

L. Wyatt 1491

Chapter 1491: Howard Family

"The Howard Family?"

Wyatt Barnes' brow involuntarily furrowed.

When he was at the marketplace earlier today, he noticed someone following him. However, the person hid so well that he couldn't immediately flush them out.

Later, the person stopped following him, so he dismissed the matter from his mind.

Who would have thought that no sooner had he returned to the inn than someone from the Howard Family would come knocking at his door?

Wyatt didn't need to guess; he knew this had to be Eliel Howard's doing.

Otherwise, how could he, a newly arrived stranger in Thames River City, draw the attention of the Howard Family?

Wyatt's guess was indeed correct.

After Eliel returned to the Howard Family, the first thing she did was find her father, the Family Head Howard, to recount what had happened in the Nine Curves Mountain Range.

Upon hearing that his beloved daughter had narrowly escaped danger, the Family Head Howard flew into a rage and wanted to confront the Walker Family.

However, Eliel managed to stop him just in time.

After her explanation, the Family Head Howard realized that the pressing issue wasn't to demand justice from the Walkers but rather to find the young man who had saved his daughter.

According to his daughter, that young man was highly likely from a force ranked at the seventh-tier or higher.

Thus, after Eliel sketched a portrait of the young man, Family Head Howard orchestrated a large-scale search across Thames River City.

It had to be said—Eliel's drawing skills weren't bad.

At the very least, the Howard Family's people were able to locate Wyatt Barnes in the city's largest marketplace based on the portrait and pinpoint the inn where he was staying.

"Please."

The Howard Family's steward squinted his eyes and once again invited Wyatt, a flicker of sharp intent flashing briefly in his gaze.

"What if I refuse?"

Wyatt glanced indifferently at the steward and asked.

"Young Master, please don't make this difficult for an old man like me."

The steward sighed, "Rest assured, you're the savior of our young mistress. Our Howard Family may not be perfect, but we would never bite the hand that feeds us. This invitation is purely because our Family Head wishes to express his gratitude. There's no ill intent whatsoever."

Wyatt gave the steward a deep look. After a while, he nodded. "Lead the way."

He had never been one to cower easily.

His previous question to the steward was merely a test.

On the way to the Howard Family estate, Wyatt learned that the steward's name was Amias Howard.

When Amias tried to inquire about Wyatt's full name, he only mentioned his surname, "Barnes."

"Young Master Barnes, is this your first time visiting Thames River City?"

Amias asked probing questions.

"Why do you ask?"

Wyatt responded.

"My subordinates reported your performance in the marketplace."

Amias said with a smile.

"Was the person following me one of your subordinates?"

Wyatt frowned.

"Yes."

Amias admitted openly, "He's a Martial Artist at the mid-Saint Realm, skilled in tracking. Yet, he was still discovered by you, Young Master Barnes. Before this, he had never been exposed, not even when tailing Martial Artists or Taoist Cultivators at the mid-Saint Realm or below."

As he spoke, Amias seemed somewhat impressed.

"There's always someone better out there. He simply hadn't encountered one before."

Wyatt said indifferently.

"Indeed, Young Master Barnes taught him a decent lesson today."

Amias chuckled.

"I assume the inn I stayed at wasn't discovered by him?"

Wyatt asked, still curious about this matter.

In his previous life as Earth's strongest Weapon King, Wyatt prided himself on his counter-tracking skills, yet he hadn't detected anyone trailing him back to the inn.

Considering his current state with ninety-nine Saint Veins activated, his hearing, vision, and sense of smell far exceeded ordinary people, further boosting his counter-tracking abilities.

And still, he failed to notice anyone.

Previously, while traveling toward Thames River City, he hadn't detected Holden Yellow or the man in the black robe. That was understandable—one was a Small Perfection Saint Realm Martial Artist, and the other was a Grand Perfection Demon Cultivator—both far beyond his current level.

But the one who followed him back to the inn couldn't possibly be in the Small Perfection Saint Realm.

In families like the Howard Family, those at the Small Perfection Saint Realm or above were unquestionably pillars of the clan and key members of their leadership.

Such people wouldn't be sent to track him.

"After he was exposed by you at the marketplace, he stopped following you."

Amias nodded, "Once he reported back, I took over and personally followed you, Young Master Barnes. That's why I appeared soon after you arrived at the inn."

"So, you're a late-Saint Realm cultivator?"

Wyatt narrowed his eyes and asked.

"That's correct."

Amias nodded.

Wyatt's heart sank slightly. The gap in cultivation levels was enough to render his counter-tracking abilities ineffective...

Still, when he remembered he was only at the peak of the Transcending Mortal Realm, he felt at ease again.

As a Transcending Mortal Realm peak cultivator, could he reasonably expect to detect a late-Saint Realm cultivator's tracking?

If he could, wouldn't that be an insult to those in the late-Saint Realm?

Before he knew it, Wyatt had followed Amias to the Howard Family estate.

As a prominent eighth-tier family in Thames River City, the Howard Family estate was located to the east, covering a vast area and exuding grandeur.

"Lord Howard!"

"Lord Howard!"

...

As they walked through the estate gates, the dozen or so family guards standing on both sides greeted Amias respectfully.

In the presence of Wyatt alone earlier, Amias' demeanor had been warm and congenial. But now, his face was stern and exuded the authority befitting a steward.

Once inside the estate and away from others, however, Amias resumed his friendly demeanor, pointing out various landmarks to Wyatt.

The Howard Family's estate was immense. Just crossing the front courtyard took a considerable amount of time.

The front courtyard featured lakes, rock gardens, and corridors, reminiscent of the Crimson Heaven Kingdom's royal palace garden back home... except the royal garden was far smaller in comparison.

By this time, the evening sky was growing dim.

The onset of night was upon them.

Lamps across the front courtyard began to light, illuminating the buildings in a golden glow that exuded a regal air.

"Young Master Barnes, just ahead is our Howard Family's main hall. The Family Head and our young mistress have been waiting there for quite a while."

Amias glanced ahead and informed Wyatt.

Hearing this, Wyatt looked up.

With just a glance, he spotted a palace-like structure standing prominently ahead, surrounded by other buildings, like stars encircling the moon.

When they arrived outside the main hall, Amias respectfully announced, "Family Head, Young Master Barnes has arrived."

"So your surname is Barnes."

At almost the same moment Amias finished speaking, a familiar figure to Wyatt appeared—Eliel Howard.

Eliel looked at Wyatt with a smile. "Well, what do you know? We meet again, don't we?"

"Miss Howard, this doesn't seem like how one treats their savior. It feels more like you're dealing with an enemy."

Wyatt said meaningfully.

"If we hadn't done this, how would we have found you?"

Eliel's smile didn't waver, as she had clearly guessed what Wyatt was referring to—the Howard Family tracking him.

"Everly, why haven't you invited your savior in yet?"

At that moment, a booming voice resounded from within the hall, full of authority and command.

The voice alone revealed that its owner was someone used to commanding respect and authority.

Wyatt didn't need to guess; he knew this was the voice of the Family Head Howard.

"Please, do come in... Young Master Barnes."

Eliel looked at Wyatt and gestured with a smile.

Without any pretense, Wyatt stepped straight into the main hall of the Howard Family estate.

The main hall was resplendent, exuding grandeur and majesty.

Upon stepping in, Wyatt's gaze immediately landed on the middle-aged man seated at the center of the hall.

The rugged man had a full beard and a massive frame. Sitting there, he radiated an imposing presence, like a "King of Lions."

This was Valentin Howard, the head of the Howard Family.

Standing behind him was a younger man.

The younger man had decent features, and his brows bore a resemblance to Eliel's.

Wyatt could guess that this was Leslie Howard, the eldest son of the Howard Family and Eliel's brother.

"They say, 'Like father, like son' and 'Like mother, like daughter'... But this rugged Howard Family head managed to father such refined children—it's truly surprising."

Wyatt mused internally, clicking his tongue in wonder.

Wyatt could almost imagine that Valentin Howard's wife must be an extraordinary beauty.

Otherwise, how could they have such exquisite offspring?

If Valentin's wife wasn't beautiful, there was only one other possibility—these two might not be his biological children.

Of course, that possibility was slim.

As a Family Head and a man of influence, would Valentin Howard really raise someone else's children?

"Family Head Howard."

Wyatt cupped his hands in greeting, acknowledging Valentin politely.

"I am Valentin Howard, the head of the Howard Family. May I ask the full name of this young hero?"

Valentin chuckled warmly, his words carrying a kind and approachable tone, devoid of arrogance.

"My name is Barnes."

Wyatt replied flatly, still uninterested in revealing his full name.

"Hmph, his name must be terrible."

Walking back into the hall behind Wyatt, Eliel looked at his back and secretly muttered.

"Hmph!"

Valentin's expression stiffened slightly as the young man standing behind him, Leslie Howard, snorted coldly. "Your arrogance knows no bounds! My father asked for your name, and yet you won't even reveal it. I'm truly curious what background you come from to lack such basic manners!"

"Whether I reveal my name depends entirely on my mood. If you want to bring manners into this... As the eldest son of the Howard Family, is this how you treat the man who saved your sister? Is that what you call manners?"

Wyatt replied coolly.

Chapter 1492: Playing the Supernatural

"You!!"

Hearing Wyatt Barnes' words, Leslie Howard was instantly enraged, yet found himself speechless.

After all, what Wyatt said was undeniably true.

He did indeed save his sister's life.

"Enough, Leslie. Young Brother Barnes is our guest and Everly's benefactor. Do not be rude."

At the critical moment, it was Valentin Howard who spoke up.

"Young Brother Barnes, thank you for saving my daughter's life."

Valentin Howard stood up and cupped his hands to Wyatt Barnes in gratitude.

"Family Head Howard, there's no need to be so polite. It was merely a small effort."

Wyatt shook his head, then added, "Now that your thanks have been given, Family Head Howard, if there's nothing else, I should get going... Tonight, I've arranged to meet with my elder at the inn."

Elder?

Upon hearing Wyatt's words, Valentin Howard and Everly Howard exchanged a glance, each spotting a glimmer of joy in the other's eyes.

"Tonight, no matter what, I must host a banquet for Young Brother Barnes to express my gratitude for saving my daughter's life... As for your elder, Young Brother Barnes, naturally they must attend as well. How about this—allow me to accompany you to invite your elder here myself?"

Valentin Howard said to Wyatt Barnes, his tone sincere.

The so-called "elder" Wyatt fabricated was merely a ploy to extract himself from the situation quickly.

Who would have thought that Family Head Howard would be so persistent, insisting on personally accompanying him to invite this elder to the Howard estate?

"Family Head Howard, I'm afraid this won't be possible... My elder doesn't particularly like meeting outsiders."

Wyatt shook his head in response.

"Doesn't like meeting outsiders?"

Leslie Howard sneered, "Quite the high standards. I wonder if they truly have the skills to match the attitude."

"Family Head Howard, it seems your son is not particularly welcoming toward me... I shall take my leave then."

Seeing Leslie go against him, Wyatt not only didn't feel upset but instead chuckled. Seizing the opportunity, he cupped his hands to Valentin Howard, offered his words, and promptly turned to leave.

"Young Brother Barnes, please stay!"

Seeing this, Valentin Howard grew anxious at once.

Upon hearing about Wyatt's elder, his first thought was to meet this individual and establish a connection—such a relationship could only benefit the Howard Family.

"My son acted carelessly; I hope you'll forgive him."

Having said that, Valentin turned and angrily glared at Leslie Howard, shouting, "You insubordinate fool, get out of my sight! I shouldn't have brought you along."

Hearing his father's enraged shouting and seeing the fury on Valentin Howard's face, Leslie was dumbstruck.

Never before in his life had he seen such palpable anger from his father—and, no less, because of an outsider.

At once, he felt his chest fill with uncontrollable rage, ready to erupt!

"Hmph!"

Storming off furiously, Leslie gave Wyatt a venomous glare as he passed by him before stepping out of the main hall.

"Family Head Howard, I bid you farewell."

Wyatt didn't wait for Valentin Howard to explain further. He took long strides toward the exit, seeing no better chance to leave than now—it would be foolish to stay.

"You're not allowed to leave!"

Yet, Wyatt had forgotten someone: Everly Howard, who had already blocked his exit ahead of time.

"Miss Howard, is this how you treat the person who saved your life?"

Wyatt's face darkened slightly. "If I had known it would come to this, I wouldn't have saved you in the first place."

"You!!"

Everly's face instantly twisted with fury.

Wyatt wasted no courtesies with Everly, his form flickering as he sidestepped her, leaving the Howard Family's hall behind.

However, just outside the main hall, he encountered another obstruction.

This time, the one stopping him was Steward Amias Howard.

"Steward Amias, are you going to block me as well?"

Wyatt narrowed his gaze, his eyes shimmering with a chilling light.

"Young Master Barnes, please don't make this difficult for me."

Amias Howard replied with a wry smile.

Without an order from the family head, he didn't dare let Wyatt leave.

"Steward Amias, let Young Brother Barnes go."

At that moment, Valentin Howard spoke up.

"Father!"

Everly's expression changed; she hadn't expected her father to let Wyatt go so easily. It had taken immense effort to track him down using the portrait she sketched.

Yet Valentin Howard ignored Everly's objections. Turning to Wyatt, he said, "Young Brother Barnes, I sincerely apologize for what happened today. Tomorrow morning, I shall personally prepare generous gifts and visit you to make amends."

"No need."

Wyatt replied indifferently and left.

Once he exited the Howard Family's estate, Wyatt felt an immense weight lifted, as though he could now roam freely and soar like a bird in the sky or a fish in the vast ocean.

Back in the Howard main hall, Everly looked at Valentin, frowning, and asked, "Father, why did you let him leave so easily?"

"Given the circumstances just now, what choice did we have? Forcefully detain him?"

Valentin shook his head. "The fact he came to our Howard Family is likely already common knowledge in Thames River City... Not to mention the factions that constantly monitor us—his associates have probably learned about his visit here as well."

Hearing Valentin's reasoning, Everly fell silent.

"Father, his background must be extraordinary. Are we just going to let this slip by?"

Everly spoke begrudgingly.

"Of course not. Tomorrow morning, I will prepare ample gifts and visit him to apologize. I'll also bring along your brother so he can extend his apologies as well."

Speaking of Leslie Howard, Valentin couldn't help but furrow his brow. "Leslie has truly disappointed me this time!"

"Father, don't be too harsh on him. He was merely standing up for you... That man—Barnes—who knows why he's so secretive, unwilling even to reveal his full name."

Everly first pleaded for Leslie before resuming her complaints about Wyatt, her expression sour.

"He clearly holds no fondness for our Howard Family."

As the head of the Howard Family and a dominant figure in Thames River City, Valentin's ability to gauge others was sharp. "Everly, have you perhaps omitted something from your account? I sense that in his interactions with you, there's a particular hostility."

"Hostility toward me?"

Everly froze. Although she could tell Wyatt had been dismissive of her, she hadn't realized he might harbor actual hostility toward her.

"Indeed."

Valentin nodded slightly.

"Could it be because I had Father compel him to come here? Is that why he harbors hostility toward me?"

Everly wondered aloud.

"It shouldn't be that simple... I sense his hostility toward you is deeply rooted, not formed overnight."

Valentin shook his head. "Try to recall—have you left out any details?"

Meanwhile, Leslie Howard watched as Wyatt Barnes left the Howard Family estate.

"That boy—my father and my sister claim he has ties to a 'seventh-tier power'... I intend to discover whether he's bluffing!"

A faint, icy smile flickered across Leslie's lips.

At the same time, he headed to the Howard Family's back courtyard, seeking an elderly man with silvery white hair.

"Grandfather Mountain, someone seeks to conspire against our Howard Family... They've even falsely claimed to belong to a seventh-tier power, and my father seems to believe them."

Leslie spoke to the old man, his tone overflowing with feigned urgency.

Chapter 1493: Ruthless Leslie Howard

The white-haired elder, whom Leslie Howard referred to as 'Grandfather Mountain,' was none other than the Howard Family's Second Elder, Koen Howard.

From a young age, Leslie grew up under his care and was treated as though he were Koen's own dear grandson.

Koen's affection for Leslie far exceeded even Valentin Howard's—Leslie's father.

This was because Valentin's love was divided in half between Leslie and Everly.

But Koen gave all his love exclusively to Leslie.

"Leslie, your father is not a foolish man. If he's trusting him, it suggests that the man could indeed be someone from a 'seven-stream faction.'"

Koen shook his head and said with a smile.

"Grandfather Mountain, you also said 'could be.' What if he actually isn't?"

Leslie replied, "My father kindly invited him and planned to host him at the feast. Yet, he declined... claiming he had a meeting with his elder. If I had to guess, that's most likely just an excuse."

Perhaps, even Leslie himself didn't realize.

The casual lie he spun to belittle Wyatt Barnes in front of the elder was inadvertently true.

It was, in fact, Wyatt's excuse.

"So, he left?"

Koen asked.

"Yes."

Leslie nodded.

"If he harbored any ulterior motives against the Howard Family, he likely wouldn't have declined your father's invitation... therefore, he seems to be harmless."

As the saying goes, 'Older ginger is spicier,' Koen's insight was thorough.

"Grandfather Mountain, while that may be true, what if he's deliberately acting mysterious, retreating only to advance?"

Leslie grew increasingly anxious upon hearing Koen's words.

If it were up to him alone, he wouldn't dare tamper with things silently.

Moreover, his sister had told him previously that Wyatt—a young man with the surname Duan—was anything but an easy opponent. Even when he assassinated Lucas Walker, it was an instantaneous kill.

Leslie admitted his strength was only marginally superior to Lucas Walker's.

"Hmm, that is indeed a possibility."

Koen contemplated the idea and nodded slightly.

"Grandfather Mountain, whether he's a threat or not is something we can verify by monitoring the inn he's staying at overnight... I want to see whether he truly has an elder coming or if he's lying!"

Leslie's eyes gleamed coldly as he spoke.

"Leslie, you seem highly antagonistic towards him?"

Koen faintly detected something amiss. Having watched Leslie grow up, he naturally understood his temperament.

"My intuition tells me he's definitely plotting something against the Howard Family!"

Leslie realized he'd let his emotions slip in front of Koen, so he quickly added, "Anyone scheming against us should not be allowed to live! If he indeed lied today, by nightfall, he won't remain in this world!"

As his words extended, Leslie's face hardened with killing intent, as though frosted over.

"Grandfather Mountain, accompany me. We'll watch him in secret. If his elder doesn't show, we'll know he's deceitful, which means he harbors impure intentions. Then, we'll need to eliminate him to avert future disasters!"

Leslie spoke with brutality, accompanying his words with a sharp gesture symbolizing assassination.

"Leslie, even if he lied, it only proves he's unwilling to accept the Family Head's banquet. This doesn't necessarily mean he's plotting against the Howard Family."

Koen frowned, his tone serious, "Furthermore, it doesn't prove he isn't affiliated with a seven-stream faction... Even if he is, declining a verbal invitation doesn't imply hostility. Some individuals dislike grand and festive settings."

"If we recklessly act against him, we'll most likely provoke the force backing him... If his backers are indeed from a 'seven-stream faction,' it would spell disaster for the Howard Family!"

Koen spoke with dire concern.

"Grandfather Mountain, I've already considered this... If we leave the family estate, we can avoid walking through the main entrance so that no one notices our departure. Even if he ends up dead, no one would suspect the Howard Family's involvement."

Leslie revealed his well-conceived plan.

Seeing Koen hesitate, Leslie intensified his tone, "Grandfather Mountain, the saying goes, 'Better to err on the side of action than regret in avoidance!' He exudes danger... Keeping him alive will undoubtedly bring calamity to the Howard Family!"

Observing Koen's furrowed brow relaxing slightly at his words, Leslie gritted his teeth and fell to his knees with a loud thud.

"Leslie, what are you doing? Get up, quickly!"

Koen rushed to his feet to help Leslie up.

But Leslie remained resolute, refusing to stand.

"Grandfather Mountain, please trust me just this once... Are you willing to see the Howard Family destroyed? You promised you'd live to see me become the Howard Family's head. If the family is annihilated, what will be left for me to lead?"

Leslie spoke with fervor, punctuating his plea by fiercely bowing his head to the floor. His forehead split open, blood dripping vividly.

At that moment, a flicker of cunning crossed his gaze.

Because Leslie's head was lowered, Koen couldn't see it.

Even if he hadn't lowered his head, Koen might not have noticed.

"Leslie, Grandfather Mountain agrees with you."

Seeing the blood streaking down Leslie's upheld forehead, Koen felt his heart twist as if carved by knives.

His entire life had been devoted to the Martial Dao.

Besides a failed romantic endeavor in his youth, he had always been alone, without spouse or children.

Leslie's arrival was a beacon of light, illuminating the dark recesses of his heart.

From then on, he was no longer lonely. He now had someone he cherished and cared for unconditionally.

For Leslie, he'd do anything, even die without hesitation.

Now, as he saw Leslie's bleeding forehead, Koen cast aside his doubts and agreed without reservation.

At this moment, regret filled his heart.

Not for agreeing with Leslie—but for his initial hesitation.

If he'd agreed earlier, Leslie wouldn't have needed to kneel and wouldn't have injured himself to such an extent.

"Thank you, Grandfather Mountain, thank you!"

Though Leslie had anticipated Koen's agreement, he still offered grateful expressions of 'false' thanks.

"Grandfather Mountain, I'll prepare two sets of stealth robes and masks."

Leslie said to Koen as he turned to leave.

"I happen to have those items, Leslie... Be patient, I'll retrieve them from my room."

Koen stopped Leslie and walked toward his quarters.

"Wyatt, if you truly have an elder present, I won't interfere... But if your elder doesn't show tonight, it'll be your day of reckoning!"

Leslie's eyes flashed with malice as he silently vowed.

Everything Leslie knew about Wyatt came from his sister.

Deep down, Leslie was nearly certain Wyatt belonged to a seven-stream faction.

Only prodigious talents from such factions could possess a Saint Artifact inscribed with 'Three-Star Saint Markings.'

"According to Everly, the Saint Artifact in Wyatt's possession carries multiple layers of complex Three-Star Saint Markings."

At this thought, Leslie's desires surged anew.

Leslie's goal for enlisting Koen wasn't truly for the Howard Family's safety; all his reasons were but pretexts.

His true aim was to kill Wyatt and seize everything Wyatt possessed.

This included the Saint Artifact etched with Three-Star Saint Markings, as well as rare Taoist Talismans carried by Wyatt.

In Leslie's mind, these treasures constituted a fortune so immense that he'd stop at nothing to acquire them.

Despite being the Howard Family's Young Master, Leslie knew their status as merely an eight-stream force couldn't compare to that of a seven-stream faction.

Just like within Thames River City.

The Howard Family operated under the dominion of the Nine Sect Alliance.

This reality stemmed from the Nine Sect Alliance being composed of nine 'seven-stream sects.'

Any one of these sects could annihilate the Howard Family effortlessly.

In Thames River City, it wasn't just the Howard Family; every eight-stream faction lived under the shadow of the Nine Sect Alliance.

Although Wyatt had saved his sister's life, Leslie took no heed of it.

No matter what favor Wyatt may have done—even saving his own life—if he had possessions Leslie coveted, Leslie would stop at nothing to take them.

Soon, Koen returned, already outfitted in black stealth robes.

In his hands, he carried another set of stealth attire alongside two eerie masks sufficient to conceal their identities entirely.

"Grandfather Mountain, let's depart!"

After donning his stealth outfit and mask, Leslie eagerly turned to Koen, his voice brimming with excitement.

Of course, Koen couldn't see Leslie's exhilaration through the mask covering his face.

"Alright."

Koen nodded and raised a hand, leading Leslie out of his courtyard and into the shrouded night.

As the Howard Family's Second Elder, Koen's cultivation level was certainly formidable.

All along the way, the guards patrolling the Howard Estate failed to notice Koen and Leslie's concealed movements. Within moments, the pair had leaped from the walls of a secluded corner and left the estate behind.

Once outside the Howard Family premises, they disappeared down a remote street of Thames River City.

At the Howard Family reception hall.

"Father, do you think... Could this be related to when Wyatt killed Lucas Walker and took Elder Thaddeus's Storage Ring, and I demanded Wyatt return Elder Thaddeus's Storage Ring to me?"

Everly tried hard to recall anything significant.

"But Elder Thaddeus was part of the Howard Family, so asking him to return the Storage Ring was perfectly reasonable... If it really stemmed from that, doesn't that make him unbearably petty?"

Everly scoffed.

"Everly, how am I supposed to advise you?"

Valentin chuckled wryly, finally understanding the cause.

"Elder Thaddeus was slain by Lucas Walker. Had Wyatt not intervened, not only would Elder Thaddeus's Storage Ring have belonged to Lucas Walker, but even your own Storage Ring would've been lost as his spoils. Wyatt stepped in, killing Lucas Walker and saving you. Claiming Elder Thaddeus's Storage Ring was only fair; how could you demand he return it to you?"

Valentin shook his head with a sigh.

Chapter 1494: Body of the Sun

In fact, Valentin Howard also knew that he couldn't blame his daughter for this.

His daughter rarely went out into the world, so she didn't know the 'rules' of the Law of the Jungle out there.

"Father, why do your words sound just like his?"

Everly Howard furrowed her brows.

She still remembered that when she asked Wyatt Barnes to return Elder Thaddeus's Storage Ring to her, Wyatt said something almost identical to what her father was saying now.

If she didn't know it was impossible for her father to have discussed with Wyatt Barnes beforehand, she would have suspected they had planned this together.

"Everly, these are the 'rules' of the world outside."

Valentin Howard could only explain it this way; some things can't be understood just by hearing about them, and must be experienced personally.

"Alright, Everly, let this matter go, don't think too much about it... Go find your brother, I need to discuss going to apologize to the young brother Wyatt tomorrow."

Valentin told Everly.

"Father, there's no way my brother would agree to this."

Everly replied with a bitter expression. She knew her brother too well; his pride was exceedingly strong.

Not to mention apologizing to someone he had a conflict with today, he wouldn't even apologize to someone he hadn't had a conflict with.

"For this matter, he must agree whether he wants to or not! I don't believe he's brave enough to defy me!"

Valentin snorted coldly and said domineeringly, "Just go call your brother, don't tell him about this beforehand... I'll tell him personally. Otherwise, if you tell him, he might sneak away in advance."

Though not thoroughly understanding his son's character, Valentin still knew quite a lot about it.

"Yes, Father."

Everly left the audience hall with a bitter smile and went to find her brother, Leslie Howard.

At that moment, Leslie had already left the Howard family's compound, and she naturally came back empty-handed.

Learning that her brother wasn't there and had apparently left, Everly actually sighed in relief.

She reported back to Valentin, "Father, I went to my brother's courtyard to find him, but he wasn't there... I asked the servants in his yard, and they all said he hadn't returned."

"That brat likely couldn't handle my reprimanding and went out to have fun."

Valentin cursed with a sneer.

"Steward Amias."

At the same time, Valentin called out loudly.

"Patriarch."

Immediately, an elderly man standing outside the audience hall walked in; it was Amias Howard, the house steward of the Howard family.

"Take some people out and bring that brat back... Use any means necessary, even if you have to tie him up, he must be here by morning!"

Valentin ordered.

"Yes, Patriarch."

Amias withdrew with a bitter smile; he disliked such tasks the most, but he dared not disobey the Patriarch's orders.

Leslie was the heir-apparent, but he hadn't yet matured, so Amias wasn't afraid of him.

What he feared was the powerful figure backing Leslie.

That figure was a real powerhouse within the Howard family, not someone Amias could afford to offend.

At that moment, Valentin only assumed Leslie had gone out to enjoy himself.

He was completely unaware that Leslie had set his sights on the young man he intended to befriend, someone suspected to be from a Seven-fold Sect.

He was also unaware that this night could very well be a 'turning point' of upheaval for the Howard family.

Leaving the Howard family, Wyatt Barnes, who had returned to the inn, did not leave.

If he were someone who avoided conflict, he would've gone as far away as possible, staying out of the Howard family's sight.

But he was not so; he had no plans to run away with his 'tail' between his legs.

After returning to his room, he eagerly entered the third layer of the Seven Treasures Exquisite Pagoda to cultivate.

The time flow rate and excellent cultivation environment in the third layer of the Seven Treasures Exquisite Pagoda allowed his cultivation to progress rapidly.

"Cultivating in the third layer of the Seven Treasures Exquisite Pagoda, if we calculate in outside time... The time it takes for me to break through from Transcending Mortal Realm Large Perfection to Entering the Saint Realm won't even be as long as it took to break through from Small Perfection to Large Perfection."

Wyatt was certain of this.

Five days of cultivating within the third layer of the Seven Treasures Exquisite Pagoda equated to just one day outside.

This was something the second layer of the Seven Treasures Exquisite Pagoda couldn't compete with.

Moreover, the cultivation environment of the second layer was far inferior to the third layer.

Comparing the two, if a comparison must be made.

It could be directly said that the cultivation speed in the second layer isn't even half of the speed in the third layer.

"Before I return to 'Crescent Island,' I should be able to break through to the mid-stage of entering the Saint Realm... Of course, if I can break through to the late-stage, that would be even better."

Thinking of this, Wyatt's mind became quite active.

"What I need to do now is to cultivate diligently to enhance my cultivation as quickly as possible! With my current strength, I can handle ordinary Martial Artists and Taoist Cultivators of the Entering the Saint Realm, but in the face of stronger ones, I'm like a lamb to the slaughter."

Ever since learning about the beings beyond the mid-stage of Entering the Saint Realm who could easily evade his backtracking, Wyatt felt unprecedented pressure.

He was eager to enhance his cultivation skill!

However, everything is a process, and he knew he couldn't rush it.

But he was just impatient, unable to control his emotions.

"Someone outside is spying."

At some unknown point, a familiar voice rang in Wyatt's ears, like a sudden clap of thunder, bringing him to absolute alertness.

"Elder Fire? You're awake?"

The moment Wyatt opened his eyes, he saw Elder Fire right in front of him.

"Yes."

Elder Fire nodded, "Repairing the third layer of the Seven Treasures Exquisite Pagoda took a lot out of me, and it took me a while to fully recover... However, during my recovery, I gained something, and my strength has returned somewhat."

"Now, my Divine Sense has recovered considerably and can extend out to cover an area... It may not have offensive capabilities, but it's useful for probing."

Elder Fire said, "I just sensed that outside this inn, there are two people spying on you, and they're not here with good intentions."

"Two people? Spying on me?"

Wyatt frowned, "Could they be from the Howard family? It could only be them! What exactly do they want?"

"During my recent recovery, I saved a bit of 'Sun power,' ready to transfer it into your body to refine your True Energy... Once your True Energy transforms into this world's 'True Origin,' it will carry Sun power, becoming 'Solar True Origin'."

Elder Fire told Wyatt.

True Origin is the power within Saint Realm and above experts.

Once one breaks through Entering the Saint Realm into the Saint Realm, True Energy will also transform into 'True Origin.'

"Sun power? Solar True Origin?"

Wyatt's eyes lit up at this, but he quickly furrowed his brows again, "Elder Fire, let's do it next time... There are still two guys outside to deal with."

"Sun power dissipates moment by moment; even I can't keep it for long... Moreover, with your current True Energy, it would only take about an hour to refine it."

Without waiting for Wyatt's consent, Elder Fire raised his hand and pointed his sword finger towards Wyatt's brow.

Suddenly, Wyatt felt a burning, intimidating warmth engulf him, transforming into a hot stream entering through his brow into his energy sea.

It was like a marauding 'robber.'

As this stream of heat—Sun power—entered, Wyatt found that the True Energy within his energy sea started to boil.

For a moment, Wyatt felt dizzy, and eventually, he completely lost consciousness.

During Wyatt's unconscious state, the True Energy within his energy sea underwent earthshaking changes.

Initially, the True Energy boiled, swelling like it was invigorated.

Immediately after, the ninety-nine Saint Veins within Wyatt were drawn by a stream of heat, rapidly circulating the spiritual energy from the heavens and the earth into his body, completing one Great Cycle after another.

This stream of heat was incredibly domineering, almost possessing the characteristic of 'Swallowing Technique.'

The spiritual energy of the third layer of the Seven Treasures Exquisite Pagoda was usually invisible; now it gathered above Wyatt's head, appearing to congeal into a large pool of liquid that continued to grow... it was spiritual energy materializing.

The materialized spiritual energy continuously surged into Wyatt's body, led by the heat stream, circulating Grea Cycle after another.

Meanwhile, black impurities began exuding from every pore of Wyatt's body.

However, the black impurities weren't much.

Wyatt's body had already undergone two 'transformations', so naturally, it didn't have as many impurities as an ordinary person.

At this moment, if any Great God with Divine Ability was here, they'd surely be able to tell at a glance... that this three-legged Golden Crow was using Sun power through a Divinely-inspired method, cleansing and overhauling this youth in purple clothes to achieve a 'Sun Body.'

This Divinely-inspired method could only be used once in its lifetime by each three-legged Golden Crow, an incredibly domineering phenomenon defying the natural order.

At that moment, Elder Fire had transformed into his real form, a three-legged Golden Crow engulfed in fire, emanating overwhelming heat waves that made the whole third layer of the Seven Treasures Exquisite Pagoda feel like it was in a 'scorching summer.'

And Wyatt, who was unconscious, knew nothing of it.

An hour, equivalent to two hours.

Two hours later, Elder Fire finally reverted to his humanoid form, his previously rosy complexion now exceptionally pale, as if he had aged hundreds of years all at once.

At this time, Wyatt gradually regained consciousness.

Initially, he was a bit bewildered.

But after recollecting for a while, he fully regained lucidity and first inspected his energy sea.

This inspection gave him quite a shock.

"This... this... this..."

Wyatt was stupefied, utterly stupefied, looking completely incredulous, as if he had discovered something unimaginable.

"This seems to be... mid-stage Entering the Saint Realm?"

After a while, Wyatt snapped back to reality, swallowing hard, murmuring in shock and awe.

Chapter 1495: Two Ghost-Faced People

Wyatt Barnes discovered that the energy sea within his body had transformed into a small lake, far surpassing what it had been before.

Previously, his energy sea was at most a large pool.

And as far as he knew, even the energy sea of Martial Artists or Taoist Cultivators at the early Saint Realm was only akin to a small stream.

Thus, the moment he used inner sight to examine his current energy sea, he realized he had already broken through to the 'mid-stage of the Saint Realm.' Though it seemed almost unbelievable, it was undeniably true.

"Elder Fire, this is..."

Wyatt looked at Elder Fire in front of him, his face brimming with excitement. He had countless questions he wanted to ask but didn't know where to start.

"Save your questions for later... The pressing matter now is dealing with those two people spying on you."

After saying this to Wyatt, Elder Fire left and returned to the first floor of the Jewel Tower.

Wyatt noticed Elder Fire's pale complexion, and although curiosity burned within him, he knew today was not the right time for Elder Fire to solve his queries.

"The Howard Family!"

Wyatt's lips curled into a cold grin.

But he didn't immediately head out and instead began testing the True Energy within him on the third floor of the Jewel Tower.

Now, the True Energy in his body was as vast as a lake, surging through ninety-nine Saint Veins, and in an instant, a large portion of it swept forth.

"Even those at the peak of the Transcending Mortal Realm, whether it's 'True Energy Weapon Condensation,' 'True Energy Beast Condensation,' or 'True Energy Domain Condensation' techniques, their explosive power over the short term may not necessarily rival mine!"

This filled Wyatt with confidence.

If True Energy were likened to the cars of his previous life, the Saint Veins would be the highways of his previous life.

And in his case, more cars could travel simultaneously.

Of course, Wyatt was also well aware that in the later stages of the Saint Realm, strength was no longer just about the utilization of True Energy and Saint Veins; techniques like True Energy Condensation also played a role.

He had already witnessed the might of these three techniques, and they were indeed formidable.

"Still, with my current strength, even a Transcending Mortal mid-stage Martial Artist or Taoist Cultivator utilizing True Energy Weapon Condensation may not necessarily be my match!"

Although those who mastered True Energy Weapon Condensation in the Transcending Mortal mid-stage were strong, their strength still had limits.

With his arsenal of techniques and capabilities, unless a mid-stage existence could defeat enemies across levels, they were unlikely to match him.

Of course, if an opponent had achieved Small Perfection in the Transcending Mortal Realm, Wyatt couldn't confidently claim victory.

After all, those at Small Perfection didn't just master True Energy Weapon Condensation but also True Energy Beast Condensation.

After spending a few hours familiarizing himself with his True Energy, Wyatt left the Jewel Tower.

"As my cultivation has advanced, my mental energy has also grown... Now, I can already inscribe Two-Star Saint Markings."

Returning to his room in the inn, Wyatt mused to himself.

Soon, he walked out of his room and left the inn.

"Hmm? Has he left?"

As Wyatt left the inn, two figures cloaked in night garb emerged from a corner near the building.

The individuals each wore ghostly masks.

The night had grown deep, and the streets were nearly deserted.

"Grandfather Mountain, let's follow him and see."

One of the masked figures glanced at the other and transmitted his voice using True Energy.

The other masked figure didn't respond verbally but nodded and followed the former.

"Two people."

Moving ahead, Wyatt didn't turn back but had already sensed the two individuals tailing him from afar.

Even if he were to turn around now, he might not spot them.

This was because the two shadowy figures were moving along paths outside the illumination of the streetlights.

"Now that my cultivation has advanced to the Saint Realm, I can use the mental technique Elder Fire taught me, 'Heavenly Eye,' to silently peer into the age and cultivation of everyone below the Saint Realm."

With this thought, Wyatt's mental energy extended outward, quickly probing the cultivation levels of the two trailing him.

"Early Saint Realm? With such feeble strength, they dare track me?"

Upon discovering the cultivation of one of them, Wyatt sneered disdainfully.

"Wait! This person is concealing his ability well. If not for my breakthrough to mid-stage Saint Realm, I might not have noticed him... Either he's using a special concealment technique, or someone formidable is protecting him."

Soon, Wyatt detected something amiss.

At this moment, he directed his Heavenly Eye toward the second individual.

When he uncovered the second person's cultivation, Wyatt's heart skipped a beat.

"Small... Small Perfection in the Saint Realm?"

Wyatt's face tensed. "Even Amias Howard, the Howard Family's steward, is merely at the late stage of the Saint Realm... A Small Perfection Saint Realm existence is rare even within the Howard Family. At minimum, such a person would be an elder."

"The Howard Family must think highly of me to dispatch an elder to keep tabs on me!"

In that moment, Wyatt felt a surge of fury within him.

He had never planned on having any dealings with the Howard Family; otherwise, he wouldn't have rejected their patriarch Valentin Howard's invitation earlier.

Who would have thought the Howard Family would stoop so low—acting honorable on the surface while employing underhanded tactics in secret?

Coming in the dead of night, what were they trying to achieve?

Trying to kill and rob him?

Taking a deep breath, Wyatt suppressed the boiling rage in his heart and calmly formulated a plan.

In the end, he slipped into a major thoroughfare.

This road was Thames River City's central artery and remained dotted with sparse passersby even late at night.

"Where is he heading now?"

Among the two ghostly figures tailing him, one appeared impatient.

"Let's keep following him and find out."

The other ghostly figure responded calmly, his voice aged and steady.

"Hmm? That's the direction of the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters... Could this brat be someone from the Nine Sect Alliance?"

Trailing Wyatt for another half hour, seeing that he continued traveling north in Thames River City, the elderly ghostly figure halted, a trace of apprehension in his voice.

"Grandfather Mountain, the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters is still a ways off from here... He could just be passing through."

The younger ghostly figure replied, "Let's keep going and watch him closer."

After a moment's hesitation, the older figure nodded, continuing forward while concealing the younger figure.

When their 'target' abruptly stopped heading north and switched to a westward route, the elderly ghostly figure let out a relieved breath. He had indeed feared the boy might be connected to the Nine Sect Alliance.

The members of the Nine Sect Alliance were affiliated with seventh-tier forces.

Killing such a person covertly was not an issue.

But if exposed, it would spell disaster for their backing family.

"I told you, there's no way he's connected to the Nine Sect Alliance."

The younger ghostly figure commented.

"Turns out they're still following me... If I continued heading north toward the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters, they might not dare tail me."

Unbeknownst to them, their target, Wyatt Barnes, had intentionally altered his course to westward upon noticing their hesitation.

He moved westward, arriving at a secluded area.

This place reeked with an overwhelming stench, being Thames River City's garbage dump. Other than the city's cleaners, few ever came here.

The region spanned roughly a kilometer.

Soon, Wyatt reached the center of this isolated zone and came to a halt.

Meanwhile, the two ghostly figures trailing him ducked into a pile of trash.

"Still pretty cautious."

One of the ghostly figures muttered under his breath, his sharp eyes fixated on Wyatt from afar, a glint of murderous intent flashing in his gaze.

"Heh heh..."

Wyatt chuckled knowingly, his gaze landing squarely on their hiding spot. "You've followed me all this way. Isn't it about time you came out? I wonder what the two of you want from me after tailing me for so long?"

If Wyatt hadn't specified "the two of you," the ghostly figures might have dismissed it as bluffing.

After all, many who feared being followed liked to bluff by claiming, "I see you" or "Come out, stop hiding," even when unsure if anyone was truly tailing them.

But Wyatt's accurate mention of "two of you" clarified that he had genuinely detected their presence.

"Hmph! Didn't expect to be discovered."

As the elderly ghostly figure displayed surprise in his gaze, the younger masked individual had already stepped out of the trash heap.

Hiding beneath their ghostly mask, their nose crinkled—a visible sign of discomfort with the stench.

The elderly ghostly figure had no choice but to follow, his eyes now filled with cautious concern.

He was confident in his concealment techniques.

Yet somehow, a mere Transcending Mortal Martial Artist had seen through his stealth?

His eyes narrowed, mental energy stretching outward as he immediately executed a 'mental technique.'

In an instant, Wyatt felt a wave of mental power sweep over him, attempting to probe his cultivation.

"Hmph!"

Wyatt grunted softly but could do little to resist, allowing the foreign mental energy to attach itself to him and investigate his cultivation.

Although the Heavenly Eye technique Elder Fire taught him included methods to block mental probes, those methods required mental energy above the Saint Realm to execute.

Wyatt's current strength wasn't enough to deploy such a defense.

"Mid-stage Saint Realm!"

Upon fully assessing Wyatt's cultivation, the elderly ghostly figure exclaimed in surprise, his voice betraying his aged years.

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Chapter 1496: Koen Howard Takes Action

"Entering the mid-Saint Realm?"

The younger masked voice exclaimed in shock upon hearing the older masked voice, his eyes filled with astonishment and disbelief.

The tone of his outburst was completely different from his earlier voice.

The earlier voice was deliberately hoarse and gruff.

This voice, however, was natural and unaffected.

"Leslie Howard!"

Hearing this voice, Wyatt Barnes instantly recognized who the younger masked man was.

It was none other than Leslie Howard, the eldest young master of the Howard Family.

Seeing that Wyatt had identified him, Leslie panicked and immediately feigned a hoarse tone, saying, "Leslie Howard? I don't know who you're talking about."

"Tsk, tsk... The mighty eldest young master of the Howard Family, hiding like this? Truly disappointing! In my opinion, someone as worthless as you isn't fit to inherit the position of the Howard Family head. Even your younger sister, Eliel Howard, is far more qualified to take that seat."

Wyatt shook his head, his words dripping with sarcasm, utterly unrestrained.

The younger masked man, Leslie Howard, eldest young master of the Howard Family, was instantly enraged. He took a step forward, ready to tear away all pretense with Wyatt.

Even if Wyatt had truly reached the mid-Saint Realm as a Martial Artist, he wasn't a match for his Grandfather Mountain.

His Grandfather Mountain, the Second Elder of the Howard Family, had already stepped into the Small Perfection stage of the Saint Realm, only a step away from achieving Grand Perfection.

However, when Leslie Howard took a step forward and was about to speak, the older masked man stopped him.

The older masked man was none other than Koen Howard, the Second Elder of the Howard Family.

"It seems that you bear a grudge against the Howard Family... Unfortunately for you, we are not members of the Howard Family."

Koen Howard looked at Wyatt Barnes and spoke indifferently.

"Judging by your cultivation, you must be a Howard Family elder. So tell me, did your family head, Valentin Howard, send you here, or are you acting on behalf of this cowardly eldest young master, Leslie Howard?"

Wyatt's gaze shifted from Koen Howard to Leslie Howard.

"You..."

Leslie Howard naturally couldn't tolerate being called a coward and was about to lash out.

Just as he opened his mouth, Koen Howard interrupted him again, "I've said it, we are not members of the Howard Family."

Koen Howard's tone was laced with impatience.

"Not members of the Howard Family?"

Wyatt smirked, "If that's the case, why don't you tell me who you two really are?"

"Hmph! Revealing ourselves to you doesn't matter. After all, you're a dead man... We are from the Shadow Mountain Black Market, and we've come to take your life!"

As Koen Howard finished speaking, two waves of True Energy surged from his body.

One transformed into a colossal axe, suspended in mid-air, radiating dominance and appearing capable of cleaving everything apart.

The other morphed into a giant eagle, spreading its expansive wings like an encompassing cloud, blocking the moonlight and darkening the already dim area into a true abyss, where one couldn't see their fingers.

Suddenly, the colossal axe and giant eagle cut through the air, positioning themselves on two sides to form a three-way encirclement with Koen Howard, locking Wyatt Barnes in the center.

"Dying in the burial ground you chose yourself—how fitting!"

Koen Howard spoke indifferently, his gaze toward Wyatt lifeless, as if he were already a dead man.

Shadow Mountain Black Market?

While Koen Howard spoke, Wyatt Barnes was thinking about something entirely different.

Wyatt had certainly heard of the Shadow Mountain Black Market and knew it was a formidable entity within the Nine-Sect Alliance's territory.

It was rumored to be a prominent and unique Third-Rate Power within the Martial Dao Sacred Land.

But unlike other Third-Rate Powers, its "tentacles" extended across the entire Martial Dao Sacred Land.

Even in this remote section under the Nine-Sect Alliance's jurisdiction, its presence couldn't be ignored.

Of course, the Shadow Mountain Black Market in the Nine-Sect Alliance territory was merely a small branch.

Yet even this branch had once terrified the nine major sects, prompting them to band together into an alliance, which still exists today.

The alliance claimed publicly that it was formed to resist invasions from Sixth-Rank Powers.

In reality, its formation was primarily to fend off the Shadow Mountain Black Market.

To them, the black market was like a "terrifying dragon crossing the river," exerting immense pressure on their region.

Fortunately, over the years, the Shadow Mountain Black Market had shown no overt interest in this specific territory.

However, the underground world was completely ruled by the Shadow Mountain Black Market.

Being a peculiar entity, it allowed anyone with talent to join, regardless of background.

Those who joined the Shadow Mountain Black Market often amassed vast wealth within a short period.

But just as many perished before they could begin accumulating wealth.

The Shadow Mountain Black Market conducted all manner of transactions, trading anything required—so long as one could afford the Holy Stones necessary to pay the price.

"That masked assassin earlier... he was likely from the Shadow Mountain Black Market!"

Thinking back to Koen Howard's reminder, Wyatt Barnes realized the assassin who had tried to kill him earlier might have been from the black market.

However, Wyatt knew this wasn't the time to dwell on those thoughts.

"Since when did Shadow Mountain Black Market operatives make it a habit to reveal their identities on the job?"

Wyatt looked toward Koen, sneering.

"I already told you—you're a dead man. Knowing a few trivial details means nothing."

Koen Howard's voice was calm as he added, "Let me send you on your way now!"

Koen Howard's words had barely left his mouth when the giant axe hanging in the air began to swing.

Gathering momentum, it struck down toward Wyatt's head with the ferocity of "a mountain-splitting blow."

Buzz! Buzz! Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!

...

The space where the axe moved was filled with a terrifying reverberation, as its sheer force distorted the air.

Like a fleeting comet filled with deadly menace, it descended toward Wyatt.

Starfall Strike!

Prepared in advance, Wyatt drew his bow and released an arrow, the projectile hurtling through the air as if ready to pierce through anything that blocked its path. Its target was none other than the falling giant axe.

Of course, the speed of the arrow was slower than the descending axe.

Yet, when the two collided, an unexpected spectacle unfolded.

The arrow pierced through the giant axe, which then fragmented and disintegrated in an instant, vanishing like flames erupting from an explosive.

"Piercing Saint Markings! Explosive Flame Saint Markings!"

Koen Howard couldn't help but exclaim, clearly recognizing the Saint Markings imprinted on Wyatt's arrow.

"Your identification skills are decent; you recognized the markings I used."

Wyatt cast a cool glance at Koen Howard, replying with indifference.

Koen Howard's expression flickered—he was almost certain now that the purple-clad youth before him was affiliated with a Seventh-Rank Power.

"Piercing Saint Markings? Explosive Flame Saint Markings?"

Leslie Howard, hearing Koen Howard's exclamation and Wyatt's confirmation, couldn't contain his excitement.

He had suspected earlier that Wyatt's weapon might be inscribed with more than one legendary level-three Saint Marking.

And now, with Koen Howard's revelation, it turned out he had been right—the weapon indeed bore a second level-three Saint Marking.

Both Piercing Saint Markings and Explosive Flame Saint Markings were considered legendary three-star Saint Markings.

"Grandfather Mountain, kill him! He's already suspicious of us being part of the Howard Family. If he lives, it could spell disaster for our family!"

Leslie Howard looked to Koen Howard and transmitted his True Energy message resolutely.

His only thought now was to see Wyatt dead, knowing that once Wyatt fell, everything he possessed would become spoils of war for his Grandfather Mountain... and his Grandfather Mountain would surely pass on the riches to him without hesitation.

Koen Howard took a deep breath, understanding fully that he had no other choice.

"If you think that just two three-star Saint Markings are enough to defeat me, then you're gravely mistaken."

Koen Howard's tone turned icy as his night armor stirred without wind. The pebbles on the ground flew upward, as if imbued with life by the aura emanating from his body.

Simultaneously, another wave of True Energy surged forth, once again forming a giant axe.

The True Energy Condensed Weapon method allowed for relentless conjuring, barring complete exhaustion of energy.

Wyatt might destroy one axe, but Koen Howard could forge another.

This time, Koen Howard held nothing back—not only did he unleash his massive axe technique, but his True Energy Condensed Beast method also dispatched a giant eagle flapping its wings ferociously and diving toward Wyatt.

In his own grasp was a massive Saint Weapon axe, which he charged at Wyatt with lightning speed.

The Saint Weapon axe lacked three-star Saint Markings but contained three distinct two-star Saint Markings, which Koen Howard had now fully activated.

Wanting to eliminate Wyatt Barnes, a mid-Saint Realm Martial Artist, and prevent future repercussions, Koen Howard, a Martial Artist of Small Perfection in the Transcending Mortal Realm, unleashed all his power, demonstrating peak force capable of crushing everything.

"Die! Die!"

"When you fall, everything you own will be mine!"

Not far away, Leslie Howard, clad in night gear and hidden behind his ghostly mask, couldn't hide his excitement.

He already imagined Wyatt's Saint Weapon, inscribed with two legendary three-star Saint Markings, beckoning to him. He pictured the other treasures Wyatt might have accumulated as an outstanding talent of a Seventh-Rank Power eventually becoming his.

Faced with Koen Howard's fully unleashed assault, Wyatt's expression grew grave as well.

Starfall Strike!

In a split second, Wyatt released another arrow, once more shattering Koen Howard's axe.

However, Wyatt only had the chance to fire that one arrow.

Because the giant eagle formed by Koen Howard's True Energy Condensed Beast method had already reached him, diving headfirst at astonishing speed, making it impossible for Wyatt to nock and fire a second arrow.

Not only that, but Koen Howard himself had closed in as well.

Chapter 1497: Unplanned 'Accident

At this moment, Wyatt Barnes was truly in grave peril.

Enemies ahead, pursuers behind!

And in this critical moment, countless thoughts raced through Wyatt's mind.

"Although my cultivation has broken through to the 'Entering the Saint Realm Mid-Stage,' facing a Martial Artist at the Small Perfection of Entering the Saint Realm still puts immense pressure on me... And that old man from the Howard Family clearly isn't an ordinary Small Perfection Martial Artist of the Saint Realm!"

Wyatt's breakthrough in cultivation had sharpened his insight, allowing him to recognize the extraordinary nature of Koen Howard, who was attacking him.

"Furthermore, that old man is even activating the three 'Two-Star Saint Markings' on his spiritual weapon... He's determined to kill me!"

As for why Koen was so intent on killing him, Wyatt easily guessed the reason.

It was nothing more than fear that if Wyatt survived today, it would spell trouble for the Howard Family.

Wyatt was convinced that the moment this old man recognized the two Saint Markings on the bow in Wyatt's hand, he had already confirmed Wyatt's identity to some extent.

This realization led to a shift in the old man's mindset.

Resolutely determined to kill him!

Only Wyatt's death could ensure the Howard Family's safety.

"You want me dead? You're destined to be disappointed... Today, the only one who will die is you! As for the Howard Family, they are bound to pay for what they have done!"

Wyatt's eyes suddenly narrowed, his sharp gaze locking onto Koen Howard, who was charging toward him, as he shouted.

His voice echoed like thunder in the ears of Koen Howard and Leslie Howard.

"How arrogant!"

Leslie scoffed, convinced that Wyatt's claims were absurd ramblings. Did he really think that a mere Martial Artist at the Mid-Stage of Entering the Saint Realm could defeat someone at the Small Perfection of Entering the Saint Realm?

Moreover, the opponent he faced wasn't just at the Small Perfection stage—he was someone who had half-stepped into the Full Perfection of Entering the Saint Realm.

"Arrogant youth!"

Koen Howard sneered, his massive axe slicing through the air, a ferocious strike aimed directly at Wyatt.

At the same time, swirling True Energy surrounded the giant axe, augmented by three strange forces.

These were the powers of the three 'Two-Star Saint Markings' on Koen's spiritual weapon, the giant axe.

Whish!!

Simultaneously, the dive-bombing giant eagle was mere inches away from Wyatt.

Time seemed frozen in that instant.

Amid the lightning flashes and thunderclaps, Wyatt fully unleashed the power of the Mysterious Eye he had long prepared, recklessly burning his own mental energy.

The Mysterious Eye was locked onto the diving giant eagle, a True Energy-condensed beast sent by Koen Howard.

This giant eagle, condensed entirely from Koen's True Energy, was powerful enough to dominate even a Martial Artist at the Late Stage of Entering the Saint Realm. Its immense strength was self-evident.

Thus, Wyatt had never dared to take the giant eagle lightly.

The eagle was even more formidable than the giant axe condensed by Koen using True Energy manipulation techniques.

Now, with time pressing and the stakes high, Wyatt had no time to shoot another arrow, and Koen had no time to condense another giant axe.

"Die!!"

Koen's pupils contracted as his gaze fell upon Wyatt, filled with cold indifference as if he were already staring at a dead man.

In Koen's eyes, even without the True Energy-condensed weapon in the form of a giant axe, killing Wyatt was a trivial feat.

The giant axe was merely his weakest tool.

Mysterious Eye!

Spatial Displacement!

Just as the giant eagle dove and hurtled toward Wyatt, Wyatt activated the most heaven-defying ability of the Mysterious Eye.

With his current mental energy driving the Mysterious Eye, Wyatt might not be able to perfectly influence a Martial Artist at the Small Perfection of Entering the Saint Realm. However, influencing the True Energy-condensed beast of such a Martial Artist presented no difficulties.

With a single glance, Wyatt caused the giant eagle to change direction while simultaneously sidestepping to the side.

In an instant, the redirected giant eagle ferociously plunged toward Koen Howard, who had been attacking Wyatt from the opposite angle, without any hesitation.

This unexpected turn of events caught Koen entirely off guard.

Never in his wildest dreams did he imagine the giant eagle would suddenly veer out of control and target himself.

There was no time for him to consider anything else—his giant axe vibrated as it smashed the eagle into nothingness with effortless ease.

After all, the giant eagle was merely condensed from his own True Energy.

With a single thought from him, its momentum had already slowed, and under his attack, it shattered instantly.

"I don't know what method you used to influence my True Energy-condensed beast, but even without it, your doom is inevitable today!"

After obliterating the giant eagle, Koen stared at Wyatt, launching another attack.

"Engage!!"

Just as Koen initiated another strike, Wyatt, who had been preparing for this moment, raised his hand and unleashed a Taoist Talisman toward Koen, shouting loudly to activate the power within the Talisman.

"Do you think a mere Talisman can threaten me?"

Koen sneered at Wyatt's Talisman. Without even glancing at it, his colossal axe carved through the air, aimed directly at Wyatt with devastating power.

As for the Talisman's force, Koen was confident he could easily destroy it.

This single attack would suffice.

From the start, Koen never imagined Wyatt would possess a 'Three-Star Attack Talisman.'

Within the Nine Sect Alliance territory, Three-Star Attack Talismans were exclusive to two forces and were never circulated publicly. Even in the black market, they were almost impossible to acquire.

These two forces were one of the Nine Great Sects, the Mysterious Rune Sect, and the Shadow Mountain black market.

Even among these factions, young individuals with Three-Star Attack Talismans were rarities.

Koen simply couldn't believe he'd be so unlucky as to encounter such an adversary.

"Die! Die!"

From afar, Leslie Howard, hidden behind his ghost-face mask, could hardly contain his excitement as he seemingly envisioned the scene of Wyatt's death and the wealth falling into his hands.

Boom!!

However, with a deafening explosion that shook the heavens, the expression hidden beneath Leslie's mask froze completely.

His eyes revealed a fear that stemmed deep from within his soul.

What exactly had happened to elicit such terror from Leslie?

As the Talisman detonation unfolded, the distant void appeared subtly distorted.

Massive shockwaves churned as towering waves of energy swept outward, wreaking havoc in all directions.

Koen Howard, caught squarely in the range of the Talisman's power, was not only disarmed of his spiritual weapon, the giant axe, but his entire body was torn to shreds before he could even let out a scream.

Chunks of flesh dissolved into a mist of blood under the repeated assault of the space-distorting waves.

All that remained was a solitary Storage Ring, falling quietly to the ground.

Koen Howard was dead.

Before he could even comprehend what had transpired, he had been killed.

"A mere Small Perfection Martial Artist dares to dismiss the strength of a Three-Star Attack Talisman... Tch, tch. It seems all members of the Howard Family share one trait: over-the-top arrogance, as if they were the masters of the universe."

Wyatt clicked his tongue disdainfully, casting a purposeful glance at Leslie Howard in the distance.

Except for the final 'unexpected twist,' everything had unfolded according to Wyatt's plan.

First, Wyatt unleashed an arrow at full strength to destroy Koen's True Energy-condensed weapon. Then, using the Mysterious Eye, he redirected the beast's attack.

Finally, the Three-Star Attack Talisman delivered the fatal blow to Koen Howard!

The power of a Three-Star Attack Talisman could unleash an attack equivalent to the full strength of a Saint Realm Martial Artist at Full Perfection.

Although Koen Howard was among the elites of Small Perfection Martial Artists of the Saint Realm, with one foot in the Full Perfection stage, he was still not a true Saint Realm Full-Perfection Martial Artist. He stood no chance of surviving a full-powered strike of that caliber.

In Wyatt's eyes, the final 'unexpected twist' was Koen getting killed outright.

Wyatt had anticipated that Koen might survive if he focused all his strength on deflecting the Talisman's power—though gravely injured, he would still be at Wyatt's mercy.

Contrary to expectations, Koen had outright ignored the Three-Star Attack Talisman, leading to his complete obliteration.

"G-Grandfather Mountain..."

Leslie stood frozen on the blood-soaked ground, stupefied.

In his eyes, the seemingly 'Undefeated War God' Grandfather Mountain had died just like that?

"A Three-Star Attack Talisman, a Three-Star Attack Talisman... Who in the world is he? How could he possibly possess one?"

Even if Leslie were a fool, he understood now that he had underestimated Wyatt—tragically so.

Moreover, the iron wall he'd kicked against wasn't merely formidable—it was something even the entire Howard Family wouldn't dare provoke.

A shiver ran through Leslie's body as he gasped sharply and regained composure.

He realized that lingering in this place would surely be tantamount to courting death.

Without hesitation, Leslie intended to flee.

But as soon as he turned, the cold voice of Wyatt rang out behind him, "Leslie Howard, if you don't want to die, stay right where you are!"

Hearing Wyatt's words, the face hidden underneath Leslie's ghost mask stiffened once more.

He dared not make another move, standing frozen in place.

"You... You truly won't kill me?"

Leslie's voice trembled, and this time, he no longer bothered to disguise it with a rasp. He knew there was no point in hiding anymore.

Wyatt had already seized control of the situation.

Now, Wyatt held dominion.

"What's wrong? Do you doubt my word?"

Wyatt sneered.

"No... Not at all! Not at all!"

For some reason, the sneer reminded Leslie of the scene where Koen Howard was obliterated by the Three-Star Attack Talisman, sending shivers down his spine and eliciting boundless fear.

Wyatt reached out and collected Koen's spiritual weapon, the giant axe, and his Storage Ring. Then he approached Leslie.

"Remove your mask, unbind your Storage Ring, and hand it over to me... Don't try anything stupid, unless you want to end up like that old man!"

Wyatt shot Leslie an icy glare as he spoke.

Chapter 1498: The Headquarters of the Nine Sects Alliance

"No! No!"

Upon hearing Wyatt Barnes' threat, Leslie Howard quickly shook his head. At this moment, there was no trace of his previous arrogance.

Now, he looked like a startled sparrow.

After removing his ghost-faced mask, Leslie's pale and colorless face was revealed, his eyes filled with lingering terror that refused to fade.

"Here... here you go."

After canceling the ownership recognition of the storage ring in his hand, Leslie obediently handed it over to Wyatt, cooperating without resistance.

Of course, behind this cooperation, his heart was bleeding.

Originally, he had believed that he would take possession of Wyatt's storage ring. Unexpectedly, in the end, Wyatt almost extorted his storage ring instead, and Leslie had no way to refuse.

Or more accurately, he dared not refuse.

He thought of Grandfather Mountain, a Second Elder of the Howard Family, who had perished at Wyatt's hands, and Leslie couldn't muster any thoughts of resistance.

"Let's go!"

Wyatt raised a hand, gripping Leslie's arm tightly like an iron clamp, dragging him away from the waste-filled mound back toward the earlier turning point.

Then, Wyatt led Leslie on a journey northward.

"You... you're part of the Alliance of Nine Sects?"

Realizing that Wyatt was leading him closer and closer to the headquarters of the Alliance of Nine Sects, Leslie's voice trembled from fear.

"Earlier today, when I visited the Howard Family, weren't you acting tough? How is it that now you've become so cowardly? I must say, it feels very unnatural,"

Wyatt casually glanced at Leslie and said.

His words made Leslie's face turn red with shame, though he had no reply.

Only after a while did Leslie manage to stammer, "What... what are you planning? What are you going to do? You promised... you wouldn't kill me. You mustn't go back on your word!"

Leslie was panicked—utterly panicked.

Although he had realized earlier, upon learning that Wyatt had killed Koen Howard using a three-star Taoist Talisman, that Wyatt's background must be extraordinarily immense, that had just been mere speculation and wasn't necessarily true.

Maybe Wyatt had encountered some incredible fortune, acquiring treasures left behind by a powerful figure, with the three-star Taoist Talisman being among them.

However, now that he realized Wyatt might truly be part of the Alliance of Nine Sects, Leslie's last shred of hope was utterly extinguished.

Deep down, he knew that if Wyatt was indeed affiliated with the Alliance of Nine Sects, then even if Wyatt killed him, the Howard Family behind Leslie wouldn't dare utter a single complaint.

For Wyatt, killing him would be as simple as slaughtering a chicken—with no need for any hesitation.

Realizing that his life was entirely in Wyatt's hands, Leslie was terrified—truly terrified.

"I promised not to kill you, and naturally I won't kill you."

Wyatt shot Leslie a disdainful glance, secretly noting that if it weren't for the fact that this guy still held some value, Wyatt wouldn't have spared his life.

Hearing Wyatt's declaration, Leslie breathed a sigh of relief.

Though he suspected Wyatt intended to use him for some purpose, Leslie refrained from thinking too much about it. For him, staying alive was all that mattered.

So long as he remained alive, he'd do whatever was necessary.

Because once a person dies, everything is gone—completely erased from existence, vanished like smoke.

The headquarters of the Alliance of Nine Sects occupied a vast area in the northern part of Thames River City.

Within this large area, it was divided into nine smaller districts, each belonging to the headquarters of one of the nine sects in the Alliance of Nine Sects.

Just as Wyatt arrived outside the gates of the Alliance of Nine Sects' headquarters, he was stopped.

"Who are you? What business do you have coming to the headquarters of the Alliance of Nine Sects at such a late hour?"

At the brightly lit gates of the headquarters, eighteen guards stood—nine on each side. One of them gazed sharply at Wyatt, frowning as he asked.

"I am a disciple of the Moon Radiance Sect,"

Wyatt said. Coming to the headquarters of the Alliance of Nine Sects, it was necessary to make one's sect known; otherwise, entry was impossible.

"Moon Radiance Sect?"

Upon hearing Wyatt's words, Leslie, who had been held up in Wyatt's hand, had his pupils constrict, and his face turned pale with horror.

At this moment, Leslie finally realized Wyatt's real identity.

So Wyatt Barnes was a member of the Moon Radiance Sect!

But unfortunately, now that Leslie knew, it was already too late.

"A member of the Moon Radiance Sect?"

Upon hearing Wyatt's words, the frowning middle-aged man seemed to relax his expression.

Then, he looked toward two specific individuals among the eighteen guards, "Dante Mullins, Boden Mullins, since he claims to belong to your Moon Radiance Sect, you two shall verify his identity."

The two, named Dante Mullins and Boden Mullins, one youthful and the other middle-aged, both nodded and approached Wyatt.

"You say you're a disciple of our Moon Radiance Sect? Do you have your sect token?"

Boden looked at Wyatt courteously and asked.

Although Wyatt appeared very young, Boden's seasoned experience in the outside world allowed him to discern Wyatt's extraordinary presence. Even as a Moon Radiance Sect disciple, Wyatt was far from ordinary.

"Yes,"

Wyatt nodded, taking out a token and handing it to Boden. It was the identity token of a Moon Radiance Sect outer sect disciple.

"The token checks out... but you're an outer sect disciple?"

After verifying the token, Boden returned it to Wyatt, clearly surprised as he asked.

"Wyatt Barnes greets Senior Brother Boden Mullins and Senior Brother Dante Mullins,"

Wyatt casually threw Leslie onto the ground like a piece of trash, slightly bowing as he greeted Boden and Dante.

From the identity tokens on their waists, Wyatt could tell they were both inner sect disciples of the Moon Radiance Sect.

But Wyatt's words left Boden and Dante absolutely stunned.

"Wyatt Barnes? Outer sect disciple of the Moon Radiance Sect?"

Meanwhile, the other sixteen guards immediately shifted their gazes to Wyatt, as if he were emitting some irresistible allure.

"What's going on?"

Wyatt was dumbfounded.

"You... you're Wyatt Barnes?!"

At that moment, Leslie, who had been lazily dumped on the ground by Wyatt, stared at him as though seeing a ghost, seemingly recognizing him anew.

"You know me too?"

Hearing Leslie's words, Wyatt frowned. Was he really that famous?

"Junior Brother Barnes, do you not yet realize that you're nearly a household name across the entire Alliance of Nine Sects region?"

At this point, Boden finally came back to his senses, flashing a bitter smile as he responded to Wyatt's query to Leslie.

"Nearly a household name across the entire Alliance of Nine Sects region?"

Wyatt was shocked.

"Since shortly after entering the sect, when you killed Sail Fenning, ranked ninety-ninth on the Earth List, and took his place, your reputation has begun to spread within the Alliance of Nine Sects region,"

Boden remarked.

"Then, when you defeated Center Montes, ranked sixty-sixth, and ascended to sixty-sixth, your brilliance astounded the entire Alliance of Nine Sects region! Nowadays, in the region, nearly everyone except those in remote areas or isolated from news has heard of you."

Boden continued to explain.

Wyatt finally understood; the cause of all this renown was the Earth List.

Realizing this, Wyatt looked relieved.

As he recalled, the Earth List was a ranking across the Alliance of Nine Sects region, encompassing the most exceptional Transcending Mortal Realm peak experts.

Regarding the Earth List, Wyatt's fame spreading throughout the region no longer seemed implausible.

At first, Wyatt was unaware of this because he hadn't thought in these terms.

Now, he realized that unwittingly, he had already become a well-known figure in the region of the Alliance of Nine Sects.

Those ranked on the Earth List, though merely Transcending Mortal Realm Martial or Taoist Cultivators, stood as the pinnacle in their domain at that level.

"What's most noteworthy is that you, Junior Brother Barnes, are merely a Small Perfection Martial Artist in the Transcending Mortal Realm... a Small Perfection Martial Artist making it to sixty-sixth on the Earth List—that has never happened in the history of the Earth List,"

Dante remarked with admiration.

"That's Wyatt Barnes?"

"He looks really young."

"They say he's only thirty-five years old... Thirty-five, ranked sixty-sixth on the Earth List. His strength and talent are undeniable."

"Word has it he's merely a Small Perfection Martial Artist in the Transcending Mortal Realm... is that even possible?"

"I highly doubt it. Ten to one, this is probably a gimmick cooked up by the Moon Radiance Sect just to attract attention."

...

The sixteen guards began discussing in whispers.

Their words reflected their skepticism that Wyatt could achieve rank sixty-six on the Earth List with the cultivation level of Small Perfection.

"There's even talk that Wyatt Barnes was informally taken as a disciple by Elder Trevor Baillie of the Moon Radiance Sect, who recognized him as a younger brother... now that's something truly astonishing,"

"That news seems credible since it came directly from the Moon Radiance Sect."

"Indeed, anything involving Elder Trevor Baillie wouldn't dare be made up."

"Regardless, just this alone is cause enough to avoid offending Wyatt Barnes... offending him would be tantamount to offending Elder Trevor Baillie."

...

As their discussion reached this point, the sixteen men gazing at Wyatt now showed unmistakable signs of fear.

Meanwhile, Leslie, still sitting stunned on the ground after learning the identity of the man he had been scheming against, was left completely petrified.

Wyatt Barnes, ranked sixty-sixth on the Earth List, an outstanding outer sect disciple of the Moon Radiance Sect.

If it had been only this, Leslie might have managed to calm down.

What truly terrified him, though, was Wyatt's *status.*

Wyatt Barnes was recognized as the younger brother of Trevor Baillie, the Moon Radiance Sect's esteemed three-star Saint Markings Master!

A three-star Saint Markings Master—there were only a handful in the entire region of the Alliance of Nine Sects!

"No wonder... no wonder his sacred artifacts had so many 'three-star Saint Markings'! As Trevor Baillie's younger brother, he certainly wouldn't lack for three-star Saint Markings,"

In that moment, Leslie pieced together many things.

However, coming to these realizations now changed nothing—it was all too late.

"Junior Brother Barnes, who might this be?"

After exchanging a few pleasantries with Wyatt, Boden glanced at Leslie, seated on the ground, and asked Wyatt.

Chapter 1499: Elder Milan

"Huh? Isn't this Howard Family's eldest young master, 'Leslie Howard'?"

At that moment, among the sixteen others, someone recognized Leslie Howard.

Howard Family's eldest young master?

Immediately, except for Wyatt Barnes, everyone's gaze fell on Leslie Howard, making him the center of attention.

If it were before, when he was still basking in prestige, such attention from members of the Nine Sect Alliance would have undoubtedly made Leslie proud and feeling highly respected.

But now, he resembled a dog that had lost its home, hanging his head low, wishing desperately for the ground to swallow him up.

"Howard Family's eldest young master?"

Upon hearing the person sitting listlessly on the ground being referred to as the eldest young master of the Howard Family, Boden Mullins and Dante Mullins were surprised but not overly shocked.

As members of a seventh-tier sect, it was only natural for them to look down on members of an eighth-tier family.

"Junior Brother Barnes, you and him..."

Nonetheless, both of them were curious about the relationship between Wyatt Barnes and this eldest young master of the Howard Family.

Earlier, they had both noticed that Leslie Howard had been brought here single-handedly by Wyatt Barnes, clearly not appearing as friends.

Now, the way Boden and Dante gazed upon Leslie Howard revealed a clear trace of hostility.

Disciples of the Moon Radiance Sect, unless facing irreconcilable conflicts, would always stand united against external threats when outside.

Thus, upon suspecting that Leslie Howard might have offended Wyatt Barnes, both Boden Mullins and Dante Mullins directed their animosity toward Leslie Howard.

Noticing their hostile gaze, Leslie Howard trembled more fiercely, fearful beyond words.

"The matter between me and him isn't something that can be explained in just a few sentences... Senior Brothers, I've come to the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters late at night to seek out 'Elder Milan.'"

Wyatt gave Leslie Howard a cold glance and then turned back to Boden Mullins and Dante Mullins with a friendly expression, contrasting sharply with his demeanor toward Leslie.

"So Junior Brother Barnes is here to see Elder Milan. I'll take you inside right away."

Boden Mullins immediately said upon hearing this.

Elder Milan was one of Moon Radiance Sect's designated representatives at the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters and ranked second among the three Moon Radiance Sect high-ranking members stationed there.

Additionally, every member of the Moon Radiance Sect knew that Elder Milan, as a Two-Star Saint Marking Master, was often seen in close companionship with the Three-Star Saint Marking Master, Trevor Baillie. In public, he had also declared Trevor Baillie to be both a mentor and brother in his eyes.

Thus, in Boden's view, even if Elder Milan were currently resting or cultivating, he wouldn't refuse Wyatt Barnes' visit.

After all, Wyatt Barnes was the younger brother of Elder Trevor Baillie!

"Thank you, Senior Brother Boden."

Wyatt quickly voiced his gratitude, lifted Leslie Howard with a casual motion once more, and followed Boden Mullins toward the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters.

Before departing, Wyatt courteously bid farewell to Dante Mullins.

"With Wyatt Barnes' current status and position, being so polite in front of an ordinary inner sect disciple like me is truly rare."

Watching Wyatt's retreating figure, Dante Mullins' eyes gleamed with excitement.

In his view, the purple-clad young man before him, unless met with untimely disaster, was destined to soar to the heavens!

If Wyatt were to remain at Moon Radiance Sect, it was highly likely that he would become the next sect leader.

For such a figure to show him such courtesy, how could he not be moved?

"Looks like that Howard Family eldest young master is in trouble... Of all people to offend, he dared to offend Wyatt Barnes."

At the entrance of the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters, several people muttered in lament.

"Indeed. Forget the Howard Family eldest young master; even if it were the family patriarch himself, give him a hundred guts, and he'd likely still not dare to go against Wyatt Barnes."

Many nodded in agreement.

"However, that Howard Family eldest young master should've known about Wyatt Barnes beforehand... Why would he still defy Wyatt then?"

"Now that you mention it, I have no idea."

"Ha! Acting like you know everything."

"Although I don't know, I noticed something earlier: when Wyatt Barnes revealed his name, that Howard Family eldest young master suddenly showed a look of panic... It's evident he was unaware of Wyatt Barnes' identity beforehand."

"You caught that? You must have hawk-like eyes!"

"If that's the case, then it's clearly Wyatt Barnes playing the 'wolf in sheep's clothing'... Looks like the Howard Family has walked straight into a disaster this time."

...

Apart from Dante Mullins, the sixteen others exchanged glances, and in each other's eyes, they saw a trace of pity—pity directed toward the Howard Family.

"Hmph! Junior Brother Barnes is naturally a patient man. If it weren't for that Howard eldest young master offending him gravely, he would never have escalated matters to this point."

Though they had not spent much time with Wyatt, Dante Mullins concluded that Wyatt wasn't the kind who would flaunt his status at the slightest provocation like some arrogant young master from a well-off family.

On the other end, Wyatt, still holding Leslie Howard, followed Boden Mullins toward Moon Radiance Sect's quarters at the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters.

The Moon Radiance Sect's base within the Nine Sect Alliance was a sprawling estate. Though slightly smaller than the Howard Family residence, it still covered an extensive area.

"Senior Brother Boden, the ones stationed outside with you and Senior Brother Dante earlier were from the other eight major sects?"

On the way, Wyatt recalled seeing the sixteen others at the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters entrance and asked curiously.

"Correct."

Boden nodded. "Including me and Dante, there are a total of eighteen stationed at the headquarters' entrance... Each of the nine sects assigns two representatives, and this week, it just happens to be Dante and me on duty."

Wyatt nodded, his guess largely confirmed, with only minor discrepancies.

"By showing yourself in front of those representatives from the eight other sects, it won't be long before word spreads across Thames River City. Tomorrow, the entire city will likely know you're here... Be prepared."

Boden suddenly seemed to remember something and reminded him.

"Be prepared?"

Wyatt was slightly taken aback. "What kind of preparation?"

"Naturally, preparation to deal with the challenges from all those Transcending Mortal Realm martial artists and Taoist cultivators who want to replace you as the sixty-sixth ranked on the Earth List."

Boden explained, "Previously, when you killed Sail Fenning and took his place as the ninety-ninth ranked, it wasn't a big deal since it was a life-and-death duel—Sail Fenning would never hold back. But later, during your battle with Center Montes, many suspect that he deliberately let you win."

As he finished speaking, Boden glanced toward Wyatt, relieved to see Wyatt unfazed and showing no anger.

"Let me win?"

Wyatt was initially surprised, then chuckled. "Just because Center Montes and I are both Moon Radiance Sect disciples? So he intentionally let me win?"

"Not just that."

Boden shook his head and elaborated, "There's been a lot of speculation out there that Center Montes was intimidated by Elder Trevor Baillie's influence, which is why he deliberately lost to you, willingly becoming the 'stepping stone' under your feet. Moreover, very few people believe you are merely a Small Perfection Transcending Mortal Realm martial artist."

"Their imagination is impressive."

Wyatt smiled faintly, seemingly indifferent to others' opinions.

What a joke!

Right now, he had already broken through to the 'Mid Saint Realm.' Forget Transcending Mortal Realm martial artists or Taoist cultivators who wanted to challenge him—the strongest figure on the Earth List could still be crushed effortlessly by him!

The Earth List's top experts, no matter how powerful, could only defeat Early Saint Realm martial artists or Taoist cultivators, their strength on par with Mid Saint Realm cultivators.

Yet Wyatt's current prowess allowed him to utterly overpower Late Saint Realm cultivators!

Even facing an ordinary Transcending Mortal Realm Small Perfection expert, he wasn't without chances of victory.

Of course, if pitted against someone like Koen Howard, who had one foot into Transcending Mortal Realm Great Perfection, if he didn't rely on his three-star Taoist talismans for offense, Wyatt was still no match.

However, this was temporary.

Once Wyatt advanced further, attaining Late Saint Realm and mastering techniques like 'True Energy Weaponization,' or perfecting the martial arts techniques within the Supreme Falling Star Arrow,

he might very well face off against individuals of Koen Howard's level in a fair battle!

"Junior Brother Barnes, my admiration for you grows ever deeper."

Boden sighed in envy. "If I were standing in your shoes and heard such rumors, I could never remain as composed as you."

Wyatt shook his head with a smile, offering no further explanation.

Having experienced life twice, Wyatt was long detached from the influence of rumors, naturally indifferent to them.

Moreover, he harbored no guilt.

"I'll have to see how many foolish individuals dare challenge me."

Wyatt's thoughts stirred, smirking inwardly.

If Boden Mullins were aware of Wyatt's current cultivation—having reached Mid Saint Realm—or knew of his current mindset, he would undoubtedly feel sorrow for those martial artists and Taoist cultivators who would seek out Wyatt in Thames River City to challenge him.

Meanwhile, the petrified Leslie Howard, still dangling in Wyatt's grip, prayed desperately, hoping Wyatt wouldn't go back on his word or kill him.

His thoughts revolved around one hope: survival.

When Boden Mullins led Wyatt to Elder Milan's courtyard within the Moon Radiance Sect outpost, things turned out as Boden had anticipated. Upon hearing Wyatt had arrived, Elder Milan immediately stepped out to personally welcome him.

"Haha! Junior Brother Barnes, I've finally met you. If it weren't for my recent obligations, I'd have already returned to the sect to meet this young genius whom Senior Brother Baillie has personally recognized as his sibling."

Welcoming Wyatt into his courtyard, Elder Milan laughed heartily, expressing his enthusiasm.

Elder Milan, whose full name was Milan Reid, was a sprightly old man, radiating kindness and approachability with his smiling eyes and gentle demeanor.

Following Wyatt inside, Boden Mullins was dumbstruck.

The amicable elder before him—was this really Elder Milan?

This was the same Elder Milan who, though not ill-tempered, was notably aloof, rarely interacting with others at the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters.

Now, when facing Wyatt Barnes, Elder Milan seemed like an entirely different person.

Chapter 1500: Making a 'Deal' with the Howard Family

At this moment, Boden Mullins fully realized that the rumors were true—there was indeed an extraordinary relationship between Elder Milan and Elder Baillie.

"Elder Milan, I'll take my leave now."

Having brought Wyatt Barnes in, Boden Mullins naturally knew to excuse himself tactfully.

"Hmm."

Facing Boden Mullins, Milan Reid merely nodded indifferently.

Immediately afterward, Boden Mullins bid farewell to Wyatt Barnes.

"Thank you, Senior Brother Boden, for leading the way."

Wyatt expressed his gratitude and watched Boden Mullins depart before turning to Milan Reid, clasping his hands lightly. "Wyatt Barnes greets Elder Milan."

"What's this? I called you Junior Brother, and you're not happy? Think I don't deserve to be your Senior Brother?"

Hearing Wyatt's greeting, Milan Reid put on a stern face and asked.

"Senior Brother Milan."

Wyatt smiled bitterly.

Though he could see Milan Reid was intentionally feigning seriousness, Wyatt nonetheless followed his lead, realizing that Milan Reid's relationship with his Senior Brother Trevor Baillie was closer than he had imagined.

"Now that's better."

Hearing Wyatt's change in address, a brilliant smile lit up Milan Reid's face.

"Who's this?"

Shortly afterward, Milan's gaze shifted to Leslie Howard, whom Wyatt had earlier discarded to the side.

He vaguely deduced that Wyatt's purpose in seeking him must surely be tied to this individual.

"He's the eldest young master of the Howard Family, Leslie Howard."

Wyatt swept a casual glance at Leslie Howard and replied.

"Howard Family? Would that be the Howard Family of East City in Thames River City?"

Milan Reid raised an eyebrow and asked.

"Yes, precisely that Howard Family."

Wyatt nodded.

"What's this? Did he offend you, Junior Brother?"

Milan Reid queried.

"If all he did was offend me, I could overlook it... But the problem is, he conspired with a Small Perfection elder of the Howard Family who's entered the Saint Realm to silence me permanently!"

Wyatt's eyes shone with murderous intent as he finished speaking.

"What?!"

Upon hearing Wyatt's words, Milan Reid's expression changed drastically. When his eyes shifted back to Leslie Howard, rage and killing intent burst forth.

Deep in his heart, Milan Reid had long regarded Trevor Baillie as his mentor on the path of Saint Markings.

When he learned Trevor Baillie had acknowledged a young man as his Junior Brother, even though he hadn't yet met Wyatt Barnes, Milan had instinctively extended that same sentiment toward Wyatt, treating him as his own Junior Brother.

Of all the scenarios Milan had envisioned for meeting Wyatt, he had never imagined it would be under such circumstances.

If something happened to Wyatt in Thames River City, how could he ever face Senior Brother Trevor Baillie?

Thus, Milan Reid was outraged—utterly outraged!

Sensing the killing intent emanating from Milan, Leslie Howard trembled involuntarily.

Panicked to the core, Leslie pleaded frantically with Wyatt Barnes, "Wyatt Barnes, you swore you wouldn't kill me! You said it yourself—you wouldn't kill me! You mustn't go back on your word!"

"Hmm?"

Hearing Leslie's outburst, Milan Reid furrowed his brows, puzzled, and turned his gaze toward Wyatt.

He couldn't understand.

Why was Wyatt so lenient toward someone who had attempted to kill him?

"Once I've said something, it's set in stone... What are you panicking about?"

Wyatt snorted coldly, silencing Leslie Howard immediately.

"However, when I said I wouldn't kill you, it came with a condition—the condition that you cooperate straightforwardly without resorting to any tricks."

Wyatt spoke calmly.

"I'll cooperate! I swear I won't play any tricks!"

Leslie Howard quickly replied, as if terrified that any delay might lead Wyatt to change his mind.

"Speak then. Who was the old guy that came with you to kill me? Based on his strength, he's definitely an elder of the Howard Family—that much, I've already confirmed."

Wyatt cast a cold glance at Leslie and demanded.

"He's named Koen Howard—a Second Elder of our Howard Family."

Leslie Howard dared not hesitate and answered immediately.

"Did he act on orders from your father, or was it your own instigation?"

Wyatt asked again.

"It wasn't my father's orders."

Leslie Howard shook his head.

"Then it was you who instigated him?"

Wyatt's gaze flashed coldly, and he questioned sharply.

"No! No!"

Catching the fleeting trace of murderous intent in Wyatt's eyes, Leslie Howard panicked and shook his head frantically. "I didn't instigate him—I didn't! It was his own doing! It's all because he heard about you and learned that you possessed a Saint Artifact engraved with three-star Saint Markings, which gave rise to his greedy desire to kill you and take your treasure."

Leslie Howard's statement made it clear he had shifted all the blame onto the now-deceased Koen Howard.

If Koen Howard, who had departed for the Netherworld Path, overheard Leslie's blatant reversal of facts, who could say whether he'd spit out three liters of blood in fury or silently stew in regret for agreeing to oppose Wyatt Barnes on Leslie Howard's behalf?

Leslie Howard's claims were, of course, impossible for Wyatt to believe.

But to him, it didn't matter.

"The Howard Family is truly audacious!"

Standing to one side, Milan Reid erupted in fury after hearing Leslie Howard's words. "To dare harbor thoughts of killing disciples from our Moon Radiance Sect—clearly, your Howard Family has grown far too complacent over the years! Do you truly believe that Thames River City would descend into chaos without your Howard Family?"

"Junior Brother Wyatt, you promised not to kill him, but I, as his Senior Brother, made no such promise... In my view, since he belongs to that Howard Family, and the Howard Family dared to challenge the authority of our Moon Radiance Sect, there's absolutely no reason to let him live!"

Although Milan Reid yearned to strike Lesley Howard down with a palm, he respected Wyatt's wishes and refrained from immediate action.

"No! You can't kill me!"

Before Wyatt could respond, Leslie Howard had already panicked.

Indeed.

Wyatt had promised not to kill him, but he hadn't said anything about preventing others from doing so.

"Wyatt Barnes, you swore not to kill me, and that means you can't just let others kill me either... This matter has nothing to do with me! I swear it has nothing to do with me! It was all because of Koen Howard—yes, Koen Howard! He coveted your Saint Artifact, and he was the one who wanted to kill you to seize it."

Leslie Howard's face went pale as he desperately argued.

With an expression of disgust, Wyatt swept a glance at Leslie and then ignored him entirely, turning to Milan Reid instead, "Senior Brother Milan, whether to leave his life intact or not means little to me... But I do have a question for Senior Brother Milan—based on this incident, would it be possible to uproot the entire Howard Family?"

Wyatt's tone turned serious as he spoke.

Milan Reid fell silent.

After a moment, he shook his head, "With just this matter, it'd be difficult. Even if the Sect were willing to fully support you, at best, they would exact punishment on those directly involved in the incident... But erasing the Howard Family entirely would be implausible."

"After all, the Howard Family is, after all, a standout among Thames River City's eight-tiered families, with ties to the Nine Sect Alliance... Destroying the Howard Family would undoubtedly lead to significant losses for the other eight sects within the Alliance, and they simply wouldn't agree to it."

Milan Reid explained.

"I figured as much."

Wyatt smiled and said, "That's why I don't plan to take his life... I plan to use him—and this incident—to make a 'deal' with the Howard Family!"

The emphasis Wyatt placed on the word 'deal' was heavy.

Milan Reid was momentarily stunned but soon grasped Wyatt's meaning—the so-called 'deal' clearly meant extorting a hefty sum from the Howard Family.

"This matter is fairly simple."

Milan nodded. He then offered an apology: "Junior Brother Wyatt, I'm truly sorry—I couldn't help you vent your frustrations."

To Milan Reid, failing to annihilate the Howard Family meant failing to properly fulfill his obligation to Wyatt and, by extension, failing to fulfill his obligation to Trevor Baillie.

Thus, he felt genuinely apologetic.

"Senior Brother Milan, how can you say that you haven't helped me vent my frustrations? The upcoming negotiations with the Howard Family still rely on you!"

Wyatt said with a grin.

"Don't worry, Junior Brother Wyatt—I guarantee I'll handle this matter seamlessly."

Milan Reid pledged solemnly.

Early the next morning, back at the Howard Family estate, Valentin Howard was seething with rage.

"What? You couldn't find that unfilial son?"

Valentin glared at Amias Howard with a dark expression as he interjected, "Don't tell me you're hiding him out of regard for the Second Elder?"

"family head, even if you gave me ten lives, I wouldn't dare oppose you!"

Amias Howard jolted with alarm upon hearing Valentin's accusation and replied with a wry smile.

Valentin's expression softened slightly after hearing this.

He had been merely testing Amias Howard; after all, Amias had never once disobeyed his orders, which was why Valentin trusted him.

"Father, what should we do now? Should we still proceed?"

Beside Valentin stood Eliel Howard, who spoke inquisitively.

"Proceed! Of course, we must proceed!"

Valentin gritted his teeth and declared, "That unfilial son—if I see him later, I'll tear him apart!"

Just as Valentin was preparing to bring Eliel Howard and a carefully-prepared 'gift' to the inn where Wyatt Barnes was staying to offer his apologies... A panicked and frantic voice echoed from afar, growing closer.

"Family head, it's bad news! Very bad news!"

The speaker turned out to be one of the gatekeepers of the Howard Family estate.

"Why are you in such a fluster?"

Already irritated, Valentin's temper worsened at the commotion. His tone grew sharp, like fuel poured onto a raging fire.

"Family head, it's the eldest young master—the eldest young master..."

The gatekeeper trembled, his words halting suddenly before Valentin interrupted him. "What did you say? That unfilial son? Do you have news of that wretch? Where is he?"

Before the gatekeeper could finish his sentence, Valentin appeared before him in a flash, his expression grim, demanding answers.

Facing the family head's overwhelming aura, the gatekeeper felt as though he could hardly breathe...

Valentin's oppressive presence weighed heavily on him.

"Family head, perhaps we should let him speak properly."

At this moment, Amias Howard intervened, addressing Valentin before instructing the gatekeeper to step back. "Take your time and speak clearly—no need for panic."

"Yes, yes."

The gatekeeper took a deep breath and, with head lowered, made no attempt to meet Valentin's eyes as he quickly recounted, "Family head, someone from the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters came earlier with a message... He said you should go there to collect the eldest young master and bring him home."