

Star Odyssey

Chapter 3: Arrival

Zhongshan had been cleared out entirely, leaving the enormous plaza filled with numerous modern facilities that left the newcomer cultivators in awe. They saw soldiers walk by with uniform blades on their backs; a strange fusion of modern and ancient equipment. Regular guns had become useless as cultivation developed, and many national armories had been destroyed in the Apocalypse. For someone to still be able to outfit all their soldiers with standardized equipment was a demonstration of their power and influence.

Lu Yin and the other newcomers were taken to a huge square where they were encircled by the soldiers, both men and women alike. About ten meters above them was a square of clear glass that separated another area from which quite a few people looked down on the soldiers and newcomers while giggling.

"I wonder if there are any useful ones this time. It'll be good if we could get someone of decent strength or even in the Realm of Man," someone grunted from among the overlookers.

"Don't get your hopes up. The Realm of Man isn't easy to reach. Besides, the Executioner has already decided who the Realm of Man captains will be. Neither of us qualified," a beautiful woman next to the man replied irritably.

"It couldn't have been easy guarding tens of thousands of survivors to Nanjing, so I have pretty high expectations of this group. If you don't want them, I'd be happy to take them off your hands." a young man said with a smile.

"Stop dreaming. It all depends on how Feng Hong handles this. He's the instructor this time, so he's sure to get the best ones," the middle-aged man said.

All the people in this upper area were captains at the camp. The camp held eighty thousand cultivators, of whom only those that had reached the Realm of Earth could become captains. Each held almost absolute power in Nanjing, with status second only to the Executioner himself. Sight of the Executioner was a rare occasion to the millions of survivors in Nanjing, so to most, the captains were the ones in power.

"Apparently, the Water Sage's disciples are coming to Nanjing to battle one of us. Who wants to take on the challenge?" the beautiful woman suddenly asked with a grin, bursting into laughter when everyone went silent, "Rumors say that she declared the Snow Maidens invincible in the Realm of Earth. Don't you guys want to defend your reputations?"

Nobody said a word in response, and despite a giggle the woman covered her mouth and went quiet as well. Although the common person might think that the Seven Sages stood equal, a few individuals knew that there were three high sages and four normal sages. The Water Sage with the Blue Camp atop her icy peak was a high sage, while Zhou Shan was only a regular sage ranked below her.

Meanwhile in the plaza below, the cultivators were being checked individually. This was mostly due to the many new diseases that had sprung up since the apocalypse. The sickness that could be contracted from the zombies was particularly difficult to treat, so the camp had to ensure that all newly arrived cultivators did not carry any illness that could endanger the camp. It was soon Lu Yin's turn, and the nurse filled in his details while he turned in his blood sample. His eyes flickered and his body blurred briefly as he exerted strength in his legs, but the only change was a slight change in the color of the blood sample. For a moment it had seemed to possess a hint of purple, but that was soon gone and the blood went back to normal.

"Lu Yin, was it? This will just take a moment, so please wait for a bit," the nurse smiled gently at him. Lu Yin nodded, thanked the nurse, and walked to the other side to wait.

It didn't take much time before the tests on all of the nearly five hundred cultivators were completed without complications. Before much time passed, a middle-aged man in a dark military uniform arrived, exerting a wave of pressure that cracked the earth and left everyone awestruck.

"He's- He's in the Realm of Earth! A Realm of Earth expert!" Someone shouted, instilling fear and envy into the onlookers.

The middle-aged man stopped about ten meters away from the newcomers before speaking with a clear voice, "My name is Feng Hong and I'm a captain in this camp. I'll say this just once: whoever is unwilling to enter the camp, leave now!"

Hundreds of cultivators looked at each other and people started to leave the formation one after the other. While the camp was powerful, those who enjoyed its shelter had to fulfill certain obligations as well. Many of these cultivators had never been soldiers, and it was quite normal for them to not want that kind of life. Lu Yin himself was in this group.

Almost two hundred people were unwilling to enter the camp, which was nearly half of the newcomers. Feng Hong looked at the departing group and said, "Joining us not only ensures your protection, but we will also look after your loved ones. They will be taken to a location near Zhongshan. Also, you will be provided with energy crystals to train and it is even possible to receive a battle technique from the Executioner."

"What's a battle technique?" Someone asked curiously.

Feng Hong replied coldly, "A technique that can allow you to exert twice your maximum power. The Executioner's battle technique is the Storm Slash. I'm sure you've seen it before, I don't need to explain that few can block it." This visibly excited all of the cultivators. They had indeed seen the Storm Slash before— with just one attack, the Executioner had taken out all of the mutant vines and cracked the earth. Even the winds had shifted in the face of his overwhelming might.

"Can we learn that?" someone asked longingly.

"So long as they are acknowledged by the Executioner, anyone can," Feng Hong answered coldly, drawing back many of the cultivators who had started to leave. In the end, Lu Yin was among less than fifty people who were still determined to leave.

"Take them away," the captain waved them off, sending some soldiers to escort the group out of Zhongshan. Looking back, Lu Yin knew that the camp would erupt into chaos soon enough.

Outside Zhongshan were a substantial number of survivors and even cultivators. As Lu Yin and the others came out, the crowd immediately pounced on them.

"Would you like to buy some real estate? If you do, you can come to me. I guarantee I'll give you a good deal."

"Want to travel, sir? Don't look at me like that. There's way too many zombies and monsters outside Zhongshan, and without a guide, you're sure to get surrounded in no time."

"Would you like a weapon, Sir? I've got sharp blades, tough spears, and a lot of other options. If you want to buy explosives or firearms, I've got those too. How about buying some self-defense options?"

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"Who has a map?" Lu Yin asked into the crowd, garnering the attention of a beady-eyed cultivator who approached immediately and glared at the surrounding hawkers to shoo them away. He then carefully took a map out of his pockets, "Here, only ten crystals."

"Ten? For a map?" Lu Yin's brows shot up, "You do know that a single energy crystal is enough for a normal person to become a cultivator?"

The man whispered in response, "Brother, this isn't just any map. It marks out the places where powerful monsters and zombies gather outside Zhongshan. You wouldn't want to be surrounded the moment you leave, right? This is your life. Are you telling me your own life isn't worth ten crystals?"

Lu Yin laughed, "Three is the best you'll get. I don't have any more."

“Deal. Take the map, my new friend.”

Lu Yin suspected he'd been conned since the cultivator had agreed way too easily, but he didn't really mind. He took three grain-sized crystals and passed them to the cultivator who grabbed them excitedly. He then leaned in closer and whispered, “Here's a little extra for you since you were so easy to do business with. No need to thank me.”

With that, the man pushed a round pill into Lu Yin's palm and left. Lu Yin recognized it immediately, but that actually prompted a confused look. This was an aphrodisiac, and a powerful one at that. While numerous plant mutations had rendered many older medicines obsolete, products from the new vegetation were more effective than anything humans had before. Lu Yin had seen people who'd used these pills before, and knew just how effective they were, but they were also in high demand and extremely expensive. No matter what, a single one was certainly worth more than the three energy crystals he'd paid for this map. Who was this guy?

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Lu Yin ignored his own question and tossed the aphrodisiac before looking around and heading towards the outer city. Studying the map along the way, he headed towards a barren hilly region to the south. ‘I hope I'll find some clues there.’

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At the highest point in Zhongshan, a gathering mostly comprised of captains sat in a meeting room. On the left of the empty seat at the head of the table was a man in a military uniform with a scar on his face. On the right sat a lovely young woman with glasses.

The captains spent a long time waiting before Zhou Shan walked into the room and casually sat at the head of the table. His gaze swept over everyone in the room before resting on the young woman with glasses, “How's the plan proceeding?”

The girl adjusted her glasses, “The initial plan to expand Nanjing's base will take at least two months, and we could lose up to two or three thousand people in battle. If you want to expand Nanjing to its peacetime borders, we'll likely see three times those casualties.”

Zhou Shan frowned, “We need to expand the base. The northern expansion has been going well, and in a few months we'll link to the capital city. At that point, the whole country will be reconnected and reclaiming our country's land will be easy. Showing weakness here will be a joke.”

“Executioner, we just received word that the Tianzhu Monk has entered the Realm of Sky,” the man with a scarred face reported. The room broke out in discussions at the news. The whole of China only had seven Realm of Sky cultivators, showing the

difficulty in reaching that level. For the Tianzhu Monk to reach that realm was a huge surprise.

Zhou Shan's gaze cooled, "Ku Sen? Investigate him. It's impossible for anyone to reach the Realm of Sky within a year."

"Got it."

"Anything else?"

The scar-faced man had finished and a cultivator stood to speak up, but suddenly froze as he stared outside the window. Everyone followed suit and made similar dazed faces. Zhou Shan spun around to look, his eyes narrowing as he peered outside.

Dozens of meteors streaked across the sky, leaving fiery trails in their wakes. One of them flew in the direction of Nanjing before landing to the south of the gathering point, shaking the earth. These meteors were more dazzling than fireworks, drawing the attention of countless survivors.

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Lu Yin had watched the scene with the meteors as well, and from a vantage point much closer than any of the other observers. Having followed his new map to the hills south of Zhongshan, he wasn't far from the landing zone when violent shockwaves blew away the clouds. He watched as the earth cracked and debris flew through the air, having to kick away a piece of metal that shot toward him before looking further south. After a brief moment of contemplation, he dashed in the direction of the crash.

Back within Nanjing, the Executioner soared into the sky. He was just about to charge south before he was stopped by a report, "Sir, a horde of zombies is charging at the walls!"

Zhou Shan turned to the east, finding a black mass of zombies heading towards Zhongshan. The city itself had been sealed off in a quick response, but quite a few survivors were left outside, crying out in despair. He grabbed his axe and flew outside the city, striking the ground and destroying a number of zombies with his attack, "Open the gates and let the survivors in. I'll defend the city"

To the south, smoke billowed into the sky from the site of the meteor crash. The crater spread a thousand meters with a white ball at the center only two meters or so in diameter. Equally white smoke was wafting off it, filling the distorted air all around.

Lu Yin approached the crater and hid in an abandoned factory nearby, observing the white ball through a crack in a wooden board. Although he had expected an event like this, he was still caught off guard when it actually occurred, "A spacecraft... This is way earlier than I expected"

