

## L. Wyatt 1501

Chapter 1501: Leading Calamity East

The abrupt intrusion of the family retainer's words left Valentin Howard, Amias Howard, and Eliel Howard as stunned as wooden statues.

The Nine Sect Alliance headquarters?

They've detained Leslie Howard?

"Brother, what on earth have you done? How could you have provoked the Nine Sect Alliance?"

Eliel Howard's heart trembled as she secretly glanced at Valentin Howard, only to find her father similarly shaken, unable to recover his composure for quite a while.

"Are you certain they're people from the Nine Sect Alliance?"

Amias Howard inhaled sharply and asked the family retainer before him in a heavy tone.

"That's what they said."

The retainer replied.

Upon hearing this, Amias Howard gradually realized the situation was likely genuine.

Within the Nine Sect Alliance's sphere of influence, nobody would dare impersonate someone from their ranks—let alone come to deceive the Howard Family.

"Family Head..."

Taking a deep breath, Amias Howard turned toward Valentin Howard, fully understanding the turmoil in his heart.

"Unworthy wretch! Unworthy wretch!"

Finally, Valentin Howard snapped out of it, his expression instantly becoming unbearably grim.

He never imagined that his son would first offend a seemingly young talent from a seventh-tier power, and now even provoke the Nine Sect Alliance.

The Nine Sect Alliance was comprised of nine major seventh-tier sects!

Furthermore, the Howard Family's businesses in Thames River City were almost entirely dependent on the Nine Sect Alliance.

A single command from the Nine Sect Alliance would be enough to obliterate the Howard Family's presence in Thames River City's commercial world.

Without hesitation and not even pausing to greet anyone, Valentin Howard vanished from his spot and headed straight for the Nine Sect Alliance.

In that moment, Wyatt Barnes was entirely cast out of his thoughts.

To him, resolving matters with the Nine Sect Alliance was now the utmost priority.

"Even if the eldest young master returns, I fear his days ahead won't be easy."

Amias Howard sighed.

Upon hearing his words, Eliel Howard couldn't help but reveal concern in her eyes—concern for her brother 'Leslie Howard.'

On the way to the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters, countless scenarios played out within Valentin Howard's mind regarding what might happen once he arrived. He had already steeled himself to clean up the mess his useless son had made.

However, after learning the extent of his son's wrongdoing, he nearly fainted.

"Elder Milan, could there be some misunderstanding? Based on what I know about my disobedient son, even if you gave him a hundred opportunities, he wouldn't dare harbor ill intentions toward your sect's genius disciple."

After hearing Milan Reid describe his son's transgressions, Valentin Howard's first reaction was disbelief.

Though his son was a wastrel, he wasn't completely brainless.

In this, Valentin Howard was certain.

"Oh? Does Family Head Howard think I'm falsely accusing your son?"

Milan Reid asked flatly.

"I wouldn't dare!"

Though Valentin Howard harbored such thoughts internally, he wouldn't dare express them aloud. "I merely find it hard to believe. My disobedient son may be unruly, but he'd never have the audacity to provoke your sect's genius disciple 'Wyatt Barnes.'"

"Family Head Howard, it seems you've truly underestimated your son."

With a piercing gaze, Milan Reid studied Valentin Howard before turning his attention toward the inner room. "Junior Brother Barnes, bring the person out for direct confrontation... let Family Head Howard see for himself that we from Moon Radiance Sect have no need to falsely accuse the Howard Family!"

When Milan Reid spoke, Valentin Howard also looked toward the inner room.

And when he saw the figure walking out from within, he froze entirely. "Wyatt... Wyatt, my young friend?"

What he saw was this—the purple-clad youth he had met just yesterday, someone he had planned to visit at his inn earlier today to apologize to.

Yet, because his son had provoked members of the Nine Sect Alliance, Valentin Howard had rushed here to clean up the mess.

Upon learning that his son had even attempted to kill Moon Radiance Sect's 'Wyatt Barnes,' Valentin Howard's heart surged with dread, his pulse pounding to the point of near panic.

Wyatt Barnes—this name was no stranger to him.

Moon Radiance Sect's outstanding outer disciple, ranked sixty-sixth on the Earth List.

Moreover, he was the sect's elder Trevor Baillie's recognized junior brother.

Trevor Baillie—a renowned figure throughout the Nine Sect Alliance region, one of only two three-star Saint Markers within its boundaries. His unique status commanded respect, even from the sect leaders of the nine major seventh-tier sects.

A man whom even Valentin Howard could only look up to!

And his son dared to attempt to kill someone like this?

Valentin Howard couldn't believe it.

"Hm! My Junior Brother Barnes holds such stature—how dare you presume to call him your young friend?"

Milan Reid snorted coldly.

This prompted Valentin Howard to hurriedly correct himself. Looking at Wyatt Barnes once more, his eyes were filled with reverence.

"Family Head Valentin Howard of Thames River City's Howard Family pays respect to Young Master Barnes! Yesterday, unaware of your distinguished identity, we may have shown some neglect. I beg Young Master Barnes for forgiveness."

Deep within, Valentin Howard's heart churned violently like an ocean in storm.

Never had he imagined that the youth who had saved his daughter in the Nine Curves Mountain Range—the one he initially suspected to be from a seventh-tier power—turned out to be Moon Radiance Sect's 'Wyatt Barnes,' the prodigy whose reputation had engulfed the entire Nine Sect Alliance region in recent months.

In this instant, Valentin Howard cursed his daughter's foolishness internally!

Had it not been for her offending Wyatt Barnes in the Nine Curves Mountain Range, the Howard Family might have established ties with this exceptional figure.

With Wyatt Barnes' talents, combined with Trevor Baillie's backing, it wouldn't be impossible for him to assume Moon Radiance Sect's leadership in the future.

"Family Head Howard, judging by your complexion, you must have had a good night's sleep last night."

Wyatt Barnes tossed Leslie Howard aside like discarded garbage before glancing at Valentin Howard. His tone was calm.

At this moment, Wyatt Barnes exuded tranquility in both his tone and expression—impossible to discern joy or anger.

Leslie Howard, upon being held and tossed out by Wyatt Barnes, began sending True Energy transmissions pleading for aid, "Father! Save me! Save me! I don't want to die! I don't want to die... Father, I'm your only son—you can't abandon me!"

However, Valentin Howard merely shot him a fierce glare, offering no assistance.

Valentin Howard's focus remained solely on Wyatt Barnes.

He knew Wyatt Barnes was the key. Only by extinguishing Wyatt Barnes' fury could there be any hope of resolving this ordeal.

By now, he had come to believe in his son's attempt on Wyatt Barnes' life.

Of course, he also understood that his son acted in ignorance of Wyatt Barnes' true identity—an identity which had been concealed deep beneath the surface.

After all, they only knew this purple-clad youth by the surname 'Barnes' and hadn't connected him to the Wyatt Barnes whose tales had swept the Nine Sect Alliance region.

Had Wyatt Barnes revealed his identity yesterday, Valentin Howard was confident his son would have never initiated conflict.

At this moment, he couldn't help but feel a surge of resentment toward Wyatt Barnes.

Was this not a case of playing the fool to hunt the tiger?

Naturally, though he nursed grievances within, he dared not voice them.

"I managed well enough."

Responding to Wyatt Barnes' statement about a good night's sleep, Valentin Howard reflexively answered.

"Family Head Howard may have slept well, but I didn't sleep a wink last night... all thanks to your eldest young master and the Howard Family's Second Elder."

Wyatt Barnes swept Valentin Howard a faint glance before speaking calmly.

"Second Elder?"

Upon hearing Wyatt Barnes' remarks, Valentin Howard's expression underwent a drastic change. He glared furiously at Leslie Howard. "Unfilial scoundrel! You even dragged the Second Elder into this mess?"

Now, Valentin Howard realized the situation was far worse than he had imagined.

If it were only his son involved, given Leslie Howard's capabilities, he might stand little chance of successfully harming Wyatt Barnes.

But the involvement of their Second Elder, Koen Howard, brought a far deeper level of trouble.

"Father, all I did was tell Koen Howard about Young Master Barnes... who could have expected him to covet Young Master Barnes' Saint Mark-engraved three-star weapon and plot to kill him!"

At this point, even Leslie Howard addressed Wyatt Barnes more cautiously, switching to the proper title.

As for Koen Howard, Leslie Howard now referred to him by name instead of calling him 'Grandfather Mountain.'

"Thankfully, Young Master Barnes is divinely protected and possessed a three-star offensive Taoist Talisman as leverage—or else he'd surely have fallen to Koen Howard."

Leslie Howard spoke with apparent fury, as though genuinely concerned for Wyatt Barnes.

Valentin Howard, utterly familiar with his son's true nature, internally rejected Leslie Howard's narrative outright.

Even under the circumstances, however, Valentin Howard refrained from contradicting Leslie Howard's statements; Leslie Howard, after all, was still his son.

No matter how unworthy his son proved, letting him perish here remained unthinkable.

"Where is the Second Elder now?"

Valentin Howard transmitted via True Energy, asking Leslie Howard. In his mind, even when faced with a three-star offensive Taoist Talisman's power, Koen Howard should have survived, if only barely.

"Father, Koen Howard is dead—killed by Young Master Barnes' three-star offensive Taoist Talisman. He didn't seem to recognize the talisman's true nature in time."

Leslie Howard responded through the transmission, his tone carrying hints of despair.

"Indeed. How could Wyatt Barnes possess a three-star offensive Taoist Talisman? Even within the Nine Sect Alliance region, only the Mysterious Rune Sect and the Shadow Mountain Black Market hold such talismans... and theirs are almost never given to outsiders."

With clarity finally settling, Valentin Howard grappled with realization.

Not only him—Milan Reid seemed equally stunned. "Three-star... Three-star offensive Taoist Talisman? Could it be Senior Brother Baillie gifted it to Junior Brother Barnes?"

Chapter 1502: Demonic Ridge of the Shadows

No wonder Milan Reid thought this way.

In the Moon Radiance Sect, even the Saint Realm experts, including the Sect Leader, couldn't necessarily possess a Three-star Attack Dao Talisman.

As for Trevor Baillie, being a 'Three-star Saint Marking Master,' perhaps he had other ways to obtain a Three-star Attack Dao Talisman.

"Young Master Barnes, this matter is indeed our Howard Family's fault... Even I, as the Family Head, hadn't expected Koen Howard to be so audacious, daring to covet Young Master Barnes and even attempt to harm you."

Valentin Howard looked at Wyatt Barnes with an apologetic expression and said.



As he continued, he feigned a look of relief, "Fortunately, Young Master Barnes has heaven's protection, and Koen Howard has paid the price with his life. This truly is a happy ending for all."

"A happy ending for all?"

Wyatt Barnes sneered, looking at Valentin Howard with deep meaning, causing Valentin Howard to feel a tinge of guilt.

"Nonetheless, Koen Howard was still the Second Elder of the Howard Family. Although his death puts an end to things, our Howard Family must bear the primary responsibility for this... While we may not be able to present a Three-star Attack Dao Talisman, we are willing to offer other compensation."

"Additionally, we are prepared to provide more items to ease Young Master Barnes's distress."

As the current Family Head of the Howard Family, Valentin Howard was a shrewd and calculating man.

Seeing that his son's life had been spared, he had already deduced Wyatt Barnes's and Milan Reid's motive.

It wasn't difficult to figure out—they wanted to extort the Howard Family.

So, without waiting for Wyatt Barnes to bring it up, he proactively addressed it.

As for Leslie Howard, Valentin Howard didn't mention much, as he knew it wasn't necessary for now.

"Family Head Howard is indeed a straightforward person! Since Family Head Howard is so forthright, I naturally won't keep holding on to this matter... Leslie Howard can leave with you. However, I hope Family Head Howard handles certain issues with sincerity; otherwise, this matter might not end so smoothly."

Though surprised by Valentin Howard's initiative, since his objective had already been achieved, Wyatt Barnes didn't intend to push the issue further.

However, he subtly hinted at Valentin Howard.

The underlying message was clear—don't plan to offer some token gestures and expect him to be placated.

"Certainly! Certainly!"

Hearing Wyatt Barnes's words, Valentin Howard broke out in a cold sweat. He had indeed considered offering some less valuable items to settle the matter earlier.

But now, it was apparent that such a course was impossible.

Offending Wyatt Barnes was something he couldn't afford, nor could the Howard Family as a whole.

"Three days from now, I will visit with Senior Brother Milan... At that time, I hope Family Head Howard has prepared your 'sincerity.' Personally, I am quite interested in items that ordinary people might not be able to recognize."

Wyatt Barnes cast Valentin Howard a penetrating look as he spoke.

The implication behind his words was tied to the Seven Treasures Exquisite Tower. Perhaps within the Howard Family's unknown inventory, there might be materials needed to restore the tower.

Currently, while the Seven Treasures Exquisite Tower had its third layer repaired, Wyatt Barnes wasn't satisfied.

The Seven Treasures Exquisite Tower had seven layers in total. Even with the third layer restored, it hadn't even reached half its potential.

"Young Master Barnes, rest assured, I will make sure to satisfy you."

Despite feeling like his heart was bleeding, Valentin Howard managed to put on a smile as he responded to Wyatt Barnes. After bidding farewell to Wyatt Barnes and Milan Reid, he took Leslie Howard away.

As Leslie Howard departed, he displayed a look of relieved excitement, obediently following behind Valentin Howard, without speaking a single word.

This entire fiasco, after all, was of his own making, leaving him feeling deeply guilty.

"Father, if you want to scold me, go ahead."

After leaving the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters, Leslie Howard, seeing Valentin Howard's silence, grew uneasy and took the initiative to speak.

"I want to know the truth."

Valentin Howard finally spoke, but his tone was unnervingly calm.

Leslie Howard dared not continue lying and proceeded to explain everything about the incident in detail.

When he brought up the moment Koen Howard was killed, he noticed his father's body slightly tremble. He quickly added, "It's my fault that Grandfather Mountain died—it's all my fault! It's all my fault!"

"You understand it's your fault, which means there's still hope for you... This time, because of you, the Second Elder was killed. It's not just you—his death brings shame upon me as well."

Valentin Howard spoke in a detached tone.

"Yes, I am ashamed of Grandfather Mountain."

Leslie Howard nodded quickly, not daring to argue.

"When we return, I plan to send you to the Demonic Ridge of the Shadows."

Valentin Howard's eyes flashed with resolution as he made his decision without reservation.

"The Demonic Ridge of the Shadows?"

Leslie Howard, who had been compliant moments earlier, instantly turned pale upon hearing those words. He screamed in protest, "No! Father, I won't go to the Demonic Ridge of the Shadows! Father, you can't do this! I am your only son!"

Valentin Howard's face turned icy cold.

Only son?

Perhaps before.

Recently, his mistress had birthed him a son.

This matter was known only to him and his confidants within the Howard Family.

Out of concerns that Leslie Howard might harm his younger son or that the family would marginalize the child because of Leslie's position, Valentin Howard hadn't publicly acknowledged the child.

When the boy was born, Valentin Howard had been delighted, but he never intended to bring him into the Howard Family.

The Howard Family had always been meant for Leslie Howard to inherit.

However, Leslie Howard's recent behavior had deeply disappointed him, prompting this decision to send him to the Demonic Ridge of the Shadows.

If Leslie Howard perished there, it would simply be bad luck.

At that time, Valentin Howard would bring his younger son into the Howard Family to groom him as heir.

"Father, I'll die there! In the history of the Howard Family, none who've ventured into the Demonic Ridge of the Shadows have ever returned alive."

Leslie Howard shouted desperately, unwilling to face the prospect of entering the Demonic Ridge of the Shadows.

"You're wrong. Once, a member of the Howard Family did survive and return from the Demonic Ridge of the Shadows."

Valentin Howard replied indifferently.

"But that was tens of thousands of years ago, and they were a one-off case. Over the past tens of thousands of years, the Howard Family has sent nearly ten thousand members into the ridge, yet not one returned alive."

Leslie Howard's face grew visibly pale, his voice trembling. Suddenly, he shot a wary glance at Valentin Howard and attempted to escape.

But escape was impossible under Valentin Howard's supervision.

Effortlessly stopping Leslie Howard, Valentin Howard declared, "This decision is final... Don't be so pessimistic. The Howard Family's ancestor who survived the ridge was, like yourself, a direct descendant."

"So, your chances are significant. After all, the area within the ridge reportedly has ties to the Howard Family's founder. Perhaps he will favor direct descendants like you."

Valentin Howard explained.

"Moreover, if you return alive, given time, not just Wyatt Barnes—even the Moon Radiance Sect and the entire Nine Sect Alliance might be beneath you. Our family ancestor, upon his return, managed to defeat Saint Realm experts from Sixth-rank factions in his prime!"

"If not for provoking a major figure within a Fifth-rank faction, he wouldn't have met his tragic end... and our Howard Family wouldn't have fallen from grace."

Initially, Valentin Howard spoke with excitement and pride, but as he continued, his tone turned wistful, finishing with a sigh.

"Leslie, I genuinely believe you have the potential to become the second member of the Howard Family to emerge from the ridge."

Valentin Howard addressed Leslie Howard.

"Father, don't think I don't know—nearly all members of the Howard Family who entered the ridge were direct descendants. What became of them? Within three months, their soul beads shattered one after another."

Leslie Howard, stricken with fear, protested, his body writhing in Valentin Howard's grip as he struggled to break free.

Finally, Valentin Howard struck him unconscious.

"Leslie, don't blame me. If there's anyone to blame, it's the magnitude of the trouble you caused... Your statements at the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters aren't believable—not by me, nor by the family elders. This matter requires closure."

Muttering softly, Valentin Howard sighed deeply.

Although he could have released Leslie Howard outright, he knew without a doubt that the family elders would unite to oust him immediately.

Howard Family rules dictated that a family head who committed grave errors would lose the privilege of their lineage's priority inheritance of the family head position.

Within the Howard Family, several influential elders shared his lineage but were from different branches. They had always waited for an opportunity to strip him of his position and transfer it to their branch.

To protect his branch's rights, Valentin Howard resolved to make this difficult choice.

It was a choice that satisfied the elders and preserved a sliver of hope for his son Leslie.

The hope was indeed slim, and even he doubted Leslie could survive.

But at least it was better than meeting death at the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters.

"The Demonic Ridge of the Shadows..."

Reflecting on his family's infamous "land of peril," Valentin Howard couldn't help but tremble involuntarily.

The Demonic Ridge of the Shadows was said to have ties to the Howard Family's founder.

Among the Howard Family members for generations, a legend had circulated: anyone who managed to walk out of the ridge alive would undoubtedly become a top-tier powerhouse.

Initially, as no one successfully emerged from the ridge, people began to dismiss the legend.

Then, tens of thousands of years ago, a direct Howard Family descendant walked out of the ridge alive, showcasing immense power, and proving the legend was not baseless.

Chapter 1503: The Challenger

Wyatt Barnes came to Thames River City with only two purposes.

The first was to purchase an inscription pen.

The second was to search for materials needed to repair the Seven Treasures Exquisite Pagoda.

He had already bought the inscription pen.

Next, his focus was on finding the materials needed to repair the Seven Treasures Exquisite Pagoda.

When Wyatt first arrived in Thames River City, he was alone. But now, at the Nine Alliance Region headquarters, where the Moon Radiance Sect's base is located, he had gained the assistance of Milan Reid.

With Milan Reid's help, he collected quite a few materials necessary for repairing the Seven Treasures Exquisite Pagoda.

Of course, not many of those materials were high-grade.

However, the Howard Family was an unexpected source of delight.

On Elder Fire's suggestion, Wyatt found more and higher-quality materials from the Howard Family than he'd managed to gather over the past few days in Thames River City.

"Family Head Howard, thank you so much."



Before leaving the Howard Family, Wyatt smiled and expressed his gratitude to Valentin Howard.

Although Valentin Howard was bleeding inwardly and hated Wyatt to the core, he refrained from showing it and dared not let it show. He could only smile and reply, "It's my honor that Young Master Barnes doesn't find them lacking."

"Not lacking, definitely not lacking."

Wyatt shook his head. "If there's a chance next time, I will surely visit the Howard Family again and pay you a visit, Family Head Howard."

Wyatt's comment made Valentin Howard shudder internally.

Next time?

This time alone had already earned him strong backlash from the Howard Family elders. If Wyatt came again, those old fellows would surely flay him alive.

Still, recalling that he had already sent away his trouble-making son, Valentin Howard let out a sigh of relief.

"Family Head Howard, farewell."

Noticing Valentin Howard's insincere smile, Wyatt felt amused and, with a faint goodbye, left the Howard Family accompanied by Milan Reid.

Valentin Howard personally escorted the two to the main gate.

Joining him were the Howard Family's steward, Amias Howard, and the second Miss of the Howard Family, Eliel Howard.

"He's actually Wyatt Barnes... How could he possibly be Wyatt Barnes!"

Even several days later, Eliel Howard was still incredulous that the person who had saved her in the Nine Curves Mountain Range was the very Wyatt Barnes who was being celebrated far and wide within the Nine Alliance Region as a prominent disciple of the Moon Radiance Sect.

However, recalling that her brother had been exiled to the Demonic Ridge of the Shadows because of Wyatt Barnes, Eliel Howard's expression turned cold, her gaze filled with icy hatred.

"Wyatt Barnes, it's all because of you! If it weren't for you, my brother wouldn't have been sent to the Demonic Ridge of the Shadows!"

The Demonic Ridge of the Shadows was a near-certain death sentence.

Eliel Howard didn't believe Leslie Howard could survive and walk out alive from there.

Eliel Howard desperately wanted revenge for her brother.

Yet, thinking about Wyatt Barnes' talent, strength, and backing, she could only feel powerless, unable to muster any concrete thoughts of vengeance, and buried her hatred deep in her heart.

"Junior Brother Barnes, you've come all the way to Thames River City; why not stay a little bit longer?"

On the way back to the Nine Alliance Region headquarters after leaving the Howard Family, Milan Reid tried to persuade Wyatt to stay after hearing him mention he'd return to the Moon Radiance Sect in a few days. "These past few days, I haven't had the chance to be a good host as your Senior Brother."

"If Senior Brother Baillie were to find out I've been neglecting you, he wouldn't be pleased."

Milan Reid remarked to Wyatt.

"Senior Brother Milan, it's not like I'm leaving immediately... Besides, I have some matters to attend to when I return to the sect in a few days, so I can't stay in Thames River City for too long."

Wyatt smiled and said, "Let's find a time to properly gather when you finish your duties and return to the sect."

"Since you insist, Junior Brother, I won't push further. However, you must let me arrange your schedule for the next few days so I can fulfill my role as host."

Milan replied.

"I'll leave it to you, Senior Brother Milan."

Wyatt readily agreed. After all, Milan Reid's assistance in recent days had been instrumental in helping him find so many materials.

Upon returning to the Moon Radiance Sect base at the Nine Alliance Region headquarters, Wyatt had barely sat down before Milan Reid called out to him.

"Senior Brother Milan, what's the rush? Do you have something urgent?"

They'd just parted ways moments ago, and surprisingly, Milan Reid immediately sought him out again.

"Junior Brother Barnes, I'm sorry to disturb your rest—however, according to the Earth List rules in the Nine Alliance Region, I couldn't avoid reaching out to you."

Milan replied with a wry smile.

"The Earth List? Is it someone challenging me?"

Wyatt raised an eyebrow in question.

It was the only possible explanation he could think of.

"That's right."

Milan nodded. "I also heard that the challenger arrived earlier today. But when they learned we'd gone to the Howard Family, they waited until you returned. Right now, the challenger is already waiting outside our Moon Radiance Sect base."

"Additionally, disciples from the other eight sects are also eagerly watching, hoping to see the famed rising star of the Nine Alliance Region in person."

Milan explained.

"If that's the case, I'll go meet him!"

Wyatt responded decisively and soon went with Milan to the Moon Radiance Sect base's entrance.

Outside the Moon Radiance Sect base, Wyatt was startled to see a dense crowd of people.

Surrounding the base were throngs of people, forming a circle around an open area.

Standing in this open area was an unassuming middle-aged man clad in plain clothes, his face scruffy and disheveled.

Yet, the man's eyes were sharp and gleaming, exuding an aura of assertiveness.

Wyatt instantly deduced that this must be the challenger.

Still, Wyatt didn't think much of the man.

Being in the mid-stage of the Saint Realm now, he'd have nothing to fear from any challenge by Transcending Mortal Realm martial artists or Taoist cultivators—even if he hadn't broken through yet.

"It's Moon Radiance Sect's Elder Milan!"

As Wyatt and Milan walked out together, many recognized Milan Reid.

"The one walking alongside Elder Milan must be Wyatt Barnes, right?"

"No doubt about it! That's him! A few days ago, I was on duty and saw him come to the Nine Alliance Region headquarters myself."

"I thought he might try avoiding the Earth List challenger, but surprisingly, he's accepted the challenge directly... Looks like he's quite confident in his strength."

...

Disciples from the other eight sects discussed among themselves, their gazes fixed on Wyatt Barnes.

These individuals were all Inner Sect disciples, each having surpassed the Saint Realm.

Ordinary individuals facing a crowd filled with Saint Realm cultivators might feel nervous or uneasy.

However, Wyatt maintained an unshaken composure amidst their scrutiny, his demeanor like an unwavering still pond or aged monk, wholly indifferent.

"Hmph! Just some guy ranked seventy-first on the Earth List... Our Junior Brother Wyatt has defeated someone ranked sixty-sixth. Why would he be afraid of someone ranked even lower?"

Reacting to the surrounding chatter, Dante Mullins scoffed disdainfully.

"Exactly! Our Junior Brother Wyatt's strength has been proven; he's no flash in the pan!"

Several Moon Radiance Sect Inner Sect disciples echoed their agreement.

"Pfft!"

Overhearing the Moon Radiance Sect disciples, many from the other eight sects couldn't help but scoff.

"That so-called proving? The one he defeated, Center Montes, ranked sixty-sixth, was also one of your Moon Radiance Sect disciples."

"True! For all we know, Center Montes might've been pressured by the Moon Radiance Sect higher-ups into deliberately losing to Wyatt."

...

Though the eight sect disciples didn't explicitly name anyone, the Moon Radiance Sect disciples knew all too well who they were insinuating.

Clearly, they referred to Elder Trevor Baillie, who had acknowledged Wyatt as his Junior Brother.

"That's nonsense!"

Dante Mullins flushed red, snapping angrily.



Other Moon Radiance Sect disciples joined in the shouting.

Still, a portion of the Moon Radiance Sect disciples exchanged hesitant glances with Wyatt amidst the commotion, betraying traces of doubt.

The surrounding murmurs and skeptic gazes didn't faze Wyatt.

He understood that the doubts surrounding him would dissipate soon enough and intended to silence the eight sect disciples shortly.

"So, you're Wyatt Barnes, the one who defeated Center Montes, took his place, and claimed the sixty-sixth rank on the Earth List?"

The scruffy middle-aged man met Wyatt's gaze, his tone carrying a hint of interrogation.

Wyatt calmly glanced at him, responding flatly, "And if I am?"

"If so, then today I'll defeat you and take your place!"

The man's eyes gleamed with confidence as he declared arrogantly, "Remember this: the one who defeats you is named..."

"Idiot!"

Wyatt lazily interrupted, a single word quelling the man's introduction with biting sarcasm.

Challenging someone was one thing, but spouting pretentious nonsense beforehand was an exhausting display Wyatt couldn't be bothered with.

"Hahaha..."

Wyatt's interruption drew uproarious laughter from the onlookers.

The timing of Wyatt's remark hilariously aligned with the man's cutoff speech, provoking amusement all around.

"This Wyatt Barnes really is bold—he's angrier now than ever."

Disciples from the eight sects shook their heads, perceiving Wyatt's audacious behavior as reckless.

"He's enjoying this now, but the aftermath will be unpleasant for him."

More people eagerly anticipated what was to come.

The scorned middle-aged man opened his mouth, appearing intent to retort.

Wyatt spoke first, his expression indifferent, "If you still want to introduce yourself, spare me—I have no interest in learning the name of a loser."

Chapter 1504: Wyatt Barnes, Entering the Saint Realm?

I have no interest in knowing the name of a loser!

Wyatt Barnes spoke these words before the middle-aged man could, causing the man's face to flush with anger, and the onlookers to gasp in amazement.

Arrogant!

So arrogant!

This thought emerged in the minds of many onlookers, including several Inner Sect disciples of the Moon Radiance Sect, who felt Wyatt's words were incredibly audacious.

After all, the winner had yet to be decided.

"Good, very good, very good..."

The middle-aged man took a deep breath, temporarily suppressing his rising fury, and stared at Wyatt Barnes, saying, "I will make everyone here witness how your words will come back to slap you in the face!"

"If you have that ability, I welcome you to slap my face."

Wyatt Barnes smiled faintly, appearing relaxed and unperturbed.

This scene caused the onlookers to look at each other in dismay.

Could it be that Wyatt Barnes really had the confidence to defeat this middle-aged man?

"Courting death!"

Wyatt's words were like a fuse, completely igniting the middle-aged man's anger. In a fit of fury, he roared and charged at Wyatt Barnes like a madman.

His speed was so fast, it was as if he had turned into a gust of wind.

"No wonder he's a renowned expert on the Earth List, this speed surpasses most early-stage Saint Realm martial artists and Taoist cultivators."

The spectators, who were all Inner Sect disciples from the nine major sects, could see that the middle-aged man's current speed was extraordinary.

At the same time, they turned their eyes towards Wyatt Barnes.

What happened next left them completely dumbfounded.

"Is this the extent of your speed?"

Wyatt's voice spread out casually.

At the same time, he had effortlessly dodged the middle-aged man's attacks several times and appeared at his side, speaking leisurely.

Judging from his tone, it was clear that the speed he exhibited was not his full potential.

After all, if one were using their full strength, it would be impossible to speak so naturally, as if in casual conversation.

Standing nearby and watching the battle, Milan Reid was also stunned by Wyatt Barnes' display of speed.

"This speed... It's probably comparable to a mid-stage Saint Realm martial artist, isn't it?"

Milan Reid took a deep breath and murmured, "With the speed Junior Brother Barnes is showing now, it's impossible he's just a Transcending Mortal Realm martial artist! It seems he's already broken through to the Saint Realm! What an incredible rate of growth... No wonder Senior Brother Baillie acknowledges him as a 'junior brother'."

Milan Reid believed that Trevor Baillie recognized Wyatt Barnes as a junior brother because of Wyatt's martial talent.

He had not considered that Trevor Baillie acknowledged Wyatt not because of his martial talent, but because Wyatt could inherit the 'occult arts' left behind by Trevor's unseen master.

Milan Reid's thoughts matched those of most onlookers.

"The speed Wyatt Barnes is showcasing completely overwhelms the middle-aged man... Could it be Wyatt Barnes has already broken through to the Saint Realm?"

"It's possible!"

"So the previous rumors that Wyatt Barnes entered the Earth List with a Small Perfection Transcending Mortal Realm cultivation are false?"

"Definitely false!"

As the eight major sects' disciples speculated incessantly, many others unabashedly used spiritual secret arts to probe Wyatt Barnes' cultivation level.

However, they all came back empty-handed.

And it was precisely because they came back empty-handed that they conclusively confirmed... Wyatt Barnes is indeed a 'Saint Realm martial artist'!

With their abilities to use spiritual secret arts, they could investigate the cultivation level of any martial artist or Taoist cultivator below the Saint Realm.

However, for those at or above the Saint Realm, their spiritual secret arts couldn't detect their cultivation level.

"Saint Realm martial artist? Junior Brother Barnes is a Saint Realm martial artist?"

Boden Mullins and Dante Mullins were stunned to hear that Wyatt Barnes was actually a Saint Realm martial artist, exchanging incredulous looks.

Other Inner Sect disciples of the Moon Radiance Sect were also dumbfounded.

Regarding Wyatt Barnes, as disciples of the Moon Radiance Sect, they were naturally not strangers to him.

They could even confirm that when Wyatt first began to gain fame, he was definitely only a Small Perfection Transcending Mortal Realm martial artist.

This was because Wyatt Barnes' cultivation back then had been probed by a group of Inner Sect disciples using spiritual secret arts, and those Inner Sect disciples were sure Wyatt was a Small Perfection Transcending Mortal Realm martial artist.

One or two misjudgments might be possible.

But with so many people, it was impossible for them all to be wrong!

For this reason, their hearts were filled with shock and disbelief.

In just a few months, Wyatt Barnes had broken through from Small Perfection Transcending Mortal Realm to 'Saint Realm'?

Just as the onlookers were shaken beyond words, Wyatt Barnes lost interest in toying with the middle-aged man any longer. He raised his hand and with a swipe, a vast amount of True Energy surged forth, striking the middle-aged man and sending him flying.

The middle-aged man landed heavily, severely injured but not unconscious.

His gaze towards Wyatt Barnes was no longer arrogant, but filled with fear, "You... you've broken through to the 'Saint Realm'?"

In his view, even the number one on the Earth List couldn't have defeated him so thoroughly.

There was only one possibility that the person before him could have crushed him in this manner – the person must have broken through to the 'Saint Realm.'

A person who could make it on the Earth List while in the Transcending Mortal Realm, once they broke through to the early stages of the Saint Realm, could rival even mid-stage Saint Realm martial artists and Taoist cultivators.

Those in the forefront of the Earth List, upon breaking through to the early stages of the Saint Realm, could even defeat ordinary mid-stage Saint Realm opponents.

"You're not entirely foolish."

Wyatt Barnes glanced at the middle-aged man indifferently, then turned and left without looking back, leaving only a graceful silhouette behind for the middle-aged man and the others present.

Saint Realm!

Wyatt Barnes of the Moon Radiance Sect is a Saint Realm martial artist!

For a moment, many present snapped out of their shock, showing expressions of astonishment and disbelief.

At the same time, the news spread like a hurricane, covering the whole of Thames River City in just one night.

In Thames River City, as long as people were not in seclusion or out of town, they heard this news.

The Howard Family was no exception.

"He actually broke through to the Saint Realm?"

Nellie Howard was greatly shocked; she remembered that when Wyatt Barnes saved her, his True Energy was not of the Saint Realm caliber.

Because of this, she was sure that before this, Wyatt Barnes was not a Saint Realm martial artist.

And now...

Eliel Howard, who already lacked any thoughts of revenge against Wyatt, felt even more powerless.

"Monster! Monster! Our Howard Family must never become enemies with him!"

After learning that Wyatt Barnes had broken through to the Saint Realm, Valentin Howard was also shocked, secretly resolving never to become enemies with Wyatt Barnes.

No matter how rampant the news that Wyatt Barnes was now a Saint Realm martial artist spread outside, Wyatt remained unaffected, comfortably staying at the Moon Radiance Sect's base in the Nine Sects Alliance headquarters.

In his leisure time, he would chat with Milan Reid, discussing martial Dao and Saint Markings.

Milan Reid, who had originally planned to show Wyatt around in the next few days, dismissed the idea after witnessing Wyatt's 'proficiency' in Saint Markings.

He discovered that whenever Wyatt discussed Saint Markings, his insights gave Milan significant inspiration.

Ultimately, he realized that the reason Trevor Baillie acknowledged Wyatt Barnes as a 'junior brother' was not just because of Wyatt's martial talent, but also due to his noteworthy talent in Saint Markings.



"Junior Brother Barnes, this doesn't seem like orthodox Saint Marking techniques, does it?"

After discussing a question and hearing Wyatt's solution, Milan Reid couldn't help but frown and say.

"Senior Brother Milan, I heard from Senior Brother Baillie that you have also been exposed to 'occult arts'... Why? Didn't you notice traces of the occult arts in what I just said?"

Wyatt Barnes said with a smile.

"Occ... Occult arts?!"

However, upon hearing Wyatt's words, Milan Reid was astonished, and stared at Wyatt Barnes as if he had seen a ghost, "Junior... Junior Brother Barnes, you... you mean you've mastered the 'occult arts'?"

"Mastered is too strong a word; I've only just begun to understand it."

Wyatt Barnes replied humbly.

Even though his words were humble, they left Milan Reid speechless for a long while.

After a while, Milan Reid sighed, "It seems Senior Brother Baillie has found the person he's been waiting for all this time... To think I previously believed that Senior Brother Baillie recognized you as his junior brother because of your martial talent."

"Now I see, I was wrong from the very beginning."

Now, Milan Reid was thoroughly convinced.

Trevor Baillie recognized Wyatt Barnes as his 'junior brother' not because of Wyatt's martial talent, but because Wyatt could inherit the 'occult arts.'

The occult arts had been shared with him by Trevor Baillie, but like Trevor, he couldn't practice them due to limitations of spiritual power.

Upon hearing Milan Reid's words, Wyatt Barnes only smiled faintly and didn't say much.

"Senior Brother Milan, will the materials I requested arrive in the next couple of days?"

Wyatt turned to Trevor Baillie, changing the topic.

His reason for staying a few more days in Thames River City was largely because he was waiting for a batch of materials to arrive.

These were materials Trevor Baillie had someone collect for him.

And those materials were also what Wyatt needed to repair the fourth layer of the Jewel Tower.

"Within two days at most, they'll definitely arrive."

Milan Reid nodded, knowing he mustn't neglect Wyatt Barnes' matters.

Two days later, the materials arrived.

"According to Elder Fire, with the materials I gathered in Thames River City, I should be able to repair about one-tenth of the fourth layer of the Jewel Tower... Such a large amount of materials, yet it's only one-tenth. It seems that repairing the fourth layer of the Jewel Tower is much more challenging than the third."

Wyatt Barnes sighed inwardly, but he knew that no matter how difficult the process was, he had to keep gathering those materials.

Chapter 1505: Shadow Mountain Black Market

Now that he had obtained the materials, Wyatt Barnes had no intention of remaining in Thames River City.

"Senior Brother Milan, regarding the materials I need, I must trouble you to attend to them."

As he said goodbye to Milan Reid, Wyatt added.

"Rest assured, Junior Brother Barnes. I will continue sending people to search for the materials you need... Once they are found, I will have someone bring them back to the Sect and deliver them into your hands."

Milan Reid nodded in agreement.

"Thank you, Senior Brother Milan."

After expressing his gratitude once again, Wyatt took his leave.

It was late at night when Wyatt departed. The darkness was so thick that one couldn't see their hand before their face. Seizing the cover of night, Wyatt stealthily left the Moon Radiance Sect's stronghold and the headquarters of the Nine Sects Alliance.

The reason he chose this particular time to leave was to avoid unnecessary trouble.

Wyatt knew full well that even though he was now a martial artist at the mid-stage of Entering the Saint Realm, he would still stand no chance if confronted by anyone at the peak of Entering the Saint Realm.

However, unbeknownst to Wyatt, as he left, a shadowy figure quietly followed behind him.

Only when he watched Wyatt safely leave Thames River City did the person stop in their tracks.

Under the moonlight, he raised his head and watched Wyatt's figure vanish into the void, disappearing without a trace.

The moonlight illuminated the man's face—it was none other than Milan Reid, who had parted ways with Wyatt not long ago.

It turned out that after Wyatt left, Milan couldn't set his mind at ease and decided to secretly escort Wyatt out of the city.

Once he saw Wyatt leave Thames River City and disappear from sight, Milan did not follow further.

Wyatt unleashed his speed, flying at full tilt toward the Moon Radiance Sect's base.

"Holden Yellow!"

On his way back to the Moon Radiance Sect, Wyatt couldn't help but recall the outer elder who had ambushed him when he left the Sect. His mood darkened instantly.

Back then, if he hadn't possessed a second 'Three-Star Divine Travel Talisman,' he would have died at Holden Yellow's hands.

"I hope you're bold enough to stay in the Moon Radiance Sect and give me the chance to exact my revenge!"

Wyatt murmured to himself, words obviously directed at Holden Yellow.

Unfortunately, Wyatt was destined to be disappointed.

After failing in his attempt to assassinate Wyatt, Holden Yellow had realized that returning to the Moon Radiance Sect would spell his doom, and so he never returned. Instead, he went into hiding.

Of course, Holden Yellow wasn't hiding because he feared Wyatt; he was afraid of Trevor Baillie, who stood behind Wyatt.

Meanwhile, in a secluded manor in Thames River City, people came and went under the cover of night.

These figures darted in and out of the manor, teeming with activity.

During the day, the manor appeared lifeless, virtually devoid of anyone. Only at night did it come alive with bustling movement.

It was here that the Shadow Mountain Black Market had established a stronghold for their branch within the Nine Sects Alliance's territory.

At present, within a spacious room of the lively manor shrouded in darkness, candlelight flickered in the breeze, casting shadows of two wavering figures.

"That Wyatt Barnes from the Moon Radiance Sect is Chidark's target! For him to have survived his journey to Thames River City and stirred up such a commotion, there's only one possibility... Chidark must have failed!"

The speaker was a wiry old man with black-and-white streaked hair. His face appeared asymmetrical, half resembling a man and the other half a woman.

He gazed at the burly middle-aged man before him and spoke.

"Could there be another explanation? Chidark shouldn't have failed."

The broad-shouldered, bear-like middle-aged man stood upright like a tower, exuding an oppressive aura of strength.

"Even if there was another reason, Chidark should have returned by now... His prolonged absence spells trouble, most likely fatal."

The old man said.

Knock! Knock!

Just then, two faint knocks sounded at the door.

"Lord Ivan Nether."

The respectful voice came from outside as both the old man and the burly man's gazes shifted toward the door.

"Come in!"

Recognizing the voice, the old man replied indifferently.

Simultaneously, he waved his hand, causing the door to open on its own.

A tall, young man dressed in black combat gear stepped inside. Upon noticing the burly man, he bowed respectfully, "Lord Richard Thai."

"What is it?"

After closing the door with another wave, the old man asked calmly.

"Lord Ivan Nether, there's a candidate Three-Star assassin outside claiming to have urgent matters to discuss directly with you."

The young man reported, "If you're unwilling to meet him, I will drive him away immediately."

"A candidate Three-Star assassin?"

The old man's murky eyes flashed with interest. After a brief pause, he said, "Bring him here."

Within Shadow Mountain Black Market, assassins were ranked by tiers.

The black-cloaked man Wyatt had once killed had been a 'Three-Star assassin' affiliated with Shadow Mountain Black Market.

Though a candidate Three-Star assassin was slightly inferior in rank, their lethal capabilities were near-equal.

In Shadow Mountain Black Market, a candidate Three-Star assassin could, with the advantage of surprise, successfully assassinate most Envoys of the Transcending Mortal Realm, whether martial artists or Taoist cultivators.

The dreadful skill of candidate Three-Star assassins was undeniable.

Soon, the returning young man brought someone along—a figure cloaked entirely in black robes, their appearance and build obscured.

A pervasive aura of mystery surrounded them.

"Greetings, Lord Ivan Nether."

The black-robed figure bowed slightly in respect toward the old man but didn't acknowledge the burly middle-aged man beside him, seemingly unfamiliar with him.

The middle-aged man didn't seem bothered, his interest instead locked on the enigmatic newcomer.

"Do you have something to discuss with me?"

The old man, formally known by the codename 'Ivan Nether,' one of Shadow Mountain Black Market's regional leaders, questioned coolly.

However, his status was limited to a regional branch within the Nine Sects Alliance territory. At the headquarters, his strength, having just reached the Saint Realm, was considered negligible—a mere errand boy.

The candidate Three-Star assassin who had sought Ivan out glanced at the young man beside him and then at the burly middle-aged man.

"You may leave."

Following Ivan's command, the young man withdrew, closing the door behind him.

"This is 'Richard Thai.'"

Ivan glanced at the candidate Three-Star assassin and introduced the burly man.

Richard Thai!

As Ivan uttered those words, the candidate Three-Star assassin's body trembled involuntarily.

When he spoke again, his voice quivered slightly, "Lord... Lord Richard Thai?"

He raised his head cautiously to glance at the burly man.

Upon noticing the gnarled scar slicing across Richard Thai's left eye, the assassin drew a deep breath and hurriedly bowed, "Greetings, Lord Richard Thai!"

As a Shadow Mountain Black Market assassin, he had mostly interacted with Ivan, a regional leader.

Though he had often heard of Richard Thai, he had never seen him.

So, even with Richard standing right before him, he didn't immediately recognize him.

But upon recalling Richard Thai's infamous reputation, veins of fear coursed through his heart.

Among Black Market assassins, stories of Richard Thai's exploits were blood-chilling. One such tale recounted how Trevor Baillie, the former Sect Leader of the Mysterious Rune Sect, had died by Richard's hand.

A mythical power within the Nine Sects Alliance territory, Trevor Baillie's strength ranked among the top three, surpassing even Ivan Nether.

Rumors of Richard Thai's origins had also reached the assassin.



It was said that he had angered a high-ranking figure within Black Market's upper divisions and was suppressed, ultimately being relegated to the Nine Sects Alliance region's branch.

This branch was one of the lowest-tier regional outposts within the Shadow Mountain Black Market.

Another popular rumor chronicled Richard's initial entry into this region.

Allegedly, upon arrival, Richard had faced hostility from high-ranking members of the regional branch.

Unflinching, he forged his position there with sheer brute force and iron fists.

Today, Richard's status within this regional branch even exceeded Ivan Nether's.

So when the assassin realized the man standing before him was Richard Thai, his terror was palpable.

"Speak freely."

Richard addressed the assassin with a slight nod, his tone indifferent.

"Yes, of course."

The assassin instantly replied, no trace of insolence in his manner, as he faced Richard Thai and Ivan Nether. "Lord Richard Thai, Lord Ivan Nether... A few nights ago, late at night, I accidentally witnessed a matter of grave concern—something that could severely harm the reputation of Shadow Mountain Black Market."

As he spoke, the assassin's expression grew heavy.

"Oh?"

Catching the gravity of the assassin's tone, Richard Thai and Ivan Nether exchanged a glance, their curiosity evidently piqued.

"That night, I had a mission to fulfill. Upon confirming the identities of the individuals involved, I left promptly... Once my mission was completed, I made my way back as quickly as possible to report this to you, Lord Ivan Nether."

The assassin explained.

"What happened exactly?"

Ivan asked.

"Someone was impersonating us, claiming to be part of Shadow Mountain Black Market!"

The assassin admitted through gritted teeth, "They identified themselves as Shadow Mountain Black Market assassins, but I could discern from their aura that they were far from genuine assassins! Moreover, all assassins in Shadow Mountain Black Market are bound by Thunder Punishment oaths—it's impossible for them to expose their own identities."

Swish! Swish!

The assassin's revelation immediately darkened Richard Thai and Ivan Nether's expressions.

Shadow Mountain Black Market, at its highest echelon, was recognized as a Third-Rate Power.

A vast organization flourished not in chaos but under strict governance and rules.

Among its many taboos, one rule stood above all: no assassin was permitted to reveal their identity during operations.

To enforce this, Shadow Mountain Black Market mandated that all assassins pledge Thunder Punishment oaths before fully joining its ranks.

## Chapter 1506: Howard Family Annihilation

Because of this, assassins from the Shadow Mountain Black Market can never reveal their identities under any circumstances.

If a Shadow Mountain Black Market assassin exposes their identity, it becomes an unforgivable taboo, and they may even face the punishment of the sacred vows—'Ninefold Thunder Tribulation,' resulting in their death by Thunder Punishment.

Pretending to belong to the Shadow Mountain Black Market is even more intolerable!

The Shadow Mountain Black Market has explicit regulations that if any force or individual dares impersonate their members, the Black Market will exert every effort to retaliate!

To uphold this 'bottom line,' the Shadow Mountain Black Market even mandates:

Anyone within the Shadow Mountain Black Market who achieves the Saint Realm must vow under Thunder Punishment to take swift action against any pretenders impersonating Black Market assassins.

Failure to comply will result in death by Thunder Punishment!

Even Richard Thai and Ivan Nether were no exception; they, too, made such vows under Thunder Punishment.

If they were unaware, that would be one thing—but once they knew, the sacred vow would take effect.

"How can you prove that what you're saying is true?"

Ivan Nether stared at the quasi-three-star assassin in front of him and asked in a low voice, "Do you dare to vow under Thunder Punishment that everything you just said is the absolute truth, and that if you lied in any way, you'd be struck dead on the spot?"

Upon hearing this, the quasi-three-star assassin didn't hesitate and immediately made the vow under Thunder Punishment.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

...

Nine thunderous explosions echoed across Thames River City, startling its vast majority of residents.

Those who heard the thunder knew that someone had made a vow under Thunder Punishment, which triggered the sacred 'Ninefold Thunder Tribulation.'

When they saw the quasi-three-star assassin so decisively make the vow under Thunder Punishment without being judged or struck, Richard Thai and Ivan Nether likewise realized that the assassin hadn't lied.

Their intent to verify the information naturally stemmed from their concern that the assassin might be trying to manipulate them into killing on his behalf.

Within the Nine Sect Alliance territory, their hands were undoubtedly the sharpest 'blade!'

"You said earlier that you've confirmed the identity of the person impersonating a Shadow Mountain Black Market assassin?"

Richard Thai asked the quasi-three-star assassin.

"Yes."

The quasi-three-star assassin nodded.

"Who are they?"

Ivan Nether asked.

"They are members of the Howard Family from Thames River City. The Howard Family is considered an eighth-tier family here, typically relying on the Nine Sect Alliance for trading. Over the years, they've amassed quite a bit of wealth."

The quasi-three-star assassin replied.

"The Howard Family?"

Upon hearing this, Richard Thai and Ivan Nether exchanged glances, the cold gleam in their eyes unmistakable.

That night, the Howard Family encountered an unprecedented catastrophe since its founding.

From Valentin Howard, the family head, to its various members—everyone was brutally annihilated except for a small handful who happened to be away.

The Howard Family's high-ranking members were killed before they could even comprehend what was happening.

Even the family's Saint Realm peak Elder Ancestors were dragged from the secret chambers in the Howard compound and mercilessly executed.

Until the moment of their deaths, these Saint Realm peak Elder Ancestors of the Howard Family couldn't fathom why Saint Realm powerhouses had come to slaughter them without uttering even half a word.

That night, blood flowed like rivers within the Howard Family.

While the Howard compound bathed in blood, the two Saint Realm powerhouses who had swiftly acted left without any concern.

As they departed, a group of black-robed figures swarmed the compound, scavenging everything of value within the Howard Family estate.

By the time the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters arrived, nearly everything of worth within the Howard Family had been looted.

All that remained were bloodied corpses and vast streams of blood that resembled flowing rivers.

The Howard Family, which had once basked in glory before the massacre, was reduced to nothing but history overnight.

The Nine Sect Alliance headquarters summoned the representatives of its Nine Sects to convene together.

"So, everyone—what are your thoughts on the matter of the Howard Family's annihilation?"

A burly man with a bushy beard asked heavily while scanning the thirty-odd representatives present.

These thirty representatives were dispatched from the Nine Sects to oversee the operations of the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters, working collectively to manage its affairs.

The thirty-odd people hailed from nine distinct sects.

Among them were Milan Reid and a few others from the Moon Radiance Sect.

"How could the Howard Family have been wiped out entirely? Was it Senior Brother Baillie's doing? No... Even if Senior Brother Baillie acted, it shouldn't be possible to extinguish the entire Howard Family overnight! The few peak Saint Realm members of the Howard Family—how could all of them have died without a single one escaping?"

Milan Reid initially suspected that Trevor Baillie had taken action to vent on behalf of Wyatt Barnes, but he quickly realized something didn't add up.

"Hmm?"

Milan Reid suddenly noticed that several people were directing their gazes at the Moon Radiance Sect representatives.

"Do we even need to guess? It must've been someone from the Moon Radiance Sect who did it... Ha, the Moon Radiance Sect truly dotes on Wyatt Barnes! Knowing that the Howard Family antagonized him, they went ahead and exterminated the Howard Family entirely!"

An unattractive middle-aged man remarked sarcastically.

"An entire Howard Family wiped out overnight, including those peak Saint Realm elders who couldn't escape... It must've been the work of a Saint Realm powerhouse!"

Another person added.

"What an audacious Moon Radiance Sect! Just for a minor dispute, they annihilate an eighth-tier family that collaborated with the Nine Sect Alliance—our shared ally no less. Moon Radiance Sect must provide an explanation for this!"

An elderly man, his face contorted with anger, nearly shouted as he stared at the Moon Radiance Sect's representatives.

"Exactly! Whatever the Howard Family's faults may have been, they were still under our collective support. If the Moon Radiance Sect intended to handle them, they should've at least informed us first! Acting on their own—what does this say about the rest of us?"

Many joined in, voicing their indignation.

"Exterminating the Howard Family will leave a mess. Who's going to take over? Supporting a new eighth-tier force will require substantial effort. What the Moon Radiance Sect did this time is indeed too outrageous!"

At this moment, Milan Reid and his companions from Moon Radiance Sect had become the target of the collective condemnation from the representatives of the other eight sects.

"Hmph! You claim it was the Moon Radiance Sect that acted—do you have any evidence?"

A burly elderly man beside Milan Reid snorted contemptuously, surveying the twenty-odd dissenters coldly. His tone carried unmistakable disdain.

This elderly man was Tate Thomsen, one of Moon Radiance Sect's Vice Sect Leaders and their chief representative at the Nine Sect Alliance headquarters.

"Exactly! Without evidence, you all should be careful of making baseless accusations."

Milan Reid sneered.

The remaining Moon Radiance Sect representatives echoed similar sentiments.

They, too, internally wondered whether Elder Baillie might have persuaded the sect leadership, causing Saint Realm powerhouses to intervene against the Howard Family—but they knew better than to reveal their doubts.

"Do we really need evidence?"

A robust middle-aged man stepped forward, sneering. "Who else but your Moon Radiance Sect would have motive to annihilate the Howard Family entirely?"

"Exactly! Clearing out the Howard Family overnight required the power of Saint Realm experts... So tell us, within the Nine Sect Alliance territory, besides our Nine Sects, who else has Saint Realm experts?"

Someone else questioned.

"Within the Nine Sect Alliance territory, who else besides our Nine Sects has Saint Realm experts?"

At this query, Tate Thomsen smirked coldly. "You all seem to have conveniently forgotten about the Shadow Mountain Black Market, haven't you?"

Shadow Mountain Black Market!



When Tate Thomsen brought up the Shadow Mountain Black Market, the atmosphere grew tense and uneasy.

The Shadow Mountain Black Market had long been a metaphorical 'thorn' in the throats of the Nine Sects and was the primary driving force behind the formation of the Nine Sect Alliance.

If not for the Shadow Mountain Black Market, the Nine Sect Alliance wouldn't even exist.

The tremendous pressure exerted by the Black Market had forged their coalition.

"Hmph! Don't try to scare us with the Shadow Mountain Black Market... Over the years, their operations have stayed covert—since when have they done anything like this?"

Soon, someone from one of the sects regained composure and retorted derisively.

His remarks were echoed by many others.

"Indeed. While the Shadow Mountain Black Market operates mysteriously, this doesn't align with their style."

"It's only been a few days since the Howard Family offended your Wyatt Barnes, and now they've been massacred. Who wouldn't believe this is linked to the Moon Radiance Sect?"

"Moon Radiance Sect—so daring in action yet so timid in admitting it?"

...

The representatives of the eight remaining sects began raining jeers upon Tate Thomsen, Milan Reid, and the Moon Radiance Sect members.

For a moment, Tate Thomsen and Milan Reid found themselves speechless.

After all, the arguments made by the other sects were somewhat reasonable.

"Perhaps it was the Howard Family's own hubris that led them to offend the Shadow Mountain Black Market?"

Finally, Milan Reid collected himself and offered a rebuttal.

Just as the representatives from the eight sects were preparing more accusations, a young man suddenly rushed in from outside.

His impolite intrusion caused those present to frown.

"Which sect's disciple dares to act so disrespectfully?"

"Certainly not someone from the Mysterious Rune Sect!"

"Not from ours either."

...

The representatives of the eight sects hastened to disassociate themselves.

Soon enough, all gazes invariably shifted to the Moon Radiance Sect representatives.

If he wasn't a disciple of the other sects, he must belong to the Moon Radiance Sect.

At this moment, the expressions on the faces of Tate Thomsen, Milan Reid, and the other Moon Radiance Sect representatives darkened visibly.

The young Moon Radiance Sect disciple who had intruded seemed blissfully unaware of the tension in the room. As he hurried deeper inside, he announced loudly, "Uncles and seniors, the reason for the Howard Family's annihilation has already spread across Thames River City."

"What?!"

The hall burst into an uproar as his words fell.

No one cared about the disciple's lack of decorum anymore.

For them, the reason behind the Howard Family's massacre was the real priority.

"What's the reason?"

Instantly, all eyes, including those of the Moon Radiance Sect representatives, focused intently on the disciple.

#### Chapter 1507: The Truth Revealed

The impulsive intruder from the Moon Radiance Sect was merely an ordinary inner sect disciple. His rash entrance earlier was triggered by the shocking news he had just heard.

Now, as he faced the collective gaze of the nine major sects' high-ranking members, he finally regained his composure. Yet, in his nervousness, he struggled to speak despite opening his mouth several times.

"Don't be nervous. Take your time."

Seeing the disciple's discomfort, Deputy Sect Master Thomsen offered him a smile of encouragement.

Encouraged by the deputy sect master's kindness, the Moon Radiance Sect disciple took a deep breath and slowly said, "The news spreading outside now is said to have been released by the Shadow Mountain Black Market... It seems the Howard Family pretended to be part of the Shadow Mountain Black Market, and they were completely massacred as a result!"

Shadow Mountain Black Market!

As soon as the disciple's words landed, the present upper echelon of the nine sects collectively drew a sharp breath.

"Hmph! From now on, some statements are better kept to oneself without solid evidence."

Recovering his composure, Deputy Sect Master Thomsen swept his gaze across the high-level representatives of the other eight sects, snorting coldly in disdain as he spoke.

Faced with Thomsen's ridicule, the other sect leaders were visibly displeased. However, they refrained from arguing further on this matter.

After all, this situation clearly wasn't in their favor.

"Deputy Sect Master Thomsen, we shouldn't dwell on this issue right now. What we need to discuss is the matter of the Shadow Mountain Black Market's actions... Their interference this time has extended far too broadly. Knowing full well that the Howard Family was propped up by our Nine-Sect Alliance, they still dared to annihilate them!"

An elderly man with white whiskers flared his nostrils in righteous indignation and spoke vehemently.

"That's not entirely fair, though... Word has already spread from the Shadow Mountain Black Market that someone from the Howard Family impersonated one of their own, which led to their outright extermination."

"Indeed! What the Howard Family did was sheer folly worthy of destruction!"

"I've heard of the Shadow Mountain Black Market's rules before. Anyone who dares impersonate them will once proven be punished to the extent of erasing their entire clan."

"The Howard Family brought this upon themselves; no one else is to blame."

...

Several high-ranking sect members from different factions, including those from the Moon Radiance Sect, agreed that this debacle was the Howard Family's own undoing and absolved the Shadow Mountain Black Market of fault.

Furthermore, the rules of the Shadow Mountain Black Market were no secret even to them.

The Howard Family could not possibly have been ignorant of them.

Yet, despite this knowledge, the Howard Family dared to impersonate members of the Shadow Mountain Black Market—it was blatant self-destruction!

"Come now, that isn't quite the right perspective... Even if the Howard Family was in the wrong, exterminating their entire clan is excessive, isn't it? At most, the individual impersonating the Shadow Mountain Black Market could've been executed; after all, 'Misfortune should not extend to the innocent family.'"

"Exactly! They've clearly gone overboard this time. It feels more like a deliberate show of force aimed at us."

"I share this sentiment. I believe we should send representatives to negotiate with them."

...

There were also high-ranking sect members who expressed dissatisfaction with the Shadow Mountain Black Market, including those from the Mysterious Rune Sect.

The dissenting sects were those closer in alliance with the Mysterious Rune Sect.

In the Nine-Sect Alliance region, it was no secret that the Mysterious Rune Sect and the Shadow Mountain Black Market were mortal adversaries.

This animosity stemmed from an incident where the previous sect leader of the Mysterious Rune Sect was slain by an eminent figure from the Shadow Mountain Black Market.

Furthermore, the pressures exerted by that figure forced the Mysterious Rune Sect's current leader, a three-star Taoist Talisman Master, to swear a Thunder Punishment Oath.

That oath stipulated the conditions under which any three-star attack taoist talisman created by him could only be circulated within the Mysterious Rune Sect.

Any Mysterious Rune Sect member acquiring such talismans had to swear their own Thunder Punishment Oath, vowing that the talismans they obtained would not be transferred outside the sect.

As a result, the Mysterious Rune Sect gained the ability to produce powerful 'three-star attack taoist talismans,' but at the cost of a lucrative market.

To the Mysterious Rune Sect, this affair was a shameful stain upon their legacy, fueling their lifelong enmity against the Shadow Mountain Black Market.

The Shadow Mountain Black Market's motive for such coercion was their desire to prevent the mass proliferation of three-star taoist talismans within the Nine-Sect Alliance region.

Such talismans could compromise their various business operations.

Imagine a second-rate assassin from the Shadow Mountain Black Market at the level of Small Perfection within the Saint Realm hunting a relatively weaker target—if the target had a three-star attack taoist talisman and used it, the assassin could easily lose his life.

Failing tasks in such ways would ultimately tarnish the Shadow Mountain Black Market's reputation.

And reputation was an asset that the Shadow Mountain Black Market valued above all else.

Therefore, they would never let three-star taoist talismans run rampant across the Nine-Sect Alliance region.

"Hmph! If you insist on negotiating with the Shadow Mountain Black Market, you can go yourselves... Don't expect the rest of us to tag along."

The Moon Radiance Sect's Deputy Sect Master Thomsen, naturally aware of the Mysterious Rune Sect's underlying schemes, scoffed coldly.

"Precisely! You want to go, then go ahead—but if you succeed, we'll hold a celebration banquet in your honor!"

"Exactly."

...

Leaders from other sects less aligned with the Mysterious Rune Sect chimed in.

These seasoned leaders weren't naïve enough to make themselves pawns for the Mysterious Rune Sect in directly provoking the Shadow Mountain Black Market.

Meanwhile, sects more closely allied with the Mysterious Rune Sect enjoyed exclusive privileges, such as significant discounts on talismans.

Privileges that the other sects did not benefit from.

Though the Nine-Sect Alliance bore the title of an "alliance," internally it was far from unified.

Unless the Shadow Mountain Black Market harbored ambitions to obliterate all nine sects, true unity among them would remain an impossibility.

And in recent years, the Shadow Mountain Black Market had shown no signs of such grand ambitions.

"You... You..."

The goateed elder, who happened to be the Mysterious Rune Sect's Deputy Sect Master, was visibly incensed by Deputy Sect Master Thomsen's refusal—and that of others. In his rage, his beard seemed to almost bristle. "Do you even consider yourselves part of the same alliance as us anymore?"

"Deputy Sect Master Ho, have you forgotten the founding principles of our Nine-Sect Alliance?"

Thomsen sneered, "This time, the Shadow Mountain Black Market could have kept the Howard Family's extermination secret, yet they openly disclosed it... They did so purely to establish their dominance and serve as a warning to others!"

"In this case, while the Howard Family was clearly at fault, getting wiped out is indeed harsh. But haven't you seen how the Shadow Mountain Black Market operates? Surely it's not your first encounter with their ways?"

At this point, Thomsen cast a meaningful glance at Deputy Sect Master Ho of the Mysterious Rune Sect, his words laden with innuendo.

"Thomsen!!"

Ho's face darkened in fury as he roared.

He caught Thomsen's insinuation—an allusion to the past humiliation of the Mysterious Rune Sect when their previous sect leader was slain by the Shadow Mountain Black Market's powerful figure.

It also referenced their coercion into swearing the Thunder Punishment Oath, constraining their dissemination of three-star attack taoist talismans.

"Deputy Sect Master Thomsen, you've gone too far... Even if you're unwilling to provoke the Shadow Mountain Black Market, there's no need to diminish our Nine-Sect Alliance's grandeur while boosting their ego!"

A short, unattractive middle-aged man snapped with indignation.

"What a loaded accusation!"

Thomsen sneered, "What exactly did I say? Did my remarks elevate the Shadow Mountain Black Market or denigrate our Nine-Sect Alliance? Or is this merely your own misinterpretation? If so, why don't you share your thoughts with everyone?"

Rendered speechless by Thomsen's riposte, the middle-aged man could only gape in anger.



Everyone present clearly understood Thomsen's veiled implication.

Even so, Thomsen avoided explicit statements, ensuring he hadn't officially offended the Mysterious Rune Sect.

Had he laid it all out, it would've amounted to a direct insult to the Mysterious Rune Sect—an act of imprudence he refrained from committing.

In any case, this matter was temporarily settled as Thomsen and the others defiantly dismissed the idea.

The Mysterious Rune Sect and its allied factions could perhaps muster enough sway over other sect leaders to band together against the Shadow Mountain Black Market.

If forced to act alone, they wouldn't dare confront even a minor regional branch of the Shadow Mountain Black Market, much less its upper echelons.

"If Junior Brother Barnes hears about the Howard Family's disastrous fall, he might actually find it amusing," Milan Reid's gaze flickered, and he contemplated internally.

Regardless of the turbulent winds stirring Thames River City, Wyatt Barnes remained oblivious for now, as he was en route to return to the Moon Radiance Sect.

With his current speed, it would still take him some time to arrive.

The distance between Thames River City and the Moon Radiance Sect was not insignificant.

When Wyatt finally reached the Moon Radiance Sect and learned of the Howard Family's massacre, he was momentarily stunned.

"Impersonating members of the Shadow Mountain Black Market?"

Upon hearing the details, Wyatt immediately recalled how Howard Family's Second Elder, Koen Howard, that night in Thames River City falsely claimed to be connected to the Shadow Mountain Black Market.

At that time, Wyatt had ascertained Koen Howard's true identity and knew with certainty he had no association with the black market.

However, Wyatt never imagined that Koen Howard's brief falsehood would ultimately lead to the Howard Family's total annihilation.

"The matter of Koen Howard impersonating someone from the Shadow Mountain Black Market—aside from the deceased Koen Howard—was only known by myself and Leslie Howard... Could it be Leslie Howard who leaked this information?"

Wyatt shook his head at the thought, finding the possibility unlikely.

"But if it wasn't Leslie Howard, then that means there was a fourth person present."

The realization sent shivers down Wyatt's spine.

Someone capable of flawlessly hiding their presence from him could only be a master of Saint Realm Great Perfection at minimum—or potentially a Saint Realm expert.

If such an individual wished harm upon Wyatt, not even his three-star attack taoist talismans would save him.

For a moment, Wyatt couldn't help but inhale deeply, suppressing the unease brewing in his chest.

Chapter 1508: He Can't Possibly Still Be Alive!

The annihilation of the Howard Family only surprised Wyatt Barnes a little, and he quickly put it out of his mind.

However, the event that followed greatly dampened his mood.

"That Holden Yellow disappeared after abandoning his post?"

The event Wyatt most wished to avoid had nonetheless come to pass.

That Outer Elder Holden Yellow from the Moon Radiance Sect, who had once attempted to kill him, chose to leave the sect after his failed attempt.

"He must have been worried that I would return to the Moon Radiance Sect and mention to Senior Brother Baillie that he tried to take my life."

Wyatt was almost certain of this.

Although Holden Yellow was only an Outer Elder, if Wyatt's senior brother Trevor Baillie wanted him dead, he could easily end his life without lifting a finger.

After Wyatt returned to the Moon Radiance Sect, the days were far from peaceful—at least not in his immediate surroundings.

This was all because, after the news of the Howard Family's extinction came out, the revelation that Wyatt had broken through to the Entering the Saint Realm spread like wildfire. The news pervaded the entire Moon Radiance Sect and left everyone there astounded.

"Oh my god! Someone please tell me this is fake news!"

Many Inner Sect disciples wailed in despair.

These disciples were the same ones who had witnessed Wyatt defeat Center Montes and had inspected his cultivation during the process.

They were all certain that when Wyatt defeated Center Montes, he was only a Martial Artist at the level of Small Perfection in the Transcending Mortal Realm.

Yet now, in such a short time, Wyatt had already broken through to the Entering the Saint Realm?

"Could it be that Elder Baillie gave him some sort of Spirit Pill or heavenly treasure?"

"I've honestly never heard of any Spirit Pill or heavenly treasure that could make someone break through from Transcending Mortal Realm's Small Perfection to Entering the Saint Realm in just a few short months!"

"Is Wyatt Barnes even human? Why do I feel like he's an incarnation of some celestial god?"

"Don't exaggerate too much... Maybe he had some sort of unexpected opportunity."

...

Regardless of speculation, the news of Wyatt's breakthrough to Entering the Saint Realm was undeniable fact.

When Wyatt demonstrated his Entering the Saint Realm abilities, not only were many Inner Sect disciples from the Moon Radiance Sect present, but members from the other eight sects also witnessed it. Thus, there was no possibility of fabrication.

For a time, the entire Moon Radiance Sect was in an uproar because of Wyatt Barnes.

If the Moon Radiance Sect had been a pond of "stagnant water" before Wyatt's arrival, now Wyatt had certainly stirred it, bringing it alive.

"Junior Brother, you... broke through to Entering the Saint Realm?"

Trevor Baillie, upon hearing the news for the first time, was completely dumbfounded.

Although the rumors stated that Wyatt's rapid improvement was due to Trevor's assistance, Trevor himself knew the truth—it was far from his doing.

He didn't have that kind of capability.

"Yes."

Wyatt nodded with a smile in response to Trevor's inquiry.

For a long moment, Trevor wore a complicated expression, bitterly smiling before saying, "I had thought your talent in Saint Markings was already astonishing, but I never imagined your Martial Dao talent to be equally monstrous. No! This isn't monstrous—it should be called 'defying the heavens'!"

To break through from Transcending Mortal Realm's Small Perfection to Entering the Saint Realm in just a few months—such progression was truly heaven-defying!

Only Wyatt knew that it hadn't been just a matter of a few months for him to achieve such dramatic progress.

Though Wyatt's talent was indeed exceptional, the true decisive factor was the Jewel Tower.

The extremely slow flow of time within the Jewel Tower had provided Wyatt with a training environment that others couldn't even dream of, allowing him to catch up to others at record speed and even surpass them.

"Junior Brother, having reached Entering the Saint Realm now, can you already carve two-star Saint Markings?"

Trevor asked.

"Yes."

Wyatt nodded once more, recounting how upon his return he had tried carving two-star Saint Markings. After failing a few times, he had eventually succeeded.

"Can you use the inscription method to carve them?"

Trevor's eyes lit up as he asked.

"After my return, I have only deduced how to use the inscription method to carve two-star Saint Markings, but I haven't actually practiced or attempted it yet."

Wyatt answered.

"May I have the honor of observing?"

Trevor asked with a smile.

"Of course."

Wyatt agreed without hesitation and began attempting to carve a two-star Saint Marking using the inscription method in Trevor's presence.

The inscription method required less than half the materials needed for traditional carving methods.

After several trials, Wyatt finally succeeded in carving a two-star Saint Marking using the inscription method.

The materials consumed were less than half of what traditional carving required, saving a significant amount of cost.

"Junior Brother Wyatt, you truly are a genius in the field of Saint Markings!"

Trevor couldn't help but exclaim as he watched Wyatt quickly succeed with the inscription method.

"I was initially thinking about how to persuade you to focus solely on the Saint Marking path... but now it seems that's unnecessary. Whether in Martial Dao or Saint Markings, your achievements are beyond ordinary people's reach."

"Ordinary people might struggle to excel in both Martial Dao and Saint Markings, but for you, that doesn't apply."

Trevor's words carried unwavering confidence in Wyatt—almost blind confidence.

"Senior Brother, I plan to register for the Inner Sect disciple assessment. When will that start?"

Wyatt asked.

"Junior Brother, with your current strength, participating in the Inner Sect disciple assessment is meaningless... I'll have someone handle the process and issue an Inner Sect disciple identity token for you."

Trevor replied.

Wyatt considered for a moment and agreed—it was indeed unnecessary.

With his current strength, even someone at the later stages of Entering the Saint Realm posed little threat to him.

Thus, he didn't reject Trevor's kind intentions.

"Junior Brother, I recall you promising me that once you entered the Inner Sect, you'd live at my place."

Trevor squinted and said teasingly.

"Of course, I remember."

Wyatt said with a smile, "If Senior Brother doesn't mind, then from now on, I'll stay here."

"Haha... Excellent! I've had a room prepared for you long ago and ensured it's cleaned regularly. You can move in directly."

Trevor laughed heartily, clearly pleased by Wyatt's agreement.

Wyatt felt a wave of warmth and gratitude in his heart upon hearing Trevor's words.

"By the way, was your trip to Thames River City smooth?"

Trevor asked.

He was completely unaware of what had happened to Wyatt on the way to Thames River City or during his stay there, as he hadn't had the chance to ask about it before.

In fact, he hadn't even known that Wyatt had left the Moon Radiance Sect.

However, Trevor didn't hold it against Wyatt, understanding that Wyatt had done so to avoid inconveniencing or worrying him.

Wyatt had long regarded Trevor as his "brother," even though there was a notable age gap between the two.

Thus, Wyatt didn't hold anything back and shared everything with Trevor.

Of course, he glossed over the dangerous parts with a casual tone.

Even then, Wyatt's recounting left Trevor shocked and alarmed.

"Holden Yellow—a mere Outer Elder dared to covet and attempt to kill you... He truly deserves death! Junior Brother, rest assured, I will mobilize my connections to locate Holden Yellow and bring him before you to deal with as you see fit!"

Trevor was enraged, truly enraged.

Initially, Trevor's respect for Wyatt arose from Wyatt's ability to inherit the inscription method, which had led to his recognition of Wyatt as a "Junior Brother."

Now, Trevor had genuinely come to see Wyatt as his younger brother.



It wasn't just about Wyatt inheriting the inscription method—Trevor truly admired Wyatt's personality and felt a strong connection with him.

When he was with Wyatt, Trevor even felt like he had found a "kindred spirit" despite the age gap.

Learning about Holden Yellow's attempt on Wyatt's life, Trevor could not suppress his fury.

"Senior Brother, stay calm. For me, Holden Yellow is no threat."

Wyatt said confidently, with a faint smile on his face.

And he truly meant it.

While Wyatt's current strength might not yet allow him to directly confront Holden Yellow, with just a little more time, he was confident he could completely surpass his adversary in every respect.

The training environment provided by the Jewel Tower's third layer far surpassed that of the second layer, giving Wyatt an unparalleled advantage in further elevating his abilities.

"As for the man in black robes, if I'm guessing correctly, he was a Shadow Mountain Black Market killer."

Soon after, Trevor's expression turned serious as he continued, "You were fortunate to encounter a benefactor; otherwise, the consequences would have been disastrous."

Wyatt had indeed mentioned the black-robed assassin.

However, Wyatt left out the part about the Demon Sealing Monument, instead attributing the rescue to a passing expert who couldn't stand by and watch. The alleged expert subdued the black-robed man with ease.

"Indeed, I was lucky to meet that benefactor... Unfortunately, when I tried to ask for their name and origin, they didn't respond and simply left."

Wyatt lamented, sounding as though it had indeed happened that way.

Of course, Trevor didn't doubt Wyatt's words and nodded as he said, "That benefactor... must either be an eminent recluse residing in our Nine Sect Alliance area, rarely emerging, or someone from a major force—one at least on par with our Moon Radiance Sect."

"From your description, the black-robed assassin likely was a 'Three-Star Killer' from the Shadow Mountain Black Market... And for that benefactor to subdue them so casually, they are definitely not a mere Saint Realm expert."

Trevor finished speaking with deep gratitude in his eyes, feeling profound appreciation for the mysterious benefactor.

In the Inner Sect region, within a spacious mansion, Evander Mullins, who had learned of Wyatt Barnes not only safely returning but also breaking through to the Entering the Saint Realm, was livid. His face was dark, and he couldn't muster a single word for a long time.

"Impossible! Impossible! There's no way he's still alive!"

Evander Mullins took a deep breath and muttered in disbelief as his face twisted in shock.

#### Chapter 1509: Demonic Possession

"Could it be that the people from Shadow Mountain's black market didn't make their move?"

Even though Evander Mullins found it hard to believe that Wyatt Barnes had returned alive, the fact remained: Wyatt had indeed come back. No matter how reluctant Mullins was to believe it, he had to accept this reality.

For a moment, he simply thought that the people from Shadow Mountain's black market hadn't taken action yet.

"No, that can't be! I agreed on a specific time with the Shadow Mountain black market. Once the time passes, it means the mission failed... And now, the time has long since passed, meaning this mission failed."

At that thought, Evander Mullins's face turned even darker.

Soon, he left his residence and departed from the Moon Radiance Sect, heading in the direction of Thames River City.

He needed to personally verify this matter.

While Mullins was leaving, many people within the Moon Radiance Sect who had interacted with Wyatt Barnes also heard the news that Wyatt had broken through to the "Saint Realm".

"Impossible... Impossible... It's absolutely impossible! It can't be true!"

Mandy Wood, who had just ended his closed-door cultivation, was struck speechless when he heard about Wyatt Barnes breaking through to "Entering the Saint Realm."

He had thought that by coming to the Moon Radiance Sect, he could erase the humiliation of the past, thoroughly trample Wyatt beneath his feet, perhaps even personally kill him!

But the heavens seemed to play a colossal joke on him.

Even though he had succumbed to his obsessions, fallen into the Devil Path, and seen an explosive advancement in his cultivation speed, he was still far behind Wyatt Barnes.

Wyatt's every step seemed to be always ahead of his own.

"No! No!! No!!!"

Unconsciously, threads of demonic energy began seeping from Mandy's body, and his eyes turned blood-red.

Suddenly, he dashed out of his secluded courtyard, attacking anyone he encountered as if he had completely lost his mind.

At this point, Mandy had already cultivated to the pinnacle of the "Transcending Mortal Realm." Among the disciples in the outer sect, few could match him.

Within moments, several outer sect disciples had been torn to shreds by his bare hands, their bodies reduced to gore!

The gruesome scene left the surrounding disciples horrified, and they scattered in all directions.

"He's killing people! He's killing people!"

"Mandy has succumbed to his inner demons and started killing!"

"Elders, stewards, help! Please help!"

...

Disciples who witnessed Mandy's rampage fled while shouting desperately for help.

For those who found themselves targeted by Mandy, they cried out continually in terror.

But unfortunately, it would still take some time for the outer sect elders and stewards to arrive. Before they could appear, Mandy Wood had already killed more than ten people.

With every life he took, the demonic energy emanating from his body surged.

In the end, he broke through!

He advanced to the "early-stage of the Saint Realm"!

"The early-stage of the Saint Realm?"

Mandy, who had been completely deranged and nearly insane, abruptly regained his clarity the moment he broke through.

At that moment, he realized the gravity of the disasters he had caused.

"Wyatt Barnes, you're at the Saint Realm, and now so am I... One day, I will step on your back and crush you!"

Having achieved his Saint Realm breakthrough, Mandy appeared to regain his confidence.

Realizing the crisis he was in, he dared not delay any further and bolted madly for the outskirts of the Moon Radiance Sect.

However, how could his speed compare to that of the outer sect elders?

In the blink of an eye, several outer sect elders appeared around him, surrounding him with sharp and menacing gazes.

Whoosh!

At the same time, as if carried by a gust of wind, another figure materialized in front of Mandy.

"Elder Easton!"

Upon seeing this person, the surrounding outer sect elders immediately saluted with respect.

The newcomer was none other than the grand elder of the outer sect, Pete Garcia.

The outer sect elders hadn't expected this incident to alarm Pete Garcia... But upon recalling the gravity of the situation, their surprise was short-lived.

If Elder Easton hadn't appeared, that might have been truly unusual.

After all, he was the steward of the outer sect in the Moon Radiance Sect. Even these outer sect elders had to listen to and obey his orders.

"You must have some nerve to raise your hand against your fellow disciples."

At this moment, Pete Garcia's face darkened. Never could he have imagined that such a heinous event would occur during his tenure as the outer sect's grand elder.

Incidents like this had rarely happened in the history of the Moon Radiance Sect.

Though Mandy didn't recognize the older man before him, the honorifics the surrounding elders addressed him with left no doubt as to his identity.

Instantly, Mandy's expression turned grim.

Taking a deep breath, his trembling hands flickered with two streaks of cold light, leaving bloody gashes across both of his palms, from which blood poured out profusely as though it were inexhaustible.

In the same moment, Mandy clasped his hands together, unleashing a brilliant, radiant blood-red glow.

"No!"

Seeing this, Pete Garcia's face changed drastically, and so did the faces of the outer sect elders around him.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

...

As Pete Garcia and the outer sect elders moved almost simultaneously, the fastest among them, Pete himself, reached the spot where Mandy had stood just moments ago—only to shatter the condensed blood mist left behind by the burst of light. They hadn't managed to touch Mandy at all.

A living, breathing Mandy Wood had vanished right before their eyes.

"Blood Escape! It's the Blood Escape technique!"

One of the outer sect elders said with a grim expression, "That Mandy Wood—he's actually a Saint Realm Demon Cultivator!"

The Blood Escape technique was a secret skill that could only be mastered by Demon Cultivators above the Saint Realm.

Once used, it granted the cultivator a movement speed that surpassed their current realm by an entire large tier, allowing them to flee instantly. It was an ultimate life-preserving method for Demon Cultivators.

However, the price of such a defiant technique was steep.

Not only could it be used only three times in a lifetime, but it also burned the cultivator's own vitality. Furthermore, they would lose all their strength for a period afterward.

Unless cornered at the brink of death, Demon Cultivators would never resort to Blood Escape.

"A Saint Realm Demon Cultivator was hidden in the outer sect, and none of you ever noticed?"

Pete Garcia swept a sharp glare over the outer sect elders and reproached them. If Mandy had simply been killed after murdering fellow disciples, that would've been one thing.

But now, that Demon Cultivator had escaped!

And he had escaped right under Pete Garcia's nose!

This was nothing short of a humiliating disgrace for Pete Garcia!

While the outer sect elders exchanged bitter smiles, Pete Garcia vanished from the Moon Radiance Sect's perimeter like the wind.

No matter what, he had to make every effort to track down and capture the fleeing Demon Cultivator!

Only then could he provide the dead outer sect disciples an explanation, an answer to the Sect!

Though the chances were slim, Pete Garcia knew that his best opportunity to catch the Demon Cultivator was now. The fugitive had just expended all his strength and couldn't have fled far, even with the aid of Blood Escape.

While Pete Garcia pursued Mandy, the remaining outer sect elders returned to the sect grounds.

Yet, regarding what had transpired with Mandy, they dared not say much.

No matter how much the other outer sect elders or stewards inquired, they merely replied that they had encountered Pete Garcia midway, who instructed them to return and console the outer sect disciples while he personally dealt with Mandy.

"Elder Reid, wasn't Mandy admitted into the sect under your watch? You're not going to escape accountability for this incident," one of the elders remarked, turning to Pierce Reid.

Pierce Reid was the one who had overseen the Moon Radiance Sect's entrance exam, where both Wyatt Barnes and Mandy had been present.

Reid could only offer a bitter smile in response to his peer's comments.

He had already braced himself for this eventuality.

"If the Sect had originally imposed rules prohibiting Demon Cultivators from entering, this wouldn't have happened."



Several outer sect elders spoke in indignation, voicing their dissatisfaction, "To be fair, this incident is the Sect's fault, not Elder Reid's. He merely acted in accordance with the rules set by the Sect."

"Exactly! Mandy's a Demon Cultivator—it's a well-known fact—but no one could've predicted he would suddenly lose his mind and slaughter so many outer sect disciples."

One after another, the elders expressed their outrage.

"Enough—we need to focus on comforting the remaining outer sect disciples right now. The events of today will surely leave a psychological scar on them. This issue could grow quite serious, and we need to contain any negative fallout," a more level-headed elder said, analyzing the situation.

"That's correct. Our priority isn't blaming the Sect's regulations right now. What we need to do is stabilize the emotions of the surviving disciples," Pierce Reid agreed.

By the time Wyatt Barnes learned of the incident, it was already three days later.

For the past three days, he had been in the meditation chamber at Trevor Baillie's residence, using intricate rune techniques to refine a "Two-Star Saint Marking."

Over time, his mastery of these intricate techniques had reached a near-perfect level.

It was only then that he stepped out of the chamber.

As soon as he emerged, he heard about the Demon Cultivator's killing spree in the outer sect.

"Mandy Wood?"

Upon learning that the Demon Cultivator was Mandy, Wyatt's expression turned subtly intriguing.

Mandy was no stranger to Wyatt.

In fact, Wyatt had encountered Mandy when he first arrived in the Martial Dao Sacred Land.

During that encounter, he had even "stolen" the spot in the Thorn Dragon Camp at the City Lord's estate in Hill Mountain City that was rightfully Mandy's.

One year later, he crossed paths with Mandy again during the Moon Radiance Sect's entrance exam.

At that time, he had sensed Mandy's deep-seated hatred and murderous intent towards him. Mandy had desperately wanted to kill him!

Yet, Wyatt had never taken Mandy seriously.

Back then—when Mandy hadn't yet fallen into the Devil Path—Wyatt hadn't feared him. Why would he fear him now, after his descent into darkness?

A Devil Cultivator like Mandy could only hope to match Wyatt if his cultivation surpassed Wyatt's by two major levels. Otherwise, he'd be powerless against the suppression of the Demon Sealing Monument's "Demon Suppression Force," which guaranteed his soul would be obliterated.

"It appears he lost control to his inner demons?" Wyatt mused to himself.

"Was he captured?" Wyatt asked Trevor Baillie.

"They claimed he was captured," Baillie replied.

"But in truth... they didn't catch him? How is that possible!" Wyatt found it hard to believe.

#### Chapter 1510: The Mission Continues

Mandy Wood, though she is a Demon Cultivator and has experienced Qi deviation, greatly increasing her strength.

She is, after all, just a Demon Cultivator at the peak of the Transcending Mortal Realm, and logically speaking, it shouldn't have been possible for her to escape despite being intercepted by a group of outer sect elders and stewards.

Moreover, Mandy killed so many outer sect disciples—such malicious acts were enough to shock the entire Moon Radiance Sect's upper ranks.

Even the outer sect Grand Elder 'Pov Easton' would intervene in this matter.

Pov Easton, who Wyatt Barnes had dealt with before, was known for being able to contend with inner sect elders in terms of strength. With him taking action, how could Mandy possibly have had any chance to escape?

"It's said that Mandy used 'Blood Escape.'"

Trevor Baillie remarked.

'Blood Escape?!'

Wyatt's pupils contracted—he naturally knew what 'Blood Escape' was.

"Blood Escape is a technique that only Demon Cultivators who have entered the Saint Realm can perform... Does that mean Mandy has already broken through to the Saint Realm?"

Wyatt's heart trembled.

A Demon Cultivator in the Saint Realm performing the Blood Escape technique moves at a speed comparable to that of Saint Realm powerhouses.

The Blood Escape technique, once activated, comes with terrifyingly severe side effects, but its speed is absurd, capable of surpassing a major cultivation tier.

So, even if Mandy was only a Saint Realm early-stage Demon Cultivator, successfully activating the Blood Escape technique would mean that anyone below the Saint Realm could forget about catching her.

"Speaking of this Mandy, it seems she joined the sect at the same time as you did, Junior Brother?"

Trevor Baillie exclaimed, "Who would have thought? Among the disciples recruited by the sect this time, besides you, there would be someone so monstrous... It's a pity she killed people within the sect, ensuring she'd never be tolerated by the sect."

"Also, having performed the Blood Escape technique, her future achievements are bound to be significantly diminished."

Trevor Baillie said.

The Blood Escape technique can be used at most three times in a lifetime by Saint Realm Demon Cultivators.

The third usage signifies the end of one's life—a complete collapse of body and soul.

Therefore, the average Demon Cultivator, if desiring to survive, would dare to perform the Blood Escape technique only twice at most.

Furthermore, each activation inflicts immense side effects on the user.

These side effects not only shorten the cultivator's lifespan but also severely hinder their future progress in cultivation.

"Pov Easton might have a hard time explaining this to the Sect Leader and the others."

Trevor Baillie shook his head, murmuring softly.

However, given Wyatt's extraordinary hearing—as someone who had opened ninety-nine Saint Veins—he easily caught Trevor Baillie's muttering.

To this, Wyatt could understand.

Pov Easton, after all, was the Grand Elder of the outer sect, responsible for overseeing everything related to the outer disciples.

As the person in charge, such an incident happening under his jurisdiction—as well as failing to apprehend the culprit—would undoubtedly warrant punishment.

"Junior Brother, regarding Mandy Wood's successful escape, keep this information to yourself and don't spread it around... Officially, the sect is claiming that Mandy has already been captured, and her execution will happen soon,"

Trevor Baillie said.

"I understand,"

Wyatt nodded.

Although Trevor didn't elaborate on the reasons, Wyatt could easily deduce them.

The Moon Radiance Sect's upper ranks were undoubtedly concerned that news of Mandy's escape would spread, plunging outer sect disciples into another wave of panic.

Only by claiming Mandy's capture could the sect quell the fear among outer disciples, restoring peace to the outer sect.

Three days later, the Moon Radiance Sect's Sect Leader ordered the execution of 'Mandy Wood.'

On that day, Wyatt also attended.

When he saw 'Mandy' tied in the center of the execution ground surrounded by a massive crowd, even Wyatt couldn't help but secretly marvel, "Such a masterful disguise technique—it's almost indistinguishable from the real thing! If I didn't already know Mandy had escaped, I might actually believe this person was her."

"Is that Mandy? The Demon Cultivator who killed twenty-three outer sect disciples?"

"Demon Cultivators are ticking time bombs... If you ask me, the sect should establish rules forbidding the recruitment of Demon Cultivators."

"Agreed! As long as such a rule is in place, incidents like this can be entirely prevented."

...

Many Moon Radiance Sect disciples discussed hotly, and even some inner sect disciples showed lingering fear when mentioning 'Demon Cultivators.'

"Hmph! You're discriminating against Demon Cultivators! So what if someone is a Demon Cultivator? I, for one, have never experienced Qi deviation. And don't forget, among the few Saint Realm experts in the sect, two of them are Demon Cultivators... Where does this leave Demon Cultivators if you disdain them this much?"

One inner sect disciple who was also a Demon Cultivator expressed dissatisfaction.

For a moment, the Moon Radiance Sect disciples fell into silence.

Indeed, among the sect's Saint Realm experts, two of them were Demon Cultivators.

It was evident that making a rule to ban Demon Cultivators from the sect was unlikely to happen.

What followed was swift. One of the Moon Radiance Sect's Law Enforcement Elders personally executed 'Mandy Wood.'

After killing 'Mandy,' he scanned the surroundings and said in a commanding voice, "The sect has never excluded Demon Cultivators because of their rapid cultivation speed and unparalleled combat capabilities... However, Demon Cultivators are always Demon Cultivators, and to the sect, they are akin to a 'double-edged sword.'"

"This sword has served the sect well until recently, when an anomaly like 'Mandy Wood' appeared!"

The Law Enforcement Elder's speech left Wyatt feeling sleepy; the words seemed too formulaic.

He didn't need to pay attention to the subsequent remarks to predict their content.

It was bound to involve admonishing other Demon Cultivators.

"Here, I warn the Demon Cultivator disciples of the sect: Avoid triggering Qi deviation during cultivation. Even if there's a risk, make sure you're far away from the sect when taking such risks... Otherwise, if something happens within the sect, Mandy Wood will become your example!"

Just as Wyatt anticipated, the Law Enforcement Elder's words contained advice aimed at the Demon Cultivators present.

The message was clear.

Demon Cultivators, if lacking certainty during cultivation, should venture far from the sect to practice.

That way, even if Qi deviation occurs, it wouldn't affect the sect.

If anything like that were to take place within the sect, leading to killing, the consequence would only be death!

Indeed, the Elder's words were impactful, making the faces of the Demon Cultivator disciples visibly tense.

With Mandy Wood's example laid bare, they dared not grow careless.

Mandy's story thus came to an end, and the Moon Radiance Sect gradually resumed its tranquility.

Using Trevor Baillie's influence within the sect, Wyatt quickly obtained an inner sect disciple token.

Wyatt officially entered the Moon Radiance Sect's inner sect, taking residence at Trevor Baillie's estate.

Due to Trevor Baillie's backing, although Wyatt was a new arrival in the inner sect, few dared to provoke him.

In the following days, Wyatt ventured into the third level of the Seven-Treasure Jewel Tower, greedily absorbing the Spiritual Energy from the atmosphere and the Holy Stones, rapidly advancing his cultivation.

Wyatt eagerly sought to break into the 'Saint Realm mid-phase'!

Once achieving the mid-phase of the Saint Realm, he could wield the 'True Qi Condensation Weapon' technique.

At that point, his combat power would undergo a qualitative transformation.

"Once I master True Qi Condensation Weapon, I'll have the confidence to defeat even the strongest Saint Realm Small Perfection experts! However, against a peak Saint Realm practitioner, things would be uncertain, given their mastery of the 'True Qi Domain' technique."

Wyatt vividly recalled the awe-inspiring power of True Qi Domain.

The assassin suspected of coming from the Shadow Mountain Black Market had conjured the 'Blood Demon Field,' effortlessly suppressing Wyatt despite his use of the Three-Star Divine Travel Talisman.

Within the Blood Demon Field, each blood demon possessed terrifying strength.

"I wonder what kind of domain I'll acquire upon breaking into the Saint Realm peak?"



This thought filled Wyatt with anticipation.

While True Qi Condensation Weapon and True Qi Condensation Beast techniques allowed for personal choice, the True Qi Domain wasn't something cultivators could select; it was considered a divine 'gift.' Of course, what was gifted always suited the user perfectly.

Just like the Shadow Mountain assassin who was a Demon Cultivator, his domain was the 'Blood Demon Field,' a sphere well-tailored to his abilities.

While Wyatt was focused on cultivating, Moon Radiance Sect inner elder 'Evander Mullins' returned to Thames River City, arriving at the Shadow Mountain Black Market's branch office in the Nine-Sect Alliance region.

His purpose was simple—to learn if the task he commissioned had failed.

And if it did fail, what would come next?

"It really failed?"

Although prepared for the worst, learning the task had indeed failed left Evander Mullins grim-faced beneath his ghoulish mask.

"Honored guest, the failure of your task resulted from us underestimating your target... As per our Shadow Mountain Black Market regulations, we will refund twice the commission amount to you."

The Shadow Mountain representatives apologized.

In other words, if Evander Mullins had paid sixteen six-star Holy Stones for Wyatt Barnes' death, he would now receive double for free.

Yet, Evander wasn't thrilled about this.

"What if I want to continue this task?"

He inquired.

Evander still presumed the task failed due to the weakness of the Black Market's chosen assassin.

"If you wish to proceed with the task, there's no need for additional commissions; we will only request that you grant our Shadow Mountain Black Market more time."

The representative explained.

"Fine! I'll continue the task... Make sure to send stronger people this time, don't disappoint me again."

Evander's tone conveyed clear displeasure.

"Rest assured, honored guest, our Shadow Mountain Black Market will not fail you a second time."

The representative assured.

After Evander left, two high-ranking officers of the Shadow Mountain Black Market convened once more in a private room at the Thames River City branch regarding Evander's task.

The two figures were 'Ivan Nether' and 'Richard Thai.'

Ivan Nether was one of the leaders of the Thames River City branch office, managing day-to-day affairs.

Richard Thai was the 'ace' of the Shadow Mountain Black Market in the Nine-Sect Alliance region, rotating between various branch offices. By coincidence, he was now stationed at Thames River City.

Richard Thai was also the same Shadow Mountain Black Market expert who had once killed the former Sect Leader of the Mysterious Rune Sect!

