

Star Gate 241

Chapter 241: Director Hao's Earnest Teachings (I)

Li Hao didn't care what happened to the others; he stared intently at Violet Moon. The Red Moon organization nursed nothing but resentment for him these days. His teacher had also killed multiple Red Moon Solars. These people would never show him mercy if they had a chance to act on anything.

He watched her to see how her injuries were and to locate her scarlet shadow. Most Red Moon members walked around with scarlet shadows, but there wasn't a sign of one around her. This was what Li Hao found strange. She hadn't utilized her scarlet shadow even when she faced overwhelming danger before.

Did she not have one? Or was her shadow not here?

Violet Moon was very strong, so if she had a shadow, it should be on par with a Solar. Why didn't he see one?

Li Hao was baffled, but there was no one who could give him answers.

Violet Moon heaved for breath off in the distance and snuck a glance back at the Silver Armor. She suddenly turned in Li Hao's direction. She could sense someone watching her. Although many people were looking at her, this particular gaze made her quite uncomfortable.

Her eyelids fluttered when she looked over—the heir of the Lis!

She was yet to see Li Hao in the ruins before this, but with the Night Watchers entering ahead of Red Moon, she hadn't been certain if he'd entered the city to investigate or gone off elsewhere. When she continuously failed to see him, she began worrying that he'd died.

Thank goodness he was still alive. More than anyone, Violet Moon did not wish for Li Hao to die in the ruins. The organization's standing command was that she had to ensure his survival to the best of her efforts, if not capture him. The caveat was that he did not have a chance to grow stronger. His quiet progression to Sunderer was already a source of grave dissatisfaction to those upstairs.

It was best if she could take him alive!

Red Moon's bottom line was that if the young man did die, she had to bring back an intact corpse. That was her last course of action. She was to guarantee his survival if it was the slightest possibility.

Thus, Violet Moon didn't care how the young man was looking at her. Some of her brewing resentment at being injured dispersed—Li Hao was over there, he was still alive!

She knew more about the eight families of Silver City than most. It was a very important matter and the organization had made preparations for many years for it. They'd wanted to soundlessly complete their plans, but missteps occurred in their last operation. It was a huge pity.

The organization had managed to disguise the other families' deaths as natural causes and stayed under the radar. Now, however, the eight families of Silver City were a hot topic.

Another loud explosion traveled out of the city—Hong Yitang was being run down. "Commander Hu!" he had to plead.

Up ahead, Hu Dingfang jerked his head back for a look. The Silver Armor was flying through the air at top speed. It would be hard to outrun this fellow on the ground. Should he save Hong Yitang?

The man's Sword Sect was stronger than the three great organizations and Hong Yitang was a Silver Moon native. His faction wasn't a menace to provincial citizens, so while the three great organizations were officially listed as evil organizations, the Sword Sect was not.

After a split second, Hu Dingfang turned and threw a blast of incomparably sharp metal energy through the air. Being a metal supernatural, he condemned his power into a ball of light, flinging it at the Silver Armor!

Kaboom!!

The soldier stumbled a few steps backward, providing enough breathing space for Hong Yitang to put some more distance between himself and his pursuer.

.....

In the plaza.

Li Hao looked at the Sword Sect instead of the outer city. Many of its members were highly worried and the Solar that he'd taken note of before, the one who seemed to be Hong Yitang's partner, was also anxious. She seemed ready to rescue the sect leader at any time.

The young man only had time for a quick glance as many Black Armors marched into the plaza. Hao Lianchuan and the other powerhouses that'd returned safely pushed back the soldiers in large swathes. Some were even thrown out of the plaza. Those that landed outside city confines quickly lost their battle capabilities.

"The rest of you can withdraw now!" Hao Lianchuan shouted. They'd brought a horde of Black Armors to them. At this rate, the Silver Armor would change focus to the group in the plaza. That would turn everyone here into cannon fodder.

The assembly quickly retreated beyond the outer city's perimeter. Wang Ming squeezed himself out of the crowd and heaved a sigh of relief to see Li Hao and the others. "Are you guys okay?"

The trio had disappeared as soon as they entered the ruins. They'd returned now, thankfully.

“We’re fine!” Li Hao chuckled and lowered his voice. “Director Hao arranged a special mission for us to complete, so we split up from everyone after coming inside. We didn’t expect Violet Moon to antagonize such a strong entity. What a pity, we’d almost finished our task.”

What special mission?

Curiosity sparked in Wang Ming, but Li Hao shook his head without an answer. Although regretful, Wang Ming didn’t press further. It was better not to ask when the matter involved classified affairs. He knew that he had trouble keeping his tongue still sometime.

Zhang Ting’s ears twitched not too far away. It was a very minute movement, but she clearly captured their conversation. A mission? Purposefully split up? Didn’t Hao Lianchuan say that something had gone wrong with the transportation to cause their separation? So that hadn’t been the case!

The martial masters had vanished and entered the outer city... They did indeed hold some advantages in the city as Black Armors couldn’t discover them as easily. These three weren’t that strong, however, so what kind of special mission could they undertake?

Zhang Ting looked at the fighting Hao Lianchuan. This man seemed open and aboveboard, as well as a bit incompetent. So it seemed that he nursed his own plans as well! She was highly concerned with Li Hao. The young man was part of the eight families of Silver City and the heir to the Lis.

It wasn’t that the central region didn’t care about Silver City after its matters were made public, but that they were completely engaged in the war. There really was no personnel to spare. But since Li Hao was part of the Night Watchers, certain commands came from upstairs.

One, obtain as much information about the eight families as possible. All information was to be collected.

Two, it was best if they could obtain the sword that Li Hao had handed in.

Three, approach Li Hao to see if they could gain special information.

Four, Red Moon was not to be allowed to succeed. As for how their success could be foiled, that was up to the operative's own decisions. Zhang Ting knew full well what this meant. There was no need to be involved in anything when there were no issues. Once trouble was upon them, her first reaction should be to save the young man. If that proved impossible, she was to kill him so that Red Moon's people could not have him!

It was fine to leave the eight families' secrets buried so long as Red Moon's plans were foiled. The government knew less than the supernatural organization.

Zhang Ting turned over these thoughts in her mind and looked at the Silver Armor in the distance. The look in her eyes shifted slightly. Silver Moon's ruins were far stronger than they'd imagined! She had to make a report of this!

Just the one thousand Black Armors, additional Bronze Armors, and the Silver Armor were priceless, to say nothing of anything else! It would make for a martial master army of one thousand strong if they were all turned in! This kind of battalion would trample right over many provinces in a horrifying display of might!

And they were only in the outer city. What about the inner city?

There was at least one origin weapon there, and it might be exceedingly strong. It could be a legendary divine origin weapon...

Origin weapons were divided into ranks. Anything that bore the characteristics of an origin weapon could be categorized thus. For example, absorbing mysterious power of its own volition to supplement the wielder's consumption, being able to minimize or enlarge the item, being able to store it within the wielder's body...

All of those formed the definition of an origin weapon. However, they were also divided according to strength. Hers was the weakest and the Flaming Phoenix Spear of Silver Moon was one of the stronger. It would be a rare sight even in the central region.

Zhang Ting glanced at Violet Moon; she hadn't known what origin weapon the latter carried, but now she knew. It was the Armor of the Thunder God! This was an arcane level item that was one degree higher than her gold level weapon.

As it was an armor type, it was more valuable in comparison. But any item that was an origin weapon was precious, no matter its type. Given that she was one of the seven moons, it was normal for Violet Moon to wield an arcane level weapon.

Zhang Ting observed silently. She hadn't entered the ruins with too many missions. After she reported in, upstairs gave her only one command. Just keep an eye on things and don't make a move, but don't let the defensive origin weapon fall into Hou Xiaochen's hands!

The item was no secret to many people. According to her superiors, this command was to prevent Hou Xiaochen from mutinying and declaring independence. He might do so at any moment once his concerns back home were resolved.

Would Hou Xiaochen revolt?

Zhang Ting didn't know, but she knew that he'd defied orders many times. He refused to participate in the battle of the central region. Upstairs had sent her to oversee Silver Moon in Hou Xiaochen's absence, but the man refused to leave. This was already a deed of rebellion!

Zhang Ting's mind ran through many calculations. She looked at the Red Moon organization and at the Black Armors being thrown out of the city. Where were the ones that the Night Watchers had obtained before? Was Hou Xiaochen secretly raising powerhouses in preparation to rebel? She needed to make a report of this as soon as possible! Hou Xiaochen might really be ready to take up arms!

But why?

Well, it had nothing to do with her.

As a Solar who'd spent the last three years in a backwater province, she might've reached late or peak Solar long ago in the central region. She was growing impatient after wasting all this time. This time, she hoped to obtain concrete evidence of Hou Xiaochen's impending rebellion. The central region might give orders for his arrest then. That would be fully justifiable if the proof declared it.

As for resistance from the three great organizations...

They wouldn't. They wanted nothing more than for him to leave. That left Hu Dingfang to consider...

Violet Moon looked in the commander's direction. Collusion with the army was a severe transgression, to say nothing of anything else. The army was an independent entity. According to dynastic laws, the Inspectorate and military were two separate systems that could not collude at any level. Any sign of untoward partnership was an omen of revolt!

Although this was on Hu Dingfang's personal schedule, he was the commander of the Tiger Wings. Perhaps she'd be able to eliminate even Hu Dingfang this time.

Chapter 242: Director Hao's Earnest Teachings (II)

As Zhang Ting observed others, Li Hao would occasionally watch her. The young man quickly turned his gaze to the plaza.

The Revolution King had made it back. Hu Dingfang launched himself with a loud howl, crossing one hundred meters and arriving in the plaza. Behind him, Hong Yitang also threw himself into the safe zone, his face full of dust while he coughed up blood.

The Solars had reconvened!

Wielding a broadsword, the Silver Armor in the distance didn't follow its black-armored brethren in rushing to the plaza. It emitted an incomprehensible shriek that grated on the ear. Whether it was Black or Bronze Armors, all of the soldiers inside the city withdrew and gathered toward it.

The expedition team shook with shock! Did a consciousness still exist inside the Silver Armor? Or did it have a different set of commands compared to the rest? It could direct the other soldiers! While the explorers knew beforehand that they faced an army, the Black and Bronze Armors were silent even when attacking. It was a completely different situation from what faced them at current.

Black Armors surged toward the Silver Armor. Eight Bronze Armors stood at the head of their respective troops. Split into eight companies, they stood in a peculiar battle formation. The Silver Armor gazed ahead, brandishing his broadsword.

The Solars were still in the plaza and looked solemnly back at it. Let's see what else this army has up their sleeves!

The Silver Armor waved its sword!

The companies of one hundred beneath it immediately split up and pulled out large shields from their armor. Shield warriors!

There'd been no sight of their shields to be glimpsed prior to this. Massive shields now blocked the soldiers from view. They seemed interconnected and transformed into a wall of iron and steel. Not only that, but another company of one hundred behind them suddenly shifted their swords into spears. A spear formation!

RUMBLE!!

Footsteps!

Uniform footsteps propelled the formidable army forward. Being a flat stretch of land, the plaza was perfect for their movement. Or rather, it could be better said that this terrain was created to gather the army in the first place.

Eight hundred armored soldiers in formation marched like they were one, advancing on the Solars. Violet Moon was the first to respond among the supernaturals, she hated these things! A bolt of lightning struck from the sky!

If before, it would send the soldiers flying. She would even break some of them apart if she put more force behind the attack. But this time, the one hundred shields instantly dispersed the lightning. Under everyone's watchful eyes, the remaining power sank into the ground.

Violet Moon jerked with shock!

The army was upon them. The shields spontaneously vanished, replaced by one hundred spears!

Whoosh!

The air broke before them. Blood-red qi trailed behind the weapons—it seemed to be killing intent. This was an army well experienced in the battlefield and certainly not what the world fielded in modern days. Even Hu Dingfang regarded the sight with a rapidly shifting expression. Would the one-hundred-thousand-strong Tiger Wings be able to withstand this thousand-strong army?

The Tiger Wings were mostly comprised of mundanes and very few supernaturals. If guns and other weapons could not damage these soldiers, then it would be a one-sided slaughter!

“Attack!” The other Solars sprang into motion as well. They wanted to probe the depths of this army and flung attacks through the air. Supernatural ripples violently shook the void!

Large shields appeared again in response to the counterattack, but combined Solar might smashed through the individual shields with loud cracks. No matter how durable these shields were, they could not hold up against the collective strength of the Solars.

It was at this moment that someone sensed impending danger. A Solar from the Celestial organization felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up!

Everyone's attention was on the Silver Armor; the group had forgotten the eight Bronze Armors. Those eight suddenly appeared behind the shields. Eight longswords materialized behind a broken shield, moving as one and sealing off all possible avenues of evasion. Eight swords struck at once!

BOOM!

The Celestial supernatural erupted with mysterious power, but was still pierced through. Bloody marks appeared on his chest and head. He swiftly backed away and was fortunate that there were more Solars beside him. Although there were those who wished him dead, everyone knew that losing a Solar at this time would be too grave a blow to morale.

The Revolution King and Hu Dingfang pivoted at the same time, rendering aid. A massive boom rebuffed the eight swords.

"Be careful!" Hao Lianchuan suddenly shouted. Everyone's attention was on the Silver Armor. Shields raised upward as it suddenly landed among the army and was hidden from view.

Hearts pounded with apprehension. These armored soldiers did not come with a notable presence. That guy could be behind any of the shields now. Who would it attack?

The shields vanished as thoughts ran wild. Jaws dropped with shock as people scanned the soldiers. The conspicuous silver armor had disappeared! It was gone! Where? Where had it gone?

Yama's Yao Cheng suddenly looked in front of him with horror. A Black Armor was bringing its sword down on him—an action he ignored as Black Armors were too weak. However, a rising terror told him that there was much more to this stroke than met the eye!

“Not... good...”

BOOM!

A massive collision rang through heaven and earth as the Black Armor brought more strength to bear than Yao Cheng. It was a peak Solar!

BAM!

Yao Cheng's blade of wind shattered and he rapidly threw himself backward, but one of his arms was still struck. It was severed with a soft schick. Face pale, he ignored the happening and flew out of the city.

All of the Solars promptly retreated without a word! The plaza was a no-man's land and fighting impossible! How could the Silver Armor change the color of its equipment?! It could change to black and imitate the Black Armors. How was battle possible under such circumstances?

Black Armors did not come with a presence and they all seemed cut from the same mold. One could not bring full strength to bear against every single one of them. Mysterious power would be exhausted in short order if that was the plan of attack. But as soon as one's guard relaxed, that was when a fake Black Armor swooped in for the kill!

“Hao Lianchuan!” The Revolution King glared viciously at the Night Watcher. Yao Cheng, on the other hand, looked at his amputated arm with unspeakable bitterness. He'd been ambushed and the Silver Armor had set its sights on him from the beginning. Did the soldier think that he was the weakest?

He'd almost died to a single sword stroke! Thank goodness there were other powerhouses beside him and he was able to make a quick getaway. It wouldn't have been possible to pull survival out of the jaws of death otherwise.

They'd just wanted to test these soldiers, but that simple probe had caused a Solar to lose his arm.

Hao Lianchuan's brow was furrowed tight and he answered irritably, "What are you yelling at me for? I didn't know about this! The Night Watchers have never run into this before. I would've told everyone if I'd known he could hide among the soldiers and change color. What good does it do for me if all of you die now?!"

His head ached, he was telling the truth! He really didn't know that the Silver Armor could hide amongst Black Armors and turn itself into one of them. It was impossible to determine—some clues were gleaned only in the second it attacked as its style was very similar to a martial master's.

They were in trouble!

The assembly was out of ideas. Meanwhile, the army quickly withdrew. The Silver Armor flew into the air after a short moment and looked outside the city. It then headed back to the inner city. Its departure was a signal for the remaining Black Armors to disperse. They would not act so long as the enemy did not enter the city.

The Darkmoons and Sunflares standing at the back sagged with relief when all of the Black Armors were gone. That'd been horrifying!

On the Yama side, the Revolution King took quick assessment of the situation. His face darkened as he looked around. Yama had been the first to arrive, so quite a few of its members had entered the city. That spontaneous eruption of Black Armors resulted in random slaughter, so it was mostly Yama supernaturals who'd died!

There weren't that many of them to begin with—just three dozen. There was only half of that number clustered around him now!

Half of his delegation was dead!

Other than the independents, it was Yama who suffered the worst losses. The organization was also missing a few Sunflares—likely dead in the outer city as well.

The Sword Sect had also lost a fair bit of people. It'd come with a sizable delegation, but eight of its members died in the outer city. Hong Yitang was likewise glowering. So many of his people had died with such a simple exploration of the outskirts!

The other organizations didn't suffer to the same degree. When it came to Yama, their greatest loss was Yao Cheng's arm. Supernaturals were less affected by a loss of their limb compared to martial masters. The latter would see an enormous reduction of battle strength if they lost an arm. All the same, some of Yao Cheng's battle strength would be affected. The key point was the blow to his confidence. If even Solars were in danger of losing their lives, then it was a grievous blow to the entire expedition!

The Revolution King swept a glance at the Night Watchers, suddenly sharpening his gaze at Liu Long and the others. "Where were the three of you before?"

Liu Long frowned faintly, then responded calmly, "Exploring the other city!"

"Exploring the outer city?" coldly questioned the supernatural. "When? Yama and the Sword Sect were the first ones here and sealed off the area. We didn't see you enter the outer city! The Night Watchers know more about the ruins than us and you three are martial masters. You suddenly disappear, then abruptly reappear, and such a massive disturbance takes place as soon as you return. You're involved with this!"

"....." Li Hao, Liu Long, and Liu Yan cursed inwardly. You're right, but this guy is obviously just looking to pick a bone!

Li Hao didn't think that the Revolution King truly believed what he spoke of. It was just that Yama had suffered such heavy losses that he must have ulterior motives with this questioning. The three stayed silent.

"Revolution, what do you mean by this?" Hao Lianchuan brooded. "You know full well what happened. Violet Moon acted too slowly and her mysterious power raised attention from those guys. What does it have to do with my people? I sent them into the outer city to investigate certain things. You're just looking to make trouble!"

"So this means that you have another way into the city?" Revolution demanded frostily. "This plaza seems to be the only way in as all other areas are shrouded under a defensive membrane. How did they enter? Tell me!"

He was indeed just looking to pick a bone, but he also wanted to gain more information. The Night Watchers were certainly concealing important intelligence.

As Hao Lianchuan frowned, the others joined the censuring. "Hao Lianchuan, do you Night Watchers want to take advantage of this opportunity to eliminate us all?"

"Is there only one such passageway into the outer city? The Black Armors keep this place under heavy guard. We easily raise their attention when we enter this way!"

"What are the Night Watchers plotting?!"

Chapter 243: Director Hao's Earnest Teachings (III)

Hao Lianchuan frowned deeply and said after a long pause, "There is another passageway, but it is much too dangerous. It's safer for martial masters, but supernaturals will die nine times out of ten if they attempt it! This is just the outer city, there's no need to try anything that would result in such massive losses..."

"Where is it?" Eyes lit up in the crowd. So there really was another way in? They needed to find a second entrance as the Silver Armor might be keeping an eye on this area at all times now! It was too dangerous. To think there really was another avenue!

Li Hao and the others blinked. Was there really a second way? Or was this just a bluff? Hao Lianchuan certainly knew that the three of them hadn't taken an alternate route, but had been directly transported in. He was obviously aware of certain things since he hadn't asked why they were in the city.

In that case, talk of another entrance was most likely fake.

"I said it's very dangerous, that's not a lie!" Hao Lianchuan's brows were still knitted together. "We accidentally discovered it on a prior expedition and lost a lot of people, so we were forced to give it up. Martial masters don't elicit much of a reaction from it, so it's safer for them to go in. I had Liu Long and the others enter first so they could investigate the distribution of the Black Armors. Their layout is different every month..."

"We don't need you to tell us about the dangers," the Revolution King rejected coldly. "We just want to know where it is!"

"I said it's very dangerous..." Hao Lianchuan frowned with budding irritation.

"Do you think we're afraid of danger?" sneered the Revolution King. "There's nothing you want more than for all of us to die. Would you be so kind hearted as to remind us of danger? Hao Lianchuan, there's something special about this alternate way, isn't there?"

The deputy director struggled for a bit, conflict visible on his face.

"We've lost quite a great deal at this point," Violet Moon hissed. "Do you think you can continue to keep it from us, Hao Lianchuan?"

The deputy director looked at Hu Dingfang, who ignored him. He couldn't call the shots in this, it was up to Hao Lianchuan.

“Fine,” the man sighed. “There’s a house on the first street with a front door different from the others. It happens to face outside, so we can enter the ancient city through it. Like I said, it’s very, very dangerous. Martial masters without supernatural ripples stand a ninety percent chance of survival. Supernaturals, on the other hand, have maybe ten percent!”

Eyebrows raised in the crowd. Enter directly through an ancient house? What was inside it and what did they stand to gain from it?

“Is there a difference between entering through the ancient house and through the plaza?” Violet Moon quickly asked.

“Yes,” a reluctant Hao Lianchuan answered grumpily. “We haven’t discovered any benefits yet for martial masters, but if supernaturals take that path, their supernatural ripples won’t be obvious when they fight. Just like martial masters, they won’t result in too much attention...”

The expressions of Violet Moon and the others shifted drastically. The Revolution King broke out in large curses.

“You bastard, why didn’t you say so earlier?! The Night Watchers want to end us all, alright!”

“You idiot!” Hao Lianchuan roared back. “How many will die from mere supernatural ripples? There’s only a ten percent chance of survival with the house, so you tell me which is the greater loss! And I want to end you guys? If I want to do that, I would’ve told you this from the get-go and let you all die! I didn’t say anything because I want us all to face the enemy together, or I would’ve taken that route myself!”

“Who knows if you speak the truth or not?!” Revolution snorted. “Perhaps you want to use the soldiers to kill us first and then take the way through the ancient house!”

No matter what, they’d gained a very important piece of information. Masking supernatural ripples! This meant that they would be able to attack without reservation. The Black Armors might not be able to pinpoint their location even after the expedition team killed some soldiers. This meant that

the Solars could ambush the soldiers, and that the Silver Armor may not find them if they went into hiding!

Damn that little bastard Hao Lianchuan! The Night Watchers were holding a lot of secrets, alright! They didn't want to share! Blast that entire organization!

It was normal for enemies not to share information, but it was Hou Xiaochen who'd called for general cooperation. The guy was a hypocrite! What kind of partnership was this??

The crowd didn't say anything, but people started shifting in the direction of the first street. Hao Lianchuan wanted to protest, but swallowed his words. He desperately wanted to speak some sense into the assembly from the looks of his expression, but sighed after a long pause and couldn't be bothered saying anything.

He looked at the trio, as if berating them for landing the Night Watchers in this mess. Li Hao was both surprised that there really was another passageway and also found that the deputy director's acting was a bit over the top!

Your expression is so playing cat and mouse, and this reaction... Perhaps you really hadn't planned on saying anything, but the more you're like this, the more tempted people are, aren't they?

So Director Hao had quite a few tricks up his sleeve!

Exposing the second entrance decreased the amount of attention on Liu Long and the others. Since there was another way in and these three were martial masters, it was truly possible that they'd been arranged to enter ahead of time. As for why the three had dropped out of sight from the beginning, perhaps they'd taken a different route in the first place. Who knew if the Night Watchers had that available to them as well?

"Hu Dingfang, keep an eye on things here," Hao Lianchuan sighed. "I'll accompany them to make sure they don't get up to other antics. It won't do for too many to die! Li Hao, you guys are with me!"

The trio quickly followed in the deputy director's footsteps.

"If anyone asks you guys later," Hao Lianchuan transmitted as they walked. "Say that it's pitch black inside and that you couldn't see anything. You don't know what was in the house, just that it felt like countless little hands were touching you. That's pretty much what it feels like. As for where you went after exiting the house, say you just randomly poked around.

"Also, remember to mention that you seemed to see a medallion right before you came out. It bore some resemblance to the city entry medallions as recorded in the ancient tomes. But remember, don't say anything unless someone forces it out of you! Liu Long and Liu Yan, let Li Hao do the talking. This guy is good at lying..."

Li Hao looked on with wounded innocence. There must be a misunderstanding, a very deep one! He'd just felt that Director Hao had some tricks up his sleeves and wasn't necessarily a good guy, so why did he suddenly seem so... calculating?

"Lastly." Hao Lianchuan didn't care what the young man thought. "Don't tell anyone that you were directly transported into the outer city. There must be something special about that. It's not like we haven't sent martial masters in before, but they weren't like you. It must have something to do with Li Hao! I told you long ago that you absolutely have something to do with this place. There's a diagram of a large turtle over the inner city doors. This place might actually be related to the eight families."

It was apparent that the deputy director was no fool. He'd always played the part to give nothing away.

"And remember not to wander off anymore from now on! Follow me closely. We might have a chance to enter the inner city. Li Hao, I think it's still up to you to see whether or not we can claim the origin weapon that covers the entire ancient city. Things will be dicey if you're dead. Your teacher will come looking for us, to say nothing of the origin weapon!

“And another thing that I almost forgot—if I’m busy when we run into danger, you can go to Hu Dingfang. That guy will definitely protect you! Your teacher’s wanted to come for him multiple times and even planned to assassinate him. He was talked out of it each time, but the guy’s dead upon exit if he doesn’t protect you well in the ruins!”

“.....” Li Hao was a bit dazed. Was Hu Dingfang an enemy? Why else would teacher want to kill him?

“He... learned the Five Styles!”

That’s fine, many people knew the method. So long as he didn’t know the Breathing Method of the Five Styles, what would his teacher care about this?

“He knows the core too!”

Li Hao’s expression shifted slightly and his eyes took on a hard cast. The core? The breathing method? How was that possible?!

“Don’t be mad, it has nothing to do with you. It’s a long story, one that your teacher threw away later on. Anyway, just remember to stick by his side when you run into danger!”

Li Hao committed the advice to heart and took another glance at Hao Lianchuan. The deputy director usually presented a jovial, somewhat silly facade. It seemed he was just as vicious as the rest when he decided to scheme against someone!

Hao Lianchuan ignored the look. I didn’t say anything, do you have proof? I transmitted everything, which makes even recordings impossible. Sue me if you have the evidence to! Hu Dingfang you bastard... you can be responsible for the insane trouble that is Li Hao!

The deputy director would take off his head to kick around like a ball if the unrest inside the city had nothing to do with Li Hao and the others.

“Director, can I talk now?” Li Hao whispered.

“Of course!” Hao Lianchuan responded with surprise. “Why not? Is there anyone who can eavesdrop on our conversation?”

“.....” The trio blinked. Then... what did you transmit your voice for? We thought there was someone listening in and didn’t dare say anything.

“Um... there’s a bad person in our team...” said a wordless Li Hao in a muffled tone.

“I see!” Hao Lianchuan nodded, then suddenly grinned. “Are you talking about yourself?”

“...no!” Li Hao still decided to put his cards on the table. Otherwise, what if this one was nearby when the young man conducted his ambush and thought that he was killing one of their own? Hao Lianchuan might kill him in return!

“I know who you speak of.” The deputy director frowned before Li Hao continued. “But remember, even though the director says that it doesn’t matter, you can’t really treat it like it doesn’t matter. Keep in mind that we’ll be in great trouble if that person dies. There will be another layer of crime levied on the director! It will also make some people feel that the director really is of the mind to... when that’s not the truth! The director just can’t be bothered to explain...”

Li Hao looked dumbly at the man. What the heck? How come you sound like you completely know what’s going on?

“Don’t look at me like that, I’m not blind to all things!” chuckled Hao Lianchuan. “That one’s not a professional in this arena and sometimes lets some things slip. They’re not an easy target to eliminate, do you understand me? Taking action means that trouble would soon be upon us.

“Another point is that what if they send a more deeply concealed plant if anything happens to her? That’s not even taking into account the criticism and censure that might follow. This one is at least a known factor and thus easy to defend against.”

“I... I lack water energy.” Temples throbbing with a headache, Li Hao scratched his head.

Hao Lianchuan rolled his eyes and looked at the young man. “What can you do with water energy if we give it to you? Can you immediately set foot into Summoner like your teacher?”

“No... but I have hopes for Dominator.”

Hao Lianchuan hesitated with internal debate. “In any case, you can’t take action against that person. You won’t necessarily resolve the issue if you do. But if you really want to, you can do so when there’s no one around. Remember, that’s when there’s no Night Watchers around. The caveat is that you must be confident of success...”

Instead of further opposition, he told Li Hao to refrain from action when the Night Watchers were around. That person may not be the only agent among the group’s ranks. She was just the one who’d concealed her strength. Perhaps there was another plant out in the open.

Li Hao understood.

Chapter 244: The Second Passageway (I)

“All you need to do when ambushing a Solar is to break through the defenses of their mysterious power,” Hao Lianchuan continued transmitting. “Also keep in mind that ambushes are less effective when Solars carry an origin weapon on them. You saw what happened with Violet Moon—the Armor of the Thunder God instantly appeared over her and rendered extreme defensive capabilities. Not even the attacks in the air could kill her.

“If you want to eliminate that one... Figure out a way to get her into the sky and have the city hit her with a few blows. You stand a chance only after breaking the origin weapon!”

The look in Li Hao's eyes grew increasingly odder. Didn't you say that I shouldn't kill her? But now you're giving me ideas how to?

Hao Lianchuan didn't care about the young man's reaction. Anything he transmitted had nothing to do with him.

"She won't be too strong even with the origin weapon. She's still less than Violet Moon. Her weapon is possibly the lowest at yellow level, whereas Violet Moon's is the arcane level. An arcane level can take five or six attacks, whereas a yellow can do three or four the most. But that will require her to be in the air for approximately ten seconds—which is where the true test of your capabilities comes in."

"Director, why don't you..." Li Hao said this aloud.

"Me what?" A startled Hao Lianchuan looked at the young man and continued transmitting, "I'm a Solar and everyone's eyes are on me. You want me to kill one of my peers? Don't even go there. I'll be suspended for a formal investigation if someone sees me commit murder. Do it yourself if you want her head. You live a good life flowing with milk and honey. And, no one will believe you if you say I put you up to it, not to mention I'll never admit to it!"

Li Hao didn't know whether to laugh or cry. This one was seriously taking a casual tone to things! Do you really think I can fling a mid Solar into the air for ten seconds? You gotta be joking! I won't be able to do that even with Liu Long helping me!

"It's not that hard!" came Hao Lianchuan's transmission again. He explained in deed and words, imparting his earnest teachings. "I'll split you guys into your own team and you can run for the thickest group of Black Armors. Attract as many as you can. They won't pay attention to you since martial masters are good at concealment. She'll have to take to the air if there's soldiers all around her!

"And, go to the inner city gates if you still can't handle her. She's dead without a doubt if the Silver Armor steps forth. Don't you want water energy? Just act a bit faster and bring some back before the ground absorbs it all..." Hao Lianchuan finally fell silent after these last words.

“Director...” Li Hao began.

“Cut the chatter!” Hao Lianchuan rebuked. “You three, stay out of trouble!”

“.....” Li Hao, Liu Long, and Liu Yan looked at each other, strange looks in their eyes. My heavens, what a two-faced guy! Director Hao was nothing good! He gave them a guide to killing Zhang Ting and the key thing was, the fatty refused to take the fall for it. Everything was conveyed through transmission and never mentioned aloud. Villains were always undercover, alright!

.....

The end of the outer city.

There was indeed a house that looked different from the other houses in the city. Not only that, but there was a signboard over it. The front door was open.

“Rein Hall.” Li Hao recognized the ancient characters. As a student of ancient studies, he recognized the basics of ancient literature. He wasn’t the only one as the major organizations had also brought field experts on this expedition.

“Is this a reference to reining oneself in at the edge of a precipice?” someone asked hesitantly. What did this mean? Why was a passageway to the city named this? Did it mean for people to discard their evil intentions at the door? Or was it simply a sign for people to rein their horses in at this door?

“Hao Lianchuan, you guys have gone in before,” said the Revolution King as he saw Li Hao and the others arrive. “So did these guys too. Tell us, Li Hao, what’s inside?”

He knew Li Hao and could even identify the young man! Plainly, it wasn’t that these organizations didn’t care about the eight families or about Li Hao, but that the young man was too weak for them to pay too much attention to for the moment.

But now, the Revolution King identified Li Hao before the crowd.

Hao Lianchuan was the deputy director of the Night Watchers, Liu Long was a veteran inspector. As for Liu Yan... who could trust what a woman said, not to mention one with a grudge against Yama? In comparison, Li Hao seemed more genteel.

The young man frowned, took a look at the Revolution King, then at Hao Lianchuan.

“What are you looking at me for?” Hao Lianchuan said faintly, “You’re a Night Watcher...”

“Shut up, Hao Lianchuan!” roared the Revolution King. He looked at Li Hao with an icy look. “Li Hao, tell us what you experienced and saw. In addition, I wish for you to accompany the others for another attempt.”

The young man remained frowning and said after a long moment, “It’s very dangerous. I’m afraid you won’t be able to bear the consequences if I die.”

“Are you thinking of Yuan Shuo?” laughed the Revolution King.

“No, I’m thinking of Red Moon!” Li Hao answered calmly. “Ask Violet Moon if Ying Hongyue will kill you for causing my death.”

“.....”

Silence. The look in Revolution’s eyes shifted while Violet Moon frowned slightly in the distance. She didn’t say anything. If Li Hao really did die here... It would cause enormous trouble—and not from Yuan Shuo. If the Revolution King was the cause, Red Moon might actually hunt him down for it.

The Night Watchers were easy to bully, but Red Moon was one to avoid provoking. The government agency had to consider the rules and the bigger picture at times. Red Moon did not.

“You can ask me though, I’ll answer honestly,” Li Hao said calmly. “But a Sunderer like me is not taking the risk again, so you can spare the threats!”

“Look at a young man like you with such sharp wits,” the Revolution King chuckled meaningfully. “You think of threatening me with Red Moon!”

How interesting! It wasn’t Yuan Shuo or the Night Watchers that the young man thought to employ, but Red Moon! Was that ludicrous?

Very!

But it was this ludicrous threat that the Revolution King had to give respect to.

“Tell us what you saw and what happened when you entered the house!”

“One hundred cubes of mysterious power!” Li Hao replied.

“What??” The Revolution King thought he’d heard incorrectly and looked at the young man with surprise.

“One hundred cubes!” Li Hao set his jaw stubbornly. “I want fire attributed mysterious power! I’m telling you only after you give them to me! A big organization like yours won’t lack for a little bit of mysterious power!”

“.....” The Revolution King laughed. “It’s fine if you don’t say anything. We’ll have someone from the Night Watchers make the trip!”

Hao Lianchuan looked at him with a half smile. “Are you sure about that?”

The Revolution King’s laugh turned into a frown and he turned back to Li Hao after a moment. “One hundred cubes is nothing so long as you answer honestly. But we don’t have any fire energy, I can give you water energy!”

“Water energy...” Li Hao mumbled. “I need fire energy though... the fire heart ape...”

He abruptly shut his mouth, but the rest had their ears perked up. This must have something to do with the Summoner of Spirit cultivation level! What Yuan Shuo had deployed before was the fire heart ape. The power of fire made one feel that it was similar to supernatural abilities. As they thought, Li Hao needed fire energy as well!

The assembly drew some quick conclusions and knew that they had to make a report to their respective senior councils when they left the ruins. They needed to tell their superiors to prepare more fire energy. It was general knowledge that the fire heart ape had much to do with the blood pearls. But now, it seemed that fire mysterious power was required as well.

The more the young man protested, the more the Revolution King smiled. “We really don’t have any fire energy. Water energy is just the same! I’ll give you 150 cubes—you can trade for 150 cubes of fire energy when we leave. And if you can’t, go to Hao Lianchuan. He’s a fire supernatural. If he accumulates his strength for a month or two without using it, that will easily provide 100 cubes as well.”

Li Hao was unsatisfied and glanced at Hao Lianchuan. The deputy director was likewise frowning. Sensing that he couldn’t gain any more, the young man acquiesced in a muffled voice, “Give it to me!”

Something shaped like a human bone was tossed over. The young man didn't reach out for it. Hao Lianchuan cursed inwardly and caught it instead. He probed it with his senses before deeming it safe and throwing it to Li Hao.

"It was pitch black after I entered the house," the young man began. "And it's much bigger than what we see now! It's impossible to determine direction inside, it's like you're completely lost! It feels like someone's watching you the whole time and there's countless little hands touching you, feeling you in the dark!"

Li Hao paused, then continued, "It was suffocating! There was a sensation in the gloom like something was about to seal you away. I didn't understand before, but I'm guessing that it was to seal away mysterious power. Or perhaps not seal... it just felt like something was blocking all of your pores. It was awful! But I'm a martial master, so the sensations weren't that apparent to me. Maybe supernaturals will feel it more keenly."

"Were you attacked?" the Revolution King suddenly asked.

"No." Li Hao shook his head.

"How long did it take for you to enter the outer city?"

"I'm not sure, it felt like a split second... I didn't measure the exact time that lapsed. It's difficult to calculate as time is hard to determine in there."

"The three of you went in together? Was anyone hurt?"

"No!" Li Hao shook his head. "It was just hard to endure. It felt like surfacing from water when we entered the city, like we'd survived certain disaster."

"Did you pass by the inner city gates when you entered the outer city?" Violet Moon abruptly interrupted.

“The inner city gates?” Li Hao shook his head. “There’s no need, there are a lot of little alleys in the streets. We ran into Black Armors before long and knew about their strength. The Night Watchers also told us about the dangers—Director Hao said to avoid them. We left through an alleyway.”

“Which one?”

“It’s after six... houses on the right after entering the outer city. Or the seventh, if not the sixth. If you enter the second street after leaving it, you’ll find a teahouse at the intersection...”

Violet Moon frowned, then asked, “You three are martial masters. Did any supernaturals enter?” She was wondering if the supernatural ripples that occurred on the first street had something to do with these guys.

“No.” Li Hao shook his head. “Supernaturals only have a ten percent chance of survival if they try this way. Not to mention, you guys were right behind us and know how many of us came in. You’d see if any supernaturals vanished.”

That was true! These three were the only ones of the Night Watchers who’d disappeared. All of the supernaturals were accounted for.

“Is there anything else?”

“No!” Li Hao shook his head, but did so with some guilt in his eyes. He ducked his head and didn’t dare meet anyone’s eyes.

The Revolution King and others stirred with interest. There was more! The kid was holding something back!

Chapter 245: The Second Passageway (II)

“Li Hao, martial masters are all about integrity!” the Revolution King said coolly. “You must speak of whatever you know since you’ve taken my payment. Although your teacher and us do not really see eye to eye, he is one who keeps his word. As a martial master and the final disciple of the Five Styles discipline, dare you swear on your teacher that everything you speak of is the truth, that there is nothing omitted?”

“Why should I swear?” Li Hao raised his head with annoyance. “Is there a point to swearing? My teacher is my teacher, why should I be swearing on him? Don’t you think that’s so juvenile? You’re all powerhouses, but you want an oath... What a joke!”

Was it laughable? If it was so ludicrous, why didn’t the young man dare swear?

“Li Hao.” A smiling Hong Yitang muddled the waters. “Don’t mind this. We’re in a partnership here and everyone hopes to enter the inner city. If the situation continues as is, we won’t be able to take care of even the outer city in the time we have left. It’s also good for the Night Watchers if they can conceal their supernatural ripples. Did you make any other discoveries in the house?”

Li Hao remained silent.

“I see that you’ve grasped the aura of the sword,” Hong Yitang continued. “You’re not far off from Dominator of Thousands. Do you wish to continue along the path of martial masters, or switch to the way of supernaturals?”

“Martial masters!”

“Wonderful!” Hong Yitang nodded. “I sense that you’re not far away from Dominator. You’ll make it there as soon as your aura strengthens enough. I’ve given up on martial dao and see that you don’t have a good sword. If you don’t mind, you can have my Earthturner Sword!”

The gift of a sword?

Li Hao blinked. The Earthturner Sword was no ordinary sword! This was the sword with which Hong Yitang had built his reputation! The man modified it many times after he entered the supernatural world, making the Earthturner Sword a supernatural object. While it wasn't on par with an origin weapon, it was much stronger than regular supernatural objects.

He's just giving it to me? The hell? There's no need for him to go to these depths if he just wants to play peacemaker!

The others were also surprised. What was Hong Yitang doing, offering up his beloved sword?

The Earthturner Sword flew toward Li Hao without another word. "I don't wish for us to be bogged down by small issues like these." Hong Yitang smiled. "This will delay more important matters. This sword will suit you for the moment, Li Hao! You'll likely have no use for it after you become a Summoner.

"Tell us what you found so that we can better be prepared."

Li Hao hesitated, then looked at the sword floating in front of him. "Thank you, martial uncle Hong!" he said in a muffled voice after a while.

Martial uncle was the polite term of address in the martial world. The various martial worlds were one family, as was Silver Moon's martial world one family—even though this family often killed each other and never saw a moment of peace.

"I'll speak about my discoveries on account of martial uncle Hong, then," Li Hao continued his narrative. "I turned back for a glance the second I walked out of the house. There was suddenly a medallion in the darkness. Some ancient characters were etched on it and I could vaguely make out a 'king' character! There was a turtle carved on it, one that seemed very lifelike.

"I wanted to take it, but when I took another look at it, I found that it was gone." The young man assessed his memories again. "Not only that, but I sensed a peculiar power from the medallion. It was very special! It's hard to describe, but it felt quite vast. There was the enclosure of the cosmos, an invincible defense, and a destruction that was complete annihilation!"

Violet Moon's expression shifted at this. A peculiar power! She seemed to know what it was. This place... really did have a connection to the eight families!

The enclosure of the cosmos, an invincible defense, and a destruction that was complete annihilation...

Her heart shook with shock. This might really be the ruins of the eight families!

Li Hao spoke of his experience so clearly it was like he'd seen it with his own eyes. Even Hao Lianchuan was a little dazed. I told you to lie to the others, not to yourself! Have you fooled even yourself with your lies?

Even I think it sounds so real! These details are incredible! What turtle, what 'king' character, what special power? I didn't teach you any of this!

Impressive!

Li Hao's recounting was too realistic. Those who'd never seen the medallion and felt the power for themselves wouldn't be able to describe it. Whether it was the Revolution King or Violet Moon, both of their faces twitched. The cloaked Celestial powerhouse also held his breath to listen intently.

The three great organizations seemed to know more things than the Night Watchers. They instantly thought of certain things when Li Hao mentioned what he saw.

Violet Moon forced herself to remain calm in the face of extreme urgency. "Did you not manage to take the medallion?" she asked with a veneer of composure.

"No." Li Hao frowned. "But I have a feeling that if I'm a Dominator... I might be able to capture it with the aura!"

He hesitated again, a pause captured by Violet Moon.

“What else is there?” she quickly asked.

The young man stayed silent before responding irritably, “Nothing.”

He must be keeping more to himself!

Li Hao’s irritation grew as he saw how eager the woman was. “Isn’t Red Moon more familiar with it than me? What are you asking me for? I say there’s more than one medallion, that there’s eight! I only had one detailed glance in the dark—there might be more there. There should be eight medallions total and special effects might occur with all of them in hand. As for what they are, I don’t know. Red Moon should know better than I do!”

Eight medallions!

Violet Moon immediately shut her mouth and didn’t ask further questions. Eight families! This city must have something to do with the eight families!

It wasn’t just her, but all of the others who understood in this moment as well. No wonder Li Hao hadn’t mentioned it. This made his identity as the heir of the eight families even more important, which was also a dangerous development. Hong Yitang grasped the ramifications and looked apologetically at the young man.

“Martial uncle didn’t know about this before...” he said in a lowered voice. “I wouldn’t have asked you if I’d known.”

“It’s fine!” Li Hao mumbled. “It’s not the first day that they’ve had their eyes on me. I just think there’s more to this ancient house than meets the eye... Whatever, you guys are the ones going inside, not me!”

Hao Lianchuan was also frowning off to the side and looking at the others. “We... didn’t notice this medallion before.”

Did people believe him?

Maybe!

If they hadn’t discovered it before, then it might have something to do with Li Hao’s bloodline. Naturally, no one asked anything further at this point. They’d understood what they needed to understand, the rest would come with experimentation.

A grumpy Li Hao retreated behind Hao Lianchuan. The deputy director looked over the sword before returning it to the young man. Li Hao was still out of sorts. He’d revealed his secrets for a measly one hundred fifty cubes of water energy and an Earthturner Sword! He rather regretted his actions!

Okay, so he didn’t regret that much. Perhaps these guys would’ve given him more if he asked. What did any of this matter to these people? One hundred fifty cubes was nothing!

Damn, I really asked for too little. The Earthturner Sword was an accident. When Violet Moon opened her mouth, I should’ve asked for a few blood pearls. Maybe I could’ve gotten some!

Oh these missed opportunities!

Liu Long grunted with disapproval and lectured in an exceedingly quiet voice, “Idiot! Hong Yitang’s not necessarily a good person either. How could you tell him these things? You idiot, you’re in trouble now. Everyone’s eyes will be on you!”

Although he kept his voice down, it was still audible. The three Solars could make out his words. Hong Yitang's expression remained unchanged, as if he hadn't heard a thing.

Li Hao kept his head down, dejected. "They wanted to force me to swear on my teacher," he ultimately responded in a muffled voice. "Those of the Five Styles can fall in battle, but cannot let our masters suffer humiliation. I can't just use his name like that. Teacher saved me from certain death multiple times and laid down his life to wrestle more benefits for me. I... couldn't bear to curse him like that. Not to mention, there are indeed gods and spirits in the world. Even the heavens favor a certain group of people. How can I live up to him if something really does come true?"

Liu Long sighed and said nothing more. The premises fell silent.

"Liu Long, is it?" the Revolution King suddenly said. "You've gone inside before. How about the Night Watchers send Liu Long in with us this time? Of course, we won't have people make the trip in vain. Whether it's Liu Long or anyone else, those who are willing to go inside will receive one hundred cubes if they make it out alive!"

The crowd rustled when they heard the offer. One hundred cubes? How generous!

For the leaders of the great factions, it was best if people willingly entered the house. They weren't afraid of spending resources—there would be payouts only if these people survived the encounter.

They needed to stay alive first.

Volunteers were much better than coerced participation. Anyone forced into the house might conceal important information.

"In addition, hefty rewards will go to anyone who obtains that medallion!" continued Revolution. "Yama is willing to purchase it for a high price. I'm sure we all know that some things cannot be claimed even if you lay your hands on it."

This, the assembly was well aware of. And it wasn't like they were guaranteed to gain the medallion either.

"Milord Revolution King," asked a Sunflare survivor from one of the small organizations. "Is everyone one hundred cubes? Both Darkmoon and Sunflare?"

"Sunflares will receive two hundred," chuckled Revolution.

"Milord is wise!" The Sunflare smiled. Two hundred cubes of mysterious power was no small sum. He'd just asked off the cuff—who would've thought that really would increase the payout?

As expected of a large organization! They were magnanimous and strong!

"If you make it out alive, you can also join Yama!" continued Revolution. "Yama welcomes all those unaffiliated with an organization!"

Some more independent supernaturals were tempted after this. Yama was one of the three great organizations! These organizations had taken all comers at the beginning of their formation. But with the rise of the supernatural world, its stabilization and increasing numbers, these organizations now had quite the set of rules and conditions for recruitment.

It wasn't easy for those of small organizations to join the three greats.

Neither Celestial nor Violet Moon said anything. They needed to survive braving the house first! Not to mention, joining Yama at this stage meant becoming cannon fodder. Only when a new recruit exited the ruins did they have a chance of becoming an official member. Hence, the other organizations couldn't be bothered with saying anything.

Chapter 246: The Second Passageway (III)

“Is there anyone who wishes to try the house?” the Revolution King asked again. After momentary hesitation, four independent supernaturals walked out of the crowd.

“Are there any from Yama, Celestial, or Red Moon willing to go?” he asked. “Rewards will be doubled for those of the three great organizations who make the attempt!”

Some walked out from the three greats after his latest offer. It was more than apparent that Revolution wished for his own people to come out alive. It would bring them the greatest amount of intel. He just wasn’t forcing their participation.

“I’ve already gone once, I don’t wish to go again,” said Liu Long. “It’s useless for me, anyway!”

“And what if I want you to go?” Revolution replied faintly. He would bring force to bear if persuasion didn’t work! The man looked at Hao Lianchuan. “If Liu Long is unwilling, then the Night Watchers will send a few supernaturals to go inside!”

“Why?” Hao Lianchuan frowned.

“Because you didn’t tell us about this before!” Revolution snapped back. “You need our cooperation, Hao Lianchuan, if you want to make it into the inner city together!”

Hao Lianchuan cursed inwardly and had no choice but to look at Liu Long. “Liu Long... you... will head inside one more time! I’ll reward you with a hundred cubes on behalf of the Night Watchers when you return!”

Liu Long frowned, but still nodded. “Understood, I will do as ordered!”

Director Hao was his superior, so there was no denying what he requested. However, he looked at the Revolution King. “I want two hundred cubes and I want them now! I don’t trust you. Also, I want water energy!”

Liu Long stared intently at the Revolution King. I want water energy! Are you going to give it to me or not? You didn't give Li Hao fire energy when he wanted it, so it's not like you'll give that to me instead now, is it?

"You want water energy?" chuckled the Revolution King. "I just gave the rest to Li Hao, you can trade with him for it. I only have some earth, wind, and metal energy left. It's all the same!"

I won't give you anything you want! He threw out a few bones that contained vast sums of mysterious power. Some were still slick with blood—the Revolution King had obviously collected them from those who'd died in the previous plaza battle. He was the strongest in the field at that time and had no use for these. It was a perfect opportunity to reuse trash that he'd obtained for free.

Liu Long frowned wordlessly. He handed the bones to Li Hao and muttered, "Take care of our other brothers in Silver City for me if I don't come out!"

The young man nodded emphatically.

With Liu Long added to the mix, a ten person team was quickly formed. Four independent supernaturals, Liu Long, one supernatural each from the three great organizations and Sword Sect, as well as another Sunderer from the Sword Sect. The Sword Sect plainly wished to experiment on the differences between supernaturals and martial masters. While they sent two, neither of the two were that strong. They didn't have many martial masters to begin with.

The group chose to enter all at once as opposed to one at a time. The latter might be safer, but also slower and harder to discern differences between the two. Would variances be a result of supernatural ability, luck, martial master, or energy system?

The ten that formed the group all possessed their own unique characteristics. Metal, earth, wood, thunder, water... Not a single attribute was repeated. The leaders of the various large organizations wished to test the differences between all traits in one go.

.....

Worry lurked deep in Li Hao's eyes—what if something went wrong with Liu Long? This place might be a trap! However, Hao Lianchuan's voice sounded by his ear. "It'll be fine, we tested this passageway before! This is a special place that offers a very high rate of survival for martial masters. It's not low for supernaturals either, but the weaker the supernatural, the higher the chance of survival! The stronger, the lower the chance of survival!

"If these guys are tempted and think they'll be fine because weaker supernaturals made it back out, or if they're enticed by the medallion... then all the better! It'll be good to ensure some of their deaths on this expedition, even if we don't claim the origin weapon."

The deputy director was already prepared—he would weaken the three great organizations if he couldn't make it to the inner city. Violet Moon and the others would have an exceedingly low rate of survival if they dared attempt the house.

Li Hao remained staring silently ahead and didn't say anything. Liu Long took the lead and entered the ancient house without a word. He possessed the courage of martial masters in spades. Since the situation was thus, he would go in. There was nothing to worry about!

He vanished soundlessly into the darkness; the others were a little more apprehensive. But when they thought of the benefits to be had, the remaining nine quickly charged into the house.

Silence!

There was no movement forthcoming. Some powerhouses found nothing when they sent their consciousnesses into the house. Just as the crowd relaxed into the quiet... a ghastly scream rang out! Frowns crossed faces. Any manner of noise should be audible from the house, but the first and only thing they heard was the scream. Was this an attempt to create a sense of danger?

That scream had belonged to an independent supernatural. He might be dead!

Expressions remained the same in the crowd. No one was fearful just because someone had died. That was just a wandering supernatural. It was within expectations even if they all died.

Another ghastly scream echoed after a while. There was no further disturbance from the house. After an indeterminate period of time, figures appeared on the street behind the ancient house. Those on the other side peered through the protective membrane with widened eyes. They were out!

The figures swiftly ran toward the plaza. These had been their previous instructions. They were to leave as soon as possible if they made it out! Some of the members of the three great organizations also bore special missions on their shoulders. They were to test the Black Armors' reactions!

The Revolution King headed for the plaza without a word. The others were hot on his heels. They weren't worried as the plaza wouldn't disappear, they cared more about whether the survivors had obtained the medallion or any other treasure.

Li Hao heaved a slight sigh of relief. Liu Long should be fine since he hadn't heard the captain's voice. If only two had died, then this rate of death wasn't that high. Hao Lianchuan's claim of a ten percent survival rate rather seemed like an exaggeration! It was further proof that the man was just in the business of scaring people away!

.....

The crowd arrived outside the plaza before long. A figure leading the pack sprinted to them—Liu Long. He didn't dare linger in the city and ran back as soon as he exited the house. He wasn't the only one, there were several more figures behind him that were each faster than the rest.

When Hao Lianchuan saw that they were about to exit the plaza, he quickly said, "Don't brashly leave the outer city. The protective film that you just received will vanish as soon as you do so! You'll have to go through the house again if you wish to conceal your supernatural ripples. This effect isn't permanent. It persists inside the city and disappears soon after you leave it!"

The supernaturals on the plaza were startled into indecision. Liu Long didn't care; he walked right out. Being a martial master, he didn't sense any protective film. What did he care about leaving the city! He didn't want to stay inside.

Another person ran out from the city—a Red Moon Darkmoon. He was very agitated and approached the edge of the plaza. Panting, he called out in a fearful tone, “Milady!”

“Go ahead and speak.” Violet Moon inclined her head. All of the organizations had sent people inside, so there was nothing to hide.

“Milady, I... I just approached within ten meters of a Black Armor and demonstrated some of my supernatural abilities. The soldier really didn't have a reaction!”

Eyebrows raised in the crowd. The Black Armors didn't react when someone within ten meters used supernatural abilities?

Violet Moon subconsciously wanted to enter the plaza to assess what was different about her subordinate.

“The Silver Armor has committed your presence to memory,” Hao Lianchuan said quietly. “It might be here shortly if you enter now!”

Violet Moon frowned, but didn't say a word as this was possible! Instead, she looked at her man. “Come out of the city!”

The man followed orders and quickly set foot outside. Violet Moon surrounded him with the power of thunder the moment he did. She immediately sensed something different. There'd seemed to be a layer around the man that was connected to the ground. It was broken as soon as he walked out!

“The ground?” She looked down; Hao Lianchuan nodded.

Understanding dawned on the group. It looked like the protective film came from the ground. It might be a similar case to the Black Armors. Walking through the house gave one the protection of the earth, but setting foot outside the city meant severing this connection with the earth. Hence, the protective film vanished and the person in question needed to go through the process once more.

“What did it feel like?”

“The house was pitch black and pretty much like Li Hao said. But... I didn’t see a medallion.” The person looked suspiciously at the young man. The others didn’t mind his findings. It was normal for Li Hao to see it and it was normal for this Darkmoon not to see it. There might really be something special about the bloodlines of the eight families.

“Did you run into danger?”

“There was a little bit of danger...” came the frightened response. “Someone seemed to put a cloth bag over me at one point—maybe that was the feeling of getting the protective film. I felt like I was going to suffocate, but it quickly dispersed and I made it out.”

“Did you discover anything else?”

“No.”

Violet Moon frowned and continued to wait. The others emerged after a short while. Two were dead out of eight—one was an independent and the other was a Yama member. The Revolution King wanted to vomit blood. His organization, again!

“Two are dead—one Plenilune, one Fullmoon. One fire and one thunder...” Violet Moon murmured. “Was it because their offensive abilities were too strong? But the metal supernatural is still alive...”

When it came to offense, metal was stronger than fire. The metal supernatural was still here! But it was also true that more offensive supernaturals had died. Additionally, no one had seen the medallion.

If anyone had, it might be treated as a fake. Since only Li Hao saw it, then the crowd believed it might really exist. These eight just hadn't been lucky enough or possibly possessed the right bloodline.

"So supernatural ripples can indeed be obscured!" said the Revolution King. "What now? Should we all take that path?"

The danger was high at a twenty percent death rate.

Chapter 247: The Second Passageway (IV)

"I'm not going into the house!" Hao Lianchuan frowned. "Deciding my fate through luck... I'm better off relying on strength instead! I accept the outcome even if the soldiers kill me. You guys can go through the house if you wish, I won't be and the Night Watchers aren't allowed to! If we must, then those below Sunflares can make the attempt. They stand a good chance of succeeding!"

Some among the Night Watchers scratched their heads. They couldn't hide their supernatural ripples. If everyone else could, then the agency would be at a great disadvantage! But since the deputy director had given his orders, they weren't in a position to contradict him.

Perhaps they'd be in an even more disadvantageous position then. The others might treat them as protective charms—if they were going to be discovered, it was the Night Watchers who would draw notice first.

At the same time, there were indeed those who felt that it was better to rely on one's own strength than luck.

"Whatever you wish of your own volition!" said the Revolution King. "But those who don't take that passageway will retain noticeable supernatural ripples. They will form a team to draw Black

Armor attention and create opportunities for others. I trust the Night Watchers have no second opinion about this?”

Seeing that Hao Lianchuan was about to refuse, Revolution insisted coldly, “There’s risks to both options! There’s danger in the second passageway and there’s danger to being bait. If you think being bait is more dangerous, then go through the house!

“No one is an exception!” He turned to the crowd. “Either you walk through here or you’re bait to distract the soldiers! Those who take the passageway will listen to orders and work with the bait team to ambush Black Armors! Our expedition will be a failure if we don’t clear out the soldiers!”

It was a good proposal that factored in the risks of all sides. Hao Lianchuan acquiesced after thinking about it for a moment.

“That works! The Night Watchers will not be going through the second passageway. Anyone else who is unwilling can stay with us!”

The large organizations conversed among themselves, splitting the crowd into two. There were roughly one hundred and fifty people left in the expedition team. A little more than half—approximately eighty—chose the house. Only a few Solars were willing to try this path—Yao Cheng of Yama, Violet Moon of Red Moon, and Hong Yitang of the Sword Sect.

The two Solars of Celestial didn’t opt for this, neither did the female Solar of the Sword Sect or the Revolution King. Li Hao was a little surprised by the distribution. Hadn’t they all been raising a fuss to take the second route? And now the Revolution King chose to stay behind!

Perhaps he did so to counterbalance the Night Watchers. Who knew the true reason? As for Violet Moon choosing the passageway, Li Hao guessed it was because she was injured. The Silver Armor had his sights on her after attacking her for so long earlier. She might be concerned that noticeable supernatural ripples would result in continued attention from the soldier.

Die! Please die! Li Hao prayed. None of these people would be missed if they died inside. According to Hao Lianchuan, the stronger one was, the higher the fatality rate. However, that didn’t mean there was no chance of survival. Perhaps the deputy director had attempted the passage

before. Li Hao didn't ask if he had. If this was the case, then being alive now meant that there was still a chance for Solars to survive the house.

"We'll split into two groups. The bait group will go into hiding as soon as they enter the city. They'll draw attention from the Black Armors when the second group leaves the house. Violet Moon, bring those people over and attack them from behind. The Silver Armor is our first priority. We also need to throw all of the Black Armors out of the city as much as possible. There is nothing to fear about the Silver Armor when it doesn't have an army behind it!" The Revolution King detailed several arrangements.

"Additionally, don't brashly approach the inner city. While there may be more to harvest there, there may be greater danger! This expedition is obviously very different from previous excavations. Don't throw away your life for a moment of greed! If the second group does not appear a minute after we've engaged the soldiers, then we'll withdraw as well!"

He couldn't give these people an opportunity to strike off on their own. Although Yao Cheng was part of the second group, the Revolution King still had to be on his guard. If there was no sign of the second group after a minute, the bait group would retreat. The Black Armors would certainly eliminate the second group when they returned to their posts.

"Don't go thinking that everyone is as despicable as you, Revolution!" sneered Violet Moon.

"It's just a precaution!" The Revolution King said nothing further after they decided on the plan of attack. Violet Moon walked off with those who wanted to try their luck; all the first group needed to do was wait. A messenger would come back after everyone left the house. That was when the offensive would start.

.....

The group acting as bait waited in silence. Hu Dingfang walked up to Li Hao and looked expressionlessly at the young man. "Stay close to me in the fighting to come, but not overly close. It'll be too dangerous if you're right next to me!"

Li Hao nodded. The army commander silently flicked another glance at him. It was good enough if the lad didn't wander off.

The group waited patiently and with some anticipation as to the results. Most were hoping that the second group lived, whereas Li Hao wanted nothing more than for all of them to be dead.

A dark figure flashed through the city after roughly ten minutes. A cloaked person swiftly ran over—a Celestial member. That organization had also sent their people inside.

The messenger's presence was slightly weighty and not very stable. It murmured at the edge of the plaza, "Things aren't looking too good... Master Yao Cheng of Yama didn't exit the house. Master Violet Moon's injuries seem to have gotten worse. Swordmaster Hong appears to be fine..."

The Revolution King's presence fluctuated when he heard the report. What?! Yao Cheng was dead?! Why?? He wanted to explode with anger! How was this possible!! Yao Cheng was a Solar! How could he disappear without a sound like this?!

"We suffered significant losses aside from the great personages. Twenty-two are dead, only sixty made it out alive..."

One-fourth of the second group had been lost!! Was this a worthwhile trade?

It was difficult to say whether it was worthwhile or not. The groups had been formed out of personal preference and death was inevitable. However, no one fathomed that they could possibly lose a Solar.

The Revolution King was beyond livid! He didn't care about the others, but Yao Cheng!! Damn it! Yama had lost too much since the start of this expedition! He forced down raging frustration in his heart and replied ponderously, "Understood!"

The Yama powerhouses around him were likewise in somber moods. Apart from Red Moon, Yama had suffered the most on this excavation.

Taking a deep breath, the Revolution King turned to the others. “Hu Dingfang... Hao Lianchuan... Are you ready?”

“We can go anytime!”

“Then... let’s begin!” They needed to eliminate these Black Armors as soon as possible.

Powerhouses set foot into the plaza and roused their mysterious power. Formidable supernatural ripples roiled through the city. A Silver Armor appeared in the sky after the span of a breath, Black and Bronze Armors swiftly converged beneath his feet and ran for the plaza at high speed.

Battle was about to break out once more!

.....

Inside the city.

Violet Moon was ashen-faced in a small alley, as was Hong Yitang white as a sheet. The two Solars viewed their actions with slight regret at the moment.

It was difficult to describe what’d taken place in the house, but they’d lost Yao Cheng and suffered severe injuries themselves. Violet Moon’s heart ached the most for her Armor of the Thunder God. It was gravely damaged and could no longer manifest around her. It had to stay inside her body to be nurtured back to proper condition. That was the root cause of her anguish.

Her own strength would be severely affected by the lack of an origin weapon. Her defensive skills had been very strong before, but now they were enormously weakened!

As pained as she was, she still smiled to see the Silver Armor fly away. The second passageway was effective. Otherwise, the soldier should be flying to her since she was closer. Although she'd paid a hefty price, the trouble to come belonged to the Revolution King and others.

"We'll wait a minute before setting out!" she transmitted to Hong Yitang. It was time for those guys to feel the pressure and suffer some casualties. "Did you see the medallion?"

"I think I did..." Hong Yitang transmitted back after some thought. "But it seemed to be separated by a layer of something. Did leader Violet Moon see it too?"

"I saw a flash of golden light... I'm not sure if it was the medallion or not."

The two fell silent, yet certain that there was treasure inside the house. What a pity that they couldn't lay hands on it. Violet Moon was already considering if she should grab Li Hao when there was a chance to and force him inside the house for a look.

Explosions rang in the distance. Battle was underway!

The second group waited a little while before following Violet Moon and Hong Yitang's lead in surreptitiously approaching the plaza. Their obscured supernatural presences gave them the opportunity to ambush the city's defenders.

.....

Li Hao struck out with the Earthturner Sword and sent a Black Armor flying. The situation was chaotic around him as fights broke out everywhere!

There were many soldiers, but the Solars were as if their illustrious name. They were also quite bold in this engagement and rushed directly into groups of soldiers! Hu Dingfang and the Revolution King jointly preoccupied the Silver Armor. The remaining Solars charged into the Black Armors and threw them out of the plaza in droves!

However, there were too many soldiers to contend with at the end of the day. Bolstered by the ground and possessing strong defenses through their armor, it meant that only Solars exercised a slight advantage against the Black Armors. Sunflares were unable to gain the upper hand and the eight Bronze Armors were also no end of trouble.

If reinforcements failed to arrive soon, they would have to withdraw.

Li Hao didn't care about that. He simply struck again and again, utilizing his sword aura. These soldiers were perfect targets! There was no need to worry about damaging them; all he needed to do was focus on attacking. He had to give it to Hong Yitang—the man's sword was very powerful. The earth shook with every stroke that Li Hao deployed and it didn't show signs of breaking when he melded his sword aura with it. Previous swords started shattering as soon as he attempted that fusion. What a good man!

Li Hao was in the stage of nurturing his aura. All of these Black Armors were his sparring partners. An anguished scream echoed in his ears; he ignored it. He had effort only to spare for himself at a critical moment like this.

He clutched a bone in the chaos and operated the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. It was the bone that the Revolution King had given him earlier. Water energy surged into his body—he wasn't the only one to do so. Supernaturals absorbed energy throughout the course of battle to replenish their reserves. Thus, the young man didn't stand out for his actions.

Li Hao was very irritated that the Revolution King had given him water energy instead of fire, and an additional fifty cubes at that! What if his kidneys were so fortified that it propelled him into Dominator? That would be incredible trouble!

With all these people around him, he wanted to make the breakthrough with none the wiser. Hence, Li Hao kept himself in check. He needed to be restrained even after he balanced his five elements again.

As strong as the Black Armors were, they were truly incompetent when it came to determining direction. They relied solely on supernatural ripples and sound. Li Hao started trying different methods against them, such as flicking them into the air with a sword stroke!

He wanted to practice how to send opponents flying; these soldiers were the best targets. Black Armor after Black Armor rose into the air as Li Hao had a great time on the battlefield. He drew near Hao Lianchuan whenever the situation became a little too dangerous. Although the deputy director wanted him to stay close to Hu Dingfang, the commander was fighting the Silver Armor. Li Hao wasn't in the habit of courting death.

After balancing his five visceral organs and strengthening his internal force, the young man started practicing the Nine Forged Force...

A minute passed in the blink of an eye. Powerful surges of mysterious power erupted at the rear of the soldiers!

Chapter 248: Breaking Through to Dominator of Thousands (I)

Without supernatural ripples giving the enemy's position away, not even the Silver Armor noted the arrival of a second group of intruders. Black Armors suddenly went flying and landed outside the city confines.

"ROAR!!" The Silver Armor gave full voice to its rage and hacked into the crowd with its broadsword. The Revolution King and Hu Dingfang had no choice but to focus on protective retreat. Violet Moon, Hong Yitang, and the others at the back swiftly joined the fray.

Soldier after soldier was tossed into the air, giving the upper hand to the outsiders for the very first time. The Black Armors were utterly routed.

Bam bam bam!

Soldiers quickly lost their mobility when they fell outside the plaza and remained unmoving on the ground. Wrath gripped the Silver Armor and it shrieked with anger that struck fear into the hearts of listeners. It sounded rusty and out of practice, but everyone heard the shrieks loud and clear!

“Keep it preoccupied!” Hao Lianchuan shouted.

“Hurry and defeat the Black Armors!” yelled the Revolution King. “Help us!”

The Silver Armor went into a rampage! It didn’t care about the situation around it and hacked with stroke after stroke! Black Armors were swiftly dwindling on the ground; the Silver Armor roared once more at this juncture. Some Bronze Armors immediately withdrew with their portion of Black Armors. Most were prevented from leaving the battlefield, but a contingent still made their escape.

“They... can run?” The crowd viewed this development with shock. These guys could even flee? Incredible!

No one cared about the ones that’d gotten away and continued to attack. The remaining Black Armors continuously lost their impetus and piled up outside the plaza. Just these gains alone were enough to inspire euphoria from the organizations!

The second passageway hadn’t been undertaken in vain. Although they’d lost a few people, this pincer movement wouldn’t have been executed so easily if not for their undetected reinforcement. Morale greatly swelled in this moment.

Battle grew easier when a portion of Black Armors withdrew. Even though the Silver Armor refused to leave and continued to erupt with strength on the battlefield, it was hard pressed to stand against the increasing numbers of Solars in the battlefield.

It threw its head back with a roar as a searing light exploded from its armor. Leaping into the air, it shook off its opponents on the ground. Battle was difficult to conduct once the Silver Armor was in the sky. The Solars were restricted from following their opponent due to the overwhelming air restriction in place.

Thus, the group could only watch as the Silver Armor powerhouse left through the air and vanished from sight. Despite that, their battle results were already exceedingly resplendent.

The battle continued! This time, it was one-sided in favor of the expedition team. Bam bam bam! Black Armors were tossed off the battlefield and the premises cleared out after a few minutes.

Smiles spread across faces. They'd eliminated at least five hundred out of eight hundred Black Armors! That was more than half in one fell swoop! There were only three hundred left from the one thousand strong army in the city, and three Bronze Armors had been smashed to pieces in the plaza.

Bronze Armors were impossible to capture as they exploded when they left the perimeter of the city. Therefore, no one thought of seizing them and just attacked until those suits of armor were destroyed.

One officer, five centurions, and three hundred Black Armors escaped the plaza. The expedition team had accomplished something magnificent in this battle!

Despite the achievement, the Black Armors were still exceedingly terrifying foes. More than twenty expedition members had died braving the ancient house, and another twenty died in a minute of direct engagement.

There were approximately one hundred supernaturals left—half of what had entered the ruins. Those that died were the weaklings. Darkmoons numbered the highest among the casualties; there weren't that many Sunflares. Yao Cheng was the only incredibly unlucky Solar to have perished in the second passageway.

While the expedition had lost a large sum of people, their battle strength wasn't actually affected that much. Even the Night Watchers lost a few Darkmoons in the last fight. As strong as Hao Lianchuan was, he wasn't able to keep an eye on the entire situation since he wasn't willing to expose the Flaming Phoenix Spear. The Black Armors weren't weak, so a few Darkmoons down on their luck were executed on the spot.

However, the delegations had been prepared for this possibility before entering the ruins. It was impossible to not suffer fatalities when exploring the ancient ruins. The Night Watchers were better off as all of their Sunflares were still alive. Compared to Yama... the Revolution King was beside himself. More than three dozen had entered the ruins. If he was counted among their number, there were only nine members left from his delegation! Five had taken the second passageway, he and three others hadn't.

Nine people!

The Revolution King didn't feel the slightest bit of joy. He didn't care about the Darkmoons or Sunflares dying, but a Solar dying truly did impact the greater picture! Yao Cheng, you piece of shit! Even Hong Yitang's still alive, but you're dead!

Of the remaining one hundred in the delegation, there were nearly twenty Celestial members left. Not many from this organization had joined the expedition, but they'd lost almost no one.

The Night Watchers were the most at nearly thirty surviving members. Red Moon and the Sword Sect possessed nearly twenty apiece. Combined with Yama, that made for almost one hundred.

Only six Sunflares were left of the independent supernaturals. Everyone below Sunflare was dead. Such were the tragic circumstances of the small organizations and wandering supernaturals.

It was difficult for Sunflares to withstand danger without a resident Solar in support, not to mention helping others. It was good enough to not further muddy the situation. When it came to the large organizations, they at least had Solars that could resolve emergencies and crises every now and then.

The group remained in the plaza instead of exiting the city at the end of battle. Bodies were being devoured by the ground. Li Hao and his companions started cleaning the battlefield as well. They claimed all the bodies that were former Night Watchers and stole a little portion from those that belonged to other factions. The best was any mysterious power they could glean.

The three Solars started congregating again.

“The Silver Armor ran off with three hundred Black Armors.” Hu Dingfang was the first to speak. “I don’t know if they’re scattered around the city or have returned to the inner city gates. Are there other powerhouses by the gates apart from this army of one thousand?”

“I can see that many Black Armors haven’t gone back to the gates,” Hao Lianchuan responded. “They’re spread out around the city. Why don’t we start cleansing the outer city, starting from the ninth street, and reconvene at the city gates? It’s been almost a day since we’ve entered the ruins!”

They only had three days to spend inside; it was probably already night of the first day. They needed to purge the outer city and gather at the inner city gates for the final battle! Such was Hao Lianchuan’s plan.

The group mulled over the proposed course of action and someone raised, “Why don’t we move as a group? Danger increases if we split up!”

Splitting up at this stage was to be highly shunned! What if they ran into a large amount of concealed Black Armors? They didn’t understand why Hao Lianchuan would suggest this idea, but the Solars of the various factions didn’t raise any objections.

Collective action? It was time to divvy war spoils at this point in the exploration. Whoever eliminated the Black Armor owned that treasure—that was one point. The second was that if they all moved together, how would they take care of private business? For instance, the Night Watchers had the largest surviving delegation at the moment. Was it right to allow all of them to walk around in fine health?

The Revolution King was most incensed out of them all. He wanted nothing more than to go their separate ways! With most of the Black Armors being taken care of, the Solars could easily eliminate the remaining portion. It was fine if more died given the current circumstances.

This was human nature!

They were all enemies to begin with. Any talk of cooperation was a joke. As for the inner city... the harvest of Black Armors was bountiful enough even if they didn't venture into the inner city. So when Hao Lianchuan mentioned spreading out, none of the Solars dissented.

"It's only Black Armors inside the city now," the Revolution King said faintly. "They don't pose much of a threat. We Solars can take a look at the inner city gates and prevent the Silver Armor from appearing again..."

In other words, stir up a storm of blood and gore in the outer city because the Solars will be far away from the scene! Kill Black Amors as well as other people. Such was the true nature of excavating ruins. Not only were these trips a chance to glean the riches of the ruins, but so were they an opportunity to harvest the fortunes of other supernaturals.

This plainly wasn't an unprecedented occurrence as none of the supernaturals or martial masters in the crowd reacted with surprise.

"We should cooperate and work together. Only that leads to mutual gain!" Hao Lianchuan called out. "We should eliminate the Black Armors first and then convene at the inner city gates. Whoever removes a Black Armor inside the city will own that suit of armor. Even if it's offered upwards, we will count whoever offers it!"

The crowd remained silent. This was the true nature of the supernatural world and a continuation of the Silver Moon martial world. It's up to you guys, we Solars will be far away. Make your way swiftly to the city gates if you're afraid of dying. If not, fight it out inside the city!

Indeed, they were still giving people an out. There was the option of reconvening with the Solars at the city gates. That saved face and placed one out of danger since people wouldn't start anything in front of the gates.

Violet Moon was the first to leave. “We’re going,” she said coldly. “Be quick about it and be careful of more powerhouses inside the city. We leave the outer city to you guys!”

The Solars rapidly set out. Hu Dingfang wanted to bring Li Hao along and waved at the young man. That wasn’t out of the ordinary since Hong Yitang also took his daughter with him. Li Hao, however, shook his head with a simple and honest expression. He looked at Liu Long and Liu Yan, as if saying that he wanted to follow the captain!

Hu Dingfang frowned slightly.

“It’s fine,” Hao Lianchuan transmitted. “Let’s go. Red Moon has standing orders not to kill him and the others won’t brashly do anything either. Not to mention, he’s on good terms with the Sword Sect. There aren’t that many who would really act against him and Liu Long is a Dominator. There won’t be much of an issue!”

Although hesitant, Hu Dingfang didn’t say anything and left with large strides. Li Hao was actually the one who wanted to say something. Celestial and the Sword Sect had concealed Solars among the crowd. Did they want to take those two with them? He wanted to let Hao Lianchuan know, but gave up the idea after some thought. It might not be a good idea if these two left. There might be unexpected gains if they didn’t.

After the Solars left, the remaining Sunflares and Darkmoon looked at each other in silence. The Red Moon delegation promptly disappeared without further word because many people were silently sizing them up.

Apparently, Red Moon had some sort of intangible scarlet shadow? Did these guys have any?

Some looked at Li Hao—was Li Hao able to extract them? It was said that origin weapons were required for the process... That was fine. The key thing was, did Li Hao know how to use the shadows to break through to Summoner of Spirit?

Chapter 249: Breaking Through to Dominator of Thousands (II)

A late Sunflare was in charge of the Sword Sect delegation. He seemed young and glanced at Li Hao with a smile. “We of the Silver Moon martial world are all one family. If you need anything, Li Hao, come to the Sword Sect!”

He waved his hand and left with his people. Li Hao grinned, sending them off with a smile. The other factions left as well. When the plaza was empty, the metal supernatural Director Zhou cautioned in a low voice, “Everyone stay on your guard. None of our supernaturals entered the second passageway, so we don’t enjoy their kind of cover!” He took a look around. “We came with seven Sunflares this time...”

There was also Wang Ming and Liu Long who counted as Sunflares, but the director didn’t include them.

“We can split into two groups—we become too big of a target if we stay together. Director Hao was very clear when he left. We need to try to eliminate as many powerhouses of the three great organizations as we can!

“I’ll lead one group, Ole He will lead the other!”

He and Director He were both deputy directors and peak Sunflares. Director Zhou was a metal supernatural while Director He was a water supernatural. The remaining five Sunflares were divided among the two groups. Director Zhou took three, leaving two that Li Hao was familiar with—wind supernatural Huang Yun and earth supernatural Zhao Huan. Plainly, Director Zhou was taking Wang Ming and Liu Long’s strength into account because those two were both assigned to the second group. This made for a roughly equal distribution of power.

Being a water supernatural, Zhang Ting was also assigned to Director He.

Li Hao didn’t know if Director Zhou had accidentally put him and Zhang Ting in the same group, or if Hao Lianchuan had left instructions to do so. In any case, the young man didn’t care. He didn’t have as much of an urge to kill the woman at present as he was yet to absorb the one hundred fifty cubes of water energy. Not to mention, they were running low on Black Armors. How was he supposed to kill a mid Solar under such circumstances?

Hao Lianchuan wants to kill her via a borrowed knife, but I'm such a weak knife that there's no hope of me doing so. There might have been a chance before, but it's too difficult now. I'm not going to take that risk.

The Night Watcher top brass was taking particular care of Li Hao to assign the people he was familiar with to the same group.

Director He didn't say anything and swiftly brought his team into the streets. "This is a chance for everyone to temper themselves," he talked as they kept a fast pace. "The various larger organizations often employ this method to show the world to their weaker members and familiarize them with the sight of blood! Kill anyone of the three great organizations you come across. There's no need for any other considerations."

"What if we run into the Sword Sect?" someone asked in a low voice.

"The Sword Sect... Do not antagonize them if they do not provoke us. The Sword Sect is a local organization and we occasionally partner with them. The three greats are officially recognized as evil organizations, so just kill them if you see them!"

The factions had been cooperating just fine moments ago and turned on each other without further ado. This was a regular occurrence and illustrated the difference between the government and bandits. They treated each other with terms of endearment when necessary; they were enemies when they had no use for each other.

Li Hao looked around without a word. Although these people had passed through the second passageway and obscured the ripples of mysterious power, their supernatural abilities remained. So at the moment he was... quite appreciative of how well they could hide without their power giving their presence away!

There was a supernatural hidden beneath the eaves of an ancient house they'd just passed by, but peak Sunflare Director He didn't notice the person. One had to say, supernaturals who passed through the ancient house had gained a great deal for their hardship. They held overwhelming advantages in a place like this.

Unfortunately for them, these big light bulbs were particularly conspicuous in the darkness. Li Hao could also discern the supernatural situation of the street over—those further away were harder to catch sight of, but this was enough. His street and the ones on either side meant that he could see the layout of supernaturals on three streets. The only ones he needed to be on guard against were martial masters.

The young man looked around curiously, observing each supernatural. It was possibly due to the large Night Watcher delegation that these supernaturals didn't attack. They'd be courting death if they did so. Having multiple Sunflares in his group meant that the Night Watchers really were unconcerned with run-of-the-mill raids. This was why Director He dared walk on the streets so blatantly.

Li Hao found it quite a pity. If he was working alone with Liu Long and Liu Yan, those guys beneath the eaves would already be dead and they'd be pocketing mysterious power. Sadly, he wasn't at liberty to give pointers with others present.

While Director He didn't discover anything, the mid Solar might have sensed a hint or two. She swept a glance in the relevant direction—just a quick glance. She didn't say anything or seem inclined to give a reminder.

Seeing that Li Hao was looking around, Zhang Ting took the advantage to strike up a conversation. "Li Hao, are you guys familiar with the city layout after your earlier visit?"

"More or less!" The young man grinned. "This is the sixth street. Each street is roughly fifteen hundred meters long with small alleyways on both sides that lead to the other streets. There were Black Armors patrolling them before—there may not be any now. The soldiers might be in hiding..."

A piercing shriek rang out ahead of them! Li Hao and the rest quickly looked to its source, their expressions shifting with dismay when they saw a sight they'd never witnessed before. An ancient house had its front door open, making room for a Bronze Armor to kill the supernatural hidden outside with one sword stroke. Mission complete, it closed the door and vanished!

Shock rippled through the Night Watcher delegation. How was this possible??

“A Bronze Armor has appeared inside a house and suddenly killed someone!” yelled Director He. He had to ignore the fact that they needed to keep quiet as this was a major development! It was unprecedented and needed to be carefully considered. It was fine if others died, but the other Night Watcher team might not know about this turn of events. He had to notify them as soon as possible even if it meant enlightening the entire expedition!

Disturbances erupted on various streets as soon as his words echoed. There were soldiers inside the ancient houses!

.....

The first street, outside the inner city gates.

The gates were tightly shut and the Solars deep in discussion when they heard Director He’s roar. Eyes widening, the group looked at each other.

“How is that possible?!” A solemn Hao Lianchuan looked back with a frown. “This has never happened before! Can only Bronze Armors enter the houses, or can Black Armors as well? These are thorny circumstances!”

The remaining three hundred Black Armors weren’t by the city gates. A few could be glimpsed on the city walls, but there wasn’t a single one outside the city gates. Had this become guerrilla warfare?

Violet Moon and the others looked around, then settled on Hao Lianchuan. “Have Solars ever entered the ancient houses?”

“No.” The man shook his head. “Sunflares have gone inside before, but never come back out!”

The group frowned. This really was troublesome. Their previous thoughts had been that the soldiers would be easy to eliminate since they wandered down the streets. But now...

“Black Armors cannot enter the houses!” Another roar rang out as they thought. “Only the Bronze Armors can!”

The latest revelation brought some ease. Thank goodness! It looked like the Bronze Armors had higher authorizations than the Black Armors. That made sense, as Bronze Armors were part of the command rank as centurions. Black Armors were just regular soldiers—their clearance levels should be different.

“There’s only five Bronze Armors... There shouldn’t be much of an issue if the delegations stay on guard.” The group turned back to the city gates with peace of mind.

The enormous city gates were crafted of ancient bronze; they towered at nearly one hundred meters in height. Since flight was impossible, they could only try opening the city gates.

The Revolution King coalesced a blade of wind without further word and shot it at the gates. The blade exploded upon collision, but the gates remained unmarked. These results meant that even a peak Solar such as him was at a loss for what to do.

“Hao Lianchuan, we can’t fly or force it open... Are you sure these gates open?”

“There was hope...” Hao Lianchuan sighed. “I invited Yuan Shuo on the expedition so that he would think of a way to open the gates. But thanks to you guys, he was sent packing before he entered the ruins. Otherwise, I think he stood a high chance of succeeding given his knowledge.”

The group fell silent. Was it us who didn’t let him in? He was the one who insisted on fighting Sun Yifei, killed the man, slaughtered so many Red Moon members, as well as exposed Summoner of Spirit. What could we have done about that?

The group started studying the gates, keeping an eye out for the Silver Armor at the same time. Or rather, they wanted to lure it out because they guessed that this officer might carry some important items. A key, for instance. Could the gates be opened by a key?

According to custom, the key to the city gates should be held by the leader of the city defenders—such as his sword. It looked to be a perfect fit for one of the cracks in the gates!

Sadly, the guy was no longer in the field. The group, however, did seem to catch silver flash by on the city walls. Perhaps the Silver Armor wouldn't be able to help itself after all of the Black Armors were eliminated and the Bronze Armors disposed of.

.....

Bam!

In the outer city, Li Hao and a few others sent a Black Armor packing. They alternated between punches and wind energy to efficiently keep a Black Armor in the air for a minute. It gradually ceased to struggle.

This was their third Black Armor. The group hadn't met many supernaturals thus far, but rather ran into Black Armors. These soldiers did not seem to be conscious and could not hide in the ancient houses like the Bronze Armors, so their fate was to fall to the expedition.

Up ahead, Director He and some colleagues easily disposed of two more Black Armors. The team had almost swept the street clean. Other than needing to be careful of Bronze Armors appearing on the sides, targeting the Black Armors was a walk in the park.

Sounds of fighting came from the other streets as well, with some unlucky souls being killed instead of eliminating the Black Armors. There were still three hundred left and some spots saw more soldiers gathered. Dying to them instead was plausible if one was unfortunate enough.

Director He walked over and threw down some suits of armor. This Night Watcher team had collected ten—quite a bulky burden. The director hesitated. These weren't convenient to travel with, but someone else could claim them if they were left here. It wasn't as if any of the armor was labeled with names.

Each organization had left two or three people outside the plaza to watch over their gains.

“Liu Long.” Director He scanned the group. “You, Wang Ming, Li Hao, and Liu Yan will take this armor back. Ah, forget it, Wang Ming stays behind. Your supernatural ripples are too noticeable and will affect the martial masters instead. Go quick and return swiftly!”

Li Hao found the command odd. Just us three? I thought you would send Zhang Ting with us too. I guess not, looks like Hao Lianchuan didn't leave further instructions.

It was normal to send martial masters on a courier mission since they lacked noticeable ripples of power. But ten sets were too easily seen and provided a huge target. Unless those in the city were blind, they'd see the three coming from a mile away. Who cared about supernatural ripples then?

Director He... isn't trying to cause our deaths, is he? Li Hao wasn't to be blamed for the sudden thought as even Liu Long was only officially registered as a peak Sunderer. Three Sunderers escorting ten sets of armor back would absolutely draw unwanted attention if anyone saw them.

Chapter 250: Breaking Through to Dominator of Thousands (III)

“Director He, isn't this too dangerous?” Huang Yun raised before Li Hao could respond. “There's too many sets of armor, which will make them a bigger target. While they're martial masters, they're not that strong...”

“It's fine, we swept the area they'll go through. Even if people come from other streets, we can quickly double back to reinforce them.” Director He looked at the street ahead. “We need to wrap up cleaning this street and also stay on guard against the Bronze Armors. Liu Long is a veteran martial master. You can leave the armor behind in a critical moment. That's acceptable, and it'll make it easier for you to flee!”

The director shook his head when Huang Yun wanted to speak further. “Say no more, there’s danger everywhere. We can’t absolve ourselves from all risks since we decided to enter the ruins...”

Huang Yun had to shut his mouth. It was true, transporting their loot back would be safer than staying with the team.

Liu Long frowned slightly, but quickly nodded. “Understood!” He grabbed a couple suits. A quiet Li Hao and Liu Yan did the same, each of them dragging several suits of armor and hoisting them up. They turned back in the direction they came from; it only took a small section of walking before darkness swallowed the rest of their team.

Liu Long frowned and muttered, “What does Director He mean by this?”

Although running transport wasn’t a difficult mission, sending them off on their own smelled a bit like sending them to their deaths...

Li Hao didn’t mind their task. He looked around them, then behind them, before curling his lip.

“Chief, isn’t this your favorite tactic?” he whispered. “Bait! He probably thinks that martial masters have thick skin and strong muscles—we won’t be swallowed in one gulp. The rest of the team is following us!”

Liu Long understood, but he still couldn’t help but curse lowly, “I wondered why he suddenly wanted to send us back! He didn’t need to be so obvious about it if he wanted to send us to our deaths. But this bastard didn’t even give us a head’s up!”

He didn’t mind that much about not receiving a head’s up. The crux of the issue was that he wouldn’t know about their followers if Li Hao hadn’t sensed them. They were plainly outside his range of awareness!

“It’s not my first time.” The young man didn’t care. “Didn’t chief say the same thing when I joined the Demon Hunters? I was bait.”

“I, at least, asked you about it!” Liu Long was still highly dissatisfied. It’s not like I arranged you to be bait without letting you know about it. You were willing, so what are you talking about now?

“Then let’s pretend they don’t exist,” Li Hao chuckled. “Chief, why don’t the three of us go off on our own? I’ve found a lot more fools hiding in the shadows. We should creep up on them and see if we can take a few out and collect some mysterious power, y’know.”

There were no Solars in the outer city streets and they weren’t afraid of Black Armors appearing. They could afford to be bolder than before. As for those following them... the trio could just leave them behind. It was easy for martial masters to shake off pursuit when they wanted to. Li Hao also wanted to use the opportunity to fight a few more times and absorb mysterious power. Perhaps he’d be able to advance to Dominator.

“Then, what do we do about these?” Liu Long looked at the sets of armor he carried.

“Just leave them here. The others will collect the armor when they come along!”

“You...” Liu Long was at a loss for words. He was more often than not a stickler for the rules, so he still wanted to complete their task. The Black Armors were invaluable, yet the young man wanted to dump them by the side of the street!

“Don’t worry, chief, we won’t lose them!” Li Hao continued. “We can take them back first if you’re really that worried about it. The plaza’s not far.”

“We should take them back,” said Liu Long after thinking it over. “We can lose our escorts after we do and strike out on our own.”

Although Li Hao felt it was a waste of time, he respected Liu Long's preferences. The trio continued dragging the sets of armor back to the plaza.

While they presented a sizable target, perhaps it was the large amount of Black Armors that prevented the two supernaturals hidden along the way from attacking. Though Li Hao noticed their position, he didn't take pains to run into them. Since he could see them, he could naturally avoid them.

After they returned to the plaza and offloaded the Black Armors to the Night Watchers on duty there, Li Hao, Liu Long, and Liu Yan entered the darkness once more. This time, they made sure to lose Director He and the rest of the team. It was too inconvenient to be tied to the rest.

.....

The seventh street.

Three figures skulked in and out of the shadows. Li Hao struck with his sword—a supernatural crouched beneath an eave swiftly responded and summoned a wooden spike with a wave of his hand. He was about to follow up with more, but Liu Long suddenly appeared from behind with a massive punch!

The blow shattered the supernatural's wooden spike. Li Hao's longsword erupted with incomparably keen sword light—the Earthturner Sword was truly different from the rest. It sank into the target and executed the man without further struggle.

“A wood supernatural, not bad!” Li Hao exhaled. “Another Yama member... Are we fated to go against Yama today or what? They don't have that many people left by now, do they?”

He sat down cross-legged and started absorbing mysterious power. The young man took in whatever energy he could get his hands on. The imbalance with water was greatly rectified after one hundred and fifty cubes from earlier.

Altogether, he'd gained more than five hundred cubes of mysterious power since entering the ruins. Li Hao absorbed energy whenever he had a chance.

Vague sounds of conflict could be heard around them. The young man scanned the surroundings as he digested their latest gains and whispered, "Chief, there's a supernatural hidden beneath the tattered table in the ninth house ahead of us..."

Liu Long was used to these statements at this point! Supernaturals possessed poor vision in this environment and to be honest, martial masters weren't that much better off. Li Hao, on the other hand, was an enormous exception. He could pinpoint supernaturals from several hundred meters out. Their targets only had their bad luck to blame with the young man around, and his comrades were willing to kill whoever wasn't a Night Watcher or from the Sword Sect!

Liu Long vanished on the spot while Li Hao continued absorbing mysterious power. It felt so good to feast like this! He really did sense that he was about to enter Dominator of Thousands soon. He continuously explored the aura of earth and even connected to the ground here to perceive its unique ripples. He was also constantly strengthening the aura of the sword, but it seemed that a final spark was still missing when it came to melding the two together.

How am I supposed to fuse the auras of sword and earth together? Li Hao sank into deep thought. Heaven and earth... Does the sword create heaven and earth?

Using the sword to hew heaven and earth into being, just as the powerhouse he'd seen had done. That one broke through the vault of heaven with one stroke. In fact, it rather seemed that he created the universe from the move.

But if he imitated the same idea, would his aura of the sword shatter the aura of the earth?

Li Hao hesitated. In that case, his ear aura would vanish. It didn't seem a bad idea to focus only on the sword. Focusing on just one would be more ideal for a swordsman, but Li Hao wished more that he could both attack and defend. He didn't just want to have strong offensive power and have a dire shortage of defensive ability.

The young man was rather conflicted. He wanted to give it a try, but the loss would be too great if his aura of the earth was destroyed after the attempt. At the same time, stagnating at Sunderer of Hundreds wasn't the outcome he wanted either.

Sunflares abounded in the land these days and Solars could be found in all places as well. There might be even stronger Novas coming from the central region soon. A Sunderer was too piss-poor useless in this regard. He had to sneak around to kill people.

"Martial masters should forge bravely forward without doubt! I laughed at the chief's hesitation when he broke through to Dominator and teacher also said he lacked courage. Now that it's my turn, I totally get how that's easier said than done!" Li Hao laughed at himself. It was so easy for him to run his mouth back then and self-righteously declare that the chief was a wuss. The man hemmed and hawed and dragged his feet! Yet when it came to Li Hao's turn, he found out that it was truly a difficult decision to make. The repercussions would be enormous indeed if anything went wrong.

"If I do end up destroying my earth aura... That's fine. I'll just break through with my sword aura if it comes down to that. If I can reach the heights of the swordsman that I saw, just one aura will permit me to conquer the world!"

Li Hao made up his mind. He would give it a try! If he failed, he would ascend to Dominator with just one aura. He wouldn't be weaker than the chief, in any case. In fact, Li Hao felt that he would only be stronger as his sword aura came from an extraordinary source.

Having made up his mind and absorbed a large amount of wood energy, Li Hao rose to his feet. He didn't have to wait long before Liu Long came back, holding a bone dripping with blood.

"Do those Red Moon guys have any blood pearls on them?" The captain bared a bloodthirsty grin.

"We're in no rush and to be honest, we shouldn't extract any right now. Violet Moon might discover that something's wrong." Li Hao wasn't planning on extracting any that they found, not unless Violet Moon was already dead. She was sure to guess something once she found something amiss. That was too much of a hassle.

“Chief, I want to pick a fight with a Sunflare.” Li Hao smiled. “Will you stand as lookout for me?”

“Oh?”

“I want to break through!” Li Hao murmured. “I want to fight one-on-one with a Sunflare, just like I did with Sun Moxian. I’ll be able to incorporate my internal force with the aura during the fight and deploy my consciousness. I’m not like you, chief, or like my teacher. Both of you are veteran martial masters with years of experience. I’m too young—if I don’t use this method and just try to ascend by myself, I’ll probably fail!”

Everyone was different. Liu Long had benefited from years of accumulation, whereas Li Hao was too young. He didn’t have much hope of advancing in his current state.

“I think I need to borrow the momentum of killing a Sunflare,” Li Hao chuckled. “I’ll be able to set a foot forward when I’m in an invincible state!”

“Sunflares aren’t weak,” Liu Long responded after a while. “You being a Sunderer...”

“I am of the Five Styles!” Li Hao beamed. “I know the Nine Forged Force and the Ghost Shadow Sword! I killed Sun Moxian before this—he was about to break through! To be honest, that fight had a great impact on me. I think I’m heading toward a transformation that will truly make me an invincible martial master!”

“Very well.” Liu Long took a deep breath. “But I recommend seeking out an earth, water, or wood supernatural...”

“We’ll go with whoever I can find! Initial Sunflare will do, it doesn’t matter who!” Li Hao looked around to see if there were Sunflares working alone or with a few Darkmoons. There didn’t seem to be any on this street; there were a few balls of light a thousand meters ahead. However, that was too far for him to bother with the trip. He glanced at the street beside them. “There seems to be a

Sunflare there, I don't know who. We'll forget it if they're part of the Sword Sect, but kill whoever they are if they're from another faction!"

The Sword Sect had given him a sword, after all. Li Hao kept that firmly fixed in mind. Liu Long didn't say anything while Liu Yan didn't have an opinion either. They quickly headed for the next street over.