

Star Gate 271

Chapter 271: The Terrifying Ancient City (I)

“No really, she’s a Night Watcher,” Li Hao repeated.

Wang Ming froze with shock, then swallowed hard. “Stop... joking... around... We’re doomed if we’ve killed a Solar level Night Watcher!”

“Don’t worry, she’s not from Silver Moon.”

“Then that’s good!” Wang Ming relaxed a little. The provinces weren’t a tight-knit whole. Although it was still troublesome if she came from another province, it was at least acceptable.

“She’s from headquarters!”

Wang Ming’s jaw dropped. “Which... which headquarters?”

“Central headquarters!”

“.....” Wang Ming sagged to the ground and clutched his head with pain. “We’re done for, done for! You killed her even though you knew her identity...”

“You did!” Li Hao chuckled. “It has nothing to do with me. You said so yourself just now, you killed a Solar. What does it have to do with me?”

“.....” Wang Ming couldn’t find tears to cry with!

“It’s fine, Director Hou wanted us to kill her.” Liu Long was the one who comforted him. “Director Hao knows about this as well.”

“Huh?” Wang Ming gulped for air, his thoughts a tangled snarl. What was going on?

“It’s no big deal, just that Silver Moon doesn’t wish to be under central control. The dynasty is the dynasty and Silver Moon is Silver Moon, understand?”

Wang Ming... didn’t. Not really. He was completely confused. He stood up after a long moment and kept his distance from Li Hao.

“I... don’t know anything!” he said in a muffled voice. “I didn’t hear anything. Please, I beg you, don’t drag me into this. I can’t take it!”

His sky was falling in!

Li Hao laughed and threw a piece of bone over. “Do you want that?”

“.....”

Did he want that?

Of course he... did!

Despite his internal conflict, Wang Ming immediately accepted the bone. There were roughly two hundred cubes of mysterious power in it, that was a lot!

Li Hao then threw over half of the origin weapon that’d been snapped into two. “Do you want that too?”

“.....”

Yeah!

Wang Ming caught the second item as well. Although the weapon of unparalleled sharpness had lost its soul, it was still superior to most supernatural objects. He only needed to hold it in his hand to sense the keenness within.

Could he possibly say no? This type of treasure wasn't purchasable with mysterious power! It could return to being a powerful weapon if he had someone reforge it when he exited the ruins! Although it was a water attributed weapon to begin with, its soul had been destroyed, leaving it simply an item made of durable materials. Said materials happen to be of the metal attribute, which made it a perfect match for him. He had to constantly detonate his sword of energy in battle because he lacked a proper weapon to wield.

This ruined origin weapon would be highly useful for him!

Wang Ming swallowed and drew a little closer to Li Hao. It felt like he was tying himself to their banner of wickedness in accepting the item!

“Are you a co-conspirator now?” Li Hao grinned.

Still conflicted, Wang Ming wrestled with his thoughts for a bit before nodding. “I guess so!”

“You killed Zhang Ting, didn't you?”

“Um... well... the three of us did so together. Ahem, you two did most of the work, I was just the cleanup crew,” Wang Ming said sheepishly.

Li Hao and Liu Long started laughing. When it came down to it, this guy couldn't bear to give up a share of the loot!

"You have no use for water energy," Li Hao raised. "Give it to chief. We'll give back two hundred cubes of metal energy later on."

"Do you guys even have any?" Wang Ming asked curiously. They... didn't, no? There were only one hundred cubes of fire energy in Li Hao's storage ring.

"Of course we do, why don't we?" Li Hao chuckled. "It's only two hundred cubes, we can get that from one Sunflare. Let me count it up for you—as of now, there's two Yama Sunflares, four Red Moon Sunflares, and seven Celestial Sunflares. That's thirteen total Sunflares!

"I ask you, are there metal attributes among them?"

"Pro... probably?" nodded a gaping Wang Ming. This is what you mean by two hundred cubes? You're going to kill people?

It was then that the sometimes slow supernatural abruptly realized, "How... how are you so strong?"

Li Hao's a Dominator?

"Am I strong? No!" Li Hao laughed. "My teacher killed a Solar by himself as soon as he became a Dominator! Me? It took the three of us a very long time to kill the Solar, and we almost died in the ambush! Does that make me strong?"

In that case... Wang Ming shook his head after further consideration. No, you're not strong, just mediocre!

But he almost cried in the next second. Aw fuck, who's like our teacher? He's so scary! Liu Long's a Dominator too, but he's not going around killing Solars! I'm a Sunflare, how am I the weakest of the three?? And here I go, running my mouth everyday on how powerful I am as a Sunflare!

The traces of blood in the distance disappeared throughout the course of their conversation. The battle site had fully recovered. This was the ancient city, the terrifying ancient city. In here, murder could be kept an entirely private affair.

Clothing and other objects were rejected by the ground. Li Hao took out a bit of fire energy when he noticed what was left behind and threw out a fireball. Everything on the ground turned to ashes and the clothing disappeared.

Everything about Zhang Ting was erased from the world.

"Chief, you should absorb some water energy to nurture your kidneys," Li Hao mentioned. "You and Wang Ming should split the origin weapon and see if you can store it within your body! I'm worried about trouble after we exit the ruins, if someone will check us or something like that. We should use everything that we have a use for and turn it into our own strength!"

They'd murdered a witness!

Zhang Ting was a Solar from the central region and their superior. If word of their deed got out and Hou Xiaochen disavowed any knowledge of their actions, the trio would be in grave trouble. Li Hao couldn't endure the consequences of offending the three great organizations and the Night Watchers at the same time. Thus, he wanted to turn all of their gains into personal power before they left the ruins.

Fortified by sword energy, he was cockier than before. He could absorb more mysterious power! His organs had previously absorbed roughly four hundred cubes of metal, water, and earth. Fire energy was the most at five hundred cubes, and wood energy the least at three hundred cubes.

Li Hao wasn't short on water energy at the moment, but he couldn't be blamed since Zhang Ting had refused to leave. He'd had his eyes set on her long ago, in any case!

"Ole Wang, keep an eye out for us. Chief and I will absorb some water energy."

"Eh?" Wang Ming blinked. "You... absorb water energy?"

What? Why?

"Martial masters can absorb any element!"

Wang Ming was so very envious and almost drooling over the notion. "Even I want to be a martial master now. We supernaturals have limitations when it comes to the type of mysterious power we can absorb and we're not as strong as martial masters. Sunflare..."

He'd been full of himself a few days ago because he was a Sunflare. And now, he felt that this level was utter trash. It couldn't match a Dominator! Just look at Yuan Shuo, Li Hao, and Liu Long. Which one of them couldn't wipe the floor with him?

Damn this is shitty! I want to be a martial master too, but there's no hope for me since I've already broken my supernatural locks.

"Shush and keep an eye out..." Li Hao ignored him as he swiftly used sword energy to distill water elemental power. He was in no hurry to observe the two characters. It was better to heal his wounds and grow stronger. The words were right there and he could study them next time if he didn't have a chance this time.

He didn't have Liu Long absorb water energy on its own—he distilled a large amount of water elemental energy and released some into Liu Long's body. He then took the remaining unattributed power and said to Wang Ming, "Ole Wang, have some unattributed power..."

The baffled Wang Ming had no idea where this energy had suddenly come from, but who cared? Time to feast!

Unattributed energy was just as well as it strengthened supernatural locks and the body. The only drawback was that it would make further ascension more difficult.

The three swiftly absorbed the energy at hand. Li Hao was fine enough, but Liu Long was as if a bottomless pit. He was too weak!

Li Hao's kidneys at least had four hundred cubes of water energy reinforcing them; it was Liu Long's first experience being baptized by water elemental energy. It hadn't been long since he became a Dominator and he was far behind Yuan Shuo—he hadn't come to the stage of nurturing his five visceral organs yet.

The man swallowed a dozen cubes of water elemental energy in the blink of an eye. As a Dominator, this was precisely when he should be fortifying his organs. This infusion of water energy came at a perfect time—and it was elemental energy, a cut above regular mysterious power.

It felt so good that Liu Long wanted to moan with pleasure! Was this what it meant to nurture his five elements?

Li Hao couldn't be bothered to explain anything. He swiftly absorbed water energy into his kidneys.

The three quickly depleted the stores of energy that they'd reaped. Wang Ming absorbed unattributed energy, Liu Long took in water elemental energy, whereas Li Hao took in both. Twenty minutes passed before they knew it, whereupon the last piece of human bone crumbled away.

The three opened their eyes and looked at each other, rooted to the spot. Li Hao took it in stride as he was used to this, Liu Long was absolutely not.

“Did... we... kill a fake Solar?” he murmured with shock. Three people had absorbed roughly two hundred cubes in twenty minutes? But... his kidneys felt very normal and he could sense that his aura had grown noticeably stronger. His mind intent was more robust than before!

Wang Ming was likewise incredulous. No wonder Li Hao and the rest wanted to kill people everyday. First they killed Sunflares, then Solars. Not even the Night Watchers could afford to keep them if they had these appetites!

Li Hao absorbed roughly half of the two hundred cubes, with Liu Long accounting for the remaining half. By now, the young man had absorbed roughly five hundred cubes of water energy, placing it on par with fire energy. However, he planned to empty the second piece of bone as well. He'd take in one hundred more cubes as well as the one hundred cubes of fire in the ring. That would ensure his fire and water maintained a balance of six hundred cubes.

His metal and earth would remain at four hundred, and wood... Well, his wood energy was indeed lacking. He could deal with that later.

“Let's absorb the other piece of bone as well. The rest can stay in the storage ring.”

Liu Long had no objections, he wasn't feeling fully satiated yet either. This was a damned good feeling!

No one asked where the pure energy came from, there was no need for questions. Just enjoy the bounty! They began absorbing once more; the last piece of bone crumbled after another twenty minutes.

“I'm going to finish with some fire energy,” said Li Hao. “Chief and Ole Wang, keep an eye on the inner city. They've been in there for almost an hour and there was movement before. There's nothing now... are they all dead?”

Liu Long coughed. Surely not?

Li Hao didn't care and turned his attention to the fire energy. It was time to strengthen his heart!

One hundred cubes were consumed at a moderate pace, placing both water and fire at six hundred cubes in the young man's body and eight hundred cubes of water energy in the storage ring.

Chapter 272: The Terrifying Ancient City (II)

Li Hao, Liu Long, and Wang Ming had improved greatly, the most naturally being Li Hao. Liu Long wasn't that far behind. When he brought his strength to bear, he noted that his aura of the waves was roughly twenty percent stronger than before. For a Dominator to be twenty percent stronger meant that he was confident of emerging victorious when battling mid Sunflares!

As for late Sunflares... that could wait until he actually met them in battle!

"It's been about an hour, right?" Li Hao rose and looked at the inner city. It was so silent that it was disquieting. The young man frowned slightly. It was just twenty kilometers from the gates to the pagoda. Since Solars could fly, they should reach it relatively quickly. Would a fight over treasure still not be resolved after an hour? Not to mention, there was barely any movement coming from that direction.

None of the people who'd entered the city had emerged. Li Hao had thought that some might come back quickly if they found nothing, but no one did!

There were thirty people left in the expedition at this stage. Apart from the trio at the city gates and the dead Zhang Ting, the rest of the twenty-six were gone!

"Should we go in to take a look ourselves?" Whether it was Wang Ming or Liu Long, both held themselves with enormous confidence. We're so good that we took out a Solar! Let's check out the city!

"There's no rush!" Li Hao cast another glance at the city, then at the two characters overhead. He still decided to comprehend "Battle Heaven" first. Although he wanted treasures and origin weapons... to break and replenish sword energy, he'd also had his eyes on these two words for a while!

The two characters took priority! No matter what the situation was, the rest of the expedition team would return in the end. It was best if everyone was injured from fighting each other—the trio outside might be able to claim some easy pickings.

Li Hao's thoughts were the same as Zhang Ting's at the moment, and he'd just confirmed that martial masters could fly in the city. They had freedom of movement even without going through the second passageway.

In that case, not much held him back. He bounded upward and climbed up the massive city gates. They were his stairs and he quickly made it to the top of the gates. He took a seat; the city gates were a staggering width at two or three meters. It was like he was sitting on a bed.

The two characters hovered in front of him, seemingly on the wall, yet not at the same time. They seemed to float in the air or even in another plane.

Li Hao reached out to touch them, but also vaguely sensed that he couldn't! It was a very complicated set of circumstances. After a moment, he forced out another drop of blood from his heart and shot it at the characters.

Boom!

As the blood entered the writing, Li Hao found himself in another area—another world! His consciousness faded in and out; he seemed to make out a startled exclamation of, "His Imperial Majesty is here!"

"His Imperial Majesty has come!"

An entire city's denizens seemed to be surprised, cheering, and working themselves into a fervor.

"His Imperial Majesty is invincible!"

Li Hao's mind still wasn't the clearest. He wanted to open his eyes, but found that he couldn't. He vaguely made out a figure landing from the sky. Countless figures surrounded it—excited, inspired, jubilant.

“Your Imperial Majesty, this small city is newly established. If you don't mind, we would be honored if you would give us a name...”

“That is far too polite of you!” answered a gentle voice, one far less tyrannical than Li Hao expected. “We are of the same origins if we delve into the particulars...”

The imperial majesty that'd broken through the void seemed to say something else that elicited a cheer from the entire city. Following that, the scene shifted in front of Li Hao's eyes and he appeared in someplace new. Weren't these the city gates that he was sitting on?

Except... they seemed a little different. Lacking the air of ancient simplicity, they seemed newly formed.

When the scene shifted in front of Li Hao again, the back of a figure was apparent in front of the young man. It's that person! The moment that he wrote out the calligraphy! The young man seemed... to be witnessing a different era.

The person raised a writing brush in the dusky lighting and searched through his thoughts. The voice from eons ago sounded forth again, “I'm not good with names and really don't know what to call the city... I'm different from that guy, he loves to come up with dubious titles and be very proud of himself for doing so...”

These words seemed both self-deprecating and sarcastic.

“Very well, I bestow the name of... Battle Heaven!”

The final pronouncement caused a disturbance in the crowd. Cheers rang madly, enthused shouts roared—the city’s denizens were very agitated. Battle Heaven!

It seemed to represent something incredible as the powerhouse who’d welcomed this personage earlier was also moved. An old man’s voice echoed by Li Hao’s ears as he reacted emotionally, “Battle Heaven? This... this isn’t appropriate! This is Your Imperial Majesty’s title...”

“It is alright, Battle Heaven is not truly my title either. Even if it is, it refers to times past. He is worthy of veneration, but I... I am not him! His life is one worthy of recollection, however, so let the city be called Battle Heaven! He showed a preference for nurturing talent, so my hope for the city of Battle Heaven is to produce fine sons for the human race. You may not use my name to conduct improper acts!”

“We would never! Your Imperial Majesty shows us great favor in bestowing us this name. Who would dare dishonor this august title?!” A shout reverberated through the ages! The old man was caught in the throes of fervor, he almost seemed like he was in a fit. The city’s name had laid a holy mission upon their shoulders!

Li Hao nearly vomited blood as the din of cheers and roars swelled more than ten times, a hundred times louder than before! Why were the people so agitated? He thought of the Silver and Black Armors. Battle Heaven seemed to be an exceedingly sacred title, an existence that did not tolerate indignity!

“Battle Heaven!”

“Battle Heaven!” Yells and whoops sounded in unison, shaking time itself and sending their excitement, hot-bloodedness, and a torrent of emotion through history. Li Hao’s blood boiled at the happening!

This person had only voiced a few regular words and given a name to elicit such a reaction. It was incredible! Li Hao was being shaken senseless!

The scene brightened in front of him after a long while; the figure was already writing. Brush in hand, he carefully penned the two characters. Fiery spirits surged through Li Hao the moment the figure raised his brush. When he completed the “Battle”, the young man suddenly understood the people’s reaction. He witnessed battle intent flaring out of the character, placing himself in the center of a battlefield.

Powerful enemies surrounded him, but he fought!

One person against heaven and earth, fighting and killing without end. There were wild beasts and monster spirits around him, but he charged again and again to kill!

Slaughter the enemy, exterminate everything! Battle did not stop when enemies yet existed!

Li Hao was caught in the middle of the scene. He’d become that person and felt it in this instance. A blade! He wielded a blade and sliced off enemies’ heads one after another!

There was another person in front of him, too hazy to be identified. One could just barely make out that he was rampaging in all directions without any reservation. He also wielded a blade!

Countless heads flew up into the air beneath the blade. A harbinger of slaughter!

Li Hao felt both muddleheaded and exuberant with battle intent. Who was that person? Whose body was he borrowing in this era? Was it that imperial majesty?

He didn’t know!

He only knew that whenever this person struck, it felt like the young man was the one striking out with his blade. The bloodshed continued until they reached the vault of heaven and ran out of enemies!

When they killed everyone, the figure in front of him paused and said something. Li Hao perked up his ears and focused his mind, wanting to hear what was being said. He turned all of his attention to catch one sentence that petrified with its implications.

“Damn, they’ve got some nerve. They wouldn’t obey when I told them to commit suicide, so I had to raise my blade instead. But I killed them all in the blink of an eye?”

Who is this?? Li Hao quailed. So arrogant! He’d killed everyone on the battlefield because they refused to commit suicide? Why... did he seem more bloodthirsty than Li Hao’s teacher?

This was a true demon!

The scene changed again as his mind reeled. He returned to where the imperial majesty was writing—the “Battle” character was complete. Next was “Heaven”.

Li Hao was transported to another scene the moment it was finished, one drastically different from before. He stood in the cosmos and saw a person in front of him, one that was still the person from before.

“How are you worthy of being called the heavens? You deserve to die! Heavenly Emperor? HAH!”

BOOM!

The sun and moon shattered and the stars dimmed. A presence so powerful that it stole the breath from one’s lungs had its head crushed in a split second!

BAM!

Li Hao felt like his brain would explode! This person was outrageously arrogant, tyrannical, cruel, and brimmed with killing intent! And he... seemed to have killed someone called the Heavenly Emperor...

Who dared call themselves that? A frozen Li Hao didn't know. Who dared? Did the Skystar Emperor dare call himself that?

Of course not!

No one dared hail themselves the emperor of the heavens, but this one who did seemed to have just been murdered! And his killer was the incomparably cocky guy from before.

.....

Li Hao woke up. He was certain he was awake this time, truly awake. He no longer saw the bloodthirsty fiend or the imperial majesty writing characters. He saw Liu Long and Wang Ming beneath him.

The two characters above his head seemed very ordinary now; he hadn't gained much... He only remembered that the imperial majesty he'd been with had killed a few people with the blade, then watched someone else commit murder.

Was that really all he'd gained?

Li Hao's mind wobbled—no, he'd gained much more! He'd witnessed a different world, the strength of the ancient civilization. These people really could shatter the sun, moon, and stars! That person had crushed a heavenly emperor's head with one move!

A blade...

Li Hao didn't have a blade, so he subconsciously waved the Earthturner Sword in his hand. Some different reflections floated to the fore and he so naturally waved the sword around...

Chapter 273: The Terrifying Ancient City (III)

Humm!

Sword qi exploded downward. The city gates were one hundred meters tall—such a distance was the limit of what martial master attacks could reach. And yet, the sword qi shot straight at Wang Ming.

The handsome supernatural didn't think much of Li Hao casually swinging his sword around. They were one hundred meters away!

However, the hairs on the back of his neck stood up the next moment and even his hair bristled on his head. He coalesced ten thousand swords without another word!

The ray of sword qi broke through all of them in an uproarious clamor, leaving behind a stunned Wang Ming who couldn't believe his eyes. Liu Long roared and punched outward—Waves Assaulting the Sky!

Boom!

The ray of sword qi began to decay after colliding with a massive wave and a Dominator at such close range. Although he overcame the sword qi, Liu Long goggled at his fist. It was speckled with blood and there were cuts that ran to the bone!

A casual ray of sword qi from Li Hao from one hundred meters away had nearly killed a Sunflare. Meanwhile, a Dominator as Liu Long barely managed to rebuff it!

Up in the sky, Li Hao also blinked with surprise. How... was this possible? He hadn't put much force behind his blow, he'd just waved a hand according to the habits of the imperial majesty whose body he'd occupied before.

How had this happened??

He jumped down from the city gates and stared at the two, saying with difficulty after a while, “Were you two... putting on an act?”

“.....” Sweat dripped down the side of Wang Ming’s face and he gaped at Li Hao like he was seeing a demon. He trembled as he cursed, “You wanted to kill me! You absolutely wanted to kill me so your secrets would stay safe!”

Damn it, he’d almost died just now!

“How is that blow so strong?” Liu Long also frowned.

“I don’t know!” Li Hao scratched his head. “I really don’t, it was just a casual swing...”

He waved his hand again as he spoke. Wang Ming paled and ducked for cover, but there was no ensuing ray of sword qi cutting through the air this time.

Li Hao remained staring blankly while Liu Long contemplated with furrowed brows. “Did you attain some kind of enlightenment just now? Were you in a state of comprehension?”

“Enlightenment?” Li Hao didn’t know whether to laugh or cry, or even how to explain himself. “If watching someone kill people is enlightenment... then I suppose so!”

He’d simply seen someone kill others moments ago; perhaps it was a remarkable feat. As the young man thought back to how the imperial majesty had slain enemies with one stroke, maybe that was the enlightenment part of his experience. He hadn’t seen anything from the fiend that mowed down enemies on the battlefield and thus, didn’t learn anything.

Li Hao exhaled softly—the stroke he’d just deployed wasn’t continuously available to him. He needed to digest his findings first! It was only now that he realized that while that blow hadn’t seemed like much, his body was devoid of internal force. It was a similar result to when he used the Incantation of the Blade of Blood. He hadn’t even noticed that his energy was being depleted!

What a terrifying finding! No wonder Ole Wang had been so horrified that he almost peed his pants. Li Hao had emptied his internal force with just a casual wave! Even though the blow hadn’t been aimed at Wang Ming and there was no aura powering it, one had to keep in mind that he’d just killed mid Solar Zhang Ting with a single stroke!

Li Hao didn’t know how to respond to the sight of Wang Ming scurrying around for hiding places. “Stop running, no one wants to kill you! Would you still be alive if anyone wanted to?”

Wang Ming glared at him from a safe distance and cursed loudly. This guy is too dangerous!

Liu Long also looked up into the sky, but didn’t read anything from the two characters. At a loss and dejected, it looked like this opportunity wasn’t for him.

Li Hao raised his head, then quickly lowered it again. Forget it, there was no taking these characters with him. He couldn’t touch them. Perhaps there’d be a chance to in the future. He still needed to take some time to digest what he’d gained.

It wasn’t like anyone other than him had freedom of movement. He finally had the effort to spare for the inner city.

All remained quiet on the city’s front, but he soon saw a ball of light heading their way. Instead of a Solar, it looked to be a Sunflare. The young man didn’t know who it was as it was too far away to be clearly identified.

“Someone’s coming!” Li Hao called out a reminder. Wang Ming and Liu Long quickly stood together and looked into the city. There was only a dim avenue in front of them with no one to be seen.

Just as Wang Ming felt that Li Hao was pulling one over them, a form materialized in the gloom. Someone from Yama!

Two Sunflares had entered on the Yama side, but this one wasn't the one who'd threatened Liu Long. It was the other Sunflare. The figure paused to see others at the gates, but quickly relaxed. There were only three of them! One Dominator, one initial Sunflare, and one Sunderer...

Although he was just a mid Sunflare himself, there was nothing to be afraid of. He wouldn't necessarily lose if it came down to a fight. He just didn't want to take action at the moment.

Li Hao and his comrades focused on the bundle in the returnee's hands. It was a piece of clothing wrapped around something.

"We can take things from the houses?" Wang Ming asked with surprise, excitement bubbling up again. No wonder no one had come out yet. They were rich if they could loot the houses! Who'd want to come out then!

"Take a look yourself!" the person responded coldly. He grunted when he saw the three blocking the gates, "Move!"

He wanted out! Although they couldn't leave the ruins at the moment, he didn't want to stay inside the city anymore. It was a bit dangerous. He'd already gotten his hands on treasure. He might not make it out if he indulged in greed and continued to stay. Not to mention, he'd have to turn everything in if he brought out too much treasure. He wouldn't be able to keep much for himself.

Wang Ming smiled when he saw Li Hao remain silent. "Now, let's not be in a rush," he said curiously. "We'd like to know more about the situation inside the city. Why are you the only one out and what are you holding?"

The Yama member's face darkened. What, are you three planning on robbing me?

“It’s pretty much the same inside and outside the city,” he answered calmly and slowly shifted away. “We can’t enter the closed houses, but some houses have their doors open. We didn’t dare enter at first, but then found out after some experimentation that those were accessible. So everyone split up to search for houses with open doors and take whatever trifles we can find...”

“Then let’s take a look!” Wang Ming continued seriously. “We’ll let you go if it really isn’t worth anything!”

“Are you looking to die?!” the person erupted with anger. “Do you really think you can do anything to me?”

He didn’t want to fight only because he did have some treasure in his hands. These guys looked piss poor, what was the point in killing them? Not to mention, it was three against one at the end of the day. How great a loss it would be if a mishap happened and he died to them!

“Didn’t the Revolution King and others go to the pagoda?” Li Hao asked. “Why is there no sign of movement or them coming out yet?”

“I don’t know.” The Yama powerhouse frowned. “Go take a look yourself if you want to know!”

“You don’t know anything... Yama is nothing good!” Li Hao snorted, suddenly seized by the urge to kill someone. Uh oh, I’m being affected by that killing demon. He suddenly slashed out with his sword!

The Yama member flew into a rage. How dare a Sunderer attack him! He courted death! He would kill these three first if he had to—do you really think I’m a pushover??

Earth energy surged as he waved a great ax into being, he was an earth supernatural. Sword qi arrived as soon as his weapon formed.

Pfft!

The sword qi pierced through the defenses of earth energy and ran through his throat. A wooden look entered the Yama powerhouse's eyes.

I'm... dead?

Li Hao didn't care what he thought. He darted forward to add a blow to ensure his target's death. A gleeful Wang Ming rushed forward without needing his colleague to say anything and began cleaning up the corpse, collecting mysterious power. A mosquito's leg was still meat, not to mention that almost three hundred cubes of mysterious power were available from a Sunflare.

It was a pity that he was an earth supernatural, however, and not metal.

Li Hao turned his sights to the bundle, but the three paused when it was open. What was this? A bundle of stones?

Yet, Li Hao's breathing deepened as he studied it closely. Wang Ming didn't realize it at first and thought the bundle really did contain rocks. After a while, however, he swallowed hard.

"These... these... seem to be... mysterious power stones!"

"What?" Liu Long asked blankly. He didn't sense anything out of the ordinary, these were just rocks.

"These... are treasures that powerhouses found in ancient ruins," Wang Ming explained haltingly. "One stone contains a lot of mysterious power! And... it might be of different attributes. The... key thing is that the energy inside these rocks is very pure and abundant! One rock might hold hundreds or even thousands of cubes..."

The handsome supernatural was stunned beyond belief. “They... were discovered in other ruins before, but... there might be only two or three rocks per ruin. It’s said that Red Moon rose so swiftly because they found a large cache of mysterious power stones!

“They’re also the key to replenishing origin weapons. The Night Watchers... have them too. Didn’t I say before that each faction has their own way of raising rookies and creating mysterious power?

“These rocks are the best resource! Origin weapons can swiftly distill large sums of mysterious power from them and they can also be used to strengthen origin weapons...” Wang Ming swallowed hard once more. “This guy got his hands on two dozen of them??”

Indeed, there were approximately two dozen rocks inside the bundle. They were rich! They were truly rich!

No wonder he’d been in such a hurry to run. If it’d been Wang Ming laying hands on such a fortune, he’d run as fast as his legs would carry him!

Not only would he run, but he would hide!

Once this treasure was discovered by others, Solars and above might come in pursuit of him. Mysterious power stones were very valuable! One or two of them might be given a pass, but a dozen at once??

Liu Long and Li Hao were likewise stunned. Just one piece of these things was worth hundreds or even a thousand cubes? These ruins were too rich! This was just the harvest from houses with open doors, what of the ones that were closed? Unbelievable! Were the others collecting this many stones as well?

Chapter 274: The Terrifying Ancient City (IV)

Li Hao had taken note of the rocks’ peculiarities when he scanned them; his unique eyesight revealed that they contained a lot of energy. However, he didn’t fathom that they held so much! Even he felt that they’d struck it rich this time.

The young man swiftly counted their new gains. Altogether, there were thirty-two rocks of varying sizes! According to Wang Ming's explanation and his own estimation, there were at least ten thousand cubes of mysterious power here, or even more...

It was an astronomical amount that blew the mind!

"It's... going to be tough to bring all this out!" Wang Ming breathed heavily. "They're not small items and we didn't enter the city. If other people see that we suddenly have a bundle of stuff..."

Reaping treasure was one thing, but there were a lot of Solars inside the city that they had to face. Long faces marked the trio. Did they have storage rings they could use? How about a space attributed supernatural? Any idiot would know they bore treasure if they carried a bundle around like that fellow just had!

"If worst comes to worst..." Liu Long set his jaw. "I'll swallow them all! Martial masters have strong stomachs and organs. I can pass them through my system when we get out!"

"....." Li Hao and Wang Ming bestowed him looks of disgust at the same time. Ew, gross.

But upon further thought, that might be the best way of concealing their newfound gains. It was ten thousand cubes of mysterious power! Solars and Novas wouldn't mind casually eliminating them for this harvest. And they didn't even need to consider absorbing the energy on the spot. They were full from the last round, how could they take in any more? Not to mention, they couldn't split so much mysterious power between them no matter how they tried!

Just as they debated how to handle their wealth, golden light abruptly erupted from the center of the quiet city! Startled, the trio looked over in that direction. Thanks to the feeble light from the pagoda, they saw... a fist!

It was a punch! Just one punch smashed a fleeing figure to smithereens—the figure was no more. It was a bit familiar... Despite their distance, everyone's vision was quite keen. That fist had come with light, illuminating the sky enough that certain details could be glimpsed.

Li Hao's jaw dropped; Liu Long and Wang Ming shook with horror. That had been... Ding Chen!

Indeed, the figure running for his life was the mid Solar from Celestial equipped with an origin weapon! He'd been blasted to pieces by one punch!

Li Hao also saw a thin sword race across the sky. There seemed to be a vicious beast superimposed on it. It was hard to make out, the young man gathered it was similar to the snake shadow he saw before. He'd cut that snake apart; this particular beast was shivering from terror.

The golden fist punched out once more, reducing the beast and sword into dust with a loud collision!

A gold level origin weapon was decimated in a split second! It wasn't snapped into two or broken, it was obliterated out of existence and it happened in the blink of an eye!

Multiple figures darted out of the city center in the next moment, they flew as fast as they could!

Golden light flashed beneath the pagoda—a Gold Armor hovered in the air!

It didn't give chase and simply watched the intruders scatter in every direction possible. He'd killed Ding Chen because the man had sought to take the Black Tortoise Seal from his hand.

The Gold Armor floated silently in the air while Solars fled helter-skelter from the city, an incomprehensible shock on their face.

A Gold Armor?! Fuck! They thought it was just decoration, but it'd come alive! That Silver Armor had erupted with power beyond Nova in the last possible second, so what about this Gold Armor??

Had it recovered its consciousness?

Possibly not!

The soldiers seemed to fully disappear when they did. But even without his full capabilities, he was likely... a Nova, wasn't he? That Silver Armor had been late to peak Solar! Or was he even greater than Nova?

If they backed him into a corner and forced him to regain his consciousness, would that place him beyond Nova??

No one dared consider the possibility. The soldier had killed mid Solar Ding Chen with one punch and an origin weapon with another. That was enough for everyone to know that there was no point in working together. They would just be picked off, one after another!

Run! The only thing to do was run! They were all doomed if they didn't run!

Li Hao shook with fright at the city gates. Hot damn, a Gold Armor! He turned and ran for safety as well! This was too terrifying!

As he scuttled away, the enormous city gates began creaking close. The young man didn't notice it at first, but his heart skipped a beat when he turned back for a look. The gates are closing?! I don't know how the others will be, but Hao Lianchuan and Hu Dingfang won't be able to make it out! They can't all fly in the city!

Director Hao's done for! He's twenty kilometers away and the gates will be closed soon! And that Kong Qi too, they're the only Solars who haven't tried the second passageway!

Li Hao grew frantic. Director Hao was a good man, it'd be such a pity if he died. The young man wanted to see if he could stop the gates from closing—even a little while would do. He whirled around and ran back—Liu Long and Wang Ming had no choice but to follow. They'd also seen the gates start to close.

However, Li Hao started in the next moment. The gates began opening once more when he drew near them! What... the heck?

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At the same time.

The Gold Armor glanced at the city gates. The crouching turtle in the air also seemed to open its eyes and look at something in that direction.

A direct lineal descendant of the eight families? It was unknown whether this thought came from the old turtle or Gold Armor.

It dissipated as soon as it formed. Battle Heaven welcomed guests and all lineal descendants of the eight families. The eight families were of the same breath and branches. The city's gates should be flung wide open when one visited!

Of course, the caveat was that the city reawakened first...

Indeed, reawakened. Li Hao hadn't been able to open the city gates before because the city had been fast asleep. It stirred with some life now.

The Gold Armor remained unmoving, as did the crouching turtle. The latter seemed to be a sculpture and permitted the intruders within the city to run madly!

Battle Heaven did not fear enemies and welcomed all guests so long as they weren't out of line. They did not, however, welcome thieves and robbers. The ancient city once more sank into silence with the appearance of the Gold Armor. Only sounds of people breaking through the air could be heard.

The Solars were frightened out of their wits. Hao Lianchuan was as pale as a sheet and manifested the Flaming Fire Phoenix beneath him. He rode something that resembled a phoenix and shot for the city gates. There was no time to consider or respect that this was the director's prized origin weapon!

Hu Dingfang appeared to be an existence akin to a deer. All four of his limbs were on the ground as he jumped and leapt wildly, moving faster than flight. He was also terrified out of his mind.

The same went for all of the others. No one was in the mood to fight even if they bumped into each other. Escape first, nothing else!

.....

Li Hao watched with a strange look at the city gates. He glanced at the gates, then at the people about to arrive. The young man suddenly grabbed the mysterious power rocks and started eating them. One... two... three...

"Eat them!" he growled. Liu Long and Wang Ming jerked with realization and started stuffing their faces. These people might take the rocks away from them as soon as they arrived! Eat first, nothing else!

Li Hao judged the remaining distance between the group and the gates, they looked for Director Zhou and the earth supernatural Zhao Huan. Would they make it back in time? He was going to run as soon as Hao Lianchuan and Hu Dingfang were almost here.

Close the city gates!

As for whether or not they could be opened again or if people could fly out... he couldn't give consideration to that!

The Sunflares and Darkmoons hadn't penetrated the city as deeply. Some Sunflares could be seen churning their way to the city gates before long. Li Hao saw Zhao Huan and Director Zhou, but there was no sign of the Darkmoons to be seen. He didn't see any of them, but neither did he care about them. They were possibly all spies, so who cared about them! None of the Darkmoons had stayed with any good intentions.

The Sunflares made it through the gates and Director Zhou took a moment to grunt, "What are you standing there for? Run!"

These fools were just standing here dumbly! What were their brains made of??

"We should... wait for the director..." Li Hao stammered.

Fucking hell, this idiot kid!

Director Zhou grabbed him and made a run for it. "Forget them, they're fast..."

Li Hao felt impossibly weary. What could he say now?

The city gates started swinging shut as soon as he was pulled away, but no one noticed it at first. It was Hao Lianchuan and the others in the distance that took note. The deputy director sweated profusely. The city gates were closing?

Run!

He propelled himself with every iota of strength and stamina, fleeing for his life. The Flaming Phoenix Spear picked up speed and raced at a pace even faster than missiles!

The city gates were closing and he couldn't fly! But even if he could, he'd worry that he wouldn't be able to make it out either.

A ball of sparks zoomed past him. The Revolution King shot out like a gust of wind and Violet Moon also tumbled out as a bolt of lightning. Hong Yitang wasn't strong, but he seemed to be a giant bear rolling along the ground. Li Hao watched with a dropped jaw—what kind of ability was that?

Being as strong as he was, Hu Dingfang leapt out with a mighty push of his legs!

Over on the Celestial side, Kong Qi was the weakest. He threw caution to the wind when he saw the gates creak shut and flew into the air, wanting to dive past the gates. Unfortunately, he hadn't taken the second passageway and was blasted out of the sky by a ray of white light.

He was gone! There was no sign of him to be seen!

Celestial had suffered minimal losses before this, but they were down two Solars in the blink of an eye. The Celestial Sunflares that'd made it out were openmouthed with shock. That's it? They were gone? Their two leaders were dead, just like that?

BOOM!

The city gates were fully closed!

"Huff huff huff..." Violent panting sounded in everyone's ears. Solars sweated profusely, perspiration pouring down their faces. The events of today would likely feature in nightmares to come.

Chapter 275: Gains (I)

The city gates were closed. The Gold Armor yet hovered in the air within the city; golden radiance could be glimpsed in the darkness even through the massive city gates and walls.

Violent panting continued throughout the horrified crowd. They could neither leave nor stay. Should they keep running? That soldier didn't seem to be in pursuit. Would he charge out of the city even though the gates were closed?

There was a small seal of a turtle shell floating over his hand...

A sliver of greed rose in everyone when they thought of that item, but it was swiftly drowned by terror.

Too strong! Ding Chen had been annihilated with one punch; he'd had no room for retaliation at all.

"How much longer until the ruins open?" Violet Moon asked despite her wan face and shortness of breath. She'd forgotten what time it was or didn't even have the ability to consider how much time had elapsed.

"A long time!" Li Hao called out while being dragged away by Director Zhou. "You guys were in there for only two hours. There's another twenty-two until the ruin doors open again."

That was a very long time! They couldn't leave even if they wanted to. It was why the crowd didn't keep running—there was no place to run to. They wouldn't even be able to fly anymore if they left the outer city and came back in. Thus, they wouldn't brashly depart the premises. They still had designs on the inner city.

"This is all that idiot Ding Chen's fault!" Violet Moon set her jaw with annoyance. "That Gold Armor was inert and wouldn't have made a move if we didn't disturb the seal in his hand..."

The Solars had swiftly run for the pagoda after entering the city, but hadn't been able to make it up the structure after prolonged attempts. They couldn't even fly up!

They had to search around the base when they were out of ideas and found the Gold Armor in one of the ancient houses. Wary and on guard at first, no one dared approach it. The might of the Silver

Armor was still fresh in their minds. But after extended tries, someone was bold enough to try attacking the soldier.

There was no response!

That was when other thoughts entered their mind and Ding Chen made use of the opportunity to attempt to sneak the seal away when everyone milled around in confusion.

The results spoke for themselves. Everyone's wits flew out of their minds when the Gold Armor moved! Violet Moon was assigning all blame to Ding Chen—no one would object since he was dead. In actuality, everyone wanted that item. Ding Chen was just unlucky enough to be the first to touch it and die a ghastly death for it.

Hao Lianchuan didn't say anything, he looked at the city gates. Hu Dingfang also frowned.

"There's still people inside."

Indeed, there were still others behind the gates. There had been thirty people left on the expedition team before. Li Hao's trio killed Zhang Ting and the Yama Sunflare, and another two Solars had died. That left twenty-six inside the city.

There were five Solars standing outside, eleven Sunflares that'd made it out, and Li Hao's three. That made for nineteen total, leaving seven inside the city—including the four Night Watcher Darkmoons. Not a single one of them had emerged. Plainly, they'd all chosen to go deep into the city and traveled slower. Since they couldn't fly, they hadn't been able to retreat in time.

The others looked around and saw that the Night Watchers were abruptly five less. Cold smirks appeared on faces when they saw that all of their Darkmoons were missing. How dare Darkmoons remain! They were just courting death to do so!

The group pivoted to Yama after the Night Watchers—the Revolution King looked wordlessly at the sole Sunflare left by his side. He was down yet another person!

Of the rest, Celestial lost two Sunflares and Red Moon lost one Sunflare. Hao Lianchuan didn't notice it at first, but then realized when he took a close look—where was Zhang Ting? He remembered that she was with Li Hao and the others. Where was she now?

It was normal for the other Darkmoons to be missing since they were trapped in the city, but Zhang Ting was a Solar! There were no Silver or Black Armors here, so the method he'd taught Li Hao before was completely unusable. She would swiftly land back on the ground even if flung into the air, Liu Long wouldn't be able to stop her.

Liu Long and Li Hao also didn't seem to be injured, which made it all the more impossible! A Dominator could not emerge unscathed after fighting a Solar.

The look in his eyes shifting rapidly, Hao Lianchuan looked at Li Hao. "Didn't Zhang Ting stay out of the city?"

"She went inside." The young man shook his head. "She said she wanted to take a look after you guys went in since it seemed safe. And then... she didn't come back out!"

No one had seen anything, so it was up to him however he'd like to spin the story.

Hao Lianchuan was simply curious. So she'd gone inside? Then she might be alive? Those trapped inside the city might not be dead, they were simply unable to come back out.

"Do we go inside again?" Hao Lianchuan asked. There were only five Solars left now.

"I'm not going!" Hong Yitang answered decisively. "I'm leaving as soon as the doors open again!"

Who were they joking?? He wasn't going inside for any reason whatsoever anymore. It was too damned dangerous. He wouldn't have made it out just now if he'd been the slightest bit slower. Who knew what would be the consequences then?!

Violet Moon and the Revolution King also seemed to be heavily injured. They might've been embroiled in battle after entering the inner city. Li Hao, however, didn't see anything when he swept a gaze over them. Had they obtained any treasure, or had they hidden their gains in something like a storage ring?

That was very possible as ancient records mentioned such things existing in the ruins. There also seemed to be a space attribute when it came to supernaturals. Since such properties existed, there was a hope of producing them in modern times. Thus, the local leaders of these factions might really have such artifacts. They didn't seem to have returned empty-handed from the looks on their faces. They simply hadn't laid hands on the most critical treasure.

Li Hao wordlessly observed the crowd—five Solars and eleven Sunflares. Two of the Solars were from the Night Watchers. There were only nine Sunflares left of the three great organizations, one for Yama, three for Red Moon, and five for Celestial. However, losing their two Solars was the greatest loss for Celestial.

The expedition team had shrunk once more. Apart from the twenty that'd left earlier and the nineteen present in front of the gates, less than forty had survived from the original team of two hundred. This wasn't to say that all nineteen here would make it to the exit, either.

Can Hao Lianchuan and Hu Dingfang take care of the Revolution King and Violet Moon? If Hong Yitang doesn't interfere, then chief, Wang Ming, Director Zhou, Zhao Huan, and I will be five against nine...

The thought popped into Li Hao's mind. Could they consider eliminating all of the rest? Violet Moon's origin weapon was damaged while Hao Lianchuan had his Flaming Phoenix Spear. The deputy director stood a very real chance of overcoming his opponent. As long as Hong Yitang stayed out of things, Hu Dingfang possessed sufficient strength to handle the Revolution King.

The young man quickly dismissed the idea. They didn't have to eliminate all of their enemies! There might be more trouble if Violet Moon and the Revolution King died; it would be better if they lived. There would certainly be representatives of the three great organizations once the team left the ruins. Would they let the matter rest upon seeing that their entire delegation was wiped out?

It would prove that Celestial's Solars didn't die to the Night Watchers if the other two Solars still lived. That would avoid certain troubles.

Many considerations ran through Li Hao's mind. If he was here alone, he would kill everyone present. He had the strength and means to. The Night Watchers, however, needed to put down roots in Silver Moon.

The young man exhaled gently when his thoughts traveled here. He was a little too bloodthirsty these days! That killing fiend must be impacting him—he wasn't so murderous before. He'd only taken a quick look in the illusion, but the other affected him even now.

"They wouldn't obey when I told them to commit suicide, so I had to raise my blade instead" reverberated in his mind. Was this the sentiment from anyone decent?

No! Only serial killers say that! Li Hao condemned inwardly. I'm no one like that, I barely even killed chickens as I grew up! I'm a genteel, refined person!

That man was indeed terrifying. Just a scene in someone else's memories eons ago still proved sufficient to impact him even now!

Hu Dingfang suddenly looked at one of Celestial's Sunflares as Li Hao's thoughts ran wild. "What... are you holding?" he asked with a strange look in his eyes.

The cloaked figures tensed with nervousness. One of them clutched a very big bag. It'd been shoved into his cloak before, but could no longer remain hidden at this stage.

“I... seem to sense something as well...” Hao Lianchuan said slowly. Violet Moon and the Revolution King turned around as well, all of them with bizarre looks on their faces.

Li Hao could already see the contents of the bag. The Celestial members seemed to have discovered some mysterious power stones, much like the ones that the Yama member had found. The organization’s Sunflares floundered in dread and apprehension. The late Sunflare threw the bag out. “We picked these up... Please take them if the venerated ones have use for them!”

He chose to give up his bounty in this moment because his two Solars were dead. Ding Chen’s death made sense, Kong Qi’s had come about from pure nerves. He took to the air even though he hadn’t gone through the second passageway. Did he think he was Violet Moon and had the protection of the Armor of the Thunder God?

The bag spilled its contents on the ground. The Solars’ eyes widened when rocks tumbled out. It really was mysterious power stones!

Hao Lianchuan wasn’t in a hurry to pick them up. “There are... mysterious power stones inside the city?” he asked with a peculiar tone.

“Yes!” answered the Celestial member. “Some ancient houses have their front doors open. When we went inside, we discovered that some houses had stones in them. There’s not that many—some hold only one, some have three to five.

“Other than us and the venerated ones who went to the pagoda, the others should’ve collected a few as well. This is why we stayed in the city—to look for more.”

Violet Moon glanced at her remaining members—they nodded back at her. Plainly, they’d also found some. They weren’t afraid of anything since their Solar was still alive.

Mysterious power stones!

These items were the key to faction strength! The Night Watchers possessed some as well—they typically appeared only in ancient ruins and in very few quantities, unless it was a special ruin. But just Celestial alone had collected almost sixty from the inner city! It was an astronomical sum!

“These are Celestial’s findings,” Hao Lianchuan chuckled. “We’d be bullying you if we took them. You should put them away...” He glanced at Violet Moon and the Revolution King. “I am sure that you two are in agreement as well, correct?”

Violet Moon snorted and the Revolution King agreed faintly, “Ding Chen and Kong Qi died in accidents. The three great organizations are of the same breath and branches...”

Chapter 276: Gains (II)

Five Solars acted at the same time before the Revolution King finished speaking!

Bam!

One person for each surviving Sunflare!

The five Celestial members knew that disaster was upon them and wanted to run, but there was quite a difference between Sunflare and Solar. Hao Lianchuan stabbed a Sunflare to death with his spear! The others were the same and executed their targets at nearly the same time!

Hong Yitang did so with a look of resignation on his face. He didn’t want to do so! But he knew this would be the outcome as soon as the Revolution King and others started speaking. Celestial’s Solars were no more. Who didn’t want this vast sum of mysterious power stones? It’d just be creating trouble for themselves if they let the Celestial members go after confiscating all of their gains.

In that case, none of them would leave the ruins alive!

These Solars were ruthless and decisive when it came to decisions such as these. Since Celestial no longer had Solars at the helm, they could all die! No one would say anything if they were all dead.

Hao Lianchuan picked at the corpses and found another twenty-odd stones from the dead. Part of the loot was extracted from the bodies.

“So many, eighty rocks!” he chuckled. Eighty of them! So much more than they expected. He dropped the good guy act at this point since no one would be selfless when it came to divvying goods. “Violet Moon, Revolution, how do you say?”

“I don’t want any!” Hong Yitang declared. He really didn’t want the treasure, but he’d participated in the killing all the same!

Such was wisdom.

If he didn’t kill people and didn’t want the loot, then these people might kill him as well too. Celestial wasn’t a faction to provoke—there would be retribution once their powerhouses found out that their Sunflares had been murdered.

Red Moon and Yama were no exception to their vengeance; these killers didn’t hold any reservations to killing anyone. Now that he’d killed Celestial members with them, he would naturally keep their secrets.

Hao Lianchuan didn’t bother with Hong Yitang after he said he didn’t want any. Mysterious power stones were treasures of strategic importance. “The four of us will split twenty each!”

“Are you certain you can hold on to so much?” the Revolution King asked coolly. Twenty stones? He and Hu Dingfang were claiming half of the spoils!

“I can!” Hao Lianchuan grinned. “Ole Hu and I aren’t necessarily afraid of you two. Violet Moon’s injuries are heavy and she can’t fight anymore. Meanwhile, you should protect your sole survivor well, Revolution!”

A frosty expression crept over the Revolution King's face and he countered after a while, "Violet Moon and I will take twenty-five stones each. The remaining thirty can go to you!"

Thirty stones held roughly ten thousand cubes of mysterious power based on the size of these rocks. Ten thousand was a lot, but wasn't that critical to the various large organizations. It wasn't worth killing five Celestial Sunflares, in any case.

However, mysterious power stones were different. Their worth wasn't measured in terms of cubes of mysterious power contained, but in terms of fuel for origin weapons. That made them treasures of strategic importance. While Li Hao and his companions wanted to empty the stones of mysterious power, that was a fool's move in the eyes of the major organizations!

If these items held three hundred cubes of mysterious power, the major organizations would be willing to buy them for one thousand!

.....

Li Hao and the rest were watching with dropped jaws. Wang Ming's eyes were wide open! He thought the three of them were bad enough... but it turns out that everyone was horrible in this field!

These guys didn't even finish talking and Celestial had already handed over their treasure! The Solars hadn't conversed with each other beforehand and killed at a moment's notice! It was one thing for the others because they wanted the treasure, but Hong Yitang didn't want any part of it. He killed the Celestial members all the same! Plainly, he looked three steps into the future when he took one step and immediately knew the dangers ahead.

Wang Ming swallowed hard. This world was too dangerous! He was too pure! Li Hao and Liu Long killed Zhang Ting at the drop of a hat, the Solars exterminated Celestial at the drop of a hat. What had been nineteen expedition members before was only fourteen now!

"Go collect the mysterious power." Li Hao's voice rang lowly in Wang Ming's ear.

“Are you crazy?!” yelled the handsome supernatural. You want me to collect mysterious power at a time like this?!

“There’s metal attribute power among them. We Night Watchers have the advantage in numbers and just got a smaller portion of the goods. It’s right that we take the mysterious power!”

Then you go! Wang Ming cursed inwardly. But... fine, I’ll take a gamble!

He cautiously crept over; the venerated personages didn’t seem to pay him attention until he started collecting mysterious power. Wang Ming’s scalp crawled when they looked at him and he said nervously, “I... I didn’t want milords and lady to dirty your hands. The ground will absorb this energy soon, so I’ll collect it for you...”

“Take it,” Hao Lianchuan chuckled. “If all of this is ours, the mysterious power stones can be divided according to your split. I trust no one has a different opinion?”

Violet Moon and Revolution didn’t say anything. Five Sunflares would result in one thousand cubes at most, and that was sullied energy. Killing people for their mysterious power was one of the dumbest actions one could take. One additional stone was better than killing five Sunflares.

Mysterious power contained in the body was filled with impurities and mixed with different attributes. It wasn’t a necessity for powerhouses when they cultivated.

Wang Ming sighed with relief behind Hao Lianchuan. Li Hao finally didn’t trick him for once! So these people really didn’t care about this. But to the trio, a thousand cubes was a sizable amount even though they’d reaped some mysterious power stones. They’d had to kill Zhang Ting to obtain that much before.

Celestial had no place at the table after their two Solars died. Their delegation was instantly exterminated. Other than the six that left earlier, the rest of the faction had died in the ruins.

Of the remaining fourteen, the Night Watchers counted for half. Hu Dingfang ignored everyone else and simply confirmed that Li Hao was alright.

“That Gold Armor guards the origin weapon, we probably won’t be able to take it!” he said. “We lack the strength to, at the very least. These ruins will open again on a later date, so I don’t recommend continuing to risk our lives at this stage!”

Their gains were plenty on this expedition; the mysterious power stones and Black Armors were all treasures, not to mention what the Solars had collected when they entered the ancient city that the Gold Armor occupied. It was a lot!

Entering the inner city now was truly to court death. The remaining Solars were of a mind to retreat.

Violet Moon flicked a glance at Li Hao. The young man was alive... that was good. It would be trouble if he died.

This ancient city of Battle Heaven was dangerous beyond compare. There was certain to be large sums of mysterious power stones in the city—that was a guarantee. The Black Tortoise Seal was also a premier origin weapon. Apart from that, there must be ultimate treasures located on top of the pagoda they couldn’t climb! They’d simply excavated a portion of items available on the surface. They weren’t likely to uncover the rest, not with their strength.

Violet Moon thought for a moment and said, “If there are no other gains to be had this time, we probably won’t be the ones in control of the next expedition!”

She was still unwilling to accept this outcome. There were already people who’d exited to the outside world. Information of what was inside the ruins was surely becoming common knowledge. Whether it was the three great organizations or Night Watchers, any of them might direct large amounts of powerhouses to Silver Moon next.

Those on this expedition were the rulers of only Silver Moon; the powerhouses of the central region hadn't paid attention to a small ruin before. But soon... they would. They might seek to enter themselves when the ruins opened next month.

"There's no helping it, it's not something we can control!" Hao Lianchuan sighed. "I think it'll take more than one or two Novas to handle the Gold Armor, to say nothing of anything else. More Novas will be needed to take him out!"

That soldier wasn't something that Solars could stand up to! An origin weapon had been decimated with one punch. Hao Lianchuan was even suspecting that this soldier was greater than Nova. Were there such experts in the central region?

.....

Li Hao listened quietly to the Solars' conversation. It looked like they'd decided to give up. The city gates will open if I walk over... There was no need for a second passageway, he could fly without a problem. Was it because of his bloodline, or some other reason?

It hadn't seemed difficult to open the city gates at first, but reality proved otherwise. The expedition team needed to take the second passageway to fly over, then push the gates open. But now... Li Hao suspected that there was something different about this city. Could Violet Moon and the others still fly over to open the gates?

He wondered this way because he had a hunch that this city seemed more... alive than before! The Gold Armor and pagoda both seemed a bit brighter, and the city itself was less dim.

Perhaps the Solars hadn't discovered it, but Li Hao guaranteed that they wouldn't dare fly over to open the gates anymore. He also felt that one matter less was desirable to one matter more. It was best to exit the ruins!

His harvest this time was much more than anticipated. There were eight hundred cubes of water energy in the ring, the thirty-some mysterious power stones they'd found, and one thousand cubes of mysterious power that Wang Ming had just collected. None of this was going to Hao Lianchuan!

Additionally, there were another three hundred cubes of earth energy from the Yama Sunflare and the enlightenment he'd gained from the two characters. He'd also risen to Dominator...

One could say that Li Hao was the greatest winner of this excavation. He kept his usual low profile, so low profile that apart from Wang Ming and Liu Long, not even Hao Lianchuan knew that they'd gained so much.

Everyone thought that they'd waited at the gates and didn't enter the city. And the fact of the matter was, they had indeed stayed outside! Thus, Li Hao was still a half step Dominator in the group's eyes—one who'd just advanced to that level.

After some discussion, Hong Yitang declared that nothing would make him willing to go inside again. The others were of the same mind and decided not to continue their explorations. It was too dangerous!

Chapter 277: Gains (III)

After the discussion was over, the Revolution King left with his sole surviving subordinate to investigate other areas in the outer city. Perhaps there were more ancient houses with open front doors.

Violet Moon also left with her three Sunflares. She didn't dare stray too far from the Revolution King due to concern about being attacked by the Night Watchers. It would take concerted action between Red Moon and Yama to withstand the Night Watchers now.

As for Hong Yitang, he decided to stick with the Night Watchers. At times like these, the government agency benefited from a good reputation.

The Night Watchers were gathered in one spot; Hong Yitang kept his distance. Hao Lianchuan scanned those remaining and sighed with emotion, "Thank goodness we had the others leave first.

We brought in such a large expedition team this time, but eighty percent of it died! This was far more dangerous than our previous explorations!”

“Director Hao, there are a few more of ours left in the city.” Director Zhou frowned. “Are we really going to leave them behind?”

Hao Lianchuan shook his head and looked at the sky. “We can’t enter the city anymore, it’s too dangerous! I suspect that even those who took the second passageway won’t be able to enter anymore either. Just look at Violet Moon and Revolution—do they dare fly over the walls now? There’s... no saving the ones stuck inside!”

Zhao Huan and Director Zhou said nothing more.

“Are you sure that Zhang Ting entered the city and didn’t come back out?” Hao Lianchuan looked at Li Hao.

“She went inside!” Li Hao nodded.

Hao Lianchuan sank into deep thought. It was fine that she’d entered the city. He was only concerned that she hadn’t and was hiding somewhere. That would be bad as she was an agent of the central region. The Solars had actually found some secrets inside the inner city, but they were in tacit accord and wouldn’t speak of what they found.

There weren’t that many surviving at this point, so not much information would be revealed. As for the situation in the outer city, all that could be freely spoken of!

On the other hand, Hao Lianchuan hadn’t given up on the Black Tortoise Seal. It wasn’t just him—all of Silver Moon wouldn’t relinquish the treasure. But had Zhang Ting really entered the city?

With the uproar that’d taken place, she should’ve ran for her life even at the cost of exposing her strength and identity. Equipped with an origin weapon and being mid Solar, she wouldn’t die so easily so long as it wasn’t to the Gold Armor.

On the other hand, could she have died without entering the city? Hao Lianchuan found that hard to believe! Liu Long and the others didn't have the strength to kill her. He looked at Wang Ming and assessed the young man's condition, remarking with an odd tone, "Wang Ming, you seem to have grown a little stronger..."

"Mmhmm!" The smiling supernatural nodded. "I absorbed some of our earlier gains when you guys entered the city, Director Hao! You're amazing and have such keen eyesight as to see even this! Incredible!"

He fawned over the deputy director as much as he could! Hao Lianchuan raised an eyebrow, is that so?

"So you were with Li Hao and the others this whole time?"

"That's right!" Wang Ming responded with surprise. "Whyever not? Li Hao himself said that he needed me to protect him. That's why I stayed. It wasn't that I was afraid, so don't misunderstand, Director Hao!"

Alright then, that was fine. Wang Ming had been present the entire time—he was a good sapling being raised by the Night Watchers. If Liu Long and Li Hao had other plans in mind, they wouldn't execute them in front of Wang Ming. It'd only been a few days since the young supernatural was deployed to Silver City.

In that case, one could only conclude that Zhang Ting had been unlucky enough to blunder into some of the city's danger zones. Well then, who cared if she was dead or alive! More than one Solar had died on this expedition and Celestial had lost two. Yama lost one, whereas Hao Lianchuan and Hu Dingfang had worked alongside them the entire time. No matter how the central region conducted their investigation, none of the blame would fall on their heads.

Not to mention that they wouldn't dare voice the truth. They could only mutely endure this loss!

“Director Hao... I have something I’d like to say,” Li Hao raised awkwardly.

“What is it?”

“I er... handed in a sword last time and you said that you’d either give me a large sum of treasures or allow me to choose three treasures from the ruins. Is the expedition over at this stage?”

“.....”

Silence! Hao Lianchuan hadn’t thought that the fellow would still remember this.

“It’s not that I really want to bring it up...” Li Hao continued hesitantly. “It’s that we almost haven’t gained anything on this trip. The Black Armors are a joint finding and have nothing to do with me or chief. That’s why I’m wondering...”

Almost gained nothing? Liu Long remained staunchly silent. Sure! Probably! We really don’t have anything to our names!

Hao Lianchuan looked at him and didn’t respond for a moment. “Out with it, what do you want?”

“I won’t be getting anything too precious,” Li Hao said hesitantly. “And I wouldn’t dare accept it either! Director Hao, do you have any origin weapons?”

“.....” Hao Lianchuan paused, dazed. Hu Dingfang had his eyes closed in repose and abruptly opened them, almost choking on his next breath. An origin weapon?

“Do you know what origin weapons are?”

“I do!” Li Hao hastily bobbed his head. “Wang Ming said that they can extract mysterious power from the land...”

“Bullshit!” Hao Lianchuan cut him off. “Don’t even think about it! My Flaming Phoenix Spear is Director Hou’s, where am I supposed to get one for you? There’s some inside the inner city, go get it yourself. It’s yours if you can get it!”

“Then... what about water of life?” asked a regretful Li Hao.

“What?”

“My teacher says that some ruins have water of life that can return a person to their youth...”

“Get out of here!” Hao Lianchuan roared. He knew about the legend, but he’d never laid eyes on it. What was the little bastard on about?

“Then fine, I want mysterious power!” Li Hao sighed. “I want all elements other than unattributed. How about blood pearls? I want as many as possible! Let’s convert everything that Director Hao promised to mysterious power, it’s probably worth about five thousand cubes...”

Hao Lianchuan looked like he’d swallowed a mosquito. “Fine!” he capitulated. “I’ll tell Director Hou when we go back!”

Whatever, it has nothing to do with me! Director Hou can take care of it!

Five thousand cubes was a significant sum if one wanted to label it that, but it also wasn’t a staggering amount either. Hao Lianchuan had harvested more than that on this trip, he could afford to pay that much. But at the same time, he was very suspicious as to whether or not Li Hao had truly turned in the sword of the Lis.

Who knew? That was Director Hou's matter.

"Director Hao, why don't we consider attacking Red Moon and Yama?" Li Hao pivoted. "If martial uncle Hong agrees to help..."

"Do you think killing them is a good idea?" Hao Lianchuan murmured with a shake of his head. "Not necessarily! At the very least, we know those two well. If the central region sends more powerful representatives after we kill them... that will be real trouble then! The three great organizations will certainly send people after their massive losses this time—we may not be able to coexist peacefully with them! Therefore, there will be upheaval to come with the three great organizations in Silver Moon. That may turn into a chance for us Night Watchers!"

He looked at the young man with a meaningful look. "Don't be so obsessed with killing. Sometimes, bloodshed isn't the only way to resolve the problem!"

Li Hao mulled over his words, but also had his own thoughts in mind. That's because you haven't killed enough! The man in my memories killed everyone—who could resist him then? That's true... Oh Bah! Why am I thinking of these things?

As for Violet Moon and Revolution being alive... Li Hao decided it was a fine outcome after some thought. He wasn't strong enough yet and couldn't brashly take action. After he returned home, digested his gains, consolidated his cultivation level, devoured mysterious power, strengthened the five organs, summoned more spirits, then nurtured his auras to the point of emerging... Perhaps he could seek them out for an individual conversation.

As for these people being good at concealing themselves...

Heh! With my pair of eyes, they'll have to hide in an outhouse... No, I'll find them with a casual sweep even if they're in the pit itself!

Origin weapons!

Indeed, he had his eyes set on Violet Moon and Revolution's origin weapons. He needed sword energy so much! There were only two ways that he knew of to replenish it. One, find a second stone door. It exuded energy so slowly that the first one likely hadn't recovered yet. Second, break the soul of an origin weapon!

Upon further thought, Li Hao felt that it wasn't the best time to make a move. If he did so and killed Violet Moon, he wouldn't be rewarded with her origin weapon. The Night Watchers would take it, and that wasn't his goal!

"The director is wise!" Li Hao flashed a smile. "I wondered why the director would let someone of the three great organizations go. So it's in preparation for events to come..."

Hao Lianchuan cast a strange look at him. What had come over this guy today?

"Director, are those stones we found earlier useful?" Li Hao asked.

"It's mysterious power stones!" The deputy director went along with the change in topic. "A treasure used in cultivation during the ancient civilization. Powerhouses abounded in that age due to this treasure, but they've long disappeared from the Skystar domain. There are many uses for this item. The most basic is to directly extract energy from it for cultivation. But to do so would be the greatest waste of this treasure!

"The second is to reawaken inert origin weapons. Some origin weapons have gone completely asleep and can only be returned to activity through mysterious power stones!

"The third is to activate some puppets from the ancient era. I suspect that the Gold Armor inside the city might possess many of these stones, which is how he can erupt with such power!

"Fourth is that this item is very useful to martial masters. They can be used to strengthen the body, but most people won't use them so wastefully!

“Fifth...”

Li Hao listened to the list with admiration. “Can you give me some?”

“.....” Hao Lianchuan’s smile didn’t reach his eyes. “This is a strategic resource, anyone who finds one must turn it in! Of course, you’ll receive money for any that you hand in. Depending on the size, even the smallest piece usually fetches five hundred cubes. Do you have any?”

“No,” Li Hao said sheepishly. “Then can I trade my five thousand cubes for ten pieces?”

“Don’t even think about it!” Hao Lianchuan shook his head. “That’s not happening. All factions need mysterious power stones these days—they’re the key to supernaturals being able to ascend. It’s easier for rookies to advance with the energy inside. How else do you think the Night Watchers are able to induct power with such a low death rate? It’s because of the mysterious power stones!”

Alright then, it did seem very precious. In that case, there was no way that Li Hao was handing his in. If he hadn’t taken the bag from the Yama Sunflare, it would’ve all gone to strengthen Yama.

Chapter 278: Gains (IV)

Director Zhou and Zhao Huan brought out a small bundle at this time—mysterious power stones. They’d discovered some as well.

Hao Lianchuan nodded, fully expecting their find. “The old rules apply,” he said as he took the bundle. “You’ll receive a large sum of mysterious power for this or anything else you want to trade for.”

He took inventory of their gains; they’d discovered quite a bit at twenty pieces. When combined with what he’d taken from Celestial, they’d reaped fifty pieces on this expedition.

As for himself, the Solars really hadn’t come across mysterious power stones. But it wasn’t that they completely lacked any gains—theirs were significant, there was just no need to go into detail with the rest of his people.

“Let’s take another look in the outer city.” Hao Lianchuan rose after concluding his business. “Although we went through it quite a few times before and didn’t see any houses with open doors, we might discover something else without the Black Armors around. If we can obtain some more stones, Night Watcher strength will increase as a whole after this expedition.”

Hao Lianchuan was in a very good mood as their losses hadn’t been too severe and their gains significant. Meanwhile, Li Hao stared fixedly at the man, looking until he saw the bundle vanish.

There was definitely a storage treasure on him! Perhaps he could ask for one of those. He couldn’t store Stellaris inside his body yet, so he had to keep it hidden on him. Thankfully, it was feasible due to its moderate size. But if he lost it... Li Hao would die of tears.

.....

At the same time. Outside Rift Canyon.

Powerful presences swept the canyon. Numerous Night Watchers were stationed around the four corners and there was even a military blockade stopping anyone from entering.

Inside the blockade.

“They’re almost out, what are you in a rush for?” Hou Xiaochen coughed a few times and looked at the furious powerhouses outside. “We’re not letting you in only because we don’t wish for you to add to any chaos or trouble...”

“Haven’t we given you everything that is yours?” He smiled. “See, which of the Red Moon, Celestial, or Yama finds have I kept instead of handing over to you?”

“Cut the bullshit, Hou Xiaochen!” snapped a red-haired hulk in the air. “We want the ruins and Yuan Shuo! If not, give up Li Hao!”

“You really... are a hasty one!” Hou Xiaochen chuckled ruefully. “Yuan Shuo’s gone, where am I supposed to find him? As for Li Hao... he’s still inside the ruins. What are you in such a rush for? Maybe he’s died inside! Didn’t you hear the survivors say how dangerous the ruins are?”

“Look at how many went in and how many are left. Apparently there’s only thirty alive inside. Added to those who came out, that makes for a maximum of fifty out of approximately two hundred... Are you sure Li Hao will come back out? Being so eager to kick up a fuss... you really don’t think much of the Night Watchers!”

Red Hair snorted, “You’re highly responsible for Yuan Shuo getting away!”

“Now now, how can you say that?” Hou Xiaochen shook his head with resignation. “Sadly, those who’ve come down in the world must endure such treatment. After all, I’m no longer a tenth of who I used to be after being injured for so many years. You’re a luckier one, Red Hair, to have made it to Nova. You’re a hot shot now, I wouldn’t dare offend you.”

A variety of expressions flickered across Red Hair’s face. Damn it! The more this fellow was thus, the less he dared make a move. Ying Hongyue had personally summoned him before he left the central region to give one instruction—do not break ties with Hou Xiaochen until the last possible moment.

That was the only thing the leader said! Despite Red Hair being a Nova and Hou Xiaochen just a sickly Solar, the man knew that Ying Hongyue wouldn’t voice unfounded statements like these. Plainly, Hou Xiaochen was not a character to run afoul of.

The Silver Moon Night Watcher director might seem feeble and cough with every other sentence, but were the Novas maintaining order and silence out of fear of the Night Watchers?

Of course not, they were wary of Hou Xiaochen!

“There’s only ten more hours.” Hou Xiaochen checked the time. “You’ve already waited three days, what’s a little more? Also, conversation needs to be conducted properly when Li Hao emerges. What does a young man, an ordinary person know? Red Moon is likely the one with the most business—none of the others look to have the same impatience.

“Everyone, it’s too tiring to constantly be in the air. Why don’t you land and rest inside your tents?”

He didn’t mind it when no one paid attention to him.

“Then I’ll go rest, I’m not as strong as the rest of you. My body... ai, it weakens by the day!” Hou Xiaochen shook his head and entered one of the tents under Manager Yu’s support.

The group watched him go, strange expressions crossing the faces of some powerhouses from the younger generation. These younger members of the various factions didn’t know Hou Xiaochen. While overawed by superiors from headquarters, all they saw were Novas who dominated the central region not daring to make a sound in Silver Moon and keeping to themselves.

It looked like the feeble man in front of them wasn’t someone to consider offending! At the same time, they were shocked by the scale of this operation. The central region really had sent multiple Novas to a border province! Was it that important that Yuan Shuo had broken through?

Novas were a domineering, premier force in the central region. Even if an organization possessed that level of heavyweight, they wouldn’t have many. The three great organizations had almost all sent representatives of this cultivation, but no one dared make a move. This was most stunning of all.

.....

Inside the tent.

Manager Yu frowned and whispered, “Director... With so many Novas exerting pressure, Li Hao...”

The young man was in a great deal of trouble!

“What are you in a rush for? The Inspectorate and Military Justice haven’t sent people yet, but Novas from the other side have arrived. Our people will come, unless they’ve decided to give up Silver Moon and no longer wish to administer it! We’re just Night Watchers of a border region. It’s naturally the central region who needs to take care of central region affairs!”

Manager Yu fell silent with thought. Was that so? Or was it more that the government wanted nothing more than these newcomers to plumb the depths of Hou Xiaochen for them?

“Cough cough cough...” Hou Xiaochen was wracked by a hacking cough. “Don’t worry, if those people stay out of it, I’ll announce that Silver Moon is no longer under the dynasty’s purview. It’s fine if that leads to chaos—the dynasty will be worried once Silver Moon secedes. They’ll be afraid that it leads to a chain reaction!”

If Silver Moon seceded due to the central government remaining unmoved when Novas invaded, the end result would be that numerous parties with their own ambitions would swiftly leave the dynasty after the news spread.

When that situation developed, it wouldn’t be long until Skystar Dynasty collapsed. Thus, Hou Xiaochen judged that if he didn’t make a move or involve himself in this affair, those fellows from the government would have to get involved.

The director said no more; he contemplated silently. I wonder how things are on the inside. They’ve gone into the inner city... That’s not an easy place to tread in!

.....

Inside the ancient city.

Li Hao and the others searched for a while. There were only nine streets, so it was easy to discover whether or not there were open ancient houses.

Reality proved that they'd been too hopeful. There were no houses they could enter!

No one knew why this city had been abandoned, if its denizens had all died or migrated elsewhere. There was no way to find out now. No one dared enter the houses with closed doors to see what was inside either.

According to Director Zhou and Zhao Huan, some of the open houses were empty. There were only antique furniture and other trappings to be found. In the absence of treasure, their furnishings were no different from regular houses.

After searching for a few hours, the remaining expedition team members didn't want to waste further time. They sat down to cultivate and digest their gains. There were only fourteen living souls in the entire outer city. The silence was so deafening that it was a bit terrifying.

Hao Lianchuan and Hu Dingfang had both suffered some small injuries, so they focused on rest and recovery.

.....

At a spot a little removed from the Night Watcher contingent.

Li Hao and Hong Yitang had struck up a conversation. Perhaps due to the fact that they were fellow martial masters or that the swordsman was a martial senior who didn't seem to share a deep grudge with his teacher... the young man was very willing to chat with the leader of the Sword Sect.

“Martial uncle Hong, are there many surviving powerhouses from the martial world of yesteryear?”

Hong Yitang had nothing better to do at the moment, so he took a walk down memory lane.

“Although there were no Dominators forthcoming from the Silver Moon martial world, it was still a peak martial faction in the ninety-nine provinces! We had too many half step Dominators, to say nothing of anything else!

“And many left Silver Moon to become the best and brightest of the martial worlds in other provinces!” Hong Yitang declared with gusto. “The supernatural world had yet to appear then, so Silver Moon’s martial masters could be found throughout Skystar Dynasty. They defined the era! Everyone knew that if they wanted to truly forge a path in blood, they should go to Silver Moon!

“If they wanted to witness the true blood and gore of the martial world, go to Silver Moon!

“The supernatural didn’t make much of a splash when it first appeared twenty years ago. Silver Mono’s martial world was so strong that the initial supernaturals—Starlight, Darkmoon, and even those who swiftly made it into Sunflare—found nothing but doom awaiting them. They were rookies pitting themselves against half step Dominators!”

Being a Sunflare twenty years ago made one a Heaven Favored. Those who survived those times were either Solar at the very least, or Nova at the most in present day. But in that age, they couldn’t survive in Silver Moon because there were too many martial masters!

It wasn’t until later that martial dao’s slow pace of development that they were overtaken by the supernaturals. By the time Solars appeared, martial masters found it hard to withstand their counterparts.

Li Hao nodded.

“Martial masters are partially responsible for Silver Moon’s supernatural domain not being that strong,” Hong Yitang chuckled. “We killed too many of them! A portion of Heaven Favored visited the province back in the day, and we also had a lot of homegrown ones. But too many of them died

here. It wasn't just your teacher, I killed my fair share too. What a pity... those guys would be Solars and Novas now if they'd survived to this day."

Li Hao nodded thoughtfully and whispered, "Was Director Hou a martial master?"

"Him?"

It was no wonder that Li Hao asked as Hou Xiaochen wasn't that old, but said to be very strong. Was he a martial master back in the day? No one had ever heard of such rumors. If he had been, surely he would've bore a great reputation.

"Maybe... maybe not?"

Li Hao blinked. How was that an answer? He was a martial master if he was one!

Chapter 279: Comprehending the Sword (I)

"There were two main factions in Silver Moon's martial world back in the day," Hong Yitang continued. "One of them was the community of martial masters that you know of and the other was the talons of the dynasty. Ahem, the latter wasn't... you understand!"

Li Hao did!

Hong Yitang smiled to see that the young man was on the same page as him. "The government wanted to ban martial dao, a decree that required the appropriate strength to reinforce. Therefore, the dynasty raised a crop of their own martial masters to take down the veteran martial masters. The ones from the dynasty had only one mission—hunt down those from the martial world!

"No one heard of Director Hou before the supernatural domain rose, but he quickly made a name for himself in the Silver Moon Inspectorate. He reached the top shortly after the Night Watchers were formed, so we suspect that he was once one of those from the government!

“He might’ve been a strong martial master,” Hong Yitang said softly. “Then borrowed Skystar Dynasty’s strength to swiftly cross over. He was at least a Sunflare when he ascended, and with the low number of supernaturals back in those days, he only needed to grasp opportunity to swiftly become a Solar.”

It was the swordsman’s judgment that Hou Xiaochen was either a Heaven Favored or a martial master who’d crossed over as a Sunderer. The public don’t know much about Hou Xiaochen as martial masters of the dynasty had their identities concealed and names hidden. They operated in the shadows; it wasn’t a good idea to build a strong reputation as that would lead to retaliation from the martial world at large.

“I see...” Li Hao nodded. All could be explained if that was the case. If Hou Xiaochen had been a government martial master assassin back in the day... that would speak to a certain strength. A weakling wouldn’t be able to undertake this kind of mission.

But... talons of the dynasty didn’t sound like... virtuous and upstanding people... Forget it, what am I insulting myself for? Li Hao stopped himself sheepishly. Weren’t the Night Watchers in similar circumstances before? They worked exclusively on behalf of the government but operated in the shadows.

Falcons and dogs of the government were what the martial world called these people. Meanwhile, those of the martial world were unstable factors of society according to the Night Watchers. They ruined public security, fought and killed everywhere they went, created a ton of homicide cases, ignored the law...

People like Yuan Shuo were the type that the government hated the most!

Of course, Yuan Shuo kept a lower profile afterward and when the supernatural domain rose, they committed even worse acts that cleared his name somewhat. In actuality, the old demon had been a wanted criminal in his time.

Hong Yitang didn’t speak further when he saw that Li Hao appeared deep in thought.

“I see that you practice the sword,” the man continued when both of them were present in the conversation again. “Your teacher practices the Five Styles and walks the path of the five auras. Although he knows the sword, and knows it quite well, he does not possess an aura of the sword!”

Li Hao lit up.

“There were once seven swordsmen that were more well known in the Silver Moon martial world.” Hong Yitang smiled. “They called themselves the Seven Swordsmen and had all comprehended sword auras. There is more than one of them!

“I see that you know the Ghost Shadow Sword—you’ve received its heritage, have you not?”

Li Hao nodded. He loved discussing these topics with martial masters. Although his teacher possessed a wealth of knowledge, he was not a swordsman. As such, sometimes his knowledge in this area was less than these swordsmen.

“Of the seven swordsmen in times past, there was the Earthturner Sword, Ghost Shadow Sword, Thunder Wind Sword, Light Sword, Ambiguous Sword...” Hong Yitang continued upon seeing obvious interest from the young man. “These seven people knew seven different sword auras! In my view, swordsmen are never weak. They can’t measure up to your teacher, of course, he’s a perverted genius to meld five auras together. He wouldn’t be a match for any one of the swords if he only commanded one aura.”

Li Hao nodded while inwardly criticizing, the key point is that teacher grasped five auras. Also, why are you ranking your Earthturner Sword as number one?

Hong Yitang didn’t mean to boast or flaunt his past accomplishments. He simply decided to share some knowledge upon seeing that Li Hao practiced the sword. “If you wish to walk the path of sword dao, yet not become the eighth sword of the seven... then you need to be like your teacher!”

Li Hao looked on blankly.

“The sword isn’t a type of sword aura!” Hong Yitang had to explain. “The Earthturner Sword is connected to the earth. Heaven and earth are turned upside down through the strength of the ground when it is deployed!”

The young man brightened.

“The Ghost Shadow Sword is vast and vicious,” Hong Yitang chuckled. “Its core lies in the shadow being formless and traceless! Isn’t that similar to the dark attributed supernaturals of our times?”

Li Hao turned over these words in his mind.

“The sword can go through a thousand changes and ten thousand variations, there is far more than one sword aura! No one denies that the auras of the five styles are strong, but is their connection as strong as the one between the sword auras?

“The supernatural focuses on attributes, so we can also look at sword auras in the same light. Metal, wood, water, fire, and earth are all sword auras! So can the wind, thunder, rain, lightning, dark, light, space, and void coalesce sword aura.

“I wouldn’t say anything if you were simply going to follow your teacher’s path, but I can vaguely sense that you have a different understanding of sword dao. Your path may not be your teacher’s path. Then I hope that another swordsman can come out of Silver Moon’s martial world—a powerful one!”

Hong Yitang concluded with some regret, unspeakable regret. He felt the same mix of emotions as Sun Yifei did, despite the latter becoming a late Solar. He had not walked his path of the qimei staff to the end! In the same vein, Hong Yitang’s Earthturner Sword was just an empty name now.

The martial masters of Silver Moon did not forget the days in which they shone so brilliantly! The Seven Swordsmen had swept the lands until they were defeated one by one. Now some of them were dead or no longer claimed the title. The Earthturner Sword was just the leader of a mere Sword Sect and not the swordsman of old!

“If your teacher can meld five auras together, why can’t you do the same with the seven swords, or even eight and nine?”

Li Hao’s jaw dropped and he scrambled to put his thoughts together. “Ah... martial uncle Hong, even if I comprehend multiple sword auras, I’ll be old before I can assimilate all of them into each other!”

He’d never manage it!

“How can that be?” Hong Yitang chuckled. “The first to be melded together will always be the toughest because the swordsman is searching for the right way. He lacks experience and knowledge, but the second will be easier.

“How did your teacher manage to fuse five? He must have his own method, his own rules, his own system. What you need to do is to use your superb potential to comprehend more sword auras. It’s fine if they’re not of the sword—remember that anything can be a sword!

“The earth is a sword, the sky is a sword, thunder and lightning are a sword, everything is a sword!

“A miscellaneous assortment is less than the essence! Everything can be defined as the sword. When you walk the path of the sword, even your teacher’s five auras can become the sword. However he has put his together is how you can try with yours!

“You are likely the only one who stands a chance to. The others don’t know how and your teacher probably won’t teach them.” Hong Yitang laughed in a self-deprecating manner. “What a pity that we don’t have potential or ability like that. You have very good foundations and a tremendous advantage in timing. Breaking through with one aura makes you an ordinary martial master. You will never surpass your teacher that way. What the martial world wishes to see most of all is for each successive generation to be stronger than the one before!

“We want everyone to know that the martial world still exists, that martial masters still exist!

“It’s an immense pity that the heritage of the Seven Swordsmen has ended,” the man sighed. “Your teacher killed the Thunder Wind Sword, Ghost Shadow Sword, and Ambiguous Sword. He knows them very well. If you can comprehend more sword auras, Li Hao... come find me. I’ll teach you the Earthturner Sword!”

Li Hao blinked and stared incredulously at Hong Yitang. The martial world placed a great importance on legacy! It couldn’t be casually bestowed upon another, even when the speaker in question was no longer a martial master. The Earthturner Sword was no unknown man of anonymity.

That Hong Yitang had been able to survive in the ruins indicated that his experience and others were first rate, even if his strength wasn’t. Would such a person freely give away his precious sword and knowledge?

“What, do you think I have ill intentions?” Hong Yitang smiled. “If you really master several sword auras and have the chance of surpassing Yuan Shuo, becoming the premier swordsman of Silver Moon and legitimizing Silver Moon’s martial world... Swordsmen are stronger than the Five Styles. No matter whose disciple you are, you would be worth making an exception for!”

“And if you really do manage the feat, I’ll let you in on a secret. The strongest of the seven—the Sky Sword—is still alive! He is a great personage now. If you can meld sword auras together, I can introduce you to him for further tutelage!”

“The Sky Sword?” Li Hao blinked.

“That’s right,” Hong Yitang chuckled. “You can ask your teacher about him. He fought the Sky Sword three times. The first time ended in failure, the second time in a draw, and he finally won on the third attempt. But having killed so many people, did he kill the Sky Sword?”

“Your teacher didn’t triumph until he melded the five auras together. It’s easy to tell from that how strong the Sky Sword is!”

Li Hao sucked in a sharp breath. Really? I've never heard teacher speak of it. His teacher couldn't win until he commanded the joint five auras... how strong did the Sky Sword have to be?

"Is he... still alive?"

"Of course!"

"Is he a supernatural now?"

Hong Yitang's face dimmed and he nodded. "Yes! And he's a so-called Nova. Even the Sky Sword has no choice but to become a supernatural. This is why I admire your teacher!"

"Well... my teacher has always wanted to become a supernatural..." Li Hao said hesitantly. "But he's never succeeded..."

"It's not that he didn't succeed!" Hong Yitang shook his head. "I know what your teacher is thinking—he wanted to enter Dominator first, then make the crossover. He wanted to have a taste of the glories of Dominator of Thousands. Do you really think he wouldn't have his ways if he wanted to become supernatural?"

Li Hao fell silent. His teacher had indeed mentioned it before that he'd wanted to be a Dominator before becoming a supernatural. However, he was injured and cut off from the path of Dominator. Hence his focus changed to directly entering the supernatural domain, but it was too late then.

Hong Yitang sighed and said nothing further, but Li Hao committed the matter to memory. His teacher had another enemy—the Sky Sword! This one was already a Nova, his teacher really knew how to pick them.

Chapter 280: Comprehending the Sword (II)

Of the Seven Swordsmen, only the Earthturner and Sky Swords were known to be alive. Yuan Shuo had killed three, leaving two unaccounted for. Li Hao turned over Hong Yitang's words in his mind.

All things could be the sword!

These were the words of a swordsman, of a veteran martial master. Perhaps they praised swordsmen too highly, but what he said made sense. Although Li Hao had comprehended the sword aura, he'd always felt that it belonged to the metal attribute!

The earth aura was naturally of the earth attribute, so he'd created the Sword of Mount Tai. But this so-called Sword of Mount Tai was just wrapping the effects of gravity around the sword aura. It wasn't a true melding of the two.

Granted, Li Hao felt that he'd succeeded in combining the two auras, but after hearing Hong Yitang's words, he felt that... perhaps he hadn't really succeeded.

True success did not look like this.

It should appear more as a complete fusion of both earth and metal in a single stroke. The sword was the sword, it didn't need further enhancement from a mountain peak. Both earth and metal could be deployed at the same time, or in a blow more than the two, or as a new type of power combined from both elements.

Such was the experience of a veteran martial master. Each sentence was extremely evocative of much more—provided that one possessed sufficient intelligence to understand it.

Seeing Li Hao in deep thought, Hong Yitang watched him silently. He, too, reflected on certain things, and with a degree of sorrow. The life of a swordsman was beyond him now! Could the young man in front of him raise sword dao back to its former glory?

Who knew!

But he recalled the domineering sword intent that he'd vaguely sensed before. Whether it was the martial world of Silver Moon, of swordsmen, or of blade wielders, they'd all fallen to the Five Styles. Could animals reign as king?

Bah!

The martial masters didn't accept it, absolutely not! But they were all defeated in the end, despite their refusal to bow their heads!

If Yuan Shuo's disciple could surpass his master and be known for sword dao, how interesting would that be even if it was an internal Five Styles discipline affair! Hong Yitang wanted to giggle when he thought of the possibilities.

If Li Hao could defeat the old man through sword dao and as a martial master as well... Well, Hong Yitang wanted to whoop with laughter and applaud with mirth. That's right, we can't defeat you, especially after you've become a Summoner. You're so domineering and it's meaningless if we defeat you with supernatural powers. But what about a pure martial master who's also a swordsman?

Surely the Sky Sword would share his thoughts—and not only the Sky Sword, but the other guy alive would think the same. But that one...

Hong Yitang became distracted as he thought of another one of the seven. Was that person still persevering? Even the Sky Sword had given up, was there hope in holding out?

Perhaps... there was. Yuan Shuo had found the path to Summoner. If he'd known of this possibility, he would've doggedly hung on that year as well. Sadly, the time had passed, but he hoped that that person would meet with a good end.

"Martial uncle Hong!" Li Hao jarred him out of his thoughts.

“What is it?” Hong Yitang smiled.

“Martial uncle, you say that all things can be the sword, so is the essence of the sword the metal attribute or not?”

“Of course not!” Hong Yitang shook his head. “Metal is just the medium with which to forge a sharper sword! But if a stone sword is keener than a metal sword, would you say that the sword’s essence is metal? If iron and metal hadn’t been distilled, then the sword would’ve remained wood, porcelain, and stone. Would you then say that the sword is of the wood or earth attribute?”

“Li Hao, you must differentiate between the sword and its medium! The sword is a technique, a method, an art! Of course, it’s also an aura to you now and auras are not delineated by attribute. You give it its attribute!

“Do not fall into the trap of categorizing all things by attribute, that’s incorrect!”

The man suddenly relished in the joy of teaching a disciple and continued with relish, “Does your aura have an attribute? It does not! It’s all from your own imagination. Take Liu Long, for example, he thinks his aura is the waves and practices the Nine Forged Force. But do you know what attribute his father, the Silver Spear of Silver Moon, was?”

Li Hao shook his head.

“It was fire according to today’s definitions! His father’s spear was of fire, it blazed like a fiery dragon and had nine dragons overlaid upon it. The Silver Spear was also called the Fire Dragon Spear!

“But would you say that the Nine Forged Force is a fire attribute method? Of course not, and it is not of water either. That depends on your comprehension. Everyone’s is different.”

Li Hao fully understood in this moment. Auras were not dependent on attributes! His teacher's possessed them because the five animals happened to map to five different elements. Therefore, his comprehension was thus as well, but that didn't mean Li Hao had to follow in his footsteps.

I see!

His teacher had not spoken of this before—perhaps he wished Li Hao to walk the path of the Five Styles from the very beginning. As it turned out, Li Hao proceeded down the way of the sword. The young man had comprehended the aura the day he used it, Yuan Shuo hadn't had time to explain anything else at that time. A premier swordsman now filled in the gaps of Li Hao's knowledge.

"A sword is not categorized by attributes!" Li Hao thought of something—then his sword aura could not be melded into random auras or shunted toward the metal attribute. If he finalized a move in that direction, his sword aura would have to be of that attribute.

He'd wanted to assimilate his sword into the five organs before, but perhaps he didn't need to do so now.

"Martial uncle, the sword aura is all-encompassing, right?" asked Li Hao. "If my sword aura is unattributed and I comprehend the fire or earth sword, then will they meld into one like my teacher's five auras? I won't need to purposefully look at them separately..."

"That's exactly what I mean!" Hong Yitang nodded with a chuckle. "You finally have a handle on things. The sword is not the one and only!"

"So any other aura I comprehend can be used as a sword, right?"

"That's right!"

"Therefore, the sword is the general outline and I can study the topics and subtopics beneath as I would, ultimately putting them back together in a general outline again, right?"

“Smart boy!” complimented Hong Yitang. Yuan Shuo’s disciple really was very smart! He was correct, the sword was a general outline!

Li Hao was rather agitated at the moment. So I can have a fire, earth, wind, and water sword... I can switch to whatever attribute sword I want so long as I’ve comprehended that aura, and then combine everything together! It will be an innovative sword intent!

The five organs nurture the five spirits... What if I nurture five different swords in them and ultimately fuse them into a sword of general outline?

The young man contemplated numerous possibilities and even tried experimenting with his ideas. He wanted to transmute the mountain in his spleen into a sword! A sword of earth!

He’d formed a new understanding of sword dao.

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“Li Hao’s having a good conversation with that person!” Hu Dingfang remarked.

“Who do you think is winning?” Hao Lianchuan glanced at the commander.

“Huh?” Hu Dingfang looked blankly back at him.

“What are you looking at me for?” Hao Lianchuan chuckled. “Hong Yitang is very shrewd and wouldn’t strike up a conversation for no reason at all. Li Hao isn’t so inclined either. The two must have their own plans with how energetically they’re chatting with each other.”

Hu Dingfang wasn't interested in this. He frowned at the distant inner city. "Do you think... we can still go inside?"

"Nope!" Hao Lianchuan shook his head. "There's no hope, don't even think about it! While we might be able to when powerhouses of the central region arrive, I think we can forget about seizing the turtle seal. That Gold Armor is terrifying—remember how strong the Silver Armor was when he reawakened?"

"These ruins cannot be explored at the moment. Even five Novas will be only going to their deaths. This was just one spot of danger in the inner city, how much of it did we explore?"

A muffled grunt sounded nearby as he spoke—Li Hao spat out a mouthful of blood as his organs suddenly bled. Hu Dingfang and Hao Lianchuan swiftly disappeared and reappeared around Hong Yitang. The two were frowning—what was going on here?

Hong Yitang looked at them innocently. I didn't do anything!

"It's fine... just some bleeding from the spleen." Li Hao smiled. "It has nothing to do with martial uncle Hong. It's my internal injuries that are too severe and have yet to fully heal..."

"You absorbed three Sunflare level blood pearls," Hao Lianchuan couldn't help but say. "But you still aren't fully recovered? Just how severe were your injuries?"

He wanted to call bullshit, but it really did seem like the young man was yet to return to full health. Look, there was internal bleeding again!

"That Kong Qi was too strong and left a surge of dark force in my body..." Li Hao said helplessly.

"Didn't you say before that it wasn't Celestial?"

“Director Hao, they had two Solars before,” the young man laughed ruefully. “I couldn’t say it was them even if it was, that would just be creating trouble for the Night Watchers. It’s fine if I’m injured, but is it worth it to have the agency gain new enemies on my behalf? I can speak of this only because they’re dead. It must have been Kong Qi... But forget it, what’s the point of going through all this when he’s dead?”

“Then I’ll go find Violet Moon and get a few more blood pearls!” Hu Dingfang declared with a brewing headache. How were these injuries acting up again? Li Hao had reaped nothing but wounds on this expedition, this wouldn’t do. He’d thought that he’d be able to help the young man secure a treasure or two, but look at how the situation had turned out!

“Hao Lianchuan, take out a wood attributed mysterious power stone!” He suddenly set his jaw.

“Huh?”

“What, I have twenty of those stones, can’t I ask for one of them?” the commander said coldly. “The results are wondrous when the stones are absorbed. Although it’s a bit wasteful, how is he to rise to Dominator if his wounds continue to linger? Can you take responsibility when too much time is wasted? One wood stone should help him make a full recovery and strengthen his constitution. It’s just one stone, can I not ask for even that?”

“It’s not that...” Hao Lianchuan answered with resignation. “My point is that we can locate the best healer for him when we return or supply some wood energy. Using a mysterious power stone is too wasteful...”

“Then we waste it!” Hu Dingfang insisted.

“Don’t... waste...” Li Hao coughed up blood.

“Hao Lianchuan!” Hu Dingfang roared. “We obtained fifty mysterious power stones this time, so what of a single one?!”

Hao Lianchuan rolled his eyes. For fuck's sake, you... Fine, whatever.

A wood stone appeared in his hand after a while. The stone was green and brimmed with vitality.