

Star Gate 331

Chapter 331: Blinded (II)

“These three provinces form an arrowhead,” Hou Xiaochen picked up the conversation.

“Proceeding south from them gives one access to the central region, heading north puts the entire northern region at one’s fingertips. They hold back the north and peer out over the south, which is why they’ve been an area that the dynasty has always paid special attention to.

“The three provinces are under one person’s control—all nine ministries within those provinces answer to him. He also commands an elite troop of the best and brightest while wielding incredible battle strength himself. He is the royal family’s appointed General of Northern Pacification. The nine ministries also appointed him the governor general of the three provinces. He is the only general to oversee three provinces.”

Li Hao had a vague recollection of these details, like he’d read about them in a book somewhere.

“Director, is this general very strong?” asked the young man. “He became a supernatural with the rise of the new domain, right?”

“Correct.”

Okay. Li Hao still wasn’t very interested. All of this felt very removed from him, like he was reading a history book. Although he knew that these people lived and breathed, what did it have to do with him? Would Hou Xiaochen have to face retaliation from this person first after he rebelled?

That was possible! So was this a... forewarning for the young man to be careful?

The car stopped as they conversed. There was someone waiting at the door—a genteel, old man with white hair. He smiled faintly when he saw Hou Xiaochen. “Greetings to Director Hou.”

“You are too polite, Deputy Zhou! To think that you would be standing here in wait, I am ashamed!”

“Zhou Xingdao,” Hao Lianchuan introduced through transmission. “Deputy director general at the provincial government and first among the deputies. He’s Director General Zhao’s old partner, they’ve worked together for nearly forty years. They started from the rank and file, making them the dynamic duo of Silver Moon!”

Colleagues for nearly forty years was a very long period of time indeed. And more importantly, they were able to become the province’s most important personages together. Strictly speaking, these two were the true shot callers of Silver Moon. However, the provincial government had declined in importance after the rise of the supernatural. The administrative system had been greatly impacted as a result.

Li Hao said nothing. He had no right to speak at a place like this. Deputy Zhou greeted Director Hou, Manager Yu, Hao Lianchuan, then surprisingly turned to the quiet young man.

“Li Hao, is it?” The old man inclined his head with a smile. “What an outstanding young man, as expected of Yuan Shuo’s disciple! A stern master produces a fine disciple—Yuan Shuo possessed a striking reputation back in his day. It is Silver Moon’s great joy that his disciple has come into his own.”

Li Hao blinked, but quickly responded, “You praise me far too highly, sir!”

“Such a promising child!” Deputy Zhou smiled and led the way through the front doors.

Li Hao raised an eyebrow; it looked like his name was known throughout certain circles now. I wonder if that’s a good or bad thing?

“That old man has never been so polite to me,” Hao Lianchuan transmitted. “But he’s quite nice to you. Did your master beat him up many years ago?”

“.....” Li Hao was speechless. My teacher fights only martial masters. This one’s a civilian, the hell is he supposed to fight? But he might be a concealed powerhouse...

The young man saw a lack of light when he looked at the deputy again. Deputy Zhou was not a supernatural and was not hiding his strength. Judging from his sagging skin, he didn’t seem to be a martial master either.

What would my teacher beat him up for?

Li Hao ignored Hao Lianchuan and followed the group into the provincial government headquarters proper. It was quite spacious and there weren’t many people in the lobby. Bystanders swiftly cleared out when they saw the group and made way for them to pass through. There were other supernaturals among them.

The young man looked around curiously and saw a few balls of light—none of them were that strong. There seemed to be three Sunflares on the second floor. That’s decent enough. But since Li Hao had killed even Solars now, he didn’t think much of Sunflares. If the vast provincial government only had a few Sunflares holding down the fort, then they would indeed lose their place at the table.

There were bigger balls of light on the third floor, some even seemed to be Novas!

However, the young man didn’t think they belonged to the provincial government. Those might come from other institutions or even the Hu Qingfeng who he’d yet to meet. It was a convening between the four major institutions, after all. The special agent from the central region was bound to come.

These people would not escape his notice given the special attributes of his eyes. Unbidden, Li Hao thought of something else at this time. He’d read some files during his tenure in Classified Affairs that spoke of others being able to see the scarlet shadows. They were either quickly taken away or died in accidents. He’d thought that he’d meet them after joining the Night Watchers, but was yet to see a single one of them so far.

Were they the same as him and able to see the balls of light? If they could, then these powerhouses hiding their strength was an absolute joke! All that was needed was for these people to take one glance to know who was hiding what level of expertise.

Where did all those people go? A curious Li Hao had always wanted to ask, but hadn't had the chance or a good excuse to. Wang Ming was plainly unaware. Li Hao flicked a glance at Hao Lianchuan—perhaps he would know a little.

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The group eschewed the elevator and climbed the stairs to the third floor. Li Hao had discovered that these powerhouses didn't like to take the elevator. Perhaps they were worried about being ambushed in small spaces.

The third floor.

A door at the head of the stairwell led to a small receiving room. Some employees were already waiting within. A large door stood at the other end of the room. That was where the conference room for this meeting was located.

Li Hao scanned the employees at the door—they were all supernaturals. One Sunflare and five Darkmoons. The provincial government was highly prioritizing this meeting.

“Director Hou is here!” Deputy Zhou’s announcement opened the door. The moment it swung open...

Li Hao thought he was going blind! He was very curious and peeked inside the moment the door opened. He thought he’d blinded himself!

Tears slowly trailed down his cheeks and he immediately ducked his head to wipe them away. He wanted to cry! He really wanted to cry! Hot damn! He was shocked beyond belief, stunned, and dazed. It was like when he'd seen Qiao Feilong when he looked behind the door...

One, two, three...

The light bulbs that he didn't see before were all here and searing his eyes. The Nova ball of light that he'd seen before was actually insignificant in this crowd. Li Hao thought he was dreaming!

Where am I? Who am I? Am I somewhere I shouldn't be?

.....

There were four groups in the conference room. Other than the other three institutions apart from the Night Watcher, the fourth party was Hu Qingfeng and two of his men. An old man sat at the head of the room—Director General Zhao.

Another old man dressed in a special military uniform sat on the left. This was the military powerhouse that many spoke of—Commander Yu. Hu Dingfang and yet another old man could only sit beside him. Plainly, the commander ranked more highly than them.

The tall and muscular inspector general of the Inspectorate sat on the right. Several more people sat next to him. This was where Hu Qingfeng's group was located as the Night Watchers were technically under Inspectorate jurisdiction.

Meanwhile, Li Hao almost went blind when he swept his gaze over these people. He didn't know whose light was stabbing into his eyes, but he did know that this wasn't a place fit for anyone!

The hell??

He was so shocked that his knees threatened to knock together. This is fucking crazy! It was like when he saw Hou Xiaochen, but there was more than one here!

“Li Hao?” Hao Lianchuan gave the young man a slight push. What was he doing? Go in! Was he trying to raise attention by freezing at the door?

Li Hao lowered his head and moved cautiously, like he was a rookie on his first day of work. “I’m nervous, Deputy Director Hao. I... I haven’t seen big occasions like this before. Can you walk in front of me? I’m scared!”

Oh for fuck’s sake... Hao Lianchuan cursed inwardly. Why was the kid pulling out this act at this time? It was ludicrous! You weren’t scared last night when you killed Solars!

While wordless, there was nothing else he could do. He walked in front of Li Hao, the young man carefully following him like he was a child. Too overwhelmed to put one toe out of place, he shuffled mutely behind Hao Lianchuan.

The door was closed behind them. Deputy Zhou headed for the chairs across from them, Hou Xiaochen sat down directly across from the director general. There were enough seats since the newcomers numbered only four people. No one had to stand.

Li Hao and the others sat behind Hou Xiaochen. The young man gingerly shifted his chair so he could avoid everyone’s gaze and hid behind Hou Xiaochen, squeezing Hao Lianchuan out from his place.

The deputy director suppressed an eye roll. What are you doing?? He’s being so strange today. Is he afraid that Hu Qingfeng will get to the bottom of what happened yesterday? Director Hou’s here, what’s he afraid of?

Hao Lianchuan kicked Li Hao’s feet. The major figures were greeting each other at the moment, but the young man was in no mood to eavesdrop.

“The one across from us and sitting in front of Deputy Zhou is Director General Zhao.” Hao Lianchuan’s transmission sounded in Li Hao’s ear. “He’s number one in the province, but that old devil is nothing good. He’s pigheaded beyond redemption and specializes in making trouble for the Night Watchers. If you get a chance when no one else is around, you can beat him up!”

Li Hao kept his head lowered and didn’t respond. He was wondering if someone stronger than Hao Lianchuan could hear his transmissions. Transmitting words was just the usage of a type of energy, a unique fluctuation and vibration. Weaklings were not capable of identifying, analyzing, and listening in on them. But powerhouses?

The young man didn’t know. He was very curious, so he raised his head and looked at the old man across the way. The old man was smiling while looking at Hou Xiaochen, but also seeming to look at Li Hao. There wasn’t truly a light in his eyes and he looked fatigued. The old man nodded imperceptibly when the young man looked at him.

Li Hao blinked, then looked at Hao Lianchuan.

“Don’t be fooled by the old guy’s kind appearance,” the deputy director was still transmitting. “He’s really not a good guy and often reduces our budget and resources...” He raised his head upon feeling that someone was looking at him. Was it Director General Zhao? Hao Lianchuan beamed radiantly at the man but continued, “Do you see that? The old devil is polite to everyone, but he’s actually rotten to the core!”

Li Hao didn’t make a peep. I understand, and this director general can probably hear everything you’re saying... You’re... you’re something, alright, Hao Lianchuan! And I bet more than the director general can hear you here!

Chapter 332: Blinded (III)

“Look to the left.” Hao Lianchuan kicked Li Hao again. “The three on the left are the commanders of the Silver Moon army! The one in the middle with the white hair is Commander Yu of the Silver Moon Division. That old man’s really something! He’s fought in wars before and personally pacified a rebellion, but he’s also cocky as hell. I’ve met him twice, but he’s always super frigid. I don’t like having to interact with that old guy!”

Li Hao looked to the left and saw the three people. He also saw Hu Dingfang looking at him; the man nodded at his wife's junior brother. Next to him was a blinding existence. The old man happened to be looking their way, seeming to look at both Li Hao and Hao Lianchuan. He was expressionless and very stern.

"Now look to the right, see that big hulk on the right?" Hao Lianchuan continued transmitting. "That massive beefy guy is the inspector general, our superior in the hierarchy of power. His name's Kong Jie—like a woman's, isn't that funny? Don't look down on Mr. Hulk, he's pretty strong as a peak Sunflare. They say he's almost a Solar, which makes him just a little less than me. That's not bad!"

The towering inspector general on the right also looked over at them. He seemed to speak to Hou Xiaochen in an even tone. "Xiaochen, leave the riff raff behind next time we have a meeting. This just creates a mess!"

"....." Hao Lianchuan continued after a beat. "He's talking about you! This guy doesn't know how strong you are, otherwise..."

It was Li Hao's turn to kick the deputy director, horrified ruefulness welling up in his heart. My dear Lord Hao, will you stop talking?! Shut up! I'm not strong, I'm not strong at all. What am I worth? I'm shit!! And they're not talking about me, they're talking about you! You're donezo!

What an incredible feat it was for Hao Lianchuan to survive to present day! The ones he'd talked about were all people who blinded Li Hao when the young man looked at them. This is nuts! What's with Silver Moon? All of them are making me go blind, I can't look at them! It doesn't look like balls of light or auras...

They exuded a terrifying feeling to the young man, but it didn't seem like they were simple martial masters or supernaturals. He just felt that he was going blind and losing his mental facilities.

Hao Lianchuan thought that transmission was foolproof—and indeed it was. Regular Novas wouldn't be able to eavesdrop. He added another word, "Blondie over there is Hu Qingfeng. He's a Nova from central headquarters. He's the second strongest here after Director Hou, so be careful of him!"

Li Hao looked at Hu Qingfeng—blindness didn't threaten him this time! The man's ball of light was enormous. Mmhmm, he was indeed very strong. And that was all there was to him!

Hu Qingfeng's expression was so frosty that it was like everyone owed him money. Li Hao didn't care. He looked at Hu Qingfeng, then at the others before sighing inwardly. So someone like this had come to Silver Moon. It was only today that the young man understood a little more about the particulars of the province.

Silver Moon was hell!

Solars were insignificant fireflies! Not even the late Solar Hu Dingfang stood out. Li Hao began doubting his eyesight when he looked at the Deputy Zhou again. Are my eyes going bad and I'm just not seeing what makes the deputy director general special?

Every minute in this conference room was thought!

There were four people on his side. Li Hao was thinking that if the newly ascended mid Solar Hao Lianchuan didn't carry the Flaming Phoenix Spear, he wouldn't have the right to sit here at all! At least the young man found his own presence slightly more worthy! Mmhmm, I'm young!

"We're all here," announced Director General Zhao. His voice was resonant, if a bit sleepy like he was running short on sleep. "We must decide on the directives today!" The old man glanced at Hu Qingfeng. "Special Agent Hu, we can discuss Director Hou's matter later. I'd like to bring up the three provinces in the north first. I trust you have no other opinion?"

"No other opinion!" Hu Qingfeng affirmed.

"We received news last night that the governor general of the three provinces in the north, General of Northern Pacification Kou Shiming, was murdered in his residence!" The director general coughed and continued in pained tones, "General Kou quelled the uprising of the three provinces and was instrumental in maintaining the continued peace and stability of the nineteen northern

provinces. He put an end to turmoil, but fell to foul cretins last night! Cough cough cough... It's hard to fathom and unbelievable. The land will reel from this event!

"We hold this meeting today also to mourn and cherish his memory. Unrest will flare anew in the three provinces without General Kou at the helm. They might even spread to other provinces. Thus, our meeting is also to discuss countermeasures against this potential disorder. Silver Moon does not border them, but we are not too far from River Origin. Once Near River is under threat, it will soon spread to our doorstep!"

"....." Li Hao's jaw dropped. Director Hou had just mentioned this person! The first thing he learned in this meeting was that this legendary figure was dead—murdered! And the director had just returned to the city...

Waves of shock assailed the young man's heart. Oh. my. fuck. What kind of twisted place am I in?

Hao Lianchuan seemed to realize something as well, judging from the sudden pallor of his face. He'd also listened to the conversation in the car. Did... the death of this general have something to do with Director Hou?

"There is no need for further words," Commander Yu proclaimed solemnly. "The three great organizations must be held responsible for this. We should petition the nine ministries to grant us permission to march on the evil organizations and crush the upheaval of the north!"

"There is no need for the director general to be concerned," the inspector general of the Inspectorate added calmly. "The Inspectorate will fully mobilize starting from this day and eliminate the remnants of the organizations in our borders! We will ensure Silver Moon's security. On the Night Watcher side, Xiaochen's presence will be a certain deterrence. We must capture all of the evil supernaturals during this operation. It is just as well that Special Agent Hu is here. With a Nova in residence, we are certain to eliminate the enemy in one fell stroke and clear out the bandits plaguing our home!"

"....." Hu Qingfeng opened and closed his mouth, unable to say a word. Two great personages had spoken and settled the matter! It started off as the death of a great general, but turned to hunting down the three great organizations and obliterating evil supernaturals in the blink of an eye.

Director General Zhao furrowed his brows and nodded after a moment. “We can do that, but we must also keep ourselves in check. Be careful not to disturb Silver Moon’s peace or disrupt order. Keep in mind that only a branch of each organization is in the province! Eliminating them all is a temporary solution and does not get at the root of the problem.

“Thankfully, Special Agent Hu and the others are here. It remains to be seen just how much Director Hou can bring to bear despite his extraordinary strength. He is heavily injured, so it is fortunate that we have Novas in residence.”

Li Hao’s mouth opened wide; he didn’t make a peep. He just thought that all of these people were devious, wily old foxes! Every single one of them with no exceptions!

When he looked at Hu Qingfeng again, he suddenly pitied the mighty Nova. Condolences should be tendered to this important figure as the other three parties—no, all of Silver Moon—wished for him to stay. They hoped for him to remain and exert himself on the province’s behalf.

Li Hao swallowed hard and lowered his head again. I didn’t hear anything, I didn’t see anything. I’m blind and deaf. Director Hou had brought him to broaden his horizons today; the young man considered his horizons broadened. This was Silver Moon? A barren land for supernaturals? A weak province that Solars could rampage through?

It was said that Novas were powerful figures in the central region. A Nova like Hu Qingfeng would be able to issue orders there, despite it teeming with powerhouses. But... why did he appear so... lonesome in Silver Moon?

“Cough cough cough...” A fit of coughing started around the conference room. Led by Hou Xiaochen, the others all coughed as well. Other than Kong Jie’s highly fortified physique, everyone was coughing, even Commander Yu.

“The Night Watchers,” Hou Xiaochen recomposed himself. “Will absolutely coordinate with Special Agent Hu and surround the three great organizations... But I am injured,” he said

apologetically. “Long trips are not for me. If they are in order, we’ll have to ask the special agent to carry more of the load. Deputy Director Hao Lianchuan will be tasked to collaborate with you!”

“Cough cough cough!” Another coughing fit circulated as the conference room seemed to turn into a sick ward. An itch started in the back of Li Hao’s throat, he wanted to cough too.

Meanwhile, an aggrieved Hao Lianchuan looked on. Why am I involved in this?

The others looked so approving of the decision that Li Hao strongly suspected this was their revenge! It was their punishment for someone’s wild transmissions and offensive words! That’s right, it’s you!

Coughing abounded within the large room. The meeting’s participants coughed one after another, immensely irritating Hu Qingfeng’s group. The executives of Silver Moon are all sick cats! One of them is always sick!

Deputy Zhou suddenly interjected a statement to interrupt the group coughing session.

“Everyone,” he said softly. “Permit me to interrupt. We need to add another line to today’s agenda, and that is the topic of reinforcements!

“The three provinces are beset by problems and will surely erupt in an uproar now that General Kou has fallen. There is no other possible outcome. The three great organizations are highly active in them, as well as many other ambitious factions. The inexhaustible North Sea pirates continue to operate in the waters and frequently attack the North Sea province...

“We are far away from the central region, its troops are slower to reach us. With the rise of the supernatural, many experts and large amounts of wandering supernaturals have joined the agitators. Commander Yu led the Silver Moon Division in eliminating bandits back in the day—they hate us for it. We were unable to fully eradicate them, so they will want revenge sooner or later!

“Therefore, we need to be ready to reinforce the provinces even without an order from the central region. Both the military and supernaturals need to be ready!”

The group nodded at his words. Commander Yu remained as stern as before.

“I cannot mobilize without an order from Skystar City. But Dingfang can lead the fifty thousand of the Tiger Wings to reinforce the three provinces. The Tiger Wings are a mobile unit, after all. There shouldn’t be a problem so long as they do not cross the North Sea.”

“I will carry out Commander Yu’s commands to the utmost!” Hu Dingfang swiftly concurred.

The old man of the provincial government didn’t say anything.

Chapter 333: Setting Strategy (I)

The three provinces of the north would be the center of trouble in times to come. That meant marching in their direction was a good decision, a very good decision. It would be chaotic there, which meant opportunity.

The disorder would be centralized in three provinces—they would become the main battlefield of the northern region. Large numbers of powerhouses would rise from them. There were numerous reasons for powerhouses abounding in the central region, one of which was the war. Times of trouble swiftly produced mighty experts.

Unrest in the three northern provinces would also attract powerhouses from all sides. Those from other regions would come, not just ones from the nineteen provinces of the north. People who could not make it in the central region and those of the other three regions who didn’t dare join the central war would congregate in the north!

“I will have Hao Lianchuan lead our people to reinforce the three provinces once the three great organizations are eliminated.”

Hao Lianchuan’s expression contorted with more suffering. Why me again?

Hou Xiaochen remained calm. Of course it's you. You had your opportunity, but you didn't treasure it. "If possible, the Silver Moon Guards will also join the northern battlefield."

"The Silver Moon Guards?" Hu Qingfeng jerked to attention like a hunter glimpsing prey. "Director Hou, what unit is this? Why isn't it registered?"

Excitement blossomed. Finally some evidence after days spent searching, and it came from Hou Xiaochen himself! Of course, he didn't intend to immediately take Hou Xiaochen to task for it, neither would the man fire back with hostility either. What Hu Qingfeng needed to do was to go along with Hou Xiaochen's words for the moment and keep digging. He needed to dig for more!

The northern provinces were in disarray; he wanted to immediately rush back to the central region. But if he did so in this state, he would be walking into trouble. Yu Xiao and Huang Jie were dead, he could only return if he had some accomplishments to his name.

"Who says it's not registered?" Hou Xiaochen coughed calmly. "The Silver Moon Guards are reformed of the few remaining after the Skystar Guards were disbanded. The unit does not fall under the Inspectorate system, so the Night Watchers naturally do not have it on our rolls. It's registered under the royal family and always has been! You'll find it if you go back and look it up. Although the royal family no longer allocates resources to it, the designation still exists."

Hu Qingfeng blinked. Under the royal family? The royal family rarely showed itself these days. He looked skeptically at Hou Xiaochen.

"This is true," Commander Yu said faintly. "It is registered under the royal family and its military designation still exists. There aren't many of the Guards. I know that there's only around a thousand of them."

Hu Qingfeng sagged with disappointment. Was that it? While it would cause a bit of trouble for Hou Xiaochen as the royal family did not see eye to eye with the nine ministries, some potential dissatisfaction from the nine ministries wasn't worth speaking of! Raising the Silver Moon Guards on behalf of the royal family? A minor detail!

It would be ludicrous to pin his hopes on using this to topple Hou Xiaochen.

“Cough cough cough...” The director’s renewed coughing broke Hu Qingfeng’s line of thought. “In addition, Special Agent Hu should be prepared to travel to the three northern provinces when business is complete here. The central Night Watchers have only just received word and may not have time to send reinforcements.”

Hu Qingfeng frowned wordlessly. He didn’t want to go! What if the powerhouse that killed General Kou was still there? It was too dangerous!

“There’s no rush in this, Director Hou.” He changed the topic without responding. “My concerns are if Silver Moon will have the strength to support the three provinces once it declares war on the three great organizations. Not to mention, there is great danger to be found in the ruins of Battle Heaven. Is it a good idea to be openly hostile with the three great organizations right now? We said we would explore and bear the risks together, but once there is war between us, it will be Silver Moon shouldering all of the danger...”

Did he make sense?

A little.

If it wasn’t for the three great organizations coordinating with the Night Watchers in the previous expedition, the Night Watchers would’ve suffered heavy losses and failed to make it into the inner city. Therefore, even if they were enemies, it was still a better idea to jointly assume the risks together for the excavations.

“Is there no way for us to explore without the three great organizations?” laughed Hou Xiaochen. “That matter is hardly urgent. The ruins are there and won’t run off. My thoughts are to rough them up first. We need to smack them around to the point where they know whose territory it is and how wrong they are. Negotiations can be conducted at a leisurely pace then. We’ll have more of an advantage at that point.”

“But according to what I know,” Hu Qingfeng protested. “Blue Moon, Half Mountain, and the Parity King are all Novas. There are three Novas from the three great organizations present in Silver Moon! Director Hao says you are injured and unable to take the field... Although I am also a Nova, I’m afraid the heart is willing but my strength is limited...”

He could sense that these guys wanted to use him as a borrowed blade—this was absolutely not what he wanted. Danger would close in around him if he proceeded down this path. There were multiple Novas and peak Solars like Violet Moon and Revolution King on the other side. They also carried origin weapons, so how would Hu Qingfeng dare officially set himself against them?

“Cough cough... It’s fine!” Hou Xiaochen smiled. “Director Hao will have my Flaming Phoenix Spear. Although he will not be able to defeat Novas, he will be able to reinforce you to a certain degree. Not to mention, Silver Moon is not without experts. There are a few Dominators among the Guards. Although they aren’t too strong, they have room to maneuver when they form a battle formation...”

You’re going to fight, no matter what.

Hu Qingfeng didn’t respond. I’m not doing whatever you guys are thinking of! I don’t care if you’ve agreed to a plan among yourselves, I’m not doing it! Worst comes to worst, I’ll wash my hands of the matter and go back to the central region! I’ll be censured at most if I go back.

The atmosphere in Silver Moon was strange and difficult to get a handle on. He’d painted too rosy a picture for himself before he came. Hou Xiaochen’s single spear jab had ruined many plans. The situation wouldn’t be what it was now otherwise.

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As the group argued, Li Hao gradually came back to his senses. He ignored the discussion and carefully looked around the conference room. Of the military’s representatives and the three commanders, he knew that Hu Dingfang was a late Solar. The other commander of the White Dragons looked to be in his fifties. He was a bit younger than Commander Yu and a bit older than Hu Dingfang. He was another supernatural—the young man judged him to be peak Solar from his ball of light. That made Hu Dingfang the weakest. It was to be expected since he was the youngest.

Not many had come from the Inspectorate. Li Hao shied away from the piercing light exuding from the towering Kong Jie. The young man focused on the others; Hao Lianchuan hadn't introduced them because they weren't well known.

There were three others apart from Kong Jie—two men, one woman. One of the men was deeply tanned and flashed a friendly smile at the young man when he sensed the gaze. Li Hao found it strange—who's that? I don't know him.

Hao Lianchuan took a break from cursing the room's inhabitants when he saw the exchange. "You don't know that piece of charcoal, do you?" he transmitted.

Li Hao suppressed the urge to roll his eyes, but also felt that it didn't matter since that one likely couldn't hear the transmission.

"You should know him!" Hao Lianchuan continued. "He was the last inspectorate general of your Silver City Inspectorate. He was transferred to White Moon City to be the inspectorate general of the capital's Inspectorate. But his position doesn't mean much as provincial headquarters call the shots here. White Moon is the capital, but he's useless as the capital city's inspector general. He would've been better off enjoying life in Silver City."

The misfortunes of three lifetimes culminated in being the magistrate of a provincial capital city. Conducting evil for three lifetimes landed one in the local capital.

Being an official in the provincial capital—such as inspector general of White Moon City—was a tragedy. Hence, the Night Watchers eschewed a branch in White Moon City and maintained only their provincial headquarters. It had to do with few numbers of supernaturals, but also forestalled a lot of trouble.

Li Hao immediately knew who the man was after Hao Lianchuan's introduction. The last inspector general had been well known, Liu Long had introduced him to Li Hao. He'd been a martial master and trained in the Iron Shirt method. Blade and spear could not touch him.

There'd been an exceedingly famous Iron Shirt cultivator among Silver Moon's martial world back in the day. He stood with the Qimei Staff and others, but died when Yuan Shuo broke through his Iron Shirt and body.

This wasn't an exclusive art, however. Many people knew it. It was a secret method that was passed on to many in the martial world.

Wang Henggang! Li Hao recalled. His portrait hung in the Silver City Inspectorate, but he wasn't this tanned in the portrait. Did he spend his days in the sun after coming to White Moon City? Li Hao thought he'd joined the Night Watchers as some said that he'd crossed over. So he'd stayed with the Inspectorate instead!

This was not a weak individual! Late Solar? Li Hao judged after momentary assessment. He really was a late Solar, when had he ascended?

The young man rummaged through his memories—Mu Sen hadn't joined the Inspectorate for too long. The current inspector general had been installed in his post roughly... three years ago?

More or less!

That meant the former inspector general became a supernatural three years ago. If he'd ascended as a Sunderer, that made him a Sunflare. Jumping to late Solar after three years was an astonishing cultivation speed, and he didn't stand out at all.

Few in White Moon City knew of him, whereas Silver City still remembered their old inspector general. Mu Sen, for example, mentioned him every now and then. There was another man and woman of the Solar level from the White Moon Inspectorate. They both looked to be between late and peak Solar.

Hot damn, this Inspectorate has multiple Solars. They have more than the Night Watchers! Li Hao realized wordlessly. But when he thought of their boss, Kong Jie, he found the situation alright. It

was still the Night Watchers that were stronger as Manager Yu was a Nova, at the very least. She was worth three Solars. Hao Lianchuan was the more embarrassing of the lot. As the first deputy director, only Deputy Zhou was weaker than him in the conference room. But Deputy Zhou barely had a ball of light around him!

How pitiful!

Commander Yu, Director General Zhao, Kong Jie, and Hou Xiaochen were eye piercing. Manager Yu and Hu Qingfeng were of the Nova level. There was another peak Solar and late Solar behind Hu Qingfeng. Apart from Deputy Zhou, that made Hao Lianchuan and Li Hao the weakest among the group.

Chapter 334: Setting Strategy (II)

Li Hao felt that he could handle the mid Solar Hao Lianchuan, therefore...

Mmhmm. After taking another look, the young man decided that this Lord Hao of his was the weakest out of everyone in the conference room. Thank goodness Hao Lianchuan had ascended to mid Solar. If he was still an initial Solar, he wouldn't be able to show his face in this meeting!

The sound of his name traveled into his ear as the young man processed these thoughts. Li Hao blinked. How am I being mentioned by name at such a gathering? He immediately snapped to attention and displayed an attentive expression. It was Kong Jie who'd mentioned him, not Hou Xiaochen.

"Yuan Shuo has shown himself in Near River recently," boomed the inspector general in a resonant voice. "He should be operating within the three northern provinces now. With his personality, he'll probably stay there for a while.

"His method of Summoner of Spirit is different from the procedures to strengthen martial masters in the central region. It feels more like the next level in martial dao cultivation. There are immensely powerful martial masters in the central region, such as He Yong. He changed his blood three times and rivals a Solar! But compared to Yuan Shuo's method, I feel that he is still slightly lacking...

“There are many with their eyes on Yuan Shuo now. Since Li Hao is his final disciple, I’ve been wondering if we should send him to the three northern provinces for a bit. He might be able to meet up with Yuan Shuo and talk to him, learn a few details about the Summoner method. Silver Moon’s martial world dominated the world back in the day and some of the old guard is still around. Not only that, but I’ve heard that there are Dominators in the Silver Moon Guards. Can we publicly announce the Summoner method, discuss some details, enhance martial master battle strength...”

Li Hao was immediately the focus of attention. Nervousness appeared on his face, but he was inwardly resigned. Is there a need for this? My teacher wouldn’t be able to fight you guys even if he was here! These old guys are seriously conniving.

“Is teacher in the three northern provinces?” he said quickly instead. “I stand ready for my orders at any time! I’m sure that teacher won’t keep the method to himself!”

It might be nice to visit the three northern provinces. Should they run away together if he ran into his teacher? The world was vast, there would be a place for them somewhere. Li Hao had thought that place was Silver Moon before, but now he realized that wasn’t likely. These fellows hid themselves one deeper than the other. Given the circumstances, the young man would never believe that they didn’t intend to rebel!

Therefore, it might be a good thing to get out while the getting was good.

“There’s no rush,” Hou Xiaochen replied with a chuckle. “Yuan Shuo hasn’t walked this path to its end yet, he’s just started. We should wait a little longer and see! Not to mention, someone like Yuan Shuo walks far only when you let him off the leash and he’s able to do whatever he wishes. He’ll be restricted at every turn if kept under lock and key.”

Kong Jie thought for a moment and nodded without further word.

“There’s also no hurry when it comes to Yuan Shuo’s matter,” said Director General Zhao. “We should talk about you, Director Hou. Director Hao couldn’t say anything of value when you weren’t present at our last meeting.”

Hao Lianchuan was even more dejected by these words. That old fart was so annoying!

“Please go ahead, director general,” Hou Xiaochen chuckled.

“The central region has ordered you to their posts several times,” the director general began solemnly. “But you refuse again and again with the excuse that you are injured and unfit for their appointments. You have now killed Red Hair with one move—he was a Nova. Director Hou, you should give us some explanations and answers today as to what your goals are.”

Tension built in the conference room; Hu Qingfeng was nervous. Why was the old geezer being so straightforward? Yes, that’s what this meeting is about, but there’s no need to be so direct!

Hou Xiaochen sighed with resignation. “I am indeed injured, that is not a sham. The three great organizations were powerful in the past and the cause of much unease and trouble. Apart from me, the Night Watchers were unable to suppress them. Although the central region might have sent powerful reinforcements, I was worried that they wouldn’t understand the situation in Silver Moon...”

“So you saw fit to refuse your orders?” Director General Zhao asked calmly.

“I wouldn’t dare!” Hou Xiaochen said softly. “I am simply speaking of my difficulties. At the very least, the Night Watchers would agree with me. Of course, if I am pivotal to Skystar City’s survival, then send me another order and I will head to the central region!”

Hu Qingfeng’s jaw nearly dropped. You’re... willing to go?

“But I need to do something before that,” Hou Xiaochen continued.

“What is it?”

“I need to obtain the origin weapon from the ancient city of Battle Heaven and provide White Moon City with another layer of protection,” Hou Xiaochen declared solemnly. “I will join the next expedition and personally enter the ruins! If we succeed, I will head to the central region after I emerge. But if I fail and die in Battle Heaven... then nothing else needs to be said.”

“Director Hou, you’re going to enter the ruins?” Hu Qingfeng couldn’t help but ask.

“Can I not?” Hou Xiaochen looked at him without a flicker of change in his expression. “White Moon City is the core of Silver Moon. Once I leave, certain rascals might stir with other ideas in mind. I’ve been worried about this over the years. If I can obtain the origin weapon that will protect the entire city, then I will have no complaints about wherever I’m sent.”

Hu Qingfeng was speechless, but decided to press his point since everything was out in the open. “If I may be so blunt, what is your cultivation level, Director Hou? Please don’t misunderstand, I’m just curious...”

“I’ve barely made it to Nova. Killing Red Hair happened only because I caught him off guard and was wielding the mighty Flaming Phoenix Spear. I’m not as extraordinary as everyone thinks I am!”

Director General Zhao gently rapped the table and stopped Hu Qingfeng from asking further. “This means to say that you will follow orders after obtaining that origin weapon?”

“Yes!”

“And how long will it take?”

“Let’s see how next month goes. If the three great organizations are eliminated next month, making it possible for me to enter the ruins, then I will. It will take only three days after that.”

In other words, Hou Xiaochen was willing to leave in a month at most if everything went smoothly.

Director General Zhao nodded and looked at Hu Qingfeng. “What do you think, Special Agent Hu?”

What are you asking me for?? How would I know??

Certain things were dicey given Hou Xiaochen’s sudden willingness to follow orders. Since he would do as told and redeploy for the central region, then the central region had no reason to act against him. They did so before only because the man conducted himself as a local despot and refused to leave. Once in the central region, he’d have to lower his head and tuck his tail in even if he was a dragon!

After thinking it over, Hu Qingfeng felt that this was also a good turn of events. However, it remained to be seen if they were able to obtain the origin weapon from the ruins. And, was he supposed to follow the man in?

But Zhang Ting had already died inside. What should he do if this guy tried to kill him during the expedition?

I need to notify upstairs to send more people, or else I’m not going inside! Hu Qingfeng looked at the director general and nodded after coming to his own conclusions. “I have no opinions, it’s all up to Director Hou. He might be my superior if he really transfers to the central region, so congratulations are in order!”

Hou Xiaochen ignored the smile sent his way and fell silent after giving his response.

“Do the others have any questions?” asked the director general as he surveyed the room. No one said anything. Nothing else was an issue if Hou Xiaochen was willing to follow orders.

“Then let us adjourn!” Director General Zhao announced wearily. “We should resolve the three great evil organizations as soon as possible. If that cannot be done, then we should wait. If need be, we can request reinforcements from upstairs.”

The old man then looked at Li Hao. “Li Hao, you are of the eight families of Silver City. We don’t know much about them, but Red Moon is very focused on you. We will continue to investigate the matter! Flipping through some ancient Silver City records, however, should result in certain information.”

The young man snapped to attention. He didn’t think that the director general would mention him for no reason at all at this precise moment. There must be a very important reason! Granted, he didn’t know why this topic was being brought up in front of so many.

Director General Zhao smiled to see the young man look expectantly at him. “I don’t know too much, but I had Ole Zhou page through many old books and found a passage that said ‘when the eight guardians are gathered together and open the sealed door, that is when we ride in conquest!’

“This may be relevant to the eight families of Silver City—they might have been protecting something or safeguarding a door that had been sealed for many years. It leads to an unknown location with no mention of who the conquest target is. There are no further records that give more details of the last detail.

“It’s been so long that you can just treat it as a legend.” The old man sighed softly. “Ying Hongyue might know a thing or two. Red Moon rose the fastest out of the three great organizations. If there’s a chance to, you should speak to Ying Hongyue...”

What? Talk about what? Aren’t I done for as soon as we meet? Li Hao said nothing and committed the conversation to memory. Eight guardians? Sealed door? That stone door? Or the eight trigrams?

The young man sank into deep thought, searching for clues. As for conquest... that was less hazy to him. Humanity seemed to have been led by a Human King during that time. He led numerous powerhouses to fight a war somewhere. The Battle Heaven Army was a troop left behind to safeguard home. However, the conquering army never came back after leaving and even the ancient city was abandoned.

Where had they gone? The central region? Or the boundless cosmos?

If before, Li Hao would never consider outer space. But after the supernatural appeared and with the advent of flying powerhouses, the young man began to wonder if there might be other living beings above their world.

He once saw a powerhouse go on a rampage in space, killing someone named the Heavenly Emperor. Was that the enemy? But he was dead!

Therefore, the Human King might be marching on an even stronger foe. Were they all dead now?

Who knew.

“Thank you for your pointers, director general!” Li Hao put it all out of his mind.

“You are welcome. This meeting is adjourned!” The old man rose to his feet and tottered to a door behind him. There was a passageway there through which he could exit.

Hou Xiaochen rose as well, walking outside with a calm expression. Li Hao and the others swiftly caught up to him.

Chapter 335: Setting Strategy (III)

“Director!” Hao Lianchuan asked nervously as soon as they left the provincial government headquarters. “Are you really going to leave?”

“If I keep staying here, especially after killing a Nova, the central region will label me a traitor,” Hou Xiaochen responded as he walked. “I was ready to leave the moment I made my move.”

“But... what will we do when you’re gone?” A headache was brewing at Hao Lianchuan’s temples. Silver Moon will be in trouble once you go! A new director will absolutely start with a purge of personnel.

“It’s not like I’m leaving right away!” Hou Xiaochen grinned and climbed into the car. Li Hao had learned his lesson and shot for the passenger seat.

Hao Lianchuan rolled his eyes. Little bastard! Granted, he happened to have business to discuss with Hou Xiaochen, so he took a seat in the back next to the director. Frowning, he continued, “Director, why can’t you use your usual excuse of being unable to travel because of old injuries flaring up?”

“As opposed to wanting me to stay, you’re better off growing stronger!” Hou Xiaochen glanced at him. “It’s been a year since you’ve ascended to Solar and you’ve been lucky enough to recently set foot into mid Solar. At your speed, when will you ascend to Nova?”

“I don’t have enough potential,” Hao Lianchuan admitted with resignation. “I’ve only discovered four supernatural locks and have yet to locate my fifth. Even if I set foot into peak Solar, I have no hope of making it to Nova.”

Supernaturals improved quickly, particularly when they were in possession of sufficient mysterious power. The caveat was that one needed to identify their supernatural locks first. Even if one was unable to open all of them in one go, those like Hao Lianchuan could slowly wear away at a lock until it finally opened. Each tiny crack and fissure would grant him vast sums of mysterious power and enhance his body.

It should be a fast track to peak Solar, but he was not that talented. He’d become a Solar after breaking his fourth lock, but lost his direction after that. He had no choice but to slowly absorb mysterious power and gradually grow stronger.

That made him the same as the kind of martial masters slowly accumulating their strength. He was as if a Dominator without sight of the next steps. He had to inch his way forward until the fifth lock appeared.

“However many supernatural locks you can see isn’t necessarily an indication of potential!” Hou Xiaochen frowned slightly. “Whether it’s martial masters or supernaturals, just breaking the locks doesn’t mean a good thing!”

“But ascension is impossible without breaking the lock...” Hao Lianchuan chuckled wryly. “My bottleneck is that I’m unable to discover the fifth lock. I think I’d be able to become a Nova otherwise. Forget it, let’s think about this once I inch my way to peak Solar.”

Hou Xiaochen frowned and thought for a moment. “It’s not impossible to find a lock that you cannot locate.”

Hao Lianchuan blinked. How?

“Ask Li Hao!” Hou Xiaochen said after more thought.

“.....”

Li Hao went slack-jawed in the front seat. Ask me? How am I supposed to know? Hou Xiaochen is just creating trouble for me, isn’t he?

“Ask Li Hao?” Hao Lianchuan was also surprised. “How would he know? Every person’s supernatural lock is in a different location. Even if they’re in a similar position, I can’t break it if I can’t pinpoint it!”

Everyone knew that there were locks around the four limbs, but so what? Could he see his? He couldn’t, so how could he locate it? How was Hao Lianchuan supposed to shatter it without a clear direction?

“Li Hao can summon the spirits of the organs,” Hou Xiaochen explained with calm composure. “The spirits need to be locked in place. Since he can do that, he can naturally identify where the supernatural locks are...”

Li Hao's heart skipped a beat. Locking the spirits! This was a Summoner secret that he hadn't spoken of, but the director was aware of it!

Hou Xiaochen didn't care in the slightest what Li Hao thought. "I don't know what method he used to swiftly enhance his five visceral organs and manifest his locks. The locks are employed to confine the intangible auras! But since he and his teacher can do so, that means they can swiftly strengthen a person's locks to the point where they emerge! Your supernatural locks may be so weak that you can't sense them yourself.

"An aura is a very intangible thing that cannot be confined to an organ under ordinary circumstances. Li Hao doing so also means that he has discovered a new use for supernatural locks. Ask him. If he has no idea, then I'm out of ideas too."

Hao Lianchuan looked at the young man with surprise.

"Well..." Li Hao replied without looking at the deputy director. "My teacher and I can indeed accomplish that, but it probably has to do with the fact that we're martial masters. I'm not sure about the others... Director Hao is not a martial master, so if his supernatural locks are weak, then they need to be strengthened first. Perhaps he can take a blood pearl to resolve that issue."

"A blood pearl?" Hao Lianchuan quickly responded. "I have, the effects weren't great."

"That's because the blood pearl wasn't strong enough! Take a Nova level one, that should be useful and manifest the deputy director's fifth lock."

It was a good idea! But it had to be tested to see if it worked. Li Hao and Yuan Shuo had swiftly enhanced themselves because the latter was strong to begin with, while the young man utilized sword energy to distill elemental power. None of that needed to be revealed. They could consider other methods if this didn't work.

Hao Lianchuan's eyes glinted with a new purpose. Red Moon! He'd simply wanted to exterminate them on a general principle before. Now? If things were as Li Hao said, then he needed to pay more attention to them.

"Li Hao, you're a martial master and won't see much improvement if you stay with a group of supernaturals." Hou Xiaochen ignored the topic at hand. "Have Little Yu accompany you to the Guards tomorrow. It's time for them to take their place on stage. Spend a few days growing accustomed to them before leaving the city.

"Beat the three great organizations either to the point of submission or to the point where they commandeer more powerhouses from the areas. You can discuss exploring the ruins with them after that. We don't have enough people for the expedition as it stands!"

Why not?

Li Hao rather understood some of Hou Xiaochen's concerns. Perhaps the director felt that there weren't enough people to die in the ruins! Instead of simply killing people to establish his authority, the director seemed more inclined for the organizations to send more powerhouses instead. The newcomers would explore the ruins for him. How devious!

The young man wasn't that interested in the Silver Moon Guards. No matter how strong they were, they couldn't be that strong. Well, with how his horizons had been broadened today, he couldn't afford to be careless either.

.....

At the same time.

Outside White Moon City, in an opulent residence.

There were numerous residences nearby—a vacation spot for White Moon’s affluent citizens. Several powerhouses were congregated here.

“Those in the know can tell that this is a frame-up!” Blue Moon complained. “We wouldn’t choose this timing even if we wanted to take Li Hao, and we definitely wouldn’t send Solars to get him. He was so close to Hou Xiaochen, we don’t have a death wish!

“This is just their excuse to move against us!” the man snorted. “Hou Xiaochen plainly wants to exterminate us. Since he’s made the first move, don’t blame us for answering in kind! Half Mountain, has Celestial reached a consensus?”

The cloaked man standing across from him answered in a haunting voice, “We will consider it if Red Moon gives us a Nova level blood pearl!”

Blue Moon looked coldly at him; Half Mountain remained unmoved.

“That’s not impossible,” Blue Moon said after a while. “With a prerequisite—we kill Hou Xiaochen. There is no problem with the blood pearl if that is accomplished.”

He was casting the situation with a rosy light as a blood pearl was a nonissue if they killed Hou Xiaochen, but if they failed, there would be no need for payment.

On the other hand, Half Mountain smiled after some consideration. “Alright!”

Blue Moon was surprised by the agreement—he’d thought that the other would not be open to the idea. But he was, that was strange!

“Parity, what are your thoughts?” Blue Moon looked at the Parity King standing not too far away.

“Let’s wait and see,” responded the Parity King with a frown. “The governor general of the three provinces has been killed and those provinces are not too far from Silver Moon. Will that affect us?”

The rest of the group frowned as well. Who’d killed that extraordinary figure? Whoever had done so represented supreme strength and was a terrifying existence. Despite being several thousands of kilometers away, the three provinces were still close by. If unrest brewed, it would drag in Silver Moon.

“I don’t know,” Blue Moon took a deep breath. “Regardless, let’s take care of the troubles in Silver Moon first! The rest can wait.”

The others didn’t protest. There was no room for them in Silver Moon if they didn’t eliminate Hou Xiaochen and the province was not territory they could give up. Otherwise, they would’ve abandoned a place after the deaths of so many Solars. It was just a border province, who cared about this place in the span of the vast ninety-nine provinces?

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The Night Watcher headquarters.

Li Hao’s office.

Li Hao leaned against a chair and tilted his head at the sky. He was still thinking when Wang Ming pushed the door open.

“Congratulations, senior brother!” the visitor said merrily. His grin broadened when Li Hao glanced at him. “I hear that you went with Director Hou and the others to a meeting this morning. There were only four of you. That’s so impressive. Are you getting a promotion, senior brother?”

Li Hao had been the lowest ranked out of the four that attended, but he wasn't interested in discussing this. Today had been a big blow to him. However conspicuous he had been yesterday was however depressed he was now. Yesterday, he'd thought that he was solidly top ten in Silver Moon, if not top five. But today?

Screw that!

And this is what was out in the open. What about in the shadows that lurked beneath? There was so much more to Silver Moon than met the eye. Li Hao fully recognized now that the province wasn't run of the mill. A regular province would not have so much hidden strength. Why was there a need to hide so many powerhouses? All of the leaders of the various institutions were hiding their strength.

He'd been unable to get a read on Hou Xiaochen—but was the man simply mysterious, or was his cultivation too high for Li Hao to grasp? Was he stronger than Nova? What were they wary of, for all of them to be concealing themselves?

If Li Hao's lack of being able to identify someone's cultivation level meant that they were stronger than Nova, then he'd seen four people stronger than Nova today. Did the central region possess any?

Most likely!

Were those who claimed themselves to be Novas truly Novas? People such as Ying Hongyue?

It hadn't been long since the Nova level appeared, but Li Hao had the sudden feeling that these bastards might reveal the previous level only when they entered the next. Hence, the Novas might be a step beyond and announced the cultivation level only when it no longer applied to them. There was absolutely a group of people walking ahead of the rest.

The supernatural domain had appeared twenty years ago and a new cultivation level appeared every few years. The Nova level had been publicized in the central region for several years, whereas

Silver Moon hadn't even known the name of the level before. Their news traveled so slowly that Silver Moon denizens thought the level had just appeared when, in reality, it had been present for many years.

Chapter 336: Southern Fist (I)

Frustration crept into Li Hao's mood as he considered the implications behind the powerhouses he'd noted in the conference room. He quickly relaxed again and smiled. Things were more interesting this way!

"Ole Wang, let's go for a ride and see an old friend."

"Vice Captain Liu?"

"No, we shouldn't see Sis Liu for the time being. Let's go visit Senior Southern Fist."

"Huh?" Wang Ming blinked. Why were they visiting Southern Fist?

Li Hao had his own thoughts in mind. Southern Fist He Yong was the strongest martial master he'd met thus far, apart from Yuan Shuo. He was a pure martial master, not one who'd crossed over to the supernatural domain.

Having undergone three blood transfusions, he matched Solars. What kind of concept was that? A Dominator with one aura was just a Sunflare, but He Yong had propped himself up a cultivation level. Thus, Li Hao felt that blood transfusions were potentially a viable path as well.

His teacher's path wasn't necessarily wrong, but the path beyond Dominator was yet to be set in stone. There might be other routes; the young man wished to understand more. Would multiple blood transfusions help him swiftly increase battle strength in the absence of grasping more auras? Those auras remained out of reach for now and were often a function of spontaneous inspiration or comprehension. They were equally possible to be the bottleneck of a lifetime.

When taking the sword aura into consideration, that made for three auras that Li Hao had already grasped. They became harder to comprehend after setting foot into Dominator—who knew how much time it would take to round out his set of five? He was also yet to coax nine layers out of the Nine Forged Force, which meant it wasn't a very useful action to observe the sea. Therefore, Li Hao decided to visit Southern Fist instead of visiting the sea.

Not only that, but he wanted to call upon Wang Henggang, the Iron Shirt expert, after visiting Southern Fist. He would visit all of the Dominators within the city confines. He'd be happy to converse with the Silver Moon Guards as well if they possessed numerous Dominators or people who'd comprehended the aura.

The plan that brewed in his heart was to follow in his teacher's footsteps. Yuan Shuo had challenged the notable personages of Silver Moon to single combat not only out of desire to do so, but also to learn from their strong suits, shore up his weaknesses, and perceive their auras so that he could meld his own.

The path of invincibility as recorded in the ancient tomes was for one to challenge the four corners and gather an aura of invincibility. That meant to say that a plethora of battles and sparring was not a bad undertaking.

.....

Wang Ming didn't care why Li Hao wanted to see Southern Fist. His senior brother had spoken. There were no missions forthcoming from the Night Watchers as operations had not yet begun for eliminating the three great organizations. Everyone had a lot of time on their hands.

A sports car engine revved as it headed for an affluent neighborhood on the southern outskirts. He Yong was rich, he didn't lack for wealth. He was a martial master from the royal family and bought a large residence in the southern outskirts soon after arriving at White Moon City. Full of classical flair, he lived a carefree and easy lifestyle. It was much better than the dorms that Li Hao was in.

The mansions of the southern outskirts.

These mansions were quite a sight to behold. Two Slayers and two Starlight were arranged as guards. That instantly elevated the premises and guaranteed security. For many, whether it was Slayers or Starlight, they were all superhuman. With them on patrol in the neighborhood, it meant absolute security.

However, they quickly opened the gates when Li Hao and the others flashed their Night Watcher medallions. They let the group through without asking any questions. It was only in instances like these that the young man experienced a taste of Night Watcher prestige.

“Nice environment!” Li Hao nodded appreciatively from the car. These surroundings were better than the ones around his residence in Silver City. The houses were hidden out of sight behind greenery, giving off an air of solitary privacy. There were even special apparatus in place to keep pests away. An undercurrent of mysterious power flowed through the area, ensuring the mechanisms’ operations. It was plain to see that much thought had gone into urban planning when this neighborhood was constructed.

“It’s alright,” Wang Ming remarked casually with indifference. “It’s not too expensive, just ten million or so for a residence.”

“What??” Li Hao clucked his tongue. That expensive??

Wang Ming rolled his eyes. Oh come on! Is ten million supposed to be a lot?

Sure, it was a hefty amount and impossible to earn through salary alone. But the Night Watchers were paid in mysterious power. One cube could be sold for a million coins. Viewed through that lens, were these houses expensive?

As for mysterious power stones, those were valued in units of hundred million in the outside world. Of course, there was no one selling them!

After becoming a supernatural, only weaklings continued to transact with mundane currency. What was the point in accumulating regular coins? Starlight and Darkmoon might need a bit of money to live, but Sunflares could earn money no matter where they were thrown into.

“I’ll give you a mansion if you like them.” Wang Ming couldn’t be bothered with Li Hao.

“No.”

“Why?”

“I don’t take bribes!”

“.....” Wang Ming was speechless. Who says I’m trying to bribe you if I give you a mansion! The hell, dude!

The car stopped in front of a residence as they conversed.

.....

At the same time, in a large yard.

He Yong was speaking to someone when his eyes suddenly darted to the door. A car’s engine could be vaguely heard through the front gates. His visitor also heard the disturbance. He Yong tugged on his beard, appearing for all intents and purposes to be a martial brute. However, a keen light shone in his eyes.

A delicate woman sat in front of him. She looked approximately thirty years old and had long hair cascading down her shoulders. She wore the long skirts that were fashionable among White Moon

high society, the kind that covered even the soles of the foot. She glanced at He Yong when she heard the noise.

“A supernatural...” The light in He Yong’s eyes danced around. “Of the Sunflare level!”

It was familiar... Wang Ming! What was he doing here? There seemed to be someone else with him... Li Hao!

Right, that was Li Hao. He Yong registered with quite some surprise. What were these two doing on his doorstep? They couldn’t wait to be rid of him in Silver City.

Someone knocked on the front door as he thought and Wang Ming’s loud voice traveled through the air. “Open up, Senior South! We’ve come to see you!”

The woman smiled at He Yong. “A friend of yours?”

“Friend?” He Yong grinned widely. “I guess, he’s a young friend of mine. He just likes to talk too much.”

The woman smiled and rose to her feet when He Yong did. “Then I shall take my leave.”

“Mmhmm.” The two walked outside together. The yard was large and He Yong was in no hurry, so he took his time. It meant that Wang Ming grew more urgent.

Knock knock knock!

“Are you home, Senior South? I hear noises, do you not welcome us?”

“What an impatient fellow.” The woman covered her mouth as she chuckled.

“He’s a cocky guy,” responded a wordless He Yong. “He kept a low profile before, but seems to have lost that fear after returning home and to the protection of people on his side.”

He laughed at his own words. That was right, Wang Ming was a Night Watcher. What need did he have to fear Southern Fist after Hou Xiaochen stabbed a Nova to death in one move?

He Yong opened the door as the two chatted. A merry Wang Ming was about to greet the senior; he paused upon seeing the woman, then smiled knowingly at He Yong.

The man didn’t explain himself; he turned to Li Hao with a nod. The woman looked at Wang Ming and the quiet Li Hao, then chuckled.

“I won’t disturb you further, big brother He. Please visit me when you have a moment.”

“I shall!”

“Then I take my leave!” She inclined her head at the two young men and walked out of the yard. A car quickly drove up to her, she climbed in with a graceful swish of her long skirts.

Wang Ming chuckled as he turned back to look at her, as did He Yong. Li Hao wasn’t in the mood to laugh. He frowned when he looked at Wang Ming. “Keep it together and don’t show that expression to just anyone you meet. You’ll be in trouble if you run into someone you can’t afford to offend.”

“What do you mean?” Wang Ming raised an eyebrow.

“A Dominator,” Li Hao replied calmly. “Senior Southern Fist’s acquaintances are all experts, as expected of a renowned martial master back in the day! Any one of your friends is a hard to find Dominator.”

Wang Ming started. “A Dominator? I couldn’t tell!” he said incredulously.

“Your eyes are bad!” Li Hao laughed. “She wasn’t just a Dominator, but was a Dominator who’s killed countless people! Despite her appearance, I think she’s around fifty! That makes her thirty years old twenty years ago...”

The young man thought for a bit. “There weren’t that many famous female martial masters in Silver Moon’s martial world back in the day. The Jadelight and Light Sword of the Seven Swords, Willow Blade, Springstitch Fist, Heartbreak Palm...

“Was that one the Heartjab Daughter of the Footjab Sect?” Li Hao smiled at He Yong.

“Nice eyes! How could you tell?”

“Her skirts drag on the ground, covering her legs and feet.” Li Hao smiled, at ease. “There were no other discerning characteristics about her body. Since she covered her legs, she might be the Heartjab Daughter. My master mentioned it a few times that she liked to strike with her legs. Faster than a blade, she stabbed through many a heart with a quick kick.

“Judging from her condition, she doesn’t seem to have broken through recently. That means she wasn’t in Silver Moon before. Is she also from the royal family?”

He Yong took a deep look at Li Hao, equal parts surprised and mystified. “Kid, why do you seem much more confident and relaxed than before? Are you more reassured just because you’re in White Moon City?”

“No.” Li Hao shook his head with a smile. “I’ve just thought through some things. You don’t need to mind it, senior. Are you going to invite us in?”

“Hahaha!” He Yong roared with laughter. “Interesting, come sit! To be honest, your prudent and cautious attitude before didn’t make you seem like Old Demon Yuan’s disciple. Now you appear more the part. He was very arrogant at your age.”

“Has the senior seen my master at my age?” Li Hao smiled. “My master is in his seventies now and had probably just broken through to Sunderer in his twenties. Senior Southern Fist isn’t as old as my master, right?”

Yuan Shuo was an older martial master. He Yong ought to be younger than him.

Chapter 337: Southern Fist (II)

“I have indeed seen your master at your age,” He Yong chuckled. “He was already a famous martial master when he was twenty. Although he wasn’t as famous as he would later become, he followed his master in traveling all over the land...”

Master’s master? Li Hao had never heard of this man before, so he was curious. “My teacher’s master...”

“Yes, he was slightly famous in his own right, but later eclipsed by Yuan Shuo. Old Demon Yuan didn’t practice the Five Styles to begin with. He dug up some graves and uncovered the method, modified it, and turned it into what we know now!”

Yuan Shuo had created the New Book of Five Styles—or rather, he’d modified it from ancient tomes. That meant that its heritage started with Yuan Shuo. Li Hao nodded without further question.

“The Heartjab Daughter...” He Yong continued as he led his visitors inside. “No one’s called her that in a very long time. She’s Madame Bai now! She didn’t marry a royal and she isn’t with me. We’re just old friends that happened to be in Silver Moon, so she came to pay a visit. Perhaps you even know her husband.”

“Who?” Wang Ming was perplexed. “I haven’t heard of a Bai surnamed family in White Moon high society that has a Dominator daughter-in-law. They would have to be quite something. Are there any Bai surnamed experts in White Moon City?”

“You already said the city name!” He Yong laughed. “Bai is the character for White.”

Wang Ming blinked. “...the Bai family that the city is named after?!” he exclaimed.

“That’s right!”

Li Hao was still lost.

“White Moon City!” Wang Ming garbled out an explanation. “It wasn’t called that before. People eventually started calling the city that and slowly forgot the city’s original name. Even the official authorities ended up calling it White Moon City.

“Silver Moon is named after Silver City and White Moon City. Everyone thinks that the province is named after the capital’s second character. That’s wrong, but only locals know this fact after so much time has passed.”

Wang Ming was a born and bred White Moon citizen, so he knew the particulars well. “White Moon City gained the ‘White’ prefix because the Bai family was city lord for 120 years in a row up until eighty years ago! It wasn’t until the royal family stepped behind the curtain and the provincial government was formed that the Bai family no longer sat in their position.”

City lord! That was an ancient title. City lords were the sovereigns of a city under the old power structure of eighty years ago. The Bai family passed down the position through various generations and was always the city lord that ruled over Silver Moon.

There weren’t many that remembered them after eighty years.

“The Bai family...” repeated a surprised Li Hao. “Senior Southern Fist says that the Heartjab Daughter married into that family?”

“Yep,” He Yong laughed. “The Bai family has split into two. One branch is in Skystar City, the other branch is here. Do you know about the White Dragons?”

Li Hao looked at Wang Ming with blatant shock.

“I forgot to say...” Wang Ming said sheepishly. “That the White Dragons were actually founded by the Bai family back in the day. They became part of the three divisions of the provincial army after the family withdrew. That was why I immediately thought of the Bai family after Senior South gave me a pointer.”

“Then the commander of the White Dragons...” Li Hao arched a brow.

“He has nothing to do with the family.” Wang Ming shook his head. “I wouldn’t say that the Bai family lacks powerhouses otherwise. The leader of the White Dragons is Commander Ren Tianchuan. You might’ve seen him this morning.”

Li Hao thought back to the attendees of the morning meeting. The commander in question was roughly fifty years old. He hadn’t heard the man speak, but he wasn’t weak given that he was a peak Solar.

The three entered the house.

“It’s not that the Bai family lacks experts in White Moon City, they just keep a low profile. I’m not pulling things out of thin air when I say you might know her husband. You know Hu Dingfang, right? Have you heard of the vice commander of the Tiger Wings, Bai Yuanqing?”

“The commander who can’t seem to tan?” Wang Ming blinked. “I’ve almost forgotten his name. Everyone calls him General Lightbulb...”

Li Hao was quite lost. He didn't know the man, and how were the Tiger Wings involved? Silver Moon was a complicated place, alright.

"That's him, that's who Madame Bai married," He Yong answered. "Hu Dingfang owes a lot to the Bai family for being able to become a commander at such a young age. The situation is a bit complex in the province.

"The Bai family supported Hu Dingfang because they wanted to make him their own man. The Bais have connections to the Ministry of Armed Forces in Skystar City, so Hu Dingfang is a right and proper representative of the Ministry of Armed Forces. Provincial armies answer to that ministry to begin with, so Hu Dingfang comes from a strong background."

"Then why didn't the Bai family support their own Bai Yuanqing to be the commander?" Li Hao couldn't make sense of what he was hearing.

"Hu Dingfang is no simple character!" He Yong laughed. "He has people behind him too. It would've been tough for him to be a commander, but it's said that his wife is quite a competent person and was a major impetus behind his success."

He looked meaningfully at Li Hao.

"She's my senior sister," the young man didn't mind admitting. "Why beat around the bush, senior? What competency can my senior sister possibly possess?"

"A lot!" He Yong laughed uproariously. "Your teacher has a good relationship with Huang Yun. I don't know the details, but they know each other and might call each other friends. Your senior sister went to Huang Yun, who then threw his support behind Hu Dingfang getting the position. The Bai family could only rub their noses and take the hit as they supported Hu Dingfang as well. They couldn't throw all that away as there were many who didn't wish for them to rise again. Hence, Hu Dingfang received widespread support from upstairs when he took his position."

“.....” Li Hao’s head ached. It was just a woman, how did it end up leading back to him? They weren’t connected to begin with, but then his senior sister got involved, which meant his teacher did as well. Once his teacher was named, that became Li Hao’s business again.

The young man shook his head with resignation. Six degrees of separation really did connect people with everyone else in this world. That meant he truly did have something to do with this Heartjab Daughter.

He Yong knew a lot about Silver Moon’s situation. He grinned when he saw Li Hao losing his patience. “It’s best to fully understand the ins and outs of everything. You can trace everything to their roots and discover some interesting things. For example, Hou Xiaochen and Huang Yun are two people who appear to have nothing to do with each other, but they shared meals and drank together thirty years ago. They seem to have become strangers thirty years later.”

Li Hao raised an eyebrow.

“Tracing another thread further will reveal that your Manager Yu appears at the same time when someone else disappears!”

“Please go on, senior.” Li Hao’s interest was piqued.

“Do you know Red Moon?”

“.....” No shit!

“It’s said that when Red Moon was established, they raised seven moons to their highest positions! Red, orange, yellow, green, indigo, blue, and violet. The first generation Violet Moon was a female expert of the Silver Moon martial world. Violet Moon has always been in residence in the province! She vanished very quickly and without a trace. Rumors had it that she was assassinated, and then Manager Yu appeared in your Night Watchers.

“The second generation Violet Moon simply inherited the position. Your Director Hou didn’t seem to like this title, so he stabbed the second generation Violet Moon to death with a spear!

“Ying Hongyue might have learned his lesson when it came to the third generation Violet Moon. Do you know who the third gen—the Violet Moon that you know—is?”

“Who?” asked a completely lost Li Hao.

“The current Violet Moon is Orange Moon’s daughter. Orange Moon is female and was a good friend of the first generation Violet Moon. And so, the third generation Violet Moon has survived to this day...”

Li Hao blinked with confusion; Wang Ming was equally blank faced, but the two understood these words. The first generation Violet Moon was Manager Yu. Second generation Violet Moon died because the title was annoying. Third generation Violet Moon was the daughter of Manager Yu’s good friend—would Hou Xiaochen be thick-faced enough to keep killing her?

The heck is all this?

“You can’t claim wild theories, senior!” Li Hao breathed out heavily. “How is this possible?”

“You don’t believe me?” He Yong chuckled. “The first generation Violet Moon was called Yu Luocho. Hou Xiaochen’s a cocky one alright, he didn’t even bother changing the name and calls her Little Yu. If she’s not Yu Luocho, I’ll do a handstand and eat my own shit!”

“.....” Li Hao was having trouble holding on to his sanity. “Forget it, don’t talk to me of martial world gossip, senior. I’m not interested! It has nothing to do with me who they are!”

However, he smiled wryly at himself. The first generation Violet Moon is Manager Yu? What... the heck?? I have an unending blood feud with Red Moon!

“How long has it been since Manager Yu joined the Night Watchers?” he still asked after thinking things over.

“I told you she vanished a long time ago, maybe fifteen years.”

Li Hao carefully calculated the timeline. Red Moon shouldn't have commenced their plans for the eight families yet at fifteen years ago. That set him more at ease. Otherwise, the situation would be very awkward. He wouldn't know if he should take revenge or not.

Old fart He Yong was not a good person! He knew a lot of secrets after many years with the royal family, but decided to share ones that involved Hu Dingfang and Manager Yu. He dragged Li Hao into them and seemed to be purposefully creating trouble for the young man.

Granted, it could also be a warning.

Li Hao was regretting his actions in revealing the Heartjab Daughter's identity. The old man wouldn't have an opening to divulge all this gossip otherwise.

“Ignore them, senior!” Li Hao laughed. “I've come with a request this time.”

“Blood transfusion?” He Yong cut straight to the chase. “Do you want to ask about the specific process, changes, or method?”

Li Hao paused. This direct?

“It's simple.” He Yong smirked. “Fight me to the point of beating me and I'll tell you! I promise I won't keep anything behind.”

The young man raised a brow.

He Yong sprawled in his chair and drawled, “What, you don’t have the balls to? Or you can’t? Is this all that swordsmen are worth? Yu Xiao and Huang Jie died so quickly, and Yu Xiao was there first. Even if Hao Lianchuan got to Huang Jie, did Yu Xiao choke to death on his own spit?”

Chapter 338: Southern Fist (III)

Li Hao frowned slightly. He knew that there would be speculations, but hadn’t anticipated that someone would expose him to his face so quickly. He Yong... was as rumored, seemingly a bull in a china shop, but in reality a combination of boldness and wisdom!

“Are you interested in sparring?” He Yong looked merrily at Li Hao. “To be honest, I’d like to witness the might of a Dominator swordsman. I fought one in the central region once, but he couldn’t stand up to a single blow!

“Of course, he wasn’t a swordsman of Silver Moon. There is a premier swordsman in the central region who was the Sky Sword of yesteryear. He’s a supernatural now and unbelievably strong, a premier existence and a titan in the Nova level!

“Sky Sword is domineering while Earthturner cowers like a turtle. I can’t be bothered with him. Jadelight is killing Red Moon all over the place with your master. The Light Sword has gone missing... To be honest, it’s almost impossible to run into a Silver Moon swordsman these days. Why don’t you keep me company?”

Li Hao looked at He Yong and asked after a moment, “Does... the senior wish to test our skills against each other?”

“I do indeed have that in mind.” He Yong raised an eyebrow. “Of course, don’t be like your teacher and want to kill whoever you’re sparring with! Your master killed people because he purposefully fought others on a similar level to him. There’s a ninety percent chance of death under those circumstances. If it’s us two... I don’t know if I dominate you or you overpower me. I think there’s no need for a fight to the death as there’s no chance of us being on a similar footing.

“I came to Silver Moon to witness the might of Summoner of Spirit. But I want to see your master, not you.”

“Then forget it!” Li Hao shook his head.

“Why?”

“Swordsmen do not spar, they only kill when the sword is unsheathed!”

He Yong frowned and sighed after some consideration. “Then... Yes, forget it. Someone else once said those words—Sky Sword. He also killed innumerable people in the central region and shed blood whenever he drew his sword.

“What a pity that I have certain matters to attend to.” The old martial master shook his head with regret. “I haven’t seen your master yet, so I don’t wish to fight to the death with you. Even if I win, I’ll be mocked for switching targets to the old demon’s disciple because I couldn’t fight him. It would be a loss of face regardless.”

“Senior might not be a match for my senior brother either...” Wang Ming couldn’t help but say off to the side. He didn’t mind injecting some opportune flattery since everything was out in the open.

“Perhaps!” He Yong laughed silently and looked at Li Hao. “I know your reason for coming. Martial masters all crave to grow stronger, or rather, everyone wants to grow stronger. But blood transfusions aren’t a good method for you. You have a strong physique and you may not quickly increase your strength after you change your blood.”

The young man frowned. Did He Yong not wish to exchange knowledge with him? That was also a normal reaction. This was a path that the man had found by himself and not everyone was willing to freely share their knowledge. Li Hao himself had kept the crux of Summoner of Spirit to himself. It was just that he’d come with the thought that he would more or less gain something from this visit.

“Don’t think too much,” He Yong laughed. “It’s not that I’m not willing, but that there’s no need! And it’s not like I don’t have anything to tell you.” The old man thought for a moment. “You’re a

swordsman, so there's a method suited to you if you wish to grow stronger. However, it's up to you to see if you dare try it."

"What is it?"

"The Flaming Phoenix Spear!"

Li Hao blinked. What did that have to do with anything?

"Hou Xiaochen must have been a premier martial master back in the day—he was absolutely one of the three commanders of the Skystar Guards! He was probably already a Dominator then. I can't tell if he's still a martial master now or a supernatural. But I could see a few things when he killed Red Hair. His spear intent remains and his aura is still there!

"Go and ask to borrow his Flaming Phoenix Spear. Origin weapons are a bit special as some of their spirit will awaken after many years of nurturing. Once they come back to life, they inherit some of their master's legacy—such as the aura!

"If you can borrow his origin weapon and if you're rich enough, get some mysterious power stones to activate it. Don't fight Hou Xiaochen, that's meaningless as he's so much stronger than you. But if you fight the Flaming Phoenix Spear by itself, you might come across unexpected gains.

"Perceive some of Hou Xiaochen's aura and sense the fierceness of the spear killing a Nova with one jab. So long as you don't die to the origin weapon, you'll see great gains from the clash between your sword intent and the spear intent!

"You might even be able to take the opportunity to comprehend some of Hou Xiaochen's aura. He was very powerful back in the day and still is..."

"Do you mean this, senior?" Li Hao's eyes danced with excitement.

“No shit!” He Yong laughed. “Is there a need to lie to you? This doesn’t just apply to Hou Xiaochen, but also Huang Yun. You’ll gain something too if you can borrow Huang Yun’s weapon. Every martial master in those days had their own personal weapon that was infused with some of their mind intent. Origin weapons are the best candidate because they have their own spirit!

“Also, some origin weapons from the ancient civilization may bear traces of their master’s intent if they were sealed away. You can try unsealing them, but that can be very dangerous! Too much is unknown about those kinds of origin weapons. If their master was too strong and the lingering intent is also too strong, you’re doomed if you awaken them. When the spirit stirs with life again, it’ll kill you with one move.

“Therefore, it’s best not to try random origin weapons. One unsealed for many years like the Flaming Phoenix Spear is a bit more stable.”

He Yong truly knew a lot; Li Hao drank in everything that he heard.

“Thank you for your pointers, senior!” Although Li Hao hadn’t learned the exact method for blood transfusion, He Yong had taught him a lot. The young man was very happy. He’d discovered that while the old martial masters of Silver Moon adhered to the perspective of their disciplines and didn’t easily teach their secret arts, they didn’t mind sharing some basic reflections.

Such was Hong Yitang, as was He Yong. Even Liu Long had gifted Li Hao the Nine Forged Force not long after they met. These veteran martial masters were quite generous in some ways.

“What are you being so polite for!” He Yong was in a merry mood. “I’m happy to see martial masters grow stronger! This is also a convenient way for me to appraise how strong Hou Xiaochen is. If his spear can’t kill you, then that means his aura is within a tolerable range for me.

“But if you die, that means this guy is absolutely terrifying and I should leave Silver Moon as soon as possible.”

Li Hao laughed and nodded at the smirk on He Yong's face. He didn't mind being used as a lab rat. "Senior, are there martial masters in the central region who can stand against Novas?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know?"

"Who knows? He Yong shrugged. "Martial masters keep a low profile and their noses to the ground after the rise of the supernatural. They're all incredibly low key other than those who crossed over the supernatural. I know some who've killed Solars, but Novas...? I really haven't heard of any, but that doesn't mean they don't exist.

"There may be more than one path beyond Dominator and Summoner of Spirit may not be the only way!" He Yong gave it some thought. "For example, I know of a guy who's not necessarily weak. Sky Sword is domineering among Novas after crossing over, but that guy is also ferocious while remaining a martial master..."

"Who?"

"Tyrant Blade!" He Yong intoned. "I saw him once seven years ago. The skies break and earth shatters when he strikes with his weapon! I'm certain that he's still a martial master, not a supernatural. But he slew a Solar with one stroke earlier than your master. That was seven years ago, who knows what he's like now."

Tyrant Blade!

"His blade gives me the feeling that he walks a different path! He didn't strengthen his body, change his blood, or enhance his organs. He improved his blade intent and turned himself into a blade!"

“Is senior saying that Tyrant Blade turned himself into a blade by enhancing his consciousness and aura, but he himself isn’t that strong?” Li Hao mused.

“That’s right!” He Yong nodded. “Tyrant Blade gave me the feeling that his mind intent is invincible, but his physical body is frail and weak. He’s so fragile that I suspect that if I punched him before he deployed his blade intent, I’d beat him to death with one punch.”

Enhancing one’s aura and consciousness to the extreme and ignoring the body...

Li Hao learned of yet another possibility today. Martial masters proceeded down a variety of paths in the bid to strengthen themselves, his teacher wasn’t the only one. Many of Silver Moon’s martial masters continued to explore.

He Yong focused on blood and qi, Tyrant Blade on the mind, Sky Sword crossed over to the supernatural, and his teacher fortified the five visceral organs... Each of these old guard martial masters walked their own paths.

They might not forget martial dao even after converting to the supernatural. In fact, it was impossible for them to forget. The martial world was an interesting place. Li Hao quite regretted that he’d never been able to experience it for himself. Tyrant Blade, Sky Sword, Southern Fist, the Three Spears, and three commanders of the Skystar Guard... That must have been a fascinating era.

Of course, present day was just as well. The supernatural was filled with all sorts of profound mysteries. Li Hao didn’t look down on the supernatural. While he’d killed some of their practitioners, that didn’t mean he had the right to dismiss them. Powerful supernaturals might run beyond the imagination.

He Yong and Li Hao conversed for a long period of time. The old martial master spoke of the fun happenings back in the day while the young man listened. They discussed the auras and gossip of the age...

He Yong wouldn't have spoken of this to Li Hao before; he wouldn't be interested in a conversation. But now, he was. At the same time, he couldn't be bothered to look at Wang Ming. The young supernatural wasn't worthy!

Martial masters could be quite focused on profit and gain. Li Hao was pulled into a conversation now because the young man had killed a Solar. He Yong had deduced that, which was why he deigned to chat today.

Chapter 339: Master and Disciple With One Heart (I)

The sky darkened as He Yong chatted with Li Hao. Eventually, the old martial master breathed out a happy exhale. "It's been a good day. It's really nice to talk to you, kid, despite your teacher not being here. That's a bit of a pity.

"It's been such a long time since remarkable juniors have appeared in the martial world. As a senior, I'll give you one final piece of information for free..."

Li Hao perked up his ears. He Yong chose to transmit his next words so that Wang Ming wouldn't hear them.

"Remember to stay in Silver Moon if you want to comprehend more auras! If you want to walk further down the path of martial dao, do so in Silver Moon! Silver Moon is a special place and might've been the center of the world a very, very long time ago. Any tree or blade of grass that's old enough might be where an invincible powerhouse once attained enlightenment. Only here can martial masters grow stronger!

"Countless people have their eyes on Silver Moon. I suspect that Hou Xiaochen continuously refused to leave because he's still on the path of martial masters. He has yet to reach its end, so he won't easily leave before that.

"Not many people knew before, but now many do. Immense powerhouses will be here soon because the province may hold treasure that can resolve some thorny problems for supernaturals and make them strong again.

“Silver Moon will soon become a focal point of the world. Even if some leave for the time being, they will quickly be back. Your teacher will come back. If Hou Xiaochen does depart this time, he’ll return. All of those powerhouses in the central will come!

“Ying Hongyue, the Yama King, Celestial... All of them will visit! The central region is just a route to gaining greater strength. The destination is Silver Moon!” He Yong smiled and concluded, “The royal family will come too! There are countless threads that connect the royal family to Silver Moon. No one knows where the royal family’s ruins are, but I know a clue or two. They may be in Silver Moon!”

Li Hao sucked in a sharp breath and looked at the old man.

“Go on back,” the old martial master said aloud with a grin. “Martial dao will rise again! This land belongs to martial dao. It once did and it will be again! Supernaturals can become martial masters as well, they just lack something at the moment. Some proceed far down the supernatural path not because they’ve given up on martial dao, but because they wish to travel further on it. They are now very, very strong. Once we sort out how to convert the supernatural back to martial masters, a batch of veteran martial masters will quickly return!”

Li Hao nodded without a word and raised a cupped fist salute. “Thank you for your pointers, senior!” He looked at Wang Ming. “Let’s go!”

Wang Ming was rather confused, but he’d heard the key piece of information—supernaturals could become martial masters. Ecstatic, he wanted to ask more questions, but had to catch up to Li Hao since his senior brother was swiftly departing the residence.

“Supernaturals can become martial masters, huh?? I’m rich!” he said with quiet exuberance.

Li Hao was speechless. Did you not hear everything that came after that? There are problems having to do with this process, ones that haven’t been resolved. Does this guy have selective hearing?

.....

He Yong watched as the two young men left. He broke out in a grin when they drove off. “Martial masters... martial world... the world at large!”

Things were finally getting interesting!

I, Southern Fist, will rise again on this ancient land. Wait for me!

.....

Li Hao did not leave his office again after visiting Southern Fist. He needed to digest the senior’s words.

Within his office.

Li Hao held a pen and drew over a piece of paper. Silver Moon, the three northern provinces, the martial world, the central region... He’d liked to view case files and gather information during his time in Classified Affairs. Sometimes, words spoke and gave Li Hao a lot of material.

There were hidden powerhouses in Silver Moon who’d never revealed themselves. Hou Xiaochen’s exposure might be part of a bigger plan. The young man wrote down a few names—Hou Xiaochen, Huang Yun, Kong Jie, Zhao Chengguang.

These leaders of the four institutions had most likely reached an agreement with each other. Li Hao didn’t believe that they weren’t aware of each other’s level of strength. Apparently, Director General Zhao had always been at odds with Hou Xiaochen. Was this a two man show, or was it a result of an unsatisfactory split of goods? Or did they simply disagree on something?

The three commanders of the Skystar Guards... The Guards had been established by the royal family. Did these people have something to do with the royal family? If Hou Xiaochen was one of them, was he betraying the royal family right now?

Various thoughts floated to the forefront, to which Li Hao quickly suppressed them all. It was enough to keep them in consideration, there was no need to pursue them to the bitter end. He just needed a good sense of appropriateness so that he didn't foolishly become someone else's pawn.

Flaming Phoenix Spear, spear intent.

Li Hao wrote down the weapon name. Could he borrow it? That was an origin weapon, and a very high level one. It might prove difficult to borrow if he brashly put in a request. But since Hou Xiaochen seemed to value him at the moment, perhaps it was a possibility.

Strength was the foundation of everything. The ruins of Battle Heaven were still there and yet to be fully explored. Another expedition might set out at the end of the month or next month; Li Hao knew that there was a slight connection between himself and the ancient cities.

The eight families of Silver City were likely relevant to Battle Heaven.

He wanted the defensive origin weapon as well, despite a lot of people having their eyes on it. If he was unsuccessful with the origin weapon, he still needed the mysterious power stones inside the city. For the little sword to recover its energy other than sources such as the stone door and origin weapons, the easiest source was these stones.

"I need to be stronger for the next excavation!" Although he was short on time, Li Hao wasn't willing to give up. In his current state, the ruins of Battle Heaven held the largest amount of mysterious power stones. Any other place might be more dangerous than the ruins.

He drew and wrote over the sheet of paper for a bit, then shredded it and burned the fragments with sword intent from the fire tiger. Although he wasn't a supernatural, he was able to call upon some supernatural techniques after gaining the fire tiger sword.

At the moment, Li Hao possessed eight hundred cubes of wood energy and six hundred cubes of metal energy. Those precious babies could not languish in storage. Other than the two hundred cubes of metal energy that he was reserving for Wang Ming, he didn't need to strengthen his organs with the remainder. Instead, he could trade them for some other attributes.

He knew the uses for wind and thunder energy. Li Hao walked out of his office when his thoughts traveled here. He didn't go next door to Manager Yu—he didn't want to be overly familiar with the first generation Violet Moon. Rather, he headed upstairs.

Manager Yu was handling general affairs in the office next door. She briefly sensed the happenings outside of her door and didn't mind them. No one cared what Li Hao did as long as he didn't lose himself in the city or kill more people.

.....

Fifth floor.

Hao Lianchuan was buried deep in paperwork when he saw Li Hao arrive. "Do me a favor..."

"Do me one first," the young man reversed their positions. "Director, help me trade for some mysterious power."

"....." Hao Lianchuan didn't know what to say. Can't you see that I'm busy? Why are you coming to me for such a trivial matter?

"I got these cubes from someone else and can't trade them easily."

Fine then, he understood.

“How many and what do you want?”

“Twelve hundred cubes, swap them for wind and thunder.”

Hao Lianchuan frowned and looked at the young man. What did he want with wind and thunder energy? Yuan Shuo had traded for plenty of the five elements before. General speculation was that they had to do with the five visceral elements. Wind and thunder, however, were baffling.

Twelve hundred cubes were neither too much nor too little. Hao Lianchuan nodded after some thought. “Will do, I’ll check our vaults in a bit. I’ll swap them out for you if we have any. There aren’t that many wind and thunder supernaturals, so not many have a need for them.

“Now you do me a favor,” he quickly said. “Didn’t you say that blood pearls can strengthen supernatural locks? I got a Sunflare level one through my connections. Can you help me see if it’ll work? If it does, I’ll figure out a way to get a higher level one. Wouldn’t we just be wasting our energy if it doesn’t?”

It was plain to see that he dearly wished to grow stronger. Everyone wanted to.

A Sunflare level blood pearl was almost useless to Hao Lianchuan, but if it strengthened his supernatural lock by only a little, that was still hope. Many supernaturals faced similar straits. Ascension was easy, but how was one to ascend if one couldn’t see the locks to break them?

“Alright, but I’ll have to send my internal force through your entire body for a close inspection,” Li Hao responded. “Are you fine with that, director?”

He also wanted to gain a deeper understanding of supernaturals. Since one had come knocking at his door, he would make full use of the opportunity. According to Southern Fist’s words, supernaturals could convert to martial masters. If that was the case, then the implications were horrifying!

Some supernaturals were domineering beyond belief. If they could become martial masters again—if Novas could become martial masters—then what level would they be? How would mind intent be resolved? Or would they be martial masters without mind intent?

They were still formidable in the absence of mind intent as their physical bodies would be enhanced to unfathomable levels. Mind intent might not be the only path.

Purely physical martial masters?

Li Hao was rather excited by the possibility.

Hao Lianchuan thought it over and set his jaw, nodded without care. “Very well, go ahead and try! To be honest, I haven’t had any motivation since making it to Solar because I haven’t been able to see my next lock. That failure means a lack of a future. Many supernaturals fall into this state when they come across the same situation. They muddle through the days without purpose since this is all they can amount to.”

Li Hao didn’t say anything. This was similar to martial masters after they reached Dominator. There was no future, so what was the point of anything?

However, true elites would try to peer into the road ahead. If there was no path, then they would walk it themselves.

Chapter 340: Master and Disciple With One Heart (II)

A blood pearl floated in the air. Hao Lianchuan stared nervously at it. He tended to be an even-keeled person, but it was hard to keep his composure when the matter had to do with his future.

Li Hao ignored him. The young man released his internal force and placed both of his hands on Hao Lianchuan’s hands. Internal force traveled through their linkage and began wandering through the deputy director’s arms.

It immediately ran into a surge of fire mysterious power that pushed back against it.

“Director, suppress your energy!”

“Okay okay!” Hao Lianchuan bobbed his head and swiftly tamped his energy down. Although supernaturals could not control their internal energy as easily as martial masters could internal force, his control was decent as a veteran Solar.

Li Hao’s internal force roved through the man’s body with some difficulty. The young man furrowed his brows after a while. The meridians are strong enough, the body is fortified, the bones are nicely dense... but he has a lot of latent injuries.

Indeed, latent injuries.

A variety of large and small cracks covered Hao Lianchuan’s meridians throughout his entire body. Such was the drawback for supernaturals. They improved so quickly and mysterious power was so powerfully offensive that, apart from a handful of powerhouses whose energy had a nurturing effect, most mysterious power attacked both enemy and self.

It was as if one furiously poured water into a wooden barrel that could only hold ten liters of water. If it couldn’t overflow, it would burst the sealed barrel.

The supernatural domain was very dangerous!

This was Li Hao’s first time investigating a supernatural’s physical body. His brows were furrowed tight. These were not good findings. Once supernaturals set foot beyond a certain boundary, they might explode of their own accord.

The supernatural domain... is a dead end, isn’t it? Li Hao sank into deep thought.

Well, that might not necessarily be the case. The Silver Armor of Battle Heaven had said that supernaturals did not have a wide path to walk on. This meant that this field also existed in the ancient civilization.

The ancient civilization possessed innumerable heavyweights that were all terrifyingly powerful. If supernaturals reached a dead-end after arriving at the Solar or Nova level, then this domain's limits were too low. Silver Armor wouldn't have mentioned this system in that case. That the soldier knew of it meant that supernaturals ought to have been somewhat famous in the ancient civilization. While the field wasn't up to par with martial dao, it wouldn't be too inferior.

Li Hao continued to investigate after noting the numerous hidden injuries. He sent his internal force around the five organs again. Avoiding the red-hot heart that he dared not touch, the young man quickly investigated the other four.

His frown deepened with the second go-around. The other four visceral organs also bore latent injuries. Since Hao Lianchuan was a fire supernatural, he must have first opened the lock of his heart. That would levy immense strain on the organ and summon incredible fire energy out of it. Although the heart had been strengthened, there were... also some injuries lurking within it.

How was this a powerhouse??

Li Hao found himself at a loss for words. These injuries were severe! It was only because none of them acted up that Hao Lianchuan was still a Solar. Once they did, there was nothing but death in store for him.

Are Director Hou and the others martial masters then?

Li Hao once more sank into deep thought. If so, the director and the others must have crossed over to the supernatural domain as Dominators and swiftly grown stronger. Then they returned to being martial masters—did that create large numbers of injuries hidden within their body?

Hou Xiaochen's coughs might not be an act.

There was also that group of feeble men in the conference room. One person coughing was an act, were all of them acting?

No... it might not be!

Li Hao hadn't had the chance to inspect a supernatural's body before and didn't know that there could be so many hidden injuries in one. But if Hou Xiaochen and the others knew how to convert back to martial dao and had already undergone the process, would that explain why they were so strong and at the same time, also constantly plagued with injuries?

Since Southern Fist had said so, that meant he possibly knew the conversion method. There might even be those already attempting the process in the central region! Hou Xiaochen and the others were possibly the vanguard. That would diffuse some of the young man's confusion. The group of invalids in the conference room was real!

If the five organs and particularly the lungs are damaged, that makes coughing very normal. I might be in the same situation if I was nurturing an aura in my lungs and the organ wasn't strong enough... Teacher would as well...

Various thoughts popped into his mind. The young man continued his observations. The balance between the five organs had been shattered and the heart was too strong. The heart might explode if this continued, or the other four organs might be crushed by an overly strong heart.

"Li Hao?" Discomfort was creeping in for Hao Lianchuan. "Are you done yet?" It was uncomfortable having internal force travel through his body.

"Take the blood pearl." Li Hao snapped back to present. "Retract your fire energy and concentrate the blood pearl on your kidneys!"

"What? Why?"

“The kidneys are of water and the heart of fire. Your fire attribute is too strong, let’s see if this can suppress it a bit!”

It was hardly what Hao Lianchuan expected, but he dismissed his skepticism. It wasn’t like he understood any of this, so he could only follow Li Hao’s instructions. The man swiftly swallowed a blood pearl; the power of a scarlet shadow exploded in his body.

Fire energy also surged and began expelling, or even destroying, the energy from the scarlet shadow. Li Hao stared sharply at it. As he expected, the power of the scarlet shadows did not mix with mysterious power. They were even opposed to each other.

Not only that, but energy from the scarlet shadows had elicited a combined reaction from the eight families at the stone door. Just what was this energy? Li Hao wasn’t able to delve more into the topic as he knew too little about it.

“Suppress your fire energy!”

“I can’t...” Hao Lianchuan was resigned. “The power from the blood pearl doesn’t seem to be combining with my mysterious power. It’s being expelled as soon as it enters my body...”

“Give this a try then—withdraw all of your fire energy into the heart!”

Fine then! Hao Lianchuan had no choice but to give it a try. Fire energy originated from the heart. Moments later, he barely succeeded in keeping his energy under control. Meanwhile, Li Hao’s internal force began guiding the energy from the blood pearl into the man’s kidneys.

The energy did not reject becoming part of the body and was quickly absorbed into the kidneys. Li Hao’s internal force couldn’t sense anything beyond that, so he focused his mind in that area. However, that made the hairs rise on the back of Hao Lianchuan’s neck. The young man suddenly seemed savage!

Mind intent!

Indeed, since internal force couldn't sense anything, Li Hao brought out his mind intent. A ferocious surge of sword intent also exploded, but was quickly retracted in the next moment. He was utilizing the earth sword aura instead of the fire tiger aura.

The earth sword aura enveloped Hao Lianchuan. The deputy director's scalp crawled with numbness and he opened his mouth to speak a few times, but held it in in the end. Damn, this kid's terrifying! Once a martial master's aura formed at Dominator of Thousands, it usually exerted some pressure on a supernatural.

Li Hao's mind intent probed Hao Lianchuan's body. Fire energy raged within the man's heart, as if under threat. Sweat beaded his forehead. "I... You... Don't do anything rash! I can sense that my fire energy is about to go berserk!"

"Hold on a second!" Li Hao swiftly sent the earth sword aura further in and probed the kidneys. Hao Lianchuan paled as it felt like his waist was about to explode. The young man finally saw something different!

The kidneys were absorbing the blood-colored energy, causing a tiny lock to shimmer in and out of sight within the organ. It was very weak and growing stronger as it took in the energy. Plainly, Hao Lianchuan wasn't able to discover his fifth lock because it was too weak. The fire energy of his heart was also so strong that it suppressed the other organs.

The deputy director's fifth lock was finally located through Li Hao's mind intent. The young man quickly retracted his mental energy and internal force. Hao Lianchuan's fire energy ignited with a roar and set his office on fire in an expulsion of flames. The deputy director ignored the risk of backlash and hurriedly extinguished the flames. He yanked fire energy out of the air and cleared out his office.

"I told you not to do anything brash," he complained. "Your aura almost killed me!" The kid was too scary!

Li Hao, however, remained quietly looking at Hao Lianchuan. “Take a look inside, Director Hao. Are your kidneys stronger than before?”

“I can’t sense them.” Hao Lianchuan shook his head. “Fire energy cannot be carelessly unleashed within the body. That easily damages the five organs. I am not a martial master and lack your kind of aura. I do not have an internal force that can easily travel throughout myself.”

Supernaturals advanced swiftly, but their mysterious power did not possess nurturing properties. Martial masters progressed slowly, but their internal force fortified their entire body.

“The supernatural path may not be suited for training.” Li Hao thought for a bit. “It’s not that it’s not good, but I feel that if we train in this domain, we should have extremely strong organs to the point where they’re energy incarnate.”

“What?” Hao Lianchuan blinked.

“Supernaturals of a single attribute will see an effect of one very strong organ and four very weak ones. The best way to resolve this issue is to prevent energy from seeping out and turn your organs into a comprehensive whole of energy...”

The young man shook his head at this point. Would that supernatural even be human then?

“The blood pearl did have an effect on you, but there was too little energy within it. It only strengthened the lock in your kidneys by a very little, the lock’s not viable yet.”

“So it really is effective?” That was all that an agitated Hao Lianchuan cared about. “You saw it?”

“Mmhmm.”

“The supernatural lock?”

“Yep. They exist, it’s just a matter of being strong or weak,” Li Hao laughed. “I took a look, you can strengthen yours—it doesn’t necessarily have to be the kidneys. Director Hao has broken the lock of the heart and three of the limbs. You’ve yet to find one more, right?”

“Correct, I haven’t located the one on my left leg even till today.”

“Then strengthen your left leg first.” Li Hao nodded. “Don’t do the five organs yet or you’ll cause a problem. An imbalance in your organs will easily rupture them.

“Novas are those that’ve broken five locks,” the young man suddenly said. “Most of them start with the heart and the four of the limbs, so it’s not hard to reach Nova. What’s hard is what comes after!”