

Emperor 2601

[Chapter 2601: Corpses And Chaos](#)

The corpses stealthily entered the city as if wanting to be part of this world.

During this process, Li Qiye in his palace opened his eyes. They flashed up and illuminated the depth of the earth.

He suddenly stood up and started heading out.

“Young Noble? What’s the matter?” This woke up Wu Youzheng and Lin Yixue who were sleeping near the gate.

He didn’t say anything and got out. He looked around the night and finally noticed a pile of debris.

The other two were right behind him. Youzheng saw his expression and knew that something big was happening.

He quietly asked: “Young Noble, what happened?”

“Someone’s here.” Li Qiye chuckled and focused his vision, undeterred by the night curtains.

“Someone’s here?” Yixue was surprised.

No one dared to take half a step inside Heavensound recently. Everyone took a long way around out of fear.

But now, there was an intruder so late at night? Who was actually so bold?

“Bam!” The pile of rocks scattered everywhere. A muscular man crawled out while holding a spear and had a long blade of grass in his mouth. He started walking towards the palace.

“Who’s that?” Yixue felt that this man didn’t have the friendliest intention.

“Not who but what. It’s a corpse.” Youzheng stared intensely at him and found a lack of vitality before shouting.

“Yes, a corpse coming back to life.” Li Qiye wasn’t surprised at all.

Yixue was shocked and took one step back. Though she was no stranger to corpses, one coming back to life and walking in front of them was a different story.

“Crack!” More mud separated, giving way to another hand. It was an old man with gray hair, also walking towards the palace.

“Look, over there, it’s another corpse.” Yixue pointed at it; her finger trembling. She immediately hid behind Li Qiye, thinking that there was no safer place.

“That’s Elder Lin of White Orchid!” Youzheng was shocked to see him.

“Master, are, are you sure? Didn’t you say Elder Lin is the number one expert of White Orchid, why is he like this now?” Yixue said in a daze.

"I don't know. We might not be considered close friends but I've drunk with him several times. I'm not mistaken." Youzheng spoke with a solemn expression.

"Didn't White Orchid disappear? Why, why are they appearing here now?" Yixue became frightened.

The scariest part was the distance between the two cities. It must be one million miles away or so yet these corpses were still here. [1]

"Over there, another one!" Yixue shouted and pointed at a different direction and inched closer to Li Qiye - the only place she felt safe.

"Bam!" More corpses came out further away from the ground.

"What the hell is going on, why are the dead coming back to life? Are all of them coming back?" Youzheng turned pale and shuddered despite having seen many strange things in his life.

"No, just darkness is coming." Li Qiye said with a flashing glint in his eyes.

"What, what will happen when, when the darkness comes?" Yixue leaned on him while trembling.

Li Qiye said: "All of you will be food. No, the entire world will be nothing but nourishment."

"They eat humans?" She got goosebumps all over.

"Yes." He nodded: "Unfortunately, it still won't be enough to satiate the incoming monster's appetite."

"They're coming." Youzheng said as the corpses drew closer to the palace.

Li Qiye was as relaxed as always, resembling a master welcoming his guests.

Of course, this scenario also happened all over Mingluo.

"Hey brother, where are you heading to when it's so late?" A cultivator met a corpse on an empty street. He didn't recognize the guy and started a small talk.

"Pluff!" A saber penetrated his chest from the back all the way to the front.

He looked down and saw his own blood dripping from the blade. Another corpse had quietly snuck up behind him and pierced through his body.

When he looked up again, the first corpse was standing right in front of him and leaped forward to bite his neck.

The corpse in the back also bit the other side. The sound of blood being sucked and swallowed resounded.

"Ah!" Screams happened since cultivators were ambushed by the corpses.

"Stop, you monster!" One friend saw this happening to his companion and took out his sword, successfully decapitating the corpse.

"Brother Hu." The victim fell but was caught by his friend. Unfortunately, the guy was already dead; his whole body turned black.

“What the hell?” His friend was shocked but he noticed some movements.

The decapitated head actually started rolling towards its body and connected back to the neck. It then got up and ran.

“Monster, where do you think you’re going?!” The friend immediately gave chase.

However, he didn’t get far before stopping because three corpses stood side by side in front of him.

He leaped backward, wanting to run but three more corpses have appeared out of nowhere to block his path. “Die!” He roared before swinging his sword.

“Ah!” Screams echoed across Mingluo.

No one noticed the infiltration in the beginning. After mounting an assault, the corpses caught many cultivators off guard and began sucking their blood.

Furious cries of battle also resounded. Many experts joined the battle in order to kill these monsters.

“The dead are coming back to life, watch it!” Warnings also spread.

Unfortunately, this wasn’t enough to stop the screamings. The corpses weren’t that strong but they couldn’t be killed, not even after decapitation.

“Clank! Clank! Clank!” Skirmishes occurred throughout the area.

“Watch out, everyone, they’ve infiltrated the main areas. Find them and kill them right away, be thorough!” A master commanded.

The city erupted with commotion. One could see corpses everywhere now on the streets and alleys.

Fortunately, there were enough visiting cultivators with ample power to kill these corpses.

“Let’s go, don’t let them run away!” These experts roared and gave chase to the fleeing corpses.

### [Chapter 2602: Men Versus Corpses](#)

“Kill them all!” Roars of battle emanated across Mingluo.

In the beginning, the corpses had the upper hand and killed many cultivators before they could react.

However, after the other side regained their wits, they held strong and quickly went on the offensive.

Of course, the natives alone would have been massacred. The influx of powerful cultivators from the big sects and systems allowed the living to reverse the tide.

It didn’t take long before the corpses were hunted down. A few didn’t get to do anything before being completely surrounded on all sides.

Strangely enough, even decapitation wasn’t enough to kill them. The body would try to find its missing head.

Seeing this scene left the spectators in horror, albeit on a brief moment. These battle-hardened cultivators instantly chopped them to pieces.

Some corpses actually fled successfully by digging into the ground and disappearing down there. The pursuers couldn't do anything about it.

"Where did these creatures come from?" This question popped up.

No one could give a good answer since they appeared all of a sudden overnight.

"They, they're the missing natives of White Orchid." A local quietly said after recognizing some corpses.

People exchanged glances after hearing this. One expert said: "Why are the missing citizens of White Orchid here on top of ambushing us?"

No one had an answer for this either.

"It's coming at last." One ancestor said with narrowed eyes.

"Ancestor, what's coming?" His junior asked curiously.

"The immortal stone of Stone Harmony. It seems to be coming out, I've waited long enough." His eyes pulsed with light.

"Immortal stone? Ancestor, is it really amazing and precious?" The junior was stirred.

The young ones followed their seniors here and actually didn't know the reason. Only a few of them heard about the immortal stone by chance.

"It's a stone with no written records." The ancestor solemnly explained: "According to the rumors, the founder of Stone Harmony found this stone, allowing him to prove his grand dao and become a progenitor. Later on, it was buried deep in the system and contained endless power relating to eternal life."

He paused for a bit and looked at his junior: "Because of this, other progenitors have come in search for it after the decline of the system but they couldn't find anything. However, the fact that it can still stay in Imperial instead of falling down to Myriad shows that the stone is still around here. People think that due to recent events, this stone is about to emerge so that's why these various powers are here. Otherwise, what's the point of traveling so far just to visit this godforsaken area?"

"It's that amazing and has mysteries about immortality?" The juniors nearby became emotional.

"Even if it doesn't have anything to do with immortality, it should still be plenty incredible since it can provide enough power for the system to stay around. It might be comparable to a dao source in terms of power replenishment." The ancestor elaborated.

"Right, so possessing this stone is akin to possessing a dao source." One junior became excited.

Anyone would love to possess the power of a dao source, regardless of who they are.

In fact, this group wasn't the only one with this realization. Other ancestors saw this scene and became excited. They made careful preparation for the stone to come out.

"Are you sure about this?" One ancestor asked his peer.

After all, they came specifically for this stone. If it didn't show up, then everyone would have wasted their time. Remember, even progenitors have failed to find anything in the past.

"Don't you see the corpses? Why did they come back to life? The most logical answer is the stone fueling them power." His peer said with conviction.

"So the rumor about its immortality effect is true." The ancestor took a deep breath while his eyes flashed with excitement.

This was the same scenario seen everywhere - old ancestors with withering vitality desperate to find something that can prolong their life. They would pay any price for it.

The appearance of these corpses became solid evidence for the effects of the immortal stone.

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Back in Heavensound Ruins, corpses were crawling out of the ground and heading for the palace. They instantly surrounded Li Qiye's group.

"What should we do?" The frightened Yixue didn't know what to do because of her inexperience so she quietly asked Li Qiye.

He chuckled and raised his finger, shooting out refined flames towards the corpses.

"Poof!" The corpses didn't even have the chance to squirm before turning into ashes scattering into the winds.

Youzheng shuddered after seeing this. The same fate would happen to him if these flames were to touch him at all.

Li Qiye purposely left one corpse alive. Before it could lunge at him, he spread out his palm to immobilize it.

He grabbed and brought it back into the palace.

The other two were afraid of more corpses showing up so they got back in and tightly shut the door.

"Young Noble, why are you catching it?" Youzheng asked.

"For a better look." Li Qiye's eyes illuminated the corpse.

"What's there to look at, it's a corpse..." Yixue muttered to herself before backing off.

Li Qiye began moving his fingers, not wasting a single movement. The skin of the corpse started peeling, inch by inch. To be more exact, this was a flaying process.

The two were creeped out and quickly turned their head away.

It didn't take long before the corpse was fully peeled from top to bottom. Only a dried mess was below, devoid of life.

"It's really dead." There was a lack of life and vitality. The flesh and muscle became as dried as wood.

However, it still maintained its initial appearance without collapsing. Something must have drained all of its life force in the blink of an eye. This was a very bizarre occurrence.

### [Chapter 2603: Flaying](#)

“What happened here?” Youzheng was surprised to see the state of this corpse versus a regular body.

White Orchid being devoured in one night was already strange and shocking enough. But now, the appearance of these missing locals appearing so far away on top of their current state? Youzheng had no idea what was going on.

“Devourment. They’re only puppets now.” Li Qiye said without any surprise.

“Puppets?” Youzheng was startled at the start but after thinking about it, this made perfect sense.

Why did the corpses come back to kill people? Perhaps a terrible mastermind was behind all of this.

“Is this the work of darkness?” He asked.

Li Qiye didn’t answer. He flicked his finger and began dividing the flayed corpse.

The individual muscles, tendons, and veins of the corpse were perfectly taken out. Next came the internal organs; no damage happened during the removal process.

“Ugh...” Yixue became curious enough to take a look only to start being nauseous and needed to run out.

Li Qiye didn’t mind. His gaze was focused on the corpse, darting back and forth. Eventually, the pieces came back together in a flawless manner.

The unraveling and reassembling process didn’t leave a single cut. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that not even a single strand of hair was missing, with the exception of one thing taken out by Li Qiye.

He took a careful look and Youzheng did the same. It was a tiny stone, only around the length of a pinky, flat and black with a faint luster.

Why was this thing inside the corpse?

“Young Noble, what is it?” Youzheng asked.

“A seed.” Li Qiye responded.

“A seed?” Youzheng was momentarily stunned before speaking again: “For what?”

This was the first time he has seen or heard something this strange.

“A fruit-bearing seed.” Li Qiye said.

Youzheng had no response.

Li Qiye continued staring at the tiny stone as if it hid an amazing secret.

“Time to go to the source.” His eyes coldly pierced through the ages.

He raised both hands and a maelstrom appeared before them. It was only around the size of a washbasin.

Numerous dao laws circulated in the maelstrom with increasing speed, seemingly wanting to disassemble everything. All mysteries would slowly unravel while inside this dao maelstrom.

Youzheng became dizzy while looking at it. He felt himself being sucked in and that his very being was slowly disintegrating along with the dao he has cultivated.

For example, his chosen grand dao, merit laws, and various techniques. They were being separated entirely.

In other words, the moment he entered this maelstrom, he no longer had any secret to speak of. His whole cultivation experience appeared before Li Qiye.

The frightened man became afraid and instantly retreated to the side, averting his gaze.

Li Qiye threw the tiny stone into the maelstrom.

"Splash!" It carried a massive power and created a tsunami of dao. It seemed to notice the danger looming in the maelstrom so it tried to escape.

Youzheng was surprised again. This stone seemed to have its own consciousness and life.

"This thing is alive?" Youzheng asked in horror. Having something akin to a parasite planted in one's body was quite terrifying.

Like Li Qiye had said, this was a seed purposely planted into the corpse.

That's the reason why they came back to life and started ambushing other people. The seeds were the source of it all while the corpses were mere bags of skin - just puppets.

Unfortunately, it couldn't escape from Li Qiye's absolute suppression and the maelstrom and succumbed to being separated.

"Zzz." It made a groan-like sound during the slow disintegration process.

It was being grinded down, inch by inch. Beneath the rock exterior were strands of black light. They also became prey to the maelstrom.

Darkness has revealed its true form. This tiny law was virtually imperceptible to the naked eye. Black in full and immensely profound on top of possessing an evil aura.

Not much was left of the stone now. The disintegrating specks of dust actually emitted a faint luster like grains of radiance on the verge of extinguishing.

They were weak and few in number, yet there was an indescribable sense of sacredness, almost like an immortal energy.

"How strange." Youzheng was surprised. A while ago, the removed parts were clearly evil but now, these light grains were actually sacred in nature.

"This is the power of the famed immortal stone that people are talking about." Li Qiye said.

“The stone exists?” Youzheng wondered.

Li Qiye didn’t answer, still glaring at the maelstrom.

“Pop!” Another force attacked the maelstrom after the process was finished, causing waves through the rotation.

The black laws in the maelstrom came together to form a tiny, black monster. It was as big as a fist and looked similar to an octopus. However, its tentacles were full of barbs.

“What the hell is this now?” Youzheng felt an evil aura causing him to stagger backward out of fear.

“It’s only a weak consciousness.” Li Qiye said insipidly.

His eyes became divine lamps with all-penetrating rays locking on this monster.

#### [Chapter 2604: Researching The Source](#)

The black octopus might be humble in size but its evil aura made Youzheng cower in fear.

He was a Grand True God with decent abilities and has seen plenty of monsters and masters in the past. However, none of them could match this black octopus in terms of evil aura.

It was particularly pure, seemingly born with darkness and evil serves as its life force. Light would be devoured instantly.

“Zzz, zzz...” The octopus continued making noises as if furious and ready to attack Li Qiye. Alas, it was wasting its time because of Li Qiye’s pressure.

“Show me the source!” Li Qiye raised his hands and added more energy into the maelstrom.

“Boom!” A large current surged in the maelstrom, increasing its rotation and separating process by ten times.

“Zzz...” The octopus bellowed and was divided into strands of dark energy.

“Pop!” The maelstrom continued to crush this energy as if wanting to reach the very origin. Space slightly fluctuated as a black fog appeared with a particular image.

There existed an unimaginably colossal octopus. Just one tentacle from it could easily destroy a mountain range. Its nefarious aura engulfed the world - the very start of the darkness.

“My goodness!” Youzheng was alarmed to see the gigantic octopus. Its frightening aura deterred people from looking at it.

“It’s only an image.” Li Qiye said.

Youzheng took a closer look and saw that the octopus was only an image made from the feeble dark laws. This was also the case for the smaller one earlier.

Youzheng took a deep breath while trembling. Just an image alone has already unleashed such evil, what about the real thing? Could this octopus be the mastermind before these events?



Li Qiye eventually sent out a golden beam from his eyes while coldly uttering: "What I want aren't trivial details, only the true source! These things before me are meaningless!"

"Buzz." He released a golden glow all around him with a fierce glare. The pulsing golden beam from his eyes was especially frightening, seemingly capable of refining everything just by looking at it.

Youzheng no longer dared to look even though Li Qiye wasn't exerting any pressure on him. The guy was assuming a terrible state. Looking straight at Li Qiye's eyes would render him to nothingness.

The maelstrom suddenly solidified and sealed the image of the large octopus.

"Bam!" The great beast struggled because it realized Li Qiye's aggressive intention. Alas, it was too late. The maelstrom has completely sealed it. Struggling was futile - a waste of strength.

Li Qiye raised his finger and exuded strands of light. Tiny golden laws began to swim and coil around each other at the tip.

He then touched the octopus' head. The contact issued a small hum as he imprinted an indelible seal on its head.

In this blink of an eye, he was able to lock the source. Using any method to hide or escape was impossible. With the help of the seal, he could chase it back to its source, and to all of its ancestors - if he wanted to.

The hair-like golden laws on his fingertips then drilled into the dark octopus' mind without leaving any wound.

They coiled around each other inside - a process that led to more golden laws being born. It didn't take long before the creature's head started glowing yellow. The laws continued to multiply and spread inside.

"Zzz, zzz..." The creature could sense the danger and struggle harder. Unfortunately, the result was still the same.

Youzheng looked back and saw the golden laws interweaving inside the octopus' head. He felt cold sweat running down his spine.

He could see that Li Qiye wanted to control the creature's will and take its memories in order to find useful information about its source.

He has only heard of this method in the past. Rumor has it that when people wanted another sect's supreme merit laws, they would use this forceful method against that sect's members.

Of course, the success rate was pitifully low. The stronger the merit law, the harder it was to take over. There was a high chance of implosion.

"Pop!" The creature's head was torn open by the golden laws from the center, a similar sight to a tangerine being peeled.

“Find the source.” Li Qiye increased his concentration to control the grand dao and reverse the yin and yang. He went upstream in the river of time to look at the past. The most profound and mysterious technique was being performed right now.

“Buzz.” The exposed head of the octopus had a maelstrom inside too, seemingly growing within its brain.

This yellow maelstrom rotated with a speed allowing it to surpass the temporal confinements. Youzheng felt the world spinning around him. He was crossing through one era after another to the past.

The maelstrom suddenly stopped, revealing a faint figure inside - completely dark in nature.

The purest darkness trapping all the light. It resembled a bottomless abyss with no end in sight.

This figure walked out of the darkness and released a might capable of suppressing all gods and devils.

“Bam!” Youzheng instantly dropped to the ground, unable to move a finger.

Just the faint image of this being alone was above all gods and emperors, no, even above progenitors.

These masters would instantly turn to the darkness before its unmatched evil. The figure seemed to be waking up and immediately noticed Li Qiye’s spying.

“Pop!” The image popped like a water bubble. The maelstrom also crumbled along with the black octopus and turned into smoke. Li Qiye couldn’t freeze this moment again in time even if he wanted to.

Everything was annihilated. The only proof of this happening was the slight ripple in space.

Li Qiye didn’t say anything, only standing there looking quite cold.

Youzheng was still trembling on the ground, unable to stand up. He was completely drenched in sweat now. That terrible aura left a permanent shadow in his mind.

#### [Chapter 2605: Black Stone Inside The Corpses](#)

Li Qiye slowly sat down on his chair with a serious expression.

“Impossible, this is Three Immortals, it doesn’t make sense.” He muttered to himself.

After a while, he looked up at the sky: “Villainous heaven, is this your doing?”

“No.” He shook his head and denied this conjecture: “He wouldn’t have wait until today to do so, no need for world destructions, and not in this troublesome manner either.”

His eyes became profound and frightening as he stared into the horizon.

He began calculating about various possibilities. Each was a horrible scenario that could scare people to death. He eventually came up with the most likely scenario and sat there in silence.

“It doesn’t matter the reason and possibility. If it is actually happening, eternal damnation is coming. Three Immortals, nine worlds, thirteen continents... none will be able to escape.” He sighed at this point.

Youzheng didn’t know what was going on but given Li Qiye’s mood, something big must have happened. The sky was falling down.

Just think about it, Li Qiye had no problem destroying the ten Vajras and an entire fleet. He challenged the Mu in a nonchalant manner, clearly viewing them like ants.

But now, this was the first time he wore such a serious expression. It made Youzheng fear for the worst.

Youzheng eventually regained enough strength to get up. He came before Li Qiye and quietly asked: "Young Noble, is there something wrong?"

He was fully aware of his inability to help, but he wanted to show his concern anyway.

"What will you do if the world is heading for destruction." Li Qiye looked at Youzheng and said.

"The world destroyed?" Youzheng couldn't react right away: "What do you mean?"

Li Qiye continued staring without answering.

Youzheng maintained his composure and scratched his head, not overthinking it: "If the world is really being destroyed, then I, I suppose I'll be eating a good meal with my family and fellow sect members. At the very least, we won't become hungry ghosts. Participating in a feast like that before death is a luxury of sorts."

He smiled wryly and awkwardly rubbed his palms together: "I'm just a little character with no grand ambition, please don't laugh, Young Noble."

"No, it's a good state of mind. "Li Qiye said: "You have people to eat together and to say a final goodbye, that's happiness."

"What about you, Young Noble?" He asked.

Li Qiye averted his gaze towards the horizon and eventually answered: "Fight."

"Fight." Youzheng didn't quite understand.

"When all is said and done, fight to the very end." Li Qiye spoke in a simple manner yet it showed his unyielding determination.

"Fight to the very end." Youzheng could sense this determination: "Young Noble, you are a savior, a great man. We can only look up at you."

Youzheng deeply bowed and showed his respect.

To which Li Qiye responded: "You think too highly of me."

Youzheng coughed and said: "Well... then, what are you fighting to the very end for, Young Noble?"

"I need to bear my teeth even if it means eternal damnation!" Li Qiye said: "I don't care what kind of existence it is, all I want to do is to topple and kill them, that's all."

"Your firm dao heart is beyond us." Youzheng emotionally said, appreciating the domineering declaration.

Li Qiye had a contemplative gaze and didn't reply.

“Young Noble.” Youzheng continued while staring at Li Qiye: “Before the great battle, have you thought about saying goodbye to people, such as your friends and followers?”

This made Li Qiye think. Would he actually do something like that?

Those who love him, those he loves, those with absolute and undying loyalty towards him... There have been too many partings with them since the start of his journey.

It wasn't that he had forgotten about these sad memories; he just didn't wish to remember them. They have been buried in the deepest crevice of his mind.

After a long time, he stopped gazing and said: “As long as I'm around, the light of dawn will still be there. My battle will sweep through the ages and I shall return triumphantly, so there is no need to say goodbye. Save that for another day.”

Now, this domineering statement revealed his absolute confidence as well.

Youzheng stood there in a daze, just trying to imagine the scene of this great conquest...

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The sudden appearance of corpses took Mingluo like a storm. Something else added to this on the second day.

“There are black stones in the corpses with incredible effects.” A piece of shocking news spread quickly everywhere.

“Black stones? What are the effects?” Many were surprised.

So during the previous night, an ancestor has captured a corpse “alive” for research on its rebirth. He managed to find some clues.

In fact, other ancestors also did the same. This rebirth phenomenon was too alluring. They couldn't stop themselves from doing research.

“Grind the stone down to powders for a mixer can yield increased power.” One cultivator from a big system revealed.

“Really?” The crowd became ecstatic. Everyone in the world wanted to increase their power.

“It's true, but the effect is clearer for disciples with shallow cultivation. The yield is rather insignificant for an expert.” The person said.

His system clearly experimented with these stones and came up with these results.

This disappointed many because the ones who came here were predominantly powerful.

“But many little things will add up to something great. Maybe it's an issue of quantity?” Someone else speculated.

The crowd found this to be a logical take.

“There are more corpses spotted in the northern area.” Someone interrupted the conversation.

“Let’s go kill them then!” Numerous cultivators ran northward.

The corpses that have just gotten out of the ground didn’t have enough time to ambush anyone before being surrounded and captured.

“No need to kill it, just take its black stone and it will be finished anyway.” It became a competition for the corpses.

“There are more in the southern streets.” More information came out.

“Go go!” The horde headed southward right away.

The corpses became hot commodities. No one was afraid of them anymore. In fact, eyes lit up after hearing about their appearances.

“An ancestor is paying a lot for these black stones. It’s a very good price.”

“That ancestor is very strong already so the stones should be useless to him, why are they paying so much for them?” Someone questioned.

“Immortality.” An expert elaborated: “Look, these corpses are coming back to life, so there should be an incredible secret behind it all, maybe hints towards immortality. Which ancestor doesn’t want immortality?”

“That makes sense.” People got the point right away.

### [Chapter 2606: Greed Kills](#)

A clear shift happened overnight where the corpses were no longer frightening and scream-inducing.

Actually, people were still screaming, but out of excitement instead of fear. The appearance of these corpses meant a fortune was coming their way.

Because of this, people’s eyes lit up after hearing about potential spotting and they ran there like addicts.

Initially, these corpses still weren’t that precious even when their black stone’s power-boosting potential was known. It had a negligible effect on masters so the demand remained low.

However, the paradigm shifted when systems started paying a high price for them. The black stones became a hot commodity with increasing prices. Some eager masters actually paid a ludicrous amount for them.

“I heard these black stones have a strong connection with the rumored immortal stone.” This piece of information quietly traveled across Mingluo: “The black stones inside the corpses are broken pieces from the immortal stone. Somehow these corpses had these stones inside them, managing to come back alive. Rumor has it that the original stone was left behind by an immortal and it can grant everlasting life...”

The city became crazier after hearing these rumors. Even the spectating ancestors joined the hunt for corpses.

The influx of these old men only exacerbated the demand and price for the black stones. It had reached an unreasonable amount.

Competition always followed right after a clear benefit. Thus, conflicts were inevitable as people hunt for the black stones.

Another rumor came out: "Using a large number of black stones can have a life-prolonging effect..."

All in all, people went crazy and hunted the corpses like crazy in Mingluo City.

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Meanwhile, Li Qiye didn't pay attention to anything back in his palace. He closed his eyes and meditated, only to crack a smile after hearing about the black stones' effect: "Ignorant fools, they'll come to find how helpless they are soon enough."

"Do you mean those stones are poisonous?" Youzheng found this plausible after seeing the nefarious nature of the stones.

"We'll find out soon. However, the positive properties are indeed true." Li Qiye said.

"So what are the side-effects?" Youzheng wondered due to the high price the stones are fetching right now.

"Do you need baits to fish?" Li Qiye looked at him and answered.

Youzheng took a second before understanding Li Qiye. He blurted out: "You mean, these black stones are..."

Li Qiye closed his eyes again, seemingly asleep.

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There weren't enough black stones to go around. Whenever a corpse appeared, masters would head there right away. The weak couldn't find anything.

For some unknown reasons, perhaps too many have been killed and that the corpses have fled, it became harder to find corpses in Mingluo. Even one or two became a rare sight in just two days.

"Looks like we've killed them all." One person sighed in disappointment after wasting half a day searching.

All they could do was lament the situation. It's not like more corpses would spawn.

Just when everyone thought that this was the end of this story, a command was issued inside the city.

"Seal the city off, bring all the natives here." A powerful Eternal commanded.

The native citizens and cultivators from Mingluo were herded together by stronger experts.

"What are you doing?! How lawless!" It didn't take long before the natives were imprisoned. It was too late to escape. Resistance was futile because they were simply too weak.

"What's going on?" The neutral outsiders found this strange.

“Hey, you all are being unreasonable here.” One outsider spoke on the side of justice. After all, they were only guests at Mingluo. Suddenly capturing the natives was too extreme.

“Hmph, what are you going to do about it?” The jailers didn’t play nice and barked back at the protester: “Don’t mess with the Trade Federation’s business.”

“You!” The protester became angry but his friend immediately pulled him back.

After the group of experts left, his friend quietly reminded him: “It’s best not to mess with the Trade Federation to avoid being killed. They aren’t as imperious as Hidden Gold Grotto but once they choose to do something, they’ll move with lightning speed and great destruction.”

Though the kind-hearted protester felt indignant, he really couldn’t afford to mess with the Trade Federation. Even the strongest sect in his system couldn’t do so either.

Another message eventually spread across the city - that the Trade Federation will execute people by the city gate.

“Execution? Why are they doing that to the natives who are too weak to provoke them in the first place.” People became confused.

“Using them as bait, of course. The corpses want to suck blood so the federation wants to use the natives’ blood to lead them out.” One expert immediately realized what was going on. His expression soured.

“I see, it’s another type of blood offering.” Many took a deep breath and muttered, unhappy about the development.

The words, blood offering, made people uneasy. This was a taboo considered to be part of the heretical and evil dao.

But now, the trade alliance was resorting to this method.

“How can they do this?!” One visiting cultivator shouted with indignation.

“Benefits move the heart.” An ancestor shook his head: “This might be an order from the higher-ups in the federation. Ordinary members can’t give this command. Remember, Venerable Deer Merchant is very old now, few in Imperial is as old as him so he doesn’t have long to live. If these black stones can really prolong life, then the federation won’t mind...”

Venerable Deer Merchant was the leader of the Trade Federation.

“They’ll invite the fury of the crowd by doing this taboo act.” One expert said.

“That’s why they’re using the natives of Mingluo.” An ancestor replied: “This entire system doesn’t even have a single Ascender, so how are they going to oppose the federation? Outsiders won’t want to step up for their sake either.”

“That’s true.” Many smiled wryly at the sad circumstance.

No one in this declining system could help the natives here. The system had no allies to speak of either. Who would stand up for them?

The Trade Federation wouldn't dare to do this against a powerful system, but Stone Harmony was only a fish on the chopping board.

### [Chapter 2607: Trade Federation](#)

"I do agree that the Trade Federation is out of line for doing this." One ancestor stated his disapproval.

"What can we do when they're so strong?" A different ancestor said: "Hidden Gold Grotto might act all that, but it isn't necessarily as powerful as the federation. The geezers in that alliance have a dozen systems or so behind them."

"That's true, they would be ruling right now if it wasn't for the three behemoths." The first ancestor sighed and admitted the federation's power.

This federation was considered the biggest alliance in Imperial Lineage. Funnily enough, their slogan and creed during their foundation focused on justice and fairness.

Their goal was to avoid total hegemony by the three behemoths. That's why some old Eternals agreed to form this alliance.

The leader and facilitator was the oldest and strongest Eternal - Venerable Deer Merchant. [1]

Later on, more Eternals joined the mix. Outside of their leader, there were five deputy leaders as well with the title of Heavenly Merchant. They were quite mighty and famous, far stronger than the ten Vajras of Hidden Gold Grotto, at least in a one-on-one scenario.

This alliance lacked institutional consolidation and the members only joined on a personal level. However, behind them were their respective systems.

Thus, the actual power of the federation was quite considerable. Provoking any member was the same as messing with a beehive.

Though Hidden Gold Grotto seemed to be on a meteoric rise recently judging by their attitude, it might not actually be stronger than the federation.

After all, the grotto only represented one system while the federation had a dozen. They were outmatched in terms of military strength and resources.

That's why people usually refrained from provoking the federation, the three behemoths not included.

No one dared to say anything to stop this blood offering. They disliked this extreme measure and wanted to stand up for justice. Alas, the disparity was too great.

Standing up for strangers and antagonizing the federation would be unwise.

On the next day, the sealed gate of the city slowly opened.

"It's happening." The spectators came out of the city in order to watch the development.

They saw platforms erected with grooves on the ground to lead blood everywhere as bait for the corpses.



The entrance and walls were filled with visiting experts. They saw the federation pushing a few dozen natives, both mortals and cultivators alike. They were bound and couldn't move at all.

The federation's experts took them on top of the platforms with executioners at the ready.

"What happened to not involving the commoners..." One master shook his head with displeasure.

No law in the cultivation world prevented one from bullying ordinary people. However, this was an unspoken agreement for the most part.

Killing one or two commoners was nothing. On the other hand, blood offering on a bigger scale was a big deal.

Wars between sects and systems were cultivators' business. They rarely targeted the territories of ordinary people. Even during a massacre, the winner would only kill the disciples of their enemy. They wouldn't bother with the mortals. Even fewer people dragged them into the flames of war.

After all, they lived in two different worlds. Mortals had nothing to do with the conflicts between cultivators. Thus, they were usually spared.

Not involving the commoners became an unspoken law of the cultivation world - a rule broken by the Trade Federation today.

Many felt that this act would ruin the reputation of other cultivators.

Finally, one older ancestor couldn't stand this any longer. He stepped out and uttered coldly: "What are you doing?! Throwing away the reputation of cultivators!"

"Don't make the mistake of interfering with our federation's business." A disciple responded in an aggressive manner.

"Even the federation can't do whatever it wants!" The ancestor waved his hand and blew this disciple flying.

"Yes, he's right." The spectators agreed with this old ancestor.

"Cloud Crane Ancestor is right. Even the federation can't do this." Another expert added.

This particular ancestor was both powerful and renowned - a big shot in Imperial Lineage.

"Brother Cloud Crane, please calm down." An old voice resounded. The disciples of the federation carried a palanquin over with an ancestor inside.

He wore a green robe, brimming with life energy.

"Green-robed Heavenly Merchant, one of the five deputy leaders." Someone recognized him.

People made way for the palanquin with a scared expression on their face.

The five deputy leaders were even more influential than the ten Vajras. They were invincible ancestors during their generation with ample resources and backing.

Venerable Deer Merchant was the strongest in the federation, then these five deputy leaders.

Cloud Crane Ancestor's expression darkened after seeing this old man. He said: "Green-robed Heavenly Merchant, you, a world-renowned master, should know that using commoners for a blood offering is crossing the line."

The crowd became quiet after this merchant showed up. The supporters no longer voiced their disagreement because this ancestor was very strong.

"Brother Cloud Crane, you are overstating the gravity of the issue." The merchant disagreed: "As you can see, Stone Harmony is heading towards destruction, they won't be able to escape death anyway. We're only speeding it up so that they can painlessly leave this world." [2]

"Bullshit!" Cloud Crane snorted: "Destruction or not, that's Stone Harmony's business. Don't speak as if you're saving them with this move."

"Brother Cloud Crane, I do not wish to debate the rights and wrongs in this world with you. I have made this decision after a meeting with the other four merchants. They're all here right now too and will be more than happy to speak with you."

This surprised the crowd. One person quietly whispered: "All five Heavenly Merchants are here, what about Venerable Deer Merchant?"

They didn't expect all five merchants to be here in Mingluo already.

Green-robed Heavenly Merchant hid a threat beneath the guise of civility, telling him to go speak with his peers.

This ancestor was strong but not enough to deal with four merchants at the same time. In fact, few in Imperial actually had this ability. Plus, Green-robed Heavenly Merchant was here too.

"Fine, your mercilessness wins today, but don't forget, your action today will invoke retribution and judgment for it is against the will of the heaven!" Cloud Crane stomped his foot and said.

"Will of the heaven?" Green-robed Heavenly Merchant started laughing: "Such a thing has never existed. This is a world of the strong, the will of the heaven is only a lie weak people tell themselves to feel better. So what if we perform the blood offering right now, you think this will of the heaven is going to stop me?"

Cloud Crane turned and left with an ugly expression. There was nothing he could do.

### [Chapter 2608: Seeking Help](#)

The departure of this ancestor silenced the scene. Dissenters could only keep their mouth shut before the might of the federation.

This blood offering would stain the reputation of cultivators and break the unspoken law of not hurting mortals. Alas, they were powerless despite wanting to help.

Cloud Crane was quite powerful and came from a strong system. Unfortunately, all five Heavenly Merchants were present in Mingluo.

The federation's strongest fighting force was here with the exception of their leader. Anyone would need to weigh themselves before interfering with this injustice.

Losing would mean death on top of implicating their own sect and system.

That's why this ancestor had no choice but to begrudgingly leave.

The only ones that could pressure the federation were the three behemoths. Anyone else would just be courting death.

"Do it." Green-robed Heavenly Merchant wore a cold expression and raised his hand, personally presiding over this event.

Everyone felt a suppression in his presence because of his everpresent aura as an Eternal. People felt out of breath as a result and didn't dare to act recklessly.

The executioners raised their blade after receiving the command.

"No..." The chained captives cried out but it was too late.

"Whoosh!" The blade glinted before coming down. Blood gushed out and heads fell to the ground.

The blood poured into the grooves and stained the ground.

People held their breath at this sight. Some were curious whether this method would work or not.

Rustles happened underground and the soil became loose. Finally, hands started reaching out of the ground and several corpses got up.

"It's them, this method does work!" People became surprised.

Everyone forgot about the blood offering and the decapitated natives. All eyes were on the corpses.

Some even thought that the federation's choice wasn't a waste of time, truly effective.

The reality was that for many of these experts, regular people were only ants. Their heart started beating faster at this development.

Of course, some didn't appreciate the injustice but since there were benefits and tempting things up for grabs, justice and morals became worthless.

With this new knowledge, someone else would have carried out the blood offering even if the Trade Federation didn't do so.

Some might be spewing justice from their mouth but they would secretly carry out this measure.

"Rumble!" The disciples from the federation were prepared. They instantly defeated the corpses that got out of the ground and pinned them down.

They took the black stones from the corpses. After losing this essence, the corpses squirmed for a bit before dying for real.

These disciples were fast and skilled to the astonishment of the crowd. Perhaps this wasn't the first time the Trade Federation has used this blood offering method. They just chose to be blatant this time around.

"Another group." Unfortunately, no more corpses came out of the ground so Green-robed Heavenly Merchant gave an order without batting an eye.

The second group of natives were brought over - paled with trembling legs.

Several more were decapitated which yielded a few more corpses. Green-robed Heavenly Merchant finally said: "That's it for today. We'll continue tomorrow."

He then left along with the experts from the federation. A stench of blood permeated the air and the soil.

The spectators had different thoughts. Some had fiery eyes, seemingly wanting to try the same thing for the black stones.

After all, they were selling for a sky-high price. Just one could make many risk their lives over it. If they could harvest more with a single attempt, why not resort to a blood offering?

The creed of not involving mortals was thrown out the window right away. However, all the natives were captured by the federation right now. No more baits were available even if they wanted to try.

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Li Qiye was still meditating inside his palace, looking just like a statue.

"Young Noble, please show mercy and save the citizens of Mingluo, they are being used as blood offerings right now." Lin Yixue beseeched.

Li Qiye didn't bother opening his eyes. After a while, he said: "Only the strong can control their fate."

"Bang! Bang! Bang!" She was on her knees and repeatedly slammed her forehead on the floor without holding back. Blood began to drip down.

"Please show mercy, Young Noble." Youzheng performed the same act.

Yixue continued this process until blood spilled all over the floor, eventually staining her dress.

Li Qiye finally opened his eyes and saw her bloody face. He sighed and waved his sleeve to concede: "Fine, I shall save them out of consideration for you."

"Thank you, Young Noble." She bowed her head again as tears flowed out. The bloodied Youzheng did the same.

"Go put bandages on." He said: "I can't save them forever. You need to rely on yourself in the future. The system needs you to grow stronger, or it will always be bullied by others."

"We will do our best." She clenched her fists.

She has always found herself blessed with happiness - adored by the entire sect. Moreover, Mingluo City enjoyed peace as well. Being weak didn't deter them from enjoying life.

But now, this feeling of helplessness during a time of crisis overwhelmed her. She couldn't protect her home and her loved ones. If it wasn't for Li Qiye, their sect would be gone right now. They wouldn't be here to talk about protecting the city and its natives.

"The path towards the dao is arduous, I hope you will strive unremittingly with your head held high. Become strong to protect the ones you wish to protect and uphold your ideals." Li Qiye said.

"I will always bear this in mind, Young Noble." She trembled, feeling all kinds of emotions. Li Qiye was the only one in the entire world who would stand up for them at this moment.

### [Chapter 2609: Stepping Up](#)

The Trade Federation resumed the blood offering activities on the second day. Green-robed Heavenly Merchant presided over the event while numerous experts brought the natives over.

More spectators joined today, lining up along the walls or floating in the air. Some conjugated into big groups...

The merchant had a cold expression as always, thinking that these natives were utterly insignificant lifeforms...

His presence served as deterrence against the potential defenders of justice as well as greedy thieves due to the high price of the black stones.

"The Trade Federation is doing it again, it looks like it'll be a big harvest for them." One spectator quietly said.

"No wonder why they're so ruthless, I think they'll corner the market and have a monopoly after this." One older expert said.

"Hmm, I think there are around sixty to seventy thousand natives under captivity right now." One expert calculated: "After the offerings are over, the federation might be able to get one thousand or more black stones, quite a handsome return."

"The stones in high quantity can prolong life too, no wonder why the five merchants resorted to this method. Venerable Deer Merchant most likely gave them the go-ahead so they went all out." One ancestor said.

People were quite envious of the federation's success. No one really cared about the wellbeing of these natives, only about the number of black stones harvested.

As for the natives, there was nothing they could do. Struggling was futile since to be perfectly frank, one expert from there could kill them all with a single finger strike. They accepted their fate and lowered their head, quietly awaiting death.

"Get ready." The merchant shouted after another group of natives was brought on stage.

The executioners raised their blades again with flashing glints.

"A bunch of idiots, daring to disturb my serenity." A lazy voice came about.

The disdainful comment surprised everyone. They all looked over and saw an ordinary man walking over with a slow and lazy pace, yawning and stretching as well.

Lin Yixue and Wu Youzheng were right behind him. The natives' desperate eyes flashed with hope after seeing these two.

"Fiercest!" People shouted after seeing him.

A path immediately opened outside the gate. People were fast and orderly in making way for him. The strong ruled this world and commanded respect.

Two days prior, Fiercest has made his name by taking care of Hidden Gold's armada and ten Vajras.

Everyone knew that not only was he strong, his personality resembled his title. This was a brutal man with a penchant for massacres.

The crowd looked at him before turning towards the merchant, aware that the former's appearance could be ominous. Moreover, the two behind him were natives of Mingluo.

"Sir, may I inquire for the reasoning behind your presence?" The merchant stood up and cupped his fist.

He was being very polite. Back when the powerful ancestor criticized him, he still sat in his palanquin. Though he called the guy "brother", he didn't truly mean it.

But this was no longer the case right now. He called Li Qiye "sir" in a respectful manner.

People could understand this. The five merchants were more prestigious and powerful than the ten Vajras. The five of them could probably defeat the ten Vajras in battle as well.

However, Fiercest's actual power was insane. He destroyed that armada without any difficulty.

Green-robed Heavenly Merchant couldn't put up an act before someone like this. It was best not to offend him.

Li Qiye yawned, seemingly annoyed that someone has woken him up. He waved his sleeve and said: "You have no business here. Get lost now."

Li Qiye wasn't only addressing the merchant but also the rest of the crowd.

"My apology, this foolish one doesn't understand you, Sir. Please elaborate." The merchant wasn't on the same level as Lucidity King or Gu Yifei, but he was still one of the top Eternals in Imperial.

This respectful act of his was quite rare already. Few deserved this treatment from him; maybe Lucidity King and Gu Yifei.

Li Qiye repeated: "Scram now, all outsiders. The natives may stay in the city. If I see any more blood offering, I will massacre your entire clan."

People understood that he was here to address the injustice right away.

The merchant's expression slightly changed. This was the first time someone told him to "scram".

“So you are here about this matter, Sir.” The merchant glanced at the two behind Li Qiye: “How about this, we’ll immediately release anyone related to you...”

“Idiot.” Li Qiye interrupted him: “I could have spared all of you with a punishment earlier, but now, your foolishness really warrants death.”

The merchant’s smile froze. He coldly responded: “Sir, you must antagonize our Trade Federation?”

He was implying that by messing with him, Li Qiye risked dealing with his backers as well.

“Just a bunch of dog shits.” Li Qiye waved his hand: “From today henceforth, I am taking over Mingluo City. Outsiders must leave. Those who disobey my rules will be shown no mercy!”

People took a deep breath after this. They knew he wasn’t joking and could actually back his words with actions.

The merchant naturally didn’t like being called “dog shit”. His federation has never been shown such contempt before in Imperial.

“Sir, you need to rethink this. We are the largest alliance in Imperial with numerous Eternals and more than one hundred systems. No one dares to oppose us. Do you think it is worth it to become our enemy over a few lowly natives?”

The merchant might be slightly exaggerating but it wasn’t far from the truth. Many experts nodded in agreement. Opposing a monster like the federation for the sake of these strangers was very unwise.

#### [Chapter 2610: Who Are Ants?](#)

“You!” Green-robed Heavenly Merchant’s expression became ugly. After all, no one could handle such disrespect in public, certainly not an alliance as prestigious as theirs.

“Being friends with us will yield many advantages while the opposite is nothing but disastrous. It’s not worth it doing this over some ants.” The merchant put on an aggressive face since he was no coward.

They have never been afraid of anyone outside of the three behemoths and would kill those who dare to antagonize them. Thus, the merchant no longer put on a courteous act.

“Your bunch are ants in my eyes.” Li Qiye chuckled and raised his hand to touch the air.

“Pop! Pop! Pop!” The disciples from the federation instantly turned into bloody mists without the chance to resist or scream.

“You!” The merchant became aghast.

Li Qiye suddenly disappeared to the merchant’s dismay. He instinctively raised his hands to summon a great shield pulsing with divinity. It was an artifact of the Eternal level and possessed amazing defensive capabilities.

Li Qiye responded with a knee strike.

“Boom!” The shield instantly crumbled and the merchant was blown flying while vomiting blood. He slammed into the city wall and left a big hole behind.

All of this happened in the blink of an eye so people only saw the merchant being buried by debris. Everyone seemed to be struck by lightning.

This wasn't the first time they saw Li Qiye in action but they were still shaken all the same. They didn't know how to describe Li Qiye for he was too domineering and direct.

Li Qiye didn't need profound techniques and invincible merit laws. His movements were as simple as can be - just violent punches and kicks that could be used by a three-year-old.

However, these moves still defeated Eternals all the same, rendering them helpless in a shocking manner.

As quiet as a virgin yet as swift as a rabbit with sheer destruction in each move - people thought back and forth and this was the only right way to describe Li Qiye. [1]

"Bam!" The merchant got out of the pile of rocks and looked quite tattered.

That strike earlier from Li Qiye almost ended his life. Blood was everywhere while his expression paled.

"See, you are no different from them under my foot, just another ant." Li Qiye posed coolly while speaking.

Wu Youzheng and Lin Yixue took advantage of this rare opportunity and jumped on stage to save the captives.

"You!" The merchant's face was as green as his robe right now. The words were humiliating and hard to hear but he couldn't muster up a strong response.

The strike shattered his confidence in a brutal manner, just like Li Qiye's words.

He was furious but the cruel reality of powerlessness made him calm down. He was imperious in the past and although his generation has passed, everyone in Imperial still treated him with respect.

Alas, Li Qiye could actually crush him like an ant. This wasn't a good feeling. The more frustrating thing was that he actually started to think of himself as an ant inside right now, a stark contrast to his prior confidence and arrogance.

He wasn't the only one feeling sad here. A few experts also felt a deep humiliation, lowering their self-esteem.

They viewed regular people as ants before, but Li Qiye said that there was no difference between them and the natives in his eyes.

Unfortunately, there was nothing they could do before Li Qiye's absolute power.

"All of you are ants too." Li Qiye confirmed their thinking as he shifted his gaze towards the crowd.

"Thinking that you're nobler than regular people and treating them in this manner." Li Qiye continued: "I just need to stomp my foot down and all of you will be dead, there isn't one damn thing you can do to stop me!"



Some spectators angrily glared at him with indignation. They stared at the helpless captives on the platform who had no control over their own fate. No one would care about their wellbeing. They were the same as these weaklings?

"I see, I see, such a grand declaration!" The merchant laughed from being too angry. This was actually going the way he wanted because Li Qiye had offended the crowd.

"Ignorant junior, you dare to look down on the world? Do you think you can take on everyone? You overestimate yourself!" He sneered.

Li Qiye chuckled in response while maintaining his stance: "You think I give a damn about the rest of the world? In your eyes, one hundred and one million mortals are the same. That's the same way for me, all of you and the rest of the world are still only ants. I can render everything to ashes with a single whim."

This domineering statement suffocated the angry crowd. A few wise masters actually thought that Li Qiye was telling the truth.

One ancestor took a deep breath and said while shuddering: "Maybe he's the real terror here. For example, Jade-break and Puresword True Emperor are powerful, but people still have a good gauge of their depths and strength. But this Fiercest, no one can speculate his height, perhaps it is far above us all."