

Star Gate 321

Chapter 321: A Fierce Battle! (IV)

Ole Huang didn't have the mental bandwidth to spare for wondering who his attacker was. He wanted to leave this forsaken place! All he needed to do was to tell Hu Qingfeng that Yu Xiao had died here. He rather regretted following Yu Xiao when the man left the hotel. So what if he managed to walk away victorious at this stage?

Ole Huang began to back away!

But would Li Hao let him go?

The young man stomped his foot and fractured the entire alley with a small quake. Walls collapsed as Li Hao charged forward with his sword!

"You..." Ole Huang was infuriated. It was plain to see that he wished to retreat. Couldn't this person tell?? Do you have a death wish?!

He knew a few details behind the Incantation of the Blade of Blood, that the longer one used it, the greater the chance of death. You and I bear no grudge against each other, are you crazy?! Is killing Yu Xiao not enough, you aren't willing to let me go either?

He could sense some incoming supernatural ripples. Their fight must be drawing a lot of attention. He didn't want to continue battling this madman! Ole Huang swiftly materialized armor of golden energy around him.

"Have you lost your mind?! You can't kill me and I don't want to kill you..."

Bam!

Stellaris slashed through the energy armor in overwhelming fashion. Blood sprayed beneath the weapon. Ole Huang grunted, setting aside his attempts to talk! That stroke had almost taken his arm!

He looked at the sword in Li Hao's hand with shock. What was that? An origin weapon? It didn't seem like one, but it was so sharp that it was unbelievable. The weapon smashed through his defenses of peak Solar in one move!

By now, he knew that he'd made a grave mistake. He shouldn't have focused on defense! There was nothing that this sword didn't penetrate, so defense was an impossibility. He was stronger than his opponent and should've attacked!

Regathering his senses, Ole Huang punched Li Hao!

The young man brightened and responded in kind. BAM!

Immense force from the punch split Li Hao's arm open and bloodied Ole Huang's fist. Blood spurted everywhere.

Madman! Ole Huang cursed. He no longer dared remain on defense and struck proactively. He punched at the young man again, whereupon Li Hao stowed Stellaris. A sword was a hindrance in close quarters and would cost the young man time.

Punch against punch!

Bam bam bam!

Their fists collided innumerable times in the blink of an eye. Li Hao took a few steps back and shattered countless tiles with his feet. His right arm was drenched in blood and hung listlessly by his side. The bones within had all been smashed to smithereens!

Ole Huang heaved for air as blood dripped down his right arm. His opponent wasn't as strong as him, but attacked in a reckless fashion without thought for his own life. After the exchange of blows, Ole Huang felt that his arm was just about crippled as well.

Li Hao flung himself forward while his opponent panted for breath. He kicked through the air instead of swinging his fists. His leather boots were in tattered pieces, but the sound of waves came from his feet. The Nine Forged Force!

Rumble!

Kick after kick after kick...

Crunch!

The sharp cracks of bones breaking came from his feet, but he smiled. Ole Huang's arms were fractured in front of him; the man's face turned white as blood drained out of them.

Ole Huang looked frostily at Li Hao and manifested a golden spear in front of him! Supernatural powerhouses are still fine when they're crippled. We have mysterious power! But what can a martial master like you do when your arm and legs are crippled? No matter how vicious you are, our difference in strength is obvious. You're less than me!

The spear hurtled through the air, aimed straight at Li Hao's head despite the lack of a wielder. The young man grinned toothily and pounced, roaring without a sound. Silent sound waves reverberated through the air!

The spear shook!

Li Hao's left arm was in good condition; it wielded Stellaris. Sword energy surged into his body as he swung the sword through the air. A streak of bright light arced through the darkness and sliced right through the golden spear!

However, the weapon exploded like Wang Ming's Heavenly Maids Scattering Blossoms and scattered around Li Hao. Ole Huang knew this move too! His status as a peak Solar was well deserved and he was not shocked by Yu Xiao. He was still in full battle condition.

A tremendous explosion echoed. Li Hao went flying like a rag doll, one covered in blood.

Face pale, Ole Huang snorted. How was this guy still not dying yet?

The young man fell to the ground and immediately scrambled to his feet. Despite coughing blood, he smiled. A sword wreathed in flames appeared—it roared with burning fury!

“Cut!” hollered Li Hao. He slashed forward, cutting through the firmament while operating Birdshot. The young man flapped forward in an incredulous fashion like he was the Silver Armor challenging the heavens. All enemies that stand in my way will be obliterated! No one is an exception!

Ole Huang's eyes widened and he rapidly backed away. This guy was completely insane and he really didn't want to fight anymore. However, a smear of fiery sparks erupted behind him. Both combatants' expressions changed drastically. Li Hao was infuriated and burned with an anger that he could not voice.

“Kill!” He rampaged again, faster than before and striking with berserk determination!

Startled, Hao Lianchuan looked at him from behind Ole Huang. All the same, he didn't stop and stabbed his weapon at the peak Solar. The deputy director was unable to describe his consternation, but there was also no time to think about it!

Caught in desperate straits, Ole Huang quickly seized up the situation and chose to face Li Hao! His rear felt very dangerous, more dangerous than his half crippled opponent! Thus, he chose to turn head-on to Li Hao. His spear rose in the air again, turning into a dozen, a hundred spears...

A chilly light sparkled in the void as Li Hao shot past the forest of spears. Bloody holes appeared on his body, but he still delivered a merciless stroke!

Pfft!

Ole Huang could only watch in horror as the sword approached him. The immense pressure behind him was so domineering that he could not retreat! He roared wrathfully and wanted to swing his fists again, but the short sword had already run through his head!

His fist continued to swing through the air with the last vestiges of glory and sent Li Hao flying again.

The young man crashed to the ground, looking for all intents and purposes like he was dead.

The spear behind Ole Huang ran him through; Hao Lianchuan flicked the man away like he was tossing a piece of trash. Unending shock filled his eyes when he scanned the battlefield!

It'd taken him only twenty seconds to reach the alley. This was his promise to Li Hao—ten seconds at the least, thirty seconds at the most. He'd come as fast as he could and now he was in a shocked daze.

Yu Xiao was dead and there were several other broken bodies on the ground! He also recognized the person that he'd just flung away—Huang Jie of the five from central headquarters. Peak Solar, a metal supernatural who was skilled in attack. He was a personage that Hao Lianchuan might not be able to defeat even when he had the Flaming Phoenix Spear in hand.

Together with Li Hao, the deputy director had so easily forced the man to death because when he arrived, Huang Jie had only half of his strength left at most! He was naturally no match for Hao Lianchuan and the Flaming Phoenix Spear under such circumstances. It was Li Hao who'd backed Huang Jie into this corner, no one else! A martial master who'd already killed a mid Solar!

Hao Lianchuan knew that Li Hao was behind their deaths because all of the corpses bore marks of sword light or prominent signs of the tiger aura. These were the methods of a martial master!

It was like he was getting to know the young man for the first time. The deputy director didn't even have the mental capacity to spare for the young man—he didn't know if Li Hao was dead or alive. There was no movement forthcoming from the prone figure on the ground.

His incredulity was too much to fathom. Was... this really Li Hao, and not Yuan Shuo? He wouldn't think twice if it was Yuan Shuo who'd accomplished everything in the alley, but Li Hao??

Rays of light erupted in the distance as supernaturals swiftly converged upon the alley. No one could be allowed to witness this scene; Li Hao's cover would be thoroughly blown. The greatest fool would be able to read the telltale signs of sword intent and the tiger aura.

Hao Lianchuan leapt into the air, ignoring the unmoving young man on the ground. He brandished the Flaming Phoenix Spear, causing the approaching supernaturals to grind to a halt. They recognized that origin weapon!

“Red alert!! Battle stations!!” Hao Lianchuan boomed. “Red Moon, you're crazy to attack Li Hao within city confines! Damn you, all of you deserve to die! Move out, Night Watchers! Seal off the city, obliterate the enemy! Please exit seclusion, Director Hou!”

His roar shook the land!

A fiery phoenix soared majestically through the sky as the city stirred to action. Powerhouses jerked their heads upward with astonishment. Red Moon? Were they insane?! Attacking Li Hao with such fanfare like this, did all of them have a death wish?

A tremendous presence rose from the Night Watcher headquarters and light flashed through the void. An overwhelming air enveloped the southern quadrant of White Moon!

A titan was coming! Was it Hou Xiaochen? There didn't seem to be anyone else apart from him. Eyes widening, the powerhouses drawing near the battlefield reversed their motion. No one dared come close. The skies were about to change!

Red Moon had gone completely crazy and those in the know were startled. This wasn't the plan! Off in the distance, Hu Qingfeng frowned deeply. Was Blue Moon an idiot? They'd agreed to move against Hou Xiaochen together, why was he acting ahead of time?

That damned fool!

Hao Lianchuan's expression shifted rapidly in the air. It wasn't until a figure on the ground began stirring to life that he heaved a sigh of relief. All the same, stupefaction was writ large in his eyes.

How... strong... are you, Li Hao?

Chapter 322: Clouds Shift On All Sides (I)

Supernatural energy surged from all corners of the city. A ray of light shimmered out of Night Watcher headquarters, cutting through the void to head straight for the alley.

Up in the air, a shuddering Hao Lianchuan was still struggling to accept what he'd seen. He wasn't afraid of the powerhouses surrounding him, but that the scene from earlier was so noteworthy that it was branded into his mind's eye.

Li Hao's final blow spoke of unparalleled ruthlessness. The young man knew that reinforcements were here, but the look in his eyes remained harshly unyielding. He risked his life even in the last second to kill Huang Jie. It was a look that Hao Lianchuan was unable to describe.

Did it belong to a wild beast that'd broken out of its cage?

Was it vengeance, or pure bloodlust found in slaughter?

The deputy director looked down again, seeing the figure on the ground still struggling to stand.

.....

Inside the little alley.

Li Hao regained his footing with great difficulty. Sword energy surged into his body to swiftly repair some of his wounds. The last vestiges of scarlet shadow energy were a very complementary match for sword energy.

The ferocious tiger returned to its cage!

Wafting the energy of fire, the tiger sword docilely entered the heart. It seemed to be waiting for its next target as it lacked the uncompromising struggles from before. It crouched down to bide its time, hiding within the mountain forest and looking for the next moment to pounce.

.....

Within Mt. White Moon outside the city.

A multicolored tiger with a broken tooth swiveled its head to scan the surroundings. It gingerly took probing steps into the forest. Violence glinted out of its eyes the moment it vanished.

Zhou Qin frowned faintly and his friend beside him shifted uncomfortably.

“That tiger...” the latter murmured. “Glanced at us with a pretty scary look when it left. Are we letting it go just like this, Ole Zhou?”

Zhou Qin was quiet for a while, but nodded without a word. Yep, they were letting it go just like this. Wang Ming's friend had asked him for a favor; it was just a tiger. He didn't ask around when it came to that newcomer—there was no need to. He could guess a thing or two—Li Hao of Silver City, a martial master.

A martial master... He thought back to how Li Hao had looked at him at their first meeting. It bore some resemblance to the tiger he'd just released. Zhou Qin was no fool, he felt it likely that the tiger would want revenge. But he was more afraid of that martial master!

He wasn't terrified, just... afraid. It was hard to put into words.

Old Demon Yuan Shuo! Zhou Qin had asked around when it came to his disciple. By all accounts, Li Hao was supposed to be an upstanding boy. Yet, Zhou Qin felt that this was the result of a masterful act. Li Hao ought to be a cruel and brutal person as well.

Would the old demon's disciple be a kind and benevolent soul?

The tiger had known to bide its time and suffer quietly because it lacked the strength to break out of its confinement. It might come back for its old captor after it accumulated enough strength back home. In the same vein, what if Li Hao one day possessed sufficient power for his aims?

Tremendous upheaval might take place then!

It wasn't that Zhou Qin was smarter or more observant than the rest; he'd just seen a different look from Li Hao than other people ever had. He'd witnessed a bearing that was at complete odds with the sincere, honest diligence the young man was reputed to possess. Just how did those rumors start, anyway?

.....

Within the alley, Li Hao had no mind to spare for that tiger. He scrambled to a standing position with difficulty and abruptly smiled faintly. Tilting his head back for a look, he saw a fiery phoenix soaring proudly and Hao Lianchuan standing next to it, looking back down at him.

This time, the deputy director saw Li Hao's smile. It was such a pure smile! Horror pricked at Hao Lianchuan's heart. He'd known before that the kid was nothing good, but how was he smiling so purely after killing so many people and being so heavily injured himself?

Was this real or another disguise?

But was there a need to keep up the facade when there was no one around? That meant his smile was genuine, so he felt... comfortable and satisfied? Did he think he'd done a good job killing, that all of these people deserved to die?

Not even Hao Lianchuan knew what he himself was thinking at the moment. It was a complicated mix of emotions.

The young man chuckled and limped over to the dead Ole Huang. He rummaged through the corpse and took out a storage ring, leaving the rest untouched. He moved on to Yu Xiao and retrieved another ring after some searching.

Li Hao then walked up to the Dominator. The latter's head was gone and his body a tattered ruin. The young man searched all the same and found a booklet with some pages ripped out of it. This was normal, quite a few people liked to do such a thing.

The spear-wielding Dominator must have excised the breathing method from the manual that he carried around. There were also those who didn't carry any manuals on them—that was also commonly seen.

Two storage rings and one booklet detailing a secret art. Those were the only objects that Li Hao looted. Moments later, he picked up the Dominator's broken spear tip and stabbed it at Ole Huang's head. He continued with Yu Xiao and the others, matching each of his moves precisely to where

he'd cut into them with his sword. Traces that he could not conceal were thoroughly destroyed, obliterating traces of the sword.

A ray of light sparkled in the sky as he finished his simple cleanup. Li Hao didn't need to look to know that it wasn't Hou Xiaochen, it was Manager Yu. It would not be the director who came. Hou Xiaochen might not be in the city. Who knew where he'd gone over the past couple of days?

The ray of light landed in front of Li Hao. Manager Yu looked at the young man, he looked back at her and bent slightly at the waist. "Greetings to Manager Yu!"

The woman swept a glance across the scene and saw the bodies. She looked back at Li Hao and read some traces from his condition. Her eyes darted around and she said slowly after a long moment, "Hao Lianchuan had you act as bait?"

"Yes."

"Do you know how much trouble you've caused?"

"A little!" Li Hao nodded with a smile. "But I think that Director Hou can handle it, it's just some small annoyances. Since the director needs to see my worth, I'm demonstrating it to him! None of this is a problem if the director thinks I'm valuable enough. On the other hand, if I think the director doesn't have the ability to protect me... I'll have to consider if I should continue to stay in White Moon or not."

"There is no problem with giving you shelter," responded an aloof Manager Yu. "But that doesn't mean that you can continuously create trouble for the director..."

"Wrong!" Li Hao shook his head. "The director should know that I'm a martial master! Old Demon Yuan's disciple! As a martial master, the requirements for giving me shelter is to resolve these troubles for me! True martial masters do not grow up in a greenhouse. My master was thus and I am thus!"

“Manager Yu should’ve been a martial master once too. I can sense a weak aura from you, one that was transmuted to the supernatural. Since the manager used to be a martial master who’d grasped the aura, I think you understand more clearly than the director that people like us are born to make trouble!”

The secretary’s eyes glinted. Li Hao! So he’d sensed some aura from her... It’d been so many years that she’d almost forgotten she was once a martial master. She looked around once more and said coolly, “Do not do this again. You can go back first, I’ll take care of the troubles here. But I must remind you, the concealment of a moment is not the concealment of a lifetime!”

“That’s enough!” Li Hao smiled. “It doesn’t need to be too long, just until I become a Summoner. If the manager wishes to see it, I can put on a demonstration for you and the director. I can show you what it truly means to be a Summoner! My teacher is just an initial Summoner and a fair distance away from his five spirits emerging from the organs. I might be a little closer! When that comes to pass, I think the annoyances of today won’t be a problem at all!”

The five spirits emerging from the organs!

Manager Yu’s heart shook. She knew a bit of what’d happened when Yuan Shuo killed Sun Yifei—two spirits had emerged from his organs. What about Li Hao?

While Huang Jie wasn’t a martial master and his level of peak Solar a little less than Sun Yifei, he wasn’t that much weaker. Although Manager Yu hadn’t seen the fight for herself, she could glean a thing or two. Li Hao may not have the ability to kill Huang Jie, but he’d certainly fought the man. He might really only be a hair below his master, which put him above countless martial masters!

The second greatest of Silver Moon’s martial world?

Manager Yu’s thoughts were unreadable and her mood was a bit glum. “You can go!” she said after a while.

“My thanks!” Li Hao raised a cupped fist salute and headed outside. He suddenly turned back to ask, “Do you have a storage ring?”

Manager Yu furrowed her brows.

“If you do, do you have any Night Watcher uniforms on you?” Li Hao pointed at the rags hanging off his body. “These are ruined and it’s too obvious I’ve been in a fight. Could I have a change of clothing?”

She’d almost forgotten about this detail. Manager Yu breathed out softly and waved a brand new uniform into existence. She tossed it at Li Hao. It was different from regular uniforms as its luxurious fabric was apparent at a glance.

Li Hao had seen it before! Hou Xiaochen wore this kind of uniform. The young man smiled and stripped down without a hint of embarrassment. He put on the new clothes and a new pair of boots, shaking off the blood and gore on his body with a slight vibration of internal force.

Hou Xiaochen’s clothes fit him; they were a tiny bit smaller since the man was roughly three centimeters shorter. That was fine, the difference wasn’t noticeable.

“Manager, do you know how to release fire?” Li Hao threw down his ruined clothes. “If not, you can have Director Hao help.”

“I’ll take care of it!” Manager Yu said nothing else as she glanced at him.

Li Hao nodded and strode off. He didn’t take or ask about the mysterious power of the two Solars. Manager Yu and Director Hao needed to use the bodies; they wouldn’t be able to give a proper explanation if the bodies were turned into a bloody mess. It would also make the Night Watchers seem like small-minded people to strip out mysterious power as soon as they killed a person.

How could Li Hao do such a thing?

As for storage rings, that was fine. He had to take some treasure after killing someone. It'd be wasted effort otherwise.

The manager frowned after Li Hao vanished at the end of the broken-down alley.

Chapter 323: Clouds Shift On All Sides (II)

Hao Lianchuan descended from the sky and looked at the end of the alley. He turned to Manager Yu with a twinkle in his eye. Although he'd previously surmised that she wasn't weak, it would seem that he'd still misjudged.

"Is Director Hou not here?"

"Mmhm!" Manager Yu didn't say anything else. She scanned the area. "Burn it all aside from that battered Red Moon mask. Don't leave anything behind!"

Burn it all and leave nothing behind. She bypassed Hao Lianchuan and Li Hao's plans to pin the deed on Red Moon as she was well versed in handling these affairs. No matter how well done the cover-up was, Hu Qingfeng was certain to fly into a rage and cause trouble when he saw the bodies of his men.

Thus, there was no need to go to so much trouble. Just destroy it all and leave nothing but half a mask. As for who died, how many died, and how they died... that could be left to the imagination!

Hao Lianchuan's eyes widened, but he didn't protest. Fire engulfed the alley. It stretched beneath the ground and consumed the body of the earth supernatural. Tendrils of mysterious power wafted through the small alleyway; the mixture of wind, earth, wood, and metal was particularly disordered.

Manager Yu waved a bolt of thunder energy into existence after scanning the surroundings. The walls around them collapsed, erasing the few traces of sword strokes.

A thunder supernatural!

Hao Lianchuan's eyebrows shot up. This was an attribute that was exceedingly suited for combat. This grand secretary was an absolute powerhouse!

"How much power did you bring to bear against that Huang Jie?" Manager Yu turned to look at him after she destroyed everything in front of them.

"Thirty percent..." Hao Lianchuan responded after momentary thought.

She had a good understanding of the situation now. Manager Yu once more looked in the direction that Li Hao had left in.

"I... don't know if it's good or bad for this person to stay in White Moon." She took in a small breath. "You should not come in too much contact or have many dealings with him. These bold and impetuous matters... Real martial masters are much more reckless than you think! When Yuan Shuo tore through Silver Moon, there was nothing he dared not do and no one he dared not kill. But this young man's violent nature may be worse than Yuan Shuo's in my eyes!

"He is alone, without any ties or considerations. Other than Yuan Shuo drawing a few notes of care, he is completely without handicap. If you don't wish to be dragged down by him, Hao Lianchuan, you should stay away from him!"

The deputy director regarded these words awkwardly. It was the first time that anyone said anything like this to him. If someone had told him before that he should keep his distance from Li Hao, that the young man would drag him down and was a killing fiend, he would think it a joke. Is Li Hao more threatening than I am?

But in this moment, he felt that perhaps Manager Yu was the correct one. He'd only exchanged a few words with Li Hao so he could make an example out of Yu Xiao, but now even Huang Jie was dead! If it wasn't for the young man's lack of strength, he suspected that Li Hao would go on such a rampage that even Hao Lianchuan himself would be terrified in the end!

“Then... Manager Yu... what now...”

“Now?” The woman flicked a glance at him. “You take care of the trouble that you’ve created. You’re the one who killed them, so make up whatever story you wish. It’s up to other people whether they believe you or not. But there’s one thing you do need to mention, and that’s that you didn’t know their identities. The Flaming Phoenix Spear killed them all when it was deployed, it’s that simple!”

A rueful expression spread over Hao Lianchuan’s face. Hu Qingfeng would realize that he was missing men sooner or later. Hao Lianchuan was in for a world of trouble when that took place. He’d thought that the burden on his shoulders might be lightened with Director Hou present. However, the secretary didn’t seem inclined to help him in the director’s absence.

“Then...”

“That’s it, I’m going back!” Manager Yu didn’t want to waste too many words on him. Her presence flared, summoning the Flaming Phoenix Spear to her hand. A streak of fiery light arced across the horizon and vanished on the spot, landing in the Night Watcher headquarters.

She left as fast as she came, leaving Hao Lianchuan in a tight spot. Leave if you want, why did you take the spear with you? Are you even thinking about me here??

Mysterious power was already surging around him. Plainly, the powerhouses from earlier knew that ‘Hou Xiaochen’ was washing his hands of the matter with that streak of light. Since the man had left, it was time to visit the premises again. Other than the three great organizations that didn’t dare openly show themselves, the other factions didn’t fear putting themselves forward and weren’t afraid of Hao Lianchuan.

Contrary to expectation, the first to arrive wasn’t Hu Qingfeng. A powerful presence roiled through the air, depositing two figures in the wrecked alleyway—Hu Dingfang and Chen Yuhua.

A brooding Hu Dingfang had rushed to the scene with the fastest speed possible and urgently looked around. He saw only a sea of flames!

“Hao Lianchuan, where’s Li Hao?!” The man’s heart skipped a beat. The boy wasn’t dead, was he??

Chen Yuhua’s expression was likewise extremely unpleasant. Was her little junior brother gone before they’d had a chance to meet? What should she do now?!

Hao Lianchuan glanced at them and responded calmly, “He’s fine, just slightly injured. I’ve already sent him back. There’s no need for a Sunderer to be involved in this!”

The two heaved sighs of relief as more figures dropped down from the sky. Hu Qingfeng was first on the scene. His face was composed, but some anger lurked in the depths of his eyes. A muscular man wearing an Inspectorate uniform followed behind him. Multiple stars twinkled on his uniform; leather boots landed emphatically on the ground. A stern expression crossed his face.

Hao Lianchuan ignored Hu Qingfeng, but quickly called out when he saw the latter, “Inspector General!”

This was their nominal superior. Not just his, but Hou Xiaochen’s as well. He was the inspector general of the entire Silver Moon Inspectorate and, judging from his speed, another powerhouse.

The burly man inclined his head and looked around. “Have all the evil supernaturals been executed?” he asked calmly, his tone less severe than one might expect.

“They have!”

“Is there evidence proving that they are from Red Moon?”

“No,” Hao Lianchuan replied rapidly. “Just that a few of them were wearing Red Moon masks. The assailants only wanted to capture Li Hao, not kill him. Other than Red Moon, it’s not hard for any of the other organizations to eliminate a Sunderer. There were two Solars present, yet they still only wished to capture Li Hao. Apart than Red Moon, I cannot think of any other organization who would seek to do so.”

“Are there any survivors?” Hu Qingfeng asked in a chilly fashion.

“There are no possible survivors when the Flaming Phoenix Spear is unleashed!” Hao Lianchuan answered evenly. “You may be unaware, Sir Hu, that the origin weapon is imbued with Director Hou’s will after being nurtured by the director for so many years. Even without his hand wielding it, it is but a small task for it to lay waste to two Solars.”

Some more people arrived outside the alley. Hong Yitang, He Yong, and a few others were all present. None of them greeted Hu Qingfeng.

Eyes darting around rapidly, He Yong sized up the scene. He furrowed his brows slightly. As a premier martial master, he could vaguely sense something different in the air.

Sword intent? Spear intent? Something like that.

Hong Yitang was expressionless, but his heart shook with shock. Sword intent! And it wasn’t just sword intent, he felt something that was somewhat familiar. He walked outside the alley in a casual manner and gently grasped at the air. An extremely fine metal shard landed in his hand. His shock multiplied to unfathomable levels!

The Earthturner Sword!

He was all too familiar with his sword. Other people would ignore the shard as it was too small—it was only slightly larger than a grain of rice. Who cared about that?

He did!

He knew that the Earthturner Sword was with Li Hao and wouldn't have found it amiss if the sword had been left here after the young man was attacked. But... it was broken! Completely obliterated!

That alone wasn't the key—this outcome was also normal since the enemy had been too strong. But these shards clearly weren't the result of the weapon being shattered. It'd fragmented of its own accord, not from mysterious power, but from a sword aura!

Countless thoughts rose in his mind; Hong Yitang even managed to reconstruct some of the scene. A premier swordsman had been attacked and erupted with his sword aura, spontaneously shattering the Earthturner Sword. Its shards shot in all directions—that sword aura had been so strong that it exceeded the Dominator level!

This person was also a swordsman!

Hong Yitang could faintly perceive the other's killing intent, fury, and berserk rage... It was a sword intent that was also slightly familiar. He couldn't believe it and didn't dare pursue that line of thinking further. The man thought back to a scene that'd occurred in the ancient city in the ruins. He'd also sensed something slightly different when he gave the sword to Li Hao, but hadn't followed up on that moment.

Today... he had to.

The battle site had been destroyed by fire, leaving behind only half of a Red Moon mask. Everything else had been obliterated. Was there a need for Hao Lianchuan to do so when he employed the Flaming Phoenix Spear?

Was he hiding something? What was he hiding?

The look in Hong Yitang's eyes shifted rapidly. Of course he was hiding something—he hadn't killed these people. Instead, a swordsman had, one incomparably strong. How many within the modern day martial world could accomplish such a deed?

Yuan Shuo?

Yuan Shuo was no swordsman. He might be able to do so, but it wasn't him. If his sword intent was so domineering, he would've become a premier swordsman and not the Five Styles King.

Li Hao!

The name appeared in Hong Yitang's mind with difficulty. He almost lost his footing. The young man was an unfathomable swordsman!

"What are you looking at, Earthturner Sword?" A voice suddenly sounded in his ears. He Yong walked over, roaring with laughter. "Are you terrified out of your mind at this battle scene?"

Hong Yitang looked back to find He Yong staring at his hand.

"What, did you find some money?" joked the latter.

Hong Yitang placed his hands behind his back and slowly melted the shard in his palm.

Chapter 324: Clouds Shift On All Sides (III)

"I'm not as lucky as Brother He." Hong Yitang smiled at He Yong. "I haven't found any money, I'm just overcome by emotion. There weren't many Solars to be found in all of Silver Moon before, but now they're dying in droves. I'm going to start fearing for my life soon if this continues. I could get by before, but now I feel that the road ahead is bumpy and living to see each sunset is a doubtful proposition!"

“You’re a rat and can always scurry away since your zodiac is the rat,” He Yong chuckled. “How are you afraid? Not to mention, you’re not the one dead. What are you afraid of? Or are you behind this?”

“Surely you jest, Brother He!”

He Yong laughed happily, ignoring Hong Yitang’s response. However, he transmitted, “Do you... sense something off about this, ole brother?”

“What do you mean?” Hong Yitang likewise transmitted back.

“I somehow feel that... our Silver Moon may have gained another formidable martial master. Or perhaps Old Demon Yuan never left in the first place!” “What? Surely not!” Hong Yitang remarked with surprise. “What makes you say that?”

“Forget it, you’re a fake martial master. There’s no point in saying so much to you!”

“.....” Hong Yitang smiled ruefully, but didn’t respond. He Yong left with large strides to look at another area. The leader of the Sword Sect breathed out slowly when he was alone again. He Yong might have felt something, but would never think that the formidable martial master he spoke of was most likely Li Hao.

Hong Yitang saw another group of people arrive—those from the provincial government and others from the army. Representatives from the four main institutions of White Moon City were all present. It was time for him to go; he departed a few moments later. This was not something he could be involved in.

Hong Yitang wasn’t interested in these affairs; he didn’t care who was dead, so long as it wasn’t himself. As for whether or not it was truly Red Moon members who’d died... did that matter?

As numerous as Red Moon’s powerhouses were, they’d already lost a large group at Rift Canyon—particularly several Solars. Did they still have more Solars to send to Silver Moon at this stage?

There even seemed to be a peak Solar among the dead. Was that Violet Moon?

That would be the greatest joke of all. She wouldn't take this kind of risk.

It was difficult to determine who the two Solars were, but sooner or later, word would spread. What Hong Yitang cared more about was if Li Hao had killed people, was there anything he should do? He'd thought it was only a matter of time before Yuan Shuo returned. Given Yuan Shuo and Hou Xiaochen's relationship, perhaps he could lean toward Yuan Shuo and the Night Watchers. But now... he felt that Yuan Shuo had gone completely missing. Who knew when he'd be back?

And Li Hao? The kid had hidden himself deep! But since he'd taken action today, he wouldn't be able to keep himself hidden for too long. Paper could not envelop fire!

It wasn't intuitive to draw a connection to Li Hao after Hao Lianchuan burned everything, but it was only a matter of time before the young man was exposed if any further aberrations cropped up in his behavior.

And here I gave him the Earthturner Sword... but it looks like the sword is no more. Hong Yitang left while turning over these thoughts.

A frowning He Yong reappeared after he departed the area. Had Hong Yitang discovered something? He'd clearly seen the fellow pick up something, but the latter hid it when he came near! There were secrets being kept here!

He took another look at the wrecked alley; there was nothing there apart from flickering flames. Destroying the scene of the ambush? Was it because the assailants possessed a surprising identity, or was there another reason?

He Yong didn't linger on the premises. White Moon City was growing ever more dangerous. All manner of riffraff was beginning to pop out of the cracks.

.....

Inside the alley.

Hao Lianchuan made a report to the inspector general and concluded, “Director Hou was just here and didn’t stay when he heard that the enemy had been eliminated. His wounds are not fully healed yet, so he left the matter wholly in my hands!

“Red Moon was so bold as to attack the Night Watchers inside the city! I mean to commence an encirclement of the organization! Director Hou is in seclusion and too injured to take the field. The Night Watchers aren’t strong enough, so we urgently wish for central headquarters to reinforce us!” He looked at Hu Qingfeng. “Sir Hu, Red Moon thinks nothing of the Night Watchers! There happens to be special agents within the city now. Our duty as Night Watchers is to clear out all evil supernaturals!

“Whether it is out of consideration for Night Watcher dignity or to suppress crime and uphold justice, Red Moon’s sins are unforgivable. Their crimes are too numerous to be recounted! Please help us, Sir Hu!”

Hu Qingfeng cursed inwardly, but he could not refuse. As a special agent of the agency, Night Watcher prestige would be used to wipe the floor if he refused. No matter what other thoughts he had at the moment, he had to consider the consequences of such an action. There wasn’t the only clique at central headquarters. It was a complicated situation back home; he represented only a portion, not all.

Trouble would come looking for him if he did not perform competently at White Moon and safeguard the Night Watcher reputation.

“Don’t worry, I will not idly sit by when evil is so brazen!” he intoned. “I’ll send people to investigate traces of the organization. If their members are found, we will show them no mercy!”

It was just talk, he wasn't inclined to actually do so.

Hao Lianchuan didn't care if his counterpart was sincere or not. He nodded and spat, "Red Moon grows bolder by the day. It was one thing to attack Silver City, but now they dare invade even White Moon! They infiltrated us with two Solars, so I recommend that the city be placed under strict military control starting today! The Inspectorate, Night Watchers, and army will take over the reins until the Red Moon remnants are fully flushed out!"

No one said a word. Someone looked at the representatives from the provincial government. It wasn't Director General Zhao who'd come, but his number one. The second-in-command at the provincial government was also an old man with white hair. He seemed quite cultured and polite.

"As you wish," he sighed without protest. "We'll be in charge of cleaning up. I'll have people take inventory of the losses and see if any innocent citizens were harmed or suffered losses. Can't supernaturals avoid the crowds when they fight?"

He turned to Hao Lianchuan. "Deputy Director Hao, Silver Moon has been stable for many years and the people live in peace. The Night Watchers must be careful. We would hope that you control the fallout if more supernaturals attack and try to avoid crowded areas as much as possible."

Finally, he looked at Hu Qingfeng. "Special Agent Hu, those of you from Skystar City are formidable. Please spend some time and effort on this matter. It would be a great accomplishment if we can eliminate Red Moon from the province. The provincial government will request commendations for you!"

"We will." Hu Qingfeng inclined his head with a smile. "Be at ease, Deputy Zhou!"

The old man quickly left without another word. This wasn't their field of expertise. Since the most pressing situation had been resolved, then the provincial government would not be further involved.

A thought occurred to someone in the Inspectorate and they whispered to the burly man. The latter nodded, his approval a cue for an inspector to swiftly depart.

The surveillance cameras!

There was a surveillance camera at the head of the alley; it was destroyed at the moment. However, they might be able to discover something if they could pull the tapes or confirm the identities of the attackers. Even now, no one knew how many had died here. The only known piece of information was that there'd been two Solars present.

Hao Lianchuan's only answer was that he'd fully unleashed the Flaming Phoenix Spear in his fury. It'd erupted with maximum destruction and all of the attackers were dead by the time he landed! Other than purposefully directing the flames to go around Li Hao, the rest were instantly incinerated. He hadn't had a chance to see how many there were or who they'd been.

The crowd dispersed upon seeing that nothing had been left behind. Hu Qingfeng left as well, walking away with ill-concealed wrath and confusion. Was Red Moon crazy? Or was someone posing as them?

There were indeed dead Solars as the messy disarray of mysterious power was very dense. There had to be one wood and one metal Solar. The metal Solar looked to have been quite powerful, most likely on par with Huang Jie. The wood Solar could map to Yu Xiao.

Those from the central region had reached an agreement with Red Moon, so why had the organization done this?! As important as the bloodline of the eight families was, the organization could do anything they wished after Hou Xiaochen was out of the picture. He didn't understand!

He soon returned to the hotel. The other two members of his team hadn't struck out on their own. They'd remained waiting in the suite. In a bad mood, Hu Qingfeng swept a glance over them.

"Where's Huang Jie and Yu Xiao?" He frowned. Where were those two bastards off to when something so major had taken place??

...wait. That's... right. How would these two run off when something so critical had occurred? He left them to keep watch at the hotel.

Metal... wood...

An ominous premonition prickled. Hu Qingfeng's expression shifted and he looked at the man and woman left. "Did you guys see Huang Jie and Yu Xiao when you came back?"

"No..." answered the woman.

"Did you call their communicators?" Hu Qingfeng's face grew dark. "Have you been in contact with them?"

"...no..."

"Well?! Do it!" he barked, making the other two jump. Unease began to set in for the latter. What was going on and why was their superior looking more and more alarmed?

Surely not! Huang Jie and Yu Xiao weren't fools. Why would they play robber for no reason at all? Did the bloodline of the eight families have anything to do with them?

No!

There really was no one apart from Red Moon who would create trouble for Li Hao. No one else understood the situation. But... there was a mid wood Solar and a peak metal Solar dead... That was too much of a coincidence! Those two would absolutely show themselves when they sensed the happenings inside the city. So where were they?!

The more Hu Qingfeng dwelled on it, the more uneasy, furious, and solemn he grew. What if it was Huang Jie and Yu Xiao that were dead? He'd be in grave trouble!

Chapter 325: Clouds Shift On All Sides (IV)

Hu Qingfeng couldn't even say that two of his men were dead. He'd just condemned all of the attackers as evil supernaturals. Once he admitted that Huang Jie and Yu Xiao were among the dead.. he'd be in enormous trouble!

"Damn that Hao Lianchuan!" The look in Hu Qingfeng's eyes chilled as he recalled something. Hao Lianchuan had insisted that he didn't know the identities of the attackers, just that they were likely to be from Red Moon. He'd quickly framed the assailants as evil supernaturals with a few words and asked Hu Qingfeng for reinforcement.

Not only could the latter not say that the two Solars were likely to be Yu Xiao and Huang Jie, but he also had to cover for their absence!

"Damn it, damn it!" He was an utter fool if he still didn't know who was among the dead. Hu Qingfeng glowered so ominously that the very sight of his face would terrify others! Hao Lianchuan had run complete circles around him! That guy definitely knew who'd died! He'd done all of this on purpose!

"The call... didn't go through..." the woman said in a low voice.

Hu Qingfeng remained quiet. Of course not! They were dead and buried in a sea of flames. Where was that call supposed to go to?

"They're dead!" he said solemnly after a while. "Don't say anything and tell anyone who asks that they were reassigned to another mission and left the city early this morning..."

"Sir!" gasped the other two. Dead? So the battle that'd erupted before involved Yu Xiao and Huang Jie? Then... wasn't the rest of the team also in danger?

“Everyone’s exchanging blows in the dark at the moment. Hou Xiaochen and the rest don’t dare move against us in the open. But… White Moon City is no longer safe for us!”

Yet, they couldn’t leave right this moment. That would place them in even greater danger.

“We can’t leave just yet.” Anxiety finally crept into Hu Qingfeng’s voice. “We need to show our faces even more in the days to come. Don’t go outside if you have no reason to. Stay within the provincial government buildings if you must!”

The more he turned the matter over in his mind, the more uneasy he grew. He would remember fatty Hao Lianchuan, that bastard! Just as they thought, all of Silver Moon’s Night Watchers were traitors! Hao Lianchuan had known who those two were, but he’d still killed them! Damn him!

.....

At the same time.

A moderately sized office in the provincial government building.

Deputy Zhou had returned from the alley and was meeting with Director General Zhao.

“It’s Yu Xiao and Huang Jie who died,” the deputy said slowly. “Hu Qingfeng doesn’t know anything and is probably just discovering that something is off.”

The elderly man shook his head. “Hu Qingfeng is strong, but his mind is rather slow. At least half of those present had guessed who’d died, for example, the inspector general and He Yong from the royal family. And yet, he was unsuspectingly led astray by just a few words from Hao Lianchuan.”

“Is Hou Xiaochen behind this?” murmured Director General Zhao, to which he quickly shook his head. “No, if he was, then not even Hu Qingfeng would make it out alive. This means to say that this operation was Hao Lianchuan’s own making. That little fatty has quite the nerve!”

“It doesn’t look like that either.” Deputy Zhou shook his head. “Or rather, the plan was his, but the results were so unexpected that he had to destroy the scene of battle! if he was behind it, he wouldn’t need to obliterate everything. His goal would be to confirm the attackers’ identities and their connection to Red Moon. It wouldn’t be to dismiss the matter entirely when there is a lack of evidence.”

“What have you discovered?” The director general looked at his old friend of many years. His deputy was a meticulous person and looked to have found something.

“It might not be Hao Lianchuan who did the deed,” Deputy Zhou breathed out softly. “It was someone else whose identity cannot be revealed. They’re very strong to kill two Solars, but they cannot be known by the public. If it’s not Yu Luocha, it’s Li Hao!”

“Hmm?” The director general blinked. He ignored the first possibility and raised his eyebrows at the second name. “Li Hao?”

“Yes.” Deputy Zhou thought for a while longer. “For a Sunderer to remain unharmed when attacked by two Solars, that would be possible if it was truly Red Moon behind the deed. If not Red Moon, but Yu Xiao and Huang Jie, then those two must have discovered something. Is there a need for them to take Li Hao alive? Can they get away with him? Hou Xiaochen would come out of seclusion in that case. Could they get away then? Therefore... if they made a move, it would be to kill Li Hao. They wouldn’t seek to capture him!

“Hao Lianchuan arrived quite speedily—likely less than thirty seconds after the fighting began. That is a very long period of time for two Solars attacking a Sunderer. They would’ve killed their target a long time ago, unless they fought among themselves. But assuming they were in full control of their mental facilities, why would they indulge in internal discord at this time?

“Therefore... another possibility is that Yuan Shuo hasn’t left after all?”

Director General Zhao furrowed his brows and shook his head. “Yuan Shuo has indeed left! That part is true. We have word from the Near River province that Yuan Shuo has teamed up with the

Jadelight Sword and conducted an incredible feat last night. They jointly destroyed one of Red Moon's strongholds and killed a Solar. Yuan Shuo even left taunts for Ying Hongyue to wait for him in the central region, that he won't come back before killing the man!"

"....." Deputy Zhou took a deep breath. "Can there be someone else behind Li Hao?"

If not... the implications were extremely terrifying. It was only now that the young man's name fully entered their line of sight.

"Forget it." The director general smiled after extended silence. "Let's ignore this for now and wait for Hou Xiaochen to return."

"Where's he gone?" asked the deputy. The two seemed certain that Hou Xiaochen was not in the city and didn't mind Manager Yu's earlier appearance. They seemed to know her identity and strength beforehand.

"I'm not sure." The director general looked outside the window. "Not only is he not in the city, but that one in the army is absent as well. The two have left together, ostensibly to take down a powerful foe. Regular people don't merit this kind of attention. Hu Qingfeng's presence is their best cover, he can prove that they're inside the city. Let's wait, news will spread soon. If a Nova or major figure dies soon, that's probably where they are."

Deputy Zhou had nothing to say to that. So Commander Yu was also absent? What kind of person warranted attention from both of them at the same time? He had some thoughts, but didn't dare voice them. They couldn't be spoken aloud even though there were only the two of them in the office. If his thoughts came to pass... then the northern region would be thrown into disarray for a while.

As a result, temporary peace might come to Silver Moon. They wouldn't draw much focus for a bit. Whether it was Yuan Shuo or Hou Xiaochen, they demonstrated their strength to deter opponents and redirect attention elsewhere. These fellows were formidable and wouldn't take action for no reason at all, much less suddenly kill others or erupt in hostility...

The martial world, Night Watchers, and army had reached an accord. It would seem that the situation in Silver Moon was more complicated than previously imagined.

Activity finally ceased at the provincial government headquarters for the night.

.....

At the same time.

Li Hao was immensely enjoying his dinner. Wang Ming sat in a daze beside him and quickly offered a beverage after Li Hao had taken a few bites.

“Li... senior brother,” he stammered. “Have a drink and wet your throat!”

Li Hao took a sip and looked at the handsome supernatural. Wang Ming swallowed hard.

“Senior brother... our Five Styles discipline... is amazing!”

Li Hao smiled.

“Um... I didn’t see anything!” Wang Ming quickly changed tack. “I destroyed it all, there’s nothing left and no backup copies!”

Li Hao nodded without a word. Wang Ming seemed to recover enough of his senses to operate normally. He looked at his counterpart with an odd expression.

“Senior brother... do you think I still have a chance to learn martial dao?”

“I don’t know.”

“C’mon, senior brother, give me a chance!” Hope beamed out of Wang Ming’s face. “I want to learn martial dao, really, I want to be a martial master. I want to be a powerful martial master!”

“We’ll see. Teacher may have a way, I don’t.”

Fine then!

Wang Ming was quite dejected, but he couldn’t forget what he’d seen. Sword qi racing to the heavens, executing a Sunflare along the way, surging up to the clouds, and then...

That was all he saw! But he knew that two Solars had died and battle was almost over by the time Hao Lianchuan arrived. This unexpected senior brother of his was damned terrifying! So terrifying that he felt perhaps Director Hao was no match.

Not perhaps, but that he’d probably die to one sword stroke if he didn’t have the Flaming Phoenix Spear. Hot damn! Were martial masters really this terrifying??

Wang Ming served Li Hao with passion, his thoughts in a far-off place. Even now he couldn’t forget what he’d witnessed. It was crazy! Li Hao had also been incredible when he killed Zhang Ting, but not this incredible. He was improving so quickly that it almost terrified Wang Ming.

“What do we do next, senior brother? Are we going to be exposed?” Wang Ming asked with trepidation. They hadn’t killed regular people this time.

“What about it?” Li Hao continued calmly munching on his dinner. “If push comes to shove, teacher’s already demonstrated what to do. I’ll go look for him, what are you worried about?”

Look for teacher? Wang Ming took in a sharp breath. If his senior brother went as well and all these killing fiends were gathered together... That would be even more frightening! No, exciting. No wait, terrifying!

Wang Ming said nothing more. His mind ran with questions of how to become a martial master, a powerful one of the Five Styles. His discipline was firmly branded in his mind.

Li Hao looked out the window. Some people would guess certain things this time, so he needed to quickly become even stronger! He wouldn't be able to keep the truth concealed from everyone—not that he wanted to. If he kept improving at such a rapid clip that he could kill Novas, it wouldn't matter if they were focused on the fact that he could kill Solars.

The young man grinned. Hou Xiaochen, Manager Yu, Director Hao, Hu Qingfeng... Various names filtered into his thoughts. He felt that he could try jumping out of his spot and utilize absolute strength to become one of the many movers and shakers of the province. He wouldn't have to passively accept events happening to him.

"The food's pretty good, it's really tasty," Li Hao said after trying all of the food. "Buy some more next time, Ole Wang!"

"No problem!" Wang Ming responded excitedly.

Li Hao laughed when he flicked a glance at his colleague. This guy's pretty interesting sometimes. It's not like I eat people, so what are you looking at me like this for? Are you forgetting that you're also a co-conspirator?

Chapter 326: A Bolt From The Blue (I)

Li Hao was highly satisfied after eating and drinking to his heart's content. However, some doubts lingered in his mind. He thought for a bit and looked at Wang Ming. "Does Director Hou often travel out of White Moon City?"

"I don't know, what's up?" Wang Ming truly didn't know as he wasn't familiar with that individual.

Li Hao nodded without further question. No matter what the context or reason was, it wasn't a small matter that he'd killed so many people tonight. Only Manager Yu had come to resolve it, and in a secretive manner without revealing her identity. Certain attempts at subterfuge were at play here.

There was no need for the smoke and mirrors if Hou Xiaochen really was in seclusion. This could only mean that he wasn't in the city. So where had he gone?

The director had just killed a premier powerhouse, drawing all eyes to White Moon City. If looked at through a more solemn lens, half of the dynasty's attention was focused here. Wasn't he worried about trouble developing in his absence? What was worth running off at this point in time?

Faint footsteps sounded outside the door as Li Hao pondered.

Knock knock knock!

Wang Ming jumped with shock and glanced at Li Hao. The latter inclined his head and intoned, "Open the door."

He swept the remnants of dinner into the trash with a wave of his hand and shut the lid on the trash can. Complexion slightly pale, Li Hao walked toward the door.

Wang Ming was slightly apprehensive since he didn't know who was here, but quickly opened the door regardless. He heaved a sigh of relief as soon as he did so. "Uncle Hu!"

Hu Dingfang looked at the supernatural greeter at the door. He recognized the boy this time. The man inclined his head, but his expression was less than pleasant. In his view, the ambush on Li Hao had much to do with their conversation before. Wang Ming had such a big mouth!

"General Hu!" Li Hao exclaimed with surprise. He looked at Hu Dingfang with bafflement. "What brings you here?"

“Are you alright?” Hu Dingfang swept a glance over the young man. Thank goodness, Li Hao seemed fine. The lad wasn’t any worse off save for a pale face.

“I’m fine.” Li Hao smiled weakly. “Director Hao came quickly and the attackers didn’t want to kill me. They just wanted to capture me, so I didn’t suffer major injuries.”

Hu Dingfang inwardly groused at Wang Ming for lacking common sense when the latter didn’t leave. Can’t you see that we’re having a private conversation here?

“You can come to me if you need anything,” Hu Dingfang said in lieu of anything else. “Also, it’s not safe with the Night Watchers. If you have nowhere else to go, you can come to the Tiger Wing. Some things aren’t how Hao Lianchuan has presented to you. A certain degree of coincidence and misunderstandings is wrapped up in events of the past.”

Hao Lianchuan must have exaggerated a great deal! Li Hao should already know that Hu Dingfang knew the Five Styles, but in the commander’s eyes, the young man might’ve chosen to come to the Tiger Wings all the same if it wasn’t for Hao Lianchuan. That fatty was an awful person!

“I understand.” Li Hao quickly bobbed his head and continued in a conflicted tone, “It’s just... I’m not at liberty to make any decisions. I have to wait until master returns.”

“.....” There was nothing that a speechless Hu Dingfang could say. After some thought, he raised another topic. “If you have time, you... can come to my house for dinner one day. Also, I’ll find a way to get you some blood pearls. You’re too weak. Sunderer is good, but the world is growing ever more disorderly!

“Silver Moon is safe enough—chaos has descended upon some of the nearby provinces. The entire north has been unstable ever since the rebellion of their three provinces. While Commander Yu quelled the uprising, scattered disruptions have continued to this day...” The man suddenly felt that there was no need to explain too much. “If martial dao proves too hard to advance in, you can consider crossing over to the supernatural. Mysterious power is easier to obtain and although your

master has broken new territory for martial masters, he is not a regular person. Not everyone can take his path.”

Li Hao quickly nodded again. Hu Dingfang had nothing else to say and Li Hao didn't seem inclined to keep his guest. Upon seeing that, the commander turned to leave.

“Please get home safe, General Hu!”

Hu Dingfang waved without a response. A while after the man's departure, Li Hao looked down from the window. As he expected, there was a woman waiting on the ground level.

Wang Ming also sidled over for a look. “Ole Hu's wife! She rarely shows herself, but she came this time as well. Are you related to Ole Hu?”

The woman seemed to sense something and raised her head for a look. However, the twelfth floor was high up, so who knows what she was able to see?

Li Hao looked for a while and looked at Wang Ming again. “Do you still not understand?”

“Understand what?”

Li Hao shook his head with a sigh. This fellow was rather silly at times. Hu Dingfang knows the Five Styles and he's pretty good at it! Do you sense nothing at all? He has something to do with the Five Styles discipline!

Shouldn't ordinary people have come to this sort of conclusion a long time ago? Are your brains operating at all?

“The person on the ground... Well, you should call her senior sister.”

“I see!” Wang Ming nodded reflexively, then blinked oddly. “Oh, I get it! One of Teacher Yuan’s old students? I’ve never heard about her!”

He understood what Li Hao was saying, then thought back to Hu Dingfang. “Oh... I get it! Hu Dingfang knows the Five Styles and he’s better than me at it. I’m an honorary disciple who knows the breathing technique. He knows it too?”

Li Hao smiled. So he isn’t a complete fool!

He wanted to retract that thought in the next second.

“So this means that Hu Dingfang is the same disciple generation as me. I’m teacher’s honorary disciple—he’s not even that. My status is higher than him among the Five Styles discipline. If I go to him and tell him I’m his senior brother... Do you think he’ll beat me up?”

“Get outta here!” Li Hao cursed laughingly. He watched as Hu Dingfang left with the woman. “You don’t need to think too much about it. Teacher is probably very disappointed!” He shook his head and suddenly sighed, “There was great potential there!”

“What?”

“Don’t you see it?”

“Huh?” Wang Ming plainly didn’t.

“Look at how your senior sister walks.” Li Hao raised his chin.

“Senior sister walks...” Wang Ming murmured in an entranced voice after poking his head out for a look. “In a very alluring way...”

Li Hao rolled his eyes, at a complete loss for what to say.

“Alluring your ass! That’s instinctive movement resulting from making the deer style an integral part of her! She notices the surroundings as she walks and is vigilant against the slightest rustle of leaves in the wind. If I’m not mistaken, our senior sister is a Dominator. She’s been one for many years!”

“What!” Wang Ming sucked in a sharp breath. “That strong? Stronger than our teacher?”

“You should read more books and ask more questions if you want to practice martial dao!” Li Hao shook his head. “Teacher melded five auras together. He’s not an ordinary Sunderer or Dominator. In the modern martial world—and I’m speaking of only Silver Moon’s, not the outside world—all local cultivators who set foot into Dominator before our teacher did is trash!”

“Eh?” Wang Ming started. What did that mean? Dominators were trash?

“Those who weren’t able to do so or advanced after leaving the province may be the true powerhouses.”

Wang Ming was truly confused.

“Silver Moon’s martial world was suppressed by teacher back in the day. He swept through the previous generation, keeping all of them down in a mental way before he progressed to Dominator. It sounds fictitious, but was very real. It was a suppression of mind intent and aura!

“That was why the Earthturner Sword Hong Yitang, Qimei Staff Sun Yifei, and others were unable to advance. If viewed through the lens of present day strength, what would they be worth as Dominators? He Yong didn’t become one until he left the province either.

“Let me put it in simpler terms.” Li Hao counted as a martial dao authority now, so he spoke with a greater degree of understanding and composure. “Of those that teacher defeated back in the day, some had such incredible potential that they didn’t die in defeat. They were outstanding talents! However, they couldn’t break through if they stayed in Silver Moon. But Dominator wasn’t a guarantee if they left...”

Wang Ming scratched his head. This was very hard to understand. What did this have to do with leaving Silver Moon? And hadn’t they been talking about their senior sister?

Li Hao didn’t bother explaining further since his colleague still didn’t understand. He brought the conversation back to their last topic. “Senior sister is teacher’s disciple, so logically speaking, she shouldn’t have broken through before teacher did. That’s not to say that she couldn’t, but the fact that she did means that her aura is very weak. It was so weak that teacher didn’t suppress it!

“To put it plainly, only powerhouses were worthy of teacher’s suppression, weaklings weren’t! Chief should be slightly stronger than her because he broke through while facing pressure from teacher. Even though he did so in a bit of a hurry and lacked a deep understanding of the aura, he’s still stronger than the usual Dominators!”

Wang Ming nodded, but still didn’t fully understand. But he knew a little more than before, such as all those who’d advanced before Yuan Shuo had were weaklings!

That was what Li Hao meant, right? Although Wang Ming didn’t understand why, he could pinpoint that it originated from teacher’s suppression. That was terrifying!

“Senior brother, do you mean that although our senior sister is a Dominator, she’s actually very weak?”

“Well, she’s not to the point of very weak, just a regular Dominator,” Li Hao chuckled. “If we divide Dominators into three levels, teacher sits at the strongest level. Next comes those like He Yong, ones who left after suffering a defeat and subsequently broke through. They’re the old guard who have room for improvement! Third are people like the chief. They’re regular Dominators.”

“What about you?” Wang Ming couldn’t help but ask.

“Similar to He Yong and the others,” Li Hao smiled. “I lack in terms of aura, but I’m slightly better than He Yong because I’m of the Five Styles. I’m above them and below teacher.”

Chapter 327: A Bolt From The Blue (II)

Wang Ming understood!

“So you’re number two in the martial world?”

“I wouldn’t dare call myself that!” Li Hao grinned. “I’m not being humble, it’s the truth. Perhaps we could say that in the current Silver Moon martial world, but who knows how martial dao has developed in other regions all these years? How many Dominators do those vast territories have and have their Dominators reached another level? Hence, we can’t really say that.”

Wang Ming nodded. Hu Dingfang and his wife disappeared in the distance as they spoke.

“You weren’t too welcoming toward him,” Wang Ming remarked with regret. “We might’ve been able to borrow his strength otherwise. Hu Dingfang is quite a formidable person and his status is high as he commands the Tiger Wings.”

“I won’t get involved in his matter with teacher.” Li Hao shook his head. “That can wait until teacher comes back. Man... what a pity that I couldn’t collect any mysterious power from all the people I killed today. What a damned shame!”

It hadn’t been convenient to collect the energy after he killed his would-be attackers, so he had to forgo it all. While he’d strengthened his five visceral organs to the utmost that they could in such a short period of time, the more mysterious power, the better. There was a lot of energy to be harvested from two Solars and two Sunflares—roughly three thousand cubes!

All of it had been wasted!

Even Wang Ming found it a pity as he knew there was a metal supernatural on the scene. What a shame!

.....

Wang Ming left after a bit more conversation. One had to know when they were overstaying their welcome. Li Hao had just experienced a great battle; he would be tired if someone continuously fawned on him.

Meanwhile, Li Hao was in no hurry to take inventory of what he'd looted. He showered first and thoroughly cleaned up before entering his room and taking out the two storage rings. He'd never seen them before, but he had a general idea of how to use them. He'd memorized quite a few ancient tomes, some of which recorded their usage.

It was simple—mental energy. Of course, modern interpretation of this concept pointed to the consciousness or aura. That special energy could access storage rings. Li Hao didn't know how supernaturals did it—through blood, perhaps?

Who knew!

His consciousness exploded and sensed something in one of the storage rings. It felt like a barrier—Li Hao's mind pierced it like a sword. A flurry of light danced in front of his eyes as he entered a small space.

It was pitch black, as if a small house. No, it wasn't even a house. It was the size of a coffin and there wouldn't be much trouble putting a person inside. His consciousness acted as a light, probing the contents of the space.

"Five mysterious power stones... rich guy!" Li Hao chuckled. Not bad, there were stones for the taking! It made sense since Yu Xiao had given him one before. Granted, the guy had only done so because he felt he could take it back. All the same, five mysterious power stones were a nice find.

Apart from the mysterious power stones, there was another familiar item. An energy ring, not a storage ring!

Energy rings were used to store mysterious power. Li Hao's mind swiftly summoned the ring for investigation. It was similar to the one he wore—five compartments that held two hundred cubes each. Four of this ring's cubes were full of wood energy!

“Yu Xiao!” Li Hao understood what he was seeing. These powerhouses had brought supplies with them on their trip. Eight hundred cubes of wood mysterious power were a significant amount. There might have been more before—the ring might have been full. The fellow had likely consumed some during his trip.

This was an unexpected gain! It was Li Hao's first time obtaining mysterious power not from a corpse of someone he'd killed. These guys from the central region were wealthy upstarts, alright! They brought large sums of mysterious power on their trips to use as supplements. Silver Moon supernaturals couldn't begin to measure up to them.

“The five mysterious power stones can be fed to the little sword. I can use the eight hundred cubes of mysterious power to nurture my wood aura.”

It didn't matter that there was no sign of his wood sword aura yet. Li Hao grinned at the other storage ring. If a mid Solar like Yu Xiao carried such treasures on him, the other peak metal Solar should have quite the riches, shouldn't he?

Aside from the energy ring and stones in Yu Xiao's ring, there was also a motley assortment of random things. There were female undergarments that seemed to be... used!

Li Hao could only conclude that the guy had liked to dress up as a woman. He couldn't bother with considering other implications. There were also some sets of Yu Xiao's clothing and a medallion. The young man had one of the latter as well, it wasn't a treasure. The token simply identified the bearer and represented a Night Watcher's rank.

Being symbolic, there wasn't much use to it.

Li Hao quickly turned his attention to the second storage ring. It was harder to open, but didn't prove too great a challenge either. The contents were similar, just slightly more mysterious power stones at eight stones.

There was also an energy ring, but less mysterious power inside. The six hundred cubes quite disappointed Li Hao. It was plain to see that the peak Solar had depleted more of his supplies. Perhaps he'd used them over the course of daily training? What a waste!

When all of his gains were summed up, Li Hao came out with two storage rings, fourteen hundred cubes of mysterious power, and thirteen mysterious power stones. It was a small resupply of his stock of mysterious power stones. He was nearly running empty on those. His injuries had been so severe this time that he'd almost exhausted the energy inside the little sword.

Li Hao had only seven mysterious power stones left—they wouldn't last long if he didn't obtain more. With the addition of these thirteen, he was adequately equipped for the short run. The two Solars had given him either mysterious power or mysterious power stones. The rest weren't worth mention. At the end, the young man looked at the booklet he'd scrounged from the Dominator.

"Hmm?" He jerked after a simple glance. What a familiar name!

The Hundred Battle Spear!

He'd heard of this spear method before—it belonged to one of the Three Spears of Silver Moon—Bronze Spear Zhang Jinan.

So the Bronze Spear was dead! Was the one in the alley possibly his heir or descendant?

Li Hao frowned, but didn't mind his actions all that much. So that person was dead. Their identity was similar to his chief's identity, which made them a martial second generation. It was impressive that they could set foot over the Dominator threshold.

However, they shouldn't have had designs on his blood pearls.

The Three Spears of Silver Moon were renowned martial masters back in the day. They might not care about the Breathing Method of the Five Styles because their own secret art was just as strong. Now that Li Hao thought back on it, the other did show signs of the Hundred Battle when he struck with his spear.

But since that martial master hadn't experienced the unending violence of yesteryear, his killing intent wasn't as dense as Liu Long's. Liu Long had fought multiple times during his duties in Silver City, after all. If Li Hao had killed the heir of Bronze Spear... did that mean Bronze Spear's legacy had come to an end?

The young man flipped through the booklet as he thought. It detailed aspects that needed to be paid attention to when utilizing the spear technique and its basic principles. When he flipped to the last page, he found an absence of a breathing method. As to be expected.

In this vein, the Bronze Spear discipline was thoroughly obliterated if there were no other heirs! Since Li Hao did not know the breathing method, he possessed form without substance. If he tried to use the Hundred Battle Spear, he would just be flailing around with the motions.

The technique was intricate and useful for spear wielders even without the breathing method. It was a pity that Li Hao neither used the spear, nor was skilled in its practice.

"Martial masters really have nothing worth coveting!" Li Hao shook his head. If circumstances permitted, he wouldn't be interested in killing martial masters at all. There was no point in doing so unless the other was a similar strength level to him, or even stronger. Only then was that meaningful. He would be killing for the sake of martial dao then, not just to kill.

It was pointless to kill the weak. The complete versions of secret arts were hard to come by and there was nothing to be had in killing a martial master. There was no mysterious power to be harvested, so what was the point?

Yuan Shuo had obtained the breathing method to the Ghost Shadow Sword likely because Ghost Shadow Sword had been overconfident. He'd been too self assured that he wouldn't lose or die. He wouldn't have left a complete record of his legacy otherwise.

This was all that Li Hao gained from his fights. Killing someone for their treasure was not a profitable business. Under normal circumstances, powerhouses that could kill Yu Xiao and the others wouldn't think much of these items. To the young man, however, they were decent.

Li Hao tossed the two storage rings to the side. All he needed to do was take a look at them. He wasn't that curious or enamored with the treasures. But they would indeed make his life more convenient. It was his fire sword aura that preoccupied his thoughts at the moment!

He sent his mind into his heart and clearly noted the current state of the tiger aura. It was vastly different from before. The thick chains of the heart wrapped solidly around a sword—a flaming red sword with a tiger head! A tiger head was imprinted on the sword itself, but in an indistinct fashion. The animal seemed to be resting.

“The fire sword and earth sword have materialized. It's best if I get swords of the remaining elements next!” Li Hao was in no hurry to fuse the two swords together. He could wait until all five swords of the elements were present. His teacher's experience would be very useful then. His process would be similar to assimilating the five auras, which would make his teacher's method highly important reference material.

Li Hao would be able to save a great deal of time and utilize a shortcut in his next steps. The sword aura would then lead all of them! When he completed the combination, they would emerge from his organs together and erupt with incredible strength.

“I don't have many clues when it comes to metal and wood, so I should focus on water first!” He didn't know if he'd gain any inspiration from the sea. Perhaps he would, perhaps he wouldn't. But

in any case, he wished to take a look. He'd only reached seven layers of the Nine Forged Force at the moment. It would take a while longer for the ninth layer.

Novas were very strong. His assessment was that if he could bring forth three auras, he would be able to stand against peak Solar. Four might not match him with Novas, but he'd be invincible in the Solar level. When all five were present, that would truly give him a fighting chance with Novas.

Chapter 328: A Bolt From The Blue (III)

Li Hao's assessment of future strength was based on five separate auras, not a combination of them. If he was able to fuse them all, then he might be able to kill Novas outright... But that was all theoretical. Reality might prove differently.

The powerhouses of the martial world were yet to reach this stage. At the very least, he was yet to hear of anyone who could stand against Novas. Even his teacher thus far only demonstrated the strength to match peak Solar. Two of his spirits had emerged then!

However, his teacher was different in that he'd melded five auras together. His two spirits were different from Li Hao's two spirits.

"I probably have to manifest three spirits to be on par with my teacher's two spirits... But my final combination of five auras might be stronger than teacher's..."

That was due to his sword aura being stronger than any single one of the auras of the Five Styles. Where he fell short compared to his teacher was experience, battle reaction, and lack of combination between auras. Otherwise, with Yuan Shuo's experience and strength, he would've killed Huang Jie with Li Hao's second stroke. The young man had to rely slightly on Hao Lianchuan—the deputy director's sudden appearance had startled Huang Jie. That was how Li Hao had swiftly killed the other.

That summed up Li Hao's self-assessment. He needed to review and appraise each battle once it was over. Identifying strengths and weaknesses would allow him to better improve himself.

When all was said and done, he started to miss the crotchety old man that was his teacher. If his teacher was here, he'd certainly help Li Hao locate a few more insufficiencies. He would then speak of his own experience and reflections, helping his student gain even more from the battles.

.....

On the border of Near River province.

The sky was dark. A bonfire lit up the bleak wilderness. Yuan Shuo had hunted down a rabbit from somewhere and was roasting it.

"Stop training, Jadelight," he chuckled. "Leisure and labor go hand in hand when it comes to cultivation, that's how I attained new reflections over these years. Narrowing in on training may not bring you as many benefits as a well fought battle!"

Wu Hongshan cracked open an eye to look at the old man, but didn't say anything.

"Why haven't you accepted a disciple in all these years?" Yuan Shuo had nothing better to do, so he struck up a conversation.

"What's the purpose of accepting a disciple?" Wu Hongshan said faintly. "You accepted quite a few, and what of them?"

"I'm doing quite well, what do you mean?" Yuan Shuo smiled. "Take my youngest disciple, if we set all the rest aside. He reached half step Dominator before I left and comprehended two auras. He's paid a visit to an ancient ruin in the few days that I've been absent. With his skill in comprehension and good luck, he might already be a Dominator!"

"Do you know how many years he's cultivated?" the old man roared with laughter.

"Ten years?" Wu Hongshan raised an eyebrow.

“Hahaha, I knew you hadn’t seen much of the world! Three years... No, one year... No wait, two months!”

“.....” Wu Hongshan looked down her nose at him like she was regarding a fool. Go on, keep blowing hot air!

“Really!” Yuan Shuo laughed uproariously. “Wasn’t I injured before? I took him in three years ago and wanted to pass on my knowledge... And guess what happened? I didn’t teach him anything other than the Five Styles, not even the breathing method. But the kid did good for himself and said he needed self defense when Red Moon came after him in July. He started focusing on practicing martial dao and absorbing mysterious power. He reached Slayer of Tens in a few days!”

“That kind of Slayer is very flimsy!” Wu Hongshan said faintly.

“No shit, I know that!” Yuan Shuo laughed. “So I didn’t say anything. To be honest, I wouldn’t think much of him even if he swiftly became a late Sunderer. The times now are not what they were before. Sufficient absorption of mysterious power and a lack of crossing over means that one can easily reach late Sunderer.

“But you know what? He then comprehended the aura!” the old man sighed with emotion. “That was when I finally felt that he might be a genius, a martial dao genius! You know Silver Spear’s son, right? I was helping him grasp the aura that day—my disciple was watching by the side. And as he watched... he somehow grasped the aura himself! Damn, that was a shocker!

“He comprehended the aura of the earth in the blink of an eye!” Yuan Shuo couldn’t stop grinning merrily. “Not only that, but when he fought Sun Yifei’s disciple a while ago, he comprehended the sword aura during that fight! Jadelight, wouldn’t you say that he’s a genius?”

“That... does indeed make him a genius.” Wu Hongshan wouldn’t care about a regular half step Dominator, but inclined her head at Yuan Shuo’s words. “But the sword and earth aura... To be honest, they’re not a good match. He’s gathering a motley assortment of auras. It’s better to follow a prescribed order and walk the path of your Five Styles. Another option is to focus only on one aura

after becoming a Dominator. The sword aura is good, but you're not versed in it, so he might not have that many chances in the future..."

"Woman, just say it if you're jealous, don't pretend like you're not interested," Yuan Shuo chuckled. "These are great achievements—and it's only been how long? Not to mention, who says that they can't be melded together? He still might be less than me when they're combined, but he might be stronger than you guys!"

"A motley assortment of knowledge doesn't mean that he's skilled at any of it!" Wu Hongshan was as remote as could be. So what if the boy fused two auras together? Would that be as strong as a singular sword aura? Being a jack of all trades and master of none was just wasting his potential.

"Go on, be jealous and envious!" Yuan Shuo concluded with a laugh. "It's a pity that the kid's wrapped up in trouble and the martial world is no longer what it once was. Otherwise I'd bring him around to all the old friends and have him increase his combat experience through challenging some geniuses."

"Like you once did?"

"Was there anything bad about that?"

"Anything bad about becoming public enemy of the martial world?"

"What public enemy?" Yuan Shuo snorted. "I overcame you guys through my own strength, not my family background or cultivation level. I won through real skill, how does that make me a public enemy? You guys were just jealous and throwing dirty water on me!"

He normally couldn't be bothered to respond to talk of being a public enemy, but the person in front of him was a martial master of the same era. He would defend himself with a few words. It was you guys who couldn't measure up, how are you still lying to yourself even now? Aren't you embarrassed by this talk of being a public enemy of the martial world?

“I’ve heard rumors that you accepted some other disciples as well.” Wu Hongshan set the previous matter aside as she didn’t want to get bogged down in it. “That they’re all pretty strong with good potential. How come you don’t talk about them?”

“There’s nothing to talk about.” Yuan Shuo brushed her off. He was a doting old father who favored his youngest son. “My youngest disciple does everything I say and is sensible, clever, kind, and good looking. Too bad you don’t have a disciple or I’d introduce them!

“Right, he’s not a violent brute either. He’s a scholar like me, a class in himself when it comes to talent.”

Wu Hongshan kept quiet. Yuan Shuo very rarely gave out compliments, even to his disciples. He obviously had too much time on his hands tonight and had decided to praise this particular one. It was one thing if the conversation remained between the two of them. How many people would be startled if word got out that Old Demon Yuan actually knew how to compliment people?

“Damn it,” Yuan Shuo suddenly sighed. “Hou Xiaochen is such an asshole! He’s possibly mistreating the lad...”

“Hou Xiaochen...” Wu Hongshan remained silent for a moment. “Was he part of the Skystar Guards?”

“I don’t know, who cares!” Yuan Shuo didn’t mind. “It doesn’t matter if he was. It’s nothing to do with me even if he was. Though we loathe those people, they did indeed focus their attention on martial masters that didn’t follow the rules. I’m one who does—I haven’t gone on a killing spree, killed innocents, tortured the weak, bullied women, killed officials, or rebelled. Do you think the Guards will possibly want anything to do with me?”

“Don’t forget, you were once a wanted criminal!” Wu Hongshan suddenly smiled.

“That had to do with other things,” Yuan Shuo roared with laughter. “I got on their list because I barged into the military camp to fight Huang Yun. That ran afoul of their rules. They put me on there just for show. It was a warning to the martial world and nothing came of it!”

Wu Hongshan’s interest was piqued after he mentioned it. As a martial master, she was very interested in that battle’s outcome. “Who won between you and Huang Yun?”

The battle had been too mysterious as no one knew who’d won, just that Commander Yu walked away fine, as did Yuan Shuo.

Yuan Shuo took a walk down memory lane and struggled over how best to express himself. He shook his head after a while. “It’s hard to say! Perhaps I won... but I also lost.”

“What do you mean?”

“That old man might’ve made it to Dominator a long time ago!” Yuan Shuo mused. “He would be no match for me if we were both Sunderers—I was invincible in that level and among my peers! But that fellow... We were both Sunderers when we fought and I held a small advantage. When I closed in for the kill though, he suddenly jumped away and forfeited the match!

“Therefore,” the old man sighed. “He was probably a Dominator, one who’d ascended many years ago. So you tell me, do I count as having won?”

“A Dominator of the last era?” Wu Hongshan wasn’t surprised by the existence of Dominators back in their times. That was normal as Yuan Shuo had suppressed only those of his generation. There could’ve easily been Dominators surviving from a previous generation; they just didn’t appear in public much.

“Mmhhh.” Yuan Shuo nodded. “He most likely was, so I didn’t continue the match after thinking it over. There wasn’t much meaning to it.

“Speaking of the three commanders of the Skystar Guards, they were almost all gathered in Silver Moon then. Do you think that old man was one of them?”

“Hmm?” Wu Hongshan blinked. She thought Hou Xiaochen was one, but never thought Huang Yun might be another! He was a commander of the military!

“Cannibal, Laughter, and Sickly...” Yuan Shuo smirked. “They were all very mysterious. Almost no one ever saw them, but we all knew they existed. Their operations always lead to deaths and they were matched by no one. Things were different before. Being able to reach their heights meant that their sources of news, intelligence, methods, cleanup, and martial power were first class. Wouldn’t it make sense if Huang Yun was one of them? The intelligence network of the military has always been top notch.”

Chapter 329: A Bolt From The Blue (IV)

“If what you say is true, then it’s not impossible that Huang Yun is a Dominator!” Wu Hongshan frowned. “So is he Cannibal or what?”

Commander Yun possessed a very upright reputation; everyone’s impression of him was that of august dignity. Cannibal, on the other hand, was infamous.

It wasn’t that he actually ate people, but that he was too vicious, too cruel. Each of his targets became a bloody, gory mess. Martial masters that he killed were left without a whole corpse. Thus, the martial world mocked him as a cannibal, that he killed people as brutally as eating them.

“Who knows?” Yuan Shuo said casually. “If Hou Xiaochen and Huang Yun are part of the three commanders, will the third also be someone from Silver Moon? Only Silver Moon martial masters can stand against Silver Moon’s martial world! Outsiders don’t have that kind of skill at all! If there’s a third one alive, who do you think is possibly them among those of the province?”

Wu Hongshan thought carefully for a second and suddenly looked at Yuan Shuo.

The old man started. What’re you looking at me for?

“If I have to pick someone... I’d say you!” Wu Hongshan replied with a raised eyebrow. “How many did you kill in the martial world? Silver Moon’s martial world was thrown into disarray and weakened because of you. What you did was more impressive than any of the three commanders! They couldn’t suppress an entire cultivation level worth of people, but you did it! So I think it’s highly likely that you’re one of them!”

Yuan Shuo blinked, thought for a moment, and nodded. Honestly, he did seem the part! If someone claimed that he was one of the three commanders, the suggestion did hold up upon closer inspection. It was just that he’d always operated in the open.

“If I didn’t know better, I would think I’m one of them too!” Yuan Shuo laughed ruefully. “If I’m one of the three... I’d be Laughter, wouldn’t you say? He laughed whenever he killed someone.”

Wu Hongshan remained silent. Who knows if you are or not? Of course, no one would inquire into the matter anymore. It was highly possible that this guy was Laughter. Cannibal Huang Yun, Laughter Yuan Shuo, Sickly Hou Xiaochen...

Was the likelihood possible?

The woman decided to put it to rest. This was all in the past. It was no big deal even if the three were who they were suspected to be.

.....

White Moon City was not quiet this night. The fight in the evening put many people on edge or made them fearful. No one knew of the conversation that took place in the wilderness that bordered Near River.

Lights were ablaze all night at the provincial government, Inspectorate, military, and Night Watcher headquarters. Thorough investigations of evil supernaturals within the city and the Red Moon terrorists were underway.

Being advanced in age, Director General Zhao was nodding off in his chair. Hu Qingfeng stayed at the provincial government all night long, seemingly devoted to the case. He brought two of his Solars to hold down the fort. They were concerned about further attacks on the government building.

In reality, they were more worried of encountering danger at the hotel.

Seeing that the director general remained at his post even in the middle of the night, Hu Qingfeng flashed a smile. “It’s late, Director General Zhao. Why don’t you go back and rest? I can keep an eye on things here!”

The provincial government was coordinating efforts with the other agencies to soothe the citizenry. There were a lot of affairs to attend to—these minor details were sometimes more time consuming than tracking down perpetrators.

The director general yawned mightily and smiled. “It’s alright, my body isn’t what it used to be at my age, but I can still stay up all night. Since the dynasty values me highly, then this old man will naturally bend himself to the task and exert himself to the utmost...”

A massive communicator on the table abruptly rang with a piercing notification. Hu Qingfeng frowned slightly. Crouched over a desk not too far away, Deputy Zhou jerked his head up. The communicator that’d just rang was for emergencies. It was a special communication system that consumed vast resources to operate. The system was for first level provincial officials only and connected directly to Skystar Hall!

The director general opened bright eyes and looked at Hu Qingfeng. The man rose without a word and left with his baffled men. Deputy Zhou also made to leave, but the director general pressed his hand down and indicated for the man to stay.

It wasn’t until Hu Qingfeng put some distance between himself and the office that the director general picked up the call. A short report commenced; the call was quickly over. Deputy Zhou’s eyes widened and he looked at his superior with shock.

“The skies to the north...” Director General Zhao breathed out softly. “Have somewhat fallen in. The north is going to descend into disorder!”

Silver Moon was located in the north. An important figure had just died! Someone incredibly important!

How important?

The three provinces that once rebelled were all northern provinces located not too far from Silver Moon. While the mutiny was quelled, unrest continued. A highly placed figure from the dynasty was deployed long ago with the royal family’s blessing to suppress the rebels and oversee the provinces!

He was a notable personage that commanded three provinces worth of armies and kept the region quiet for many years. He killed so many people that no one dared mutter with discontent. He was venerated as the head of the region even after the rise of the supernatural. This person was a very important pillar of the royal family outside the central region!

The Night Watcher system of the three provinces and other supernatural systems were wholly in his grasp. And tonight... he died!

Director General Zhao raised his head to look outside the window. His deputy was likewise amazed. Although they had their speculations... it was still hard to believe when it actually took place!

The three provinces were about to erupt with chaos! That person had killed too many and suppressed the three provinces for so many years that endless resentment festered. He’d been too strong and wielded so much power that grumblings were useless, even though countless people in the three provinces were discontent.

But now, he was dead!

Director General Zhao rubbed his face with rueful resignation. He walked out of the office to where Hu Qingfeng waited. The supernatural hadn't eavesdropped on the conversation. That kind of action was easily uncovered when it came to classified affairs. Once he was found out, he would be in grave trouble.

"What is it, Director General?" Hu Qingfeng was surprised to see the old man stumbling in a lost daze. Had he received bad news? Was he about to be fired? That would be wonderful! All the old man did was pawn him off from morning to night and never spoke about true business at hand. It was better if he was gone as soon as possible!

The director general started to speak, then stopped. He continued with difficulty, "Special... Special Agent Hu..."

Hu Qingfeng looked at him. Out with it!

"The General of Northern Pacification... is dead!"

Hu Qingfeng blinked. Who was the General of Northern Pacification? A title like that was usually bestowed by the royal family. The nine ministries rarely handed out positions crafted with these words. Thus, he didn't respond at first.

Upon seeing his lack of a reaction, Deputy Zhou supplemented, "The... governor general of the three provinces!"

Governor general...

Hu Qingfeng shook when he registered the explanation! Incredulity blossomed in his eyes, he didn't believe it! How was that possible?! How. was. that. possible?!

It wasn't sorrow or grief, just pure, unadulterated shock. How was the governor general dead?? That was Governor General Kou, the royal family's spokesperson in the north! The Inspectorate didn't care whether he lived or died, just that he was a peak Nova!

How was this possible?! He also had countless powerhouses protecting him! It wasn't possible!

Hu Qingfeng's worldview was being overturned. The first thought to surface after the shock was that the three northern provinces would erupt with the death of this one. They bordered Silver Moon, would the unrest spread to Silver Moon?

On the other hand, that wasn't what he was most afraid of. His concern was if nearby powerhouses would be requisitioned to support those three provinces. Hu Qingfeng's shaking grew worse. Governor General Kou was dead! Who did it? If I'm sent in his stead, I'll be in real danger next!

.....

No sleep was forthcoming for mundanes on this night, it was also elusive for regular supernaturals. It was impossible to find for all of the senior councils and premier powerhouses. This wave of insomnia spread from Silver Moon, rapidly reaching Skystar City more than a million kilometers away!

A bolt from the blue! How did two dead Solars in Silver Moon compare??

.....

The next morning.

Li Hao reported to work bright and early. Hao Lianchuan did not return this morning or even last night. He was probably busy handling the deaths of the Solars. Therefore, Li Hao went to work alone this morning.

There was no sign of supernaturals watching him. Not a single one!

The young man set foot through the doors of the Night Watcher headquarters around 8 am. Night Watchers bustled to and fro; some offered a few words of comfort when they saw Li Hao. The young man had been attacked last night, and while he seemed fine, they still wished to express their care and concern.

Investigating the tracks of Red Moon was their greatest mission at the moment. Everyone was busy. There was no longer anything to be wary of when it came to this supernatural organization. It'd suffered heavy losses after a few engagements and the Night Watcher director had easily slain a Red Moon Nova. Agency morale soared at the moment. When they heard that Red Moon had once again attacked Li Hao, they clamored to fully exterminate the organization. People straightened their uniforms and shined their boots, ready to leap into action.

Li Hao paused before walking through the front doors and glanced at the sixth floor. There was nothing to be seen from there before, but a new sensation emanated from it today. He couldn't look at it directly, a feeling he'd felt when he previously faced Hou Xiaochen. The young man's eyes sometimes hurt when he looked at the director.

That sensation had been absent for the last couple of days, so Li Hao had guessed that Hou Xiaochen wasn't at headquarters. But the feeling returned today, so... that meant Hou Xiaochen was back?

Chapter 330: Blinded (I)

Li Hao walked into the lobby with new thoughts swirling through his mind and headed toward the fourth floor. Manager Yu walked out of her office just when he reached his. She glanced at the young man, aloof as ever.

"Li Hao, the director has come out of seclusion. As we said before, you are to meet him after he emerges!"

Come out of seclusion? Was Hou Xiaochen not here before? Li Hao couldn't make sense of things either. Did Hou Xiaochen want to see him because of events from yesterday?

“I understand, Manager Yu.” Li Hao refrained from letting any of his thoughts appear on his face. He decided to pay a visit later, but saw that the secretary remained staring at him. There was nothing else to do but follow behind her and head upstairs together.

When they reached the fifth floor, a Hao Lianchuan with reddened eyes happened to walk out of his office. He headed upstairs as well and nodded when he saw the young man, barely managing to squeeze out a smile.

Li Hao thought he was fretting over yesterday’s affairs, so he didn’t say anything.

The three headed to the sixth floor together—there was only one cavernous office in it. The door opened as soon as Manager Yu knocked on it. Li Hao found Hou Xiaochen sitting in a chair, the man’s eyes looking off into the distance. He seemed weaker than when Li Hao saw him last. Coughs repeatedly shook the man. He inclined his head to see his visitors and didn’t say anything.

“Cough cough...” Hou Xiaochen coughed a few more times. A handkerchief appeared in his hand and he wiped the corners of his mouth with it. A smear of red vanished as soon as it was seen, promptly Manager Yu to anxiously rise to her feet.

“Director...”

“Come, sit.” Hou Xiaochen’s smile was as gentle as ever.

Li Hao surreptitiously looked around the office out of the corner of his eye. Otherwise, he kept his eyes pointed forward. There weren’t that many objects within the office, just two that particularly stood out. One was a massive screen and the other a map so colossal that it took up an entire wall.

There was another door to the rear of the office—that was probably where Hou Xiaochen lived.

The director breathed out softly and leaned against the chair, looking weary. “Well done yesterday!” He smiled at Li Hao. “Martial masters should take action when they should. They neither kowtow to the strong nor bully the weak, and they don’t fear anyone!”

“I’ve created trouble for you, director!” Li Hao rose.

“It’s just a small matter! Hou Xiaochen smiled. “Attacking you in White Moon City shows blatant disrespect for me, so kill them if you’d like! You can kill two Novas if you have the ability to, to say nothing of two Solars. What of it?”

Li Hao was tongue-tied. I er... can’t manage that!

Hou Xiaochen coughed softly and furrowed his brows when he looked at Hao Lianchuan. “Your reaction speed was astonishingly slow. You had the Flaming Phoenix Spear with you and knew that you would have to rush to a battlefield a few thousand meters away, but you still took twenty seconds! If I sent you to a battlefield for a war, you’d miss the proper battle timing every single day!”

Resigned, Hao Lianchuan quickly rose to his feet as well. “Director, I...”

“That’s enough!” Hou Xiaochen interrupted with a cough. “You’re decent to have made it to mid Solar, but you’re still too slow.”

Slow? Hao Lianchuan rather thought he was fine, he was making fast progress! Granted, it couldn’t compare to the director.

Hou Xiaochen didn’t seem to care what’d happened yesterday. He looked at the group in front of him and said softly, “What’s past is past. Just pursue Red Moon with more fervor and thoroughness.

“Ole Hao went to the previous meeting of the four institutions,” the director changed the topic. “That didn’t go too well. Since I’m out today, the other three wish to converse again. And so we shall.

“Li Hao, you will come too.”

“Me?” Li Hao blinked. You want me with you in this? Although he was just part of the director’s entourage, shouldn’t it be the deputy directors that went with him? He was just a newcomer of a few days!

“Let’s go together!” Hou Xiaochen smiled. “You can broaden your horizons, meet more people, and see more powerhouses. Martial masters cannot look up at the sky from the bottom of a well. Silver Moon isn’t a very tall sky, but you have yet to reach its limit in your current state.

“You wouldn’t need to go if yesterday’s battle hadn’t happened. Since it has... Come along!”

Despite his surprise, Li Hao didn’t refuse. “Thank you for placing so much importance on me, director!”

“As I should. According to what you say, I should give you more opportunities after you’ve demonstrated your worth, should I not?” joked the director. Li Hao could only grin foolishly in response. Manager Yu really tells this guy everything!

“Let’s go.” Hou Xiaochen joined the group in standing up. “The meeting between the four institutions is today at the provincial government headquarters. They are the main institution of the province, after all. In Silver Moon, the Night Watchers are just a subordinate agency of the Inspectorate. Remember this well, Li Hao. The Night Watchers are not the be all and end all in the province.”

The young man hastily bobbed his head. He didn’t care about this at all. With how strong Hou Xiaochen was, who would keep to that?

The quartet walked out the front door amid a sea of admiring and worshipful gazes. A black car waited for them; the driver was quiet and of few words. Li Hao observed him for a while and concluded that the driver might be a martial master. He wasn't a supernatural as there was no ball of light around him. Since there was no aura to be detected, the driver was likely below half step Dominator. It didn't matter what cultivation level he was then.

Fatty Hao Lianchuan darted for the passenger seat as soon as he reached the car, leaving a wry Li Hao in his dust. How was he slower than the fatty?? Since Hao Lianchuan had taken the passenger seat, the young man had to squeeze with Hou Xiaochen and Manager Yu in the back as the car didn't have two back rows. The damn fatty's horrible! I want to sit up front too!

Although he'd been ferocious in killing others yesterday, Li Hao knew just how much he was worth. He was no match for Hou Xiaochen; he'd also die to a single spear jab. It was very stressful to be in close quarters with the man.

But since the situation had shaken out thus, he had no choice but to sit beside Hou Xiaochen. The director sat in the middle, flanked by Li Hao on his left and the secretary on his right. He remained coughing—Li Hao could see things more clearly at this distance. He saw a faint smear of red in a handkerchief. Weird, isn't that supposed to be an act? There's no one else here now, so why is he keeping that up?

But as a subordinate, he needed to express some concern. "Have your wounds still not healed, director?" he hastily asked.

"It's fine, they're old injuries. I'm unable to completely do away with them." Hou Xiaochen smiled. "Little Li, how is your understanding of the Skystar Dynasty?"

"There are nine ministries, the royal family, and ninety-nine provinces in the dynasty..." Li Hao reeled off.

"Is that it?" Hou Xiaochen chuckled.

“Well... I’ve never been out of Silver City and not everything is written in books, so I...”

“Haven’t seen much of the world!” A note of criticism and blame crept into the director’s voice. “Yuan Shuo only cared about the martial world and digging up graves. He doesn’t pay attention to anything else. Although you’ve spent a few years by his side, you don’t know much about the world.

“Little Yu, give Li Hao a brief overview of the current situation in the dynasty.” With that, Hou Xiaochen closed his eyes and ignored the young man.

“The Skystar Dynasty was established in 1531,” Manager Yu began in a calm voice. “It has been 199 years since then and will be the dynasty’s 200th grand anniversary next year. In the first 120 years, the royal family ruled the world. Eighty years ago in the year 1650, the nine ministries offered up a joint petition for the royal family to abdicate their power. From then on, the nine ministries administered the land together.

“The nine ministries are divided into the Ministry of Administration, Ministry of Armed Forces, Ministry of the Inspectorate, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of the Judiciary, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Relations, and the Ministry of Examinations that determines the promotions of officials.”

Li Hao listened silently. He’d heard about the nine ministries before, but hadn’t paid much attention then. Silver Moon didn’t have some of these institutions, or their presence wasn’t very evident if they did exist.

“The ninety-nine provinces are roughly divided into five regions of north, south, east, west, and central. The central region is extensive and highly populated. Business booms, fortunes gather. Typically, twenty-two provinces in the center are demarcated as the central region.

“Silver Moon is part of the northern region. There are nineteen provinces in the north.”

Manager Yu brought Li Hao up to speed on basic knowledge as the car drove. Few were those who would know all of this material if asked. The world was too vast! A province was many people's heaven and earth. Who cared about matters outside their home? But as the secretary spoke on, Li Hao slowly began to grasp the enormity of the dynasty.

It was incredibly big! The nine ministries, royal family, and provinces...

Silver Moon was just one of the ninety-nine and it fell on the border. Apart from a thriving martial world back in the day, nothing else seemed to set it apart.

When the car approached the provincial government building, Hou Xiaochen opened his eyes with a cough.

"The nineteen provinces of the north operate quite independently, but three of them are a unique case. They're closer to the central region and have been under military control for many years due to several reasons.

"The first is the province named Fog as it's enveloped by fog year round, making it seem like a city in the sky! The second province of River Origin is home to many large rivers, piracy, and floods. The third province of North Sea hosts a large sea within its borders. It is also the boundary between the north and central region. Crossing the natural boundary that is the North Sea puts one in the central region."

Li Hao thought back to the maps of the dynasty that he'd perused before and could roughly pinpoint where these three provinces were. They were distant from Silver Moon. Of course, they didn't seem that far when laid out on a map. All one needed to do was to cross the neighboring province of Near River to reach River Origin province.

River Origin, Fog, and North Sea formed a triangle. North Sea was the point of the triangle, whereas River Origin and Fog was a straight line to Silver Moon. If one set out from Silver Moon and traveled through Near River, that would place them at the intersection of River Origin and Fog. Continuing some more thousands of kilometers forward would put one in North Sea. Crossing that province led one to the central region.

Li Hao didn't quite understand why Hou Xiaochen was introducing these three provinces in detail. There were nineteen total in the northern region, were these three very special? And... military control?