

Necropolis 191

Chapter 191: Celestial Emperor of Exalted Major?

"Blood dragon and blood phoenix...." Lu Yun's expression darkened as he stared at the blood phoenix approaching him. "Tell me, are there any other blood whatevers in the world?"

"You may not get an answer if you ask anyone else, even Myrtlestar," responded the dread zombie. "There are two more blood fiends apart from these two: blood qilin and blood turtle."

"Dragon, phoenix, qilin, and turtle." The governor paused in shocked recognition.

There were four divine beasts that represented the gods of the four cardinal directions—the Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird, and the Black Tortoise. There were also four auspicious spirits of good omens—the dragon, phoenix, qilin, and turtle!

Noting Lu Yun's dazed expression, the dread zombie continued, "That's right. It's those four creatures of auspicious omens. Blood fiends themselves have no physical form, but they can manifest through dragons, phoenixes, qilins, and turtles to plague the world with disaster and destruction.

"Isn't it funny? What the world hails as auspicious creatures delivering peace and prosperity can become world-ending nightmares just like that."

Lu Yun's expression shifted uneasily in tandem with his thoughts.

"Come, come to me..." the blood phoenix whispered to the governor like one would a lover. "Let me use your body, your blood, your flesh, your bones, and your soul to refine this supreme divine sword. Come to me!"

Crimson light exploded from its body and a pungent smell broke through the protection of hellfire to assault Lu Yun's senses. Lightheaded, he felt an urge to complete the Sword of Chaos with his own flesh and blood.

"Wake up!" He bit his tongue and jerked himself awake. The blood phoenix was only a little more than three meters away from him.

"Come, come, let's complete this sword together and return the divine race to its glory. The light of the divines will shine on all the heavenly planes once again."

"Piss off!" growled Lu Yun, throwing a powerful punch at the blood phoenix.

The phoenix flashed back to the smithing platform under the giant sword and continued hammering Huang Qing's body.

"Hm?" Lu Yun started and whirled around, coming face to face with a young man. The newcomer wore a worn, white robe with an expression that suggested ancient pain. His eyes seemed to house a boundless ocean of stars.

"I told you the Sword Barrow spells doom and that trespassers will die." His voice grated like two pieces of dry wood rubbing together.

Lu Yun shuddered violently. "You're the Dusk restriction!"

The young man being here was nigh unfathomable! Lu Yun had seen that pair of eyes twice before. Once outside Dusk City, where the eyes glared Donglin Yuhuang, the patriarch of House Donglin, to death by popping him like a bubble.

The other time was outside this very Sword Barrow.

Lu Yun took a closer look at the unexpected visitor. The young man was neither alive nor dead, but stuck somewhere in between and was alternating between the two states.

"Restriction?" The young man paused. "Many seem to have called me that over the past thousand years." That was when the restriction had appeared in Dusk Province.

"Then what did people call you before that?" Lu Yun sucked in a deep breath.

The man's eyes grew unfocused as he travelled down the dusty hallways of memory. "A thousand years ago, many called me... His Majesty the Celestial Emperor of Exalted Major."

"What?!" Lu Yun's eyes threatened to fall out of his skull. "The Exalted celestial emperor?! You're him?!" He reflexively took a few steps back. "Who's the one that stands with the nine celestial emperors now?"

Lu Yun immediately contacted hell with his mind. His envoys had all died more than a thousand years ago, so they wouldn't know about things that had occurred after their death. He could only ask the Infernum.

"What?" Yuchi Tianhuang gasped with incomprehensible shock. "The Dusk restriction is the Exalted celestial emperor?! Then who's the celestial emperor now?!"

He'd established a great intelligence network within the world of immortals in his efforts to revive the divine race's fortunes and lift the curse on the White Tiger tribe, yet he'd never gotten an inkling that a celestial emperor had been replaced.

"His Majesty was replaced?! How is that possible??" Zhao Dianliang from the Exalted Immortal Sect could barely recover his jaw. Peace reigned in Exalted Major! There'd never been news of the celestial emperor clashing with anyone, nor had there been any battles on a grand scale. Yet... here the celestial emperor was, as the Dusk Province restriction.

Even the Nephrite celestial emperor was in the dark.

Lu Yun's widened eyes were still fixed on the Exalted celestial emperor, while the man trained his gaze at the blood phoenix and walked toward it.

Seemingly blind to the human's approach, the blood phoenix continued to hammer doggedly at Huang Qing's body.

"Rumors fly that the nine celestial emperors will undertake a joint attempt at breaking through the dao immortal realm. If that imposter is up to no good...." Apprehension rose in Lu Yun's heart.

"Back off!!" The blood phoenix stared rancorously at the celestial emperor, its eyes glowing crimson.

The celestial emperor was rooted on the spot, like a spear thrust into the ground. However, he suddenly reached out and grabbed at the phoenix.

“Move!!” the phoenix shrieked again. Beams of dense, crimson light flared from its body. Blood energy surged and filled the Sword Barrow almost to the brim.

“The blood energy here originates from this blood phoenix!”

Swoosh!

Hellfire covered Lu Yun’s body in a protective layer, blocking the terrible crimson light. Meanwhile, a fight broke out between the Exalted celestial emperor and the blood phoenix.

The crimson figure had transformed into an actual phoenix, its blood-red wings blotting out the sun and pinning the human down. Unfazed by his disadvantage, the celestial emperor manifested a treasure resembling the brocade canopy of an imperial carriage.

“That’s the Exalted Parasol!” Zhao Dianliang exclaimed when he saw the adorned umbrella. “He really is the Celestial Emperor of Exalted Major!”

Ignoring the words, Lu Yun made his way to the smithing platform and examined Huang Qing’s body. There were no signs of decay or damage from the continuous hammering; she looked just like how she’d appeared in life.

Lu Yun frowned and reached out to Huang Qing.

“Don’t touch her!” the Exalted celestial emperor cautioned worriedly with his hoarse voice.

“Die!!” The blood phoenix suddenly lost its mind and knocked the celestial emperor away, growing to three hundred meters tall and lunging at Lu Yun.

“Auwuooooo!” A piercing dragon howl sounded from Lu Yun’s side, marking the leap of a crimson dragon that clashed with the phoenix midair.

“Blood dragon.” The celestial emperor frowned slightly. “You’ve tamed the blood dragon buried in that burial mound. How unexpected.”

“Oof!” Pain flickered through the celestial emperor’s eyes. Thick death energy gradually rose from his body as he lifted his head and let out an inhuman roar.

In midair, a pair of giant eyes slowly opened.

Chapter 192: Nine-Phoenix Casket

Silence descended when the giant eyes opened.

Eyes bloodshot, the celestial emperor of Exalted Major stood rooted to the spot with a steadily diminishing aura of a living being. Meanwhile, the two blood-red combatants tearing at each other froze in midair, like insects trapped in amber. However, their auras menaced each other in an increasingly murderous fashion and their eyes turned completely scarlet.

“What’s going on, Aoxue?!” Lu Yun glowered at the blood dragon in midair.

“I’m, I’m not sure. I’m still with Sir Qing Han!” Aoxue could see what was happening in the Sword Barrow through Lu Yun and shared his shock. That wasn’t her!

She hadn't taken even a single step away from Qing Han; she knew how important the Qing scion was to Lu Yun. Should any danger to Lu Yun arise, he could retreat to the Gates of the Abyss and come up with a response. Thus, Aoxue would never abandon Qing Han to appear next to Lu Yun.

The blood dragon that had burrowed out from the gates wasn't her!

Wait, blood dragon? It was the blood dragon that everyone thought had been whisked away by the Enneawyrms Coffinbearers!

Previously, Aoxue's transformation into a blood dragon upon her release from the netherwood coffin had summoned the Enneawyrms Coffinbearers, but Lu Yun had driven them away. When they retreated, they'd taken the body of the blood dragon, leaving only a skeleton behind.

Lu Yun then resurrected the skeleton with the Tome of Life and Death, making Aoxue an Envoy of Samsara. She'd come back to life as a blood dragon, but now... here was another one.

The Enneawyrms Coffinbearers didn't take the blood dragon away with them, they left it in hell!

Lu Yun's darkened when he deduced where the blood dragon had come from. If the blood dragon was still residing in hell, where were the Enneawyrms Coffinbearers?

He activated the Tome of Life and Death fully and swept its power through the netherworld, but found no trace of the nine dragons bearing a coffin.

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"Blood dragon and blood phoenix appearing in the world at the same time... die!" Something growled from above the giant crimson eyes.

The Exalted celestial emperor seemed to be unconscious and insensate to the world. Remaining upright where he was, he was as still as a statue, with thick death energy radiating from his body. Meanwhile, the enormous eyes hovering in the air radiated a tremendous power that sealed the two terrifying blood fiends. Cracks spiderwebbed across their bodies, like they were porcelain or jade figurines.

Screech!

A soul-piercing shriek pierced the air as the premises darkened.

Lu Yun jerked his head up to find a phoenix that spanned five hundred kilometers from wing-tip to wing-tip emerging out of nowhere. The pitch-black bird was wreathed in black flames, and it had nine heads.

A nine-headed phoenix? And the bird bore a giant black coffin on its back!

"A Nine-Phoenix Casket!" His eyes shot wide with surprise. Like the Enneawyrms Coffinbearers, the Nine-Phoenix Casket was a vicious feng shui layout that also existed on Earth.

It resembled a nine-headed phoenix bearing a giant coffin, but according to what his sect had deduced, the phoenix was actually part of the coffin. Lu Yun had yet to encounter the layout in this world, but he was seeing its original form now.

"It's... dead?" He scanned the nine-headed phoenix with his Spectral Eye. Yup, it's dead.

Just like the nine dragons of the Enneawyrm Coffinbearers, there were no ripples of life from the nine-headed phoenix.

Layers of layouts wrapped around it in a protective bubble, like mountains protecting a noble tomb, preventing Lu Yun's Spectral Eye from comprehending the phoenix's history before its death.

Bam!

The very air trembled as the giant nine-headed phoenix slammed into the enormous eyes. Unwilling to back down, the rest of the eyes' face slowly materialized in midair.

"Now!" Lu Yun's eyes lit up. The two behemoths were too preoccupied to care about a puny human. He dashed to the sealed blood dragon and phoenix, sending the two into hell and suppressing them with the power of the Gates of the Abyss.

But at that moment, he lost control over both mind and body as the giant eyes and phoenix shifted their attention to Lu Yun.

Screeeeech!

The bird's nine heads shrieked with great pain, prompting it to lunge at Lu Yun with great ferocity. Giant eyes in the air had filled out a complete face that didn't belong to the Exalted celestial emperor, or anyone else Lu Yun knew. Anger drifted onto the face, a clear sign of irritation at Lu Yun for collecting the two fiends.

At that moment, Lu Yun didn't even have time to think before he came face to face with the nine-headed phoenix. Its tremendous power threatened to tear his body, spirit, and soul apart, while he could do nothing but stare blankly ahead. His thoughts were frozen by the terrifying might.

Roar!

A dragon's howl exploded from his body, followed by nine enormous shadow dragons emerging from his nascent spirit, all of them jointly bearing a black coffin. The Enneawyrm Coffinbearers!

The feng shui layout rushed out like his personal combat art, protecting his body and dispersing the pressure exerted on him. Lu Yun goggled at it in shock. This was the Enneawyrm Coffinbearers he'd fought in the netherworld and driven away!

So it was never in hell, but in my nascent spirit! He widened his eyes as he recalled the initial fight. The Enneawyrm Coffinbearers I saw when I first arrived in this world wasn't the physical manifestation of a feng shui layout, but the actual Enneawyrm Coffinbearers! Real dragons, real coffin! And it's always been in me!

Even the Enneawyrm Coffinbearers summoned by the blood dragon hadn't come from some unknown dimension, but from my own body! Does all of this have something to do with the Tome of Life and Death?

He took a deep breath. That was the only possibility he could think of. Only the book that ruled over all life, death, and reincarnation would be capable of taming the Enneawyrm Coffinbearers.

“Time to go!” The second he regained control over himself, he grabbed Huang Qing’s body and entered the Gates of the Abyss.

Time in the outside world stopped for him.

Chapter 193: The Temptation of Immortality

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Lu Yun didn’t even have time to catch his breath after entering the netherworld. Stuffing a handful of healing pills into his mouth, he circulated his mystic force with closed eyes.

Pfft.

Blood seeped out as a crimson mist from all his pores, dying his clothes red. All of his bones, flesh, and meridians spontaneously crumbled away. Not even the pills he’d taken could stop his body’s destruction. The aura of the nine-headed phoenix was just too much for him to handle, even without any physical contact between the two. Its terrifying aura alone was sufficient to almost destroy him!

“This is bad!” Yuying gravely manifested a pill cauldron on instinct—the very treasure that had been buried with her.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

No sooner had the cauldron appeared than the Emerald Mistfire, Lucent Voidfire, and Daevic Skyfire emerged as well. They settled over Lu Yun like a blanket and whisked him into the cauldron. Yuying threw numerous ingredients of great vitality into it. Pill refinement!

She was going to refine Lu Yun like a supreme pill!

“Xuanxi, Feinie, come help me!” she called out.

In the seaside stronghold and on the banks of Dusk River, Feinie and Xuanxi opened their eyes at the same time and entered the Gates of the Abyss with a simple turn. Sensing Lu Yun’s condition twisted their expressions considerably.

“Master’s body and soul have almost shattered. I will use master’s body as the main ingredient and refine the Void Meridian Pill to cure his wounds!”

Xuanxi and Feinie blinked, struck dumb with amazement. This was to refine a person into a pill and the void into their meridians!

It wasn’t precisely a pill, per se, but a method that was capable of saving someone with even a shattered body and broken soul. Of course, the success rate was very low. It was said that an ancient celestial emperor had revived his dying son that way, but other than him, no one else had ever been known to succeed.

“Don’t do anything to him,” came a soft voice from Violetgrave, which lay beside Lu Yun. “His constitution is unique, so this injury is nothing to him. A Void Meridian Pill? Whether the refining process succeeds or not makes no difference to him.”

The sword gently rose into the air and transformed into a young girl in violet dress.

“Who are you?!” Yuying, Feini, and Xuanxi looked warily at her. Hell and the Tome of Life and Death were Lu Yun’s greatest secrets that not even Qing Han knew the truth of. This stranger nonchalantly showing up was certainly a stunning development!

“It doesn’t matter who I am. What matters is that you don’t touch him.” The girl dimpled and released Lu Yun from the cauldron with a wave of violet light.

His clothes burned away by the three immortal fires, a completely naked Lu Yun sat cross-legged in midair. A tiny black flame ignited in his dantian and slowly spread through his entire body.

Whoosh!

Hellfire forced out the three immortal fires that Yuying had incorporated into Lu Yun’s body; they’d already been at work healing him.

“Is this... rebirth?!” The three envoys gawked in shock. Their master was coming back to life the way only a phoenix could! A thought struck them at the same time; the three ladies whirled around and saw a girl with crimson hair standing silently behind them.

Huangqing.

Lu Yun had made her an Envoy of Samsara with the Tome of Life and Death as soon as he’d entered the netherworld. She quietly stood at attention, like a scarlet shadow. No one would’ve even noticed her if she didn’t move. Moreover, she’d become one with the blood phoenix. Both her body and soul had transformed, unlike Aoxue.

The blood fiend inhabiting Aoxue had been removed by the Enneaworm Coffinbearers. Only the bones of the blood dragon had been left behind to be resurrected by Lu Yun.

Essentially, Aoxue was only half a blood dragon.

Huang Qing, however, had come back to life in the body of the blood phoenix. She’d even devoured the blood fiend attached to her and melded it into a part of her. She was in truth a pure blood phoenix.

Despite her transformation, she still retained her combat arts and innate abilities as a phoenix, which had naturally become available to Lu Yun as well.

Phoenixes were also hailed as the ‘immortal divine birds’. They had a myriad of skills to keep themselves alive and could deploy the pinnacle of their restoration skills after death to enter the cycle of rebirth. However, the world was fair; the phoenixes’ near immortality ended up restricting the development of their bloodlines.

Seeing that Lu Yun had gained the ability of rebirth with Huangqing as his fifth envoy, Yuying and the others relaxed.

“So it turns out that a phoenix’s rebirth has restrictions. If nothing is left of a soul, the phoenix cannot return from the dead.” Lu Yun opened his eyes and looked at Huangqing. “Phoenixes divide part of their soul to form a soul seed. As long as the seed remains, the phoenix lives on.”

That was the secret of the phoenix race.

Every phoenix split off a tiny part of their soul at birth and stored it somewhere safe. This created the illusion that they could come back to life even after they were killed and their souls destroyed.

“Soul seed... soul seed, heh.” Lu Yun sniffed. “What a terrible conspiracy. Phoenixes would’ve remained flourishing at the top of the world of immortals. Instead, the race declined by the day and eventually died out.”

Huangqing tensed.

“All living creatures have three ethereal and seven corporal parts to their souls, every single one of which is essential. To split one’s soul apart and create a soul seed.... Tsk tsk, phoenixes would never reach the peak of cultivation, no matter how gifted they were.”

Lu Yun sighed. “Dragons and phoenixes are often mentioned in the same breath, and both are held as tremendously gifted. Other than the divine race, they, too, are the favored races of heaven. While the dragons have spawned many top experts to protect the clan’s supremacy, phoenixes rarely cultivated any famed geniuses. That’s the drawback of soul seeds. Perhaps phoenix heavyweights discovered the truth of this a long time ago, but couldn’t resist the temptation of immortality in the end.”

He heaved a long breath as Huangqing lowered her head. After this rebirth, her soul was whole again. She hadn’t yet split it and created a new soul seed.

“You’re right,” sighed the girl in violet dress. “Who can resist the temptation of immortality?”

1. I’m changing the spacing of her name to reflect her new identity as an envoy and servant to LY.

2. The Chinese soul dualism tradition indicates that there’s an ethereal (yang) and corporate (yin) part to a person’s soul. The ethereal part leaves the body after death, and the corporal stays with the corpse. Daoism takes the concept further and proposes there’s three parts to the ethereal soul (hun) and seven to the corporate one (po).

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Chapter 194: Strength of a Celestial Emperor

“Who are you?” Only then did Lu Yun turn to look at the girl, his forehead slightly creased. She wasn’t a threat to him in the world beyond the Gates of the Abyss, but her very existence made him uncomfortable.

He didn’t know her, nor had he ever even seen her before. Yet there was something strangely familiar about her. It was as if they’d been together for a long time and had a deep understanding of each other. That both unsettled him and made him very uneasy.

“Me?” The girl smiled faintly. “I’m Violetgrave.”

“Violet... grave?” Lu Yun gaped at the girl, flabbergasted. “You’re the weapon spirit of Violetgrave? I thought only dao immortal-grade treasures have spirits.”

“Weapon spirit?” Violetgrave cast a confused look at the sword at her feet. “I’m no weapon spirit. I am Violetgrave.”

“Huh?” Lu Yun struggled to wrap his head around her response.

“You are Violetgrave, and Violetgrave is you,” Huangqing spoke up. “It’s said that some powerful treasures are able to take human form and exceed the limits of their nature.”

She cast a glance into the depths of hell as she spoke, to where Ruyi sat cross-legged on the ground, recovering with the energy of the netherworld. The nearby Yueshen kept the Infernum from rushing over to crowd the area.

“But isn’t that Violetgrave at her feet? She...” Lu Yun was still quite confused.

When Ruyi had possessed the Divine Spymirror, the treasure became her new body and she couldn’t materialize as a separate entity from it. But even now, however, Lu Yun could still feel a connection with the sword and hear the dread zombie’s mumblings within the weapon.

Huangqing looked assessingly at Violetgrave. She couldn’t comprehend the girl’s existence either. The violet-clad girl appeared to have only recently reached immortality, yet she could tap into a mysterious power great enough to release Lu Yun from Yuying’s cauldron.

With a wave of her hand, the sword flew into Violetgrave’s grasp. A strong feeling of harmony immediately emanated from the girl and the sword. Clearly, the two were one. Even the dread zombie remained meekly quiet in the sword, seemingly having given up on escaping.

“I can feel that you’re important to me,” Violetgrave said seriously. “I regained consciousness because of you. Thus, I shall continue to follow you.”

Lu Yun shrugged and responded uneasily, “I hear that you devour your masters?”

“They tried to force me to bend to their will despite not being my fated master,” she responded without missing a beat. “Of course I would fight back.”

Something didn’t sit right about that explanation.

“What should we do with the three big guys outside?” Lu Yun put aside the issue of Violetgrave to consider the more immediate problem at hand. He had a verbal agreement with the Dusk restriction, but he didn’t know if the deal still held, given the current circumstances.

Perhaps the restriction was the celestial emperor of Exalted Major, but the giant eyes were devoid of humanity and held only violence and killing intent. It seemed that the celestial emperor was constantly alternating between the two states.

When he was alive as the celestial emperor, reason reigned and he was capable of independent thought. When he was dead, he became the terrible Dusk restriction that’d taken countless lives.

Lu Yun had managed to strike a deal with it strictly through borrowing the Nephrite celestial emperor’s influence and flashing a hint of power from the Tome of Life and Death.

“That’s simple.” Violetgrave gave it some thought. “I can seal the dread zombie within the sword and turn it into a puppet. It will be yours to command in battle, but the puppet is only good for three uses. After that, it will revert back to its dread zombie self and you will also have to free it.”

Lu Yun paused. Within the sword, hope flickered in the dread zombie’s eyes. Three times. Just three times as Lu Yun’s puppet lay between it and freedom.

“I know what you worry about, but the dread zombie has become sentient. Just like any human being, it knows what success and failure are, and the need to advance and retreat. It won’t indiscriminately wreak havoc in the world.” She then added, “There are too many beings in the world who can destroy it.”

Lu Yun’s eyes widened at this declaration.

“It, it can rival a celestial emperor, and there are only nine of them in the world!” He couldn’t believe his ears. “What do you mean there are too many who can destroy it?”

“Celestial emperors? They are...” Violetgrave cocked her head, “...origin dao immortal, correct? The world is much vaster than you can imagine. Even the nine majors and the ten lands are but a small part of it. Origin dao immortals are not the greatest power that exist at present.

“Think about it. The one who buried the dread zombie in the sword could’ve easily defeated it, but dared not show his strength.”

With a tremble, Lu Yun fell silent. That’s right!

Chen Xiao had easily defeated the dread zombie and buried it in the sword, but other than that one time more than a decade ago on Qing Han’s behalf, he’d never once shown his true power.

The girl form of Violetgrave disappeared before Lu Yun could answer. A strange connection then formed between him and the dread zombie within the sword.

“I’ve sealed its consciousness and turned it into a puppet. You can order it to fight for you, or you can apply its power to yourself to temporarily gain the strength of an origin dao immortal.

“But remember well that you can only do so three three times. After that, the dread zombie will regain its consciousness and I will no longer imprison it in the sword.” Violetgrave’s voice grew steadily weaker until she fell back into deep slumber.

“Three times... that’s enough!” Lu Yun’s eyes shone brightly.

“Master, what should we do with the blood dragon?” Huangqing asked Lu Yun. It was now so completely suppressed that it didn’t even have the chance to summon the Enneawym Coffinbearers.

“Let Aoxue devour it once we’re outside.”

Huangqing was only a true immortal for now, but Lu Yun could sense a tremendous battle strength from her that would rip through peerless immortals—ones who hadn’t suppressed their cultivation, at that! Lü Biao and Beigong Yu, the two peerless immortals currently residing in the netherworld, were no match for her.

Once Aoxue had devoured the blood dragon and completed her transformation, she would be another great asset to him.

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Lu Yun left the netherworld and time started back up again. The Enneawyrms Coffinbearers and the Nine-Phoenix Casket crashed into each other in midair, each attempting to devour the other. He even saw the nine dragons open their eyes at the same time.

I can't allow it to enter my nascent spirit again! Sensing the tremendous might around him, Lu Yun channeled the power of the dread zombie into himself without hesitation.

Chapter 195: The Sword Moves

The power of a celestial emperor! Origin dao immortal! Power sufficient to equate oneself with any emperor of the majors.

Greater clarity about the very world itself was revealing itself to Lu Yun. New understandings flowed into his mind about the laws and energies of nature. In fact, he could easily reach out and grasp any of them. They were tangible to him in more senses than one; the energies of nature—of heaven and earth—were his to command.

The battle between the Enneawyrms Coffinbearers and Nine-Phoenix Casket released enough energy to tear him apart. But at this moment, all of that packed as much of a punch as a spring breeze. Though destructive forces rioted in the firmament, they were completely unable to harm him.

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"One hour!" Lu Yun took a deep breath. "That's how long I've got with the zombie puppet's power. Until then... I am a celestial emperor!"

Steel flashed in his eyes. He looked up at the sky where dragons and phoenix were still locked together in a maddened struggle.

"Scree—" Nine pairs of eyes from the casket trained on him with unfathomable hatred. The blood phoenix under its control had shed its shackles and become another lifeform entirely as soon as Lu Yun had appeared.

Nine phoenix heads shrieked in discordant unison, slamming the Enneawyrms Coffinbearers back with powerful beats of its black-feathered wings. It then gathered all of its strength and hurtled toward Lu Yun at top speed. Its instincts told it that killing the young human would return the blood phoenix to its clutches.

"Nine-Phoenix Casket!" Lu Yun squinted slightly. The shadow of a great pagoda erupted from his form, followed suit by razor-sharp sword qi.

The Sugato Sword.

His newfound strength gave him the ability to make use of the pagoda's full power with trivial ease. After a hundred thousand years of being sealed away, this preeminent treasure was finally shining once more.

Countless streams of sword qi gathered into an inescapable blade, slashing down at the Nine-Phoenix Casket with sundering speed.

Boom!

A deafening explosion rang out from the collision with the avian coffinbearer's body, sending the sword's wielder a few steps back. Though the Sugato Sword trembled slightly, the Nine-Phoenix Casket had fared no better—the sword light had successfully repelled it. In fact, a bloody hole was visible through its chest!

Desolate birdsong filled the air and black blood rained down from the sky, gathering into an inky river below.

"The Sugato Sword!" remarked the suspended face, becoming clearer as it spoke. Lu Yun even saw the figure of a giant coalescing around it. Figure dimming, the Exalted celestial emperor's energies seemed to be transferring to the materializing giant.

Before the Nine-Phoenix Casket could recover, the Enneaworm Coffinbearers pounced on it to quash it for good. A bone-white skeletal arm snaked out of the black coffin, grabbing the casket in a vise grip. It wanted to rip the casket apart, though its efforts were quickly stymied by a puff of black smoke from its opponent.

Suddenly, Lu Yun picked up on a grand conviction emanating from the Enneaworm Coffinbearers. His eyes darted back and forth in uncertainty, keeping the Sugato Sword at the ready but not wanting to act in haste.

"The Enneaworm Coffinbearers wish for you to help defeat that which lies in the casket," the now-visible giant suddenly said. Fully materialized, he wasn't as absurdly large as the eyes that'd preceded him, but was still several kilometers tall in his own right. A fearsome energy rippled from his body, the same kind that had slain Dongling Yuhuang.

Lu Yun snuck a glance at the celestial emperor. The man was planted upright on the ground like an unmoving corpse, no signs of life visible in him. Clearly, the emperor was dead. Giving the urge to make the emperor one of his envoys a firm headshake of denial, he turned his attention back to the two coffins.

"Neither of them are anything good. I may as well let them duke it out." A sinister smirk quirked Lu Yun's lips.

The giant hesitantly slanted his eyes. "What of the blood dragon and blood phoenix?" Lu Yun blinked at the giant, who continued gravely. "As roots of great evil, they must be destroyed!"

The Sword Barrow was protected by a massive feng shui grand influence. Even Dusk Province's restriction couldn't descend on the premises unhindered. It'd only managed to visit this tomb due to Yuchi Tianhuang's essence of metal qi breaking the layout open.

"The blood dragon slept for five thousand years beneath Mount Myriad Formation. Why did you not destroy it then?" The current Lu Yun was more than qualified to speak on equal terms with the restriction, so he was hardly afraid of the kilometers-high giant.

The blood dragon was formed over the course of five thousand years, yet the restriction had arrived in Dusk only a millennium ago. Between then and now, there was more than ample time to kill what it claimed was a threat. The fact that it hadn't meant that it had other compunctions.

The giant glowered without answering.

"No wonder..." Lu Yun snorted, finally realizing what the Nephrite celestial emperor had meant back then. If it weren't for the ancient Dusk tomb, Zhao Fengyang would've been able to erase the restriction anytime. Even now, the restriction wasn't actually here in the flesh. It was using the Exalted emperor's body and soul to manifest here!

In other words, the Exalted celestial emperor was nothing more than a puppet of the restriction! One that hadn't quite died and could withdraw its energies from him at any second.

The restriction looked at Lu Yun. There was an almost imperceptible flare of murderous intent, but it was quickly hidden away after abruptly recalling something else.

The young man ignored the giant in favor of the dueling coffins.

"Roooooar—" The largest dragon king among the Enneawyrms opened its eyes. It uttered a piercing cry that one of the phoenix heads responded to. After that, both coffins charged at him with one mind.

"Scram!" Lu Yun shouted angrily, reaching to unleash the Sugato Sword once more. An impenetrable net of blades filled the microcosm in defense. However, the coffins had apparently turned incorporeal and the Enneaworm Coffinbearers' skeletal arms had even retracted themselves.

Boom!

The two vessels ignored the fearsome barrier before them, passing straight through to disappear into Lu Yun's body. Quite upset, he quickly examined his nascent spirit, but couldn't find any traces of what had just happened.

"So the two buried in those coffins are using him as their vessel. They are using his body to return themselves to life..." the giant murmured.

Rumble.

In the next moment, the Sword of Chaos behind Lu Yun shifted.

"The sky as the sheath,

"The earth as the guard,

"Sword of Chaos,

"Come forth!" Boundless conviction spread in all directions as the entire barrow began to shake.

Chapter 196: Birth

The Sword of Chaos!

Against all odds, it began to move. A terrifying aura burst from the blade, cracking the sky and threatening to crush the realm itself in its potency. Fissures spread upon the earth in all directions, echoing the cracks in the firmament. The already-shaky ground began to cave and crumble.

"This is very bad!" The giant panicked. "The Sword of Chaos is about to be born. It is the last hope of the ancient divines. If someone of that race claims it, the dao of immortals will surely be overthrown and the rule of the divines restored!"

His chest heaved as he expanded to an even greater size, threatening to encompass this world altogether. A colossal palm grabbed at the sword.

Buzz!

Fierce vibrations from the Sword of Chaos drove him back. Shadows coalesced, walking out from the void into the plane of existence.

"With heaven as the sheath and earth as guard... O Sword of Chaos... bless the divine race!" The thought-chant repeated with real grandeur through the sphere.

"Divine obsessions!" Lu Yun was just as dismayed as the giant. True to their name, divine obsessions were the lingering obsessions of dead divines. "The divine obsessions are being absorbed into the Sword of Chaos... to be forged into the sword's will!"

His eyes sparkled with wonder to be witnessing such a sight. The extinction of the ancient divines meant that the Sword of Chaos was still incomplete. Though it looked like a finished product, it was missing the most important component of a divine sword: a will of its own.

Here and now, these gathered divine obsessions were finishing the last step in the forging of the blade. Refined obsessions would bestow upon it a will!

A fountain of black will welled up from the sword—a crystallization of the hopes and dreams of a long-lost people, the passing wishes of a bygone era. At the same time, it heralded the impending return of a glorious race that'd long been sealed in the annals of history!

Once upon a time, the ancient divines had ruled the world with an iron fist. They severed the dao of immortals, establishing in its stead the dao of divines. There was no dao of immortals, only the path of godhood!

If they did manage to return, the entire world would be thrown into chaos.

Fwoosh.

Lu Yun's body suddenly quavered as the Sugato Sword in his hand erupted with a will of its own, surging with reckless abandon toward the Sword of Chaos' torrent.

The Sugato Sword was the pinnacle of artifice. Forged by man, it could even sever connate treasures. Now, its competitive spirit was roused by the detection of a will matching its own from the Sword of Chaos that'd just been born into the world.

A battle! Which would emerge on top?

If the Sword of Chaos was a connate treasure, the Sugato Sword wouldn't have champed at the bit so. Indeed, the sword of the ancient divines had detected the presence of an opponent as well, and its will aggressively intensified in response. As luck would have it, the two swords were perfect rivals for each other in almost every way.

Two stupendous sword wills engaged in battle, their sparring ground the sky overhead. The duel of swords was a hundred times fiercer than the previous one between the coffins.

"This world will soon be destroyed." Lu Yun paled, noting the worsening spatial collapse. He didn't have much attention to spare for the Sugato Sword; instead, he darted toward the door at the edge of the realm as quickly as he could.

The destruction of any plane, even a small realm like this one, was too much for a contemporary immortal to bear. Even a real celestial emperor would be reduced to dust when facing down such overwhelming power.

The giant grabbed the Exalted emperor's body and slowly disappeared as well.

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Rrrumble...

Quaking seized the Sword Barrow, the noble tomb undergoing the same convulsions. Thousand-kilometer waves whipped up in the Great Cloudwater Lake. If not for the Black Tortoise, its waters would've destroyed the nearby township in an instantaneous deluge. As it was, the divine beast could only hold back the first instance of violent waves.

"What's going on?!" Inside the town, the already discomfited Yue Cheng and Zhu Yu jumped to their feet, dashing back to the lakeside in a few heartbeats. If the Great Cloudwater Lake was stirred up, the transportation formation in the township would surely be destroyed. Once that happened, it would also seal their future executions in stone.

No one would bother to hear explanations of any sort, nor would any entreaties be voiced on their behalf. The local wardens would only deserve death for the destruction of the transportation formation.

"What in the world.... Why are these things happening?! Why?!" Driven to the point of madness, Yue Cheng was beside himself. He wanted to stop the oncoming tsunami, he really did, but the waters were too strong for him!

Two rampaging sword wills within made it even more difficult to handle, even cutting into the Black Tortoise that kept trying to head off the tidal wave.

"Soldiers, form up! We must hold back the flood!" Zhu Yu's shrill shrieks moved her troops into position. They did as she commanded, manifesting the image of a divine beast that charged at the waves.

Anarchy reigned in the town due to impending disaster. The waters were too fierce; the Black Tortoise finally succumbed to the terrifying sword wills and disappeared in the next instant. Zhu Yu's soldiers were forced back despite their best efforts, while Yue Cheng barely had time to react before a stray wave sent him flying.

Well and truly out of control, the lake would drown the streets in a few more moments and then—

“Calm!” A crisp, feminine voice cut through the cacophony. Another image of a great Black Tortoise fell from the sky, pressing down upon the turbulent lake.

The titanic wave momentarily calmed, but the twin sword wills raging within it refused to relent. They nearly took on their physical forms again, slashing toward the silver-armored girl on top of the image’s head in a crossing attack.

Despair blossomed in Yuchi Hanxing’s eyes. The sword wills were too strong! She could use the Heavenly Formation of the Black Tortoise to calm the waters, but there was nothing she could bring to bear against the swords.

“Disperse!” A different voice boomed from beneath the lake. The wave immediately bent to his will, sword wills subsiding along with the medium. Two human figures burst out from the waters, closely followed by a large demonic frog. The amphibian carried a dozen tadpoles and a hundred or so eggs upon its back.

During his helter-skelter gauntlet run out of the Sword Barrow, Lu Yun had tossed the tomb keepers into hell out of convenience. He’d also chanced upon the panicking frog and tadpoles after collecting Qing Han.

“A... a celestial emperor?” Both Zhu Yu and Yue Cheng were stupefied. They couldn’t make out Lu Yun’s appearance, but they could feel the power radiating from him. An origin dao immortal!

There was a celestial emperor in Dusk Province? But... who could it be?

Boom!

Something seemed to explode underwater. The waters that were quenched a moment earlier rose up with renewed keenness. However, Lu Yun was ready for this very thing. He raised a hand in interception as soon as the waters erupted and tremendous energy flowed toward him from the land, fueling his seal over the lake.

No matter how the swords struggled, they couldn’t break through. Though he couldn’t resist the destructive force of an imploding realm, the two swords were a different matter.

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One long hour later, when the sun was blazing high in the sky, peace had finally recaptured Great Cloudwater Lake. The Sugato Sword had returned to his hand, having once more assumed the shape of a small pagoda.

Unfortunately, the Sword of Chaos was nowhere to be found.

Now that the Sword of Chaos has returned to the world, it’ll certainly find its way back into the divines’ hands... Lu Yun’s brows were knit with worry.

His body sagged with the weight of the world when the power of a celestial emperor dispersed. The laws and energies of heaven and earth, so crystal clear just moments before, had disappeared from his perception, and layer upon layer of pressure descended upon him. He suddenly felt like he was mired in a muddy swamp.

“Freeing oneself from this mired state... is this the goal of cultivation?” A moment of clarity came to him.

Chapter 197: Challenges

Great Cloudwater Lake was hardly recognizable, now that the mist had dispersed and the glitter of the water was gone. It was forever transformed.

Sword intent raged within and sharp sword qi bubbled on the surface. It was now a forbidden dominion that employed boundless sword intent to shred anything that encroached upon its territory. Not only that, but countless sword zombies emerged, swimming back and forth like schools of fish.

The Sword Barrow’s explosion had removed the restrictions on these creatures, thereby freeing them. Being named zombies, they possessed foggy, mostly vacant minds, but also instincts of their own. While the lake might now be a land of death for living creatures and other kinds of zombies, it was positively heaven on earth for the sword zombies.

“It’s not impossible for those sword zombies to be resurrected!” Lu Yun breathed deeply while scanning the vast lake. “This area is now off limits for ordinary people, but for some prodigies in the way of the sword like Mo Chenfeng or Dongfang Hao, it’s a sacred land of cultivation! Sadly, it’s not very useful for me,” he sighed softly.

No clear winner had emerged from the clash of the two swords, as neither could overpower the other. In the end, negation of the two magnificent sword intents was the only result. The defeated wills had merged with the lake and crafted an atmosphere that could help awaken a cultivator’s sword intent. It was perfect for those who hadn’t yet grasped theirs, or could temper it further if they had. Alas, it wasn’t of much help to Lu Yun. He could temper his own sword intent anytime he wished, thanks to the Sugato Sword.

“From now on, this lake shall be named... the Sword Lake. It will be Dusk Province’s second sacred land of cultivation!” he slowly proclaimed after a deep breath.

Beside him, Yuchi Hanxing shook violently. She finally realized how important her position had become. The Sword Lake!

Dusk Province’s second sacred land of cultivation, a locale a hundred times more significant than the transportation formation! A formation could be reestablished somewhere else, but the Sword Lake was one of a kind.

As for Yuchi Hanxing’s real identity, Lu Yun chose to keep it a secret. The truth was too cruel, although he wouldn’t hide it from her either if she was determined to find out.

“As for whether or not Dusk Province will truly develop into a transcendental sacred land of dao, that depends on our journey to Xiankan!” Lu Yun looked in the direction of the imperial capital, his eyes brimming with resolve.

In order to establish a tomb-raiding sect in the immortal world and raise it to new heights, he had to possess his own territory. A sacred land of the immortal dao? Well now, that didn’t sound half bad.

Since the lake was now the Sword Lake, Cloudwater Township, flooded by sword intent as it was, was renamed to ‘Sword Pavillion’.

The sword intent cavorting in town wasn't as overpowering as the rays in the lake. Even so, many cultivators and immortals beamed with happiness and sat down cross-legged when they noticed the change, meditating to comprehend the sword intent in the air.

By now, Yue Cheng and Zhu Yu had fully given up. It would be sheer suicide for them to remain in their position; Lu Yun would never allow outsiders to share in the benefits. The same applied to those who coveted Dusk Province. The governor would not allow those small fries to stay.

The celestial emperor who'd emerged from the lake on the previous night had quelled the Sword Lake with a few words. That terrifying sight had imprinted itself deeply in Yue Cheng and Zhu Yue's minds. On that very day, the two of them handed in their letters of resignation to the Nephrite court, asking to be transferred somewhere else.

However, the imperial court was currently undergoing a changing of the guard, so the two had to at least wait for the coronation of the new celestial emperor before they could leave. Meanwhile, it went without saying that Yuchi Hanxing was the head official of Sword Pavillon.

Heavily wounded, the Black Tortoise returned to the Scroll of Shepherding Immortals to rest and recover, while the Spiriteater Demon Frog accepted Yuchi Hanxing as its new mistress.

The frog and dozen tadpoles were blessed with thick skin and durable flesh that made them impermeable to the lake's sword intent. In fact, the big fellows had been feasting on sword zombies ever since their recovery. Change, no change, it mattered little to them. In the end, the Spiriteater Demon Frog even solemnly became the lake's guardian beast.

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The center of Nephrite Major, near Life Province's border.

A giant transportation formation noisily activated with a release of dazzling, multicolored rays of light.

"There he is!" the immortals standing watch over the formation gasped.

Boom!

The formation shook gently as a giant fortress ship appeared in the air. Without pause, the gorgeous, grandiose ship took to the sky and sailed toward Xiankan.

"Look, that's Lu Yun. He's finally here!"

"The number one youth sovereign of the immortal world!"

"Governor of Dusk Province!" Numerous exclamations instantly arose in the surroundings.

"Lu Yun! Stop at once, I'm challenging you here and now!!" A spirited yell rose from the ground, quickly followed by others.

"I was too busy cultivating when the battles occurred in Dusk Province. Otherwise, my name would be listed as one of the youth sovereigns!"

"Hey kid! I might be an immortal, but I still don't acknowledge your title! Stop and fight me if you have what it takes! Show us your reputation isn't only hot air!"

“Lu Yun, do you dare accept my challenge?!”

“Governor of Dusk, come down here and fight!”

Lu Yun frowned faintly at the din of challenges rising from below.

“No need to pay them any attention.” Qing Han’s eyes flashed with contempt at the cultivators and immortals hooting and hollering after the ship. “Nothing but gutless, opportunistic flies looking to make a name for themselves.”

Lu Yun blinked and hesitated. “If I refuse all challengers today, won’t people say that I shied away from fighting in Life Province and ran away with my tail between my legs?”

“Hm?” Qing Han stared into space, menace flashing across his expression shortly thereafter.

That Dusk Province would become a future sacred land of immortal dao was set in stone. The newly formed Sword Lake was enough to drive all sword cultivators crazy by itself, not to mention the Sword Tower in Dusk City.

In the world of immortals, countless people now coveted the city. It was still an embryo for now, without the formidable foundations of a full-fledged sacred land. Anyone could still hope to become the master of this future pearl. Shying away from challenges would be a tremendous blow to Lu Yun’s reputation.

“Stop the ship!”

“Aye aye!” Holder of the spirit key, Ge Long was currently steering the vessel in Lu Yun’s stead. At the imperial envoy’s order, he hastily halted the ship and Qing Han immediately dropped down from the bow, sword in hand.

“Qing Han, Lu Yun’s the one we’re challenging. What are you showing your face for?”

Qing Han possessed remarkable fame in Life Province. Very few were those who’d never heard of him. The Qing Clan’s walking disaster, harbinger of ill luck... and at the same time, the little darling of the Twin Devils Qing Buyi and Chen Xiao. Hence, quite a few heads ached when they saw him jump down from the ship.

“Aren’t you all challenging Lu Yun?” Sword in hand, floating in the air, Qing Han sniffed coolly, “He’s the number one youth sovereign. Is he someone that any misfit is entitled to fight?”

“Hmph!” Some couldn’t help but harrumph with disdain, but they were too intimidated by Qing Han to do much else.

“Spin it all you like. Don’t tell me your youth sovereign or whatever is afraid of us? He’s hiding behind you!” The immortal who’d publicly challenged Lu Yun earlier sneered.

“Think of it how you will. To challenge him, you’ll need to overcome me first.” Qing Han’s lips gently curved up. “As you all know, I’m only a good-for-nothing who has to rely on others. If you can’t even defeat someone like me, how are you worthy of fighting a youth sovereign?”

1. Ask not how a town becomes a pavilion... I know not. I fear LY's naming capabilities are on the same level as JC of SOTR lol!

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Chapter 198: Flying Head Technique

Qing Han's words gave everyone pause. Defeat him for the right to challenge Lu Yun? Who didn't know that in Life Province, and Xiankan in particular, Qing Han was the foremost young master to avoid!

While the young master himself didn't like stirring up trouble and rarely made waves, he was an absolute nightmare when bullied. Chen Xiao and Qing Buyi were two demons who wouldn't think twice about killing anyone foolish enough to provoke this young master.

Though Qing Han's cultivation level in the spirit realm was itself an outstanding feat, no one ever took note of it. All they could see was him "throwing his weight around" under the protection of his two elder brothers. Over time, Life Province associated him with 'good for nothing', 'silver spoon', and 'plague lord'.

"Qing Han, have you lost your mind?" the true immortal snorted coldly. "Who doesn't know that you're the number one hornet's nest in Nephrite Major? Fight you? If someone really beats you, the two demons behind you will tear them to pieces!

"Hehehe, this so-called number one youth sovereign has quite a few tricks up his sleeve, huh! Hiding behind someone who's off-limits? In the end, he's nothing but just a wimp afraid of facing us!"

Qing Han resheathed his sword and placed his hands behind his back. Striking a stance in midair, he surveyed the cultivators and immortals crowding the area. There were about five hundred would-be challengers.

"A youth sovereign is dauntless and indomitable. He forges onward, no matter the dangers," he murmured. "In Dusk Province, Lu Yun slew a peerless immortal and faced down a dao immortal. He reigned undefeated, overpowering half of the geniuses in the immortal world. Was cowardice ever to be found in him?

"And what of you people? Cowards who don't even have the courage to fight trash like me. Yet you still dare challenge him? How delusional. You're out of your minds!" Mockery curved Qing Han's lips.

"Whatever, talk as much as you want, but it all comes down to him being afraid to fight." The immortal smirked coolly. "I hear that Lu Yun's relationship with the Dusk restriction is unclear. Killing a peerless immortal, fighting a dao immortal? Who knows if he's the one who did it, or that so-called restriction?

"I hardly think that a mere spirit realm cultivator can defeat a peerless immortal! Prove it through accepting my challenge!"

Boom.

The energies of an immortal blossomed from his figure the moment his voice fell, accompanied by the unbridled power of an immortal-level aura. "Come out and fight!"

Qing Han narrowed his eyes as a misty purple glow flared from his hand. Ready to step forward and fight in Lu Yun's name, the governor's voice rang out leisurely, "Fine. It seems a fight is unavoidable."

Many grinned with delight at these words. They weren't genuinely interested in fighting the governor. All they wanted was to force him out of the fortress ship!

As long as he did so, there would be people enough to deal with him. This was Life Province, after all, a place where any immortal could unleash their true powers without worry.

However, the governor's ship's defenses were simply too powerful. Innumerable ninth-rank treasures were mounted on board. Even a dao immortal would need to invest enormous time and effort to breach the vessel's defenses.

It was impossible to quickly kill Lu Yun this way; Nephrite Major's powerhouses would arrive in the interim, thereby ruining their plan. Therefore... they'd come not to challenge Lu Yun, but to lure him out of the fortress ship!

This was a scheme solely intended to kill the governor. If Lu Yun were to refuse, a mountain would soon grow out of a molehill. Purposefully disseminated rumors would spread throughout the world, staining Lu Yun's reputation. That would also provide enough of an excuse so that certain persons could use it as a pretext to force his resignation.

Of course, if he were reckless enough to leave the ship or allow the challengers inside, then his death was all but assured. Whatever he chose, the plot was simply infallible.

"However—" Lu Yun suddenly added, "—just like Qing Han says, the line of people who want to challenge me can run all the way from Dusk City to Xiankan. I'd die from sheer exhaustion if I fought you all one by one."

The true immortal was about to jeer, but Lu Yun forestalled the man. "Therefore, you have to first earn the right to meet me in battle. Hm, you lot are pretty spineless and chicken-hearted to the point of fearing that Qing Han might accidentally kill or cripple you. How about this, I have an elderly golden core servant. If you can defeat him, I'll come out and fight you."

Humiliation and anger roiled in the crowd. Scared of Qing Han? Afraid that he'd kill or cripple them? What the hell was this fool talking about?! They were just unwilling to provoke Qing Han's two fiendish backers!

His next words inflamed them to new heights and installed an itch to tear the governor apart with their bare hands. Almost all of those present were spirit realm cultivators. Perhaps they weren't the greatest of geniuses, but they were certainly far from mediocre. Dispatching a golden core servant against them? That was humiliation, pure and simple!

Lu Yun was obviously purposefully shaming them. But what could they say? As long as they could lure him down from the ship, they could force themselves to endure anything.

"Fine!" the true immortal shouted through gritted teeth. "Have your old servant come down and fight me!" Intense humiliation flashed in his eyes, but for the sake of his clan's grand plan, he would swallow his fury. First, kill the golden core slave, then lure down Lu Yun.

“Tsk tsk, just look at you. You’re scared of a spirit realm cultivator like Qing Han, but you’re full of swagger against my golden core servant... I wonder what kind of clan you grew up in,” Lu Yun’s voice echoed mockingly once again.

Resisting the urge to puke blood, the true immortal snarled like a wild beast. Meanwhile, Qing Han squinted in an attempt not to laugh. A golden core servant? He clearly remembered when said servant’s head beat back the Feng peak august immortal!

On the fortress ship, Ge Long pitifully handed over the spirit key to Lu Yun, shook his blue robes, adjusted the steward’s cap on his head, and stepped off the ship.

“It really is an old servant at the golden core realm!” Many cultivators below inhaled sharply when they saw Ge Long. “Is Lu Yun just trying to humiliate us?”

They’d thought Lu Yun was just exaggerating for effect. Surely, he’d send a spirit realm cultivator, at least, or even an immortal. But there was no mistaking it. The servant was indeed only at the golden core realm!

“Die!!” Fury bubbled to the surface when the true immortal spotted Ge Long. Sword light flashed from his hand and slashed at the ‘ant’s’ neck in a swift and decisive strike, not even giving him a chance to react.

Pff—

Ge Long’s head ejected high into the air. Blood geysered from his neck as his head dropped heavily on the ground, followed by the rest of his corpse.

“Lu Yun, come out and fight!!” The true immortal’s black hair floated proudly in the breeze, his immortal sword growing increasingly brighter. Here and now, he had but one desire: to kill Lu Yun with his own hands.

“You there, what are you talking about? You haven’t even beaten this steward yet, but you’re thinking of challenging His Excellency?” a voice suddenly came from the ground.

Unbidden, eyes swiveled in that direction. To general stupefaction, the old servant who had been decapitated stood back up, the headless corpse juggling his head back and forth.

“Shameless junior, how dare you attack this steward by surprise.... Eat this, Flying Head Technique!” Under dumbstruck stares, the golden core servant threw his head at the true immortal.

Bang!

The head smashed viciously into the immortal’s face, right smack in the middle. The man screamed in pain and fell down from the sky.

Chapter 199: Straight Ahead!

What the...!

The true immortal, who hadn't even announced his name, was knocked out cold when Ge Long's head made impact. Universal shock mirrored on the crowd's faces when they saw him tumble down from the sky. A casual beckon returned the head to Ge Long's hand.

"Anyone else?" Hefting his head, the servant slowly floated back up and coldly announced, "To challenge milord, you must first get past me."

Resting his head back on his neck, a barely perceptible flash of light reattached it to his body. Below, countless cultivators stared at him, their eyes threatening to pop out of their sockets.

"Are you man or ghost?!" someone asked haltingly after a long moment.

"Mind your own business." Ge Long glared. "What does it matter either way? Defeat me if you want to challenge His Excellency, or get lost!"

The surrounding cultivators gave their best imitation of cicadas in winter. Mute as mice, even the handful of immortals who'd been ready to step forward hesitated. Immortals in the same cultivation realm wouldn't give them pause, to say nothing of a golden core servant, but this fellow was truly too abnormal. He could even frisk about with his head chopped off... and then use the severed head as a thrown weapon!

What kind of monster was he?

Many were tempted to fall back, as the Governor of Dusk was no longer an easy target to pick on. There were naturally rules to follow when challenging a youth sovereign. One had to send an official challenge, select a location, and even invite powerhouses as witnesses. This current mess of random hollering and insults was unheard of. Just about anyone was walking in and having a go!

Lu Yun was entirely within his rights to have someone screen his challengers. For someone to bark at a youth sovereign when they couldn't even defeat his servant was sheer insanity!

"The same goes for the seventeen golden and three arcane immortals hidden nearby. This steward allows you to come forth as well and challenge me!" Ge Long shouted as he suddenly pointed at various spots nearby.

"Seventeen golden immortals and three arcane immortals!" Qing Han immediately realized the implications. His expression turned somber at the drama that was unfolding: this was a ploy to kill Lu Yun.

The hidden immortals would attack together the second Lu Yun revealed himself, and it would be impossible to withstand such an assault. Full-fledged golden immortals couldn't be compared to peerless immortals whose cultivation had been sealed to the august immortal realm. The latter might be a little stronger than most august immortals, but they were far from the strength of a golden immortal.

In Cloudwater Township—or rather, the Sword Pavillion—Lu Yun had had to rely on a bloodcorpse to deal with the half-step golden immortal, borrowing its strength to kill the immortal. He stood no chance against proper golden immortals, not to mention the three arcane immortals that were also present.

Qing Han narrowed his eyes, his gaze sweeping over each and every person at the scene, firmly engraving their appearances and auras in his mind.

“Hehe, why are mighty golden and arcane immortals running away? What a bunch of weaklings.” Sensing the departure of the nearby immortals, Ge Long laughed out loud, rather proud of himself.

“Alright, let’s go.” Standing on the fortress ship, Lu Yun gently shook his head as he watched Ge Long below. Not even he knew what kind of creature the steward was. He wouldn’t even have been aware of the man’s formidable combat potential, if not for Ge Long saving Qing Han the last time. Each august immortal from the Feng Clan had been an extraordinary powerhouse in their own right, but Ge Long’s head had sent them all flying.... It was simply impossible to measure the man’s fighting prowess by his cultivation realm.

After Qing Han and Ge Long had returned to the ship, the grandiose vessel slowly flew away under the crowd’s unwilling stare, making for Xiankan. Now that the immortals who’d been lying in wait had left, the cultivators naturally no longer wished to challenge Lu Yun. That would simply be suicide. However, the way Qing Han had looked at them before leaving made them uneasy.

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Along the way to the capital, Lu Yun refrained from setting even half of a foot outside the ship. A malicious consciousness had zeroed in on him the moment he’d entered Life Province. If he dared to leave the fortress ship, he’d be immediately killed by the consciousness’s owner.

Xiankan now lay right in front of his eyes.

“What an imposing imperial tomb!” Lu Yun observed the capital, astonishment plain on his face.

An imperial tomb! Xiankan was unexpectedly established above a tomb!

“The legacies of the world’s nine majors mostly originate from the tombs of ancient immortal emperors. The nine celestial capitals are all built above these tombs,” explained Qing Han. Far from being a secret, this was a well-known fact. However, no one but Lu Yun could’ve laid eyes on Xiankan and immediately recognized that it was built above a tomb.

Of course, Qing Han was aware of his friend’s abilities, so he wasn’t surprised in the least.

Xiankan was a thousand kilometers wide and resembled a giant curtain of light from afar. Despite a population of millions upon millions of members of Nephrite Major’s innumerable clans, the capital didn’t seem crowded. That stemmed from the innumerable small worlds within the metropolis, many of which weren’t even activated.

It was a miniature universe unto itself.

Xiankan was the center of Nephrite Major’s politics, power, wealth, culture, and resources. No other place in the major could be mentioned in the same breath. All of the major’s houses and clans possessed their own territories, but their headquarters were located in the capital. As a matter of fact, the vast majority of most clans lived in Xiankan. To leave Xiankan was to be exiled. To leave meant to fall behind and be overtaken by the other clans.

“Dusk Province is nothing but a cesspool by comparison.” Lu Yun bluntly gave his province such a qualifier.

Qing Han shook his head, but didn’t comment.

“Halt!” an expansive voice suddenly resonated in the sky. “No flight apparatus are allowed within fifty kilometers of the capital!”

“What?!” Qing Han immediately erupted in anger. “Jin Hexi, what do you mean by this?!”

Flight treasures forbidden within fifty kilometers of the city? Such a rule had never existed. On the contrary, all sorts of flying vessels could head straight into Xiankan.

After all, the city was a miniature universe. Given the egregious distance between the various locations inside, even immortals would exhaust their energy, if forced to ride their swords. Flight treasures were the only convenient means of transportation.

Yet someone was now saying that flight treasures were forbidden within Xiankan? What manner of madness was this?

Lu Yun’s eye also twitched. A colossal fortress ship slowly overtook theirs from behind and entered the fifty-kilometer boundary of Xiankan. No one stopped it. Clearly, this was yet another obstacle aimed squarely at him.

An immortal wearing golden armor stood in front of Lu Yun’s ship, his figure radiating a golden haze.

“Didn’t you hear me? All flight treasures are banned within fifty kilometers of the capital. Please disembark, or turn around and depart.” The armored immortal’s voice was detached, and his expression haughty.

“Who is he?” Lu Yun asked Qing Han.

“Jin Hexi, a golden immortal from the Jin Clan.” Qing Han’s chest gently heaved up and down from anger. “They’re a Feng Clan vassal.”

“A Feng Clan vassal?” An evil grin appeared on Lu Yun’s lips. “I’ve already killed an august immortal of the Feng Clan, so what’s there to be afraid of from a vassal golden immortal? Ge Long, ramming speed!”

“Aye aye, sir!” Ge Long circulated his internal energy and poured it madly into the spirit key in his hand.
Boom!

The ship trembled and sent out rays of light in every color as it hurtled toward Jin Hexi.

“S-stop! I wasn’t done yet!” Qing Han wanted to cry. “Jin Hexi is the commander of the Xiankan imperial troops—”

But it was far too late.

The giant fortress ship rumbled forward and made straight for Jin Hexi. The latter stared, flabbergasted, disbelief shining in his eyes.

Chapter 200: Corpse Refiners

From in and out of view, immortals that were poised to make a move against Lu Yun could only look on in shock. Jin Hexi was the commander of the imperial troops in the capital!

No matter the cultivation level of the imperial defenders, they represented the imperial family's authority. As the commander of the imperial troops, Jin Hexi was one of the most influential figures in Nephrite Capital. Even core members of the Feng Clan showed him deference.

And yet...

The absurdly extravagant fortress ship slammed into Jin Hexi with great ferocity, expelling all of his inner energy, flattening him, and squashing his blood, flesh, and bones. What remained was a large meat patty stuck to the bottom of the ship's bow.

Still, he was alive.

Golden immortals were extremely resilient. Even upon the destruction of flesh, bone, and muscle, they could still recover, due to the golden immortal creeds within their bodies.

Rumble.

After an enormous reverberation, the fortress ship continued its way into Xiankan beneath the crowd's flabbergasted stares.

"Stop, stop right now!!" someone yelled. "Are you starting a coup, Lu Yun?! Put the commander down!"

The voice belonged to the newly arrived imperial army, but they couldn't do anything about the situation. All of them were august immortals, while that fortress ship had just pulped a golden immortal. A combined charge from all of them wouldn't even slow down the ship.

They, too, had battle formations at their fingertips, but deploying the formations required their commander's guidance. Said commander was currently a meat pie plastered on their enemy.

Lu Yun stood atop the bow and cast his gaze at the distant capital with his hand on the side of the ship, ignoring the commotion from the imperial army. Suddenly, a giant figure descended and slammed into the vessel, which shuddered and halted with a rumble.

Roar!

An inhuman growl rang throughout the ship. Lu Yun's pupils contracted with alarm.

A zombie!

A zombie covered in green fur stood by the bow and held back the ship with one hand, peeling Jin Hexi away with the other. It looked like a tall and burly middle-aged man under the fur, and it was at least a peerless immortal.

A dark look flickered through Lu Yun's face before he schooled his expression into one of indifference.

"What a big yum-yum!!" Drooling, Ge Long's eyes were glued to the zombie.

"Are there others in this world who can command zombies?" Lu Yun scanned the zombie before shifting his gaze to another faint figure in midair.

Encircled by a leisurely grace, the newcomer wore gray robes and was a golden immortal as well. Standing quietly in the air, he raised a flute to his mouth and played.

“Grrr!” Melodies from the flute sent the zombie into further frenzy. It reached out and brought Jin Hexi off the ship.

Lu Yun struck out his arm to prevent Ge Long from lunging at the zombie. “Rumors speak of immortals commanding zombies in battle. You must be one of these mythical beings.”

“Jin Heyi of the Corpse Refiners in Truespirit Major. A pleasure, Your Excellency.” The newcomer put away his flute and landed on the ship, bowing slightly to Lu Yun. “My younger brother has given offense out of youthful recklessness. I hope Your Excellency may find it in yourself to forgive him.”

“Oh?” Lu Yun cocked his head at the man and the zombie behind, taking a closer look. The very image of docility, the zombie’s crimson eyes were fixed in an unblinking stare at the fortress ship.

Jin Hexi’s body had recovered, but his extravagant golden armor had been shattered. He looked extremely bedraggled, and stared on with dread and confusion. Was this Dusk governor insane? How dare he attack the commander of the imperial army right outside Xiankan? Wasn’t he worried he would offend the imperial family?

“Corpse Refiners? Never heard of ‘em.” Lu Yun shook his head. None of his five envoys knew about them either.

“Is your sect about to enter the world?” Qing Han asked tensely. Clearly, he knew the sect and what made the mysterious group terrifying. He just hadn’t expected someone from the Jin Clan to be a disciple.

Jin Heyi nodded. “The nine celestial emperors have entered closed door cultivation to attempt breaking through the dao immortal realm. A golden age is upon the world of immortals. We have stayed away from the mundane world for tens of thousands of years, but it is now time for us to return and gain a foothold in this new world.”

“I see.” Lu Yun nodded. “Since an elite disciple of the Corpse Refiners has spoken, I’ll let the commander off the hook. Let’s go.”

He waved a hand, signalling Ge Long. Casting one final longing look at the zombie, the old steward tightened his grasp on the spirit key and steered the fortress ship into the capital.

“That Jin Heyi wanted to befriend you,” Qing Han said later with some hesitation.

Lu Yun’s expression darkened. “But I’m not interested.”

“What’s wrong?” The governor’s reaction had startled Qing Han. He could tell that Lu Yun was suppressing his intent to kill.

“Corpse Refiners... Corpse Refiners... Heh, no wonder they’ve turtled down for so long.” A sinister smile tugged at Lu Yun’s lips. “They refine living zombies!”

“What?!” Qing Han’s jaw dropped. “Living zombies?”

“They refine living people into zombies!” Murderous intent colored Lu Yun’s voice. He was no saint, and wouldn’t have stuck his nose in this, but the Tome of Life and Death bestowed upon him both the power

and the responsibility to maintain the balance between life and death. Refining living people into zombies shattered that balance and violated enormous taboos.

He didn't find this kind of duty irksome. Back on Earth, he'd gathered an organization of expert tomb raiders to enforce order, preventing other tomb raiders from affecting the world at large. If he'd stayed any longer, he was worried that he'd channel the power of the dread zombie and kill Jin Heyi then and there.

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Outside the capital.

"He wants me dead." Jin Heyi smiled as he watched Lu Yun's ship flying into the capital. "So I've encountered a moralist right after returning Nephrite Major. Heh, how interesting! Oh, how I look forward to refining him into a zombie."

A malicious smile split his peaceful demeanor. Next to him, Jin Hexi couldn't help the shudder that ran down his spine.

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Lu Yun allowed himself to relax only after he'd entered the capital. There were too many experts in Life Province, which was why he'd spent the entire trip on the ship. He wasn't safe until he reached Xiankan.