

Necropolis 91

Chapter 91: Capture the Witch

On the banks of Dusk River.

Dark clouds loomed in the skies, and chilling winds swept across the ground. Violent black waves jumped and leaped through the river, raging with the howling of ghosts and incorporeal things that went bump in the night. Mysterious monsters rose and fell along with the currents.

Everyone believed them to be the evil creatures from the ancient Dusk Tomb, and that only power from the Dusk River Sacrament could seal them.

This was the day of the ritual, the most important day in Dusk Province. All of the prefects, city lords, and heads of major factions were gathered by the river. Sacrificing offerings wasn't enough; combined prayers and the fervent wishes of the crowd were required to complete a ritual of this magnitude.

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"Today is the day of the Dusk River Sacrament that is held every hundred years. It concerns the safety of everyone in Dusk Province." Feng Li and Lu Yuanhou stood before the altar in loose formal robes, their faces painted with solemn and deferential expressions.

The Lu scion sounded a long whistle. "However, the leader of the province is absent. It seems that His Majesty the Celestial Emperor made the correct decision. Incompetent dolts like Lu Yun shouldn't hold the position of governor."

A stocky Li Youcai stood beside Lu Yuanhou and Feng Li, his hands and head lowered respectfully, too intimidated to say a word.

"Prefect of Duskwater." Feng Li laid his eyes on the man.

"This subordinate is here!" hurried out Li Youcai.

"Strip the titles from the seven city lords under your jurisdiction. If they aren't going to attend the Dusk River Sacrament, they have no right to be the province's city lords." Feng Li didn't know where they were, but he wasn't going to miss the chance to capitalize on a mistake. He would be able to plant his own people here once those seven were stripped of their positions.

"Un- understood..." Li Youcai sweated profusely as he accepted his orders. He didn't dare talk back at a time like this. These two special envoys were people he couldn't risk offending. The fatty had paid them several visits since regaining consciousness, but he was never allowed into their residences.

"The hour is upon us. Let us begin." The oration for the Dusk River Sacrament appeared in Lu Yuanhou's hands, but it was a copy since the original was in Qing Han's possession.

"Let the ritual commence!" Li Youcai announced at the top of his lungs.

Yin energy thickened beneath the heavens as the altar behind the group activated with a dense black light.

Wanfeng remained unconscious on the altar, while ninety-nine pairs of children that looked roughly four years old had woken up. No one cried or threw a tantrum. All of them docilely sat on the altar and silently awaited their deaths. In other words, something was plainly controlling them.

In the eyes of all the onlookers, the Dusk River Sacrament was a sacred ritual to save everyone in Dusk Province, and it was an honor to become one of the offerings. If the children cried or fretted, it would cast a pall over the sacred ritual.

Lu Yuanhou rose into the air as he chanted the tongue-twisting oration. Once voiced, the words were given a life of their own. They melded into the altar and elicited rippling flames from the structure.

What a shame that Lu Yun is nowhere to be seen, he smirked. If he saw me sacrificing his beloved maid, his cultivation would deviate from sheer anger! If not for fifth uncle's disapproval, I would've delivered Lu Yun to the altar and sacrificed him as well! That denial made him fume with frustration.

Before Lu Yuanhou had left for the province, he received orders to do everything he could to keep Lu Yun under control. If that failed, he was to kill the young governor, leaving only the body intact.

However, in his second attempt against Lu Yun, it was the old freaks in the clan who stopped him.

He'd suffered defeat twice at Lu Yun's hands. The first time, he suffered the abject humiliation of a thorough beating. The second time, he was scared into not even showing his face. The incidents burned a fiery hole of hatred in his stomach that he couldn't release.

At least sacrificing Lu Yun's beloved little maid would bring a twisted sense of satisfaction to his heart.

The Dusk River agitated like boiling water. The rippling flames on the altar enveloped Wanfeng and the ninety-nine children, slowly setting them on fire. Black glyphs flickered in the flames, absorbing their lives and transferring it to the structure beneath them.

As Lu Yuanhou read out the oration, countless figureheads in the province knelt on the ground and bowed down in worship before the altar. Terrifyingly enormous power created a vortex that spanned five kilometers in all directions.

"Here it comes!" Feng Li and Lu Yuanhou perked up with great excitement. A supply of tremendous power rose from the altar and entered their bodies. This was a gift, the feedback from the Dusk River Sacrament.

So this is what the ritual brings to its worshippers. Once I absorb this power, I'll be able to ascend to the refined spirit realm, refining my spirit with inner fire!

Lu Yuanhou was ecstatic. Considering his cultivation speed, it would've taken another three years to refine his spirit. The power the ritual granted him, however, would push him to the next realm with no side effects. In fact, his cultivation would be more stable than if he'd made the breakthrough himself.

I must host all coming Dusk River Sacraments as well!

Lu Yuanhou and Feng Li exchanged a knowing glance. The rush left them hooked; the next occurrence wouldn't be allowed to slip from their grasp.

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Rush!

A tall wave rose from the wildly agitating river and admitted the entrance of a graceful figure. The power that had wrapped around Feng Li and Lu Yuanhou like a cozy blanket retreated like the tides, and the blazing flames on the altar were slowly extinguished.

The Dusk River Sacrament had been forcefully halted!

“What monster dares disturb the ritual?!” demanded Lu Yuanhou, stopping the oration with a dark expression.

“The ritual I passed down to protect Dusk Province used plants and dogs of hay as offerings. Why dost thou sacrifice lives today?” A reprimand sounded from the river as a young woman with blue hair, blue eyes, and clad in a blue silk dress rose from the water. She stood barefoot on top of the waters, her mere presence calming the violent river around her. She coolly scanned the crowd by the riverbank.

“You are... the Dusk River God!!” Li Youcai shrieked, staring at the girl with fear and disbelief. This was what the river god had looked like when she’d first manifested a thousand years ago!

What was the dead river god doing here?

“Nonsense!” growled a maddened Lu Yuanhou. “The river god is dead! This is an evil spirit born from the river! Men, arrest that witch!”

In that split second, he’d been so close to ascending to the refined spirit realm. Now that the power had vanished without a trace, the breakthrough had slipped through his fingers and become a distant goal once again.

What did the Dusk River Sacrament, or the lives in the province matter to him? All he wanted was the cultivation benefits the ritual would bring him!

“That’s right! It’s high treason to interrupt the ritual! Take that witch!” Feng Li finally recovered from his shock. Whether this river god was real or not, she had to die. The world of immortals didn’t need living gods anymore, and even less a god that people worshipped!

Chapter 92: An Imposing Bearing

No one had expected the Dusk River God to manifest and forcibly interrupt the Dusk River Sacrament! Likewise, no one doubted the girl’s true identity. Who else but the Dusk River God would be able to interrupt the ritual and calm the maddened river?

All of the Dusk cultivators bowed down, kowtowing and worshipping her. An endless supply of gratitude flowed into Xuanxi’s body, devout sentiments that propelled the vestiges of her strength back to the empyrean immortal level and beyond.

No one was more grateful to her than Dusk residents. It was she who’d suppressed the ancient Dusk Tomb and ended the calamity of evil. It was she who’d sealed the tomb with her own life.

Over the past thousand years, the frequency at which the spirits and specters rioted had been significantly lower. Therefore, it was no wonder that the cultivators would offer the river god their most fervent gratitude and belief as soon as she appeared.

“You bastards and idiots! The river god is dead! This is a water monster born out of the river!!” Lu Yuanhou frothed at the mouth to see the river god grow ever more powerful from the cultivators’ worship. Anyone who wrested his opportunity away was his worst enemy!

“Kill her!!” he roared again, but no one dared do anything. The immortals from the Feng and Lu Clans were no exception. A strange influence had risen from the Dusk cultivators and formed a weighty atmosphere, converging heavily on the immortals like a gargantuan mountain.

It didn’t result in physical damage, but it could destroy their spirits. Unity of will was invincible!

Xuanxi had protected the province for a thousand years. Her place in the locals’ hearts was even greater than that of the Nephrite celestial emperor. Her mere presence commanded and banded together the will of all living beings in Dusk Province, in return creating a power that guarded the river god.

She had been dead for a millenium, but that wasn’t such a long period of time for cultivators. Some of those who’d weathered the initial great unrest from the Dusk Tomb still lived. They passed down the river god’s deeds to those around them, praising her for her benevolence. Tales of her actions had thus traveled through generation upon generation.

More importantly, she was the deity they sacrificed to at the Dusk River Sacrament every century. Those of Dusk Province had never forgotten about her.

“How can this be?! How?!” Feng Li and Lu Yuanhou had completely lost their calm.

“Do you all want to rebel by worshipping a water monster?!” snapped Feng Li.

“Rebel?” a coolly mocking voice floated from the river as a young man in black emerged from behind Xuanxi.

“Qing Han! Why are you with that witch?!” Feng Li and Lu Yuanhou’s expression fell. Unlike Feng Li, Qing Han was the true envoy of the celestial emperor. Everything he did represented His Majesty.

“Witch?” Qing Han scoffed. “Are you calling the river god, the one who used her own body as a seal and kept the province protected for a thousand years, a witch? What schemes are the two of you cooking up?”

“Nonsense!” Feng Li’s thoughts had reordered themselves by now. He might be known as a skirt-chaser in Nephrite Capital, but he was craftier than Lu Yuanhou. “The river god died after sealing the ancient tomb a thousand years ago,” he denounced. “She couldn’t possibly have come back to life after all this time!”

Xuanxi silently scanned the crowd on the riverbank with clear eyes. The Dusk denizens hadn’t forgotten about her even after a millenium. They attended the ritual for her, rather than treating it as a perfunctory mission. That truly did move her.

“If the river god is dead, why would I be here?” Qing Han snorted. “The river god sealed the entrance to the ancient tomb with her own body, but no one witnessed her death, did they?”

He brandished the token given to him by the celestial emperor and boomed solemnly, “Receive your imperial decree, Xuanxi!”

Xuanxi curtsied gracefully.

“On behalf of His Majesty the Celestial Emperor, I do appoint thee the Dusk River God. Thou art to guard the river and protect all lives in Dusk Province. What say you?”

Everyone on the riverbank held their breaths and stared unblinkingly at the figures floating above the Dusk River.

“Xuanxi receives the decree,” Xuanxi responded quietly.

A commotion broke out from the crowd. The Nephrite court had invested the river god with a title! She must be the real deal!

Although it had been Qing Han who appointed her, the token in his hand indicated that he represented the will of the celestial emperor. There was no difference between his actions and the celestial emperor issuing the decree himself.

The heavenly court naturally had the authority to bestow titles onto divine spirits. Those who were officially recognized were true gods.

Many factions still hunted ‘wild’ divine spirits in the world of immortals, but no one dared lay a finger on an appointed deity. Like the governor, the true gods were members of the court and represented its authority.

“Let the Dusk River Sacrament end today,” Xuanxi murmured. “The entrance to the tomb at the bottom of the river has been completely sealed.”

Another bout of cheers broke out on the riverbank.

“Don’t do anything reckless!” Sensing his companion’s rising anger, Feng Li hurriedly grabbed Lu Yuanhou and transmitted caution. “This was merely an opportunity to improve our cultivation. Just let it go.”

Lu Yuanhou gnashed his teeth when he saw Lu Yun walking toward them atop the river. He’d lost again!

“No more Dusk River Sacrament?” He broke into a sudden smile. “If that’s the case, take the offerings and go.”

The Lu and Feng clans sighed in relief. The power of the altar had dissipated, so the Lu Clan ascended the altar and made a grab for Wanfeng.

“Wait!” Xuanxi frowned slightly.

“What is it?” Lu Yuanhou feigned confusion. “Is there something else you want, Honored River God?”

“Leave the offerings,” said Xuanxi.

Lu Yuanhou burst into raucous laughter. “Are you joking, Honored River God? Since the ritual is no more, what do you need the offerings for? This young master brought them here, so I will take them away with me.”

Derision marked the faces of the Lu immortals as well. They'd traveled from the capital with Lu Yuanhou's fifth great uncle. The cultivators and immortals of Dusk Province might revere the river god, but they didn't have a lick of respect for her.

She was just an empyrean immortal, their clan had captured many of her kind. If the cultivators here hadn't created a strange atmosphere to stop them from harming the river god, they would've killed her before Qing Han issued the decree.

"We meet again, Lu Yuanhou." Lu Yun walked on the waves and landed on the riverbank. Mo Yi and Diexi followed closely behind him.

Lu Yuanhou stared at Lu Yun, killing intent flashing through his eyes. "Something you need, Governor?"

"You came for me time and time again. I just didn't have the time to deal with you before." Lu Yun sneered. "Now, you can safely rest in peace."

"You want to kill me?" smirked Lu Yuanhou. His fifth great uncle had brought many powerful immortals from the clan this time. Although golden immortals didn't dare set their foot into the Dusk Province, about a dozen august immortals had come. Seven of them were even his companions. If his fifth great uncle hadn't forbidden him from killing Lu Yun, he would've already ordered the immortals to take him out.

Raaa.

A low growl swept the premises. Even before the smile dropped from Lu Yuanhou's face, he realized with terror that the immortals around him had died one horrible death after another.

It looked like something had sucked them dry. Spirits and bodies were deflated, shriveled and drained. Then, a skinless humanoid monster emerged before him and grabbed him by the throat.

"Stop!!" Feng Li shouted, his expression crumbling as soon as he saw the crimson monster. "You can't kill him—"

Crack!

The bloodcorpse broke Lu Yuanhou's neck and devoured his spirit before Feng Li could finish. Even his soul was gone!

Thus marked the end of the brilliant young genius from the Lu Clan of Nephrite Capital.

"Dusk Province is my territory." The bloodcorpse returned to the Gates of the Abyss while Lu Yun continued in a low growl, "While I remain the governor, you have to play by my rules. I will kill whoever lays a finger on my people, no matter who you are!"

Li Youcai shuddered. It seemed more like Lu Yun was speaking to him.

Chapter 93: Lacking the Five Senses

Lu Yun was being unusually forceful in this moment.

His peer from the Lu clan had attempted to kill him many times, finally taking Wanfeng and throwing her onto the altar as an offering in the end. Each time, Lu Yun's response had been muted out of wariness of the Lu Clan.

But this time, the governor would no longer back down. Considering the companions he'd gathered, and the circumstances of the province, he finally had the confidence to hold his head high and stand his ground.

Gathered along the riverbank were major Dusk factions and those who bore specific ill-intent toward Lu Yun. Killing Lu Yuanhou served as a warning, just like killing a chicken in front of the monkeys to intimidate them.

The Nephrite court had stipulated that there was to be a reselection of governor in five months, and Lu Yun would naturally abide by imperial intentions. If anyone dared to pull a trick on him during this time, however, he wouldn't show them any mercy.

Diexi had thrown herself under Lu Yun's banner. There was no shortage of powerful cultivators in the world who could see through her true nature, and a zombie king had no place in the world of immortals. Even if she hid in Dusk Province, people of unusual might would find and kill her.

Only Lu Yun considered her alive and her own person. Diexi had given the Yin Formation Orb to Feinie precisely because she'd wanted his protection.

As the Dusk governor, Lu Yun was a member of the Nephrite court with jurisdiction over an entire province. Diexi, on the other hand, was the strongest being in the region. Joining Lu Yun's camp made her part of the imperial court. Together, they could gain a foothold here and survive.

With Diexi and the nine bloodcorpses, Lu Yun had nothing to fear, locally. It was also reassuring that the province's restriction hadn't made a move against the zombie king or the bloodcorpses. It seemed that they were allowed to stay.

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Such was the end of the farce.

Cultivators and immortals filed away from the riverbank, many of whom were casting looks of frustration and dread at Lu Yun. The immortals from the Lu Clan having been slaughtered, Feng Li slunk away with his people.

Li Youcai gave up on striking a conversation with Lu Yun and took his leave when Mo Yi refused to even look at him. As Situ Yun and Qin Xianhuo readied to depart as well, Lu Yun remarked faintly, "Isn't there something the two of you should do?"

They hesitated. "We..."

"I promised to take you out with us, but I didn't agree to let you go." Lu Yun stared at Qin Xianhuo seriously. "You saw too many of my secrets in the abyss."

"I know what to do." Qin Xianhuo set his jaw and reached deep into his mind, extracting his memory of what had happened in the abyss and destroying it.

Back when Yuying had first left Wayfarer, she too had erased her memories of him.

Situ Yun hesitated when he saw Qin Xianhuo's actions. However, Diexi's threatening gaze pushed him into doing the same as well. Their eyes clouded over momentarily, and only then did Lu Yun let them go.

"Should I do that too?" Mo Yi suddenly asked seriously.

Lu Yun looked at her in surprise. "Why should you?"

"Aren't you worried that I'll reveal your secrets?" She wasn't joking at all.

Lu Yun shrugged. "We're friends. I trust you."

Mo Yi blinked, then smiled. It was a smile that reached her eyes. It felt good to be trusted; the new feeling was a luxurious one.

"Come on, come on. Let's go back to your manor and take a good nap. I haven't been able to relax for the past fifteen days." Lu Yun subconsciously glanced at Wayfarer, recalling the man sealed on the altar in the burial mound and the flickering image of a pair of eyes.

Was that Wayfarer really this man's eyes?

Wayfarer shook his head. "Don't look at me, I don't know either."

Xuanxi had told him about the other Wayfarer, but he had no idea how to explain things.

"You really don't remember anything about your past?" Lu Yun asked as they slowly strolled their way back.

"I don't." Wayfarer shook his head. "I don't even know if I'm human."

"Huh?" Lu Yun paused, along with the others. "You don't know if you're human?"

"I don't have the basic five senses." Wayfarer's expression was very stiff. "I know I'm in the outside world, but this place feels no different to me than the abyss. I can't see, hear, smell, or taste anything. I don't even feel pain," he murmured. "All living beings have five senses, but I have none. Perhaps I am dead."

Lu Yun shuddered. Qing Han and Mo Yi goggled at each other in shock. Didn't people live to satisfy the desires brought about by the five senses? Those, in turn, gave rise to all human emotions—greed, love, fear, and hatred and so on. Without the ability to perceive the world, what was there to live for?

"Then you..." Qing Han asked dumbly.

"My consciousness allows me to understand your conversation," explained Wayfarer.

It was a sixth sense for cultivators and immortals, one that could perceive the environment in the place of eyes and ears. However, it wasn't a true replacement. It couldn't hear sounds or see colors.

"I'm used to it." Sensing their shock, Wayfarer lifted a corner of his lips. "It's been like this for me ever since I gained consciousness. I'm used to the feeling."

“You will recover!” Lu Yun piped up, a possibility dawning on him. The other Wayfarer, his bright gaze, and... that pair of crimson eyes.

“Perhaps,” whispered Wayfarer. “What is the purpose of my life?”

“To recover what you’ve lost, of course!” the Dusk governor chuckled. “To recover your sight, your hearing, and your senses of smell, taste, and touch!”

Wayfarer paused. It seemed there was some purpose to his life after all.

“Also, you should study the divine obsession in your gourd and see what it is.”

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Lu Yun slept for three days straight. He was simply too tired. Back at the Water Altar, he’d spent a full day setting up the feng shui layout to block the altar’s power. If he hadn’t been a golden core cultivator, he wouldn’t have been able to maintain such a high level of concentration for so long.

“You’re awake, sir!”

Lu Yun awoke to Wanfeng’s worried expression. Yawning, he sat up and made a thorough stretch.

“Are you alright, Wanfeng?” he rubbed her delicate nose and asked smilingly.

Wanfeng lowered her head, her face flushed. “This servant is well.”

She didn’t know what had happened. She remembered being kidnapped by the head of House Ge, but now she was back to this manor. Her master must have saved her. There were a thousand things she wanted to say, but she didn’t know how to say them at all.

“Um, sir, Senior Wayfarer wants to take me as his disciple...” Wanfeng said with some hesitance. “This servant doesn’t dare say yes without consulting you.”

“You should!” Lu Yun bounced up from the bed. “What are you waiting for? He’s a wickedly powerful immortal!”

Wayfarer had captured the terrifying divine obsession under the abyss simply by tapping on his gourd. There was no telling the depths of his cultivation. Not even Diexi, an arcane immortal, could sense it.

Moreover, Wayfarer had managed to survive in the abyss, untouched by any of the powerful dark creatures. That alone was proof of his strength.

It would be Wanfeng’s greatest fortune of several lifetimes to have Wayfarer as her master.

“Come on, let’s go greet your new master!” Lu Yun jumped off the bed.

Chapter 94: Breaking Free

Wayfarer wouldn’t stay in Dusk Province, of course. Lu Yun had been wondering how to form a connection with the man, only to find out the moment he woke up that Wayfarer wanted Wanfeng as a disciple.

Seeing her master's agreement, Wanfeng exhaled softly in relief. The senior had shown her many things during the three days that Lu Yun had spent asleep. Though she wasn't formally apprenticed to him yet, the relationship was already established.

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Rather than a grand ceremony, Wayfarer simply accepted a cup of tea from the maid in the grand hall of the city lord manor, thus becoming her official teacher. However, he then immediately raised the idea of leaving the province with her.

According to him, Dusk Province was too ruined to foster any great talents and staying would only be a waste of her potential. Hence, no matter how reluctant she was, Lu Yun kicked her out in the end.

Wayfarer's words were the stark truth. She wouldn't be able to grow if she were confined to Dusk Province, and her empyrean-grade spiritual root would likewise wilt into obsolescence.

"Follow your teacher and cultivate properly. You can come back and protect me once you become an immortal," he told her with a smile.

The maid nodded with fatalistic determination and glanced back every other step as she walked away with her new teacher.

"Having second thoughts?" Qing Han gave a half-smile at Lu Yun's regretful gaze. "Honestly, you can leave the province with her." A strange feeling rose in his heart when he uttered these words. "A heavyweight like Wayfarer can guarantee your safety. The Lu Clan wouldn't dare voice any objections even if you gave up the position of governor," he said after a moment of thought.

Lu Yun slowly shook his head. "No need." Standing on the walls of Duskriver City, he gazed into the distance. "I need Dusk Province. The province will help me revitalize my sect. That little bit of obstacle to come isn't enough to make me flee with my tail between my legs."

"Your sect?" Qing Han blinked. Before coming to the province, he'd studied Lu Yun's background but hadn't found anything that mentioned a sect.

"Correct, my sect." Lu Yun nodded. "I'm currently the only one left. That's why I need a stout foundation to rebuild it from the ground up!" He wanted the tomb raider lineage to shine in all its glory in the immortal world.

"You have my support!" Qing Han clapped his shoulder with a smile. "When you formally establish your sect, remember to save a founding elder seat for me."

"Deal!" Lu Yun laughed heartily.

"That reminds me," something occurred to Qing Han and he turned serious, "be wary of the Skandha Range."

"The Skandha Range?" Lu Yun snapped to inner attention.

"Li Xing, the one who came with me, is from there. He's been wanting to kill you in order to avenge the old willow tree spirit that died in Dusk City." Qing Han was incomparably solemn. "The Skandha Range is home to age-old inheritances and unfathomable mysteries. More than one earthshaking powerhouse

comes from there. Although it declined alongside Dusk Province, many still consider it home, Li Xing among them. He left it about a thousand years ago.”

Lu Yun nodded slowly. Twelve hundred years ago, the willow spirit had wrought destruction upon the province. As the governor back then, Yuying had hunted it down in person, prompting the spirit to flee into the Skandha Range for shelter.

“I should get going as well.” Qing Han’s mood dipped all of a sudden, his reluctance bleeding through.

“Yes.” Lu Yun nodded. He knew the imperial envoy was originally scheduled to leave after the Dusk River Sacramento. Only, overly exhausted, Lu Yun had fallen asleep for three days. As a result, Qing Han had waited all this time, intent on not leaving before he’d said a proper goodbye.

“When you go back, please thank Qing Yu for me. I know she’s no crone,” Lu Yun requested as he recalled the girl who’d saved his life twice.

“I will,” Qing Han promised. “Do you want to see her?”

Startled, a small smile graced Lu Yun’s face. “Don’t tell her I called her a crone.”

Under the setting sun, Qing Han’s silhouette slowly vanished from view.

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“We failed to obtain the Formation Orb, and that castrate also mysteriously died. How are we supposed to report to the prince?!”

Outside Nephrite Capital, Situ Yun paced around in circles. He and his companion had returned a while ago, but had opted to hover outside the city gates for a long time because they were afraid to face His Highness. The crown prince was certainly not one for mercy.

Not only had they failed their mission, all related memories had also been erased from their minds. They didn’t even know what’d transpired! The prince would certainly not spare them.

“Mi-Mister Qin, what do you think we should do? Neither of us can withstand His Highness’ wrath!”

Qin Xianhuo’s expression also flickered rapidly.

Hummm—

Just as he was about to continue, a droning sound suddenly emitted from his body. A faint shadow landed on him, as if it’d threaded through the obstruction of time and space from a place far, far away.

“What’s going on!!” The old formation master blanched. From the depths of his soul came an enormous, twisting pain as his consciousness grew hazy.

An enormous painting scroll slowly unfurled over his body, its inky panorama of mountains and rivers fading away to form a human figure that overlapped with Qin Xianhuo. The old man’s expression froze, two scarlet glows appearing in his eyes as his appearance underwent a transformation.

“You, who are you?! Where is Mister Qin?” Situ Yun looked on, his face ashen with horror.

“Congratulations on your newfound freedom, Dao Brother Wayfarer!” a bright and resounding voice called out. Ripples slowly spread outward in the sky, heralding the entrance of a young man wearing rose-gold robes.

He was tall and well-built, his eyebrows as straight as swords and his eyes piercing like the stars. Opulence and regality wreathed themselves around him and he seemed to command everything through his every minute gesture.

“Your Highness!” Situ Yan’s face froze in astonishment, but he was still baffled by the sudden turn of events. Why had Qin Xianhuo suddenly become someone else?

Why had the crown prince suddenly appeared and called this man Wayfarer? Wasn’t that the governor of Dusk Province from a thousand years ago?

Pfft.

Before Situ Yan had a chance to fully comprehend the situation, the youth who was nobility incarnate turned him to ashes with a casual slap.

“So it’s you, Zhao Changkong.” Wayfarer glanced at the young man and stretched his legs, getting himself accustomed to his new body. “Who would’ve thought you’d see through the secret pawn I left back then. You must’ve purposefully sent him with my painting to receive me.” His voice took a murderous turn. “In that case, you must know who sealed me on that accursed altar?”

Zhao Changkong nodded with a small smile. “Since we could save you, we naturally know who sealed you away. We even know where your other selves are located.”

“My other selves?” Wayfarer’s eyes shone bright. “Where are they?”

An intense greed and lust for blood flashed across his face.

“We didn’t save you out of kindness. One hundred years. Within one hundred years, you will help us pacify the land and secure our place on the imperial throne. Then we shall help you subdue your other selves,” Zhao Changkong responded indifferently. “This is a transaction.”

Wayfarer fell silent. He could sense the frosty killing intent targeting him. If he were to refuse, he would undoubtedly die on the spot.

“The current celestial emperor isn’t dead yet, is he?” The older man’s tone was icy. “Do you plan on committing regicide?”

“Our royal father has reached the limits of his cultivation. He is now ready to step into an unknown realm. He has made preparations to abdicate in order to batter open the gates to this new realm. Meanwhile, we do not yet have the power to quell Nephrite Major, so your assistance is required,” Zhao Changkong replied peacefully. “We had thought the three of them would bring back the Formation Orb along with you. Their failure was unexpected.”

“Alright, I agree. I’ll help you pacify the land for a hundred years.” Wayfarer nodded. “I also need you to support me with resources so I can restore my strength. Furthermore, I know who possesses the orb right now.”

1. The crown prince is using the royal we, but since he's not the celestial emperor, I didn't want to capitalize his pronouns. I did opt for the plural, however, to indicate how, well, pompous he's being.

Chapter 95: Luring the Snake out of the Hole

After Qing Han's departure, there seemed to be an emptiness in Lu Yun's heart, like he'd lost something. He should be back for a visit in five months. We'll eat and drink together then!

Five months from now was an extremely important date for Lu Yun. If Qing Han truly viewed him as a friend, the young man would come.

But why do I feel kind of hollow.... The idea suddenly sent shudders down his spine and he promptly rebuffed himself with a reasonable justification. No, it's not because of Qing Han, I only feel this way because Wanfeng left.

Qing Han is a man, what would I miss him for? Aiya, truth be told, I really do miss little Wanfeng. For some inexplicable reason, he felt a sense of loss at the maid's departure.

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Lu Yun spent another three days in Duskwater City. During that time, he personally filled the six vacant city lord positions with Mo Yi's suggestions.

House Ba was now thoroughly in Mo Yi's camp, the first cultivator faction under her command. The fortunate Ba Chuyi had also become a city lord.

She'd wrestled back real power in the city. In fact, the entire prefecture was under her control. She'd grown from a mere figurehead for Li Youcai to being the one dictating orders to the prefect.

It'd been her detached and indifferent nature that originally allowed Li Youcai to progressively nibble away at all of her authority. Having learned her lesson since then, thanks to Lu Yun's reminder, she'd realized that one needed to be a true city lord in order to spend her days in peace.

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Lu Yun traveled back to Dusk City with Ge Long and ninety-nine soldiers of the Dusk Phalanx. The local situation there had also gone through tremendous changes.

He'd extinguished House Ge's primary forces in Duskwater City and labelled them as traitors of the major. Once word had traveled back of these developments, Houses Feng and Youxiong immediately joined hands to uproot what was left of House Ge from Dusk City, expelling them from the city once and for all.

After its destruction, House Ge's properties were divided between Houses Feng and Youxiong.

Lu Yun was fully indifferent to this development. Now wasn't the time to deal with these people. In five months, he would finally wield the province's true power.

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"Hmm?" When he returned to the governor's manor with Ge Long, he discovered that some people had moved into what should've been an empty house.

“Something’s off.” Before he could consider the issue in detail, someone barred his way at the door.

“Who goes there? Who dares trespass in the governor’s manor?” It was a group of cultivators dressed as servants. There were even nascent spirit cultivators among them, a level that would make them a powerhouse in Dusk Province.

“Are you from the Lu Clan?” Lu Yun asked frostily while his expression darkened.

“Get lost,” the man snapped, his cold voice dripping with obvious scorn.

“Heh heh heh, the Lu Clan truly doesn’t know good from bad.” Lu Yun burst into uproarious laughter.

“Die!” Equally indifferent as his peer, one of the cultivators lifted his hand to send a ray of sword light flashing at Lu Yun. It was a heartless strike meant to kill Lu Yun, making plain the attacker’s disregard for life.

Hummm.

The entire manor abruptly lit up as nine dragons surged out, barely blocking the sword light. Pale, Lu Yun fell back several steps, while the spirit realm cultivator stood in place, coolly unruffled.

“You tampered with the manor’s protective formation!” A belabored grin appeared on Lu Yun’s lips.

“So you’re the governor. Take him!” Their eyes gleaming, the Lu cultivators outside the gates immediately sprang into action.

“Protect milord!” With Ge Long’s shout, You Tu led the other soldiers in a charge to protect Lu Yun.

“Stand down!” the governor shouted at them as a white-robed woman appeared by his side. Seven swords streaked into light and instantly executed the Lu cultivators. Her expression as frosty as snow, Yuying landed in front of her master and shielded him with her body.

“Charge inside!” the governor shouted. Without a word, Yuying set a course with her seven swords as they opened up a path of slaughter on their way in.

A cold smile playing on his lips, Lu Yun went in right behind her with Ge Long and the Dusk Phalanx bringing up the rear. He’d issued a warning on the banks of the Dusk River a few days ago, and even killed immortals from the Lu Clan. However, the clan plainly saw fit to disregard the lesson, even going so far as to occupy his manor.

Since killing Lu Yuanhou wasn’t enough, then he ought to kill a few with real status next.

They stationed some cultivators outside the gates to stop and distract me so that I wouldn’t examine the current layout of the land!

Lu Yun immediately noticed something was amiss when he set foot inside the manor. The place was encircled by a brand new grand formation that immobilized Yuying the moment she entered.

Returning home was when he’d be most relaxed, and seeing his residence occupied by others would naturally infuriate him. As a result, he’d entirely disregarded the situation outside. His opponents had perfectly grasped his habits, leading him to unwittingly fall right into their trap.

What a powerful formation. I can see through to its origin, but to break it will require some effort. He could unravel the formation, but that would give time for its controller to kill Yuying, Ge Long, and the Dusk Phalanx.

On the banks of Dusk River, the bloodcorpses had slain the clan's august immortals in broad daylight, as well as Lu Yuanhou. The formation in the manor would certainly not be an ordinary one.

But Lu Yun wasn't particularly worried. His opponents might've lured him into a trap, but he too was luring the snake out of its hole.

"Sage grandnephew, you've finally returned," an aged voice travelled out from the manor's interior, followed by the appearance of an old man, his features so withered he seemed to have one foot in the grave. He tottered in, supported by two female immortals. "This fifth great-uncle's already waited for you for more than half a month."

"Whose fifth great-uncle are you?" Lu Yun frowned as he examined the old man.

"Oh, I'm Yuanhou's fifth great-uncle. He's my poor older brother's most cherished grandson." He panted in exhaustion after that introduction. "I'd first planned to keep your mind somewhat intact. But you bastard forgot your roots and killed Yuanhou! I admit, that kid didn't live up to expectations, but he was still your cousin, and my brother's only official grandson!

"You killed your kin!" the old man shrilled with outrage. "I would've spared your consciousness and let you be a puppet with your own thoughts, so you could still experience the joys of life. But now, you will die! No one takes Lu Qingxun's pill without thought of the consequences!"

Chapter 96: On Pain of Death

An awkward silence reigned after Lu Qingxun's venomous declaration.

"Eh?" Confidence crumbling, the old man stared dumbly at Lu Yun. "Why—why are you alright?"

"Should I not be?" Lu Yun asked.

"You took my Aurum Openia Pill." Lu Qingxun's chest heaved violently, his eyes boring into Lu Yun. "Why haven't you turned into my puppet?"

"Do you mean this?" A pill appeared in Lu Yun's hand with a flip of the wrist. "The control art you attached to the pill is so obvious that even a blind man could spot it." He shrugged. "I'm no fool. Why would I take it?"

Yuying nodded in deep agreement. She'd spotted the trap when she first laid her eyes on the pill.

"What a waste of an antique pill to tamper with it like this! You're wasting the world's resources!" mocked Lu Yun.

"How, how..." murmured Lu Qingxun. "If you didn't take the pill, how did you transform your constitution and cultivate, even reaching the golden core realm?"

Lu Yun scoffed, "Have you gone senile? Do you think the Lu Clan is the only one who has this pill?"

"Someone else gave you one?" Lu Qingxun gnashed his teeth. "How dare you betray your clan?!"

“Betray my clan?” Lu Yun had had enough. These people had tried to turn him into a puppet with a tampered pill, and now this old man had the audacity to accuse him of betrayal? His lips twisted into an angry smile. “If that’s what you think, then I should live up to your expectations. Senior from the Lu Clan, do you want to see how I’m going to betray the clan?”

He put away the pill with a twist of his wrist, replacing it with the seal of Dusk Province. He used it to draw upon the power of heaven and earth in the entire province.

“I, Lu Yun, Governor of Dusk Province hereby declare that the Lu Clan of Nephrite Major is forbidden from entering the province, on pain of death!” His voice rumbled throughout the city, reaching all corners in an instant. The seal’s power swelled, further spreading his words to every nook and cranny of the province.

The entire province boiled over in reaction. All Nephrite Lu cultivators were forbidden from entering, on pain of death!

The Lu Clan—not a house, nor a sect, but a top clan—wasn’t what it had been due to the disaster that’d caused their decline, but they were still among the most powerful factions in Nephrite Major. The Dusk governor had made that clan his enemy!

“Insane! Completely insane! Not even Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi would have the balls to do this, and there’s not much those two bastards wouldn’t do! Does Lu Yun think he’ll always land on the right side of death?”

Feng Li had been secretly organizing his agents somewhere in the Dusk Province, and his jaw dropped in shock when he heard Lu Yun’s order. There were no words to describe the young governor other than “insane”.

Meanwhile, Li Youcai, having just sworn fealty to Lu Yun, dove into his blankets and moaned, “I have nothing to do with that madman! Nothing! I’m not his subordinate. I’m not his man. I don’t know any Lu Yun!”

By contrast, Mo Yi smiled when she heard Lu Yun’s declaration. “That’s the Lu Yun I know. Tsk tsk, that’s a right and proper blow to the Lu Clan’s ego.”

A public face slapping of a peak clan!

Though the deaths of Lu Yuanhou and the clan’s august immortals were humiliating to the clan, they were a minor quibble for many. The young often bickered and fought, and the results didn’t matter much.

However, Lu Yun had now forbidden the clan from entering in his capacity as Dusk governor. That was no different from slapping the clan in the face with the entire world as witness, or peeing on the clan’s most sacred site.

The clan would never recover from this humiliation. even if they killed Lu Yun and tore him to pieces. Face and dignity were what top clans valued the most!

.....

“You—” Lu Qingxun was so furious that his voice sounded distorted. He barely looked alive as his chest heaved violently and his face paled. “Kill him! Kill him!!” he shrieked. “Kill this brat!!”

“Activate the formation!!”

The Lu immortals had been itching to do something. With a roar, they activated the grand formation encircling the governor’s manor.

Tremendous waves of might converged from all directions and created a giant vortex. Soon afterward, the powers of gold, wood, water, fire, and earth surged and clashed against each other, creating bolts of black lightning outlined by destructive power.

Five Element Demolition!

This was a grand formation utilizing the opposing relationships of the five elements to create a terrifying destructive power that would render even arcane immortals to ashes!

Within the formation, a sense of despair sank down on Yuying, Gelong, and the Dusk Phalanx soldiers. It was a fear of destruction that all living things innately possessed.

“Die, die, DIE!” Lu Qingxun puffed out. Even his eyes were pale; Lu Yun had almost made him kick the bucket through sheer anger.

“And if I don’t?” Lu Yun effortlessly dodged a bolt of black lightning. He was standing at the blind spot of the formation. No matter how rampant the destructive power raged, it wouldn’t hurt him.

“Kill him!” Lu Qingxun screamed again, his pale eyes almost spewing actual fire.

Hum.

Black light radiated from the grand formation as the five elements circulated again. The blindspot shifted, and destructive power blanketed Lu Yun.

Bam!

An enormous, glowing orb rose from Lu Yun, dispersing the destructive power with a large vacuum that abruptly appeared in the center of the formation.

Yuying and the others finally had some repose from their struggle. A few other formations descended to protect them as a graceful figure in black soared into the sky.

Emerging from the Gates of the Abyss with the Formation Orb, Feinie instantly disintegrated the Five Elements Demolition with the treasure’s light. That was what made the treasure powerful— it could not only establish formations, but also unravel them.

Crack crack crack.

The formation disks buried under the manor cracked, and the powerful formation fractured like an egg shell.

“How dare you ruin my formation, witch?!” Pushing away the two immortals supporting him, Lu Qingxun jumped into the air and attacked Feinie with his palm. As a peak august immortal, the woman was just a mere bug that he could swat to death with a casual slap.

Feinie harrumphed and retaliated in kind.

Bam!

A great shockwave formed as two enormous hand shadows clashed. Terrible pulses of immortal energy swept through the manor and demolished everything!

Pfft!

Head snapping up, Lu Qingxun threw up a mouthful of blood. His bones groaned under the pressure and he toppled to the ground.

“Clan Elder!” The Lu immortals struggled out of the ruined manor, panicking when they saw their elder collapse.

“Kill them all!” growled Lu Yun.

Feinie had established layers of defensive formations when she’d emerged to protect her side from the shockwaves. With the grand formation broken and Lu Qingxun on the ground, Lu Yun quickly gave his order.

No mercy, and no quarter! All those from the Lu Clan were to be exterminated!

“Leave me!” Lu Qingxun sucked in a breath when he heard the order and shrieked, “Kill that brat first!”

The Lu immortals immediately changed course and charged at Lu Yun. Though the formation was broken, the governor was just a core realm cultivator.

It couldn’t be easier to kill him.

Chapter 97: Surveillance

Hum.

Black energy rippled from Lu Yun, sending the Lu immortals flying backward before they could approach.

Feinie landed and stood calmly before Lu Yun, guarding him with her diminutive body. Her gaze was as steely as the sword throwing off black luminescence in her hand.

“Empyrean immortal?! You can’t really be just an empyrean immortal!” An incredulous Lu Qingxun threw up another mouthful of blood. He was a peak august immortal, half a step from ascending to golden immortal. How could an empyrean immortal knock him to the ground with a single slap?!

“Kill them,” Lu Yun commanded, casting a frosty gaze over the Lu immortals.

Swoosh.

A faint white dragon impression flashed behind Feinie as she readied her sword. Her weapon created seventeen duplicates of itself that lunged at the Lu immortals, brandishing fangs and claws like dragons.

“Nineteen Cerulean Sword Dragons!!” Lu Qingxun stared blankly at the seventeen dragons of sword energy. “This is a sword technique that was lost for thousands of years. How do you know it?! All of you, move out of the way!” the Lu elder roared as a strange, cyan light emitted from his body. An ancient beast seemed to have awakened within him.

Aghast at the changes in their elder, the Lu immortals hurriedly moved away.

“The sword technique recorded in the ancient texts consists of nineteen swords. You’re only manifesting seventeen, which means your technique is incomplete. There is a weak point to be found!” Lu Qingxun’s frail, wizened body that looked like it would scatter into a pile of bones at any second suddenly became hearty and strong as bluish-black fur grew out of his shriveled skin.

“Take the woman alive and acquire the method of Nineteen Cerulean Sword Dragons!” Lu Qingxun howled like a beast before pouncing on Feinie with his arms extended. His aura had become more than three times as powerful as before.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Seventeen rays of sword energy knocked the behemoth away, but failed to leave any visible wounds on the old man’s body. A trace of gravity floated into Feinie’s expression.

Roar!

With a prolonged cry, Lu Qingxun leapt at Feinie, using his giant body as a weapon.

“This is a physical combat art. He’s sacrificed the power of an immortal in exchange for greater physical strength!” Lu Yun stood behind Feinie and whispered, “Don’t fight him head on.”

He recalled such combat arts from Xuanxi’s memory. Once activated, the combat art channeled an immortal’s energy to enhance their body, making it invincible against weapons. It was designed to counter immortal and flying swords.

In this state, however, the user wouldn’t be able to use any of their arts.

Feinie nodded. She turned into a flash of shadow and ran circles around Lu Qingxun, refraining from using the Formation Orb. There were unwanted eyes and minds looking in on their battle, which was why she had quickly put the Formation Orb away after destroying the formation.

There was no lack of keen eyes in the world of immortals. If the Formation Orb was discovered, Lu Yun would likely never be able to leave the province for the rest of his life.

Lacking the treasure, Feinie set up formations with her footsteps, leaving patterns on the ground. She didn’t need spirit stones or crystals; she was the Formation King of the immortal world, after all, a title she’d earned with her skill five thousand years ago. For her, anything and everything could be used to set up formations.

Lu Qingxun had turned into a beast with his physical art and was tangling with Feinie, while the other Lu immortals had targeted Lu Yun. They were single-mindedly focused on killing Lu Yun. Only the young man’s blood would cleanse the clan of the humiliation they’d suffered!

Swoosh!

Sword energy drove into the ground before the immortals as Yuying dropped down from the air, her soft hair slightly tousled. Seven swords circled around her, acting as an unbreakable barrier between Lu Yun and harm.

On an exhale, Lu Yun used his death art to connect the realms of yin and yang and a bloodcorpse dashed out of the Gates of the Abyss. One by one, the Lu immortals collapsed with all of their blood and life essence drained, their faces frozen in a state of eternal shock.

“What the hell is that?!” Lu Qingxun’s expression twisted when he saw the crimson shadow.

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Some corner in Dusk City.

A rippling mirror reflected the image of the situation inside the governor’s manor.

“Can you tell what the crimson shadow is?” asked a middle-aged man clad in a golden outfit, his eyebrows slightly furrowed.

“Sir, I can sense death energy, corpse energy, and a trace of ghost energy from the figure.” An old man with a goatee considered the mirror closely before concluding with great confidence, “It should be some kind of zombie from an ancient tomb.”

“A zombie?” The man in gold widened his eyes in disbelief. “The governor can control the zombies in ancient tombs?!”

“Nothing is strange in the world of immortals. This subordinate once saw a strange man in Exalted Major who could manipulate zombies to fight for him. The governor must’ve discovered some unusual heritage.” The old man made a thoughtful noise. “Moreover, the woman in white next to him is Pill Fairy Yuying, the eighth governor of Dusk from twelve hundred years ago.”

The man in gold paused. “Pill Fairy Yuying? Isn’t she dead?”

The goateed elder shook his head. “No one knows for sure, but she’s alive now and at the peak of true immortal. She must’ve survived the heavenly tribulations a thousand years ago, but severe injuries forced her to fake her own death to give her time to recover.”

“That makes sense.” The man in gold nodded, accepting the explanation. “That also explains why the governor can walk the path of cultivation.”

“As for the woman in black....” The old man frowned. “She must be somebody, but I can’t identify her.”

“That doesn't matter, she’s just an empyrean immortal.” The man in gold smiled faintly. “So the governor’s trump card is a strange zombie. Determining that is enough, we’ll sell this information to the Lu Clan. It’s high time to be on friendly terms with them.

“They suffered a tremendous blow that almost ended their line a hundred years ago. However, the Lu Clan regained their position at the top of Nephrite Major in only a short century and crushed their enemies in return. The depth of their foundations makes them a worthy ally.”

“Let’s go,” he said to the goateed old man.

The old man nodded and put away the mirror with a wave of the hand, then the two vanished inside the city, riding two swords.

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“They’ve put away their surveilling treasure, sir,” Yuying transmitted to Lu Yun.

“We can stop pulling our punches, then,” Lu Yun said coolly.

Feinie nodded and her fingers swiftly flew through three hundred sixty-five hand seals. Beams of black light shot out of the ruins of the manor, tearing the insane Lu Qingxun apart. His beast-like head rolled to Lu Yun’s feet.

“You’ve turned your back on your lineage and forgotten your ancestors!” The spirit within the head continued growling as Lu Qingxun’s eyes bored into Lu Yun. “Traitor!”

Chapter 98: The Netherwood Coffin

Terror struck deep into the core of every cultivator in Dusk Province. Calamity Lu was back, and with even stronger patrons this time. No one was safe, not even notables from the Nephrite court!

Lu Qingxun wasn’t actually dead yet. His nascent spirit remained sealed inside his head, which now hung above Dusk City’s southern gates. The man’s miserable screams could sometimes be heard, aggravating the citizens’ already frayed nerves. That was an august immortal’s head! Immortals were rare in Dusk Province to begin with, not to mention a lofty august immortal!

Originally, the province’s cultivators were just waiting for the moment that Calamity Lu was expelled from his position, so they could hunt him down and dismember him into a thousand parts. But such revenge was now out of reach, whether he stayed as governor or not.

Please, someone kill him in the competition five months from now!

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Reconstruction had begun on the governor’s manor. Proceeding so quickly hadn’t been part of Lu Yun’s plan, as he’d initially wanted to secure his position first, but there was little choice now that his residence lay in ruins.

He tossed a handful of soybeans into the air and thirty-six armored warriors of the golden core realm descended from the skies, providing the requisite menial labor.

As for the manor’s protections, Lu Yun and Feinie had spent a long time looking through the Formation Orb before settling on an immortal-grade formation called the “Capsizing Dragon Quintet.” It provided double the power of its predecessor, the Enneawyrms Provenance Formation.

The corresponding feng shui layout was named the “Frolicking Dragon Quintet.” It gathered fortunes from all five orientations of the world—east, west, north, south, and center—and could slowly restore the province’s destroyed dragon vein.

However, the vein had been contaminated by evil energies for far too long. It would take untold years for it to regain its former glory from five millennia ago, when the province was in a golden age.

As for the stone, and other materials required, Lu Yun had allotted three days for Dusk City's great houses to collect them. If they were to fail, they would follow in House Ge's footsteps.

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I'm allowed one more Envoy of Samsara at the moment. Should I recruit this princess after all? Inside the Gates of the Abyss, Lu Yun examined the bronze outer-coffin as he considered his options.

Of his three current envoys, Yuying was the Pill Fairy, Feinie was the Formation King, and Xuanxi was a prodigious talent in creating powerful talismans. He'd originally planned to make the next envoy a master craftsman.

Equipment, pills, formations, and talismans were the four strongest auxiliary paths in cultivation. These paths were supplemental to walking the immortal dao. Among them, equipment ranked first. Powerful treasures like immortal devices and flying swords all held great significance for cultivators and immortals alike.

More importantly, if he had a master craftsman at his disposal, he would gain their knowledge and be able to puzzle out how to refine the prized luopan of tomb raiders—the feng shui compass. He might even be able to manufacture the item outright! The compass could locate treasures, assess feng shui, pinpoint dragon veins, uncover a layout's weaknesses, and decipher formations.

However, the dragon princess was hardly a craftsman and knew next to nothing about this auxiliary path.

Lu Yun's Spectral Eye couldn't see through the other casket inside the outer-coffin, nor could he discern the dragon princess' circumstances. However, Xuanxi had once been her close attendant. Through her memories, he knew the princess was also a powerful immortal.

"The competition is drawing ever closer. Yuying, Feinie, and Xuanxi aren't combat specialists. Feinie's Nineteen Cerulean Sword Dragons may look powerful, but she can only summon seventeen swords. It's still very incomplete." He tightened his lips. "Fuck it, let's go for broke! What's the big deal? I'll have another envoy slot when I reach the life core realm anyways."

In Xuanxi's memories, the princess called "Aoxue" commanded not only the combat arts of her race, but had also mastered the teachings of various schools and created her own martial style.

No one at her cultivation level was her match in close quarters, a trait that Lu Yun highly coveted. Many factions would certainly oppose him during the competition. The only way to secure his position would be by trouncing his opponents with overwhelming force.

He now knew who'd arranged for the bronze outer-coffin—the nefarious Wayfarer. But that Wayfarer was currently sealed on the Water Altar, so Lu Yun opened the coffin without fear or hesitation.

Rumble.

The lid slid gently open with a dull sound, unleashing an overpowering crimson light that shot straight at the horizon and dyed the dark world a bright scarlet.

Yuying, Feinie, Zhao Dianliang, Yueshen, and the others stared fixedly at the eerie coffin, their figures shaking violently. There was a frosty sense to that bloodiness; it weighed down on their hearts and minds like a towering mountain.

Squashed beneath the outer-coffin, the Skyriver city lord shrieked as his body melted into a puddle of blood, sealing his death. Lu Yun paled, falling back and staring with disbelief at the coffin's interior as a blood-red casket slowly floated up from within.

"A netherwood coffin!" he yelled.

Just like bronze outer-coffins, tomb raiders abhorred netherwood coffins. They'd rather face one of those thousand year mummies head-on than deal with one of these coffins!

Under ordinary circumstances, they'd immediately about face and leave without second thoughts. But Lu Yun now faced a netherwood coffin that was encased within a bronze outer-coffin! What kind of lunatic was Wayfarer to stack these two vile items together?!

Had he seriously been trying to create an unparalleled demon of pure malice?

Any corpse put inside a bronze outer-coffin or netherwood coffin would be demonized, transformed into an evil being of extreme yin, an existence that could rival a zombie king or a bloodcorpse.

"The princess must be a monster by now." Lu Yun took a deep breath and stepped forward. "Go back!" he shouted sternly.

Boom!

The Tome of Life and Death shook as the energy inside the Gates of the Abyss converged to ferociously push the floating casket back inside the outer-coffin. But the moment the force vanished, it rose in the air once again.

"Damn it!" Color drained from Lu Yun's face. "It's not an ordinary netherwood coffin, it's also a hanging coffin!"

A hanging coffin was one of a coffin's possible conditions. Any coffin could become one, and their appearance implied that the corpse inside had already mutated into an unknown, harrowing monster. It might be a bloodcorpse, a zombie king, or something even more appalling.

"What a dreadful existence!" Yueshen's complexion was so white it was almost transparent. Intense fear was radiating from the depths of her soul.

Though known as nightmares amongst tomb raiders, the nine bloodcorpses shrieked at the coffin's emergence and hid behind Yueshen, cowering in fear. It would seem that even immortal ghosts and bloodcorpses were terrified of the newborn entity.

Three immortal fires ignited in Yuying's hand as Feinie gripped the Formation Orb.

"No matter who you are, you will fall in line as long as you're inside my domain," Lu Yun growled. Hellfire combusted all around him, and the Tome of Life and Death emerged from his dantian to shield the realm inside the Gates of the Abyss.

“Rend!” With a resounding roar, Lu Yun struck the hanging coffin with all his strength, shattering it entirely. A scarlet light blossomed and turned the world behind the gates into a sea of blood.

Chapter 99: Bad Omen

A lengthy dragon howl rang out through the world behind the Gates of the Abyss as a young dragon slowly crawled out of the netherwood coffin. It was slightly over three meters in length, and covered in crimson scales that twinkled like extravagant blood crystals.

Head, horns, whiskers, claws, body, tail...

It looked exactly like the dragons of Lu Yun’s memories. However, it wasn’t a living dragon, but an undead one. The bronze outer-coffin and netherwood coffin had turned the dragon princess of the North Sea into a strange zombie. It was neither bloodcorpse nor zombie king, but something so much worse.

Roar!

After the howl, the dragon elicited tall waves from the boundless ocean of blood with a turn of its body, threatening to submerge the netherworld.

“A blood dragon!! Kill it! Kill it now!!” A terrified voice screamed from above. The dormant divine obsession that’d been aimlessly drifting around was startled into wakefulness by the crimson zombie dragon. It morphed into a human face that shrieked and wailed and raged hoarsely.

“A blood dragon?” Lu Yun tapped into the world’s power through the Tome of Life and Death to keep the ocean at bay. A trace of confusion colored his face when he heard the divine obsession.

A blood dragon? Was that a subgroup of dragons?

Xuanxi’s memories informed him of different levels of dragons within the clan, but there was no mention of a blood dragon.

“Disaster, disaster!! A blood dragon is born and blood wafts through the world! Kill it, kill it!” The divine obsession’s speech grew disjointed as terror suffused its hoarse voice.

Seemingly oblivious to the wailing and shrieking, the blood dragon tossed and turned in the crimson ocean, throwing up petrifying waves to fight the power of the netherworld.

“Xuanxi!” Lu Yun called out. The river god immediately returned from the Dusk River to appear in front of him.

“That’s the princess!” The dragon was the first sight that greeted her as soon as she set foot past the Gates of the Abyss. “But why? How did Her Highness become a, a blood dragon??” She staggered back, her countenance white as a sheet and nothing but shock and disbelief in her eyes.

“You know about them? Why can’t I find any information about them in your memories?” Lu Yun frowned.

A pillar of black light shot up from the Tome of Life and Death, gathering and compressing the terrible crimson ocean. With the power of this world entirely under his control, he was unbeatable here.

Outside, the dragon would easily drown all of Dusk Province within the crimson ocean, but in here, it was no match for Lu Yun.

“It’s an ancient curse, a bad omen for the world. Everything I know about blood dragons has been erased and was only retrievable when I encountered one.” Xuanxi’s face paled and her voice grew hollow.

Indeed, Lu Yun was now able to recall some legends about the blood dragons from her memories. Blood dragons weren’t really dragons, but corpse demons.

All living beings could turn into blood dragons after their deaths. They were bad omens, harbingers of great calamity. It was said that a blood dragon had been sighted a hundred thousand years ago, right before the terrible war of immortals.

A blood dragon is born and blood wafts through the world...

The creature brings bad luck and disasters like a feng shui layout. No, it’s more like a living layout! It’s the combination of a layout and a zombie!

Lu Yun quickly made the connections in his head. There were living layouts in the burial mound, and the Enneawym Coffinbearers had manifested from the dragon vein in Dusk Province.

Who was buried in the physical coffin that the nine dragons bore? Could it be another blood dragon?

“What was that Wayfarer trying to do? Why the hell did he create such a monster??” Lu Yun could sense the chilling presence of eldritch bad luck and misfortune from the blood dragon.

Myriad Formation Summit falling from the sky, the disturbance from the ancient tomb in Dusk Province, the restriction against golden immortals, the Dusk River Sacrament, the Enneawym Coffinbearers in the governor’s manor... and even the corpse coffin in Yueshen’s body!

All that had been set up to nurture the blood dragon!

“Thank heavens the last Dusk River Sacrament was interrupted! Though I released the dragon, it isn’t fully mature yet. Die!” roared Lu Yun.

Whoosh!

Hellfire set the crimson sea ablaze. The blood dragon struggled within, whimpering and keening with pain. Through the agony brought about by the hellfire, the dragon reared to the skies and voiced a summoning call.

Out of nowhere, nine enormous dragons bearing an even bigger coffin slowly descended upon the world.

“Enneawym Coffinbearers! This is the layout’s true form!” Lu Yun put two and two together when he saw the nine dragons and coffin. This Enneawym Coffinbearers wasn’t just shadow forms, but the real deal! He could even observe minute details of the dragons and the coffin.

All man-made feng shui layouts were based on something real, whether natural phenomenon or other lifeforms. The layout of Ghost Yanking Feet, for example, was inspired by a corpsefish’s tentacles. The

nine dead dragons and the giant coffin before Lu Yun was the source of inspiration for the Enneawyrms Coffinbearers that scared all feng shui masters.

“That’s... the nine dragon lords!” Xuanxi exclaimed in shock. “Even the supreme dragon lords fell in the calamity a hundred thousand years ago!?”

The nine dragon lords were second only to the dragon emperor himself, and rivaled the celestial emperors of the majors in status and authority, but were much stronger than them. They’d long since reached a height that current immortals couldn’t even comprehend.

In the eyes of the dragon race and cultivators of the water spirits that served them, their emperor and his nine lords had definitely survived the great war, though that calamity had claimed even the lives of celestial emperors.

But here they were, the bodies of the nine dragon lords.

“But who’s in that coffin? If nine supreme dragon lords serve as its coffin-bearers...” muttered Xuanxi. “Is it the dragon emperor? No, not even he would be important enough for this arrangement.”

“The bodies of nine dragon lords?” Lu Yun’s eyes flashed. “Good! Stay and have some tea since you’ve come!” He extended his arms to the sound of great cracks!

Hellfire blazed while bolts of black lightning danced frenetically and peals of thunder boomed. The entire netherworld had come alive under Lu Yun’s command. The ocean of blood was compressed into a grounded orb, atop which sprawled the crimson dragon.

Wham!

His fire ignited the world. An inferno of black flames hurtled toward the Enneawyrms Coffinbearers in the air.

“Hell...” a deep, raspy voice suddenly emitted from within the giant coffin.

Chapter 100: The Fourth Envoy of Samsara

Wham!

A fiery conflagration slammed into the Enneawyrms Coffinbearers, igniting and devouring the nine dead dragon lords and the pitch black coffin in an instant.

“It’s a layout as well!” Lu Yun’s face clouded over. From what he could tell, the Enneawyrms Coffinbearers had long since turned into a layout that could collect all things yin and evil beneath the skies. The corpses of the dragon lords had turned into dragons of extreme yin themselves.

What was buried in the coffin?

Who did that voice just now belong to?

The pillar of hellfire in the sky wavered in his moment of distraction and a giant bony arm probed out of the coffin, making a grab at the blood dragon Lu Yun had pinned to the ground. The blood dragon crooned in response and struggled to throw itself into the arm, its eyes shining with excitement.

“Back off!” With a wave of his hand, Lu Yun retrieved the Tome of Life and Death. Another burst of hellfire from the book shot out toward the skeleton arm.

Although he had an endless supply of power within the Gates of the Abyss, his lacking cultivation limited the variety of his attacks. He was attacking with only the fire’s raw power, instead of utilizing its many uses.

This was the most powerful fire in the world. It could torch anything and everything, and even refine karma. Nevertheless, the unusually powerful Enneawyrms managed to withstand the fire.

Wham!

Fire blasted the arm and reduced it into ashes. However, the hellfire in the air suddenly shrank in on itself as the Enneawyrms vanished without a trace.

“That layout didn’t come in through the gates...” Lu Yun stared darkly at the jade-like white dragon skeleton that had been left on the ground. “The Enneawyrms is a layout, and so is the blood dragon. There’s a mysterious connection between the two that connected the Gates of the Abyss to wherever the Enneawyrms was. Now that the nine dragons have collected the blood dragon, the two spaces are separate again.”

The blood dragon was gone. The dragon princess’ body had served as its host, but it didn’t take the corpse with it when it left. Therefore, it was incomplete.

With the Dusk River Sacrament cut short, the blood dragon hadn’t yet come into its full power. If Lu Yun hadn’t let it out, it would still be trapped in the bronze outer-coffin and the netherwood coffin. And now, it had had no choice but to abandon its body and escape with only the layout that had given rise to its existence.

“Let’s hope that thing is too wary of the world behind the gates to descend in person,” Lu Yun muttered in the direction the blood dragon and the Enneawyrms had disappeared in. “Fourth Envoy of Samsara, seek your place—”

He turned and barked an order at the pristine dragon skeleton on the ground. The Tome of Life and Death radiated with a faint glow.

Fwoom!

The skeleton on the ground burst into flames, hinting at an alluring figure flickered in and out of existence within the fire.

Bam!

With a strike of her palm, Xuanxi knocked out Zhao Dianliang, the only other man here. The fire dissipated, revealing a completely naked girl.

She was very tall—even barefoot, she was still half a head taller than Lu Yun. Her body was lovingly molded, slim, but curvy. Not even the finest sculptor could spot any flaws. She was perfect the way she was.

Crimson locks ran down to her hips, highlighting the stark contrast with her snow-white skin. A thin red line marked the space between her eyebrows, adding a fey touch of seduction to her.

Looking at her face made Lu Yun dizzy. He'd only met two people who could rival her beauty—the male-projecting Miao and Qing Yu.

“The dragon princess sure is well-rounded.” Yueshen lowered her head after closely observing the girl's breasts, feeling inadequate in comparison.

“You're young, you still have time to grow.” Yuying offered reassurance despite her faint jealousy as well.

Yueshen pouted. “I'm several thousand years old...”

After a moment of silence, the envoy deadpanned, “I'm talking about your breasts.”

Yueshen wanted to cry.

“Fourth Envoy of Samsara Aoxue greets the master.” The dragon princess knelt down, her long crimson hair pooling on the ground. Having previously been a blood dragon had left her with some of the creature's features.

Lu Yun gulped, then looked away with great difficulty. His envoys' clothing had all decayed to tatters after their deaths. Their resurrections were a true rebirth, delivering them to the world as naked as a baby.

Fortunately, they've all been stunning women. If I make a man my envoy in the future, I'm gonna get an eye infection. He twisted his body uncomfortably at the possibility that he might see a stark naked man kneeling in front of him one day.

“At ease,” he said with a wave of his hand.

Aoxue rose to her feet, her incredible assets jiggling a bit. Lu Yun felt his nose start to burn.

“Your Highness!” Xuanxi flung a chiffon robe over Aoxue to cover her figure.

“Xuanxi.” Aoxue flashed Xuanxi a stunning smile when she saw the river god. “You and I are both our master's envoys now. Address me as princess no longer.”

“I understand.” Xuanxi nodded.

After becoming Lu Yun's envoys, both the dragon princess and her old subordinate were left behind in the past. There was no need to bring them up again.

“Xuanxi is too oblivious,” grumbled Feinie. “Didn't she notice that our master's eyes were glued to Aoxue? Why would she put clothes on her?”

The dragon princess blushed. Aghast at her mistake, Xuanxi reached out and yanked the chiffon covering off Aoxue.

Lu Yun had absolutely no earthly idea what to say about the situation.

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The governor's manor was completely rebuilt.

Originally suffused with yin energy, the manor was now prosperous and lively after its reconstruction. Rather surprising was the addition of an enormous willow in the main courtyard.

This was where Lu Yun had killed Old Willow from the Skandha Range. The tree spirit's body had been broken into pieces, but they'd grown anew. He wasn't too concerned, as long as it didn't disrupt the feng shui of the manor.

Ah, but I can use this tree to recreate the feng shui layout back in the sect's headquarters. Lu Yun suddenly recalled his sect back on Earth. There'd been an unknown layout centered around a thousand-year-old willow. When he'd entered the sect, though, the tree had been dead for centuries. Even he didn't know what power the layout possessed.

"Let's give it a try!" He looked at the tree with great enthusiasm.