary immortals: a hundred thousand for true, two hundred for empyrean, five hundred for august, a million for golden, five million for arcane, and ten million for peerless!

“Void-ascended immortals will fetch one billion premium crystals! Any aether dao immortal will be compensated with crystal cannons according to the number of their dao fruits! Any arcane dao immortal, lord-grade ships for the same!

“For the head of Donglin Taihuang, ten lord-grade ships and one trillion premium crystals! The bounty is effective from this day forth, lasting unto perpetuity! Even if I die, as long as Dusk Province remains, it will be valid forever. One of us will be annihilated in this feud, there is no other resolution.”

As he reached the end, Lu Yun gradually calmed down. He was truly furious this time. If he hadn’t unleashed his anger like this, he didn’t know what he would’ve done instead. His emotions were being swayed by something indescribable.

All color vanished from Donglin Taihuang’s face. Lu Yun must die, Dusk Province must be razed to the ground! Hysteria flashed through his eyes.

“Even if Dusk Province falls, the bounty shall remain valid for as long as the Panorama Pavilion exists,” a different voice suddenly boomed through heaven and earth.

“The Merchants of Creation as well!”

“The Starcatch Atelier...”

.....

All thirteen masters of the merchant guilds that’d worked with Dusk Province in the past joined in on issuing the bounty.

“Anyone who wishes to collect need not visit Dusk Province. You may receive the same reward from any of our branches.”

“Many thanks, my friends.” Lu Yun cupped his fists to salute the empty air. He’d guessed the masters of the thirteen guilds would follow him to Exalted Major very quickly.

Their influence was felt all over the world, and they had smokescreens available everywhere. Moreover, all thirteen were nine-fruit arcane dao experts with innumerable treasures. Even the Exalted celestial emperor would be hard-pressed to notice them without being informed beforehand.

Chapter 648: Footprints

Everyone knew they were witnessing the beginning of the end for House Donglin. There was no return from this.

Although the Lin Clan often clashed with House Donglin for being traitors, the house had grown increasingly powerful until they’d finally become the greatest aristocracy in Aureate Major, even threatening the authority of the heavenly court.

Now, however, House Donglin was truly doomed.

The turn of events proved one truism: wealth enabled one to do anything and everything!

Lu Yun was a wealthy man. Not only that, his allies were wealthy as well. The thirteen merchant guilds monopolized more than half of the riches in the world of immortals, which made them the wealthiest group of people in the world.

It seemed that any enemy of Lu Yun’s would be considered their enemy as well! They would even continue supporting his followers if the youth died. Just what exactly had Lu Yun given them?!

The Exalted celestial emperor felt the onset of a headache. Thank heavens he hadn’t acted on his impulse to kill Lu Yun before!

After speaking their piece, the heads of the thirteen merchant guilds concealed themselves again. Not even the celestial emperor knew where they were hiding.

The thirteen old freaks had built a great foundation in the world of immortals. Their people could be found across all of the facets, four seas, and top clans. They would have no difficulty blending into any crowd.

Fortunately, an agreement existed between the merchant guilds and top factions of the world that the former would never attempt to conquer the world of immortals, on pain of heavenly tribulations.

Otherwise, the elites of the world would've come together long ago to destroy the large merchant guilds. Granted, that would've been an action of last resort. No one wanted a fight to the death with wealthy tycoons unless there was no other way.

Now that the heads of the thirteen merchant guilds had taken a stand for Lu Yun, no one would say anything to the contrary. Once again, the young man proved that he had many friends in the world of immortals.

.....

"Let's go, young master..." Members of House Donglin were terrified. Despite their numbers, they now felt like helpless lambs surrounded by salivating wild beasts.

By "young master", they were referring to Donglin Taihuang. Being less than a hundred years old made him a youth, thus he was called a young master. To Lu Yun however, a hundred-year-old was an ancient relic.

"No!" Donglin Taihuang grit his teeth. "We have to enter Mount Exalted with them. If we leave now, we'll immediately meet our end!"

Their new territory in Aureate Major had certainly been surrounded by enemies by now. As for their old territory... well, it'd been erased from the map by Lu Yun.

Aureate Major would be the first to attack House Donglin after the clan bounty announcement. That made those who'd followed Donglin Taihuang to Exalted Major the house's remaining hope. There was still room to maneuver if they followed the Exalted celestial emperor into Mount Exalted, but if they took their leave now, they would be hunted down in short order.

Immortals of Exalted Major were tempted by the bounty as well, but not those loyal to the celestial emperor. They saw the demon fetus in the divine tomb as the real threat here, and their liege had no attention to spare for anything else.

.....

Mount Exalted seemed to be a realm of illusions. Although the mountain towered into the clouds like a great pillar, a completely different sight greeted the eye once they entered the mountain.

Gone was the tall peak, replaced by a blinding scarlet land instead. The sky and air matched the land's color, glowing with a strange red light reminiscent of blood that'd congealed for a long time. The earth beneath their feet was fissured with ugly cracks, seemingly having seen no water for countless years.

"Where in the world are we?!" Ge Yanxia's distended body squirmed with discomfort. Fur seals were marine animals and there wasn't the barest hint of water energy in this strange world, which gravely unsettled her.

"Last Repose," said a voice. "This is the Last Repose of we divines."

Many had come to Mount Exalted for this mission—the Exalted celestial emperor alone had brought more than thirty thousand people. Divines numbered among their ranks as well.

“The divine race!” Many were surprised by the speaker’s admission. The race was a mysterious bunch who rarely appeared in the world of immortals. Even when they did, they disguised themselves as different beings.

And now, there were divines among them.

Currently, a silent mutual agreement existed among the contingent to not make it an issue. Only the Exalted celestial emperor could enter the divine tomb, so the divines were clearly here at his invitation.

This wasn’t the time to start anything; all conflicts would be resolved in the tomb.

For one, the Donglin immortals had decided to use everything they had at their disposal to kill Lu Yun upon entering the tomb, even at the cost of complete mutual destruction. There was no reconciliation possible between them.

.....

The dried scarlet land was devoid of all life. It was the Last Repose of the divine race, but appeared completely different from that of the human race.

During the time of Emperors Fall, the human race had reigned supreme. Countless great emperors had numbered among the human race, but only one could be found among the divine race.

Although the Last Repose of the divines was a sacred land, it was more of a symbolic site than anything else. The real legacy lay within the tombs beneath the Last Repose. There were not only tombs of the primordial divine court there, but also some from before Emperors Fall.

Giant footprints of different sizes could be seen crisscrossing the dry cracks, painting an uncanny picture. Some were as small as sixty meters long, while others were as big as valleys.

“Do not, under any circumstances, take flight or use any flying treasures, including lord-grade fortress ships!” the celestial emperor warned seriously before continuing further. “This place is covered in a great space-restriction formation. Nothing is allowed to take flight and the formation is extremely unpredictable, often winking in and out of existence.”

The uninformed would likely immediately attempt flight in the Last Repose and promptly crash to their deaths. Gravity within the Last Repose was greater than in the outside world; once in a descent pattern, even an immortal would be crushed into paste, their nascent spirit decimated.

Lin Yu and Lin Xuan stood on top of a hill, looking out into the vast expanse of scarlet. They couldn’t figure out what they were looking at.

“Is this a layout exceeding the grand influences of the world?” Lin Xuan flipped through the tomb raiding archives, matching the landscapes to the book and analyzing them. However, he couldn’t spot any patterns. The landscapes were an aftermath of the trodding from giant footprints.

Lin Yu spotted no formations, either.

Chapter 649: God? Akasha Ghost?

Cracks snaked through the vast dry land and an air of lifelessness permeated the air. Everyone felt jarringly weighed down upon entering the Last Repose; some of them even stumbled to the ground. Gravity was more than three times stronger inside!

Well, in truth, gravity was a foreign concept to the world of immortals, and the level of added weight was negligible to immortals. They were able to adapt to the change after some judicious leg stretching.

.....

“According to the celestial emperor, the altars scattered all over the land are entrances to the divine tombs.” Lu Yun scanned an area within five thousand kilometers with the Spectral Eye.

The expedition didn’t stick together, but immediately fanned out and split into smaller teams upon entering the mountain. There was more than one entrance into the tombs in the form of constellations of bloody altars. Each altar could transport five hundred people at most before collapsing. More importantly, everyone had their own agendas here.

Other than the celestial emperor and a handful of other immortals, most were here to dig for the treasures inside the tombs. Although there were many altars in the Last Repose, they were scattered over a great tract of land and their locations constantly shifted. Not even the celestial emperor could readily locate them all.

The space-restriction formation flickering in and out of existence kept immortals from taking flight, even for a low altitude skim, as any potential drops would render them into meat paste.

An eerie power loomed over the land.

Though the entrances were difficult to locate, the celestial emperor had handed out maps detailing the interior of the mausoleum. After all, they were here to slay the demon fetus, it only made sense for him to share that information.

The demon fetus would be born in four days!

“The celestial emperor is still keeping many things to himself.” Qing Yu approached a large footprint and took a closer look. “This footprint is no older than half a year. There’s a giant humanoid creature somewhere in the Last Repose.”

Her tone was grave as she voiced her observations. The footprint was more than a kilometer long with clear swirls and whorls of a foot. It had been created by a ‘person’. According to her speculation, the footprint had been stamped into the earth less than six months ago. A giant form had walked through this area recently!

Strangely enough, there were no other footprints within two hundred and fifty kilometers of their group. Did that mean the humanoid monster was able to traverse two hundred and fifty kilometers with a single step? Or was it hopping about on one foot?

“This isn’t from a human being.” Li Youcai knelt down and closely examined the crisscrossing patterns of the footprint. “This belongs to a god.”

Yueshen had taken control over Li Youcai, but didn’t block off his senses this time. She directly possessed him instead and assumed full control, suppressing his consciousness.

Yueshen had rested in hell for the past three years and her soul had long been restored, as had her memories and even combat arts from her past life. Lu Yun could bring her back to life immediately if she so wished, but she refused and insisted on remaining an immortal ghost.

She would have to depart from hell if she returned to life, since no living souls could reside in the world of the dead. Compared to the world of immortals, Yueshen far preferred hell. Her nine bloodcorpses had transformed into nine imprints and been assimilated into her body. Though she wasn't at the level of a ghost king, she was close.

By possessing Li Youcai, Yueshen could perfectly conceal her energy as an immortal ghost with his yang energy. She was able to recognize the footprint with all her memories recovered.

"A god? Do you mean a divine spirit?" Lu Yun cocked his head at Yueshen. "Or a divine?"

"Neither a divine nor a spirit... but a god!" Yueshen clarified. "Gods are something completely different from divine spirits."

Divine spirits were born of nature and tributes offered by living souls after they mastered a certain set of rules. Divine spirits had then created a race through continuous procreation—what everyone knew as the divine race.

Gods were a different story entirely.

"What are... gods then?" Lu Yun asked in surprise. Was she referring to the omnipotent beings spoken of in the legends on Earth? The creator of the world, perhaps? Or something else?

"They're undefinable and unexplainable... However, I believe I've figured out why Ruyi and I died. We discovered the secrets of the gods," Yueshen said faintly. "And so we died. The divine race and divine spirits were created in the image of the gods. In other words, we should've been created by the gods."

She tilted her head bemusedly. "The dao of sacrificial worship has been around as long as there have been living entities. Living souls prayed to nature in exchange for strength and protection... Thus divine spirits were born.

"Who were these people praying to, and who granted the power gained through rituals? ...the gods!" Yueshen stared fixedly at the large footprints. "These were left behind by a god. They... were once here."

Lu Yun and Qing Yu exchanged a glance. No wonder the celestial emperor hadn't said a word about the footprints and their origins. He must already know the truth.

"I can reconstruct the scenario when the footprint was created with my illusions," the little fox stood up atop Lin Xuan's head. Silver light suddenly shot out from her baby blue eyes and turned them silver.

Jingle!

The bell on her neck rang with a series of clear tinkles.

Hum.

A silver ocean emerged above the footprint, its waters projecting a pristine white humanoid monster. Its face was smooth and flat, its features crude like they had been painted on by a child. Its expression, however, was very eerie—seeming to be both a wail and a smile. Its empty eyes brimmed with deep resentment.

It suddenly whipped its head around, its gaze intense and terrifying.

Bam!

The illusion of the silver ocean shattered.

The little fox's silver hair stood on end and she went completely stiff, falling from Lin Xuan's head and bouncing softly on the ground. Neither brother paid her any attention; they were still reeling from the horror of seeing the white monster.

"Are we sure that's a god and not a ghost?" Lin Yu said with a shudder once he'd finally recovered enough to form a sentence. "That thing was more terrifying than an akasha ghost."

He bent down and picked the little fox up, then placed her back onto his head.

"That wasn't a god. ...it was an akasha ghost," Lu Yun said slowly. "Yueshen, by gods, do you mean akasha ghosts?"

All eyes were on Yueshen, who looked as befuddled as the rest.

Chapter 650: Capturing Akasha Ghosts

Akasha ghosts!

Lu Yun hadn't expected the footprints to be left behind by an akasha ghost! He'd encountered them before, and more than once. In fact, he'd arrived in the world of immortals because of an akasha ghost, or more precisely, a layout of absolute death!

.....

"What did you just say?" Lu Yun's eyes whipped to Yueshen, meeting her baffled gaze. "Who did you say left the footprints?"

His eyes bore into immortal ghost's.

"Gods!" Yueshen shuddered. "They were left by the gods... These are the footprints of the gods! Gods... it can't be!!" Yueshen's eyes were wide with disbelief. These were indeed the footprints of the gods, but they turned out... to be left by akasha ghosts instead?! Did that mean that gods became akasha ghosts after they died?

Did gods die? Could they die?

Yueshen shook her head, her heart a tangled mess despite being an immortal ghost.

"This akasha ghost isn't like the ones we've encountered before." Qing Yu hadn't lost her rationality. With a flip of a hand, she gathered the illusion shattered by the akasha ghost through space and time.

"You're right." Lu Yun nodded. "But it's still an akasha ghost."

Thud!

Yueshen suddenly returned to hell, leaving Li Youcai snoring thunderously on the ground. She was having a mental breakdown. Being a ghost instead of a living person, her condition could be exceedingly unstable. Something challenging her understanding of the world was enough to cause significant mental anguish.

Of course, this was temporary. She would be back to her perky self after some rest.

“Come on, let’s go find an altar.” Lu Yun gave the giant footprint a final once-over before departing.

Akasha ghosts seemed to only be able to tap into their full strength in layouts of absolute death. Otherwise, Lu Yun would’ve been dead during one of his many encounters with the strange ghosts.

And now, the one that’d visited here had left behind a series of footprints. Lu Yun couldn’t understand it, so he didn’t waste effort trying.

There were only four days until the demon fetus arrived in the world, but the Exalted celestial emperor didn’t seem too worried. That meant there was no shortage of altars in the cracked land of the Last Repose, so Lu Yun should have no trouble locating one.

With a flip of his hand, he manifested a luopan of faint gold. It was a complete feng shui luopan, created by merging his two previous ones.

The new product had only one layer and one indicator, but the treasure was connected to his mind and could point him to what he was looking for. Lin Yu picked Li Youcai up and the group continued to advance.

“Here it is!” He came to a sudden stop.

Not far ahead was a small altar of roughly six meters across. Pentacolor light sparkled on it and a small doll was propped up on the heart of the altar. It was little more than a foot tall, with neither facial features nor limbs, resembling a tilting doll with its bottom cut off.

Lu Yun sensed very faint ripples of energy from the doll. It... felt alive.

“The altar seems to be a collection of the connate essence of the five elements!” Qing Yu’s eyes lit up as she approached the altar to get a closer look. “It really is that!”

Connate essences of the five elements!

Lu Yun could summon such ingredients of incredible value with his Mastery of the Five Elements, so he and Qing Yu were no stranger to such essences. However, they weren’t of much use to him at the moment, as he wasn’t powerful enough to refine connate grade ingredients.

He might be able to, if he could deploy the three immortal fires at their maximum, but that was something beyond his current abilities. It’d taken everything in Lu Yun and the sacrifice of a living soul for him to refine Scarlet Ape’s chunk of iron rod.

.....

“An altar refined out of essences of the five elements... Why would the immortals of Exalted Major leave a treasure like this untouched?” Lin Yu dropped Li Youcai and came up to the altar, surprised. He reached out to touch it, but Lu Yun surprisingly slapped him away.

Smack!

“Don’t touch it if you don’t want to die.” A great aura unfurled from Lu Yun to push the people around him away.

“What’s wrong?” asked a confused Lin Xuan. He’d inspected the altar closely, but hadn’t noticed anything amiss.

“To enter a divine tomb through an altar requires the sacrifice of a life.” Lu Yun frowned deeply at the altar glittering with light. “The Exalted celestial emperor knew about this beforehand, but didn’t breathe a word.”

He cast a glance at the fading bloodstains on the altar. Someone had already come before them and entered the tomb.

Rumble!

A crimson cloud emerged in the sky as a big, stark-white foot descended and stomped down on the altar.

“Dammit!!” Qing Yu was the first to react. As soon as the enormous foot dropped, she opened her arms wide and unleashed great cosmic power over everyone around her, retreating backward in a streak of light.

Boom!

A cloud of smoke wafted up in their wake as a white akasha ghost dropped down from the sky and stepped on the altar to shatter it, leaving a footprint roughly three hundred meters long on the ground.

Slowly, the akasha ghost began to grow indistinct, like it was about to fade away.

“Akasha ghost!!” Lu Yun shouted. “We can’t let it get away! Guard me, Little Yu. Lin Yu and Lin Xuan, set up a formation!”

With that, he leapt into the air and charged at the dissipating akasha ghost.

Qing Yu understood Lu Yun’s intentions. He’d had more than one encounter with akasha ghosts and survived their attempts to kill him. Now that he’d encountered another in the real world, he wasn’t going to let it off that easily.

Qing Yu remained where she was and isolated the area with two starstones circling around her, her body turning almost entirely into light.

The Lin brothers sprang into action as well, one setting up a formation and the other setting up a layout. Combining the strengths of formations and feng shui, they were able to create a formation and layout of unprecedented strength.

Lu Yun wasn't worried about letting the akasha ghost escape; he was more worried about attracting others' attention and wasting all the effort they'd put in.

Clatter!

An iron chain attached to a pair of shackles shot out from his palm when he shook his hand, targeting the ghost. This was something he'd taken from another akasha ghost. They were treasures native to hell, possessing the power of yin spirits.

Lu Yun hadn't ever used the two treasures up until now, not even when he faced a ghost king in the lineal tomb. He'd been waiting for this moment to capture an akasha ghost!

The ghost was caught off guard. Never had it fathomed that someone would make a move against it!

Swoosh!

The iron chain and shackles looped around the akasha ghost and bound it tight.