

### Chapter 31: Shock

The chaotic fight showed Lu Yin that he could now defeat school leaders, but he didn't get much time to bask in that fact before Zhang Dingtian raised his blade to kill both Parlie and Veron. He stopped the man immediately, "Wait, we can use these people as bargaining chips!"

Zhang Dingtian was confused, "Bargaining chips? With whom?"

"You should know that these students came to Earth for a trial. Although people can die in trials, the students who participate all have strong backgrounds; we can use them to negotiate with the higher-ups of the Great Yu Empire."

Bai Xue looked at Lu Yin, "We're going to use their lives to obtain Earth's freedom?"

Lu Yin nodded, "Although this trial is supposed to evolve humanity, it's actually a method for the Great Yu Empire to recruit warslaves. All earthling cultivators that aren't chosen for other purposes are sent to battlefields, be they between the Great Yu Empire and other empires or between the galaxies controlled by different races. Those battlefields are far crueler than these trials; even Explorers won't necessarily survive. These students can help us keep more people on Earth."

Zhang Dingtian silently sheathed his blade, while a twinge of sadness flashed across Bai Xue's gaze. Humans had once thought they were the only intelligent beings in the universe, but all that had changed once they discovered that corpse on Neptune. Now they knew that Earth was just a primal planet under the surveillance of a large empire; so what if they could enter space, they were always caught under someone's gaze. Moreover, they were currently facing something even scarier than mutant beasts and zombies; once the planetary trial was over, countless people would be sent to battlefields where perhaps even the Seven Sages would only be considered soldiers of decent ability.

Jeraldine stared at Lu Yin with surprise; she hadn't known about such a plan at all. In fact, she'd never heard of a situation where natives asked the Great Yu Empire for anything, forget negotiations using high-ranking children as hostages. She was certain that he was only digging his own grave with it, but somewhere in the back of her mind she also felt like it just might work. After all, Veron's background was quite decent; he had a relative in the Thirteen Imperial Squadrons.

"Cough, you, you're such a simpleton. The Great Yu Empire is known for military discipline, we won't be cowed by mere natives!" Parlie taunted from the side.

Lu Yin glanced at him, "You don't need to worry about anything, just stay alive to be our bargaining chips."

Parlie just sneered; it was clear that these natives were clueless about the reality of the Great Yu Empire. However, Bai Xue looked at Lu Yin in surprise. After all, even though it might be useful to catch students trying to negotiate with the Great Yu Empire, this would doubtlessly endanger the youth himself, maybe to the point of death. Did he have some hidden backers? No one helped others at the cost of their own lives. Her caution only rose.

BANG! A loud explosion from the north sank Zhang Dingtian's heart in an instant, and he shouted as he rushed towards the source, "NO, THE RESEARCH CENTER!"

Two figures flew away to the west, figures that Parlie recognized at first glance, “Eddy, Hayden.”

The Bladesage shot into the sky in pursuit, but two more people joined the escapees from another direction. He turned grim as the energy from his body set the air off buzzing, all energy seemingly vanishing into his raised blade. It felt like this one strike would split the Earth.

Lu Yin watched with amazement as the attack blasted the skies apart, drowning out all sound. He wondered whether it was a battle technique for a moment, but he knew that wasn't the case; this was simply the man's strongest attack.

Eddy and the other students in the west were stunned by the attack and how deeply Zhang Dingtian had hidden his true strength. While the slash was not a battle technique, it closely resembled one and was truly terrifying.

“Don't wait, run!” Eddy called out in an instant, and Gerlaine and Balaror nearby were surprised as well, “This guy is nuts! Run!”

The Bladesage's slash split the sky as it crashed towards the trainees out west, shocking the people in Beijing as it distorted the air all around. Eddy, Hayden, Gerlaine, and Balaror stopped and turned around, bracing themselves for the incoming attack that split into five separate energy waves. When the aftershocks finally disappeared, a shocked Eddy was the only one who was relatively fine. Hayden's black robes had been torn apart to reveal the scales covering his upper body, the blood on his lips shining under the sun. Gerlaine was panting as she stared at Zhang Dingtian, while Balaror had spat out a mouthful of blood entirely. His skin had noticeably turned greener, and there were some cracks all over his body.

“Go!” Eddy cried out, rushing west once more. Hayden took one more look before following reluctantly, followed by the silent duo behind him. An impressive Zhang Dingtian floated heroically in the sky, cheered on by the masses at having sent four students running with one attack.

Lu Yin's eyes narrowed in excitement and inspiration. How much stronger would his Cosmic Palm be when he got to three stars? Would he be able to beat this? Bai Xue simply heaved a sigh of relief, smiling softly; the Head of the Seven Sages had shown his prowess once more.

Jeraldine was left dumbfounded at the presence of a realmbreaker among the natives, while Parlie and Veron watched with awe; this was someone stronger than the vast majority of Sentinels in the Great Yu Empire. They realized their error in underestimating this man; if they had known, they would certainly have avoided the capital before.

Zhang Dingtian flew north to check the Research and Development Center, while Lu Yin and Bai Xue rushed to catch up to him; this was one of the most important places in China. Jeraldine grabbed the two captive students and followed behind.

The Research and Development Center was in the northern part of Beijing, and was where the corpse recovered from Neptune had originally been stored. Lu Yin didn't know why senior management had decided to transfer it to an unknown location, but a huge explosion in the process had triggered the subsequent Apocalypse. The Research and Development Center was very much the origin of everything

that had happened. Parlie and Veron had only considered checking Zhang Dingtian's residence and Number One's office, but hadn't thought to check the Research and Development Center that Eddy had targeted.

Arriving at the Center, the group saw wreckage and corpses everywhere, causing Zhang Dingtian to clench his fists before sending soldiers to block off the area and search for any survivors. However, one guard ran up and interrupted him, "Bladesage, President Lian wants to meet you."

"The President is alive?" Zhang Dingtian clearly grew delighted, following the man right away to a small hollow a few kilometers away from the wreckage. This was the entrance to the Center's basement, and within the cordoned-off area was an old man in a white coat who was leaning against a wall drinking water. Beside him was a beautiful woman in a black business suit, and the Bladesage questioned her anxiously, "Huansha, how is the President?"

"He's fine, he was only startled," the woman replied.

"What nonsense, I wasn't startled," the old man grumbled, "I only sprained my ankle."

Huansha smiled, "Yes, yes, you only sprained your ankle."

Zhang Dingtian looked to the old man as Lu Yin and the others arrived, "Mr. President, what happened?"

Bai Xue gave Lu Yin an odd look as she saw him rifle through Parlie and Veron's cosmic rings, confiscating everything of value. There was technically nothing wrong with this— he had contributed to that battle and there was no chance he would waste the loot— but the scene left her perplexed. The youth himself was excited to discover an entire cube of star crystals, which left him anticipating the next use of his die.

President Lian had Zhang Dingtian disperse the troops and even sent Huansha away, leaving only Bai Xue, Lu Yin, and Jeraldine with the two leaders. Lu Yin soon asked Jeraldine to move away, which she only complied with after a glare from him; Eddy had clearly discovered something here, and she wanted to know what it was too. Bai Xue stared at Lu Yin in a similar manner, hinting for him to leave, but he blatantly ignored her and looked at President Lian with curiosity.

"Who are you?" the President asked.

"Zhou Shan's representative," Lu Yin answered, leaving the woman speechless.

### **Chapter 32: Escaped Criminal**

Zhang Dingtian paused before saying, "He is Zhou Shan's friend, and a Realm of Sky powerhouse."

"Realm of Sky? And you're from Earth?" The President grew even more astonished when Lu Yin nodded, "I didn't expect anyone outside of you seven and the Tianzhu Monk to accomplish it. Unbelievable, boy, how did you manage such a feat?"

"Talent," Lu Yin answered calmly.

President Lian simply nodded, accepting that explanation at face value.

"President, what happened?" Bai Xue asked.

The President sighed, "The Research and Development Center was attacked; the alien stole all the information."

"What information? There should be nothing in the Center that he's interested in."

President Lian shook his head and frowned, "I don't know, he connected that thing on his wrist to the center's terminal and suddenly grew happy."

"That's his gadget," Bai Xue said, "This is foreign technology that far exceeds our networks, it might have been able to decipher something we couldn't. No wonder he wanted to destroy the Center, he likely doesn't want us to find out."

"No, I'm the one who destroyed the Center," President Lian exclaimed, smiling bitterly at everyone's surprise, "That man killed all the researchers when he came in, and went directly to the terminal. He would have found the basement if I didn't destroy the building, and it was the only way to draw all of you here as well."

Lu Yin felt a renewed respect for the old man; few people had the courage to put their lives at stake for the cause.

Zhang Dingtian frowned, "The Center has been destroyed and all the information is gone, we can't even find them for our vengeance."

"Who said that the information is gone? What's the point of my presidency if that were the case?" President Lian shook his head again, opening the door to the underground, "There's a backup of everything underground; any of you who has the foreign technology can try it out. Maybe you can obtain some information too."

Zhang Dingtian, Bai Xue and Lu Yin went down immediately, and a few minutes later they were looking at the projection from the watch in shock. The screen was displaying the explosion that occurred half a year ago; on the screen of the Research and Development Center, there was nothing special about the explosion. However, the gadget enhanced the video to show a black shadow rushing west in the aftermath of the explosion; that shadow moved so fast that Earth's technology simply couldn't capture it.

All three cultivators had grim expressions on their faces, while President Lian was stunned, "What is this black shadow? A human?"

Lu Yin answered, "Half a year ago, the Seven Sages weren't in the Realm of Sky yet. This speed is comparable to someone in that realm; if I'm not wrong, it should be that corpse."

"That thing was alive?!"

"Mm. One can cover their body in energy to stop all functions; it should have been enough to fool our technology. Well, I guess that means this corpse was the criminal mentioned in the students' missions."

Everyone fell silent and stared at the screen, while Lu Yin looked at President Lian, "May I ask why you decided to transfer the corpse? Zhou Shan mentioned that there was some uncontrollable substance on it."

President Lian glanced at Zhang Dingtian and Bai Xue, "It was a highly explosive compound; given the amount of it on the body, we knew that there would be grave effects if something set it off. We couldn't find a way to neutralize that substance, so we decided to move the threat away."

"Primary was worried that the corpse would blow up during the move, so he separated the seven of us. We'd never expected his fears to come true and cause the Apocalypse. At least we managed to protect the survivors," Bai Xue continued softly.

Lu Tin nodded, "He truly was selfless; given the strength of the explosion, he wouldn't have died if you had been protecting him."

President Lian sighed, "No one expected things to turn out like this, but now it looks like the corpse was the one who triggered everything. He must have been the one to cause the explosion."

Lu Yin frowned, feeling like something was off; why would the criminal want to cause the Apocalypse? That had triggered Earth's evolution, wasn't he afraid such an event would catch the attention of the Great Yu Empire?

"We placed a tracker under the corpse's skin when we first started studying it; let me see if it still works," the President said while tinkering with his terminal. Moments later, there was a blip on the world map and he said excitedly, "I found it! This is where the signal was last detected."

Everyone looked over; the mark was in Europe, within the Mediterranean Sea.

"That student from before headed west to search for it," Zhang Dingtian concluded.

"Should we follow?" Bai Xue asked.

Zhang Dingtian stared at the screen, "No."

Lu Yin explained, "That corpse was once an Explorer; even if he's heavily injured right now, he'll still be fine. It's too dangerous for us to go."

"Don't worry, if those students are unable to capture him, he'll definitely come back here," President Lian claimed, explaining when he saw Lu Yin's obvious confusion, "His belongings are still in the Research and Development Center; he won't let them go."

"What belongings?" Lu Yin asked. He had only heard about a blade that had been brought back to Earth with the corpse.

President Lian was just about to reply when Bai Xue cut in, "This is top secret; we can't tell you."

Lu Yin was amused, "We're in the middle of the Apocalypse and the Seven Sages are the highest authority in China; how secret can it be?"

She glared at him, "We have no idea about your background. For all we know, you might be another student."

"Zhou Shan can vouch for me, I was already at his camp when the students arrived," Lu Yin frowned.

Her lips curved into a beautiful smile, "I remember hearing the students mention that the Great Yu Empire has been watching Earth for a long time; it's not impossible for someone to have come here early."

"Now you're just imagining problems," Lu Yin grew irritated. This woman was giving him trouble at every turn, and on top of that she was supposedly in some sort of relationship with Liu Shaoge.

"I'm just stating facts," she responded calmly.

"The facts are that the students you've seen so far are only the first batch. The second will be arriving soon, and among them will be people you can't defeat. I can help you, stop treating me like an enemy!"

"Hmph. If you're really an earthling, not helping would make you a traitor anyway. If you're not, it's pointless for us to ask you for help."

Lu Yin gritted his teeth, but couldn't refute her point. In the end, Zhang Dingtian looked over as well, "Your background is uncertain, and Zhou Shan can only speak for himself. If you want to know, then you must get majority approval from the Seven Sages."

"Forget it, communications are still disrupted anyway. Besides, this woman clearly has power; I'd lose even if there was a vote." Lu Yin stormed out, leaving a thoughtful Zhang Dingtian behind.

Bai Xue commented, "He's extremely powerful; I don't know how someone could enter the Realm of Sky outside of us and the few foreigners we gave some of the inheritance to."

"The Tianzhu Monk has already shown that it isn't impossible; this guy would be the second."

Bai Xue nodded. She wasn't deliberately targeting Lu Yin; she genuinely was suspicious of him. He was unreasonably strong and extremely greedy; she still recalled the weirdly immediate response of looting those two students.

Lu Yin left the basement with a grim face. Earth was currently dealing with the Apocalypse, the ruthless students, and even a runaway criminal in hiding! With the soon-to-arrive second batch of students, things were only going to get more chaotic and he needed to quickly increase his strength. The Great Yu Empire was just an ordinary nation within the Frostwave Weave. There were numerous weaves in the Outerverse with geniuses born every day. If he couldn't handle the students of mediocre schools, there was no way he could match up to those from the Thirteen Imperial Squadrons or Yu Academy.

"Jeraldine!" he shouted.

She walked over, "What's wrong?"

"Post that the criminal is in the Mediterranean Sea."

"What? Really?"

"Mm. Do it."

She frowned, "If you know that, why don't you go yourself?"

"Just do it! Why do you have to question everything?" Lu Yin snapped, prompting her to switch on her gadget and send the message out.

### Chapter 33: Another Zombie King

The most important thing to Lu Yin right now was gathering star crystals, followed by catching the criminal. Terence's formcast model would allow his third transformation into the Melder Realm, but normal models stopped at that point. A rare few models could help with the fourth advancement, and students like Veron or even Parlie certainly didn't qualify to possess them. The only one possible on earth would be on the criminal.

Even if the criminal was very strong, Lu Yin was unsure of what tricks the four students had up their sleeves. He realized that he might as well muddy the waters and draw the attention of all other students, making it chaotic enough to give the criminal a better chance to escape. No one in this first batch would be able to match him when he added the third star to his Cosmic Palm, so he had to push things until then.

Within a secluded courtyard in the capital, Lu Yin closed his windows and scattered fire crystals around before returning to his room and spreading his arms. The die slowly materialized, its surface still dim as it hadn't yet recovered from the previous use. Without star crystals, it would take a long time to recover to usability. Lu Yin rubbed his hands together as he stared expectantly at the die, then crushed a cube of star crystals that he had gathered with much difficulty. The surging star energy entered the die and brightened it instantly, the stars sparkling all around.

Lu Yin licked his lips with anxiousness, feeling somewhat like a gambler, "Come on, I hope I have good luck. Let's see what I get."

The die spun quickly as he placed a finger on it, forming a beautiful image of twinkling stars. Lu Yin's eyes remained glued upon it as it came to a halt, five surfaces blanking out until the one-pip side was left behind.

"Pilfer again," Lu Yin was pleasantly surprised, as Pilfer could retrieve an item from a random person's cosmic ring. The first roll of this number had given him the Cosmic Art. He watched as it shot a beam out into the void, opening a passageway that dropped something to the ground with a soft thump. He stared at the ground in disbelief; a snack?

On the ground before him was an exquisitely-packed snack bag, with what looked like advertising on the cover that he couldn't understand. He picked it up with a stoic face, but that expression was his best attempt to not cough up blood; he'd spent an entire cube of star crystals to activate the die and all he'd gotten back was a snack! Even a broken dagger would have been better than that! The die's surface dimmed before it gradually vanished, the room returning to its previous state with Lu Yin clutching that one snack bag. He felt his heart bleeding from the unfairness of it all.

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Lu Yin remained in the capital for ten days; the city had calmed down significantly from the former excitement, and the zombies and beasts continued battling outside the city. Their reducing numbers gave more cultivators the courage to step out of the city.

But while Beijing was quelled, Europe erupted instead. No one had believed Jeraldine's message that the criminal was near the Mediterranean Sea at first, but once it was discovered that Eddy and the others had departed China, many rushed to beat him. A massive battle three days ago had set the very

sea aboil, the criminal revealing Melder-level power that killed several students and left Eddy's team among the injured.

This wasn't the only group of top students either; three teams from China, two from Russia, two already in Europe, and multiple others from across the other continents caused chaos across Europe, news that really pleased Lu Yin when he heard it from Jeraldine. All was good as long as the criminal remained free; he was close to finishing the third star of the Cosmic Palm, and estimated that he needed no more than half a month to go from the vague image he had now to the completed version. He would act then.

Countless zombies were aimlessly wandering outside the capital, beside the road and in and out of the abandoned buildings as they chewed on unknown substances. Gunshots rang out as a convoy of armored vehicles plowed through them, leaving the ground covered in blood and the air full of a putrid stench. They were driving along when a sudden explosion rang out, fierce winds flipping the vehicles over, sending out a rush of cultivators who were confused by the strange gust. A tall man dusted himself off and barked, "What happened?"

Someone reported, "Captain, a gale came out of nowhere and flipped us over."

The tall man frowned as he looked around, seeing that there were no winds in all directions; where had the gale come from? It was then that a shop in the distance was split by an unseen attack, followed by the cultivators' torsos flying off into the sky. They had all been massacred in an instant.

Cultivators dying in the field was nothing too strange, but more and more of them were killed by such invisible attacks over the next few days. Once someone in the Realm of Earth died, Zhang Dingtian personally left the capital to investigate; that man had been second only to the Seven Sages, so no weaker cultivators dared to act. Zombies from both sides of the road snarled and charged towards the Bladesage, and he noticed strange creatures wriggling underground, but he remained expressionless as an energy wave swept out and decimated the creatures.

Perhaps he was too intimidating, as both sides of the road fell silent. He met no sneak attacks even after traveling quite a distance, causing him to stop and consider his options. He pulled out Borise's personal gadget that Bai Xue had given him, deciding that it was best to use it right now. A light tap set it off beeping, and his gaze immediately focused northeast as he slashed out with his sword. The attack sliced across the earth, a pathetic figure hurrying to escape as it nursed an injured left shoulder.

Zhang Dingtian pursued immediately, his blade sweeping out immediately. The fleeing figure turned around and showed a frightened face; it was a zombie! The creature crashed into the ground, its hands flailing as a cruel light flashed in its scarlet eyes. Formless blades of wind slashed out at the Bladesage, but a swipe of his hand rebounded the attack and sliced the creature's head off in an instant. The head rolled a little ways away before being crushed by an aftershock.

Zhang Dingtian frowned at the zombie's corpse. To his understanding, zombies were failed specimens of apocalyptic evolution; they simply shouldn't have such strength. This thing had the sheer power of a Realm of Earth cultivator, and it could even control wind blades with its hands. He rushed back to the capital to report the event to President Lian.



“What? A Realm of Earth zombie that can control the wind? How is that possible, they are just failed evolutions.”

“I saw it with my own eyes,” Zhang Dingtian replied.

President Lian muttered darkly, his gaze solemn. The zombies outnumbered the human survivors many times over; if they could also evolve or cultivate, they would make for another powerful enemy. Even more alarming was the ability to control the wind; that was impossible through simple cultivation. Even Zhang Dingtian didn’t have such a capability; in fact, they only knew of two people who wielded such supernatural abilities. How could the zombie have come by it?

“If there was one, there will be another. Didn’t Lu Yin come from Jinlin? Check with him if he has met any similar zombies,” President Lian suggested.

Zhang Dingtian immediately summoned Lu Yin, and Bai Xue commented the moment she saw his face change upon hearing the information, “You know something.”

He nodded, telling them of his experience with the long-haired zombie king back near Jinlin. At the time, he’d thought the capital would have known already, but they were only learning of it now.

Bai Xue was incredulous, “Swallowing natural energy crystals can grant supernatural abilities? How is that possible? Even humans can’t do that.”

“It’s what I saw; I have no reason to lie to you.”

President Lian’s expression was solemn as he looked at the trio, “We’ve always assumed that zombies are a failed branch of human evolution, and facts indicate that this is largely true. Most zombies only pose a threat to the average human, but what if they aren’t failures but a divergent path? Wouldn’t that make sense?”

Zhang Dingtian’s gaze changed, “Humans can cultivate with the energy cores found inside the mutant beasts. Perhaps zombies can similarly absorb energy crystals and gain stronger abilities.”

President Lian replied, “No one has seen a zombie swallow a beast core. Mutant beasts can easily wipe out entire hordes, and even if injured they can still escape. No one would be willing to give a zombie a hard-won beast core either, so there’s no way for one to get a hold of any. But it is plausible that a rare few manage to find energy crystals through dumb luck; if our assumptions are true, Earth will see enormous change.”

### **Chapter 34: Murder**

“I’ll go grab a zombie to test,” Zhang Dingtian left immediately, returning in a flash and throwing a zombie to the ground. He stuffed an energy crystal into the creature’s mouth, but even as everyone stared for a while, the creature had no reaction. Both he and Bai Xue heaved sighs of relief.

Lu Yin was unconvinced, “We can’t base our judgment on a single one, go catch a few more.”

Zhang Dingtian nodded, ordering his subordinates to capture some more zombies. More than fifty were bound and sent over within half an hour, and he placed an energy crystal into the mouths of each one. Most didn’t react as expected, but one suddenly growled and revealed a pained expression, its scarlet

eyes staring daggers at the Bladesage as surging energy heated and ripped apart its skin. A loud explosion rang out as its body splattered all over the place.

President Lian watched this scene in astonishment, "Different zombies react differently after being given the crystals, that means this type of evolution is feasible."

As Lu Yin looked at the mangled flesh on the ground, an image of Yin and that head suddenly appeared in his mind, sending a chill down his spine. He didn't dare take it out to examine it right now.

"This has to be kept strictly confidential, it cannot leak out to certain individuals." Bai Xue said coldly, throwing a dirty look Lu Yin's way.

He replied calmly, "It seems like the planetary evolution isn't as easy as it seems. If the zombies can evolve, are they considered trainees in the trials too?"

"Zombies possess no intellect." Bai Xue snapped.

Lu Yin laughed, "No intellect? That may not be the case."

Zhang Dingtian immediately issued an order for anyone outside the city to return, deciding to use the ballistics he had left to bomb the zombies. There seemed to be no way to make them human again, so if their threat was significant, allowing them to remain was risky. That risk multiplied tenfold if they could obtain great power by ingesting elemental crystals.

President Lian approved of this; there were just too many zombies. All it took was the evolution of one in ten thousand for things to become catastrophic; that sort of supernatural energy was not something that an original human being could withstand. A good example was Bai Xue. Realistically speaking, she would not have been a match for Borise if not for her gift of Frost.

Earth-shattering explosions rang outside the city that night, and Lu Yin watched as salvo after salvo of guided missiles swept across the zombie hordes. These creatures were only frightening out of sheer volume, and ballistic missiles were thus the best way to deal with them. However, the bombings only lasted two minutes, leaving him rather surprised; he felt almost certain that there had to be more missiles in Beijing's arsenal.

His attention diverted to the sky, he saw a distant figure dashing towards his residence through the air. Focusing closely, he was surprised to see that it was Bai Xue. What could this hostile beauty want from him so late at night? Watching the gorgeous woman approach under the pale moonlight, he felt like he wouldn't have any qualms with making a cuckold of Liu Shaoge.

However, Bai Xue landed in his courtyard and looked around, not growing less agitated as she stared at him. A puzzled expression came over Lu Yin's face as he asked, "Is anything the matter?"

Jeraldine walked out from her room as well, sending a glance of confusion towards the Water Sage.

"Nothing, I was just passing through," Bai Xue said dully.

"Err... Are you sure?"

After a momentary pause, Bai Xue answered, "The personnel in charge of firing the missions are all dead, and the ballistics have been damaged beyond usability."

“What? Who did that?!” Lu Yin asked in shock, but a bemused smile filled his face as Bai Xue stared at him in silence, “Oh, so you rushed hoping I was absent and you could use it as evidence against me.”

“I hope you had nothing to do with this; we wouldn’t be forgiving,” Bai Xue said menacingly.

Lu Yin was baffled by it all, “You seem to be so guarded against me, why?”

Bai Xue didn’t respond, instead turning around and preparing to leave.

“Wait, you can’t just leave like that; you owe me an explanation!” he gently walked over to her side, stretching a hand forward to touch her hair. Bai Xue sent an icy glare his way, the surface of her body starting to radiate cold air which swept towards him. When he swept it away with his right palm and made to grab her hair again, her body was suddenly covered in a layer of ice that reflected the moonlight.

Lu Yin’s palm smacked against the ice and shattered it, prompting Bai Xue to take a few steps back as she glared at him warily. Only then did he shrug, “I was just horsing around.”

“It wasn’t funny,” she replied coldly.

“Barging into my home to threaten me this late in the night wasn’t funny either,” he responded with a slight chill of his own.

Bai Xue’s eyes twinkled, and she left behind a “Sorry” and her signature fragrance as she took to the sky. Watching her fly away, Lu Yin wondered just what kind of person would want the ballistics destroyed. Was there anyone who’d want the zombies kept alive?

Jeraldine squeaked in admiration as she watched Bai Xue leave, “I’m always so enthralled whenever I see her. Zhou Shan was right; this woman really does seem like a water goddess. Even in terms of looks alone, she’s definitely worthy of comparison to Starsibyl.”

“Starsibyl?” Lu Yin asked in confusion.

Jeraldine looked towards the sky and spoke with a longing tone, “She’s the most beautiful woman in the universe, rumored to be at least an explorer. She visits trials quite often, supposedly to look for those who are destined to meet her. She’s said to have the power of divination, and can also look into the past; she’s the fantasy of countless people.”

Lu Yin was speechless, “Yours too?”

Jeraldine rolled her eyes, “For me, she’s my idol. She comes from a powerful, mysterious sect in the Inverse; any random disciple of that sect can destroy any youth from the Great Yu Empire. She’s a legend on the battlefield, too, she... Nevermind, you wouldn’t understand even if I explained. I’m going to bed.”

Indeed, Lu Yin dismissed Jeraldine’s words. The universe was beyond vast, and things often got grossly exaggerated as stories spread around. He fully believed that this Starsibyl’s supposed divination abilities were one such thing; it simply made no sense.

While he considered what he'd just heard, Lu Yin stared into the stars once more, as two stars spun on his own right palm with a third starting to manifest. The eradication of the zombie horde was put on hold and he didn't really care about how Zhang Dingtian would handle it, but he was concerned that the second batch of students would be arriving in only about forty more days. He was running out of time.

Meanwhile, Zhang Dingtian ordered ten thousand cultivators to leave the city in batches to head out and eliminate all the zombies. They were told they could ignore all mutant beasts, which made the task fairly easy. He and Bai Xue oversaw the departures from atop the city walls, the latter commenting, "Even if we destroy all the zombies around the capital, there are still more everywhere else."

"This is still better than nothing," the Bladesage said with a grave tone, "I've also ordered troops to travel to Jinlin, Hubei, and elsewhere to deliver an update on the situations. We're trying to minimize the risk."

Bai Xue's eyes lit up when Hubei was mentioned, "How is Shaoge doing?"

Zhang Dingtian looked at her and responded monotonously, "I don't know."

Bai Xue fell silent.

The zombie purge was accomplished quite successfully. Ten thousand cultivators were able to kill and burn nearly two million zombies each day, so after only a few days, the area surrounding the capital had been emptied. Now, all that filled the vicinity was pungent smoke. Zhang Dingtian personally investigated westwards where the ballistics team had been stationed, but even after several days, he couldn't find any clues about the identity of their killer. The only thing he knew was that the assassin was swift and brutal, massacring more than 500 people within a minute.

"Do you think Lu Yin could have done it?" Bai Xue asked from a distance.

"Did you see it with your own eyes?" he asked in a grave tone, his eyes sweeping through the ground.

She pursed her lips, "We'd better connect with Jinlin as soon as possible. This Lu Yin guy is suspicious, I have a feeling he's a student from outer space."

"And what if he is? With our current world, we should only draw a line between allies and enemies; we don't have the option to segregate ourselves based on race or origin any longer."

Bai Xue had a melancholy face, but remained silent.

Zhang Dingtian turned to walk back inside, but a white flash blurred past him as he opened the door. The flash was headed straight for his throat, but he was barely fast enough to dodge most of the attack. Still, a thin wound appeared on his neck and started leaking blood. A silver-haired youth with a twisted smile thrust his butterfly sword forward once more in attack, forcing him to draw his longsword in a defensive stance as the blade swung down towards his eyes. The Bladesage braced himself for impact as the weapon drew close, star energy bursting forth to slow the attack as his own forward thrust split the earth nearby.

### **Chapter 35: Information**

"You really are the strongest of the Seven Sages. I'll see you soon!" Silver retreated a few steps, turning around and rushing away. Zhang Dingtian was about to send a slash behind him, but stopped as he

realized that he was fleeing in the direction of Bai Xue. Ice formed everywhere as the Water Sage stretched out her palm to confront him, but he simply laughed in mockery as his butterfly sword shattered the ice with ease, leaving her helpless as the blade stabbed towards her neck. She resigned herself to death, but watched the youth redirect the attack in surprise as a starry palm blocked the way.

Lu Yin had used the Roving Step to barely appear in front of Bai Xue in time, threatening Silver with a counter-attack that forced him to change targets. The air trembled as the two attacks met, the astral explosion blasting Bai Xue away and shattering the ground. Shockwaves spread out in all directions and filled the room with a cloud of dust; by the time it cleared, Lu Yin was still in place but the silver-haired youth had disappeared from sight. Fewer than ten seconds had passed from Zhang Dingtian's injury to this point; leaving the nearby soldiers with no time to react.

"Are you alright?" Lu Yin asked as he stepped out of the debris.

Bai Xue was shaken by that touch of death; the delicate blade had effortlessly torn through her defences and threatened her life. This was the first time she'd felt such fear since becoming one of the Seven Sages. It took her a moment to nod, "Thank you."

Lu Yin then turned to look at Zhang Dingtian, "You're hurt."

"I'll be fine," the Bladesage touched the wound on his neck, the blood shocking the soldiers who had just arrived. They couldn't believe that the strongest of the Seven Sages had been injured, but he himself was more confused to see Lu Yin, "Why did you come here?"

Lu Yin looked at his palm, "I was curious. I wanted to know who the murderer was."

Zhang Dingtian answered, "It was the guy who just left."

"I know," Lu Yin replied. He looked at Zhang Tian's wounded neck and frowned. He had seen the entire process of Silver's attack, and was quite astonished by the Bladesage's perception to be able to avoid that attack at such close range without using any battle techniques. He had to admit that he could have done no better in the same situation. However, what truly intrigued him was how Silver had managed to hide his aura so completely. While most students could somewhat accomplish that to avoid scanners, Zhang Dingtian had almost let him get close enough to kill him in one blow.

"Why was he targeting you?" Bai Xue asked.

Zhang Dingtian narrowed his eyes, "I'm not sure, I've never met him before. The only possibility that comes to mind is that he doesn't want the zombies killed."

That comment hit Lu Yin hard; this attempt proved his previous guesses that Silver was connected to the zombie kings somehow. This also meant that Silver wasn't really paying attention to the trial's mission, but was instead worried about keeping the zombies alive. The youth was a complete puzzle; although some assumptions could be made, there was only so much that could be learnt from a single assassination attempt.

"Pass down orders to keep killing the zombies for 24 hours," Zhang Dingtian suddenly commanded. Since it was impossible to capture someone that fast and sneaky, he would simply suppress news of the attack and redouble his efforts at eliminating the zombie horde. He quickly set about hiring even independent cultivators to join in on the task.

Time flew by, and soon there was only a month until the next group of students arrived. Numerous fights had broken out all over Europe in the meanwhile, but there was no news of the criminal's capture. One day, Lu Yin's gadget activated automatically and beeped as it sent him an announcement.

"Dear Students.

The grace period has now drawn to a close; location tracking can no longer be disabled on your gadgets, and your positions will be openly available. Please finish your missions as soon as possible.

Good luck."

This message would cause the trial to become even more cut-throat. The first batch of students had already been on Earth for two months, and this time had been considered a safe period when they could hide their battle ability and just look for rare herbs or minerals in order to improve their results, but now that this period was over, everyone's location would be publicly broadcasted unless they got rid of their gadget entirely. Lu Yin sighed, gazing at the sky. The true trial was now starting, and hiding was no longer a possibility. The last two months could also be considered an opportunity for the people of Earth to fight the students for resources; this was what the greater universe considered a fair opportunity for evolving planets.

"There's quite a few," he mumbled to himself. Vesta's gadget finally connected to the net for the first time, showing a model of Earth with the locations of every single student. The pods he'd seen in Jinlin had only been a small fraction of the total number; he now saw nearly a hundred students in Asia, with more in Europe, Africa, the Americas, and even some all the way in Antarctica. However, most of the students were currently centered around a spot near the Mediterranean Sea.

As he looked through the map, a message suddenly popped up on top, "The Tianzhu Monk of Earth has defeated Hayden."

Lu Yin was surprised by this; were battle results also going to be announced now?

This information startled many other students as well. Hayden was known to be the strongest in his school, so a native defeating him was stunning, especially for common students like Jeraldine. Top students were often considered unbeatable, and this defeat made them consider the risks of this trial much more seriously. Although the Great Yu Empire held many trials every few months, it was rare for a top student to be defeated anywhere. The strongest natives of typical planets weren't even Sentinels, ensuring that those like Hayden were invincible.

Another message quickly appeared, "Eddy has defeated the Tianzhu Monk."

This piqued Lu Yin's interest; why would Eddy and Hayden visit Tianzhu? Jeraldine anxiously sought out Lu Yin, "Now that the trial has officially started, you can see everyone's location on the map and can contact them, too. You're aware of this, right?"

Lu Yin's heart sank, "You can contact each other?"

She nodded, "The students come from all over the Great Yu Empire so most of us don't know each other, which is why so few people contacted each other over the past two months. Whatever, the

important bit is that someone already released news that the criminal left something important in Beijing that he'll come back to retrieve."

Lu Yin's gaze turned cold, "Who?"

Jeraldine shook her head, "I don't know, the net only shows the positions of the gadgets, not their users."

Lu Yin ran through the possible suspects in his mind, but the only people who knew that the criminal had left something in the capital were the Seven Sages, President Lian, and himself. Not even Eddy had known about it, so now that the news had been leaked, Zhang Dingtian and Bai Xue would absolutely suspect him.

Surely enough, an energy wave swept through the area very soon. Lu Yin flew into the sky and saw Zhang Dingtian and Bai Xue, saying immediately, "I wasn't the one who leaked the information."

"Convince me," the Bladesage glared at him.

Lu Yin narrowed his eyes in thought before ordering Jeraldine, "Announce that the criminal hid something in Tianzhu, which is why Eddy and Hayden were there. It was also why the Tianzhu Monk was able to beat Hayden."

Jeraldine instantly complied.

"That won't slow them down for long," Zhang Dingtian said.

"I'm demonstrating my sincerity; it's up to you whether you believe me or not."

Zhang Dingtian inhaled deeply, clenching his blade. He wanted to capture this only outsider who knew the secret, but Lu Yin was too strong for him to be confident in victory.

"Let us check your gadget," Bai Xue remained skeptical.

"Who the hell do you think you are?" Lu Yin shouted, "Come take it from me if you dare!"

"You!" Bai Xue was exasperated. She had wanted to give Lu Yin a chance to prove his innocence since he saved her life, but he was too stubborn.

"There are a total of nine people who were aware of this secret. I'm in the capital, so why would I say something that would bring trouble to myself like an idiot? Even if I had ulterior motives for being here, I would still keep my mouth shut," Lu Yin said coldly.

### **Chapter 36: Robbery**

Lu Yin's words made sense, and Zhang Dingtian and Bai Xue exchanged glances. They realized that if Lu Yin really was a student taking the trial, he wouldn't have done something to cause himself trouble.

"There is a person that I have my suspicions about, though," he continued, glancing at Bai Xue, "Liu Shaoge."

The two Sages were astonished, "Why?"

"Hubei has been marked blue, you know what that means."

Bai Xue disagreed, "My entire domain is blue, as is Nanjing. That doesn't mean anything."

"You're one of the three High Sages, and the only reason Nanjing is blue is that I saved it. Liu Shaoge isn't a High Sage, he isn't even much stronger than Zhou Shan; how could he possibly defend himself from the trainees? Look at the map yourself, you'll see there are multiple students around the region." This explanation silenced Bai Xue's retort; she simply couldn't pick a hole in his argument.

Zhang Dingtian heaved a deep sigh, sheathing his sword as he turned to leave, "Innocent until proven guilty; that applies to you, and it applies to Liu Shaoge as well."

Bai Xue also left after one last, troubled glance at Lu Yin. It was only then that Jeraldine approached, "Was it really Liu Shaoge who spread the news?"

"How would I know?" Lu Yin answered nonchalantly.

She blinked, "But you sounded so certain just now."

Lu Yin smirked at her, "How would I convince them if I didn't? If you're going to scapegoat someone, you need to have full confidence in your words. What have you been studying in school if you don't even understand this?"

Scapegoat someone? How despicable! While Jeraldine was disturbed by these words, Lu Yin returned to his residence. Meanwhile, her post on the net prompted many of the students bitterly fighting in Europe to rush to Tianzhu. Although Eddy and Hayden tried to clarify that they had only been passing through and fought the Tianzhu Monk through coincidence, no one believed them.

To Lu Yin, the official network was like a movie over the next few days. There were constant messages about X defeating Y, Z dying, and the like; some of the students trying to fly over from the Americas had been eaten by mutant sea beasts on the trip. The commotion continued for five days until Eddy and Hayden finally managed to prove their innocence, convincing people that the criminal hadn't left anything in Tianzhu.

When the focus finally shifted back to Beijing, Lu Yin sighed. He'd known that he couldn't keep people distracted forever; those challenging trials weren't fools, and Beijing was clearly the place most likely to have anything related to the criminal. However, Eddy had suggested that the students group up and take control of Beijing, waiting for the criminal to appear. If the month passed without that happening, they would stick together against the next batch of students. This suggestion proved quite popular with those who wanted to try and get into Astral-10; no one in the first batch had confidence in facing the next individually, but Eddy's suggestion gave them a sliver of hope.

Within Beijing, Zhang Dingtian and Bai Xue looked terrible. They were aware of the situation and knew how bad things were about to become; the capital would soon become a battlefield. Although Zhang Dingtian was extremely powerful, there was a limit to his strength and he didn't have any battle techniques that suited him; it would be impossible to protect the city alone. Bai Xue was significantly weaker, and the blunt truth was that even all of the Seven Sages gathered together would still face a hopeless situation.

Lu Yin was just as concerned as the two Sages. He had taken the identity of a native in the trial, so if Beijing was taken over, it would drastically reduce the effect he was aiming for. Also, he had no



intentions of allowing the criminal to go free with the item that had been left behind. Beijing was critical to all of his plans.

“Lu Yin, let’s go. Beijing won’t be able to defend itself,” Jeraldine told him anxiously, but he was lost in contemplation. The most powerful people on Earth right now were Zhang Dingtian and Eddy, the former being a tiny bit more powerful, but there would be many opponents of comparable strength in the upcoming battle. He needed to be stronger than them all to keep the city from battle; at the very least, he needed to reach Eddy’s level and sweep through them all with his Cosmic Palm.

Considering all this, he whispered to Jeraldine before flying off, “Stay in Beijing, I’ll be back in a few days.”

Jeraldine was left gritting her teeth in reply. He was aware of the situation; why was he asking her to stay and die?

Right as Lu Yin was about to leave the capital, Bai Xue popped out to confront him, “Are you trying to escape?”

“I’ll be back before the trainees attack the city,” he answered softly.

“And why should I believe you?” she asked, her beautiful face expressing all the disdain she held towards him.

“You don’t have to; you can’t stop me regardless,” he stated matter-of-factly, “Or do you want a deathmatch with me right before an impending war?”

Bai Xue clenched her fists.

“Let him go.” Zhang Dingtian’s voice rang out, though he remained out of sight. Bai Xue could do nothing more at that point, and simply floated back to the ground. Lu Yin stared at the city for a while before leaving, taking out his gadget once he was far enough away.

“The closest one is... you,” he said while rushing west.

With Lu Yin’s departure, Jeraldine tried to leave as well. She had no obligation to him and would have fled long ago if he hadn’t been keeping an eye on her, so this was the perfect opportunity. Unfortunately, she’d missed something in this perfect plan; Bai Xue.

“What right do you have to stop me?” Jeraldine demanded furiously as the Water Sage stopped her.

Bai Xue glared at her, “Because you’re Lu Yin’s woman. Since he left, you have to stay.”

“I’m not his woman! Don’t spread rumors!” she screamed angrily, but while Bai Xue was powerless against Lu Yin, handling this girl was a breeze. It wasn’t long before a block of ice plopped down in Lu Yin’s residence, it would take quite a while for Jeraldine to thaw out. “Damned Lu Yin, Damned ice girl, damned natives... every damn one of them is unreasonable!”

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Shaanxi was the province closest to Beijing, but without any of the Seven Sages protecting it, the strongest people within were only in the Realm of Earth. Still, a large group had gathered within its largest gathering point of Tongchuan. Russel was a laid-back person who was easily satisfied with minor accomplishments. As the second strongest student of Garu Academy, he had no ambitions to complete the trial mission and was content with simply occupying a region and harvesting what resources he could to have a decent result. He was delighted during the past two months of peace; as a Sentinel—no, a Realm of Sky cultivator—he'd taken over the city and become its guardian deity worshipped by all. Although he helped the survivors eliminate some mutant beasts on occasion, most of his time was spent in quiet explorations that resulted in the occasional delight of a rare item. Even the thought of his results made the man happy.

Sipping some wine under the sun, Russel was humming some tunes from his hometown as he thought to himself with a smile, 'Primal planets like this one are the best. The air is fresh, the people are honest, and I'm free to do whatever I want! All I gotta do is find some valuable materials... heh, this is just the best! Hahaha!'

After enjoying himself for a bit, Russel waved over two beautiful young ladies and had one massage his shoulders while the other was tasked with keeping his glass full and working on his feet. He moaned in pleasure, "Ooh..."

Just as he was about to take a sip, a shadow suddenly blocked the comfortable sun. He frowned and looked up to see a rather plain young man staring down at him from mid-air.

'Hmm? A Sentinel?' He grew serious and shooed away the two girls who'd grown frightened, glaring at the man above him, "Who are you?"

"A thief," the youth said briefly.

"What?" Russel stared blankly, "Come again?"

"I said I'm a thief," Lu Yin repeated graciously. He'd come to the conclusion that the only way to raise his strength quickly was to absorb star energy, and robbing the students was the way to go if he wanted star crystals.

"I know you're a trainee too, kid, but you have to be an idiot! Do you know who I am? Want to rob me? Let me tell you, I—"

He felt a sharp pain in his stomach before he could finish, sent crashing into the ground by the terrifying blow. The impact formed a deep crater, and at the bottom of it Russel coughed up blood and looked up with a pale face. Wasn't that the Spacerender Palm? The hell? Where did a monster like that come here from?

### **Chapter 37: Planetary Thief**

Lu Yin descended to the ground and approached Russel, "Empty out your cosmic ring before I have to force you."

"You have to be the leader at some school, why are you robbing me instead of finishing the mission? Won't you lose points?" Russel's face twitched, but Lu Yin responded by raising his arm and leveling a

cold glare. As the air started to distort from a Shockwave Palm, he urgently spoke up, “No! D-Don’t attack, I’ll do it, I’ll do it!”

Russel removed everything from his cosmic ring as he spoke, revealing a wide array of items, but Lu Yin only grabbed the star crystals and a few of the more useful ones before leaving.

“Hey, what’s your name?” he called out, but upon being ignored he could only curse at the existence of such a bastard among the trainees. He suddenly remembered something and hurried to check the network on his watch, but the only thing displayed at the top of the map was ‘Russel has been defeated.’ This left him coughing up blood again; if there was no name, the thief had even stolen his gadget!

Once he was far away from Tongcheng, Lu Yin glanced at the network on his gadget and nodded in satisfaction. He was aware that the people monitoring the trial on Earth knew who he was, but they had still hidden it to keep things fair. Who next? That was answered by a quick glance at his map; he didn’t take much time to choose someone before hurrying off.

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Lu Yin robbed more than ten students around China over the next three days, all of whom had thought they were safely hidden. Each one was about the same level as Jeraldine, content with occupying a piece of land, harvesting some rare materials, and just surviving to the end. They had no interest in disrupting the status quo, but they had been unfortunate enough to come across someone in desperate need of star crystals. After all, no matter how small it was, even a mosquito had some meat on it.

High up in the sky, he was currently reorganizing the contents of his cosmic ring. Although its capacity was quite large, it was still far from sufficient for his current needs. He had picked up too many random ores and ingredients during his hunt, leaving him with no choice but to throw out some of the less valuable items. He wasn’t too concerned since most of these students carried things of little value, but he was frustrated by just how poor these students were. Even after robbing so many, he had only managed to gather two cubic meters of star crystals!

The truth was that all students with the courage to participate in planetary trials were the cream of the crop, and were thus also much wealthier than ordinary students. Lu Yin likely wouldn’t have found a single cubic meter of crystals even among a thousand ordinary students; across the universe, star crystals were as valuable as gold was on Earth. Even the extremely wealthy hesitated to use them to advance their training and preferred only having them around as a life-saving measure in case of an emergency; their star energy came from absorbing the latent energy in the surroundings.

“This is too slow. Looks like I have no choice but to rob school leaders like Veron,” Lu Yin muttered to himself. He had already robbed everyone within a reasonable distance, and information was quickly spreading on the network about a planetary thief that had mixed in with the students. They were starting to panic.

More and more students were heading towards Tianzhu to take up Eddy’s proposal, and at least thirty had gathered already. Ten of them were the strongest in their academies; after all, only someone in the top three of their school would have the confidence to pursue the criminal. The group left all of Tianzhu trembling in fear.

Five days later, Eddy announced that there was no need for any more people to gather at Tianzhu; he would now be heading to Beijing. This lit the network aflame; the battle with the natives was officially about to start.

'Is it starting? Guess I need to get busy too,' Lu Yin stood up from where he'd been hidden and soared into the sky.

"Ian has been defeated." Two days later, another notification appeared on the network that left many students in despair. They had already seen this message ten times over, and the rumors were that this thief had a stolen gadget so no one could know who he was. They had first assumed he was only robbing common students, but Ian was the strongest in his academy. This left many terrified.

On a piece of barren ground, a young man coughed up blood as he glared into the distance, watching Lu Yin use some of that crimson to gain access to his cosmic ring. Lu Yin's eyes lit up as he saw the contents, "Nice, you've got some pretty good things in here. As expected from a school leader."

"Who the hell are you?! What academy are you from? Give me a name!" Ian roared with fury. He had been unfortunate enough to meet this guy, and before they could even begin talking, he'd been rendered speechless by a Spacerender Palm. Another had closed in before he could recover his senses, and this one had beaten him into the ground.

Lu Yin tossed the ring back, "Call me Seven."

"Seven?!" Ian was infuriated, but could only watch as Lu Yin left.

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At the westernmost part of China, Qinghai, Eddy, Hayden, and a group of at least ten students looked grave.

"Ian was robbed too, Eddy, we have to take care of this guy before we go to Beijing; there's still fifteen days for the second batch, we have enough time," someone suggested.

"Yeah, it's no good to let a rat like that stick around to cause more trouble," someone else said, looking annoyed. A classmate of his had been robbed as well, and knowing the thieving bastard was even targeting girls left him mad with rage.

Eddy and Hayden exchanged looks, "Fine. We'll work in pairs and search around Beijing while slowly closing in to isolate his gadget's location. If you see anyone alone who has the power to match a school leader, just attack. It's better to get the wrong person than let the thief go free."

"If only the network hadn't blocked photo share, or we could recognize him right away," someone said begrudgingly.

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"So they're working in pairs?" Lu Yin checked the gadget locations on the map, "Interesting, one of each has to be a school leader. Alright, come at me!"

Half a day later, he was floating amidst the clouds when two students appeared on the horizon and checked their gadgets. "Only 1,700, just trash," one of them said disdainfully.

The other person gestured towards Lu Yin, "Get over here, kid."

Lu Yin calmly flew towards them, his eyes showing nothing.

"Did you see the person who robbed you?"

"Yup," Lu Yin nodded.

"Draw me a picture."

Lu Yin shook his head, "I never learned how to draw."

"Are you dumb or something? Just use your gadget and you'll be able to draw whatever image you imagine!"

"Oh. Well that's pointless, the person is right here."

"Here? Where?!" The two were astonished.

"Me," Lu Yin pointed at himself. A clap of the Shockwave Palm distorted the air around him, knocking one of the students out.

"So you're the thief. DIE!" the second managed to resist, drawing his sword to attack. This was the top student of his academy, and while he couldn't compare with those like Veron, he was much more powerful than people of Terence's ilk. Unfortunately for him, that was nothing in the face of Lu Yin's Cosmic Palm; one attack snapped his sword and swatted him to the ground.

Just like that, Lu Yin had successfully robbed two more students and created another ruckus on the network. Eddy took the news in with a grim face; someone had already been robbed after such little time. Where had this bastard come from?

"Remember not to get close to any strangers," he messaged everyone, but this was a pointless suggestion. The students had already started keeping their distance regardless of power.

"Hmm... Half a cube more... I can use this to cultivate," the thief commented as he checked his cosmic ring. He then removed his gadget, threw it into a stream, and dashed away to an abandoned farm. Crushing the crystals, he immediately activated his Cosmic Art to absorb all of the energy.

Far away, Zhang Dingtian and the others in Beijing watched the network speechlessly.

"I guarantee that's Lu Yin." Bai Xue determined.

Zhang Dingtian looked confused, "Why?"

She told him of how the youth had robbed Parlie and Veron, "So who else could it be?"

Zhang Dingtian was perplexed, while Lu Yin looked ordinary, he was someone who went completely overboard at times. He had robbed more than 15 people so far, many of whom were the strongest of their academies. What was he planning?

If Bai Xue could determine the robber was Lu Yin, Jeraldine was naturally able to come to the same conclusion. The news left her far more amazed than Zhang Dingtian and the others; she knew that Lu Yin had only been a Seeker she could crush the first time they met, and that same bug had now grown to the point where he could overwhelm school leaders. He was simply a monster.

While Lu Yin leisurely absorbed astral energy at the farm, Eddy and the other students were going crazy searching for him. They fruitlessly continued their search for five days without a single clue, but all they found in the end was an ownerless gadget in a stream.

“Keep searching. If we can’t find him in the next seven days, we’ll go straight to Beijing. There are only ten days before the next batch arrives, we can’t afford to screw up the plan,” he said sternly.

### **Chapter 38: Gerlaine**

Up in the distance, two figures were floating in the sky. They were Gerlaine and Balaror, the same duo who had initially chased after Eddy. Instead of joining forces with him, they were fishing for benefits elsewhere.

“This is exhausting, let’s rest a bit,” Gerlaine swung her long hair about, her pretty face revealing a hint of weariness. Looking around at the lush green farm they were nearby, Balaror smiled and agreed. However, both their personal gadgets suddenly started beeping, prompting Gerlaine to look into the distance in surprise, “Huh, there’s another student here. 2100.”

“That low? Let’s check it out.” Balaror replied, and the two slowly headed for the farm.

Within the farm was a troubled Lu Yin. It had taken only a few star crystals for him to go from a new Seeker to the peak of that realm, but going from a starting Sentinel to the peak required hundreds of times that amount. He had absorbed about a cube of star crystals, but his combat level had only grown to a little past 2,000. A portion of the energy had been used to eliminate any impurities, which meant it would take many more cubes to become a peak Sentinel. He was no longer sure if he could get there even targeting school leaders.

“Looks like it’s impossible to max out for now, at least I’m over 2k,” Lu Yin mumbled as he recalled Parlie’s strength, but was suddenly distracted as he noticed Gerlaine and Balaror approaching. He was particularly intrigued by the latter; did a dryad manifest itself from the plant life here?

“You inside, come out,” Gerlaine charmingly ordered, flinging her hair back with pride. Lu Yin walked out as asked, but she was displeased when she realized that he barely even noticed her, “Hey, what are you doing staring there? I’m the one talking to you”

He pointed at Balaror, “Is that a nymph?”

“What? Such insolence!” Balaror grew furious in an instant, sending a kick towards Lu Yin. As an elite student of the Great Yu Empire’s Outerspace Academy, he was second only to Gerlaine here at over 2,900 battle power; he didn’t see someone at 2,100 as a threat.

Lu Yin dodged with Roving Step, appearing to the youth’s right as he pressed down on his abdomen. “Robbery,” he said with an icy tone as enormous force blasted out from his palm, the explosion blasting Balaror away as the Spacerender Palm split skin.

Gerlaine's gaze focused as an unusual bow appeared in her hands, rumbling thunderously as she aimed an arrow at Lu Yin. He felt the approaching danger and immediately dodged with the Roving Step, barely in time as an arrow whizzed past his ear into the distance. It tore through the air and shook the earth in its wake, and moments later a thunderclap resounded in his ears accompanied by a violent shockwave.

Before he could even look back, the girl was already aiming another arrow at him. He clawed forward to stop her, but she dealt with that by forming lightning all over the surface of her body in a stormy armor. The appearance of the armor twisted the air and shook the ground, forcing Lu Yin to get serious as two stars appeared on his palm. Another loud explosion rang out, as his attack barely tore through the armor and struck her body.

Both literally and physically, Gerlaine was blown away. This armor had been a gift from her brother, and its defenses were something few Sentinels could break through. And yet, this random person had managed to do it.

"DON'T YOU TOUCH HER!" Balaror howled as she landed away from her bow, odd green stripes appearing on his skin and spreading across his body. The surrounding plants started to squirm the next moment, and the grass below Lu Yin jumped up like a living creature to grasp his feet. Lu Yin was surprised by the hostile aura all around him, but an eruption of star energy shattered the plants and let him charge straight forward with another palm attack. Balaror swung both of his weed-covered arms to counter, but despite a deafening impact that sent a cloud of debris into the air, the palm slapped him into the ground. Both of his arms were twisted at a strange angle, and he spat out blood.

"Oh, that's where I remember you. Both of you were hidden in the capital once," Lu Yin commented as he picked the man up, tossing him towards the girl and drawing closer.

"Gerlaine and Balaror have been defeated," the network notified all gadgets on Earth.

"Even Gerlaine lost to him?" A distant Eddy was surprised.

Fallen prone on the grass, Gerlaine glared at Lu Yin, "You're that planetary thief!"

Lu Yin frowned, "Don't slander me; I'm a good person."

"Bullshit!" she shouted.

"A diva cursing someone? Such a bad temper!" Lu Yin was taken aback.

Gerlaine just snorted, but Balaror spoke up, "Kid, I'm warning you not to touch her. Her brother is Gerbach, one of the strongest youths of the Great Yu Empire. If you hurt her, there's no place you can get to to escape him."

"I already said I'm a good person, I don't hurt people," Lu Yin pursed his lips, snatching Gerlaine's cosmic ring as he spoke. Unlocking it with some blood from her mouth, he immediately started rifling through it for star crystals.

Gerlaine and Balaror were dumbfounded by this behavior; just how was he a good person? The ease and familiarity in his actions showed that he'd done this many times before. Gerlaine protested and started kicking at Lu Yin while yelling, "Hey! Don't mess with that! I'll give you whatever you want from there, but don't go through a girl's stuff!"

“Useless crap,” Lu Yin rolled his eyes, but they suddenly gleamed and his breathing sped up. Astonished by a pile of star crystals that summed up to at least two cubes, he turned to her in surprise, “You’re rich!”

Gerlaine gritted her teeth and her face went red, “Bastard!”

Taking the crystals, Lu Yin threw her ring back and began to search through Balaror, whose reaction was much calmer once he realized that the two of them wouldn’t come to as much harm. While Balaror’s ring didn’t contain as much wealth as Gerlaine’s, it wasn’t far behind either. Lu Yin ended up with a bit over three cubes, something that made him feel rich. Satisfied, he turned to leave, “It’s been a pleasure meeting you two; if it is our fate, we’ll meet again.”

“At least give me your name, you bastard!” Gerlaine screamed.

“Call me Brother Seven,” Lu Yin waved goodbye, starting to rise into the sky.

The girl was extremely upset at this, but then an idea popped into her mind, “Wait! Do you want more star crystals?”

The thief that had just started to ascend shot back to the ground and looked at her, “What do you mean?”

Gerlaine smiled cunningly, “Come with us. I’ll lead you to rob others.”

Lu Yin was flabbergasted while Balaror grimaced; it had started again. Gerlaine never allowed herself to be at a disadvantage. She was normally decent, but if she ever lost out to someone, she’d do anything to not end up with the short end of the stick.

Lu Yin stared at her with a confused expression, “You want to lead me into more robberies? Do I look like an idiot?”

She snorted, “It’s your call to believe me, but you don’t even have a gadget to find other students with. There’s maybe a week before they start invading the capital, what kind of luck do you think you’ll need to meet any of them this week? But if I help you out, we can meet one every step of the way.”

Lu Yin sneered, “What if you set a trap for me?”

Gerlaine raised her head, “On my name, I’d never do such a thing. Go ask anyone, they’ll vouch for the character and trustworthiness of Gerlaine from the Outerspace Academy. I’m Gerbach’s sister, what could I gain from harming you?”

Balaror was speechless, but Lu Yin’s eyes narrowed as he considered the proposal. He was confident that with his current increased strength, he could escape even if trapped and surrounded. “Alright, you lead the way, but I’m going to keep your cosmic ring until we’re done.”

Gerlaine clenched her jaw, “Alright.”

After the two students recovered for half a day, the three people flew north. On the way, Lu Yin asked, “I wanted to know, is this guy a nymph?”



"I was born on Planet Botany," Balaror grunted, "Everyone there looks like this; do you have a problem?"

"Oh, no. The universe is really vast, there are all sorts of creatures."

A furious Balaror turned away, feeling like Lu Yin had insulted his people.

Gerlaine rolled her eyes, "So what? You've also seen Parlie. Those of Planet Third Gravitas are 1.6 meters tall at the most. He can be considered Mr. Average with his height of 1.2 meters. There are also planets where the people have scales, or four arms, or are even ten meters tall. There are also all kinds of grotesquely shaped ones."

"Aren't you a student from the Empire too?" Balaror suddenly asked as he looked at Lu Yin suspiciously.

"Of course not, I'm from Earth," Lu Yin replied, leaving both of them wide-eyed and humiliated.

Half an hour later, Gerlaine informed them excitedly, "Two students are coming."

Lu Yin was thrilled, but he glanced at the girl who seemed even more eager than himself. She turned back to him, "Hey bastard, how are we going to do this?"

### **Chapter 39: Robbing Together**

Lu Yin lifted an eyebrow at Gerlaine's words, flashing a fake smile, "You want to be a part of this?"

Gerlaine's eyebrows lifted as well, "You don't want me?"

The two stared at each other before Balaror pulled her aside, "We can't be seen; it won't reflect well on your brother if word of it reaches the school!"

Gerlaine finally understood and nodded, concealing herself as she told Lu Yin, "You can go play then, we'll hide."

Lu Yin did not object, watching two figures appearing in the distance. He wouldn't feel at ease with the two right next to him; them being hidden away was a better option.

Ten minutes later, the network sent out another notification of a pair's defeat. Most students around the country looked at it in surprise; they had thought the bandit simply stopped five days ago, but the menace was at it again!

Said bandit was currently being stared down by an excited Gerlaine, "Quick, how much did you rob? Split the goods!"

Lu Yin looked at her curiously, "You sure?"

"You can't be thinking of immorally hoarding everything."

He thought about it and nodded, tossing her a small star crystal, "Take it then."

"What? You stingy bastard!" Gerlaine was riled and charged straight at him.

"It's not my problem if you don't want it," Lu Yin said with a smile. He had realized the girl's personality problem long ago. She was helping him because she was disgruntled with the robbery, and she would

have stayed on his side even without any pay. He wasn't worried about her throwing in the towel until she could retrieve what he'd stolen.

Gerlaine's help greatly smoothed up Lu Yin's robbing process, allowing him to procure a staggering five more cubes of star crystals that left even the rich traitor jealous. However, there were only about four days left before the second batch arrived when he also met true danger for the first time since the Apocalypse. Gerlaine had found two people on top of an abandoned supermarket in the network, but once he arrived, he was surrounded by seven. Five of the people here weren't carrying their watches to conceal themselves, and three were even school leaders! It was quite a wager.

"You're the planetary thief? Only combat level 2,100, seems like you have formidable techniques," a coarse-looking student barked, one of the stronger ones in the group.

Beside him, a girl with a hot body smiled demurely, "Most people who obtain star crystals use them to upgrade their battle techniques. Are you like this too, Junior? Could you tell this senior of yours what these battle techniques are?"

Lu Yin's lips curved upwards, "You really want to know? I'll give you a taste."

The girl smiled like a maiden, but raised her hand, aiming an energy gun at him, "Junior, you do know that one doesn't always have to rely on themselves in battle. External items are important as well."

Several others took out more energy guns at the same time, aiming them at Lu Yin. This was the same type of gun that Terence had used to bore a hole through Jeraldine's shoulder; it certainly wasn't weak.

Lu Yin stared at the ambushers as he retrieved a fire crystal from his cosmic ring, suddenly smashing it against the ground. The blaze set the entire building aflame, and as a few people opened fire he dodged with Roving Step. A few other types of elemental energy crystals quickly formed a powerful breeze that only spread the flames all around, and the usage of frost crystals formed a white mist that further obstructed vision.

Having moved quickly, Lu Yin left a phantom behind in his original spot as he appeared behind one of the school leaders, slapping out with Cosmic Palm directly. The opponent's ring armor was shattered in an instant as he was sent crashing into the ground, and Lu Yin followed up with a spin and a Spacerender Palm that struck out in all four directions. The enormous energy crushed the building and dissipated into the void, injuring four of the remaining six students.

The two students left tore through the Spacerender Palm to attack Lu Yin, but his gaze turned cold as he stretched out a palm towards each. Stars appeared in both attacks, blasting the floor open and splitting the abandoned supermarket in two. The trio fell towards the ground, but Lu Yin suddenly felt a sharp pain in his back and turned around to see that the first student he'd slapped down had stabbed a sword into him. Blasting his current two opponents away, he turned around and grabbed that student's shoulder, unsheathing his dagger to strike. The student's eyes shrank as he let go of his sword to retreat, but Lu Yin flung the dagger forwards and scored a glancing blow on the cheek. Blood splattered across the nearby wall as the dagger tore through a dozen buildings, burying itself into a tank nearby. The ruined building started to shake as dust sprang up everywhere.

Gasping for air, a now-nervous Lu Yin struggled to heighten his senses. These three elites were just as strong as Parlie, and they'd surrounded him with nowhere to hide.

In the distance, Gerlaine and Balaror looked over with elated expressions. The girl especially was eager, "Do you think we should rob them in one go?"

"Yes, but we have to wait for his injuries to get worse," Balaror muttered.

Gerlaine was pleased, "At least Eddy isn't stupid and know how to lay an ambush, or I would have done all this for nothing."

Balaror was surprised, "You knew this was a trap?"

"Of course not, stupid, but as long as Eddy wasn't dumb, I knew he would think of something. I can bring that scoundrel around to rob people, so he used me to lay an ambush. None of us are idiots." She rolled her eyes before giggling, "Even Eddy would find it hard to escape from this kind of ambush, this bastard is done for!"

Seven ambushers, and only three were of any real threat to Lu Yin. However, even those three were shocked as he sighed and retrieved something from his cosmic ring, "That is..."

In the distance, Gerlaine was stunned, and went red in the face, "That shameless bastard!"

Lu Yin smiled as he donned a set of ring armor that flickered with lightning. Indeed, this was the armor that Gerlaine claimed had been given by her brother for defense; having confiscated her cosmic ring until they parted ways, he had both this and her bow.

"Gerlaine's armor!" the bulky man shouted and glared at Lu Yin, "You actually dare to rob Gerlaine, you must be crazy. Her brother is Gerbach."

"I don't give a damn who her brother is, your brains have to be mush if you think I need to differentiate between my targets!" Lu Yin sneered, sending out a Spacerender Palm. The buff man clenched his jaw as he crashed into one of the pillars, causing the entire building to collapse.

All combatants bounced out of the ruins, one of them crushing a crystal to summon blades of green wind that struck towards Lu Yin. Lu Yin simply charged towards the attack, allowing the lightning arcing all across his body to deflect the wind blades as he appeared before the man and landed a firm Cosmic Palm. He almost spat out his internals before fainting on the spot.

Seeing things go awry, the other two retreated immediately. While Lu Yin could barely break through it with the full force of the Cosmic Palm, they didn't have such ability. In the end, a seven-man ambush had led to five defeated and two escaped. When these results were announced over the network, everyone fell silent including Eddy. He'd thought he was the strongest amongst the first batch of trainees, but it would be difficult for even him to obtain such results. Not long after, everyone cooperating with him received a message to give up on the bandit; they would invade the capital in three days.

"Come out," Lu Yin plopped down on the floor and stared at a distant Gerlaine and Balaror. Both were shocked; today's battle would certainly make this youth famous. Gerlaine remembered the native realmbreaker sending four people running with their tails between their legs using a single strike, but

this display of power left her shuddering just as much. What sort of battle technique could severely wound a school leader with one strike?

“Help me with this,” Lu Yin threw some ointment at her.

“What?” Gerlaine pointed at herself while glaring, “You want me to do this?”

“Is that difficult to understand?”

She grew furious, “You must be dreaming! I’m a young lady who’s pure as ice, I’ve never touched any man’s body. Such heresy!”

Lu Yin stared coldly at her, “Don’t think I don’t know what you were thinking. If I was defeated just now, you wouldn’t be so courteous towards me. Apply this medicine now.”

“Let me do it,” Balaror offered.

“No, your hands are dirty,” Lu Yin snorted, leaving the man peeved.

#### **Chapter 40: Two Pips**

Lu Yin continued to stare coldly at Gerlaine, “I said, help me apply this ointment.”

The girl gritted her teeth and spat out slowly, “Alright, but you better remember this. I’ll settle things with you one day”

She then grabbed some of the ointment and rubbed it into his back, prompting a refreshed sigh. This product from Shamrock Enterprises was quite effective; his wounds were already scabbed over. Gerlaine’s hands were soft and gentle, and with the added cooling effect of the ointment, he experienced true pleasure. His gaze towards her even softened.

However, it quickly came to an end. Wiping clean, Gerlaine spoke up, “Hey, get up. Let’s go find the next target.”

However, Lu Yin tossed her cosmic ring back to her, “I’ve had enough, no more robberies. You can carry on yourself.”

“What? No, we haven’t even found Eddy yet, we have to rob him!”

Lu Yin laughed and ignored her. Those people hadn’t considered him a huge threat before, thinking a few elites could handle him, but now that he’d beaten seven, he would certainly face more such ambushes in the future. Only a fool would keep going at this point. Rifling through the five cosmic rings, he salvaged two more cubes of star crystals before waving her goodbye and flying away.

“You idiot, where’s my armor and bow?” Gerlaine shouted behind me.

“Lend them to me for a while, I’ll return them later!” his voice faded into the distance.

Gerlaine stomped on the ground in annoyance. The bow and armor were gifted by her brother for her to defend herself with, and were the only things that could strike fear into his heart. Now, they’d been robbed by that shameless scoundrel!

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Within the capital, Zhang Dingtian and the rest saw the results in the network as well. Bai Xue was shocked; each one of these students was from the Realm of Sky, and those that dared to work on the missions were at least top three in their schools. Almost half of them were even school leaders, and she had first-hand experience of their power. Now, Lu Yin had defeated seven of them in one battle. Just how had he gotten so strong after disappearing for only a few days?

As she was left wondering, Zhang Dingtian looked south and flashed a rare smile, "An old friend is back."  
"Zhou Shan?" Bai Xue's eyes gleamed.

The two quickly flew towards the south, but then stopped mid-way and gazed northwards, "Another old friend. Looks like they want to help the capital in trying times."

Bai Xue was pleasantly surprised, "Wu Sheng is here too, that's great."

Zhang Dingtian sighed deeply, "They shouldn't have come. Four of the Seven Sages plus Lu Yin is still five against dozens. There's a huge disparity here."

A long journey away, Lu Yin found a desolate mountain village and surrounded a building with fire crystal traps. He then took out a star crystal and crushed it, absorbing the surging energy with his Cosmic Art.

West of Beijing, Eddy and his followers appeared as well, "Prepare yourselves, the invasion starts in three days. Remember, the natives defending the capital are nothing, but the second batch is about to appear. The Melders will be restricted to Sentinel strength, but it still is no easy feat to deal with them."

All the students were solemn. It was rare to have a second batch of trainees in the Great Yu Empire's planetary trials, and this instance was purely because of Astral-10. A number of freaks that were normally hidden away had decided to participate in this second batch.

More and more students approached the capital from all directions. A dozen weary students descended upon the South China Sea, "We've finally reached China, and that fellow Eddy and his team are plotting to steal the criminal's items. We need to move to stop him from gaining an advantage."

Students similarly appeared in eastern and northern China, bringing turbulent times with them. Dawn of the third day, Zhang Dingtian was staring out from atop Beijing's steel walls as a group of silhouettes appeared in the distance. At the same time, a distant Lu Yin finally opened his eyes. Five cubes of star crystals over three days of meditation had cleansed his body of impurities; he was now overflowing with energy and felt a drastic increase in strength. Not only did his body contain much more than before now that he was a peak Sentinel at level 3000, it was more compacted as well.

Although he'd plundered a total of seven cubes of star crystals, he had only used five so far. He now looked at the two remaining cubes in anticipation; the temptation was just too much! Drawing his die, he eagerly rubbed his hands together and crushed one cube's worth, "Okay, let's see my luck. Pilfer isn't worth it, I'll never get something good, but..."

The surface rapidly returned to its dazzling brightness, and Lu Yin nervously swallowed as he gently flicked out with a finger to start it going. His gaze was frozen on the spinning die, eyes growing wider and wider until it started to dim and the surfaces started to fade away. He'd rolled a two.

This excited him greatly; it was his first time getting this roll. He watches as a black vortex formed beneath the spinning die, its usage popping to mind. Blackhole Disassembly? Disassemble anything? What could that mean? He was rather confused at first, so he threw a random piece of scrap iron into the vortex; it passed through in an instant, but what popped out on the other side was a small piece of pure iron with a smooth, hard surface that had shrunk down significantly from what he'd put in.

He finally realized what Disassembly meant; any material thrown into this vortex would be broken down into its basic components. This seemed reasonably useful, so after considering his options for a bit, Lu Yin threw in a cosmic ring he'd confiscated from one student who'd acted a little too unreasonable. A fingernail-sized piece of dark red metal emerged on the other side that made him quite happy instantly; this was imperial gold, an extremely precious material that was key in the creation of cosmic rings. He immediately threw all of his stolen rings into the vortex to get a thumb-sized ingot, but after a moment's consideration he threw that back in as well. A twinkling dark-gold metal plopped out on the other side that lit his eyes aglow; this was imperial gold essence, something far more valuable than imperial gold that was used in the crafting of high-quality cosmic rings with massive storage spaces. Carefully stowing it away, he thought to himself, 'I should probably find some junkyard to harvest materials from.'

The vortex disappeared after five minutes, but Lu Yin already knew that its duration could be extended with star crystals just like the Timestop Room. His head started to ache at the realization that he'd found another crystal sink that would keep him poor in the future regardless of his income, but he muttered to himself that he'd figure something out before standing up to stretch and pop his joints. He looked towards Beijing and blasted into the distant sky, "It's time to go back."

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The capital was already in shambles by the time Lu Yin started rushing back, millions of survivors watching the skies with fear as occasional shockwaves overturned the earth and brought disaster to them all. By the time they'd received news that Eddy's coalition of dozens of students had started their attack, the battle had already begun. The steel walls were devastated in the very first moments.

An arrogant Hayden was accompanied by two other students as they stared at a panting Bai Xue atop some ruins outside the city. "A mere native wants to block us? You should know your place!" one of them said with contempt, but his gaze was burning just as brightly as those of his peers; she was just far too beautiful. Each one of them was a school leader and could easily handle the Water Sage, but her appearance had prompted them to join hands while many more watched from the distance.

Hayden frowned at Bai Xue, "Woman, I'll give you an opportunity to follow us. I can bring you away from this shithole planet to truly explore the universe."

"Hayden, you can't be thinking of keeping her for yourself, right?" one of the students beside him was immediately upset by his words, but he remained indifferent. There were various alliances and rivalries amongst the academies themselves, and he was stronger than the two beside him. Of all those currently in Beijing, only Eddy and Zhang Dingtian could defeat him in battle.

Bai Xue clenched her fists and released a measured breath as her blue hair drifted into the air. The ground suddenly froze and the temperature of the entire region plunged, but the three students confronting her didn't mind the change. She could handle one school leader at best; it was impossible to face three at once.

In the distance, Zhou Shan roared as he smashed into the ground with a student. It took all he had to deal with just the one, however, and there were more than a dozen figures still staring down from up in the sky. The students knew there was only one ending to this war; after all, this was nothing more than a city of natives.

"Stop messing around. Let's go," one of the students arrogantly said before pressing down toward the capital with one hand. Enormous pressure crushed countless survivors until they vomited blood, but they could do nothing more than stare at the sky in despair.