

## Necropolis 71

### Chapter 71: Taboo Against Taboo

Fully alert, Lu Yun clutched an oversized black donkey hoof. He'd begun refining these items en masse soon after exiting Yuying's grave, and completed the process the day before departing for Myriad Formation Summit. There were a dozen of them in total, and the one currently in his hand was the most powerful of the lot.

"Do I cram it inside her mouth?" He stared into the zombie's eyes. Sparkling like rubies, her irises were shining so brightly they could move a man's soul. He sensed no aggression or lust for slaughter from them, but her gaze seemed somewhat vacant, her eyes empty.

Lu Yun exhaled softly with relief when he saw that her soul had yet to fully take shape. "Actually, will it fit?"

Grasping the hoof tightly in his hand, he glanced at her dainty little mouth, a little stumped. Shoving a black donkey hoof in a zombie's mouth was the way that tomb raiders usually dealt with them.

An ethereal voice floated to his ears just then, interrupting his thoughts. "You can stop your deliberations. I no longer fear the thing you hold." As the voice sounded, Lu Yun saw the girl's previously unfocused gaze come alive. She looked straight into his eyes without blinking.

Most importantly, the faint hint of death on her brow was nowhere to be seen. A zombie king!

She'd reformed her soul and come back to life as a true zombie king! Blanching, Lu Yun stumbled back in quick succession.

"How... what?!" he exclaimed incredulously. "Two hours should've been the bare minimum for you to absorb this dense concentration of extreme yang."

"It is as you say." The girl nodded. "But the three august immortals used weapons of lightning and thunder against me. The pure yang energy contained within them is the bane of all dead, and it scattered the last vestiges of death inside of me."

Lu Yun glared sidelong at Qi Shenghui's group. They were huddled together, strenuously resisting the crimson light. The governor ground his teeth together and thought, what a bunch of shit teammates!

Rather than helping, they'd facilitated her completion instead.

"You lured me here on purpose!" Realization dawned belatedly.

"Correct. I would've been powerless to do anything, had you stayed at your previous location." The girl nodded. "There's something on you that calls out to every fiber of my being. I would very much like to know what it is."

The corner of her lips rose in a smile that could bedazzle every man in the world, but her scarlet eyes flashed hungrily in the next moment. "Whatever it is, it is inside your body. Allow me to cut you open and see what it is."

She suddenly reached out with her delicate hand, her fingers forming a claw and grabbing for Lu Yun's chest. In a state of heightened tension, the governor shot backward the moment he saw her move. In addition, a black figure appeared in front of him in the same instant, surrounded by a glowing white light.

Boom—

The girl's hand clashed violently against the dazzling white halo surrounding the shadowy figure. The zombie king shook as her eyes gleamed with joy.

"The Yang Formation Orb! So you have it," she enunciated to the black-robed woman, her red lips parting gently.

Feinie. Formation Orb in hand, she'd emerged from the Gates of the Abyss at this critical juncture.

The atmosphere about the two of them was strikingly similar in a way. Faint sorrow marked both of their faces, but instead of Feinie's mournful melancholy, the girl displayed a more youthful resentment.

The zombie lifted her other hand, revealing a black, fist-sized bead pulsing with a dark glow that seemed to echo Feinie's white pearl. Like hers, it was a Formation Orb, but one that was a jet-black hue.

"The Yang Formation Orb?" Lu Yun first sighed with relief, then blinked in startlement. "Following that logic, yours must be the Yin Formation Orb."

The girl didn't reply, but her eyes betrayed a building belligerence.

"Only by combining the two are they whole. That is when the true power of a connate treasure can be released. As you have delivered the yang half to me upon a silver platter, it would be rude of me to decline. Hand it over!" With a sudden growl, the zombie's hand shot at Feinie.

"What incredible strength!" The envoy flinched. In her current state, she was no match for a being that undoubtedly stood above the golden immortal realm, so she shot backward instead. While guarding Lu Yun, she deployed the power of her orb and placed one hundred and eight formations in front of her enemy in less than the span of a single breath.

Without even resorting to using her own orb, the zombie king's crimson hand tore through all hundred and eight formations with the sheer power of her flesh alone. It was a display of brute, savage force that had Feinie paling; her opponent was powerful beyond words.

She could've felled peerless immortals during her heyday, with the orb's assistance, but the key issue was the presence of another orb in her opponent's hand. In all likelihood, the zombie was just as much a master of formations as herself.

Outlined with reddish light, the girl's hand struck viciously at Feinie's chest. If the blow were to land, it would tear through Feinie and annihilate Lu Yun behind her at the same time.

"Stay back!!" Lu Yun suddenly barked out. From the corner of his eye, he'd noticed Qing Han ready to leave the security of the formations and charge their way. "Mo Yi, keep an eye on that kid!" he roared like an enraged lion.

“Don’t worry, nothing will happen to him.” Though Mo Yi didn’t know where the black-robed woman had come from, it was a sign that the governor still had cards left to play. As for Qing Han, attacking the zombie king would be nothing short of suicide.

On the other side, Qi Shenghui’s group lay sprawled on the ground, passed out cold.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Nine crimson shadows abruptly appeared around Lu Yun and slammed into the zombie girl’s palm nine times. Having always been on the offensive thus far, the girl fell back nine steps in succession. A chink had finally appeared in her unassailable confidence.

Nine faintly red shadows floated in the air and encircled her. Bloodcorpses!

They’d finally reemerged from the Gates of the Abyss.

After devouring the undead hag, these fearsome fellows were tamed inside the gates by Yueshen, with the help of Yuying and Feinie. They were initially immortal bodies meant for Yueshen. Though her spirit could no longer inhabit their bodies, it was still possible for her to exercise control over them.

For tomb raiders, zombie kings were brought up in hushed whispers and were the greatest of taboos. Even the tombs of the living they inhabited were classified as forbidden grounds.

Bloodcorpses, on the other hand, were the other horror tale. No ancient records spoke of them, but folk tales were nevertheless transmitted by word of mouth. Who would’ve thought that these two taboos would appear in the same place to face off in a clash of titans!

## **Chapter 72: Karma**

Between zombie kings and bloodcorpses, which were stronger?

Lu Yun wasn’t the only tomb raider who’d ever sought an answer to this age old question. There were stories of bloodcorpses and zombie kings on Earth, but no one had ever seen those mythical entities with their own eyes. Granted, it was equally likely that whoever had had never lived to tell the tale.

The crimson light on the island thickened, threatening the integrity of Lu Yun’s formation of eight trigrams. If the formation broke, the yin and yang of the island would reverse again and the zombie king would almost instantly drain everyone of their vitality.

“But...” Feinie hesitated when she realized her master’s intentions.

“No buts!” ordered Lu Yun. “Just go!”

“...Understood.” As his Envoy of Samsara, she couldn’t defy his order. She entered the eight trigram formation with the Yang Formation Orb, the power of which stabilized the deteriorating arrangement.

Lu Yun remained rooted to the spot, fervent curiosity on his face. His eyes were fixed on the battle between the nine bloodcorpses and the zombie king. There would be a winner between them today that would give a definitive answer to that question.

The bloodcorpses morphed into bloody shadows and struck at the zombie king from nine different directions. Meanwhile, the zombie girl was now entirely crimson in color, terrifying viciousness and

bloodlust having replaced the serenity in her eyes. Her long black hair was also dyed red as it snaked in the wind.

She still hadn't moved an inch, but had remained on the spot and gestured with her hands, summoning black shadows to block the bloodcorpses. She suddenly took a sideways step to allow a bloodcorpse to pass, landing a palm on its shoulder and scattering its form into a bloody mist as it flew past her.

Though it quickly regathered itself in midair, its color had faded somewhat.

"She's too strong, milord," Yueshen weakly transmitted. "I can't win."

Although she remained hidden, it was she who'd been controlling the bloodcorpses. Essentially, it was her fighting the zombie king, and that blow from the zombie king had damaged her spirit.

"Release your control and allow the bloodcorpses to fight on their own," ordered Lu Yun. The bloodcorpses had no consciousness, only instinct. With Yueshen directing them, her control had suppressed their instincts and weakened their power.

"Alright!" Clenching her jaw, Yueshen withdrew her consciousness.

Roar!

The nine bloodcorpses lifted their heads and howled like wild beasts. The entire island trembled in response, and the waters of the Dusk River boiled over. The crowds of corpses that had crawled ashore fled back into the water, terrified. The black skull of malice hovering above the island also violently scattered like smoke.

Bloodcorpses now fully off the leash, the shadow of blood around them also transformed into crimson light and clashed with the zombie king's aura. They vanished on the spot. When they reappeared next, they were already grappling with the zombie king, their teeth sunk into the girl's flesh!

The girl's expression descended through various degrees of monstrous horror as fangs erupted in her mouth to retaliate in kind.

The ten monsters on the island raged completely out of control, and their respective auras grew ever more blood-chilling. Even the Path of Ingress was shaken from its post of suppressing the Dusk River and was bobbing up and down along with the water.

Lu Yun retreated unsteadily and tongues of black flame darted out of every pore on his skin. The power fluxes around him grew unsteady and chaotic.

Under the devastating onslaught of the terrible crimson light from the ten monsters, the combination of malice, extreme yin, presence of death, and all other evil forces in the air transmuted into something entirely different. This thing was invisible and intangible, yet omnipresent in all matter.

Karma.

Karma didn't deal direct damage to anyone or anything, but the weightier the bad karma that was attributed to a cultivator, the more powerful their heavenly tribulations became. In fact, if their sins reached a certain point, a heavenly tribulation would descend even if the cultivator's level of strength didn't warrant one.

Lying unconscious on the island, the bodies of the three immortals should've transcended those of others in this world and been free of all impurities. However, a sweep of karma across their beings left a trace of black qi, contaminating their bodies like maggots burrowing into dead flesh.

Thick tribulation clouds quickly enveloped the small island as a result of this dense concentration, bringing crackling lightning and howling thunder. Mo Yi, Qing Han, and Feinie gaped at the sky, color draining from their faces.

The power of this lightning tribulation exceeded comprehension. If it hit the island, everything on it would be smote to ashes, the island included. No matter how evil and terrifying the bloodcorpses and zombie king were, they would still be crushed under the might of heaven and earth.

"Karma.... Ah, I understand now," Lu Yun muttered as he stared at the blanket of bad karma. His eyes and body were afire with black flames; in fact, it looked like his very being was composed of fire. He closed his eyes and extended his arms into the air, then... began devouring the manifestation of karma on the island, creating an enormous vortex above his head.

Jaws dropped from his three overwhelmed companions within the protection of the formation of eight trigrams.

Whoosh!

The fire within Lu Yun's body burned ever more intensely, refining karma into true qi and incorporating it into his being. The qi in his body circulated at a mad speed, and his cultivation progressed exponentially.

Burn away karma with the fires of hell!

There was a divine fire beneath the eighteenth level of hell that consumed karma, weakened destiny, and cleansed heaven and earth—that was the true nature of the fire in Lu Yun's body!

Induced by the large amount of karma on the island, hellfire spontaneously exploded and cleansed away sins, transforming the bad karma into Lu Yun's qi. As the karma on the island gradually dissipated, so too did the tribulation clouds in the sky.

Black lightning crackled around Lu Yun. When he next opened his eyes, his black gaze reached several meters away. A black core slowly coalesced within his dantian like a miniature black sun, floating above the Tome of Life and Death.

Golden core realm!

The tremendous power he'd absorbed by burning all of the karma on the island had pushed him into the core realm. A death art emerged from the tome and entered Lu Yun's consciousness.

Judgement of Life or Death.

Levying one instance of judgement would determine if his enemies lived or died.

The bloodcorpses and zombie king were still locked in combat. The ripples caused by the ascension of a qi transformation cultivator were too weak to attract their attention, and even the dissipation of karma hadn't disturbed them at all.

The only thing they wanted was to devour each other!

“It’s past noon. The island’s going to sink, now.” The slight tremor that Lu Yun had sensed beneath his feet made his stomach lurch.

### **Chapter 73: Dusk River Palace**

The island itself formed the tomb for the living. It’d floated up from the abyss, attracted by the pure yang energy between heaven and earth. Now that the latter had started dissipating, the island began sinking back to the depths it normally called home.

Sensing the new development, Lu Yun shouted, “We need to go!” Now wasn’t the time to examine the new death art he’d obtained. Turning on his heels, he sprinted toward the eight trigrams formation.

The three immortals inside it paled in horror.

“It’s too late,” Mo Yi bemoaned, her face wan as despair tinted her voice. “A barrier has formed around the island and cut us off from the outside world! We’re trapped now.”

“The Path of Ingress!” Lu Yun shouted urgently. “Feinie, collect the Path of Ingress!”

His “augmenting formation” was currently suppressing the other end of the path, but there was a transportation formation hidden within as well. Feinie immediately reacted after his reminder. She deployed the Formation Orb in her hands and hastily activated the transportation formation. The Path of Ingress, bane of formations, would be invaluable as their hope of escaping the depths.

Hummm—

In an explosion of white, glaring light, the path, as well as the formation, vanished without a trace.

Rumble—

The entire island sank below the water’s surface. But rather than being submerged in water as common sense would dictate, it immediately arrived inside an unmeasurably deep chasm.

“Look over there!” Qing Han exclaimed.

Looking in the direction Qing Han was pointing, Lu Yun and Mo Yi saw a colossal skull embedded onto the wall of the chasm, a dragon coiled on one side and a tiger crouching on the other.

It was the corpse coffin made from Yueshen. But, destroyed alongside the burial mound, it now lay in tatters.

“It hasn’t even been a day since we left and here we are, back again,” a dejected Lu Yun lamented.

“Is this where you explored before?” Mo Yi asked as she observed the giant head, appalled .

Lu Yun and Qin Han exchanged a glance, then nodded together.

“And now, we’re back,” Qing Han murmured.

The island's crimson light had dissipated, but the life-devouring force lived on, still vying for supremacy against Lu Yun's formations. As the island continued its steady descent, more and more grotesque monsters appeared in their field of view, appearing one after another on the cliff faces

"What on earth are those?" Qing Han couldn't help but shudder.

The creatures rested on the cliff, unmoving, coming in all sorts of shapes and forms. Most were humanoid, but much bigger than ordinary humans. Each of them was at least thirty meters tall, and some of them even exceeded three hundred meters in height.

"Desiccated corpses, one and all," Lu Yun gravely identified. "Some sort of monsters seem to have climbed up from the bottom, only to have their life essence sucked away midway."

Remains densely littered the cliff, their numbers too many to count.

"Did the island devour their life essence?" Mo Yi wondered, somewhat incredulous.

Lu Yun shook his head gently. These deaths far predated the existence of the tomb for the living.

Thanks to her knowledge, Mo Yi could barely identify a few creatures. All of them belonged to long-extinct species. Though they'd survived the great war of immortals a hundred thousand years ago, they'd vanished from the world since then. Only the ancient records of the great factions still chronicled their existences.

Who would've thought that she'd see so many of them gathered in one place!

"The Gandharva Divines!" Mo Yi suddenly pointed at a humanoid creature more than sixty yards meters, its body a bright vermilion hue.

"Blessed with potent talents, the divine race was the first to rise and enslave other races after the great war. They dominated the immortal world, and the Gandharvas were their royalty!

"But for unexplained reasons, the divine race vanished dozens of millennia ago, including the Ghandarvas. It was their disappearance that had allowed the other races the breathing space to develop.

"What's this corpse doing here? Was this a place of interest in the past? Perhaps they once explored this site?" Incomprehension filled Mo Yi's eyes. Thanks to her extraordinary background, she possessed even greater knowledge than a noble scion like Qing Han.

"This is the Gandharva divine emperor's ninety-ninth crown prince, also known as the greatest genius of the tribe. He died here eight thousand years ago," Lu Yun suddenly said with a frown. Why had this particular individual been alive long after its race's supposed disappearance?

"Eight thousand years ago?! Impossible!" Mo Yi exclaimed reflexively. "How do you know this?"

Lu Yun declined to comment. The dead were open books for his Spectral Eye, in which he could read someone's entire history by merely seeing a fraction of their remains. But that was a secret he would never divulge.

Realizing the rudeness of her question, Mo Yi changed the subject after a slight pause.

“Why are there so many ancient species gathered here? Judging by their final postures, they seemed to have been fleeing for their lives. What on earth could be residing at the bottom?” she whispered.

Somewhere else on the island, the bloodcorpses and the zombie king still faced each other, but the fighting had come to an end.

The zombie girl cut a sorry figure, her clothes and crimson hair in disarray. But the bloodcorpses weren't in much better shape. Each of them sported a missing arm or leg. That she'd confronted all nine of them by herself had spoken volumes about her strength.

Boom—

The island violently shook suddenly, as though it'd hit something, then resumed its steady descent.

“Is that... the Dusk River above us?” Qing Han stared up at the waves cutting across the void above them; the black waters were strikingly familiar. They were identical, in fact, to those of the Dusk River.

“Wh-what's going on here?” he sputtered, dumbfounded. The river was above their heads? Then what about the abyss they'd just journeyed through?

“The world is twisted here,” Mo Yi said. “A strange power is interfering with the laws of space. We're now on the Dusk River's riverbed, but at the bottom of the chasm at the same time. The water seems so very close to us, but it's impossible to reach with our strength. In fact, it might even be beyond a dao immortal's powers.”

Lu Yun nodded in agreement. At the bottom of the rift, bones and ruins filled their vision as far as the eye could see, as if it were the site of an ancient battlefield.

Silent thus far, Feinie suddenly exclaimed in spite of herself, “Dusk... River... Palace?”

“What?” Following her gaze, the rest hastily looked back and saw an enormous ramshackle palace quietly looming over the bottom. A plaque hung right at its center, three words carved on it in giant letters: Dusk River Palace.

“So the river god truly exists,” the stupefied Qing Han mouthed.

“Perhaps,” Lu Yun replied nonchalantly. When Ge Long had first mentioned a water god, he'd immediately smelled deception at play, a hypothesis that was substantiated after having learned inside the burial mound that the so-called Dusk River Sacrament was a means to revive the dragon in the bronze outer-coffin. Yet here was an honest to goodness palace at the 'bottom of the river', presumably belonging to said god!

“No, not perhaps! The river god really exists!” Qing Han shook his head, then pointed at the endless darkness behind the palace. “Right over there.”

#### **Chapter 74: The River God Cometh**

“What?!” Lu Yun and the others were floored by Qing Han's words.



“Is the Dusk River God really over there?” The young man cast his Spectral Eye over the endless darkness beyond the palace. Teeming information filled his field of vision, but there was nothing about the so-called river god.

“He’s still alive then?” Lu Yun’s heart chilled slightly.

“I do not think you should step out of here.” A sonorous voice suddenly filled the air. It was the girl who was now a zombie king, who’d now returned to her former coolness.

After descending into the abyss, the nine bloodcorpses were apparently cowed by something else entirely. They were helplessly shivering, their bloodthirst having utterly dissipated.

“Yueshen,” Lu Yun called out softly, opening the realms of yin and yang. The ghost understood her master’s wish and piloted the bloodcorpses back into the Gates of the Abyss.

“What is this place?” asked Lu Yun, to which the zombie king shook her head. “You don’t want to open up my body and see what treasures I have anymore?” That she was no longer on the offensive was rather curious.

“There is no point in that anymore,” the zombie king responded coolly. “If I am to remain trapped here, nothing new and shiny will do me any good.”

Lu Yun didn’t respond, as he didn’t know whether the Path of Ingress was powerful enough to send them outside.

After reversing life and death, the girl would’ve left the tomb for the living and entered the wider world. But the interference from his nine bloodcorpses had unexpectedly brought her right back. Thus, it was reassuring to hear that he’d be safe for now. He wouldn’t be able to put up a fight if she insisted on taking his life. “Is the Dusk River God really close by?”

“The Dusk River God?” The girl shook her head in confusion, clearly ignorant of the subject.

“He’s right there, behind the palace!” responded Qing Han. His voice sounded rather hollow and his body was shakily lumbering in that direction.

“Wait! Do not let him go over there!” The zombie girl shouted, concerned that Qing Han was about to leave the island.

Lu Yun hurriedly grabbed onto him, but it seemed his friend was bewitched and wouldn’t stop!

Fwoosh!

The zombie girl was already in motion and a flash of crimson sliced toward Qing Han.

Bang!

Mo Yi stepped forward, dispersing the girl’s attack. Seven stars rose from her body, pulsing potent power around her. They cast rays of brilliant starlight that outlined her like an astral goddess.

Feinie’s aura began waxing in strength as well. The Formation Orb hummed to life, creating an array of formations readied for defense.

"If he steps off the island, all of you will die as well." The corpse girl said this very matter-of-factly, without making another move. Evidently, she was holding back out of fear that something would be disturbed by their commotion.

Lu Yun delivered a swift chop to the back of Qing Han's head. The other youth barely made a noise before falling unconscious. This wasn't something he would've normally done, but Qing Han's mind and senses were clearly addled.

"I knew I'd have to carry him on my back again," the young man muttered with mild annoyance. Mo Yi twisted her lips, while Feinie's eyes lit up with envy.

"What're you afraid of?" Lu Yun didn't actually put Qing Han on his back again. Instead, he helped his unconscious friend assume a sitting position.

"I am just a small, insignificant arcane immortal. Under this abyss... what do you think I should be afraid of? Anything and everything," sighed the zombie girl. She would be much better off if she were still an unthinking zombie. Even a ten-thousand-year zombie had no sentience to speak of.

Unfortunately, she was a zombie king that had transcended death and returned to life. Aside from her body being well, dead, she had a mind and soul like any living person.

Even a zombie king wasn't a zombie's final stage of evolution. Legends had it that if a zombie king took one step further, it would turn into a living creature once more. All brutal instincts would be purified and it would lead an existence under the sun that was accepted by heaven and earth.

Right now, the girl could be said to be a living zombie. As such, she could be affected by fear.

"You said you're an arcane immortal? Why hasn't Dusk Province's restriction executed you?" Another voice sounded nearby before Lu Yun had a chance to respond. The group turned their heads; the three unconscious august immortals had woken up.

They were protected by their weapons of thunder and lightning, which could restrain the zombie king's crimson light and shield them from serious injuries. Lu Yun had absorbed their bad karma, as well; not a touch was left.

"Buncha pigs." He couldn't help but grind his teeth when he saw who it was. If these three hadn't used those blasted weapons and summoned the pure yang thunder needed to clear away the last lingering remnants of death, he would've already subdued the zombie girl with his black donkey hoof.

Qi Shenghui glared vicious murder at Lu Yun, but his malice instantly went up in smoke when he saw the zombie girl. The macabre proceedings from earlier had left an indelible impression upon him. More importantly, she was an arcane immortal, one that the province's restriction hadn't slain!

The zombie king ignored him, peering into the darkness behind the watery palace instead.

"Legends speak of a bottomless demonic lair within the world of immortals, home to countless evil spirits. Can this be it?" Qin Xianhuo swallowed some pills that he'd fetched from a storage item. Since his injuries weren't all that severe, he quickly recovered most of his energy.

"The demonic lair of legend?" Feinie paled. "I've heard about it, too. Many books unearthed from ancient tombs talk about such a thing. Maybe..."

“What’s this ‘demonic lair’?” Lu Yun’s mind called up memories of the subject to mind. These memories belonged to Feinie and corroborated what she’d said. There’d once been a demonic lair in the world that teemed with untold evils, specters, ghouls, and demons. An ancient immortal emperor had sacrificed themselves and used the utmost of dao to seal the lair away.

“No way it’s this place, right?” He smiled a bit uncertainly.

The great war a hundred thousand years ago had fragmented the world into nine majors, ten lands, and four immortal seas. Truthfully, no one knew exactly where this sealed lair was.

Upsettingly enough, this place bore an uncanny resemblance to the legendary lair. Moreover, if even the world had been shattered... how could an ancient seal remain intact?

“H-he... he’s here.” Qing Han stirred, his eyes opening and fixating upon the infinite darkness outside the island.

“Who? Who’s here?”

“The Dusk River God, he’s coming.” Qing Han’s lips became waxen.

“He’s probably entranced by something. Any solutions, little fox?” Mo Yi patted to the vulpine pet nestled in her bosom.

“Squeak squeak!” The fox opened her aquamarine eyes, glancing toward the darkness with obvious dread, then stuck her head back in Mo Yi’s clothes. The young lady grew rather upset.

“What did she say?” Judging from the city lord’s expression, Lu Yun could tell something was wrong.

“The Dusk River God cometh.”

1. Arcane is the second highest immortal level, two steps above august, which is what everyone else here is.

## **Chapter 75: Sacrifices Birthing a God**

If Qing Han had said this, Lu Yun would only think it was the influence of whatever had a hold on him.

However, Mo Yi was an august immortal. She was channeling her full power, seven stars forming the Big Dipper around her and releasing terrifying force. More importantly, her eyes were clear and her thoughts cogent.

“The river god. Where is he?” Lu Yun furrowed his brows, as he couldn’t see anything.

Mo Yi offered no reply. She was completely ready to fight, her gleaming sword drawn and form hovering in the air.

“August immortal... the Duskwater city lord is an august immortal?!” Qi Shenghui and the others goggled at Mo Yi with shock. She wasn’t the typical august immortal, either. The eunuch felt that even the three of them working in tandem wouldn’t be able to defeat her.

“She’s hidden a lot from the outside world.” Qin Xianhuo’s eyes gleamed with insight. “Her original cultivation must’ve been even higher still... she ruined her own cultivation to descend to this level!”

“Ruined her own cultivation!” The others looked at Mo Yi with disbelief. All immortals sought the heavenly dao to attain ever-greater heights. To voluntarily nullify one’s level required incredible courage and resolve.

“Do not attack,” the zombie king instantly said when she saw that Mo Yi was poised for battle. “The tomb for the living bars its passage.”

When the tomb returned to the abyss, it had erected a barrier. It wasn’t to keep Lu Yun and the others in, but to keep the horrors below the abyss out.

At the zombie girl’s warning, Mo Yi returned to the ground, retracting the crown of stars above her head as she did so. However, her brilliant sword was still bared and remained at the ready.

“The barrier around the tomb will prevent the creatures in the darkness from coming in. We are safe here, as long as the barrier isn’t disrupted,” the zombie king explained, still concerned about Mo Yi’s aggressive stance.

She’d remained in this tomb for who knew how long. A tomb for the living was a special place of existence that converted the energies of the dead into life essence, continually nurturing the girl that had been buried within. Any living creature that dared invade would be devoured by the tomb and processed for fuel.

Back then, the zombie girl had largely been an insensate zombie. Someone had placed her soulless body here, and she’d passively kept a memory of all the goings-on since then.

The barrier outside was strong enough to resist the combined might of multiple august immortals.

In here, innumerable monsters lurked in the darkness, looking for an opportunity to strike. Space itself continuously pressed down on the barrier around the tomb. If a fight took place in addition to that, the stressed walls might very well crumble. The monsters in the darkness would then kill all of them.

Qi Shenghui, Situ Yun, and Qin Xianhuo all hurriedly dismissed their gathered power, fearing for their own safety. At the same time, they also breathed a collective sigh of relief; they were safe for now. Otherwise, either Mo Yi or the zombie king could slay them as easily as snapping their fingers.

Mo Yi nodded and put away her sword. Her eyes remained fixated upon the darkness outside.

“The Dusk River God is here.” Lu Yun suddenly paled. His eyes glassed over and he moved toward the outside, step by gradual step.

“Do not go out there!” The zombie girl was thrown into disarray. If he broke the barrier on his way out, they’d all be doomed!

“Be quiet and let me go,” the young man suddenly interjected. “Open a corner of the barrier. My cultivation is weak enough not to disturb it.”

“You...” Mo Yi and the zombie king were both taken aback. Clearly, Lu Yun was only pretending to be entranced. He was playing along with whatever was trying to lead him out of the tomb.

“Careful,” Qing Han offered weakly. “The river god is no ordinary spirit. He’s more dangerous than any of his predecessors.”

“Do you know what the river god is?” The zombie girl glanced at Qing Han with some surprise.

“Yes,” nodded Qing Han. “The original Dusk River God is dead, but the river above us has birthed a new deity out of a thousand years of sacrifices. It’s that thing in the darkness.”

Gods hadn’t originally existed in the world. They were creations of belief and an abundance of worship. Sacrifices were made in exchange for great power, becoming the focus of myriad thoughts that then coalesced into divine beings.

Thus, the first gods were born out of humanity’s sacrifices. Those gods were a simpleminded lot, protecting the people whose minds they’d sprung out of against the predations of nature and the other races.

When they obtained wisdom and enlightenment from humans and grasped the law of sacrifice, they slowly broke free from human control and became their own race—the divines. They gradually grew to become one of the strongest among all the rest, founding their own nation and pressing the other races into servitude.

After the great war a hundred thousand years ago, they peaked and became the rulers of the world.

The river god currently in the darkness was a divine born from the Dusk River Sacrament over the past thousand years. Because of the spatial chaos beneath the river, the god that should’ve come to life there was instead ensnared in this abyss.

Qing Han didn’t know how he knew all of this. It was like a painting scroll had surfaced in his mind to illustrate the process of the river god’s birth. He’d wanted to head outside, not because of being bespelled, but because of the compulsion from some force inside him.

“I’ll go with you!” Qing Han shouted with sudden realization. “I can deal with that river god!”

Lu Yun turned back with some confusion.

“Trust me, I really can!” Qing Han stood up shakily, but strode surely and resolutely to his friend.

“Alright then.” Lu Yun nodded with tacit understanding.

“Allowing two cultivators to pass is the most the barrier can bear. If any of you immortals wish to leave, do not blame me for what happens next.” Bloodthirst flared in the zombie girl’s eyes, making Feinie’s eager footsteps come to a skidding halt. The zombie king had locked on to her.

“Stay here, Feinie. You won’t be able to help anyway,” said Lu Yun. The wistful envoy inclined her head in acknowledgment.

The zombie girl opened the barrier just a little bit, marked by a watery ripple dancing across it. Lu Yun and Qing Han cautiously ventured out of the tomb, hand in hand.

A sinister wind immediately began blowing in the previously quiet darkness as spectral wails beat upon their eardrums. Qing Han shivered involuntarily.

The palace of the river god emitted a phosphorescent light that clashed against the shadows everywhere else, illuminating a gigantic corpsefish that was nailed to one of its walls by a brass spear.

“That’s the previous Dusk River God. He—she’s a corpsefish!” Qing Han murmured upon discovering the desiccated corpse.

### **Chapter 76: Utmost Treasure of the Divines**

“That’s the previous Dusk River God?” Lu Yun threw Qing Han a disbelieving glance before checking the remains of the corpsefish with his Spectral Eye. “Well, it really is! How did a corpsefish become a god??”

It made no sense whatsoever. Corpsefish were zombie-like creatures born out of fish that were contaminated with human grievances after eating corpses. How could something like that become a god?

Qing Han shook his head, as confused as Lu Yun. “But that is indeed the corpse of a god....”

Grotesque shadows swarmed out of the abyss, advancing on the two. The tortured cries grew louder and more intense, and a pungent smell assaulted their senses. Something big was coming their way.

Heavy breathing sent a shudder down their spines as a mysterious power weighed down on their chests like a mountain, making their breathing difficult.

Hum.

A soft white light radiated from Qing Han as an empty scroll rose from his body. It was the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals, made by combining the Panorama of Clarity, Portrait of Emptiness, and the Profile of Harmony. Its light drove away the enormous thing silently shuffling toward them from the dark. In fact, it even seemed capable of suppressing the power of the abyss.

“Why is that painting in your hands?” A hoarse voice traveled out from the underwater palace, followed by the emergence of a strange-looking woman.

She was completely naked, but her shrivelled face and exposed skin looked lifelessly grey, as if she hadn’t seen sunlight for a long time. What surprised Lu Yun most was the tail attached to her torso in lieu of a human lower body.

A mermaid?

Wait, is she dead or alive?!

Lu Yun shuddered. All that was left of her tail were bones! It looked like the flesh had been eaten away by something. Closer inspection revealed that not only had her tail turned into a skeleton, her entire body was a dried husk that lacked the color and shine of a living being.

He pulled Qing Han behind him and took a few steps back, unsure if the creature was dead or alive.

“Why is the treasure of the divine race in your possession?” The mermaid asked again when Qing Han didn’t answer, slowly drifting toward them.

“The utmost treasure of... the divine race?” Lu Yun blinked. She means the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals?

“Are you the Dusk River God?” demanded Qing Han, his body enveloped by the treasure’s light.

“...I am,” the mermaid bit out, then abruptly erupted with a piercing shriek. Violence entered her lifeless eyes. “Speak! Why would the most precious treasure of my kind fall into the hands of a human slave—”

The entire underwater palace shook as corpsefish after corpsefish ventured out. A dense swarm of white tentacles sealed off and isolated the space. There was no water here, yet the creatures swam as if they were underwater.

.....

“What’s happened to them?” Qi Shenghui asked in a quavering voice when he saw Lu Yun and Qing Han suddenly stop moving. The three supposedly lofty august immortals were as lost as headless chickens here. Terrors lurking within the darkness and the strange young woman in front of them had triggered their deepest fears.

“They see what you can’t see,” the zombie king said faintly. “You will be able to see the same if you walk out of the barrier. If you dare think about doing that, however, I will kill you.”

The eunuch shuddered, too frightened to respond.

“What does that young lad possess that keeps even the monsters from approaching?” If the zombie king left the barrier, the monsters in the dark would swallow her whole. However, the giant thing had cautiously inched its way toward Lu Yun like it was wary.

The zombie king pursed her lips, eyes flashing with a trace of anguish. A living soul trapped in a dead body and enduring daily torment... that kind of agony was one that few could imagine.

.....

Whoosh!

Emerald fire suddenly licked the air when the swarm of corpsefish poised to attack. Shrieks of pain sounded out, leaving only piles of ashes after a few breath’s time. As if it were sentient, the fire then churned toward the river god.

“Emerald Mistfire!” The river god cried out, reflexively backing away and darting back into the underwater palace. A tremor spread throughout the architecture, seemingly afraid of something.

Emerald Mistfire was the antithesis of the divine race!

Yuying dropped down from above with her signature white satin dress and aloof expression. With a wave of her delicate hand, the fire returned to her and shrunk into a spark.

“Please punish this servant for being late, sir.” She knelt on one knee before Lu Yun.

“At ease,” Lu Yun sighed in relief. “You did well.”

The short-lived battle had imparted concrete clues nonetheless. The three paintings were the divine race’s utmost treasure, but the three immortal fires could seal the three paintings. Therefore, that meant the fires were natural banes to the divine race!

“Let’s go into the palace!” Lu Yun quickly made up his mind. Since the Dusk River God was vulnerable to both the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals and the Emerald Mistfire, he had nothing to fear!

“Wait!” Qing Han called out.

“What is it?”

Qing Han pointed at the spear pinning the former river god down. “The previous river god was at least a peerless immortal, but the brass spear pinned her to death here. It must be a valuable treasure.”

Lu Yun slapped his forehead and rolled his eyes. Here he was, an experienced tomb raider, yet he’d overlooked a real treasure! A spear capable of killing the previous river god.... Both the owner of the spear, as well as the spear itself, must be powerful beyond measure.

“Wait, don’t move it yet!” Lu Yun hurriedly stopped Qing Han when the latter was about to yank out the spear.

The Qing scion stopped in his tracks. “What’s wrong?”

“The last river god died here a thousand years ago during the unrest of Dusk Province.” Lu Yun checked the details about the god’s death, his tone turning grave. “The owner of the spear may still be alive.”

His mind nagged at him to make the river god an Envoy of Samsara, but he immediately dismissed the idea.

Although the river god was a peerless immortal, she would be at most only a true immortal after being resurrected by the Tome of Life and Death. Moreover, Lu Yun couldn’t accept that she was a corpsefish.

Nailed here a thousand years ago... did this thing really stop the unrest in the province? Lu Yun’s head swam with unanswered questions.

The current river god was born less than a thousand years ago. She seems terrifying on the surface, but Yuying is able to restrain her. So that makes her an empyrean immortal at most! Her strength mostly comes from the influence of the abyss. Capture her, and we can save Wanfeng!

Lu Yun hadn’t forgotten that Wanfeng was still on top of the altar by the Dusk River. Though the power of the Dusk River Sacrament wouldn’t go to the mermaid, the will of everyone attending the ritual would. Gods were born of people’s faith, thus the river god would be empowered by her believer’s prayers.

If he captured her, he would be able to use the moral high ground to save Wanfeng. Nothing would be more convincing than words straight from the river god’s mouth.

“The owner of the spear may still be alive??” Qing Han shuddered. What a terrible place this abyss was. Who knew how many more monsters were hidden in the darkness! If they pulled out the spear and awakened something powerful, they could be crushed by a stray thought.

“Enter the palace,” boomed Lu Yun, “and take the river god alive!”

## **Chapter 77: The Hand in the Shadows**

Take the river god alive!

Both Qing Han and Yuying exuded excitement when they heard Lu Yun’s plan, especially Qing Han. Although the god wasn’t quite as he’d imagined, he couldn’t help a surge of excitement.



He was but sixteen and knew the stories surrounding the Dusk River God, having studied countless texts and records about the deity. Now, not only had he seen the mythical river god with his own eyes, but he was going to capture it!

Whoosh!

Emerald Mistfire leapt out of Yuying's hand and cast an emerald radiance in the abyss.

"What are those?!" Qing Han stopped in his tracks before entering the underwater palace.

White, strangely-shaped monsters covered the ground. They were lying prostrate with heads lifted, mouth at the top and eyes at the bottom. Slender limbs propped slim bodies up like spiders' legs, the joints reversed. They'd been staring at Lu Yun and the others with black, dark eyes, but as soon as the light of the Emerald Mistfire illuminated their habitat, they started and skittered away.

"Ghouls!" Lu Yun called out. "They're often seen in ancient tombs with thick yin energy or burial mounds of ten thousand bodies. They crave everything yin and fear all things yang. It's rare for them to attack the living of their own accord; just ignore them."

He'd encountered ghouls back on Earth before, and hadn't expected to see such a large group within the abyss. They possessed the strength of an ox, but the courage of a mouse. They never attacked unless they were provoked first.

Qing Han and Yuying nodded slightly and made their way into the underwater palace. It was a tattered representation of what it had been, but there were hints of a once extravagant architecture.

"Qing Han," Lu Yun suddenly asked, "do you find this place familiar?"

"I do." Qing Han nodded. "It looks just like the palace in the burial mound under Myriad Formation Summit."

"That's right. It's very similar. The palace in the burial mound was designed for burial purposes, whereas this is a real palace." Bafflement gleamed in Lu Yun's eyes. "That one was obviously built after the burial mound was set up, and it was based on the layout of this underwater palace."

Lu Yun struggled to grasp a fleeting inspiration in his mind, but something was still missing.

"Do you think the river god had something to do with the burial mound?" asked Qing Han.

"Perhaps." The governor shook his head, his mind a mess of tangled thoughts.

"How—how dare you come inside!" the hoarse voice shrieked. The river god was hiding in the depths of the main hall, and her expression tensed when she saw the humans follow her into the palace.

Corpsefish emerged from beside her, creating several trapping formations with their tentacles to form the layout of Ghost Yanking Feet.

Whoosh!

Emerald Mistfire surged and reduced the corpsefish to ashes before they could come closer.

“Stay away! Don’t come any closer! Wait, no, come here. Come to me!!” The river god garbled forlorn squawks, highlighting the insane edge to her voice. There seemed to be something wrong with her mind.

“Wait!” Qing Han grabbed Yuying. “Don’t. There’s something there!”

The Scroll of Shepherding Immortals flickered in and out of existence over Qing Han, imbuing him with power.

“What is it?” Lu Yun couldn’t see anything with his Spectral Eye.

Earlier, Qing Han had been the first to see the Dusk River God. The barrier around the tomb for the living not only segregated the abyss and its terrible inhabitants from them, but also prevented those in the tomb from seeing the monsters. Therefore, no one other than Qing Han had seen the river god in the underwater palace in the beginning.

The Scroll of Shepherding Immortals granted him a good variety of abilities, allowing him to see what Lu Yun couldn’t. Meanwhile, the Dusk governor could detect all dead things, but not living beings, or those that were stuck between the two realms.

“It’s the thing that ate the river god’s tail!” Eyes widened with fear, Qing Han hastily retreated a few steps. “No, no.... There’s something bigger. We’re inside its mouth!” He grabbed Lu Yun and beelined for the exit. “Go, go, go!”

Raaaagh!!

A tremendous roar tore through the air, shaking the palace and crumbling the premises. It felt like a giant mouth was gradually closing.

“This isn’t a palace,” Qing Han cried out, “but the mouth of a monster!!”

“What?!” Lu Yun couldn’t believe his ears. This turn of events was utterly fantastical and almost incomprehensible.

The palace was actually a monster’s mouth? They’d checked before entering and seen nothing around or behind the architecture. So where had the monster come from?

Yuying swiftly reacted and brought Lu Yun and Qing Han to her side, moving so quickly that she almost turned into a streak of emerald flame herself.

Crackle.

Rumble.

The maw bit closed and crushed the palace.

“Hahahaha!” A peel of ear-splitting laughter escaped the river god’s mouth. “Come, you lowly slaves! Didn’t you want to capture me? Come on!!”

She stood inside the giant mouth, losing all semblance of sanity.

Raaaaaaagh. A low growl emitted from the mouth of the giant monster.

Rumble rumble rumble.

The terrain under the abyss trembled and rumbled as terrible cracks spread through the palace. Something was emerging from the earth.

“What, what have you done?!” screamed the panicked zombie king. The tomb for the living was shaking and wavering, covering the barrier with fine cracks.

“Halt!” ordered a clear voice before a corpsefish swam out from underneath the monster, her body penetrated by a brass spear. It was the last river god, who’d been nailed to the wall.

Her body transformed in the next moment, keeping the fish tail but turning her upper body into that of a beautiful human girl. Just like the current river god, she, too, was a mermaid.

Her figure was full and lustrous, her complexion radiant. Long, pale blue locks floated as if underwater. She now fully resembled her living self. Wrapping her slim hand around the spear in her chest, she yanked it out with a firm tug.

“Go back from whence you came!” she snapped, the spear radiating beams of iridescent light, suppressing the giant monster erupting from the earth.

Gradually, peace returned to the abyss. The underwater palace reemerged before Lu Yun, but now it was eerie and terrifying in his eyes.

“Humans should not be here,” the mermaid turned and disapproved in a lilting voice.

“Aren’t, aren’t you dead?” Qing Han stared at the mermaid, wide eyed and tongue tied. Her curvy body brought a faint blush to his cheeks.

The mermaid sighed faintly but didn’t respond. “This is the Divinewater Talisman of the clan residing in the Dragon Palace. If you manage to enter the Dusk River, this will allow you to escape.”

With a flip of the god’s wrist, the droplet-shaped talisman fell into Qing Han’s hand. Then, she buried the spear back into her chest with a sudden motion. Her body slowly reverted back into that of a corpsefish and pinned itself to the exterior wall of the palace.

Silence was restored to the bottom of the abyss. It was as if nothing had happened, and the previous river god hadn’t made an appearance at all.

“The Dusk River God is a true god, born of sacrifice and worship,” murmured Yuying. “Although she’s been dead for a thousand of years, her will to protect all lives lingers... Perhaps it really was her who sealed the great tomb.”

“Then why would she leave instructions for such a terrible ritual, using ninety-nine pairs of children as tribute?” Lu Yun stared at the dead corpsefish, befuddled.

“I’ve read records from the year of the disturbance. It’s said that the ritual the river god passed down didn’t use young boys and girls as tribute, but wood, grass, and dogs made from hay. Worshippers received strength in exchange for the sacrifices.

“However, the next governor appointed after the great disturbance believed the power one received from offering grass and wood wasn’t enough to keep the great tomb sealed. Therefore, he changed the sacrificial goods to children, while leaving the rest of the ritual the same.” Qing Han spilled the beans on everything he knew. He had previously labeled the Dusk River Sacrament as nothing more than a conspiracy, but hadn’t dwelled on the details. But now that the previous river god had shown herself and saved them even after her death, the disguised girl realized there was something amiss.

“The river god must’ve fallen victim to a plot too.” Lu Yun frowned. “Who was the governor after the calamity?”

The previous governor had died in the unrest, so there would’ve been a new one appointed after him.

“Wayfarer,” replied Qing Han.

“What?!” Yuying started, looking at Qing Han in disbelief. “What did you say? Wayfarer? Which one?”

“There’s only ever been one—the master artist known as the Art Saint.” Qing Han considered Yuying carefully. The latter’s identity was very apparent now.

Wayfarer and Yuying had been very close, both as master and disciple, and close friends. Many had viewed them as a match made in heaven.

If Wayfarer had been the next governor, he must be responsible for everything, including the calamity in Dusk Province a thousand years ago. He’d even gotten the previous river god killed.

However, Lu Yun had unanswered questions. Everyone had seen the river god falling into the river after exhausting her power. Why was there a spear embedded in her, then? And how had she turned into a corpsefish?

“What are you doing here?” Lu Yun asked when he saw the zombie king, Mo Yi, Feinie, and the three august immortals walk out of the tomb for the living.

“The barrier is broken,” the zombie king responded with an impassive expression. “We are here to welcome our death.” Her eyes glinted with bloodlust. If it hadn’t been for the mermaid driving away the local monsters, everyone in the tomb would’ve already been eaten.

“Wait!” hurried out Lu Yun before the zombie king could open up with slaughter. “She gifted us with a Divinewater Talisman. If we can enter the river, we’ll be able to escape with it!”

“What?!” The zombie king lit up with excitement.

“Before that, however,” Lu Yun said decisively, “I’m going to capture that false river god!”

The river god was still hiding in the palace and sneaking glances outside.

## **Chapter 78: The Lair of Divine Burials**

“You’re going to capture the river god?!” screamed Qi Shenghui. “Are you trying to break the boundary circling the ancient tomb and let all the evil things out?”

“You really are an incompetent fool!” Qing Han snorted. “The river god from a thousand years ago is already dead. The current river god was born out of the Dusk River Sacrament.”

Anger blossomed on the eunuch's face, but he swallowed his retort.

Mo Yi was no longer hiding her true power. The might of a peak august immortal continuously crashed over the three unwanted guests like tidal waves, killing all of their impulses in their infancy. If the eunuch dared set a toe out of line, death on beautiful wings was sure to immediately follow.

"If she's the river god, what are you taking her for?" Qin Xianhuo frowned at the river god peeking at them.

"My maid is still on the altar as a sacrificial good. How am I to save her if I don't capture the river god?"

Wanfeng was the first person Lu Yun had ever seen upon arriving in this world, and she'd risked her life multiple times to protect him in Yuying's tomb. He would not abandon her.

Relationships were far more important to him than as tools of convenience. While they were under the burial mound, Qing Han had exhausted himself to save Lu Yun. In return, Lu Yun had carried the boneless imperial envoy to safety, despite them being enemies at the time.

"All this for... your maid..." Situ Yun gnashed his teeth but swallowed his complaints.

The dangers of the underwater palace were now clear to all. It was also the reason why the barrier around the tomb had been broken. All of that was set in motion for a simple maid?

To immortals on high, maids were nothing but toys. Expendable. Replaceable. This fellow was willing to risk his life for a maid?!

Though Mo Yi had known about Lu Yun's motivations, a bemused glint still flashed through her eyes when she heard him reiterate his goal.

"I do not understand humans," grumbled the zombie king.

"You're human now, too." Lu Yun solemnly looked at the zombie. "If you don't want the entire world of immortals to come after you, you must learn to live and think like a human once you get out of here."

The zombie king's living soul marked her as mostly the same as a living person, despite her dead body. According to his Spectral Eye, at least, she was alive.

The zombie king started. "You... consider me human?" She knew very well what she was—an unnatural existence abandoned by heaven and earth and shunned by all three realms. The entire immortal world would hunt her down if anyone were to ever find out what she was. In anyone else's eyes, she would be the epitome of perverse evil.

"There's always a sliver of hope in the heavenly dao. Since you've made it to this point, you are human and the heavenly dao approves of your existence." There wasn't a single note that rang false in Lu Yun's voice.

The zombie king fell silent, her ruby-like eyes shining with emotion.

"The palace is the mouth of a giant monster," Lu Yun muttered to the architecture before him, turning his focus away from the zombie king. "It's not realistic to take her from inside. We need to lure her out."

"Is she really the river god?" Qin Xianhuo asked after a bemused pause.

Lu Yun's eyes snapped to the old formation master. "She is. Do you have a solution?"

"I can lure her out if she's part of the divine race, but..." The formation master paused.

"What are your conditions?" The old man was certainly up to something, but there was no time to waste. Who knew how long they'd spent drifting down to the bottom of this bottomless abyss? Worry of not having enough time to prepare after they got out was constantly gnawing at Lu Yun.

If they wanted to save Wanfeng, there were still a slew of preparations to be made after capturing the river god. She wasn't her benevolent predecessor, who'd cared about the people.

Plus, she looked half-dead.

"You mustn't abandon the three of us if there really is a way to get out of here." The old formation master gravely solicited such a promise from the Dusk governor.

They'd thrown Lu Yun into the tomb for the living as a disposable scout, and the issue of how to kill Lu Yun and his companions was still a top priority in Qi Shenghui's mind. Now that the governor had a way out, he would most certainly leave the three of them behind. Therefore, Qin Xianhuo took advantage of the situation to exchange help for safety.

"Deal!" Lu Yun didn't bother thinking over it at all.

Qi Shenghui and Situ Yun looked at their companion and heaved simultaneous sighs of relief.

A pained expression creased the formation master's face as he took out a three-inch-long bar the width of a thumb. "This incense is called Divine Lure, a spiritual item born in nature. Once lit, it releases a fragrance that's uncontrollably attractive to the divine race."

"You'd better not use that on the river god." Qing Han frowned. "There's no shortage of her kind in the abyss. In addition to the river god, there are countless other divines, and monsters that they've morphed into." The imperial envoy pulled a grave face. "If you light the incense, it's possible that all of the monsters in the abyss will be lured here."

The Scroll of the Shepherding Immortals had rejuvenated Qing Han and granted him some of the abilities of a divine in the process. In his eyes, the abyss was no demonic lair, but the burial pit for the entire divine race. The divines here dated back to more than a hundred thousand years ago, and there were even some that had died after the great war of immortals.

The shriveled corpses on the cliff face were all divines. They'd attempted to escape the abyss by scaling the walls, but something had drained them of their blood and life essence halfway. This abyss was a final resting ground that had sealed away the entire divine race!

"That won't happen." Qin Xianhuo smiled wryly and continued with a tinge of embarrassment in his voice. "My incense is of the lowest rank, so it'll only attract the weakest divines."

Given the incense's properties, it was an important tool for when major factions of the world went divine-hunting.

Although the race had disappeared for reasons unknown, the current world of immortals was in an early development stage. In remote areas, there were primal human villages where the most prehistoric rituals were still conducted to summon divine spirits.

Divine spirits could wield powerful elemental power and possessed high battle capabilities. Thus, major factions in the world thus sought to capture these spirits for their own use. Above all, it was also a way to prevent the spirits from coming together as a race to enslave the world again.

“That still won’t do.” Qing Han shook his head. “The divine race has been sealed here for a very long time. Even a lure of the lowest rank would be fatally attractive to them.”

“Allow me.” The taciturn Feinie broke her silence. “I can focus the fragrance of the lure into a single thread and prevent it from spreading.” With that, she manifested a spirit stone and etched lines in the ground.

“What’s this formation?” Qin Xianhuo’s eyes sparked with passion when they scanned Feinie’s formation.

This was also when Qi Shenghui noticed the newcomer. He stared at Feinie with an incomprehensive frown. “Who is this woman and why is she here? She wasn’t around when we came down.”

Situ Yun, whose honest facade belied his wiliness, remained silent. He knew better than to ask something that touched on Lu Yun’s secrets. How much of a fool is Qi Shenghui to ask the question now? He really has a death wish, doesn’t he?

“None of your business!” snorted Lu Yun.

The flash of killing intent flicking through the governor’s eyes stabbed Situ Yun’s heart with foreboding. The governor’s promised to get us out, but what if one of us gets eaten before our escape?

“Done!” Feinie rose to her feet and dabbed away her sweat. This was no regular formation, so it’d been taxing for even her to set up.

## **Chapter 79: Scourge**

“Place the incense in the formation and light it,” Feinie said, calming her breathing.

Qin Xianhuo’s eyes widened with undisguised shock when he looked at her. Just like the white-clad young woman, this black-robed girl had emerged out of nowhere. He refrained from making probing inquiries, but the formation in front of him caught his eye next. He was a grandmaster of formations, but couldn’t see through it. Even its runes were indecipherable.

“What are you staring at? Get moving!” Sensing the man’s stare, Feinie knitted her graceful brow.

“Ah, yes, yes!” Qin Xianhuo hastily placed his incense in the formation and set fire to it.

The incense was a spiritual item born from nature, and, when lit, it released an invisible and intangible aroma. Immortals could control the flow of the air, thanks to their arts, but this aroma was beyond their reach unless they used a special method.

Feinie’s formation, for example.

Hazy light erupted from the formation, fully dissolving the stick of incense and sending a strange fragrance wafting through the air. Feinie's hands formed a seal that twisted the fragrance into a rope that drifted toward Dusk River Palace.

"Smells so good...." The river god hiding inside the palace yawned ferociously, entrancement rising on her face. "What smells so good?" In a daze, she slowly drifted out of the palace to follow the aroma.

"Something's amiss!" A slight frown crossed Mo Yi's brow when she saw the god's figure. "Don't go over there!"

"What's wrong?" Lu Yun's expectant look upon the approaching river god morphed to bafflement when he heard Mo Yi's.

"Fall back!" Mo Yi spread out her arms and swept the group back with an enormous swell of strength. Even the three august immortals couldn't offer any resistance before being summarily pushed to the back. That was when they finally realized the full extent of Mo Yi's power.

Qi Shenghui's face, in particular, was ashen. All those thoughts he'd had of killing her because of her beauty were simply crazy!

The zombie king also seemed to realize something was amiss. Flinching, she swiftly fell back, unwilling to be in close quarters with the river god.

"What on Earth is going on?" Lu Yun repeated upon Mo Yi's failure to answer.

"I'm afraid you'll have to rethink your plans to capture her." The city lord's face was a little grim. "She, as well as her life, seem to have become part of something else.

"What?" Lu Yun blinked. "What do you mean 'she's become part of something else'?"

"It's that monster!" Qing Han realized as well. "Just now, inside the palace, I saw something eating away at her, but I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me. Just look at her, does she seem alive to you?"

Now that the river god was trapped in Feinie's formation, everyone could see for themselves how her fishtail had been picked clean of flesh and blood. Dessicated, there was no trace of life coming from her upper body. At first glance, Lu Yun had mistaken her for a zombie.

"Something's absorbed all of her vitality, leaving only this body as bait. Perhaps her thoughts are independent, but her life is no longer her own."

"Diexi is an arcane immortal, yet she still cowers inside the abyss, too afraid to take half a step outside the tomb for the living," Mo Yi whispered. "The river god is merely an empyrean immortal, so how can she survive here?"

Diexi was the zombie king's name, as Mo Yi had learned after striking up a conversation after Lu Yun and Qing Han's departure from the tomb.

"I..." His cultivation too low to discern the situation, Lu Yun didn't know what to make of the situation after this analysis. "Well, what should we do then?" His face was grim. They'd gone to no small trouble to lure this 'River God' out, only to discover there was no good way to deal with her.



Even if they were to capture her, she would die the moment she broke away from the monster.

“There’s still a way!” Yuying’s voice resonated in Lu Yun’s mind. “Sir, you can take the previous river god as your envoy. She’s qualified to be one!”

The previous god had cherished the common people. She’d kept to herself so much that the populace hadn’t known of her, yet in times of trouble, she’d risked her life to save the province and ultimately died to a scheme within the abyss.

“We have no other option,” a tense Lu Yun responded. “But her corpse is currently suppressing the creature under the palace. If I take her, we’ll be setting it free.”

He’d already considered the possibility upon realizing the previous river god wasn’t a corpsefish, but other misgivings had come into play.

“Sir, don’t overthink it,” Yuying continued to advocate. “Even dead, she can quell the monster. Wouldn’t that task be a trifle once she comes back to life? Moreover, she gave you the talisman earlier. She certainly has a way to escape this place.”

“Very well. We’ll do as you suggest.” His mind made, Lu Yun no longer hesitated.

“What the bloody hell is that!” Qi Shenghui suddenly swore loudly.

Sword light flashed soon after, followed by a pale head flying high in the air. A headless body spasmed forward a few times before dropping lifelessly to the ground, a strong fishy stench arising from it.

A ghoul.

One of these creatures had appeared from somewhere, only to be beheaded by a single slash of Qi Shenghui’s sword.

“Did you just kill a ghoul?!” Lu Yun shook uncontrollably, wrath plain on his face.

“It’s nothing but a trivial monster. Why are you making a fuss?” The eunuch snorted coldly.

“Get away from him! Wait, prepare to fight!” yelled the governor. Ghouls never attacked the living on their own, but they fought tooth and nail once provoked. They also nursed grudges for an inordinately long period of time.

Sure enough, rustling soon reached their ears as a seemingly boundless sea of creatures emerged from the darkness, crawling in their direction.

“Bugs, one and all. What’s there to fear!” Qi Shenghui screeched. He’d accumulated quite the pent-up resentment ever since coming to this place, and now he’d found targets to vent on. With a battle howl, he brandished his weapon and charged into their midst. In the blink of an eye, a foul reek permeated the air.

“We’re done for,” Diexi lamented, her face wan.

## **Chapter 80: Self-Sacrifice**

Qi Shenghui had sprung into action too abruptly for anyone to anticipate his moves and stop him in time. Exhilarated laughs braying from his mouth, the eunuch covered a three-hundred-meter radius with brilliant flashes of his sword, continuing the carnage of ghouls. The air reeked of blood and gore.

“Yuying!” Lu Yun signaled at his envoy, no longer paying attention to the eunuch.

With tacit understanding, Yuying compressed the Emerald Mistfire in her hand into a tiny flame blazing above her palm. The smaller it became, the stronger its power grew, until it unleashed a daunting aura that slowed the approaching monstrous tide.

“Feinie!” Lu Yun turned his attention to his other envoy, who’d already begun inscribing a formation on the ground even without prompting. Seeing her focused on her task, Lu Yun turned to Qin Xianhuo.

“Take out all of the formation stones on you or we all die here!”

Recognizing the severity of the situation, the old formation master itched to throttle Qi Shenghui with his bare hands. You damn half-man! You’re nothing but trouble! How dare you just hack and kill in the abyss? The thick stench of blood would attract a legion of monsters!

Now was not the time to cling to worldly possessions. He dumped out everything that could be of use to Feinie. The woman was a formidable master of formations, that much he could tell. Even a grandmaster like him paled in comparison.

Boom—

The ground shook. In the darkness, a behemoth stirred and approached, step by step.

Qi Shenghui stopped cold, his killing frenzy abruptly sated. He beat a hasty retreat and hid behind the others, but no one paid him any heed.

“Don’t use yours, use mine!” Seeing Feinie ready to call upon her Formation Orb, Diexi hastily interrupted her, handing over the Yin Formation Orb. The formations in the yang counterpart were as domineering and tyrannical as the sun. Its harsh energy flared as majestically as the grand dome of the sky. Such a power would sear the depths and send all of the abyss boiling over.

Although Diexi owned the Yin Formation Orb, she wasn’t proficient with formations herself. Only someone like Feinie could deploy the treasure’s full power.

“The Formation Orb!” Qi Shenghui’s line of sight zeroed in on the item that was now in Feinie’s hands. It was, after all, the very goal of their journey. Hidden behind the crowd, his expression betrayed none of the thoughts racing in his mind.

Boom—

The ground trembled again as an oddly-shaped foot suddenly landed from above. It was inconceivably enormous and rather resembled the hoof of a bull. Just the foot alone spanned more than dozens of meters, and it had golden fur covering its back.

“What the hell is that! Hurry and stop it!” Lu Yun shouted anxiously when he saw the foot rise and hover above them, about to slam down.

Diexi took in a deep breath, her body bursting with intense crimson as she aimed a hand at the foot.

Bang—

The hoof stamped down, instantly shattering the light, but it was also slowed in return.

“Get lost—” Yuying shouted furiously. Jumping in her palm, the Emerald Mistfire billowed into an inferno that belched fire at the approaching hoof.

A bull’s roar rang out like a clap of thunder and the foot withdrew, then fell back. An enormous, scarlet eye, filled with spite and bloodlust, glowered at them from the dark.

“It’s a kui! Those divine beasts were supposed to have been wiped out a hundred thousand years ago! What’s it doing here?!” Qin Xianhuo looked on incredulously.

“It really is a kui!” Mo Yi could recognize the beast as well.

According to records unearthed from ancient tombs, kui were divine beasts that resembled cows with one leg and one eye. A variant of the dragon race that had dragon blood in its veins, their roars mimicked thunder and they possessed extraordinary strength.

Their numbers were extraordinarily low to begin with, but they were also zealously hunted for their hide and fur. Those two made for prime ingredients in forging treasure and weapons, especially since they could attract the power of thunder and lightning.

By the time the great war of immortals had erupted, the kui were already extinct. Yet here was one right in front of them.

Crackle—

Bolts of black lightning, each as thick as a thumb, gathered around the creature, then abruptly converged to strike at Yuying.

“How dare you flaunt mere yin lightning in front of me?” White robes fluttering about her, Yuying shot into the air. Jets of blue and yellow fire rose like a pair of scorching, bicolored wings unfurling behind her back. Black energy gathered in her hand, distorting the air around her.

At long last, she was displaying the true strength of an Envoy of Samsara.

She pushed out with both hands, combining the Emerald Mistfire, Daevic Skyfire, and Lucent Voidfire into one. A teeming sea of flames resulted from the integrated fires, then ruthlessly roiled toward the yin lightning.

Boom!

The impact of fire and lightning discharged a blinding explosion of light that flooded the entire area, melting countless monsters. But, roused by the commotion, even more of them surged out of the darkness.

With a blood-curdling shriek, the kui ricocheted away like a leather ball. As for Yuying, her face was wan and blood seeped out from every pore of her hands.

“Hold on for another ten breaths!” Feinie suddenly called out. “I can finish my formation then!” The incense formation from earlier had cost half of her strength; she, too, was fighting through her pain.

“Alright!” A bleak smile flitted across Yuying’s lips when she scanned the newly gathered wave of endless monsters behind the kui. She opened her arms wide, a dazzling white luminosity rippling out from her. The light illuminated the entire abyss and pushed the three immortal fires to the very limits of their current power!

“Die, all of you—”

Whoosh!

Yuying’s figure ignited an enormous blaze that birthed a terrifying shock wave that rammed through space itself. She paid the price of her own life to fully deploy all three immortal fires.

The kui, the legion of monsters... everything turned to ash.

It took ten full breaths for the fiery ocean to finally abate. And Yuying... had become ashes as well, her soul gone back to the Tome of Life and Death to await her next resurrection.

Hummm—

A hazy glow arose from the ground. Feinie’s formation was finally complete.

“Is she dead?” Qi Shenghui asked subconsciously as he searched the inky black darkness.

Lu Yun turned back with incandescent rage, fixing an ugly look on the castrated man.

“W-w-what do you want! Don’t forget your promise! You said you’d lead us out of here, that you wouldn’t abandon us!” Qi Shenghui fell back with wild shrieks. The young man was a mere golden core cultivator, while he was an august immortal, but this fact was far from the eunuch’s mind at the moment.

“True, but I never promised to protect you. So you, get the hell out of the formation!” Lu Yun snarled.

Yuying’s rebirth through the Tome of Life and Death was a given, but her death had been a public affair this time. She would no longer be able to openly serve at Lu Yun’s side in the future.

“Y-y-you can’t do that!” protested a thoroughly frantic Qi Shenghui.

Yuying had made a funeral pyre of herself to give them a reprieve, but everyone could sense the increasingly fearsome auras gathering inside the darkness. To leave the formation at such a time was tantamount to a death sentence.

“Do I have to do it myself?” Mo Yi raked the eunuch with a frosty glance. If Yuying had failed just then, the city lord would’ve had to step in to stop the monsters.

“In that case, why don’t we all die together!” Qi Shenghui sneered and made a quick hand seal, imbuing his figure with an unnatural golden light. “I’ll detonate myself if you force my hand!”

Lu Yun and the others were absolutely livid. How fecking shameless can this guy be?! Anyone else would be too ashamed to stay, but this trash turned around and threatened them instead. Situ Yun and Qin Xianhuo were painfully red with shame.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Explosions thundered from above as a crimson claw viciously struck the formation's wall of light, causing the entire formation to tremble. Hovering in the air above, the Formation Orb released a black, indistinct glow that protected it.

"This power... we're dealing with an arcane immortal at the very least!" Feinie blanched. For someone like her, who was currently in the true immortal realm, such an opponent was beyond her abilities.

"Do not look at me." Sensing all eyes on her, Diexi shook her head gently. "That kui was a golden immortal, yet I was not its match. The creatures here can suppress me."

As an arcane immortal, she should be a strong existence in this place, at least in theory. Yet she didn't dare take half a step outside the tomb for the living. Like all zombies, her strength was repressed by the same force that had curbed the titanic undead hag in the burial mound and kept her in the abyss.

Outside, the legion of monsters continued their frenzied assault. Even the Formation Orb was shaking beneath the onslaught.

"We can hold for two hours at most." Feinie's complexion grew increasingly pale. "This place seems disconnected from heaven and earth, so my formations can only deploy a fifth of their normal power."

"Damn it!" Qing Han clenched his teeth. "The governor's shadow servant is injured and can't fight for now. It's my turn to go out and repel them."

"Hm?" Everyone pivoted to him, dumbfounded. Didn't that woman die earlier?

Lu Yun was also dumbfounded. Qing Han was smart as a whip and had guessed Yuying's real identity long ago, but why was he suddenly exposing the truth? Had he realized something more?

"That servant carries many treasures on her, most especially the three great heavenly fires. Had she died, the fires would've become ownerless, and thus been released." Qing Han smiled faintly. "But I don't see them anywhere, which means she's still alive."

The truth suddenly dawned on the group. Qi Shenghui, in particular, scowled acrimoniously at Lu Yun. She's not dead, but you wanted to throw me out. That was just an excuse for revenge!

Lu Yun exhaled, immensely grateful to Qing Han. Though the young man knew full well they were the three great immortal fires, he'd labeled them as heavenly fires. Heavenly fires were also mighty flames born of the world, but their power couldn't possibly compare to the three greats.

"Don't go out, your cultivation level is too low." Lu Yun hastily pulled Qing Han back. He's definitely going to use the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals on those creatures.

Boom! Crack!

A titanic fist violently slammed into the light curtain from above, and was answered by an enormous fissure in the wall of light.