

Star Gate 251

Chapter 251: Breaking Through to Dominator of Thousands (IV)

Black Armors fought supernaturals through the entire outer city, as did some supernaturals fight each other. People crouched in waiting outside the ancient houses, lying in wait for the Bronze Armors to present themselves. There were also those hiding in the shadows and trying to determine if there was an opportunity to pick up scraps.

The eighth street.

A figure in black hid between two walls in a small alley, propping itself up in the air with its legs. It silently waited for prey to present itself. Darkness wrapped around the figure. Having braved the second passageway, its supernatural ripples were obscured and further concealed it in the gloom.

He was a dark supernatural of the Sunflare level and thus held an exceptional advantage when placed in this city. If it wasn't for his supernatural ripples, he would be as comfortable as a fish in water in these surroundings. Sadly, the telltale signs of his power were enormously troublesome and prevented him from drawing too close to his opponents.

But ever since entering the second passageway and having his power obscured, he realized that this was a playground for dark supernaturals! As a Celestial member, he bore his own mission. It was simple—kill as many people as possible.

Whether it was the Night Watchers, the other two organizations, the Sword Sect, or independent supernaturals... he was to kill whoever he came across.

Celestial's goals had always been strange and their style eerie. They were more like assassins, sometimes killing anyone of any kind and sometimes helping the very same. If it wasn't for how formidable the organization was, one as inconstant as they were would've been jointly eliminated by others a long time ago.

Naturally, Celestial possessed its unique strengths if it could survive to present day. They recruited large sums of dark attributed supernaturals, claiming eighty percent of all dark supernaturals as their members. That further added a layer of mystery to the organization.

They kept a very low profile, but were deemed sinister all the same. Randomly killing others without a clear motive was one of the reasons why. Therefore, not only did the Night Watchers label them as a terrorist organization, but so did Red Moon and Yama exclude their brethren from the list of people they could work with.

In the supernatural domain, they were more frequently regarded as an independent organization of assassins.

Just as the figure reviewed his mission, his ears twitched—someone was here. A person had slipped into the other end of the alley amid the darkness.

A mark's here! The Celestial member rejoiced. The other's face gradually came into view, becoming visible enough for the Celestial member to also catch a glimpse. He furrowed his brow. Li Hao?

A Sunderer!

That wasn't the key, but the young man's identity as one of the heirs to the eight families. Celestial's standing orders were to avoid killing Li Hao if possible and to get any information they could out of the young man. The best case scenario was if they could capture him alive.

As the man pondered whether to let Li Hao go since it wasn't ideal circumstances to take a captive... The young man approached from the other end of the alley.

"You seem to be a Celestial powerhouse," Li Hao suddenly said when he was ten meters away. "Is it not tiring to climb these walls? It's very dangerous if you go too high. Why don't you come down and show me the might of a Sunflare?"

He hoped for direct combat with the Sunflare. His opponent might not be able to respond in time if he ambushed the man.

The Celestial powerhouse jerked with surprise and immediately landed on the ground. He turned to leave. Celestial members preferred operating in the dark. It was time to retreat if they were found out. He was decisive even when the target was just a Sunderer. Direct combat was not the Celestial way.

Sword aura erupted behind him as he set out to leave!

“Did you ask to be excused before trying to leave?”

“You court death!” The Celestial Sunflare twitched with anger upon finding that a Sunderer dared attack him. Although Li Hao had killed Sun Moxian, a Sunderer was a Sunderer in the end. The young man was no Dominator!

The Celestial powerhouse whirled back around with a small sword in his hand. He stabbed it at Li Hao’s throat. Fast, accurate, vicious, and covert! Such were the characteristics of an assassin with the dark attribute.

Clang!

A clear collision rang out as Li Hao brought his sword up to check the blow. He raised an eyebrow as he was forced back a few steps. Sunflares were indeed much stronger than Darkmoons. This was his first time fighting a Sunflare by himself. Liu Long or his teacher had been involved on prior occasions and he was just a helper.

Li Hao swung his sword without a word, deploying the aura of the sword! At the same time, a mighty surge of earth aura manifested with a stomp of his foot.

“Eh?” The Celestial powerhouse started. What was going on? He seemed to see the earth rise and fall—was this what they called the aura? But... he knew that Li Hao commanded an aura of the sword. “Two auras?”

He suddenly grasped the situation. Yuan Shuo was known for fusing five auras together; his disciple had also comprehended two auras! No wonder the kid dared attack him. “Heh, I’m not staying around to play with you. You are a genius indeed, what a pity...”

Humm!

A sword reverberated in the air as Li Hao stabbed it forward without a word, preventing the other from leaving. “Someone must die when martial masters fight. You won’t be leaving unless you die!”

The two exchanged blows once more. A small sword darted in and out of the shadows. Li Hao tilted his head to the side, evading an attack, then turned for a kick. A Sunflare and a Sunderer grappled with each other in the tiny alley!

The Sunflare prepared to stay—or maybe he no longer had a choice in that matter. Li Hao seemed to want to test himself in single combat. In that case, he would kill Li Hao first because he sensed more people outside the alley.

The Celestial powerhouse abruptly understood everything. The one waiting possibly wanted to use him as a stepping stone for the young man. How dare you! I’ll have you taste regret when I’m done with Li Hao!

A sword pierce. A soundless killing. Li Hao’s sword aura shifted without noise—the Ghost Shadow Sword.

Two swords clashed against each other. The young man’s sharpness knew no bounds when he drew upon his recollection of that stroke that severed the heavens. While he comprehended only a

fraction of what that blow entailed, every move that he deployed as a result was sufficient to raise the hairs on the back of his opponent's neck.

Meanwhile, the Celestial powerhouse's sword was uncanny beyond belief. It struck from inconceivable angles and almost stabbed Li Hao a few times.

The two exchanged blows in a rapid frenzy and continuously changed positions. One blade sank into the target's body—Li Hao was the first to be injured. The sword stabbed so deep that bone could be seen.

He didn't care and punched with his other hand, as if a vicious tiger swiping its paw. His right hand gripped the sword and his left hand waved a fist, forcing the other back so he had space to slash his sword forward again!

The Ghost Shadow Sword was formless and intangible; Li Hao slashed a dozen times in quick succession and exhaled a breath of sword qi! It pierced through the Celestial member's shoulder with a soft puncture!

"Oof!" A muffled grunt came back on the wind. The Celestial Sunflare was shocked; it wasn't that he'd never seen Sunderers before, but those who could stand toe-to-toe with Sunflares were few and far in between. Or rather, he only knew of a few veteran martial masters who'd grasped the aura for many years that could accomplish the deed.

Li Hao was too young!

The young man didn't care—all he thought about right now was how to kill his opponent. He might be able to break through after that! If not, then he would have to try breaking through heaven and earth with his sword.

The Sunflare was target practice to see if he could meld his auras. After a series of probing maneuvers, Li Hao suddenly found it regretful. This guy wasn't that strong. Indeed, he might be

able to win the battle if they kept fighting like this. He didn't need to advance to the next cultivation level.

So this was all that initial Sunflare was good for! Li Hao didn't find himself any weaker, not when he was equipped with two auras.

Can this guy even force me to use the sword aura to break the earth aura? The young man frowned. If his opponent's caliber was too low, it would not lead to good results if he forcefully used the auras on his own.

The dark supernatural seemed to fly into equal parts rage and urgency after his shoulder was pierced through. His thoughts of easily killing Li Hao were no more. He'd wanted to save some strength for those to come, but the young man was more difficult to resolve than previously imagined!

"You have a death wish!" he snorted and flooded the surroundings with the power of darkness. Both the supernatural and Li Hao were pulled into a ball of dark light. Soundless and formless, not even Liu Long waiting outside sensed anything amiss.

Li Hao, however, did. He was enveloped by the gloom and caught in a swamp of darkness. It felt like cotton filled his surroundings and deadened his senses. The next sword stroke that arrived shot straight at his throat. The young man's reaction was slower than before. He brought his sword up to check the blow, but was just slow enough that his opponent waved it aside. The thin sword once more aimed at his throat.

Li Hao's eyes widened with surprise and joy. And here I was, thinking he's a bit weak. So this is why—he was pulling his punches!

Internal force roiled within the young man's body as the enemy attacked him once more. The aura of the earth appeared and a faint sliver of consciousness manifested near his throat. It blocked the small sword with a clang, but a tiny bloody mark formed on Li Hao's throat.

This was what he wanted!

Li Hao was delighted. This was the kind of opponent he hoped to meet, one that could threaten his life!

The dark supernatural grew more alarmed as the fight recommenced. He no longer held anything back, but he still couldn't defeat Li Hao. The boy was growing fiercer the more they battled!

The two were snarled in the murk. Bloody marks appeared on Li Hao's body, but each one excited him further and he continuously tried to meld the two auras together. Although he was unpracticed, he tasted some success when he occasionally attacked and defended in the same breath.

The battle formation of Black Armors appeared in his mind's eye. The shields focused on defense and gave way for spears and swords to jab outward. That was also a type of coordination between attack and defense, and it was very strong! A group of Black Armors had withstood a crowd of Solars. If it hadn't been for enemies to their rear as well, the expedition team wouldn't have so easily defeated the soldiers.

The moment defense vanishes is when I attack! Attacking is a type of defense too, killing the enemy is naturally defending myself. Li Hao sensed the coordination and fusion between the two auras according to his own comprehension. Did the sword have to break through heaven and earth?

Not necessarily! Had the swords and spears smashed the shields? No! Coordination wasn't necessarily at the cost of one or the other.

Li Hao suddenly had a deeper understanding of the two auras. The aura of the earth vanished, instantly replaced by an upwelling of the sword. The Earthturner Sword flashed forward and left a trace on the Celestial powerhouse's body. The dark supernatural's heart spasmed with surprise.

Li Hao was growing stronger!

Meanwhile, the young man exulted in this coordination of his auras.

Chapter 252: Breaking Through to Dominator of Thousands (V)

The aura of the earth contains the aura of the sword, and the aura of the sword contains the aura of the earth. ...Earth encloses sword?

Li Hao coined a new term and turned his thoughts to earth supernaturals. Some of them utilized spikes of wood and occasionally embedded sharp rocks in the spikes to stab the enemy to death! His earth aura abruptly shifted and a sword seemed to grow from the ground. On strict defense up to this point, Li Hao abruptly struck with the sword!

It cut into his opponent, causing the dark supernatural's heart to jolt with fear. The urge to run gripped him. Was this kid about to ascend to Dominator of Thousands? The man wanted to flee! His body shifted as he prepared to escape, but a vigorous aura of the earth swelled around him. There seemed to be numerous intangible walls within his vicinity!

Li Hao stepped forward and slashed at his target. Spikes jutted out of the formless walls at the same time, all aimed at the Celestial Sunflare!

The man shouted with fury upon seeing that he couldn't get away. He jabbed back in response, finding a perfect opening to pierce through. However, a wall seemed to appear over Li Hao's sword. The supernatural's sword slowed like it'd sunk into a swamp; he found it impossible to advance further. It was then that Li Hao swung his sword in a reverse sweep and severed his opponent's arm!

"Ahhh!" A pained gasp broke out of the Celestial member. He stared incredulously at Li Hao, shocked that an earth aura had risen out of a sword aura. What was that??

Li Hao, however, was overjoyed. Who cared what his opponent thought?? He swung again and again, his sword aura as unending as the force of the earth. It shot forth from all directions, leaving countless marks on the supernatural's body.

Seeing his opponent wracked with pain and about to roar with fury, Li Hao abruptly changed the sword aura around his weapon. It was now exceedingly robust, as weighty as Mount Tai coming down on his target! Hints of a keen blade were intermixed with sturdy presence at the same time, forming a strength that could destroy all things!

The combination of earth and sword aura!

The earth aura enhanced strength—who said that the earth was only good for defense? It could also attack! Li Hao's sword stroke was similar to the heavy earth attacks of earth supernaturals, but contained an indomitable power of destruction as well!

Boom!

Rumbles rang out as sword light enveloped the shadow. At the end of the alley, Liu Long widened his eyes for a look when he heard the disturbance. There appeared to be a mountain bearing down in the sword light, one that was of blades and fire!

Craaaaack!

The earth aura forced the Celestial Sunflare to his knees in unbearable agony. Sword light flashed by and sliced him into two! Despite killing his opponent, Li Hao did not stop. He waved his sword again and summoned the Sword of Mount Tai. He slashed forward!

Faint marks were inflicted onto the ground with a large bam, but they quickly began to repair. The young man took a step forward and sprinted for Liu Long, his earth and sword aura exploding in unison.

The team captain frowned and sent a wave roiling in response. Wave and a stroke of Mount Tai collided with each other. Wave was extinguished and Mount Tai was decimated with a loud explosion. Their respective wielders grunted softly. Li Hao slashed forward again—Liu Long met him with a punch. The young man needed a little more of a push to complete his breakthrough, just as Yuan Shuo had once furthered the process when Liu Long progressed.

He didn't mind giving Li Hao a hand, just that this hand was extended with great difficulty. It was exceedingly easy for Yuan Shuo to hit me, but damn if it isn't painful for me to hit Li Hao...

The three auras clashed again with a loud bang!

Liu Long pushed off from the ground as he was forced backward. Irritated, he answered with a wave of the Nine Forged Force. He was going to churn the Sword of Mount Tai away, obliterate the mountain peak, and stamp out the sword qi in one fell swoop!

Li Hao struck once more, unending and unbounded! How could waves ever destroy the earth?

Humm!

Various noises echoed in the alleyway as a wave of nine layers could not destroy Li Hao's sword technique. The wave weakened until the young man struck a dozen times in the blink of an eye!

Liu Long firmly planted his feet into the ground as a massive collision rang out. This time, he stumbled back more than ten steps and didn't stop until he crashed into the buildings on the other side of the alley. He almost fell into an ancient house!

Pfft!

Shocked, he spat out a mouthful of blood. After shock came... a mental breakdown as he could not accept the outcome. How was this possible?! Even if Li Hao had risen to Dominator, the lad was just an initial Dominator! I've been one for a few days now and I'm a veteran martial master. What of Li Hao??

Across the way, the young man came back to his senses. His expression shifted slightly when he saw Liu Long spit out blood and he bit through his tongue, coughing out blood himself.

"Chief... is... really... amazing..." he panted. "I've... suffered... internal damage... If I hadn't strengthened my five organs during this time... The Nine Forged Force... would've shattered my organs... Chief... you... were too ruthless!"

Liu Long looked skeptically at Li Hao. Was this real?

“Chief...” Liu Long garbled. “Hurry and get me... out of here. The disturbance... was too great... others will have... sensed it.”

“Alright!” Liu Long suppressed his skepticism and swiftly offered his back to the young man. “Are you hurt?”

“Yes!”

“Have you broken through?”

“You can say that!”

Breaking through to Dominator didn’t result in a large commotion. That was ever the case with martial masters. Their strength extended from inside out, so any changes were contained within the body. Supernatural ascension caused a significant ruckus as the breaking of locks and chains clinked and clanked without end.

Wang Ming advancing to Sunflare, for instance, had been a noticeable event. Li Hao, Yuan Shuo, and Liu Long hadn’t given off external signs when they set foot into Dominator. It was a spontaneous convergence of aura and consciousness.

Liu Yan rushed over at this time. “Li Hao, how could you hit the chief?!” she murmured.

“I didn’t, it was because... the pressure to break through... wasn’t enough. I needed... chief’s strength... to stimulate the change... in my aura! Chief... was too strong... and hurt my organs! We need to... retreat!”

Liu Long was beginning to feel embarrassed, but he was still skeptical. Am I really too strong? The hell, I feel like I'm the one who was injured, so how come your wounds are worse? Were you injured when you fought the other guy earlier?

"You're very strong to meld two auras together... I hadn't thought that you'd succeed so quickly. Li Hao, I feel that you... you might soon exceed me."

Might?

Liu Long himself wasn't certain of that. He could only keep his doubts to himself. The kid was nothing good and might not tell him the truth if he asked.

Li Hao smiled from his position on Liu Long's back. Thank goodness I acted fast enough, or chief might die from anger right now. He was reliving everything that had just happened. The Sword of Mount Tai was the name that he gave his move. It was as weighty as Mount Tai, but also incomparably keen. He had a hunch that killing Sunflares wouldn't be a difficulty with it in hand!

Li Hao was beginning to feel a little too pleased with himself. He couldn't! He needed to remain grounded and keep a low profile!

Teacher could kill Solars as soon as he became a Dominator because he melded five aura together. I'm nothing compared to him! It's hard for me to kill mid or late Sunflares at this stage. When I'm compared to teacher... forget it, I need to work harder!

Meanwhile, the captain who carried him did seem a bit weak. A Dominator with just one aura... is a little too weak for words! Man, I have to keep in mind that I need to show face to the chief in the future. I can't be stronger than him in front of others, he might not be able to accept it.

Li Hao happily reminisced over events that'd just taken place. The most noticeable difference of becoming a Dominator was being able to direct his aura according to his will—this was the effect of mind intent!

The aura and mind intent were the same concept. It was called the aura in the Sunderer stage, whereas Dominators liked to call it mind intent. As mind intent, it could be directed by one's thoughts.

Prior to this, Li Hao had to stomp his foot whenever he activated the earth aura. It wasn't that he had a particular habit of doing so, but that stomping his foot made it easier to connect to the earth. He had to think back to the sword stroke of that day whenever he deployed his sword aura because simulating that scene helped him access his aura.

All of that took time. Granted, it was a very short period of time and wouldn't normally delay anything. But if the enemy was familiar with his capabilities, they might interrupt him when he stomped his foot.

After he advanced to Dominator, Li Hao found that he didn't need to undergo those preparatory motions. He could call upon his aura as soon as he thought about it, such was mind intent! Not only that, but the young man realized that he had many more reflections and discoveries to sort through.

Various bottlenecks had been shattered after he progressed. There had been limits to the amount of internal force he could store before. Now that the upper limit was broken, his body started generating more force. He could even sense the locks within himself—the so-called supernatural locks. They sealed off a lot of his body. His consciousness continued to slowly transform. Li Hao closed his eyes to let the sensations wash over him.

Liu Long avoided other supernaturals as he carried Li Hao on his back. He carefully walked around the streets. Some movement could be heard from where they'd just battled—more fighting. It was most likely people struggling over the mysterious power left by the dark supernatural.

Neither Liu Long nor Li Hao had taken any because they wanted to stall for time. As was demonstrated, no one could ignore several hundred cubes placed there for the taking. They wouldn't bother chasing their enemies for the moment.

Who would forgo mysterious power waiting to be claimed? Powerhouses that'd rushed to the site were probably already ripping at each other for the spoils. Fights like these were a frequent sight on the streets of the outer city. Who knew how many would be alive to reconvene at the inner city gates?

Liu Long trotted to the edge of the plaza, but didn't set foot in it. He stopped next to the perimeter as there were fewer people here. Any fights that broke out in this proximity would be easily noticed by those standing guard outside.

"How are you now?" Liu Long whispered. Were the boy's injuries that bad? He'd been skeptical before, but now wondered if he really had hurt Li Hao that badly. A Dominator should recover quickly enough.

Chapter 253: An Honest and Simple Little Li Hao (I)

Li Hao didn't respond to Liu Long; he focused on quietly sensing the condition of his organs. His heart was a little stronger than the rest of the five. When taking into consideration the mysterious power that his teacher had previously given him, it meant his heart had absorbed roughly five hundred cubes of fire energy.

Then came his spleen and kidneys in terms of amount absorbed. They respectively corresponded to the earth and water elements. After killing earth supernatural Li Dahu and receiving one hundred fifty cubes of water energy from the Revolution King, it meant that both organs had absorbed approximately four hundred cubes each.

The liver and lungs corresponded to the wood and metal elements. They were strengthened the least at roughly three hundred cubes each. Just his five organs alone had consumed approximately eighteen hundred cubes of mysterious power. He'd also absorbed some wind, thunder, and unattributed power. The combined total was more than two thousand—it was a stunning number!

Although this wasn't a difficult amount for the three great organizations or Night Watchers to produce, it was almost impossible for one person alone to consume it all.

Granted, the factions likely wouldn't dissent if the person in question guaranteed a swift progression to Dominator. No one would object to creating a Dominator from two thousand cubes of mysterious power.

I am unable to maintain the elemental balance as fire energy is still the strongest in my body... There was no helping it as he'd truly met more fire supernaturals than the rest. The Solar Qiao Feilong and his Sunflare subordinates had all been fire attributed. Even Hao Lianchuan and Sun Yifei were of fire.

"Chief." Li Hao opened his eyes and looked at Liu Long. "How much metal and wood energy are in the two hundred cubes that Yama gave you?"

Li Hao had returned the energy to Liu Long after the man returned. The Revolution King was an interesting fellow to give them three elements while wholly missing out on fire and water.

"Roughly one hundred cubes of metal." Liu Long had glanced briefly at his bounty before, but was only able to give an overall estimation. "Sixty of earth and less of wood at roughly forty cubes."

Metal energy amounted to the most as the Revolution King might have happened upon the corpse of a metal supernatural.

"Lend me two hundred cubes, chief. I'll return them to you later on..."

Liu Long didn't need to balance his five organs for the time being, he was still nurturing his kidneys. Therefore, Li Hao hoped to borrow his mysterious power first, particularly the cubes of metal energy. His metal and earth elements were out of alignment, representing that his sword and earth auras weren't balanced either.

If he could obtain one hundred cubes of metal energy, that would mean he'd absorbed roughly four hundred cubes of both elements. That would just barely reach a state of equilibrium between his elements.

Li Hao was different from Yuan Shuo in that the professor's five auras were evenly matched, so there was no issue if he strengthened one organ or all five at the same time. Li Hao, however, needed to develop two auras in conjunction.

Liu Long threw some bones to the young man without further word. Li Hao looked into the distance—the entire outer city was shrouded in darkness. He wasn't interested in participating in those struggles anymore. His organs needed to be strengthened first.

The little sword might be fully depleted after absorbing this round of mysterious power—he'd have to slowly nurture his organs on his own or obtain some blood pearls after that. The latter provided decent effects as it fortified the entire body. While it didn't pinpoint specific areas like the five elements did, one could swiftly digest it without the need for sword energy.

The sword at his waist sparkled with a very faint, dim hue. Li Hao started absorbing once more. He could endure more after setting foot into Dominator and digested energy more quickly than before. His capacity had grown larger after his body grew stronger.

Satiation was forthcoming when he previously absorbed mysterious power. The same wasn't happening even after he absorbed a few dozen cubes of metal mysterious power this time.

His lungs were strengthened and the metal energy was completely consumed after half an hour. The young man started on wood energy, setting aside earth energy for now as he didn't want to break the newfound balance. He was less than ten cubes in when...

Li Hao opened his eyes, lost and disappointed. There was no more sword energy! Although he knew that the little bit left would quickly be exhausted, it was still a forlorn feeling to suddenly run out.

His breakthrough to Dominator had much to do with sword energy. He wouldn't have made such swift progress on the path of martial dao if not for this energy. And now, it was gone.

The stone door ruins that Yuan Shuo had found last time could replenish the sword, but they didn't exude energy fast enough. The vast sum that the sword had absorbed previously had accumulated over a long period of time.

It'd only been a few days since they refilled the weapons of the eight families. While his teacher said that there may be eight stone doors, Yuan Shuo was yet to find a second ruin after investigating

Silver City for a few days. He'd gone into closed door cultivation before continuing his explorations and now Yuan Shuo was gone entirely.

Thus, there was no effective way that Li Hao could currently employ to restore his sword.

"Ai!" Li Hao put these thoughts out of his mind after an imperceptible sigh. This was good enough! His lungs and spleen had absorbed roughly four hundred cubes each, as did his kidneys. There was a small balance between them too. A little less wood energy and a little more fire energy at this stage didn't affect the equilibrium that much.

Should he start summoning his spirits? He needed to further develop his sword and earth auras, but would his three other organs be able to endure the strain?

Nurturing a spirit was a process that permitted the usage of the aura, but that usage easily broke the balance of elements and levied incredible stress on the five visceral organs. His teacher had absorbed nearly one thousand cubes of fire energy to successfully summon the fire heart ape. Li Hao didn't hope for immediate success; the process of nurturing his spirits was also one that strengthened the auras.

Teacher only has a strong heart, none of his other organs are on par with mine. He still dared forcefully summon the tiger spirit under those circumstances and even forced it into manifesting. On a whole, my organs aren't any weaker than teacher's!

"Chief, keep an eye out for me." He looked at Liu Long when his thoughts traveled here. "I'm going to cultivate for a bit. Unless I say something, you can ignore me even if anything unexpected happens."

Liu Long frowned slightly, but still nodded. The young man closed his eyes again moments later, wanting to meld his earth aura into his spleen. The earth was an expansive, tolerant entity that might be easier to tackle than the sword aura.

The aura moves according to the mind!

The aura of the earth rose in his spleen in accordance with his thoughts. Yuan Shuo's auras of the five styles manifested as the five animals. Liu Long's Nine Forged aura of the sea took the shape of the waves. Li Hao's aura of the earth became a mountain.

A mountain did not represent the earth, but it was what Li Hao focused on at the moment. It was a specialization of heavy earth and not the entire earth. The young man was unable to present the unbounded aura of the earth—he would have to reach higher levels for that to be possible.

A mountain entered his spleen with a boom that only his heart and ears could hear. Enormous pressure exploded in his spleen, shaking it to the point of bleeding. Color drained from Li Hao's face! But he didn't panic thanks to the guide of Yuan Shuo's tutelage and experience. Such was the benefit of having a good teacher, he knew what to do under these circumstances.

He closely observed his spleen with his mind and discovered something new. A tremendous peak rammed itself against a lock in the internal world of the spleen—the supernatural lock!

He needed to subdue the earth aura, but just as his teacher had encountered when pacifying the fire heart ape, Yuan Shuo's heart hadn't been strong enough to bring the ape to heel. The professor had to utilize his supernatural locks to help him suppress the fire heart ape and lock it away.

This was what Li Hao planned to do now—utilize the might of his supernatural locks to immobilize the mountain. The prerequisite to that was his supernatural locks needed to be stronger than his aura!

If the lock proved weaker than the aura and broke to the mountain, then Li Hao would either die or ascend to the supernatural. It used to be that martial masters craved making the crossover, but Li Hao wasn't willing to anymore. It was not his path even though he'd be stronger after rising to the supernatural world.

Clatter!

The faint sound of chains echoed in his ears. A sturdy and durable chain snaked toward the mountain. While the landmass wasn't as hot-headed or resisted as violently as the fire heart ape, it still shook without pause!

Each oscillation was exceedingly unbearable and accumulated as blood seeping out the corners of Li Hao's mouth. His other four organs were shaking as well. No wonder his teacher said that the other organs needed to be strong as well—otherwise, the remaining four might shatter at any time.

His teacher had taken a week to subdue the fire heart ape. He did so for a different purpose; Li Hao was simply temporarily locking his aura away so he could nurture it. His teacher was ready to physically manifest his auras at any time. Not to mention, that had been his teacher's first attempt. He spent most of his time strengthening the heart. Meanwhile, strengthening his organs was part of Li Hao's daily routine. This was his final step in that stage—locking the aura in place!

.....

Liu Long watched the young man silently, understanding certain things. As a Dominator, he knew what Li Hao was attempting—a summoning of the spirit! To think that the young man would start summoning his spirits as soon as he reached Dominator!

The team captain thought back to Yuan Shuo's words and how the professor had told him to strengthen his five visceral organs, particularly his kidneys. Li Hao looked to be strong enough already, so that little bastard was lying when he said he suffered internal damage earlier. The kid was awful!

Liu Long put those thoughts out of his mind and silently watched the proceedings. Observation was a type of cultivation. In asking him to stand guard, it meant that Li Hao didn't intend to keep any part of the process a secret.

“Summoner of Spirit means for the aura to enter the five organs. I can vaguely hear the sound of chains and the fire heart ape was wrapped by chains...”

Chains...

Supernatural locks!

“So the supernatural locks keep the aura in the organs? Does this mean that the earth aura is erupting and entering the spleen right now?” Liu Long took a close look. Indeed, Li Hao’s spleen was bleeding, some of which had oozed outside. How strong were the young man’s organs?

Liu Long didn’t know, but he knew that they had to be much stronger than his. Yet, judging from Li Hao’s pale face, even he couldn’t withstand the process. He was having a difficult time subduing his earth aura.

“Therefore... my organs probably won’t be able to endure it either!” Liu Long furrowed his brows, this would be difficult. It looked like a long span of time was needed to nurture the five organs.

“Should he use a blood pearl to strengthen them overall?” He looked at Li Hao and quickly shook his head. The young man hadn’t enhanced his organs to their limits.

Liu Long speculated that the young man could so quickly fortify his organs thanks to the sword in his hand. But he’d stopped soon after switching to wood energy; he’d reached a bottleneck. It looked like the aid offered by the sword was no more. Otherwise, Li Hao would only need to repeat his actions from their sparring sessions and absorb that energy for swift recovery. And yet, the young man did not.

Chapter 254: An Honest and Simple Little Li Hao (II)

So the kid’s being forced into summoning his spirit now because he has no other choice after running out of that special energy. Otherwise, he’d wait until he was absolutely sure of success before attempting the process! Having been team captain for many years, Liu Long easily parsed the basic logic at hand.

Yuan Shuo was just being arrogant when he called Liu Long an idiot. Who dared affix that descriptor to the man? He’d deduced many things in only a few moments, including the fact that Li Hao’s life-saving energy was depleted. Liu Long also found it a bit of a pity that there was no more.

Whether it was handling injuries or needing to recover in situations to come, it would all be a huge hassle!

“Pfft!” Li Hao spat out a mouthful of blood. Liu Long wanted to move to his side when he recalled the young man’s words—ignore him unless he said anything. Thus, Liu Long also stopped a worried Liu Yan with a slight shake of his head.

Li Hao was battling the massive mountain. Suppression! Chains wrapped around the enormous peak as it shook and trembled. Everytime it quivered, the young man grew exceedingly concerned for his lock. If this continues... my supernatural lock will break!

Teacher said that suppression became much easier after he utilized his chains. Is my supernatural lock too weak for the job? He’d been too hasty, but he had no other choice. He was out of sword energy. Was he supposed to wait until that was replenished before locking his aura in place? There was no need for that!

His urgency mounted as the situation continued; failure began to loom over Li Hao. If he continued to struggle with the mountain, that would spell the end of his breakthrough attempt and possibly even damage to his organs. If he succeeded, then some injury was fine. If he failed, that was a tremendous loss.

My supernatural lock isn’t strong enough...

My lock isn’t strong enough, my foundations aren’t enough... They’re not solid enough...

Various thoughts flashed through his mind as internal force flared inside his body. Li Hao suddenly had another thought—a thought that belonged wholly to himself. It was something not even Yuan Shuo could accomplish.

Internal force flowed into the spleen and strengthened the supernatural lock—of that, everyone was well aware of. But what of the Nine Forged Force? Could that also replicate the lock with nine

layers of force? Even two or three times would put the supernatural lock on even footing with the mountain.

If I strengthen the lock with internal force and layer it to increase its strength, then send it into motion, will that spontaneously suppress the mountain?

Only he and Liu Long knew the Nine Forged Force, no one else could walk in their footsteps. This was a process full of innovation and danger. What if the Nine Forged Force broke his supernatural lock instead?

Thump thump thump! echoed from Li Hao's body. Liu Long took another look and frowned when he recognized the method. What was the lad operating the Nine Forged Force for?

Nine Forged Force... Layering of internal force... Is he sending internal force to the spleen to subdue his earth aura? Liu Long frowned and looked carefully at Li Hao. The young man's spleen was bleeding even more heavily. Internal bleeding often threatened life itself, so what was Li Hao doing?

The Nine Forged Force was spontaneous destruction that came from layering force, shaking it, and reassembling it. What did he want to strengthen?

His aura?

Impossible!

Then... his supernatural lock so it could suppress the earth aura? Liu Long understood when he took another glance, but also sucked in a sharp breath. The kid was the epitome of a newborn calf not being afraid of a tiger! Using the Nine Forged Force to layer his supernatural lock would either break it, or create so much force that his spleen was ripped apart. The only other possibility was that he succeeded in bringing the earth aura to heel, but that was the lowest likelihood out of the three possibilities.

Liu Long's frown deepened as he simulated everything in his mind. He spoke up when he suddenly thought of something, "Don't be in a rush and don't do this. No, I'm not saying to not use the Nine Forged Force. What you need to do is split your internal force into five parts and strengthen all five locks of your visceral organs at the same time! The five visceral organs are a circulatory system and one whole. The strength of one contributes to the strength of all, but when all five are strong, one is strong as well!"

Anyone else would be utterly baffled by these words, but Li Hao instantly understood. He'd gotten sidetracked! Strengthening his five supernatural locks meant that his spleen might be enhanced as well. The danger was lower and the five organs formed a circulatory system.

Liu Long was a veteran martial master at the end of the day; he emphasized stability when it came to training. Li Hao's way of focusing on one organ wasn't impossible, but it was much more dangerous.

The young man thought briefly and decided to listen to his elder. He wouldn't necessarily come off any worse for the wear, but he might suffer greatly if he didn't.

Splitting his internal force into five parts was also a test of his control over internal force. Martial masters rarely lost control over their internal force as it naturally budded within the body. Not much preparatory work needed to be done as it wasn't an external resource. Control naturally followed when that strength appeared.

Five currents of internal force surged into the five organs, strengthening five supernatural locks. The one of the spleen suddenly trembled. Li Hao tried bringing more force to bear—it suppressed the mountain with a loud rumble. But for the barest moment, the young man sensed that the struggles against the lock were too great and his spleen suffered further damage. Not only that, but cracks began crawling through the chain.

Li Hao jolted with shock. Thank goodness he'd split his internal force into five or it might really have rammed through the lock.

BOOM!

He dismissed some of his internal force and didn't dare layer it too many times. Just twice. The supernatural lock swiftly absorbed the force that flowed in and shook once more in the process. It clamped down more firmly over the mountain and locked one corner away!

Once... twice...

Li Hao tried again and again. While his body continuously produced internal force, he weakened at a rate visible to the naked eye. Color drained from his face as the essence within his body was consumed by his five visceral organs.

A gigantic rumble sounded after an indeterminate period of time, accompanied by the clatter of chains. A large mountain towered inside the spleen, fully immobilized by the supernatural lock. Vertigo assailed Li Hao when he opened his eyes.

"How is it?" Liu Long quickly asked.

"I just managed to lock it away..." Li Hao panted. "I consumed too much energy and depleted my internal force. My organs are damaged, but... it was worth it!"

It was very worth it!

When his supernatural lock melded with his earth aura, Li Hao discovered that the lock was now growing with the mountain. When there came a day that his earth aura could emerge from his spleen, he would be a Summoner of Spirit just like his teacher!

That was out of reach for the moment. All he could do was barely utilize the earth aura and the mountain that represented it. It would have to emerge from his spleen for him to be a true Summoner. Otherwise, he was just a Dominator beginning to spy into the secrets of Summoner of Spirit.

Even so, it was quite a feat as he'd just set foot into Dominator!

"You're... gravely injured!" Liu Long assessed unhappily. "Can you not heal yourself anymore?"

"Yep." Li Hao nodded with a fatigued smile. "Don't worry, I just look weak. I'll be even stronger when my internal force recovers!"

Liu Long nodded, then suddenly raised, "You could withstand your aura invading your organ, but suffered heavy internal damage when my aura of the waves didn't even enter your body. How come your organs go from weak to strong so quickly?"

"....."

Silence.

"Chief, I'm actually injured now!" Li Hao coughed softly.

Liu Long swept him with a cold glare. Got nothing to say now, huh, you little bastard? He couldn't be bothered to take Li Hao to task for his lie. "Do you think... I can give it a try?"

Li Hao opened his mouth, but didn't have a response.

"The answer is no, isn't it?" Liu Long's expression was a sight to behold.

"That's not it..." Li Hao laughed dryly. "But chief, we should first slowly nurture our auras and organs. My... situation is a bit unique, you know how it is. My organs are already very strong, so I decided to just give it a try. But don't worry, I'll help you when I think of a way and get my hands on some goodies..."

“Forget it!” Liu Long deflated, then quickly recovered his composure. “I’m already satisfied with being able to set foot into Dominator! At least there’s a path ahead and Dominator is just the beginning. My internal force and organs are still developing. They haven’t reached their limits yet. Once they do, I’ll be able to fight peak Sunflare at the very least. I’m in no hurry.”

The path of martial dao was to be walked slowly. Li Hao had taken a shortcut, but that was his fortuitous opportunity. Or rather, one left behind by the Li ancestors. If he had an incomparably strong forefather who’d left behind these treasures to resolve these obstacles, he might be in a greater hurry than Li Hao or keep more to himself. The young man hadn’t withheld that many secrets from the rest of the team.

“What supernatural level do you think you’ll map to when you recover? Can you fight a late Solar like your teacher?”

“.....” Li Hao raised his head and looked blankly at Liu Long. A late Solar? You... you really think the world of me! I’m just nurturing my auras, I’m not a real Summoner. There’s still a difference between me and teacher. Teacher’s auras had reached great perfection—while I’m not sure where mine are, I know that my supernatural locks aren’t strong enough.

My auras are also in an initial state, teacher’s are on a completely different plane! He succeeded decades ago. How am I supposed to compare to him?

“Chief, I’ll tell you when I reach great perfection with my auras!” Li Hao laughed wryly. “I’ve depleted too many resources and exhausted my internal force. I can’t meld the second aura at the moment. I can try when I’ve recovered!”

He had to give up the sword aura for the time being. That had to wait until later!

The young man also felt that the sword aura would be much more difficult and dangerous. It was best not to try it for now. He couldn’t help but think of the source for the sword aura. What if his lungs were pierced clean through by the sword stroke?

A sword didn't want to be confined in the first place, particularly the one that he'd seen. If the process of nurturing the sword was similar to locking down the earth aura... then he wouldn't try nurturing his sword aura unless he strengthened his lungs to the level of one thousand cubes!

"That's just as well..." the young man mumbled. The sword aura for the outside and earth aura inside. The combination of offensive outer and defensive inner suited his purposes. He stumbled as he rose to his feet and glanced at the outer city. "Let's go, chief. Let's go directly to the city gates and not waste time with the ones inside the city anymore. Anyone can tell that I'm gravely injured, so withdrawing from training won't be losing face for the Five Styles discipline."

The biggest lure of the outer city was the prospect of obtaining mysterious power. But without sword energy, Li Hao didn't lust for mysterious power as much.

"Alright!" Liu Long didn't mind. His goal was to kill Li Dahu—they'd crossed that off a long time ago. Hunting supernaturals for their mysterious power... Since he was a Dominator and didn't hold hopes of ascending to the supernatural world, that energy no longer held as much allure for him.

It was also why the Solars didn't really care about mysterious power. Breaking the fifth supernatural lock wasn't a matter of accumulating mysterious power. It required time—time to slowly wear away at the lock until it was broken. If one tried to ram right through it, it was more likely that self-detonation was the ending instead!

When one reached Solar, one could also partake of mysterious power naturally produced by the world. It was what the Revolution King meant by Hao Lianchuan being able to produce more than one hundred cubes in two months.

Chapter 255: An Honest and Simple Little Li Hao (III)

Everything remained a mess inside the outer city. Director He and the rest of the team had been resigned by the disappearance of Liu Long, Liu Yan, and Li Hao. There was nothing they could do about losing the trail as the three were martial masters. As they were too hard to locate, the second Night Watcher team had to give up the idea of using them as bait.

Being injured, Li Hao no longer wished to run into supernaturals. He directed Liu Long away from all of them. There were much fewer balls of light in the city now. He noted the concealed Celestial and Sword Sect Solar when he looked around. They were likely up to nothing good as the young man saw multiple balls of light disappear around them.

Who was the Sword Sect Solar hunting? And who was the Celestial Solar hunting?

Li Hao wasn't worried about the Night Watchers as the second team possessed a mid Solar. If anyone dared attack them, they'd be killed in return. Zhang Ting would finally act when her own life was in danger.

As for the first team, metal supernatural Director Zhou was very strong as a peak Sunflare. There were numerous Sunflares in that team, which presented a thorny issue for an individual Solar seeking to ambush the group.

Keeping those thoughts in mind, Li Hao and his two companions made their way through numerous streets and drew close to the inner city gates. Balls of light abounded over there and someone heard them coming from far away.

Hu Dingfang broke through the air—he didn't dare fly, but he was extremely fast nonetheless. He went slack jawed with shock when he saw Li Hao on Liu Long's back. The young man was as white as a sheet, his internal force depleted, and blood stained his clothes.

“What happened??” Hao Lianchuan rushed over as well. He thought Li Hao was putting on an act at first, but his expression quickly changed too. It was too real to be an act—the young man had gotten thinner as a result of expending too many internal resources and emptying his internal force. “Who did this??”

They were both stunned. Liu Long was a Dominator and the two were with the Night Watchers. Who could still harm Li Hao to this degree?

The two weren't the only ones concerned. Violet Moon and the others frowned when they took note of Li Hao's condition. How had the young man ended up in these straits? Violet Moon had given orders to her people to either capture Li Hao when they saw him, or leave him alone if they couldn't. Red Moon wouldn't act against Li Hao. Was it Celestial or Yama behind the deed?

Blood trickled out of the corner of the young man's mouth when he coughed. He looked at the group and said haltingly, "I'm... fine. It's just my organs that are damaged... my internal force depleted... and my foundations injured..."

And that was called fine?

Faces darkened and Hu Dingfang grew irritable. "Who did it?!"

He wouldn't die of his injuries now, would he? Would Li Hao be able to continue cultivating even if he recovered? His condition was too critical!

Hu Dingfang had swindled Old Demon Yuan out of one final disciple, if a second final disciple was crippled on his watch... He really wouldn't be able to explain himself.

"I'm... not sure," Li Hao coughed and shook his head. "I... didn't even see them... They were too strong and too fast..." The young man took a deep breath. "I only saw a flash of a dark shadow. I had time to raise my internal force for one instance of defense... They were a dark supernatural..."

Many looked to the Celestial powerhouse upon hearing these words. His name was Ding Chen; most dark supernaturals came from this organization. Hidden beneath his cloak, Ding Chen didn't immediately say anything.

"They shouldn't be from Celestial... please don't misunderstand!" Li Hao said.

"How are you so sure?" Hu Dingfang frowned.

“That person... was too strong!” Li Hao explained. “I almost died from a casual blow. Thank goodness Director Liu was beside me... Director Liu is actually a Dominator! Ordinary Sunflares aren’t that strong... so... that person must be a Solar!”

“Cough cough cough... A Solar attacked me! Celestial only has one Solar. If he didn’t leave the inner city gates, then he’s not the one... I suspect... that there’s more people from the outside? Otherwise, there’s no reason that... people won’t discover a Solar being present... Cough cough...”

Strange looks appeared in people’s eyes. A Solar! One that was yet to be discovered! Although Li Hao said his attacker wasn’t from Celestial, their rapidly shifting thoughts were certain that it was Celestial behind this!

That organization was skilled at concealment. If equipped with supernatural items, they might really be harboring a Solar. Celestial was a mysterious bunch that didn’t show their true forms beneath their cloaks...

“It looks like Celestial came well prepared this time!” Hu Dingfang looked coldly at Ding Chen. “You still possess quite the self-assurance even without Half Mountain!”

Two Solars!

There was no doubt about it, the unknown assailant must come from Celestial! Being a group of eccentrics, it was very normal for them to casually deliver a punch or slap if they couldn’t stand the sight of Li Hao. All killers were thus.

“There is no conclusion in this matter yet, Commander Hu...” Ding Chen said in a low voice.

“Very well, I’ll wait for your members to gather again,” Hu Dingfang said coolly. “A Solar might go unnoticed if we weren’t paying attention before, but I’m sure we can see some hints if we take a close look now. If we find a Solar that doesn’t belong to your organization... how about we execute them on the spot?”

Since you won't admit to it, we'll kill whatever Solar we find if one appears later! Dare you agree to it?

Ding Chen was highly anxious, uneasy, and wanting to cast blame on his hidden counterpart. What did you go and attack Li Hao for? If you wanted to do that, you should've completely taken the young man out!

Here he is, alive to tell the tale. Damn! Anything Ding Chen said at this time was inappropriate. The group was right in that hidden Solars were hard to discover if one wasn't carefully observing the expedition. But once everyone returned and all Solars were focused on Celestial... it would be hard for his counterpart to remain in hiding!

Trouble would be upon them then, so Ding Chen chose to remain silent. That was a tacit admission that Celestial possessed a second Solar.

"General Hu... don't... don't create more enemies for the Night Watchers!" Li Hao said at this time. "I'm really fine, I just need some time to recover. I don't think it's someone from Celestial, I have no grudge with them... They don't have a reason to kill me."

"You don't understand!" Hu Dingfang barked out coldly. "An organization that takes joy in killing others and makes killing their mission statement... You're too young. You are the heir to the eight families and as such, there are those who wish for you to be alive and those who wish you dead!"

"That's not it, General Hu." Li Hao grew frantic. "You're from the army and I... I just don't think it's Celestial..."

Urgency marked his voice. Don't create more enemies for the Night Watchers! Even if it was Celestial who attacked Li Hao, let's just pretend it wasn't. It wasn't like he'd died.

Hao Lianchuan frowned and glowered at the Celestial spokesperson. "No matter if it was you guys or not, Ding Chen... and I can't really say you're behind it since we didn't catch you in the act,

shouldn't you summon that one for introductions? It's juniors having fun in the outer city. It's not appropriate for Solars to be involved!"

Ding Chen was resigned, he really was rather resigned. "I trust... that there must be a misunderstanding," he said after a prolonged pause. "We concealed it before because that is the Celestial way. We don't like to expose everything about us in front of others. I'm sure there is another explanation for the attack on Li Hao!"

He emitted a shrill whistle at the end of his words.

Ambushing someone was no grave matter, but the key was that a hidden Solar had done the ambushing. That made it a big deal. The target being Li Hao was also a grave matter. All of this together was why everyone paid it so much attention.

Otherwise, who cared about a Sunderer dying?

A figure swiftly ran in from the darkness when the long whistle rang out. Upon seeing that Ding Chen was fine and everyone was looking at him, the powerhouse beneath the cloak paused with a frown. What did you summon me for if nothing's happening?

"Well met!" A fist slammed down on the newcomer—Hu Dingfang's fist!

It was fast beyond belief; the startled newcomer immediately pulled out a sword of darkness and jabbed back. He went flying after a loud collision and Ding Chen quickly stepped forward.

"Commander Hu!" he protested.

"So you're the one who attacked Li Hao?!" Hu Dingfang demanded coolly.

The injured cloaked figure coughed, mystified. Me? When did I attack Li Hao? I didn't even see Li Hao in the city!

Ding Chen quickly murmured some words by his ears, bringing an aggrieved expression onto the newcomer's face. Killing people was a normal occurrence, but he really wasn't behind this. He thought of nothing else but responding with anger, "I'm not behind it... If I was, I wouldn't give him the chance to escape. Someone wants to expose me..." His eyes darted around as he continued, "There's another Solar in the city! I came across them, it might be them..."

It was Hong Yitang's turn to jerk with surprise. "Ah, everyone, please don't misunderstand. This person slanders another!" he said hastily. "I'll tell you the truth, that person is my wife. She rose to Solar not long ago and is still stabilizing her cultivation level. She's a wood supernatural, not of the dark attribute. How could she attack Li Hao?

"Li Hao's master, Yuan Shuo, is a peer of my time. How would I bully my junior? Don't you dare run your mouth and cast aspersions on people's character! My lover is just protecting my sect's disciples and doesn't mean anything else by it..."

Two Solars were suddenly exposed, and they'd exposed each other! The reason? Li Hao's injuries.

"Martial uncle Hong wouldn't attack me," Li Hao quickly protested. "He gave me the Earthturner Sword, it's not him! And it's not Celestial, this is all a misunderstanding! General Hu, Director Hao, I'm fine. I'll be fine after a few days, let's let the matter drop!"

Hao Lianchuan glanced at him while Hu Dingfang stewed. The others merely thought that sometimes... Li Hao was truly... should they say simple, or dumb? Of course, not creating more enemies for the Night Watchers at this time was a good idea. He was an interesting fellow, to be a stick-in-the-mud who kept the bigger picture in mind!

There were many people like Li Hao in the Night Watcher ranks. They were too much of a stickler for the rules and didn't wish to pursue many things to the end in case it ruined bigger plans. The young man rather suited the Night Watcher style.

What else could the rest of them do if he didn't wish to pursue the matter?

The group looked at Hong Yitang; the swordsman had been in such a hurry to admit to the Solar in his organization because he was afraid that if an investigation started in earnest, it would bring trouble to the Sword Sect if it really fell to them.

Sword intent rose to the sky—a signal for his wife!

Chapter 256: The Terrifying Sight of One's Back (I)

Hu Dingfang frowned as they waited for the concealed Sword Sect Solar to show. "Wasn't your lover... someone else before..."

Hong Yitang coughed dryly and his daughter suddenly said next to him, "That's my senior sister, she fell in love with father as time went on. Father remarried when my mother died!"

"....." A ringing silence greeted her words. Hong Yitang felt so awkward that he wished for the ground to swallow him whole.

He'd never spoken of this to outsiders as it was a difficult subject to raise. The supernatural world didn't care about these relationship particulars, but in the martial world, some veteran martial masters would ridicule him for marrying his eldest disciple! It was a flagrant violation of martial world rules!

Granted, it was fine now that he was no longer a martial master, but he would still be condemned and disdained by countless martial masters for his past actions. Hong Yitang coughed dryly to mask how uncomfortable he was.

"Eh, ah, everyone... I humbly request that you keep this a secret for me..."

Hao Lianchuan and others from the Night Watchers chuckled, whereas Violet Moon and other supernaturals smirked. All the same, one faction possessing two Solars made it formidable indeed!

So while knowing looks and smug looks flew through the crowd, no one said anything. Instead, shoulders relaxed with relief. They'd exposed two Solars in one go—Li Hao was their lucky star!

Who would've imagined that even the Sword Sect possessed a second Solar? It wasn't that the group was wholly unprepared, but that Hong Yitang was being far from honest!

An embarrassed Li Hao smiled apologetically at Hong Yitang from a distance. The man responded with a faint smile and inward ruefulness. Could he blame Li Hao?

No!

It wasn't the young man who'd exposed them. It was all because that Celestial bastard wanted to drag his wife down and slander the Sword Sect. Damn him!

Hong Yitang was ninety-nine percent certain that this fellow was behind the assault on Li Hao. What a pity the young man wished to smooth things over. If not, the sect leader was of a mind to ally with Hu Dingfang and the Night Watchers to take out the Celestial delegation first! The fucking bastard!

Hong Yitang's ire mounted the more he thought about it. This wasn't just a simple case of exposing their hidden strength, but that his personal secrets were out in the open. They would be in more danger from now on!

Hao Lianchuan clapped Li Hao on the shoulder and regarded the young man skeptically. You didn't inflict these wounds on yourself, did you? Nice going kid, you forced two Solars to reveal themselves with just a few words. Is even Zhang Ting going to be revealed if you say another few words?

You've really got some skill up your sleeves!

.....

The inner city gates.

Two Solars had been exposed in a matter of seconds. Hong Yitang's second wife came before long. He transmitted a few words to the woman who possessed ordinary beauty. She paused briefly before explaining, "The Sword Sect would not ambush Li Hao. We would not, and we dare not. Grandmaster Yuan is the leader of martial dao in our times. The Sword Sect is not so bold as to harm his final disciple!"

Hong Yitang nodded hastily as well. They would not be the scapegoat for this matter! The others might not know, but he understood all too well that Yuan Shuo might really kill him if he harmed the old demon's student. No matter how, his own doom would be forthcoming if anything happened to Li Hao. Hong Yitang knew Yuan Shuo well and Yuan Shuo knew the martial world's old guard well.

It would prove to be more troublesome than offending the three great organizations if he ran afoul of the old demon.

"I do not believe that the Sword Sect would do this..." Li Hao coughed when no one else said anything. "Don't worry, martial uncle Hong. I, Li Hao, will not do an injustice to anyone!"

He coughed again, spitting out flecks of blood. His organs did seem to be gravely damaged and the coughing didn't sound fake.

It wasn't fake to begin with—any pretense would be quickly unmasked by all of the powerhouses present. No one believed that he was putting on an act.

"Forget it, let's let this matter pass!" exhaled the young man. "It's my own lack of skill that landed me in these straits. Perhaps they're not a Solar... If they're not, then it's just a normal occurrence if I die in the attack. There's no need for those who walk the martial path to pursue this to the ends of the world!"

He looked at Violet Moon and asked hesitantly, “Leader Violet Moon... Could you give me a blood pearl? My injuries are severe and I’m worried I’ll die here if there’s more fighting to come.”

“.....”

Silence.

Violet Moon’s face was so frosty it could freeze fire itself. A blood pearl? That was a divine shadow! Li Hao was crazy! Red Moon and him were enemies, but he was asking her for materials to treat his wounds!

“I’m so heavily injured and my organs damaged that regular mysterious power is useless,” Li Hao explained earnestly. “I’ll need either legendary treasures or a blood pearl—those are the best for healing martial master injuries. We don’t need to go into particulars, I just need one. Leader Violet Moon, I don’t think your organization wants to see me die, either.”

“Are you looking to die, Li Hao?” Violet Moon bit off. “Or do you really think you’re so wondrous that you cannot be permitted to die?”

Li Hao sighed and didn’t say anything else. Hao Lianchuan frowned at the response.

“If you really have them, Violet Moon, what’s the harm in handing out one?”

Hu Dingfang was already walking toward her. “If you don’t have any, I’ll enter the city and kill some Red Moon supernaturals. I’m sure I’ll collect one then!”

“You can try!” Violet Moon hissed. “Try and see if I’ll care that my entire delegation is dead!”

“Then I will!” Hu Dingfang punched forward without further ado. A dragon howl and tiger roar ripped through the air, ferocious beyond contention. With how injured Li Hao was, there was no difference to Hu Dingfang laying down his life if Violet Moon refused to offer a blood pearl. In that case, he would beat it out of her!

Violet Moon also erupted with thunder and lightning; Hu Dingfang broke through it with one punch! His arm emerged unscathed and he continued to deploy the tiger fist!

A ferocious tiger threw its head back to the sky with a howl!

The scalps of those in the surroundings ran with numbness. Hu Dingfang really was very strong after learning the Five Styles and becoming a supernatural. He could give Sun Yifei a run for his money. They were both late Solars and ascended from martial masters. Hu Dingfang knew the Breathing Method of the Five Styles and his offensive capabilities were astounding as a metal supernatural. One of his punches was the equivalent of a late Solar’s full strength!

Violet Moon was injured and her Armor of the Thunder God damaged. She held no advantage at all and was forced onto the back foot.

Sun Yifei had killed pure peak Solars in the central region—pure as in homegrown supernaturals, not ones who crossed over from being a martial master. Regardless, those were still formidable and did not count among the weak. That Hu Dingfang could match him explained why he was so arrogant.

Rumble!!

Collisions rang out as Violet Moon was forced back. Her power of thunder and lightning exploded with abandon.

After a while, the quiet Revolution King interjected, “You two... is there a need for internal discord like this? The city gates aren’t open yet, who knows how much treasure is inside? Is this worth it?”

“Violet Moon, there ought to be dead Red Moon supernaturals in the city. You need to collect your divine shadows from them, in any case. Why don’t you give a blood pearl to Li Hao since he is gravely injured? It doesn’t need to be too strong—Darkmoon or Sunflare will do. Red Moon won’t miss one such divine shadow, will it?”

Hu Dingfang halted his moves. He didn’t want to fight to the death because the Revolution King would not idly sit by. Both Yama and Red Moon only had one Solar each. They’d reached a tacit understanding even if they didn’t ally together.

A partnership!

The Night Watchers, Celestial, and Sword Sect all had two Solars. They would be fools if they still didn’t work together. As strong as they were, they would find it difficult to stand against so many enemies.

Violet Moon’s face shifted through a variety of expressions before she settled on a frosty and disquieting look. One blood pearl was nothing, but it rankled her terribly to give in!

She looked at Li Hao. The simple and honest young man was looking straight back at her, not a hint of fear to be found on his face. He smiled to receive Violet Moon’s attention. There was no sign of timidity or cowardice, a noticeable difference from before.

There was no reason for his change other than the fact that their enmity ran too deeply to require a polite facade. He did not need to bow and scrape when it came to Red Moon! His teacher had killed multiple of their powerhouses and he was their target. There was no need for him to be as polite to Violet Moon as he was to the others. Despite killing numerous Celestial and Yama members in the dark, he was still friendly to them on the surface.

At the very least, he wouldn’t let them know that he thought of them as an enemy.

“Leader Violet Moon, do you know how to make the blood pearls? I can teach you if you don’t...”

Violet Moon looked coldly at him and retracted her previous assessment that he was an honest and simple young man. To Red Moon, at the very least, he brimmed with malicious intent!

Granted, this was only to be expected. She just hadn't thought that a mere Sunderer would dare provoke her. After some more silence, she threw a red pill to Hao Lianchuan.

"So Red Moon does know how to create blood pearls," he said with curiosity. "I thought you didn't know about the unique properties of your divine shadows before."

A frosty Violet Moon said absolutely nothing.

Li Hao took the pill from Hao Lianchuan and sniffed it closely. He was assessing its strength, but put on a great show of seeing it for the first time. "A Plenilune blood pearl, eh? I thought it was a Sunflare level one... It looks like leader Violet Moon has more than one and just gave me the weakest one!"

Violet Moon continued to remain silent.

Li Hao laughed and swallowed the pill. All eyes focused on him! Were blood pearls really that useful? Their organizations had hunted down some Red Moon powerhouses and even created some blood pearls according to the leaked instructions. But they'd entered the ruins too quickly to know what the effects were.

This was just a Darkmoon level blood pearl... Would it heal Li Hao's severely damaged organs? If it could, that would make it a compelling resource even if it wouldn't enhance their strength.

Li Hao operated the Breathing Method of the Five Styles to digest the power within the pill. Although the effects would be poorer without sword energy, blood pearls were made for martial masters. They were still quite effective without the accompaniment of sword energy.

Being a Dominator, his aura was stronger than before and his rate of absorption even faster. He devoured half of the red energy in the blink of an eye and immediately felt its effects in his organs. A healthier flush returned to his cheeks and his body began inflating like it was being filled with water. His emaciated look from moments ago improved greatly and internal force burgeoned in his body.

Chapter 257: The Terrifying Sight of One's Back (II)

Li Hao opened his eyes with a long exhale. "What a pity... I might have made a full recovery if it was a Sunflare level blood pearl, but thank you to leader Violet Moon all the same!"

A variety of looks filled the crowd's eyes. These effects... were incredible! The young man had been so gravely injured moments ago, and while he didn't seem to be returned to full health, internal force circulated in his body again and his organs no longer bled or shook from strain. At the very least, it didn't seem like his foundations were harmed anymore...

And this was just a Darkmoon level blood pearl. What about a Sunflare level one, or even a Solar?

"Li Hao, the previous matter really looks to be a misunderstanding!" suddenly remarked the Celestial spokesperson Ding Chen. "I asked Kong Qi—it wasn't him who attacked you. Of course, it might take some time to undo the misunderstanding..."

He tossed a ring to the young man. "This is a new invention from the central region—a storage ring. It's small, but can hold a large sum of one thousand cubes of mysterious power. It's divided into five slots—you can store the same kind of mysterious power or five different types inside it. Let this be our compensation to you. There's also one hundred cubes of fire energy within, the type that you need!"

Li Hao was rather taken aback, he was truly surprised! Celestial... is giving me a present? This is a wonderful item! Storage boxes were so big and bulky; they were a hassle to carry around. They also couldn't store too much energy—a couple hundred cubes was their maximum.

So this tiny little ring could store one thousand cubes?

A startled Hao Lianchuan looked at Ding Chen. What was this fellow investing so much for?

“I have a small question,” Ding Chen continued. “Are blood pearls effective for all martial masters, or are they effective only for those of the Five Styles discipline?”

First he built up a relationship, then he gave a present. It seemed that the Celestial spokesperson was after this answer.

Li Hao frowned with thought, then answered, “It’s effective for all martial masters, but the breathing method of the Five Styles offers the best results. Those of other disciplines won’t have the same marked effects. If my discipline’s conversion rate is ninety percent, then the others will see at most seventy. However, the effects are miraculous all the same!”

He answered honestly as these answers could be easily obtained through experimenting with other martial masters. The marvelous effects of the Breathing Method of the Five Styles was a known factor, so there was no need to keep that a secret. People wouldn’t believe him if he lied too much.

Seventy percent! Eyebrows raised in the crowd. That was still very impressive. Violet Moon’s eyes narrowed and she looked at Ding Chen. What is your purpose in asking this question at this time?

“Is it effective for supernaturals?” Ding Chen didn’t seem to see her. “Can supernaturals strengthen their bodies if they absorb blood pearls?”

“It’s hard to say.” Li Hao frowned. “Generally no, it doesn’t seem useful even when paired with the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. But, that’s not to say that they’re completely useless.”

“Nonsense!” Violet Moon roared with fury. “How dare you speak nonsense, Li Hao! It’s true that the blood pearls are useful for martial masters, but they’re absolutely ineffective for supernaturals. They even absorb mysterious power instead!”

This last speculation absolutely could not become fact, not even rumor. The consequences would be unimaginable if it took shape. The general public was just curious for the moment. Martial masters were tempted, organizations that raised martial masters were tempted. But if it was said that blood

pearls were useful for supernaturals... then Red Moon would face trouble far beyond what it faced now!

They would run the risk of being annihilated!

The three great organizations weren't truly invincible. When everyone in the world had their eyes on you and treated you as nutrients... The dire consequences were easy to imagine!

There was already enough killing between supernaturals because mysterious power could be used to strengthen oneself. If scarlet shadows were more effective, then what was the point in hunting supernaturals? They would kill scarlet shadows, of course!

These things could be artificially fostered; there were even those who wished to charge into Red Moon headquarters and seize the method to create them.

Li Hao frowned at Violet Moon and said in a quiet voice, "I'm not spouting nonsense, I'm just talking about my findings. What are you in such a hurry to deny? Just give it a try to find out if it's real or fake.

"The power contained by the blood pearls does indeed conflict with mysterious power to a certain degree. There are no benefits to be had from absorbing it under normal circumstances, and it may give the user more pain instead.

"But my teacher discovered that blood pearls can strengthen supernatural locks! I don't know if the supernatural domain has made the same discovery that the stronger the locks are, the greater the potential released when they are broken. Therefore, enhancing supernatural locks is a good thing—but only for geniuses!

"If a genius' locks are too weak and easily broken, they'll ascend easily, but their foundations will be too weak. This is where blood pearls are useful. They can be absorbed by supernatural locks and make it harder for ascension. It's the same concept as martial masters enhancing their supernatural

locks, but without the need for martial training. It's the same idea as how you guys raise martial masters in regular times!

"The key thing is that it saves a lot of time. It takes a few years to raise a Slayer, at the very least. But one blood pearl will easily take care of that!"

Some breathed rapidly within the crowd, others looked around with shifting expressions on their faces, while yet others grappled with a surge of emotions. Li Hao's words were absolutely useless for regular supernaturals. Strengthen our supernatural locks? Do you take us for idiots?

But when it came to powerhouses of the large organizations, they knew more. Enhancing supernatural locks, for instance, and then shattering them did indeed release more potential. Was this why martial masters made for a much stronger supernatural when they crossed over?

Martial masters trained internal force, an energy that also strengthened supernatural locks. That wasn't to say that martial masters are always stronger when they ascend, but that more of their potential was released, so they could aim for higher cultivation levels.

It was the aspect of nurturing martial masters that was time consuming and more trouble than it was worth. But if one blood pearl could resolve that problem, then didn't that mean an ordinary person could take one blood pearl, break their locks, thereby skipping past Starlight and start off as a Darkmoon?

If that was the case, then this was incredible!

Ding Chen asked no more questions; his thoughts flew rapidly. Could he trust what Li Hao said? All he needed was to verify it through someone. He needed a candidate with decent potential, one that ascended easily but lacked strong foundations. They could take a blood pearl to see if that would turn this kind of person into a powerhouse with deep foundations.

"How do we send the blood pearl into the supernatural locks after it enters the body?" asked the Revolution King despite himself. "You said that it conflicts with mysterious power..."

Li Hao frowned without saying anything.

“You’ve already talked about the crux of the issue.” The Revolution King smiled. “Plus, we all know your true motives. Why don’t you tell us a little more?”

Did anyone here still not grasp what the young man intended? He spoke about all of this so matter-of-factly because he wanted to put Red Moon in even more difficult conditions!

“It’s not that hard.” Li Hao exhaled slowly and ignored the vicious glare coming from Violet Moon. “Those who can control mysterious power can suppress it and make room for the blood pearl’s strength. Those who cannot can just exhaust their reserves. Supernaturals do not have infinite reserves of energy. There is no conflict when their bodies are devoid of mysterious power!”

Abrupt enlightenment dawned on the assembly. It wasn’t that they hadn’t thought of this possibility, but that they didn’t realize it would be so simple! The key thing was that it was hard to exhaust their reserves at their level. They had no further questions since it was so easy.

“Then Summoner of Spirit...” pressed the Revolution King.

“Do you think I’m an idiot??” Li Hao roared with anger. “Only my teacher can reach that level, how am I supposed to know?!”

These guys were out of bounds! I’ve already spoke about so much, but you keep asking and want to know about Summoner of Spirit!

The Revolution King didn’t respond in the same vein, he smiled instead. It was fine if the young man didn’t say anything, they’d already gained a great deal of important information. Blood pearls could strengthen supernatural locks and enhance a supernatural’s foundations. To be honest, they knew much more at the Solar level and understood that at times, supernatural locks shouldn’t be broken just because they could.

It might lead to the supernatural's death!

Many peak Solars or Novas wished dearly that they wouldn't shatter further locks. It was usually done prematurely at their level and led to the supernatural's death.

Blood pearls... Red Moon!

Violet Moon's brow was furrowed as she fell deep into thought. She looked at Li Hao without censure or irritation. Could blood pearls really strengthen supernatural locks? She didn't know!

Divine shadows were Ying Hongyue's personal domain. Red Moon members were aware of their existence and that they were useful to martial masters, that was all.

If they could enhance supernatural locks...

The look in her eyes shifted as she thought of something. Was that why some Solars could fight five or six of their peers at the same time? Her leader was invincible when he was a Solar and nearly the same when he became a Nova. Were these revelations a factor in his strength as well?

Enhancing supernatural locks was a bad thing for many people, but it was wondrous news for geniuses and powerhouses. There was nothing more they wanted than to deepen their foundations. Continuously breaking through without thought would only end up in self-detonation as they reached beyond their means!

Everyone mused over this new information. What Li Hao revealed was very worthy of further contemplation. Not many knew of the scarlet shadows' effects before this. Although many in Red Moon did, no one dared easily lose theirs. They belonged to Ying Hongyue! Who dared use them for personal gain?

Only a few people had obtained blood pearls over the years and they didn't dare use them randomly. Eating one was the last thing on their mind. Only someone like Li Hao and his teacher were that bold.

Quiet descended upon the scene. Meanwhile, Liu Long and Liu Yan had been petrified by amazed shock all this time. They didn't say a word while stupefaction and incredulity gripped their hearts. Li Hao was getting better and better at lying!

Chapter 258: The Terrifying Sight of One's Back (III)

Li Hao was the one behind his injuries, but he not only exposed two Solars, received a blood pearl for recovery, obtained an energy storage ring, another one hundred cubes of fire energy, and put Red Moon on even more troublesome footing. Were these the horrors that the educated could inflict on their enemies??

They created countless conflicts with just a few artfully placed words and lightly touching on a few subjects! One had to know, many in the assembly were his enemies, but not even Violet Moon spoke in this moment.

Hao Lianchuan patted the young man on the shoulder. "Don't voice nonsense. If you'd offered this information to the Night Watchers, we would've counted it as an achievement of great merit. How can you go around talking about it with such a lackadaisical manner!"

What a pity! Although the effects were pretty good in this assembly, Director Hou might've used the knowledge to greater effect. Little fella, you lack the proper venues. This could've caused a greater splash!

If it was disseminated to the wider public, all of the big guys in the central region would want a blood pearl. They can give it to their children if they have no use for it. Who wants their descendants to be ordinary mundanes? Practicing martial dao is so tiring!

One blood pearl could save years of effort and enhance one's foundations. All that was needed was to kill a few Red Moon members!

“Director, I...” Li Hao kept his head down. “Either I say nothing, or I speak only the truth!”

“.....” Very well then, pretend I didn’t say anything. Hao Lianchuan coughed in lieu of responding. “Everyone, consider the matter of Li Hao’s injuries settled! Hu Dingfang, stop creating trouble for Violet Moon at the drop of a hat. Who knows how irritated she might be right now? If you kill her, people might think that we’ve gotten our hands on a peak Sunflare blood pearl. What will you do when they come to you for it?”

Hu Dingfang flicked a glance at the deputy director and didn’t say anything. He naturally wouldn’t raise a fuss after Li Hao was much recovered.

It was only now that the young man had the strength to look at the inner city gates. As he expected, there was a turtle to be found! Not terribly big, it shimmered in and out of sight over the inner city. It was a very vivid, lifelike turtle!

Li Hao then looked at two characters hovering in the air over the city. He recognized the ancient characters.

Battle Heaven!

The two words floated over the city gates. His blood boiled and emotions frothed at seeing the name.

The big turtle kept by the Wangs... He thought of the line from the folk song. The Wangs hadn’t seemed all that strong in the lyrics and didn’t seem to possess any offensive capabilities. But when he saw the characters of “Battle Heaven”, a surge of valor rushed into his brain. This was at odds with the Wangs of the folk song. To battle heaven... Harken this boldness of vision and breadth of spirit!

The city of Battle Heaven?

Li Hao had the urge to throw his head back and howl at the sky as he considered the two characters.

“Do you know those two words?” Hu Dingfang suddenly asked the young man. He didn’t. Not many present did. Hao Lianchuan did because they’d dug into old records after previous expeditions. Only powerhouses skilled in battle could reach this stopping point, it was beyond the capabilities of excavation members versed only in knowledge.

Li Hao nodded and took a deep breath. “Battle Heaven!”

Battle Heaven?

The group mulled over the response and frowned faintly. Just listen to that conceit, yet also remarkable intrepidity! The city of Battle Heaven! Did its residents vie with the heavens themselves?

Li Hao took another look; he stared fixedly at the characters. Who’d written them? He didn’t know, but it must have been a hero with grand aspirations and vision. The young man even vaguely sensed that their writer really had been ready to declare war on the heavens when he wrote them!

Arrogant and strong!

Was this the city of the Wangs? Li Hao didn’t know, but it was very possible. The Wang family wasn’t ranked too highly out of the eight, weren’t they? The young man considered the characters with slight confusion. If a Wang family had such a formidable city, then what about my Lis? They didn’t just leave a sword behind, did they?

Various questions swirled in his mind as he studied the gate again. It was tall, very tall and at least one hundred meters. It would be hard to open it if they couldn’t fly. Battlements topped the city walls, but they were difficult to make out through the darkness. He seemed to catch a glimpse of white on the ramparts.

Was the Silver Armor up there? Were the gates impossible to open if it didn’t come down?

“Li Hao,” Violet Moon raised noncommittally. “You are Yuan Shuo’s student and he’s explored countless ruins in his lifetime. He knows much about these, so can you determine anything?”

Li Hao didn’t say anything. He simply drew near the city gates and looked upward. The two characters in the sky still sent his heart pounding.

Battle Heaven!

His gaze fell on the gates after a while and he touched them gently, feeling the cool touch of metal. He gave a light push—they were completely still. Indestructible!

The city gates seemed to be one solid hole, but a very thin crack could be made out with careful observation. There was another tiny crack in the air—this was possibly where a key could go. These gates could only be opened from behind, or through this crack. However, there were fifty meters up to the crack. Would they be attacked if they flew up there?

It was a dead end!

Of course, the Solars could stay in the air for a bit if they used their origin weapons to defend against the airstrikes.

Li Hao took in the details and looked at the city walls—they were also very tall. When he touched them, he sensed that they were a similar material to the ground. They were truly one whole with the city walls! As opposed to breaking the walls, they might as well try the city gates.

“I’m just a rookie and can’t read much from this.” Li Hao turned back with a shake of his head. “It might be better for Solar powerhouses to fly up there and use their powerful weapons to defend against the attacks in the air. The gates might be able to be opened from the back. That will save us a lot of trouble.”

His suggestion was greeted with partial eye rolls. They'd considered this proposal, but who was willing to make the trip? There was the Silver Armor on the city walls and who knew what else behind the gates? The attacks in the air might shatter their origin weapons and inflict enormous injuries. Who was willing to pay such a massive price?

This wasn't a solo operation, it was supposed to be a joint expedition!

"Let's set this aside for now and have everyone come together." Hao Lianchuan broke the silence. "The Black Armors should be mostly eliminated. Whatever's left won't be much of a problem!"

It'd been almost three hours since the fighting started in the city. That was enough!

There was indeed much less of a disturbance coming from the city, just some scuffles here and there. Either the weak were all dead or people were moving in packs throughout the city and forestalling any opportunities for ambush.

When no one objected, Hao Lianchuan called out, "All supernaturals in the city will convene at the city gates!"

People rushed to the meeting point a few moments later. Some were injured, some dragged their broken bodies in. There were people with broken arms and legs. One... two...

More and more supernaturals filtered in. The Solars silently watched as the crowd grew bigger; no more was forthcoming after twenty minutes.

Li Hao swept a look at the assembly. There'd been more than one hundred of the expedition before, but now there were barely sixty with the Solars included. Another half had died!

Apart from the Solars, there were roughly fifty supernaturals surviving. Twenty Night Watchers remained. They'd plainly suffered some setbacks, but still possessed a sizable contingent. On the other hand, there were... three Yama members!

Indeed, only three Sunflares remained apart from the Revolution King. They made for a lonely sight.

Less than ten stood with Red Moon. At the end of the counting, it turned out that Celestial was the strongest of the three greats. With the Solar inside the city, they still numbered thirteen members under their banner.

There were only ten left of the Sword Sect, and there were no independent supernaturals to be seen! The wandering supernaturals that'd moved alone were all gone.

Li Hao counted silently. It was expected that Yama had so few people left since he'd killed quite a few. It was normal that Red Moon didn't have many left either. But the Sword Sect had had a Solar with them. Why were they so short on people as well?

Hao Lianchuan was also surprised by the results. There were fewer people left than he thought and the Night Watchers had lost a few. Can it be... He looked at the hidden Solars from Celestial and the Sword Sect. They'd done their fair share of killing, hadn't they?

If not, how would so many have died in one fell swoop?

He wasn't the only one to think so because there were really too many Celestial survivors. There were fifteen of them!

Indeed, fifteen included the two Solars. How many had they sent into the ruins? Twenty-two! That meant they'd retained two-thirds of their people and ninety percent of their battle strength. How was it possible for so many of the others to die if it wasn't for the concealed Celestial Solar rampaging through the city?

Meanwhile, Ding Chen was also startled by the results. All of the other factions had lost too many, including the Night Watchers. The government agency had numbered more than thirty before and

was greatly diminished at this point. Celestial had only lost three in the last round of bloodshed—that really wasn't a lot!

“How many did you kill, Kong Qi?” Ding Chen transmitted with a pained tone. Why had so many died? Everyone would absolutely think Celestial was behind everything since they'd lost the fewest members. They would think that the organization had assassinated too many! How else could each organization suddenly losing so many be explained?

The Solar named Kong Qi was likewise dejected. “I... I didn't kill that many! I ambushed three Night Watchers, a few Sword Sect supernaturals, two Yama Sunflares, and a Red Moon Sunflare... and then I came back!”

He had indeed killed people, but he hadn't exceeded ten. It was almost fifty that'd died in the last round—the woman from the Sword Sect must be behind it!

Ding Chen's shoulders slumped slightly. That was still a lot. If the one from the Sword Sect had done similar, then some infighting, as well as a portion being killed by Black Armors, ambushed by Bronze Armors... These results were only to be expected.

If they hadn't recalled the two Solars ahead of time, the pitiful amount left now would be truly awkward indeed.

Chapter 259: The Terrifying Sight of One's Back (IV)

The Revolution King wasn't as livid as everyone might have expected. He found an internal calm instead. There was almost no ensuing rage from the sight of only three Sunflares left by his side. He'd known that his people would die before embarking on the expedition, but leaving only three for Yama... Celestial and the Sword Sect were bold indeed!

Hao Lianchuan didn't comment on the situation and pivoted, “Everyone, report back how many Black Armors you eliminated so we can form a bigger picture!”

“The Night Watchers captured seventy-two,” Director He said promptly. “We forced one Bronze Armor into desperate straits and it self-detonated...”

Seventy-two was a sizable harvest. The other factions quickly called out their numbers. The sum total came to more than two hundred Black Armors being terminated and three Bronze Armors self-detonated!

This meant that there were less than one hundred Black Armors left within the city and at most two Bronze Armors. The army of one thousand was finally liquidated and there were no more threats left in the outer city!

Sixty-some people stood in front of the inner gates. Sunflares occupied the greatest portion, with Darkmoons being in the minority. They were too weak, after all, and thus almost all dead.

“What do we do now?” Hong Yitang frowned at the towering wall. “We’ve finally made it to this stage and it seems that we must head inside the city for a look. But are we to force our way up if that guy doesn’t come down here? Don’t the Night Watchers have a way?”

“There is a way!” Hao Lianchuan smiled.

Really? There’s really a way?

“Anyone who has their presence obscured by the second passageway can fly through the city!”

“.....” The crowd was dead silent.

A keen light sparkled in the Revolution King’s eyes as he looked wordlessly at his Night Watcher counterpart.

“Nice scheming!” he finally said. “You speak of this only now and didn’t say anything before... You were prepared to use those who took the second passageway as scouts from the very beginning, weren’t you? No wonder you didn’t let any of your Night Watchers try the ancient house!”

Who didn't understand what was at play after the Revolution King pointed things out! Violet Moon also looked at Hao Lianchuan with an exceedingly unpleasant expression.

"Violet Moon and Swordmaster Hong can fly without hindrance," Hao Lianchuan said seriously. "Just try if you don't believe me. There are no more threats in the air to you anymore, truly! This is a good thing, you have much more freedom of movement than us and can even fly over the city walls. I didn't have the courage to try the second passageway, so you guys enjoy the first mover advantage for your troubles!"

He made sense, but Violet Moon still boiled over with annoyance when she thought of how no one dared fly when this bastard said they couldn't.

"Hao Lianchuan!" she hissed. "Are you not worried that—"

"Don't be angry," Hao Lianchuan chuckled. "I'm just an initial Solar—I really didn't have the courage to take the second passageway. I didn't hide this information from you on purpose, I was just concerned that you guys would leave us behind after gaining the ability to fly. Now you can fly over the city walls and throw that Silver Armor down to us. We'll attack him together, open the city gates, and enter together. That makes it much more safe!"

The Night Watchers knew quite a lot about the ancient ruins. Flying had been on the table when they brainstormed how to get past the city gates, but not even Solars dared easily give it a try. They would be going to their deaths if things went south.

Now that the truth was proven otherwise, Violet Moon was both irate and exasperated. But upon further thought, they really did hold a significant advantage. It was so much more convenient when they could fly.

Hong Yitang, however, cursed inwardly. Holy fuck! I wouldn't have gone through the second passageway if I'd known this earlier! That damned Hao Lianchuan obviously wants me and Violet Moon to be bait and lure that guy down. It's too dangerous! And here I thought that the second passageway would conceal my presence, that I would be safer if it was easier to keep a low profile. It turns out to be a trap! Hao Lianchuan is nothing good!

Violet Moon didn't say a word as she brooded over the situation. As gravely injured as she was, she didn't want to be an easy target.

"You guys can take the second passage too!" she declared coldly. "It's not like it's sealed shut!"

"If even Yao Cheng died, I'm dead without a doubt if I try," Hao Lianchuan sighed. "We might lose half of the other Solars too. How are we to withstand that one if too many Solars die?"

"Since the two of you have already gone through the process, why don't you put forth just a bit more effort? You can have more of the spoils when we divvy up the goods! Get that guy down here, kill him, and we'll all feast on the inner city!"

Off to the side, Li Hao could only regard the deputy director with respect. No wonder he'd tricked the others into taking the second passageway! Not only did he want to weaken the other delegations, but he was laying the groundwork for this move.

What would happen if Violet Moon and Hong Yitang refused? Would Celestial accept it, to say nothing of the Night Watchers? Would the Revolution King?

We just want you to be bait, we don't want to kill you. Can't you fly up there for a look?

There would be no further cooperation if this was the case. And let's say only the Night Watchers attacked Violet Moon at the end of the expedition, would she be able to withstand the might of the agency?

This was plainly her thought process as well. She took a deep breath and suddenly proposed, "Have Li Hao try! Li Hao, force out a few drops of your heart blood and drip it into the crack in the city gates. Let's see if that opens the gates..."

Li Hao's jaw dropped. What's this got to do with me?

"If the gates don't open after you try," Violet Moon concluded coldly. "Hong Yitang and I... can fly up there for a look. Don't even think about it otherwise!"

She wouldn't be satisfied unless she tried all other possible avenues.

"I'm from the Li family," the young man frowned. "This is an ancient city of the Wang family. It belongs to a completely different faction. Aren't you barking up the wrong tree?"

"Just try!"

"My wounds aren't fully healed and I suffered extreme internal injuries just now," Li Hao pointed out waspishly. "Are you trying to force me to death in wanting my heart blood this very moment?"

"No!" Violet Moon smiled. "You like blood pearls, don't you? I'll give you one! If you are unable to open the city gates with your heart blood, I'll compensate you with an initial Sunflare blood pearl. You'll recover then!"

Oh for fuck's sake! Li Hao cursed. He'd had a grand time shooting the shit earlier, but now he'd talked himself into a corner!

Would his heart blood prove effective? Who the hell knew? It was fine it was ineffective, but if it was... these Solars wouldn't look at anyone but him from now on!

A headache throbbed at his temples.

Hao Lianchuan also cursed to himself. He'd forgotten about Li Hao being a factor.

Hu Dingfang wanted to protest when the young man answered, “Fine, but... I want a Solar level blood pearl. If not, then ten Sunflare level ones!”

“Are you kidding me??”

“You guys are getting rich after you enter the city, what’s in it for me after I pay the price of my heart blood?” Li Hao responded with annoyance. “Is it over the top that I want some payout? No matter whether or not I open it, I’m agreeing only after you give me the things first! If not, I won’t do it and it has nothing to do with me if you open the gates or not!”

His heart blood was likely useless, Li Hao was very aware of that! He would’ve opened the stone door last time if it had an effect. So he was just losing a few drops of blood essence, but it would be an enormous loss if he didn’t recover them. A Sunflare level blood pearl would absolutely do the trick.

But the key issue was that he wouldn’t be happy unless he earned something for his troubles. He didn’t care about mysterious power anymore since there was no more sword energy to distill them. In that case, blood pearls were just as fine.

“Ten is too much,” said the Revolution King. “Let’s do three. How about it, Li Hao?” The man turned to Violet Moon. “Red Moon will not be asked to pay this price. The Sword Sect, Celestial, and Yama will each pay one or a treasure of equal value! Since Li Hao is providing his heart blood, the Night Watchers are exempt from payment!”

“Er...” Hong Yitang didn’t accept the distribution. “I’m also going up the city wall after Li Hao fails...”

What, am I supposed to pay for that as well? Even if a Sunflare level blood pearl wasn’t all that costly, why should he pay that price?

The Revolution King smiled and amended faintly, “That’s true. How about Yama offer two of similar value?”

Why fret over small gains and losses like these at this time? If Li Hao refused to take action and Violet Moon dug in her heels as well, then were the Solars actually supposed to fight it out?

Li Hao acquiesced to the situation with a nod. “Very well, I will agree on account of the Revolution King. If it was Red Moon... I would never, not in a million years!”

Violet Moon narrowed her eyes at him. She really hated the brat at the moment! If it wasn’t for the fact that they couldn’t kill him, she’d slap him to death with one palm strike!

“There’s not much use for an overabundance of heart blood,” Li Hao added. “Being a Sunderer, I don’t have that much. It won’t do you any good to force me to my limit. I’ll coalesce three drops, and that’s it! Don’t say anything else if they prove ineffective, or you might as well dig my heart out and hang it on the city gates for a try.”

The group didn’t say anything. Hu Dingfang ran a few quick calculations, judging it to be fine if the young man expended only three drops of heart blood. The three Sunflare blood pearls would replenish his consumption and even strengthen his blood qi. That would do.

Violet Moon threw over three pills the color of blood. Li Hao was beginning to suspect that all of these guys carried storage rings. Or were space supernaturals a thing? There wasn’t any place to store treasures on them, so where were they pulling all of this out from?

He swallowed one blood pearl as soon as he received them, then stepped forward. He circulated a breathing method and slapped his chest with a soft exclamation, slapping out a drop of blood that glistened like a ruby.

He sprayed it over the gates—they remained unmoving!

Slight disappointment rippled through the crowd. Although this was within expectations, it seemed that the heirs of the eight families were truly ineffective when it came to the other families. They would have to locate the ruins of the Lis if they wanted to make use of Li Hao.

The first drop of blood was completely ineffective. The young man slapped a second drop of blood into existence and sprayed it over the gates again—still nothing. He took a deep breath. As his back faced the crowd, it obscured the strange look that entered his eyes.

His blood was ineffective, he could see that. But he also sensed that the two characters over the city gates seemed to want to... absorb his blood. There was an attraction to his blood. He forced himself to concentrate on spraying his blood over the gates and preventing it from coming in contact with the two characters. However, his heart shook with excitement.

Was there a meaning behind those two characters?

Chapter 260: Reawakening (I)

“Battle Heaven...”

The two characters seemed incredibly strong. Perhaps... Li Hao could try letting them absorb some of his blood later on and seeing if it had an effect. That was out of the question for now. There were so many people assembled that if they saw an effect on these characters, they might rip the young man apart and feed him to the writing.

The third drop of heart blood splashed over the gate. Still ineffective! Li Hao's face was pale, but he quickly recovered with the aid of the blood pearls. He exhaled slowly and looked toward Hao Lianchuan.

“Director... please burn my blood away so that Red Moon doesn't use it for some other purpose...”

Violet Moon was actually so inclined and wanted to collect the young man's blood from the gates. Instead, Hao Lianchuan waved a fireball into existence and scoured the city gates of every drop of blood.

There were no other ideas left to the assembly. It looked like the two Solars had no choice but to head up the city wall to lure the Silver Armor down. A heavily panting Li Hao backed away. He wore an unhappy expression, but inwardly capered with glee. He'd made out like a bandit again!

The key piece of new knowledge that he'd gained was the particular attraction to the two characters. When he lifted his head once more to look at them, it felt like he gazed upon the diagram of the eight trigrams in Silver City.

It wasn't the eight trigrams that he looked at, but a faint image of a person writing out the two characters in calligraphy.

"Battle Heaven!" The person bore a longbow the color of blood on his back and a blade at his waist. It was the faintest of shadows, but it overwhelmed the young man to the point where color drained from his face.

The figure lacked the dominating presence of the Li forefather and his killing intent, so how did it seem so... terrifying?!

It was just the faintest of images without sound; he seemed to be a very genteel, refined person. And yet, Li Hao felt like he'd plunged straight into the pits of hell. He didn't dare look at the figure head-on!

He lowered his head, sweat dripping in large drops from his forehead.

"Li Hao..."

"Chief... I... lost too much heart blood... my injuries are flaring up again... I'm in a lot of pain..." Li Hao gasped for breath like a drowning fish.

The assembly jerked with shock. How was the young man in such poor condition? That rainfall of sweat didn't seem like an act, but how could that be with just three drops of heart blood? Were his previous injuries acting up again?

The back of that figure appeared in Li Hao's mind's eye. It didn't make a move, unsheathe a sword, or do anything at all. It simply calmly wrote out two characters, but that was more terrifying than the sword stroke that Li Hao had seen before.

Who was that? A Wang forefather? Why did he seem so much frightful than his own ancestors? Or was he so weak that he couldn't tell the difference and subconsciously finding the man horrifying? Or had the Li forefather shown a descendant grace and dulled the sensation for Li Hao?

Questions floated into his mind as Li Hao heaved for air. Sweat dripped onto the ground; it took a while before the voices by his ear became more clear. He felt that he'd survived absolutely calamity once more. These people could cause death simply by the backs of their figures from eons ago. That was the true horror of the situation.

The Wangs!

Li Hao turned the surname over in his mind. Was the Wang forefather this terrifying? Could it be... that his Li family was the weakest among the eight? No way!

But he had to consider the possibility with this latest development.

.....

The young man lowered his head, his eyes shot through with blood. He'd only gotten a glimpse of that figure's back, but it was like he saw the cosmos. It wore a longbow, blade, and held a calligraphy brush.

There was no connection to the turtle of the Wangs, none at all. Yet someone like this had appeared here endless periods ago to write down these characters.

The others didn't see anything; Li Hao hadn't at first either. It wasn't until he sprayed his blood over the city gates and drew the attention of those characters that he witnessed the frightening scene.

The young man panted heavily, drawing strange looks from those around him. Hu Dingfang was nearly dancing in place from frustration and a bit of regret. He hadn't thought three drops of blood essence would matter; Li Hao was getting the far better end of the deal in trading them for three blood pearls.

But now, Violet Moon would already be dead on the ground if looks could kill!

Even Hao Lianchuan thought Li Hao was acting at first... but he slowly dismissed the thought when the young man continued to shake and drip with sweat. How horrifying would the lad be if this was a facade?

"Li Hao!" Hao Lianchuan called out. A silent Liu Long scanned the premises with an ill-tempered expression on his face. The young man's condition was not right.

Li Hao lifted his head after a long moment. His eyes were shot through with blood and he seemed to be in considerable pain and shock. "I'm... fine..." he gasped out. "It's just that my... internal injuries seized up... It's like a burst of dark force exploded in my body... I'm fine now."

Hao Lianchuan looked coldly at the Celestial delegation. Hu Dingfang directed a look that promised death at Kong Qi. A burst of dark force? They'd left something behind in Li Hao's body?

Kong Qi found himself quite innocent when the two glared at him. It's nothing to do with me! I really didn't attack Li Hao, I didn't even run into him! What am I supposed to attack?

But... it really was very difficult to explain himself at the moment. The young man's status did indeed appear to be the result of wounds besetting him. There was nothing Kong Qi could do. Any explanation was useless, not to mention that killers were not in the habit of defending themselves.

The rest of the assembly was so quiet that one could hear a pin drop. Li Hao was just a Sunderer and thus inconsequential to the greater picture, but his master was one to consider. Yuan Shuo was the foremost martial master of the dynasty and an existence who could slay late Solars. If something happened to Li Hao here... blood and violence will soon rain upon the lands.

A drenched Li Hao stood up after a while and smiled. "Really, I'm fine. My apologies for causing everyone concern. This is how martial masters are—we often deal with latent injuries. Thankfully, there's blood pearls to make use of, so I might be able to recover very soon!"

He swallowed a second blood pearl as he spoke. Of the three blood pearls that he'd received, he was down to one in the blink of an eye. Normal people wouldn't go through them so quickly, but his injuries were so severe that a faster than usual rate of consumption seemed normal.

In actuality, his organs were swiftly digesting the last two blood pearls and the Darkmoon one from earlier. As a Dominator who nurtured one aura, he consumed a great deal of resources. He wouldn't dare take blood pearls like this in regular times—the energy from these scarlet shadows had once blocked his meridians and turned them solid.

But now, all that two blood pearls did was help his five visceral organs recover from their injuries and replenish the blood essence and internal force that he'd depleted.

Dominator of Thousands was completely different from Sunderer of Hundreds. He'd switched from a small cup to a large wooden tub in terms of energy capacity. His internal force was much stronger than before and his blood was also different. The transfusion of blood was wholly complete.

He didn't dare look at the two characters over the city gates anymore, they were too frightening. His presence recovered greatly after he took the second Sunflare level blood pearl; he was no longer as white as a sheet.

The scene came across very differently to the rest of the crowd. Blood pearls were miraculous healing panaceas! The healing properties were incredible enough, even if they didn't enhance a martial master's cultivation level.

“Li Hao’s already made his attempt.” Hao Lianchuan turned his attention to Violet Moon. “You saw it for yourself, it was completely ineffective. Shouldn’t you two be giving it a try now?”

Li Hao did his part, now it’s your turn.

Violet Moon’s expression was calm. She flicked a glance at Hong Yitang, then at the Celestial delegation. “Celestial had people take the second passageway too. Have one of them fly five meters up into the air and see if they’re attacked.”

Ding Chen didn’t say anything in defense of his organization. Yama had paid the price of two blood pearls, they paid one. The Night Watchers sent out Li Hao, the Sword Sect offered Hong Yitang. They were indeed putting forth the least amount of effort. Thus, he simply glanced at a Sunflare.

The Sunflare in question said nothing when he saw his leader look at him. He pushed off from the ground and shot into the air. Three meters, five meters, ten meters...

Interlopers were usually attacked at five meters, but nothing happened this time.

So it’s true! Many rejoiced. Many of the survivors had taken the second passageway. Other than the Night Watchers who didn’t send a single person, most of the rest had come through that avenue.

They were honored guests according to the customs of the ancient city. The rest were illegal trespassers! Honored guests had a proper identity, so the restrictions weren’t that strict for them. As for illegal trespassers, who cared if you died or remained in good health!

Li Hao involuntarily looked at Hao Lianchuan when he saw that the Celestial representative now had freedom of flight. It would’ve been nice to send a portion of their people through the second passageway. What if their enemies all took to the air? Liu Long had gone through the ancient house, so he should be able to fly. As for the others, including himself... Li Hao didn’t know if they could. Martial masters didn’t give off supernatural ripples. But he’d never tried it as who knew if a martial master would also be blasted to death?

It'd be one thing if he never saw the airstrike in action, but after seeing Violet Moon nearly obliterated, no one dared give it a try. Hao Lianchuan's word of warning wasn't necessary. If Solars couldn't withstand the pressure, how could they?

Hu Dingfang frowned and transmitted, "Hao Lianchuan, we should let a portion of our people take the second passageway. I can do it if you're unwilling to. Otherwise, once our partnership is at an end and Violet Moon takes to the air... How will we respond to them then?"

The gap between one side being able to fly and the other being grounded was apparent. Being unable to fly was a self-imposed restriction.

"Don't worry!" Hao Lianchuan responded through transmission. "What are you in a hurry for? You'd have to go up there too if you can fly with impunity. Who the heck knows what's behind the walls? What if there's a Gold Armor or something like that... Do you have a death wish? Let them go up first. That makes it easy for us to run if the situation turns south!"

He knew that the Night Watchers would struggle with additional limitations if none of their people went inside the ancient house, yet it wasn't necessarily a worse situation than what it was now. Had people forgotten that Yao Cheng had died inside the house?

It was an incredible feat that twenty Night Watchers were still alive at this stage. That they hadn't lost a single Sunflare was a miracle! Hao Lianchuan felt that this expedition was well worth it even if they left now. The evil organizations of Silver Moon had suffered enormously on this excavation to the point that even their foundations in Silver Moon were affected!

Violet Moon was more at ease when she saw that Hao Lianchuan hadn't lied to them. They could indeed fly. On the other hand, Hong Yitang was highly conflicted.

Oh, fuck! So I really have to take the risk?