

Necropolis 691

Chapter 691: The Sword Of Slaughter

Newly reformed, the lightning dragon was more than thirty percent stronger than its original incarnation.

Dongfang Hao didn't relax his guard from beginning to end, but even so, he hadn't expected such a turn of events. Smoldering from the lightning dragon's heavy blow, he flew backward in the air, black smoke trailing after his figure.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Soon after, a second beast, a third, a fourth... more giant lightning creatures fell from the sky and assailed Dongfang Hao. As if possessing a consciousness of their own, the beasts unleashed combat arts unique to them as soon as they landed.

Overwhelmed by the combination of lightning and combat arts, Dongfang Hao was soon run ragged. This Navy Thunder of World Extinction was proving to be even more daunting than a Diabolical Tribulation of World Refinement!

For their part, the lightning rods had not only lost their use, but were even reinforcing the tribulation, amplifying its intensity by more than thirty percent. By this point, how could Dongfang Hao fail to understand that this was anything but Lu Yun's ploy? The Dusk governor had used a method that the divine didn't comprehend, and even fooled the Sword of Chaos' perception to manipulate these lightning rods!

"Bastard!!" Sword Divine burst into a storm of curses.

Even so, he was the inheritor of the Sword of Chaos. An ethereal blue sword curtain blossomed from the weapon and tore the giant lightning beasts apart. Nevertheless, he'd also suffered heavy backlash, given the blood pouring out of his mouth.

"Do you need my help?" a soft, gentle voice reverberated inside his mind. "I can weaken the tribulation by eighty percent for you."

"No need!" Dongfang Hao spat out with a ferocious expression. Sword curtains rippled out of the Sword of Chaos and tore the giant beasts apart in a maddened frenzy, but he was now drenched in blood from the heavy wounds he'd suffered.

"Your wounds haven't healed yet. Focus on recovery... and be ready to deal with the one called Lu Yun!"

Eighty-one illusory swords suddenly appeared by Dongfang Hao's side. They rose in the air, made a sharp turn, and shot back down, destroying all of the lightning rods stuck in the ground.

The tribulation's intensity instantly waned and returned to normal. Even so, a tribulation of this magnitude was no laughing matter. As violent waves surged across the West Sea, each strike of the tribulation lightning vaporized an enormous volume of seawater; an area ten thousand kilometers across had already become a land of lightning beasts.

An endless stream of beasts born of lightning roiled in the sky, snarling as they threw themselves at Dongfang Hao in a frenzy.

“He’s already reached his limits. I wonder what kind of trump cards he has?” Lu Yun stared unblinkingly at the figure of Dongfang Hao adrift the lightning.

By now, Lu Yun’s replica Xing Chen could also use death arts, just like his primary self. From hell, his nascent spirit controlled Xing Chen, so there was no longer any difference between Lu Yun’s primary body and his peak golden immortal replica.

Alas, since this replica had been refined from the Nine Yin Soul-Parting Wood, the soul-severing power of the material made it impossible for the replica to become Lu Yun’s primary body.

Even so, each of the two could interchangeably utilize the other’s combat arts through his nascent spirit.

In any case, he was aware that Dongfang Hao knew of his presence, but Lu Yun wasn’t planning on interfering at all. If his age-old rival wanted to do things the hard way, who was he to stop the man? It wasn’t like Lu Yun would be the one dying in the end.

The many layers of killing formations that Dongfang Hao had set up came into view, the breathtaking menace they exuded constantly warning off the hidden Lu Yun. But the governor hadn’t planned on attacking to begin with, so he was content to observe in silence.

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Boom!

A giant illusory sword fell from the vault of the sky and tore through the tribulation clouds—a bigger version of the Sword of Chaos had arrived!

Dongfang Hao slowly recovered his calm. This newly-arrived Sword of Chaos was very different from the one in his possession. While they were identical in appearance, the concepts they expressed were poles apart.

His Sword of Chaos represented a legacy, a civilization... while the giant sword fallen from the sky was haunted by the desire to slaughter.

Sageliness within, kingliness without!

Boom!!

The tribulation clouds reformed themselves and once again sent snarling beasts in a furious assault on the giant Sword of Chaos.

“It’s unfortunate that I still don’t have the sword heart... I can’t perfectly deploy the Sword of Slaughter.” There was a tinge of regret in Dongfang Hao’s expression. The Sword of Slaughter was one of his strongest assets. Once unsheathed, it could slaughter the sky, slaughter the land, and slaughter all things living!

There was nothing alive that couldn’t be killed.

He'd always been reluctant to call upon it, but he had no other choice at this critical stage in his tribulation.

So dreadful but a moment ago, the lightning was relentlessly obliterated by the aura of massacre emanating from the Sword of Slaughter. And no matter how brutal, the lightning beasts couldn't find a way to approach their target.

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"Is that his ace?" Lu Yun blinked. "It must be. This is the ancient divines' Sword of Slaughter, and its power is the purest dao of slaughter in the world."

A solemn expression flashed through Ashu's eyes. "Fortunately, he doesn't have the heart of the Sword of Chaos, so he can't truly control the Sword of Slaughter... Otherwise, he'd be able to cleave this tribulation in twain with a single sword slash."

"Cleave a tribulation in twain... with a single sword slash?" Lu Yun shivered.

"The Sword of Slaughter is a forbidden treasure that represents the opposite side of the Sword of Chaos... I'm glad the Sword of Chaos wasn't complete in the past, or the divines might still be ruling the world to this day!" Ashu took a deep breath. "For now, he can only use the Sword of Slaughter in extremely limited ways, so keep the lass Zhao Wushuang safe at all costs. No matter what happens, you can't let her lose the sword heart, or else the consequences will be dire beyond imagination!"

The Sword of Chaos was one entity with two different facets. One dealt with inheritance, the legacy of divine civilization, while the other the essence of massacre, salvation through killing. To truly master both of them, the sword heart was required.

The sword heart had been the first part to be forged. It'd long been lost even before the fall of the ancient divines, and it happened to be in Zhao Wushuang's custody at the moment.

If Dongfang Hao were to get his hands on it, he would immediately gain mastery over both the Sword of Inheritance and Sword of Slaughter. By then, he'd most likely be able to re-establish the ancient divine dynasty.

But while he could use the treasured sword to weather his tribulation for now, he wasn't truly its master yet. The will of slaughter inside was so strong that he might very well be overcome and become the sword's slave.

Unless as a last resort, Dongfang Hao would never summon this sword.

"I see." With a nod, Lu Yun crooked a finger at Dongfang Hao's tribulation.

Under Ashu's dumbstruck gaze... boundless dark-blue lightning fell into Lu Yun's palm without even transforming into lightning beasts. Was Dongfang Hao's tribulation... ending just like this?

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"What in the heavens just happened?" Dongfang Hao stood beneath the Sword of Slaughter, looking in stupefaction at the dissipating tribulation, unable to recollect himself. This scene was strikingly similar to what had happened during Zhao Wushuang's tribulation!

Hadn't it been Lu Yun who'd helped her through her lightning tribulation? Perhaps there was another special reason, one that'd now helped him? Had it been Lu Yun, there'd be no reason for him to help Dongfang Hao.

Chapter 692: A Big Foot

Dongfang Hao was at a loss and Holy Lord Ashu was caught off guard as well. There was no reason for Lu Yun to help Dongfang Hao survive his tribulation. What was even more shocking was that Lu Yun had absorbed the tribulation with a strange combat art!

"Did you refine the lightning rods with this kind of combat art?" Ashu asked without thinking.

Lu Yun nodded and flashed him a meaningful smile.

"Blast it!" cursed the holy lord. Knowing the young man's secrets marked him as one of Lu Yun's. No matter how unwilling he was, there was no return from this!

The Yellow Springs emperor was a perfect example. Lu Yun had made him an ally of Dusk Province through a series of schemes, simply because he'd visited the province in person. And the emperor hadn't even gained anything from the alliance!

Ashu wasn't a living soul of the world of immortals, but a tomb keeper of the underworld. To truly come back to life, he needed to stay with Lu Yun.

He glared viciously at the Dusk governor for a long while before finally heaving a sigh. He was a smart man; he knew what choice he needed to make.

"Alright, what's with the sour face? I'm not going to stop you if you want to return to the underworld. If you decide to stay in the world of immortals, though, you can't be anything but one of mine!" Lu Yun smirked at Ashu like a cat that got the cream.

"The world of immortals isn't yours," grumbled Ashu.

"Not yet," Lu Yun responded impassively, which earned an incredulous look from Ashu.

Not yet?

What did he mean? Was this brat going to conquer the world of immortals like the primordial immortal emperor of old?

"You better not even think about doing that..." Ashu sighed faintly. "The world of immortals isn't as simple as it appears to be. If you dare conquer it, you'll end up like the immortal emperor of the Primordial Era."

"Let's not go into this now... What do you think is Dongfang Hao's tribulation beast? An unknown dragon type?" Lu Yun stared at the tribulation beast looming increasingly larger within the tribulation clouds.

Its form, body, claws, whiskers, and horns all resembled those of a dragon. At the top of its head, however, burned a ball of black flame that radiated a destructive presence.

“A torch dragon!” Ashu exclaimed. “These divine dragons were born in hell before Emperors Fall! They were masters of destruction and used to be guardians of human dao, but were slaughtered to the last in the battle of Emperors Fall! So they’ve returned to the world as well?!”

Tribulation beasts were based on real creatures; they were projections cast into heavenly tribulations, which meant anything that appeared existed for real!

A torch dragon appearing in a heavenly tribulation meant that there must be a living torch dragon in the world now. The tribe of divine dragons were born with power that rivalled the human kings, and the most powerful of them had been emperors back in the day!

Unfortunately, all of them had been thought to be killed in the battle of Emperors Fall.

“Divine dragons born in hell...” Lu Yun fell into deep thought. The fire on top of the dragon’s head wasn’t hellfire, but another kind of black fire. Its destructive power made even Lu Yun shudder.

The torch dragon circled in the clouds and roared its fury, but hesitated from making a dive. The presence of the Sword of Slaughter was so intimidating that even the torch dragon dreaded it.

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“It’s time.” Lu Yun cracked a smile. “Let’s go!”

“Go? Are we leaving already?” Ashu hadn’t caught up with his line of thinking.

Lu Yun laughed heartily. “We’re going to kill the dragon and take the tribulation essence!”

Swoosh!

Invisible hellfire enveloped his body and insulated his life force, after which he flew into the tribulation clouds. Ashu went with the easiest route and concealed what little vital signs he projected. After his adjustments, he looked like a piece of rotten wood, completely devoid of life.

Cultivators’ tribulations targeted the living; lifeless things would naturally be ignored.

Dongfang Hao’s expression flickered uncertainly. The torch dragon posed a great threat, not from the beast itself, but the ball of fire above its head. Looking like nothing more than a small bloom of candlefire, the ball of flames radiated calamitous might.

“Kill!” Since the torch dragon refused to make the first move, Dongfang Hao left the protection of the Sword of Slaughter and shot into the tribulation clouds with an angry roar. He must face the tribulation beast without utilizing the Sword of Slaughter; its power might destroy the tribulation essence as well.

Seeing its quarry leap into the sky, the torch dragon shrieked a piercing howl. The black fire surged and ignited the tribulation clouds.

“Die!!” Dongfang Hao snarled, his body suddenly transforming.

Bam!

Expanding three hundred meters tall, he burst out of his clothes. His bones and flesh transformed as well, giving him four heads and eight arms!

An origin divine!

Dongfang Hao hadn't given up the body of a human, but had instead created the body of a divine through a physical combat art inherent to his kind. The elemental energies of earth, air, fire, and water converged violently around him, taking shape as four divine swords.

Sword of Earth!

Sword of Water!

Sword of Air!

Sword of Fire!

The physical manifestation of an origin divine and its accompanying elemental strength was Dongfang Hao's secret weapon. Not even when he'd faced Lu Yun in the Exalted Immortal Sect did he pull out this trick.

To kill the tribulation beast and ascend to immortality, he was exhausting all of his trump cards. Summoning the Sword of Slaughter was a given, and he'd now progressed to deploying the combat art of origin divines.

Tribulation beasts were powerful, but not so much so that they were impossible for void realm cultivators to deal with. They were a trial set up by heavenly tribulations and the immortal dao—not an instrument of unequivocal death.

Wham!

The four giant swords slammed into the torch dragon like four pillars soaring to the sky, disintegrating it with a whimper.

The small ball of flame detached from its head and transformed into a pond roughly six hundred meters across in the sky, within which boiled lightning essence radiating sword energy.

Up in the stratosphere, the tribulation clouds were dissipating; Dongfang Hao's inner energy began evolving into immortal force.

"What... that's it? The tribulation beast wasn't as powerful as I expected..." Dongfang Hao was reeling from the anticlimactic development, but wasted no time in dismissing his divine manifestation and flying toward the pond of tribulation essence.

Boom!

A giant foot came out of nowhere and kicked him with tremendous force; its unstoppable might hurled him through the air!

"Who is it?!" Dongfang Hao widened his eyes in panic and disbelief.

The momentum flinging him back was too great. He couldn't regain control over his body, and had to watch as two figures approached his tribulation essence and collected the pond with a flip of a hand.

"Lu Yun!!" Dongfang Hao cried out in tragic frustration. "You and I will never coexist peacefully!!"

Bam!

A sword emerged between heaven and earth, spanning the entire world of immortals and casting a looming shadow below.

Phenomenon of ascension.

Chapter 693: How Did It All Turn Out Like This?

The phenomenon of ascension encompassed the entire world—grander and more striking than during Zhao Wushuang's ascension!

It was, for all intents and purposes, comparable to the staggering phenomenon that'd taken place during the birth of the Karmic Tree. The cries of innumerable swords resonated in the world of immortals, accompanied by a boundless sword aura that turned the entire world into a sea of swords.

Sword Divine had ascended to immortality!

Every immortal in the world was painfully aware of the fact. Always lurking in the shadows, sometimes appearing to destabilize the status quo, Sword Divine had finally become an immortal.

"This is Sword Divine ascending to immortality?!" someone shouted in alarm. "Then what about the tree-shaped phenomenon last time?"

Many realized the crux of the issue. Last time, the world had witnessed the vision of a golden tree. Prevailing wisdom at the time had been that it was Sword Divine's phenomenon of ascension. However, the divine sword cutting through the world now and the symphony of swords were more befitting of Sword Divine's ascension.

But in that case, who had it been the last time?

Lu Yun?

Lu Yun had been spotted only a few days prior, his phenomenon a mere carpet of purple energy a few hundred kilometers across.

Qing Yu? She wasn't an immortal yet! Perhaps there was yet another hidden peerless genius in the world that no one knew of?

"He's truly better than me!" In Dusk Province, inside Dao City, Zhao Wushuang's eyes dimmed with sadness.

A phenomenon of ascension bespoke an immortal's potential and almost always determined the heights one would reach in the future. True, her own phenomenon had also affected the entire world, but it still paled in comparison to Sword Divine's.

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Meanwhile, Dongfang Hao raged with indignation. The essence of his tribulation had been stolen! He'd be able to guess the culprit's identity even if he threw his brain away.

Lu Yun!

Tribulation essence could temper an immortal body and strengthen one's immortal foundations. And in case he didn't need all of it for himself, he could still use the rest to strengthen his clansmen and subordinates!

But now, the liquid essence that formed a lake six hundred meters wide had been entirely claimed by Lu Yun, a loss that almost drove Dongfang Hao crazy.

"Men, deploy formations! Don't let him escape no matter what!!" he raved as if gone stark mad. His phenomenon still lingered in the air, but he'd already lost all semblance of composure.

Boom!

A somber killing aura spread out over the sea for a million kilometers. Dream-like radiance flickered through the sky as one thousand and eighty-eight killing formations abruptly took to the air, sealing off space within a five hundred thousand kilometer radius.

"Who said I was leaving?" an indifferent voice rose, followed by a giant foot more than five kilometers wide that dropped from the sky and stepped right on Dongfang Hao.

Dongfang Hao saw red! He'd become a void-ascended true immortal, but Lu Yun's replica, Xing Chen, was a peak golden immortal!

Inside the replica, the heart and lungs of heaven and earth echoed in harmony and generated an inexhaustible supply of strength. Now that Lu Yun's primary body had also become an immortal, his nascent spirit had propelled Xing Chen's strength to unprecedented realms.

Death art, Size Manipulation!

Lu Yun had become an unfathomably huge giant. Stepping down with one foot, he sank Dongfang Hao straight into the ocean, stirring up prodigious waves in the West Sea.

Indeed, Lu Yun hadn't left. How could he, when the area was blockaded by multiple layers of formations? Unless Feinie were to arrive and operate the Yin and Yang Formation Orbs with him, it'd be very difficult to break through the ancient killing formations.

As for Holy Lord Ashu, he'd taken to the sky to ward off an unknown powerhouse.

"Lu Yun!!" Dongfang Hao struggled beneath Yun's foot, seething with anger and indignation, but he couldn't unleash his pent-up fury no matter how hard he struggled.

He'd just overcome his tribulation and become a void-ascended immortal! This should've been the most glorious moment of his life, yet he found himself crushed under someone's foot, unable to move!

He was about to explode with rage!

Meanwhile, his phenomenon of ascension continued to swallow the energy of the land, ready to flow into him and increase his strength once it reached completion.

"Why are you shouting my name?" Lu Yun's distant voice came from high above. However, no one could see him. Only a giant foot and half a calf were visible.

Dongfang Hao choked on his fury.

“Some things aren’t yours to have, so I’ll collect them in your stead for now. When you grow strong enough, feel free to come find me and take them back.” A giant hand descended from the sky and grabbed the Sword of Slaughter.

“Bastard!!” Dongfang Hao struggled frantically, but Lu Yun’s foot was akin to the Five Finger Mountain imprisoning the Monkey King. No matter how hard he fought back, Sword Divine couldn’t break free from the giant foot crushing him.

Instead, the Dusk governor’s hand wrapped around the Sword of Slaughter. Shaking violently, the sword unleashed rays of deadly aura that sliced Lu Yun’s hand open, splashing bright-red blood in the air.

“Open!!” With a resounding shout, the Gates of the Abyss opened wide and drew the Sword of Slaughter into the kingdom of hell.

“Stop!!” a furious scream reverberated in the sky as a white-haired old man carrying a sword on his back suddenly appeared. His sword shot out of its sheath and slashed straight at Lu Yun.

A giant beam of light a full five thousand kilometers long sliced across the heavens and crashed down heavily on Lu Yun.

“Scram!!” Holy Lord Ashu answered in kind and dispelled all of the accumulated life force within him, returning to his previous state as a living dead.

Death’s aura surged in the air, turning the surroundings into a small-scale underworld. Ghostfire smoldering from his figure, Ashu greeted the sword with an explosive punch.

Boom!

When the two collided in the air, space began tearing. The old man flushed beet red as his sword shattered into sparks of cold light. He coughed up blood, and his figure lost most of its vigor.

“A holy lord of the underworld!!” he shouted in alarm. “Why have you come to the world of immortals? Aren’t you afraid that powerhouses from the three Firmaments will come together to kill you?!”

The old man had realized that Ashu was no ordinary holy lord, but one from the depths of the underworld, an existence similar to a primordial principal realm immortal. In the world of immortals, such an existence was simply invincible!

Wherever a holy lord stood, the surrounding area became their domain of the underworld. Ghostfire burning in his eyes, Ashu looked coldly at the old man and his now bladeless sword handle. “I don’t want to kill indiscriminately... so get lost!”

“We’re the ones who should be leaving,” Lu Yun interjected. After gathering the Sword of Slaughter into the netherworld, he’d returned to his normal size. “Well then, have a good day now!”

With the Boundless Step, he strode millions of kilometers away in a single step and made good his escape.

Ashu stared blankly, dumbstruck by the sudden change in the situation. Quickly recomposing himself, he hastened to seal away his essence and vanished from view.

Lu Yun had stolen the tribulation essence and filched the Sword of Slaughter. Here, Sword Divine was on home ground, so who knew what other tricks he might have left up his sleeves?

Thankfully, the holy lord had sealed his essence in time. Any longer and he might truly have been forever unable to return to life again.

Steal Dongfang Hao's phenomenon of ascension?

Phenomena of ascension were connected to the world itself. Other than the one concerned, the world itself would retaliate against anyone reckless enough to touch them, destroying their body and erasing their dao!

"What happened to me just now? Why did I let that kid drag me into his madness?" Ashu grumbled during his flight. He'd exposed his true self in broad daylight. No one could do anything to him for now, but if the old monsters in the underworld were to find out, they'd certainly show up to drag him back.

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In the sky, the sword-like phenomenon of ascension coalesced into its final form and gradually merged into Dongfang Hao's figure.

An empty look in his eyes, Sword Divine lay on his back at the bottom of the sea, letting the enormous phenomenon of ascension wash over him, increasing his strength and healing his wounds.

Pure humiliation!

He'd never been so humiliated in his life!

Starting from the day of his birth, and especially after he'd obtained the Sword of Chaos, today marked the greatest humiliation he'd ever suffered in his life!

"How did it all turn out like this?" he murmured to himself.

Chapter 694: Body-Tempering Art

There wasn't a soul in the world that wasn't aware of Sword Divine's ascension to immortality. Some envied him, others begrudged him, and some more were afraid, but none of them knew what exactly had taken place during his tribulation.

If they were to learn that the eminent Sword Divine had not only been robbed of his tribulation essence and his most precious treasure, but even been stepped on and dunked into the seas... perhaps many would laugh at his misfortunes.

As it were, the killing spree against the Dongfang Clan slowed down to a crawl. No one knew how powerful he'd grown after his tribulation, and if he were to go on a rampage to avenge his kin... few in the world would be able to withstand him.

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"Teacher, I've let you down." A long time later, Dongfang Hao emerged from the seabed and looked downcast at the white-haired old man.

"It's not your fault." The old man shook his head. "Who could have predicted that Lu Yun would collude with a holy lord from the underworld?"

"But I lost the Sword of Slaughter and the tribulation essence."

It was a hard loss to swallow. He could still temper his immortal body and mold his immortal foundations with other precious materials and treasures without the tribulation essence... but he'd planned on saving it for the juniors of his clan.

More importantly, he'd lost the Sword of Slaughter!

"It matters not, it's nothing but tribulation essence. Isn't the one called Lu Yun using tribulation essence as a reward for killing Dongfang immortals? You can just create some clan bloodlines and exchange them for the bounty." The old man tossed aside his bladeless sword handle and comforted his pupil.

"As for the Sword of Slaughter... it's nothing but part of the Sword of Chaos' will. As long as you retrieve the sword heart, the Sword of Slaughter and Sword of Inheritance will both return to you.

"However, the arrival of a holy lord from the underworld is a major issue!" The old man suddenly turned solemn. "Recently, some rotting kuns swam out of the underworld and were slain by a powerhouse. And now we have a holy lord setting foot in the world of immortals... This is no trifling matter!

"I have to head to the underworld now and find out what has taken place there. Also, creatures from the Blood Sea have come ashore again. Their goal might be the central world, so stay away from the Blood Sea for the time being and don't enter the central world. Wait for me to return to make a decision.

"Lastly, refrain from provoking Lu Yun at all costs... a holy lord from the underworld isn't someone we can afford to offend!" With that, the old man whose cultivation had reached an unimaginable realm, soared into the air and winked out of existence.

Dongfang Hao looked down, his eyes suffused with a mixture of madness and killing lust.

"Is a holy lord really someone I can't afford to provoke?" A sinister, murderous smile appeared on his lips.

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"...so tell me, how are you going to compensate me?!" Ashu yammered on and on during their trip back to Dusk Province. Now that his breathing rhythm had been disrupted, his figure was enveloped by an intense aura of death. All of the life force he'd painstakingly accumulated had vanished for good, forcing him to return to his original living dead state.

"I used the power of my core essence to stop the ingress realm old fart's sword strike for you. One more time and I'll forever lose any opportunity to be revived!" he added earnestly. "What's more, I've exposed my strength for all to see. The old fossils in the underworld will find out sooner or later, and when they do, they'll make sure to drag me back there!

"You made a fortune this time, but what about me? I've paid a colossal price, so how are you going to compensate me?!"

“I’ve worked out two types of breathing methods, one of metal and one of fire.” Lu Yun stopped in his tracks before answering. “They can temper the heart and the lungs... Of course, if all five organs can be gathered and the power of the five elements shaped into one complete cycle, you should immediately be able to come back to life and break free from the underworld’s shackles.”

Though he was also a a holy lord, Ashu was nevertheless a mausoleum keeper. By leaving without permission, he’d violated the will of the underworld, so people would naturally be dispatched to bring him back.

However, if he could return to life, he’d break free of his status as a mausoleum keeper and escape the underworld’s influence.

“Is that true?!” Ashu’s eyes lit up. He’d previously only cultivated the breathing of metal, but that’d been enough to fill his body with a boundless life force that’d constantly eaten away at the aura of death inside him.

“To be more precise, it’s not a breathing method in the truest sense... A breathing method is a way to forge lungs,” Lu Yun added after some thought. “As for the heart tempering method, it’s meant to synchronize the frequency of heartbeats with your breathing cadence, in order to offset the intrinsic opposition between the five elements.”

He gently probed the lungs and heart of heaven and earth inside his replica. The rhythm of Xing Chen’s breathing and the beating of his heart formed a marvelous resonance. When synchronized, the fire-attributed heart and the metal-attributed lungs could break free of the conflict between the two elements and achieve perfect harmony.

Moreover, he could gradually derive a fire-attributed breathing method from his breathing method. All of this was made possible by Qing Yu’s formula dao.

“In the strictest sense of the word, you could call it a breathing method, but it’s closer to an organ-forging method... a kind of body-tempering art!” Lu Yun’s eyes lit up. He’d finally found the right wording to describe this set of cultivation methods.

A body-tempering art was one that circulated from the inside out, from the organs to the flesh, to methodically strengthen the body and slowly temper it into an indestructible stronghold. That way, one could absorb and wield an even greater amount of energy from nature. In turn, one’s combat arts would grow even more explosive.

“It’s true that immortals train their bodies as well, but merely as a side-effect of their cultivation. Their innards are weak and can’t endure baptism from the energy of the land. In contrast, my body-tempering art is purposefully made to strengthen the flesh. Of course, it will also result in greater vitality in the process!”

Traditional cultivation was centered around the nascent spirit. The stronger the nascent spirit, the greater the immortal’s strength. One’s physique tended to be completely neglected. However, a strong body was the true gateway to greater strength!

Once back in Dao City, Lu Yun began to formulate the body-tempering art together with Qing Yu. As for the tribulation essence and the Sword of Slaughter he'd obtained from Dongfang Hao... he threw those to the back of his mind and proceeded to forget about them.

He did think of something and urgently commanded Xing Chen to make a public appearance and cancel the bounty on the Dongfang Clan.

"Sword Divine Dongfang Hao is now an immortal whose phenomenon of ascension affected the entire world of immortals. This makes him one of the greater powerhouses and therefore, hunting Dongfang immortals is a mission fraught with peril.

"As to not put fellow immortals in danger, I hereby declare the bounty on the Dongfang Clan null and void!" Many were those who sighed in relief at the news.

No one was all that eager to fight Dongfang Hao to the death after his ascension, wary as they were of his wrath. However, equally many were those that found it a pity to give up the tribulation essence and the Dao Flower projection. Therefore, Lu Yun rescinding his bounty was without a doubt a decision to celebrate.

However, some were miserable at the news.

For example, a Dongfang Hao using all of the resources at his disposal to fabricate the Dongfang bloodline in ordinary mortals, almost coughed up blood when he learned of it.

Chapter 695: Pathetic Little Worms Up On High

The head of the Panorama Pavilion was at his wit's end. His cherished granddaughter of less than two years old, connate peerless immortal Liu Qingmiao, was kicking up a fuss about discarding her immortal foundations to cultivate anew from the beginning!

So shocked that his soul was about to depart from his body, the Pavilion lord almost fell to his knees to beg her to change her mind. After all, her immortal foundations had been forged by a Heaven Descent Pill! When it came to her future, the sky was the limit. At the very least, she was bound to become an existence akin to the ancient primordial emperor. Why would she ever want to sever those foundations?

The Pavilion master was very unwilling, more than unwilling!

However, this little bean sprout of less than two years old, the most treasured existence of Panorama Pavilion, little princess Liu Qingmiao, wouldn't listen to anyone other than her master Lu Yun and his wife Qing Yu.

Qing Ruyan? Forget it, she obeyed the child's every whim, while Yue Longsha, Zhu Yan, and the small recalcitrant dragon had all been brought to heel and could be seen scurrying around her day in and day out.

About to lose his mind, the Pavilion lord streaked into golden light with Liu Qingmiao and arrived outside Lu Yun's doors.

"Lu Yun, come out here right this instant!!"

Heads in Dao City lifted at his booming voice and stared at Lu Yun's residence in shock.

“What’s the matter? Why is the head of the Panorama Pavilion so angry? Is the merchant alliance and Lu Yun quarreling? Are they about to become enemies?”

The sight of the Panorama lord rushing into Lu Yun’s residence with bloodshot eyes fueled the crowd’s rampant imagination.

“Dusk Province’s current strength, Dao City’s wealth... it’s all thanks to the merchant alliance. If they were to fall out with Lu Yun, we wouldn’t have much to fear from Dusk Province...”

“Not much to fear?” Yet others shrugged.

On Witherdew Major’s battlefields, Dusk Province braves had swept uncontested through the legions of several majors and conquered the territory that’d formerly belonged to Exalted Major. Additionally, the Dusk Phalanx’s showing in the battle of the North Sea had been even more magnificent. The image of the two Black Tortoises was now deeply etched in the common mind.

Even without the merchant alliance’s support, Dusk Province would lose only a little wealth at most. Lu Yun still possessed a hoard of treasures, and he could always find other channels to sell them.

When the other leaders of the merchant alliance heard the news, they scrambled toward the scene, afraid of a worst-case scenario.

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“What’s the matter?” Xing Chen walked out and looked at the Pavilion lord in confusion. Lu Yun couldn’t be spared as he’d reached a crucial stage in his efforts to develop the body-tempering art with Qing Yu.

“Little sweet pea, did you make your grandpa angry again?” He hastily took Liu Qingmiao’s hand from her grandfather and examined her from head to toe. When he made certain she wasn’t injured, he looked up vigilantly at the pavilion head.

The one who spoiled her the most in all of Dusk Province was naturally Lu Yun. Otherwise, how would she have become such a mischievous imp?

She might have been one of the little fox’s soul-parts in her past life, but in the here and now, her soul had been reformed into a complete whole and all memories of her previous life erased.

Now she was simply Liu Qingmiao, Lu Yun’s founding disciple.

The little girl clambered onto his shoulders and pulled a funny face at her grandfather, who stared back at her, huffing with anger. Lu Yun had seemingly been chiding her, but in fact, he’d been side-eyeing the Pavilion lord all along. The demand in his eyes was clearly, “Old thing, what did you do to my dear disciple?”

“You, ask her!” The Pavilion Master glowered at Lu Yun for a long while, before finally snorting in incredulous anger. “Your cherished disciple wants to discard her immortal core and cultivate again from the beginning!”

He’d brought his granddaughter to Lu Yun in the hopes that the governor would dissuade her from this wild idea.

“Hmm?” Lu Yun blinked, then turned his head to look at the little girl sitting on his shoulders. Exquisitely chiseled like a doll, her small face was fully earnest. When she met his eyes, she nodded resolutely.

“Master~ I want to cultivate from the beginning!” she said in a sweet babyish voice.

“From the beginning?” Lu Yun nodded gently. “Let’s do that then. As it happens, I have a cultivation method that’ll fit you like a glove.”

Boom!

At that, the pavilion head lost his temper.

“Old Liu, calm down first!” Seeing him about to explode, the other twelve heads of the merchant alliance rushed forward and held him back.

Up in the sky, the human demon’s eyes slowly materialized into existence. The pavilion head shuddered violently when the cold gaze landed on him, and he hastily suppressed his strength back to the august immortal realm.

Like a giant frog, his chest heaved up and down as he shot a vicious glare at Lu Yun. The last thing he’d expected to see was the young man agreeing to Liu Qingmiao’s request—as if it was of no importance! And he even wanted to recommend a cultivation method?!

“Sir Lu, I think this matter deserves further consideration!” The master of Starcatch Atelier, one of the thirteen merchant houses, hastened to intervene. “After all, Qingmiao’s immortal foundations were forged by the Heaven Descent Pill. She has the potential to become a primordial immortal emperor. It would be a pity to let her abolish her foundations and start afresh!”

“Is a primordial emperor any good?” Lu Yun squinted at the man. “Fine, I won’t hide certain things from you all any longer. I feel that restarting from the beginning is the correct decision.”

The head of the Panorama Pavilion snorted, but he refrained from commenting and pricked up his ears, waiting for Lu Yun’s reasoning. After all, the Heaven Descent Pill was something effective only on unborn fetuses. Even if he were to refine another one now, it would be of no use to Liu Qingmiao.

“Perhaps this sweet pea heard my discussions with Little Yu.” Lu Yun gently scratched Liu Qingmiao’s jade-like nose bridge.

“Master, stop scratching my nose!” The little girl swung her small head from side to side. “If you make it smaller, I won’t be pretty when I grow up.”

Lu Yun: “...”

The Pavilion lord: “...”

“Ahem, back to the matter at hand,” Lu Yun continued after a slight pause. “In fact, connate immortals are part of a far-reaching scheme.”

“What?” Everyone looked at him in confusion, but no one interrupted him.

“From when the immortal dao was first established, to a very long period of time afterward, there was no such thing as connate immortals. Every immortal began their journey as a mortal, and they cultivated step by step and faced their tribulations before ascending to immortality.

“Then one day, the path of cultivation was severed and the void realm disappeared. It was then that the first connate immortals appeared and the so-called world of immortals came into being.

“I can tell you without the shadow of a doubt that current void-ascended immortals far surpass these connate immortals from the past, be it in immortal force or nascent spirit!

“Void-ascended immortals possess a phenomenon of ascension and tribulation essence. This is the immortal dao in its truest form, the way it was established by the founders back in the Primeval Era. As for those connate immortals in the Primordial Era, they were nothing but neutered immortals.

“The ancient primordial emperor, the four cardinal emperors, the celestial emperors of the different facets, or what have you... To me, they’re nothing but pitiful, conceited, pathetic little worms up on high.”

Everyone forgot to breathe for a split second.

“If Qingmiao has enough determination to sever her immortal foundations and cultivate again from the start, I’ll naturally fully support her decision.” Lu Yun rubbed her small head. “Come with your teacher, I’ll show you how to cultivate from the start.”

“But master!” Liu Qingmiao peeped at Lu Yun like a chick. “Grandpa has Tribulation Traversing Pills on him...”

Chapter 696: Garden of Immortal Crystals

While Lu Yun did dote upon Liu Qingmiao very much so, she was something of a headache most of the time. The little bean sprout often came up with one outlandish idea after another that would throw him for a loop, to the point where he frequently wondered if she wasn’t another transmigrator from Earth instead of the ancient monster ancestor reborn.

In the meantime, Xing Chen tugged the small golden dragon out of Liu Qingmiao’s arms and took the little bean sprout inside the kingdom of hell.

Even when the replica returned to the netherworld, time outside still flowed in parallel with time outside. As long as his primary body, the one that’d refined the Tome of Life and Death, didn’t return to hell, the passage of time wouldn’t be altered.

Inside hell, the resurrection layout’s floating peak was nowhere in sight. It’d merged with a special biome and become the only location in this world infused with vitality. The five-hundred-kilometer-wide zone of life it created was a taboo region, at the center of which sat the lightning lake.

Sword energy boiled inside Dongfang Hao’s lightning lake, a place where lightning and sword energy met to form a variation of liquid lightning. At less than a hundred meters wide, Lu Yun’s own pond wasn’t as big, but it was filled with the purest of tribulation essence and contained a prodigious amount of vitality and natural energy.

Lu Yun severed Liu Qingmiao's cultivation and the foundations of her immortal dao, then threw her into the smaller lake.

"Alright, now use the liquid lightning to recast your immortal foundations and spirit root. I'll stand watch for you." His replica Xing Chen sat down cross-legged and kept quiet.

"Senior sister..." At the center of another lightning pond, one close to six hundred meters wide, a now-mortal Zou Longxiu lay sprawled on his stomach and watched Liu Qingmiao anxiously.

"Be a good boy, junior brother. Don't talk, focus on your cultivation!" Liu Qingmiao advised like a wise elder, but not before choking on a few mouthfuls of liquid tribulation essence first.

Children are quite precocious nowadays, aren't they? Looking up and glancing through the kingdom, Xing Chen noticed a subtle change in the ten Yama Halls positioned in the ten directions.

If I hadn't ascended to immortality, the Yama Halls would have remained as before. In other words, identical to the Yama Halls of the human dao era.

But now that I've become an immortal and forfeited my authority over reincarnation and judgement of life itself, these Yama Halls have unexpectedly evolved into the Yama World of the Ten Directions, an offshoot world born from hell.

A sudden realization struck Lu Yun. With the mindset of a modern man from Earth, he had relinquished his ascendancy over all things living. Not only had that not weakened his strength, but he'd even obtained unexpected boons in the process. Likewise, Yuying and the other Yama Kings had also benefited tremendously from his decision.

Now that the Yama Halls had evolved into a world of their own, the Yama Kings could incorporate their nascent spirits into that world and enjoy enduring life as their nascent spirits lived on, just like Lu Yun with the kingdom of hell!

Of course, that still didn't represent absolute safety.

A horde of akasha ghosts had invaded the netherworld not too long ago. If not for Ge Long, the kingdom would lay in shambles now. Even so, the old servant had sustained heavy wounds and was now resting under the Karmic Tree. With this experience behind him, Lu Yun no longer dared be that impulsive.

His kingdom was weak still, weaker than any of the facets in the outer world, which was all the more reason for him to exercise caution.

Hell was a broken realm, and there were many other fragments of it floating in the multiverse at large. He had to locate them one by one and incorporate them into the one in his possession.

The other primary method to do so was to continue increasing his strength and reinforcing his nascent spirit, until it one day evolved into the true six paths of reincarnation. By then, all the fragments scattered across the multiverse would return to him on their own.

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While Liu Qingmiao and Zou Longxiu were busy recasting their dao foundations, Lu Yun and Qing Yu successfully formulated the body-refining art. All in all, it comprised of a collection of breathing methods and a set of boxing techniques!

Breathing circulated from the inside out, while boxing techniques flowed from the outside in. Together, the two combined perfectly into a complete cultivation system.

Moreover, the body-refining art was also a complete method in and of itself. As long as they continued perfecting it with formula dao, it could be used when one was a cultivator, continue to be relevant after immortal ascension, and be useful even further beyond.

“This body-refining method is only a starting point. It can be used in endless ways and engender countless possibilities... If you can obtain another organ of heaven and earth, I can improve the method to the true immortal level by following the organ’s properties!”

Qing Yu’s eyes sparkled with excitement. In her hands, formula dao had reached a heaven-defying degree of sophistication. Once she became an immortal, she could assimilate formula dao into immortal dao and establish it as a legitimate path of immortal dao, one that coexisted with the four great supplemental paths of equipment, pill, formation, and talisman. In fact, it might even be superior to the four ‘traditional’ paths!

“The third organ... The time is indeed ripe!” Lu Yun abruptly turned solemn. “Little Yu, there’s two months left until your tribulation. During this time, I’m going to lure the Ancient Tree of Life here.”

With a slight start, Qing Yu looked down. She was going to ascend to immortality in two more months. The poison curse inside her was becoming more noticeable by the day, and it’d begun to faintly resonate with the immortal dao of the world.

If left to its own devices, the poison curse would taint all of the immortal dao during her ascension, causing the deaths of an incalculable number of lives governed by it. If that were to happen, it’d be a calamity on an unprecedented scale.

Lu Yun still didn’t know who it was that’d used Qing Yu as a pawn and planted the terrible curse inside her... Weren’t they afraid of falling victim to the poison themselves? Or perhaps, like he’d first conjectured, someone just wanted to use her to gather the ten great connate spirit roots of the world?

She now had three of them in her possession: Embittered Bamboo, Moon Osmanthus, and Fusang Purewood... The Chaos Lotus, the fourth connate spirit root and ranked number one among all ten, was most likely with the Ling Clan.

Miss Ling Rumeng, the clan’s young genius, had elicited a phenomenon in the form of a Chaos Lotus during her ascension. It’d been visible through the whole of Nephrite Major, marking her as one of the peerless geniuses of the present age.

But she’d disappeared afterward and hadn’t been seen in public since. Although many people coveted her Chaos Lotus, no one had been able to pick up her trail again.

The Ancient Tree of Life!

As long as he could lure the tree away from the Endless Desert to the west of Nephrite Major, the poison curse on Qing Yu could be lifted. Moreover, according to Ashu... the Wood Altar and the liver inside were located right at the foot of the ancient tree. When the tree arrived in Dusk Province, the altar and liver would come with it.

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In front of Dao City's western gates, a vast construction project was underway. A waterfall of immortal crystals was chiseled into a giant garden. Everything inside the garden was made of crystals...

To everyone's stupefaction, the garden occupied an area bigger than Dao City itself—more than ten times bigger, to be exact. A garden of this scale had to require immortal crystals in the hundreds of trillions, at the very least!

Lu Yun's actions once again set the world astir.

Chapter 697: Thirteen Drops of Thunder Essence

What a spendthrift. What a prodigious, good-for-nothing, spendthrift!! No one expected Lu Yun to build an enormous garden using hundreds of trillions of crystals!

It was hundreds of trillions of premium crystals!

The crystal mountains that the Deaf Prince and other five prodigals possessed were only hundreds of billions of premium crystals, but they were already powerful enough to crush dao immortals.

Lu Yun, however, had sculpted a garden out of pure crystal, expending several thousands times more resources—not to create an immortal weapon or formation, but a useless garden!

Three hundred and sixty-eight trillion premium crystals was an astronomical number in the world of immortals. Immortal crystals were not only the main currency of the world, but also a resource necessary for cultivation. Crystals were also required to refine pills, treasures, talismans, as well as set up formations. What was the point of building a garden with hundreds of trillions of them?

Whether for show or cultivation, the garden was an enormous waste of resources!

Upon receiving the news, the heads of the thirteen merchant guilds rushed to the construction site, but were stopped by a magnificently grand formation.

Yama Kings Feinie, Aoxue, Huangqing, and Xingzi were personally holding down the fort. They'd set up formation upon formation with the Formation Orbs of Yin and Yang to isolate the area.

The crystal garden was prime bait to lure in the Ancient Tree of Life; this was too important a matter to risk any kind of disturbance. Thus, Lu Yun had gone so far as to set up formations with the Formation Orb to protect the land.

Construction was executed by his Infernum and bean soldiers, and he himself was in charge of the layout of the garden.

“What are you doing, Lu Yun?!” demanded the head of the Panorama Pavilion. Although the crystals were Lu Yun’s personal property, as a senior and ally, he felt it was his duty to guide Lu Yun onto the right path.

Among them, the Yellow Springs emperor harbored the most grievances. He’d extended an invitation to Yellow Springs Land more than once, but Lu Yun had either made excuses or dodged the invitation. It wasn’t until a few days ago that his replica Xing Chen had made a surprise visit to Yellow Springs Land, but only to procure ten trillion crystals from the land’s vault...

Ten trillion was an astronomical sum for Yellow Springs. The land was impoverished, compared to the other nine majors and nine lands, so the Yellow Springs emperor had to grit his teeth and tighten his belt to scrounge up the ten trillion.

The entire ordeal left the emperor frustrated and full of grievances. Not only had he lost his successor to Dusk Province, but he’d also given out ten trillion crystals without getting anything in return after becoming Dusk’s ally!

If the merchant alliance hadn’t given Yellow Springs a discount on lightning rods and crystal cannons out of secondhand guilt, the emperor would’ve torn up their treaty and spat on it for good measure.

He could tell from a quick scan of the ten trillion forming the garden’s foundations that they were the ten from Yellow Springs! The unique energy of the land remained on the crystals; he purpled with such rage that he almost lunged at Lu Yun.

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“Ah, seniors, Your Majesty.” Lu Yun turned and smiled at the immortals clustered around the garden.

The emperor tasted blood at the back of his throat. He’d put on another disguise, yet Lu Yun was still able to recognize him at first glance and reveal his identity. Thank heavens he didn’t repeat how the emperor had bestowed the honors of honor upon Dusk Province with his presence, or the emperor would’ve spontaneously deviated on the spot then and there.

“I’m building a crystal garden to nurture the projection of the Dao Flower,” Lu Yun said with a smile.

“What? To nurture the Dao Flower projection?” Many were caught off guard.

Lu Yun had collected the projection earlier, planning to use it as bounty on the dao immortals of the Dongfang Clan. After retracting the bounty, the projection of the Dao Flower remained in his possession.

“That’s right,” Lu Yun responded matter-of-factly. “After all, it’s merely a projection that will dissipate when given enough time. That’s why this junior is building a crystal garden outside Dao City to nurture and sustain the image.”

Realization dawned on everyone; the Dao Flower was more valuable than the crystals. However, the revelation also turned many faces dark. With the projection of the Dao Flower, Lu Yun would still have a chance to establish a sacred land.

“I have a question,” someone said. “Are these all the immortal crystals you’ve gotten?”

“Of course.” Lu Yun nodded. “All of the crystals I’ve earned through coercion and my collaboration with the merchant alliance are here.”

“Hmph!” the immortal scoffed. “This seat risked making Donglin Taihuang my enemy when I killed thirteen void-ascended immortals of House Donglin... According to your words, you should pay me thirteen billion crystals. Can you still do so?”

The nascent spirits of thirteen void-ascended immortals appeared in his hand.

After a brief pause, Lu Yun checked their information with the Spectral Eye. They did indeed belong to Donglin cultivators, and they had indeed been killed by this immortal.

Void-realm cultivation methods were now mainstream resources in modern society. Many geniuses had obtained the basic method sold in Dao City and created ones that were more suited to them. The peak factions of the world had officially failed to monopolize the void realm.

It would be an exaggeration to say void-ascended immortals were common cabbages in the streets, but there was no shortage of them.

The popularization of heavenly formations had also allowed regular immortals to escape the fate of becoming obsolete. Thus, the retribution looming over Qing Yu for restoring the void realm had dissipated.

“I can’t pay you in crystals,” Lu Yun said with a nod.

“Harrumph!” the immortal huffed with a deep scowl.

“If Sir Lu Yun can’t pay you,” interjected the head of the Panorama Pavilion, “the merchant alliance will offer the crystals.”

“There’s no need.” Lu Yun shook his head and produced thirteen drops of tribulation essence containing sword energy with a flip of his hand. He snapped his fingers and sent the essence to the immortal. “I don’t have crystals on hand, but I have a good amount of tribulation essence. Will this suffice as a substitute?”

“It will!” The immortal was overjoyed. Thirteen drops of tribulation essence were worth far more than thirteen billion crystals. Only idiots would turn down an offer like this!

Tribulation essence could be used to construct or strengthen an immortal constitution, making it useful for both cultivators and immortals. Without hesitation, the immortal offered thirteen nascent spirits to Lu Yun, who crushed them without even glancing at them.

“Alright, I’m making some changes to the bounty,” he announced. “The nascent spirit of a Donglin void-ascended immortal will fetch one drop of tribulation essence. The rest of the conditions remain unchanged.”

Chapter 698: Liver

Lu Yun naturally wasn’t going to tell them the truth, and the projection of the Dao Flower provided him perfect cover. To lure in the Ancient Tree of Life, he needed not only the Key of Life, but also a great formation built with immortal crystals.

According to Ashu's estimations, the formation would cost him anywhere from two hundred to two hundred and fifty trillion crystals. He'd splurged three hundred and sixty eight trillion to be on the safe side. That was what he'd been earning all those crystals for!

Spanning the entire garden, the formation he'd created was difficult to spot. Every shoot of grass, every tree, and every particle was part of it. Once activated, the runes would come together to form a great formation.

Lu Yun couldn't afford to let people realize that he'd set up a formation with more than three hundred trillion crystals. All eyes in the world were now on Dusk Province; nothing he did would escape their notice.

If someone noticed what he was actually doing, deathsworn would immediately appear to destroy the formation, even if they had to self-detonate. The surviving members of House Donglin would stop at nothing to disrupt his plans.

Nurturing the Dao Flower in the garden, on the other hand, was in line with majority interest. As long as the projection remained in Dusk and thus under their scrutiny, they wouldn't have to worry about it, and they might stand a chance to take it for themselves.

Lu Yun had already placed the Dao Flower into the garden.

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Seven days!

That was all it took to complete construction on this spectacular, glorious garden. Located to the west of Dao City, the garden spanned a hundred kilometers in width. However, it was far bigger on the inside—hundreds of thousands of kilometers bigger, to be exact. Bigger than even Dusk Province, which was only forty thousand kilometers across and couldn't have possibly housed the garden.

"That's no regular crystal garden... Lu Yun's set up a formation. Is he trying to refine the projection of the Dao Flower in the garden?!" Many immortals realized that they'd been fooled only when the unseen formation surged with power upon the garden's completion.

Of course, very few had dared to intervene during the construction, what with the connate-grade Formation Orb and the restriction against immortals in Dusk as lines of defense. And now that the garden was done, the most they could do was complain.

Within Dusk Province, even crippled origin dao immortals wouldn't be able to do much unless restricted-level powerhouses made a move, such as the scarlet apes of the North Sea, Yin Jiuyong of Truespirit Major, or the great fur seal of the West Sea.

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"What is he doing? Why would he use so many crystals to build a garden?" Outside Dusk Province, Dongfang Hao stared at the garden with the Sword of Chaos in hand and frowned. His keen instincts told him that Lu Yun was planning something. "Is this for that Qing Yu's tribulation?"

His constitution and nascent spirit had been thoroughly tempered and completely settled by now. Though he'd once literally been under Lu Yun's foot, had his tribulation essence and Sword of Slaughter

stolen from beneath his nose, and even been tricked by the cancelled bounty on the Dongfang Clan, Dongfang Hao's resilience bounced him back to his former composure. Once he recovered, very few things could undermine his iron will.

He'd paid a visit to the border of Dusk Province to observe Lu Yun and figure out what he was up to this time.

The garden comprised of more than three hundred trillion crystals had taken the world by storm. Many had come to assess the garden for themselves upon its completion, including the two scarlet apes from the North Sea. However, they remained outside Dusk Province, just like Dongfang Hao.

Four giant swords isolated Dusk Province like enormous doors and a great formation pierced through the sky, sending endless sword energy around the province. It was the formation diagram that Lu Yun had gained from the Exalted Divine Tomb!

Lu Yun had burned a dragon vein to activate its power. He wouldn't have minded using the formation to ambush his enemies, if circumstances were different, but not now—the Ancient Tree of Life was crucial to lifting the curse in Qing Yu's body. No hiccups would be tolerated today, which was why he manifested the sword formation to deter potential troublemakers.

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"That old ancestor... is in Dusk Province?!" Goldenlight yelped and almost wet himself in his hurry to run away.

Clank!

Silverlight knocked him down with a swing of her iron rod.

"What are you afraid of?! Back then, only that honorable one was willing to take in the monster spirits and teach us the immortal techniques. As long as we don't make a move against Dusk Province, he won't do anything to us," Silverlight snorted. "This formation... Lu Yun's target is the Ancient Tree of Life."

Goldenlight turned to his dao partner with shock. Silverlight was the better of the two of them in both strength and experience. Light glittering in her eyes, she'd recognized the formation in the crystal garden immediately.

"I was just a lowly monster spirit cultivating under the guidance of master, but master still taught me everything without holding anything back. That primeval formation requires the Key of Life, has Lu Yun gained it already?" Silverlight looked on curiously.

.....

Whoosh!

A beam of emerald light soared into the sky, puncturing a hole into the dome above Dusk Province.

Boom!

Boom!

Boom!

Three explosions traveled from the hole in the sky and black smoke billowed out, enveloping all of Dusk Province.

“What is he doing? Is he trying to destroy the province?!” Everyone could tell that the black smoke was yin energy—an endless supply of yin energy! Such energy should only exist in ancient tombs to raise dead spirits, but Lu Yun had created an endless supply of it to cover the entire Dusk Province!

Before they could come to any other conclusion, the yin energy vanished with a wave of Lu Yun’s hand, sucked into another space. Then, an altar of one thousand kilometers across fell from the hole in the sky, smashing heavily into the crystal garden.

Blinding emerald light exploded from the altar, but nothing else was forthcoming as the garden spanned hundreds of thousands of kilometers. The addition of an enormous altar raised no further ripples.

“That’s... a liver!” someone shouted. “There’s a liver on the altar! What’s going on here?!”

The emerald altar was enormous, and the liver was just as large! Did it belong to a giant beast? How big must the beast be when the liver itself was five hundred kilometers wide?

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“An organ of the world... Dammit, Lu Yun’s after the organs of the world!!” Dongfang Hao gnashed his teeth, but there was nothing he could do at the moment. Dusk Province was under the protection of the sword formation. Even his master would be cut to pieces if he attempted to force entry.

Boom!

A fourth and final explosion rang out as something resembling the roots of a plant drilled out of the hole in the sky.

Chapter 699: The Demonized Ancient Tree

As if they possessed a life of their own, the gigantic roots ran amok the moment they slipped out of the hole in the sky.

“So Lu Yun’s ultimate goal... was this thing!!” Many of the world’s leading figures were shaken. They naturally recognized it for what it was: the Ancient Tree of Life! It was the very tree that’d made its home in the Endless Desert of Nephrite Major’s western region!

Powerhouses all over the world had long been aware of its existence. In the past, many had ventured into the desert to try taming this tree that was both a treasure and a spirit root. But all of their attempts ended in failure without exception. With even the mighty Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi trapped inside the tree, it was easy enough to imagine the outcomes of those weaker than them.

Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi were at least on the level of Lu Feng or Mo Yi. But after Mo Yi severed her cultivation to attain the void realm and become a void-ascended immortal, she most likely exceeded Qing Buyi, Chen Xiao, and Lu Feng in strength.

However, she wasn't a daredevil like those two, who never thought twice about doing anything or killing anyone, so her claim to fame was limited to that of pioneering the void method.

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"The Ancient Tree of Life is unimaginably strong... According to the rare mentions found in ancient writings, it was likely the treasure of a primeval powerhouse a very long time ago. Stop him, we can't let him lay hands on the tree no matter what!" worried a Ling dao immortal.

"Stop Lu Yun? Be our guest." Other immortals rolled their eyes at the man.

Every inch of Dusk Province was protected by the sword formation. Whoever barged in at a time like this was simply committing suicide. Moreover, Lu Yun would certainly show no mercy during this time. He'd give no quarter to anyone who tried to stop him from summoning the tree.

Dongfang Hao also remained silent. He hadn't expected Lu Yun would do something every immortal dreamed of, and succeed when no one else had.

The Ancient Tree of Life hadn't fully emerged from the opening yet. Only a hundred or so of its radicles were visible, and the thin roots thrashed and whipped around indiscriminately, as if resisting the call.

Lu Yun stood in the center of the immortal crystal garden, the dark-green key floating above him exuding a dazzling halo of light that blended with the garden below.

The immortal crystal garden was a giant formation in and of itself, one designed to summon the Ancient Tree of Life. However, it now appeared that... this formation wasn't big enough to accommodate the tree in its entirety.

"To think it'd grow this big after merging with the Wood Altar..." Somewhere nearby, Holy Lord Ashu was a little bedazzled as well. He looked at the root hairs extending out of the opening, his expression blank. Each root was at least five hundred kilometers long... and these were the smaller ones.

When the tree itself arrived, an area of at least a million kilometers wide would be needed to accommodate it. Moreover, this tree seemed to have gained awareness and was bitterly resisting the summons from the Key of Life.

"Feinie, deploy the formations!!" Lu Yun shouted at the top of his lungs. The Yin and Yang Formation Orbs slowly emerged in the air.

"At your command!" Feinie walked out of the emptiness and activated the two Formation Orbs, immediately setting about drawing formations without foundation in order to expand the garden's surface area.

"We're also going!" The two Lin brothers exchanged a look, ready to help.

"You two, get back here!" Lu Yun stopped them, then shouted, "Seniors of the merchant alliance... lend me some money!"

"How much?!" Inside Dao City, the head of the Panorama Pavilion and the other leaders of the merchant alliance bristled with alertness. They'd been overawed when they realized Lu Yun's plan, so now that the governor wanted to borrow money, they naturally wouldn't refuse.

“Three hundred trillion premium immortal crystals!” Lu Yun cut straight to the chase.

“Very well!” Thirteen people grit their teeth and waved their hands.

Thirteen rivers of crystals rushed through the sky and gushed toward Lu Yun. Three hundred trillion premium immortal crystals was an enormous sum for even the thirteen merchant houses. It was a sum that they’d never be able to take out in the past.

In the world of immortals, there were so many immortal crystals that the total might as well be infinite. However, most of them were cached underground in the form of raw ore. Immortals all over the world did their utmost to mine it, but what they’d extracted thus far was only a tiny fraction of the entire reserve.

Therefore, the amount of crystals in circulation was finite. The thirteen merchant heads were the wealthiest figures in the entire world, but three hundred trillion was an astronomical number, even for them.

However, things were different now. They’d established an alliance and partnered with Lu Yun to distribute Dusk Province’s many treasures across the entire world. As Lu Yun enriched himself, so had they. Even more than him, to tell the truth!

The goods available from Dusk Province sold like hotcakes and inspired a similar effect in the trading guilds’ original businesses. Their growth was nothing short of exponential.

While there was a difference between assets of the trading guilds and the personal wealth of the thirteen heads, they were still able to come up with the frightening sum of three hundred trillion premium immortal crystals.

Rumble!

An ocean of crystal danced in the sky and amassed in the shape of a magnificent dragon that flew headlong into the garden.

“You two, use these immortal crystals to set up formations and double the garden’s strength!” Lu Yun roared at Lin Yu and Lin Xuan.

“Understood!” The brothers’ eyes lit up.

Lu Yun hadn’t kept anything secret from them when he’d laid down his formations. In fact, he’d left them in charge of the construction efforts in some parts of the garden. Hence, such a task was no issue for the two brothers that shared a near-telepathic bond.

In next to no time, dazzling light erupted from the garden.

With a quick succession of hand seals from Feinie, the Sumeru Formation expanded ever outward and occupied an ever-increasing surface. Each time the formation grew, so did the garden grow as well.

Inside the garden, each blade of grass, each tree trunk, each brick, and each tile shone with a sparkling, translucent glow. From them gathered a terrifying amount of immortal energy that was mixed with life essence, the combination of which shot to the sky and barrelled into the giant Ancient Tree of Life.

Boom!

Another explosive sound came from the great hole in the sky as a giant root slowly extended out of the hole. The lateral roots growing from it no longer struggled; instead, they tirelessly absorbed the tremendous energy and vitality in the surroundings.

Above the tree roots, the giant trunk, crown, sparkling branches, and translucent leaves slowly descended from the hole in the sky. A vast aura of life spread to every corner of Dusk Province.

“It’s finally been tamed!” Lu Yun sighed gently in relief.

“Hey kid!!” a familiar voice came from inside the tree. “This tree’s been demonized and become self-aware. You better be careful!” The voice belonged to Chen Xiao.

“What?!” Lu Yun immediately looked up with a start and saw a giant human face on the treetop looking back at him with a supercilious smile. Upon being discovered, the branches and leaves of the treetop quickly amassed into a great hand that grabbed at him.

“After an eternity, I’ve finally found you... Key of Life. Hand it over!”

Boom!

A terrible power erupted in the world as the hand fell on Lu Yun.

Chapter 700: Formation of the Ten Yama Kings

General shock and awe percolated at the tree’s arrival, the crowd’s blood running cold at Chen Xiao’s warning. The Ancient Tree of Life that could be seen towering in the Endless Desert every so often... had been demonized?

The giant tree hand pierced through space and arrived in front of Lu Yun, its fingers wrapping cruelly around him. It was powerful—too powerful. It felt like layers of space trapped his body tight, immobilizing him like a fly stuck in amber.

Lu Yun wasn’t afraid of death.

Indeed, as long as his nascent spirit inside the kingdom of hell lived on, he would never die. But if his body were to be destroyed, the demonized Ancient Tree of Life would certainly make off with the Key of Life.

Boom!

Jet-black light erupted next to Lu Yun. With a ferocious blow, Holy Lord Ashu blasted the giant hand to pieces.

“Lu Yun, this is the last time I’m helping you. The old monsters from the underworld have come to the world of immortals and are currently searching for my trail.” Ashu’s chest heaved up and down, the power of his essence vibrating faintly.

“There’s no need for you to do anything!” The spatial seal around Lu Yun now broken, he was free to move again.

“Woah kid, you’re fraternizing with a holy lord from the underworld? How daring!” Qing Buyi’s astonished voice came down from the Ancient Tree of Life.

“There’s a crystal core inside the tree. Destroy it and the tree’s consciousness will be erased!” Chen Xiao’s shout came from far away. “Tell the holy lord beside you not to attack. Holy lords from the underworld are the very reason this tree became self-aware!”

Ashu shook violently. About to throw another punch, he subconsciously retracted his arm.

“Ahhhhhhh!!” howled the demonized tree. Its roots twisted and bunched together into a pair of long legs, while the crown and trunk split apart and transformed into a pair of arms. The tree now resembled a giant treant and exuded a terrible aura.

Immortal energy and life essence from the garden streamed into it without end, giving rise to a demonic aura that billowed from it like a cloud of smoke. In its corrupted form, the Ancient Tree of Life was comparable to the demon god from the Exalted Divine Tomb!

A hint of hesitation appeared in Lu Yun’s eyes, but he decided not to activate the sword formation covering Dusk Province. If he did, the tree would likely be destroyed by the rain of swords.

Hum!

In the northern reaches of Dusk Province, a black column of light shot into the sky and pierced through the clouds. Soon after, a giant black willow slowly arose in the crowd’s alarmed gaze, so tall it looked like a giant mountain that shouldered the sky.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Dusken soil shook with each of the black willow’s steps as it made its way toward Dusk City.

Creeeaaak!

Along the way, the willow also underwent a transformation; its roots turned into feet and its branches twisted into arms. Just like the Ancient Tree of Life inside the immortal crystal garden, the willow tree now looked half tree and half human.

The desolate willow!

Master of the sacred land of demonic dao, the Skandha Range!

The desolate willow was merely a peerless immortal, but the aura flaring from it was as vast as the sea. Its titanic figure eclipsed the province and cast it in its shadow.

Trembling, fear flashed in the Ancient Tree of Life’s sculpture-like eyes.

“Demon Willow... Why are you here?!” it growled furiously. Rooted at the center of the crystal garden, it abruptly straightened up and furiously absorbed the immortal energy in its surroundings. As it did so, its foliage shone increasingly brighter and its giant leaves gleamed like green jade.

Undeterred, the desolate willow continued striding toward the Ancient Tree of Life with deliberate steps, shaking the land each time its feet touched the ground. If not for Lu Yun’s formation of three

hundred and sixty-five cities protecting Dusk Province, the desolate willow would've sunk the land to the seabed along the way.

Be it inside or outside the province, every single soul held their breath and quietly watched the two colossal existences that stuck out like sore thumbs inside the province's trivial forty thousand kilometers.

Rumble!

A bolt of black lightning flashed through the sky above as a giant face slowly came into view.

The demon god! After being thwarted in the North Sea, the demon god had unexpectedly come to Dusk Province!

There was no telling what he'd possessed this time around. In any case, he'd somehow transformed into a giant face thousands of kilometers wide and was staring fixedly at the desolate willow and Ancient Tree of Life. Clearly, these two trees were entities he was eyeing as potential possession targets.

Stopping in its tracks, the desolate willow turned and looked at the demon god in the sky. Like the three legs of a tripod, three mighty demonic beings faced off against each other, forming the corners of a giant triangle. Because of the demon god's arrival, the desolate willow now had to proceed with caution.

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"This Dusk Province truly is plagued by misfortune!" someone chuckled. "It's always being ravaged by some evil monster or another. Establishing a sacred land? That's completely over and done with."

His voice wasn't loud, but everyone heard him clearly. A stifled snort came from the sky, full of schadenfreude. Meanwhile, the four sword gates shone increasingly brighter in the air, hanging over Dusk Province like four scorching suns.

A hint of wariness appeared in the demon god's eyes, but he stood his ground. He had no choice but to appear in person. If the two demonic trees were to come to blows, they'd certainly injure each other and might even devastate their demonic essence, thus ruining their bodies. For that reason, he'd come to prevent their mutual destruction.

"You keep doing what you were doing... I'll stop this demon willow," the demon god suddenly offered.

Roar!

The demonized Ancient Tree of Life howled at the sky and its giant hand once again clutched at Lu Yun. It naturally knew the demon god was no well-intentioned soul, but if it could obtain the Key of Life and complete its transformation... the demon would be nothing but a laughable gnat after that.

The desolate willow wanted to stop it, but the demon god stood in its way. He hovered above one of the province's main cities, holding it hostage to make the sword formation hesitate before attacking.

If it came down, the formation would certainly level the city, thereby destroying the province's guardian formation. Lu Yun's control over the prodigious sword formation wasn't perfect yet, so he couldn't use it to launch targeted strikes.

Hum.

Dark-blue light glinted as a blade appeared in front of Lu Yun and walloped the tree hand to shreds. Wielding a saber with an edge that flowed like liquid light, Lu Feng stood in front of his little brother.

“If you have a secret weapon left, now’s the time to use it. I can’t hold it for long.” Lu Feng didn’t look back. The blade in his hand slashed relentlessly, firing a barrage of invisible sharp blades that bombarded the Ancient Tree of Life, each strike peeling off bark from the trunk and chopping through branches.

Even so, he wasn’t the tree’s match. After all, even Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi had been imprisoned inside for years on end.

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“Formation of the Ten Yama Kings!” Lu Yun commanded coolly. Ten different colors glowed radiantly in the air as a corresponding number of magnificent palace halls slowly came into existence inside the crystal garden. “It’d be another story if you didn’t have a fragment of hell inside you, but now...”

Formation of the Ten Yama Kings!

The power bestowed upon the Yama Kings by the Tome of Life and Death was finally making its grand entrance.