

Star Gate 361

Chapter 361: Such Marvelous Luck (II)

Madame Hong directed a quick glance at her husband; Hong Yitang nodded imperceptibly at her. Her pupils shook violently with understanding! So Li Hao was behind the deaths of Yu Xiao and the others. Unbelievable!

She was all too familiar with the Earthturner Sword—it wouldn't have broken unless unfathomable power coursed through it. Had Li Hao already reached that state?

Meanwhile, the young man was very hungry and stuffed his face. He prepared to speak when Hong Qing suddenly said, "Were you ambushed by someone again? Why are you covered in blood? And your ear... how..."

"No, I was just training."

Hong Qing regarded him wordlessly. How do you get yourself in this state just through training?

"Martial uncle, I've come to you because I have some questions to ask."

He wouldn't have visited without a purpose in mind!

A smiling Hong Yitang understood. "Tell me, what can be stumping Li Hao?"

The young man thought for a bit. "Does the ultimate peak of speed mean even stronger explosive force?"

"No."

Li Hao blinked. No?

“It’s not just speed that results in explosive force!” Hong Yitang chuckled. “You’re a learned person, so you understand that explosiveness is correlated with acceleration. This process accumulates energy and aura, which makes explosiveness strong!”

“To put it simply, you need to continuously explode with force and accelerate to increase your impact. If your speed continuously increases in the process instead of remaining fixed, then you’ll explode with greater strength!”

“Ah, that’s true!” Li Hao nodded with abrupt understanding. “So the power you erupt with is what you’ve accumulated in the process. It’s still your own, but just a process that quickly stacks it together like the Nine Forged Force, right?”

“You know it yourself, so is there a need to ask me?” Hong Yitang didn’t understand what Li Hao wanted to do, but he didn’t mind chatting with the young man.

“So it’s still a process of accumulating aura...” Li Hao murmured to himself. “Just that this process is sectioned into parts and culminates in one kind of aura, correct?”

“You can say that.” Hong Yitang mulled over his response. “The ancients mentioned accumulating aura, but your question is one of dynamic accumulation. It’s an easier and faster way. The ancients also had a method of static accumulation. They would hold their breaths and erupt at a key moment...”

Li Hao blinked with sudden realization again. He also knew those ancient tomes. This would help him understand the bird style more.

“But this aura is snapped into two when I turn or counterattack,” the young man raised another point of difficulty. “I can only maintain it if I chase someone, but that means I’m stronger than them. In that case, I can’t accumulate the aura. What do I do then?”

“You shouldn’t ask me that,” Hong Yitang chuckled. “You should ask your teacher, and not Yuan Shuo, but your physics teacher. Have you learned about parabolas? Who told you that the peak of a parabola is the fastest speed and greatest explosive force?”

“Must you operate in a straight line when you exercise? Are parabolas unacceptable? Or any sort of curve?”

Li Hao blinked and looked at Hong Yitang. Dang, am I getting a physics class from you?

Hong Yitang took a sip of tea and ignored the odd looks from his wife and daughter. He looked at the young man and thought for a moment. “Whether in chase or escape, none of that needs to take place in a straight line. Eagles do not dive at their prey in a singular line, their prey runs. An eagle continuously adjusts direction in the process.”

Li Hao nodded thoughtfully and picked up more food. Some of his earlier questions were being answered.

“Then how does the extremity of speed transform to aura and mind intent?”

Mind intent? It was Hong Yitang’s turn to cast a startled look. Does this fellow want to comprehend another type of aura?

“Jadelight is very fast among the Seven Swords, as fast as light itself!” the man responded. “It’s difficult for me to explain how you should understand it, so I can mention Jadelight as a reference.

“She has a brief accumulation period before she draws her sword, which makes it the best timing to kill her. She demonstrates a momentary pause, but explodes with incredible strength once her sword is unsheathed!

“To put it simply, she draws her weapon slowly, yet deploys it very quickly! Her sword lands even faster, which is an immense test of her arm, wrist, and reasonable channeling of internal force. She

often deployed her sword like this, year after year until she finally comprehended her Jadelight sword aura.

“Something like a sword aura sometimes depends on potential, but is other times contingent on effort. If brandishing the sword ten thousand times is not enough, then do so one hundred thousand. If not, then one million until the act of drawing your sword is the aura!”

Drawing the sword is the aura? Li Hao pondered over those words. Sword techniques floated into his mind and he drew his mental sword. Fast, faster, fast to the extreme, a spontaneous eruption...

An explosion as scintillating as fireworks!

Yes, fireworks...

Rising into the air, acceleration, and explosion! A spontaneous eruption of light!

“Does the Jadelight Sword technique explode like a firework?” Li Hao looked at Hong Yitang.

Most people wouldn't be able to follow the jump in logic, but Hong Yitang didn't mind. He thought for a bit and nodded. “A bit! It didn't occur to me until you spoke of it. Fireworks need an accumulation from fire if they're to rise into the air. Gunpowder ignites and creates propulsion, which in turn facilitates a resplendent sight. It's a process of accumulation!”

“I understand!” answered the young man.

“That's good.”

Their conversation baffled Hong Qing and Madame Hong. What were these two talking about? It was fireworks one moment, parabolas the other. They jumped from topic to topic—the point of their conversation was impossible to determine.

In reality, what the two discussed was very simple. The extremity of speed, a fast eruption, and the formation of aura... That was what they'd been exploring all along. Li Hao knew that Hong Yitang would understand and the man did. If he'd brought this up to anyone else, they'd say he was spewing nonsense!

Li Hao took a deep breath. He'd reached an initial understanding, but this aura needed some time and practice. It wouldn't be shaped in an instant.

"Martial uncle, I'd like to see the Earthturner Sword technique," he changed the topic.

"I don't practice the sword anymore," Hong Yitang smiled. "But I can teach you if you're interested."

"No, not teach!" Li Hao shook his head. "There's no hurry for this. I need to digest today's reflections first, but I'm serious, martial uncle. I'd like to find some time to spar with you. It's all good, whether it's with full strength or a fight to the death. If you can pull your blows, then please do so. But if not, that's alright too. I wish to witness the Earthturner Sword!"

Both Hong Qing and Madame Hong frowned. They were even irritated. Was this a challenge? A challenge between martial masters? Li Hao's teacher had issued a challenge back in the day, but that had been when Hong Yitang was still a martial master.

"I decline." Hong Yitang smiled.

"....." Li Hao was quite dejected and felt like climbing a wall. He really wanted to witness that move for himself. Truly! It didn't matter that he might be injured or even die for it. It really didn't matter.

There were only a few ultimate ends for martial masters—death in the hands of an even stronger powerhouse, old age and sickness, or reigning invincible throughout the land! All martial masters thought of potential death when they took action, so Li Hao really could accept death from sparring. That just meant that his skill was less than his opponent's.

“I am a supernatural now, not a martial master!” Hong Yitang laughed to see the young man's crestfallen expression. “The rules of martial masters are ineffective for me. Even if they still applied, I am no match for you as an initial Solar. What would be the point of such a fight?”

Li Hao breathed out gently and dropped the subject. “Does martial uncle have any half step Dominator disciples? Ones who have comprehended the Earthturner Sword?”

“No.” Hong Yitang shook his head. “My most capable disciple is my daughter, who is a late Sunderer.”

Hong Qing rolled her eyes and looked at her stepmother. Nah, I can't be bothered to say that your most capable disciple isn't me, but your now wife!

“I've joined the Silver Moon Guards,” Li Hao suddenly said. “Director Hou is letting me create a personal team of one hundred with impressive benefits! Dominators will have an annual base salary of twelve mysterious power stones and can sense aura from the ancients once every three months. Late Sunderers can do that twice a year...”

Hong Yitang blinked.

“There's plenty of mysterious power to go around,” Li Hao continued. “Joining the Guards means becoming part of the Night Watcher system, but with fewer restraints. With the Guards, you'd only need to listen to me. As for the ranking officer Golden Spear, I can be the liaison. My people don't need to come in contact with him...”

“In other words, I make the call. You are justice if I say you are!”

Hong Yitang did a double take at the young man.

“I don’t think that the Sword Sect has much use for its Black Armors,” Li Hao chuckled. “I don’t have any and the new troop will need them. I can convince the Guards to purchase them with treasure! When it comes to the Guards, Senior Golden Spear seems like a martial master of noble character and integrity. Someone like him... can be deceived legitimately! Director Hou is not in residence these past couple of days, so the senior can make the decision. He’ll absolutely buy the Black Armors!”

Hong Yitang’s jaw sagged.

“I can take just part of you guys, it doesn’t have to be everyone,” Li Hao pointed out. “If part of the sect joins the Guards, you’ll answer to the army and won’t just be the Sword Sect anymore!”

Hou Xiaochen laughed with great resignation and some doubt. “Aren’t you afraid of Hou Xiaochen?”

Wouldn’t this be ruining Hou Xiaochen’s plans?

Li Hao shook his head. “The director just wants less trouble and may not really desire the Sword Sect’s strength! Perhaps he values only Earthturner Sword and doesn’t think much of the rest!

“It would be a declaration from Earthturner Sword if the Sword Sect and Black Armors join the Guards. Your attitude would be made even clearer if your daughter was one of the members. Director Hou will understand that a powerful swordsman would rather break than bend, that this is the best outcome!”

“I am no strong swordsman,” Hong Yitang chuckled. “I’m not as strong as you.”

Chapter 362: Such Marvelous Luck (III)

Li Hao ignored Hong Yitang’s declaration of weakness and thought for a moment. “The Sword Sect focuses on the sword and I am also a swordsman. If Earthturner Sword no longer wishes to take up

the sword... then send some of your martial masters to join my banner. It might be of some help to them. This arrangement is to our mutual benefit!

“As Silver Moon attracts more attention and Director Hou reveals his strength, that means the margin of survival for the Sword Sect is closing. Some things within Silver Moon cannot be easily disturbed. If they are, Director Hou and some others will be very dissatisfied.” The young man looked at Hong Yitang and said softly, “Does martial uncle think that Director Hou is the greatest of Silver Moon?”

Hong Qing and Madame Hong blinked with astonishment. Was he not? How was someone who’d killed a Nova with a single spear jab not the greatest of the province? He’d be a premier existence even in the central region!

“Is this coincidence or fate?” Hong Yitang couldn’t help but laugh. “We happen to want to draw close to the Night Watchers and have one hundred sets of black armor in our possession. You happen to be a swordsman and come to me at this time—everything is just such fortuitous timing. I don’t seem to have a reason to refuse you.”

“That’s right, it’s destiny!” Li Hao smiled. “Am I right that martial uncle isn’t surprised that Senior Golden Spear is with the Silver Moon Guards?”

“What’s there to be surprised about?” Hong Yitang chuckled. “That’s good, it suits him! Golden Spear... is... how do I put this. Those who utilize spears are upright, honest people! They are as straight as their weapon. They strike without regret and press forward without looking back! Spears are more unswerving than swords!

“While I can’t say that all spear wielders are good people, most of them are! Golden Spear was the first spear of Silver Moon and we all thought that he should’ve joined the army. His current circumstances suit his preferences. He is certainly stronger after joining the Silver Moon Guards. The dao of the spear doesn’t have to be a unique one. So long as one carries themselves with righteousness and integrity, their dao will only grow stronger!”

Such was Hong Yitang’s evaluation of Golden Spear. Li Hao nodded; he wasn’t familiar with Golden Spear, but Hong Yitang must have his basis of understanding to speak thus.

“My Sword Sect doesn’t have many martial masters,” Hong Yitang raised at this point. “Do you want them all, or just Sunderers?”

“I want them all, it’s not hard for Slayers to become Sunderers in this day and age! Late Sunderer isn’t hard either, the difficulty lies with comprehending aura! Those who have caught martial uncle’s eye and been accepted must be good talents. But I will have one limitation for them, which is that they cannot cross over to the supernatural.”

Hong Yitang considered the term and nodded. “Alright, twenty Slayers and ten Sunderers. These are all the martial masters that the Sword Sect possesses at the moment. My Slayers are not initial Slayers, so it shouldn’t be too hard for them to break through to Sunderer.”

Thirty people! Hong Qing and Madame Hong gaped.

“Dad, we... we...” Hong Qing couldn’t help but protest. Had her father agreed, just like this? She and the others had been sold with just a few words? Sold to the Silver Moon Guards and to Li Hao, with no negotiation at all? Selling them to Hou Xiaochen was better than Li Hao!

“This is very good!” Hong Yitang chuckled. “You have a chance of comprehending the aura after you join the Guards. Only then do you have hopes of becoming a Dominator. I can’t bear to let you go, of course, but I have to as a martial master!

“I can’t bear to let you risk your life fighting others or engaging in death duels. I can’t bear to let you go either. But the fledgling has grown and it is time for you to learn how to fly. To keep you by my side my entire life... The times are different now!”

The man sighed with emotion. The times were indeed different—the Earthtuner Sword was no longer Silver Moon’s supreme swordsman!

Li Hao ignored Hong Qing and transmitted to Hong Yitang, “Martial uncle, there seems to be many drawbacks to supernaturals converting to martial masters! It appears to be very troublesome to fully abandon mysterious power, the key point being that there is one violent impact during the process.

Those whose organs aren't strong enough find it hard to endure and will have to break the supernatural locks of their organs at the same time..."

Hong Yitang slightly raised his brow.

"Martial uncle was a half step Dominator many decades ago, so you crossed over as a Sunflare. Solar should not be too difficult for you to attain. Not only do martial masters possess many supernatural locks, but they can also discover these locks. Therefore... martial uncle may have been strengthening your locks and organs all along to prevent backlash! Perhaps your locks are at an incredible peak now.

"Breaking four locks makes one a Solar, another one of the five organs makes a Nova. Martial uncle may have broken all four locks on your limbs, but your attribute doesn't seem that apparent. Are you fire, metal, or earth? I've seen several hints each time martial uncle makes a move, and you seem to be of the earth attribute to the outside world..."

The young man wasn't making sense, but Hong Yitang continuously raised his brow. "Li Hao," he transmitted. "I'm old and don't quite understand what you mean."

"It's fine," Li Hao transmitted with a grin. "But blood pearls really are very helpful when it comes to strengthening the five organs! Martial uncle may not have realized it before, but I suspect that this is how Ying Hongyue walks his path. He strengthens the five organs and their supernatural locks in preparation for returning to martial dao. Blood pearls are truly unique!"

Hong Yitang sank into deep thought.

"Be at ease with your people in my care, martial uncle," Li Hao continued aloud. "I won't hurt them. However, Red Moon powerhouses are tasty treats these days. If martial uncle wants a bite, you better hurry. Someone else might make off with them otherwise!"

Hong Yitang burst out into laughter after flicking a glance at the young man. He raised his tea cup instead of responding to those comments. "Then I'll have to trouble you to look after Hong Qing

and the others! I'll have them report to you soon. As for the one hundred sets of armor, I'll take whatever the Guards can give. It doesn't matter how much it's worth."

Li Hao raised his tea cup as well. "Very well, thank you for your support, martial uncle!"

"You're welcome!" The two tossed back their tea cups like they were drinking alcohol.

With that, Hong Qing was at a complete loss for words. Was that... it? What was her father thinking?? And what was Li Hao thinking??

"Martial uncle is welcome to come find me when you think I am worthy of a fight..." Li Hao rose with a smile. "I now have the fire and earth swords. I will coalesce the metal sword soon and the water sword is within my considerations. I don't have much inspiration for the earth sword yet, but when my five swords are complete, I hope Earthturner Sword freely instructs me with his knowledge!"

The young man opened the door and walked majestically, utilizing the same high speed to instantly vanish from the private room.

Within the room.

Hong Yitang furrowed his brows. The fire and earth swords were complete, so was the eruption of speed today from the metal sword? The water sword... would come from the Nine Forged Force?

Swords of the Five Elements! The Five Styles!

The man understood certain things in this moment. The Five Styles summoned the five spirits. Had Li Hao formed his second sword when he killed Yu Xiao and the others? If the young man could kill a mid Solar with two swords, would he kill a late or even peak Solar with three swords?

What about four or five?

Damn, you think highly of me. You want me to find you when you've comprehended five swords... You want to fight me as a Nova?

As Hong Yitang laughed to himself, his daughter's urgent voice traveled into his ear. "What are you thinking about, dad? How did you agree to just send us to the Silver Moon Guards?"

"It's a good idea!" Hong Yitang's chuckles continued. "The Guards are safer than the sect and you'll have a chance to temper yourself. There are benefits and treasures to be had—killing so many birds with one stone is wonderful!" Seeing his wife look at him with some worry, he reassured, "It's fine, Li Hao is... quite a decent fellow!"

"Yitang, should I go too..."

"You're a supernatural, what are you going for?" Hong Yitang shook his head. "You should hold down the fort at the Sword Sect. I may need to enter closed door cultivation for a bit and think over certain questions. I won't emerge for a few days. Who will run the sect if you're not here?"

"Closed door cultivation?"

"Mmhm." Hong Yitang nodded, the look in his eyes remote as he looked out the window. It opened in a southerly direction... the south!

Making one's way down south would place one at the North Sea. The central region was past the North Sea. Yuan Shuo was possibly in the North Sea or even central region now, wasn't he? Ying Hongyue and the others were all there—Tyrant Blade, Sky Sword...

Silver Moon's people were certainly found all over the world. Her martial masters were extraordinary no matter where they were. What a pity that the name of Earthturner Sword no longer rings throughout the world.

Hong Yitang stood after drinking the last cup of tea. “Let’s leave things here for now. Hongxiu, you stay until Qing’er and them enter the Silver Moon Guards. Bring the other disciples back to headquarters with you. I’m going back first to take care of some small errands and then going into seclusion. I’ll visit Qing’er when I’m out.”

“Dad...”

“That’s settled! I’m off, I have business to take care of!” Hong Yitang quickly rushed off, leaving behind a resigned and aggrieved Hong Qing. Li Hao was the one who’d barged in, but she was somehow part of the Guards after he left. Her father had made an expeditious exit, leaving her with nothing but questions!

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Hong Yitang swiftly drove off in a car. Indeed, he was driving. The car drove very fast as it made its way out of the southern quadrant and headed straight forward!

He turned left and right after leaving White Moon City, veering from the direction of the Sword Sect. Hong Yitang’s car didn’t stop until he reached a large manor. He stood outside the door, finding no one when he peered inside. It seemed to be empty.

Frowning, the man scanned the premises with his senses and spat after a while. “Damn!”

Who knew who he was cursing?

He climbed into the car after a while, still cursing. This time, he drove in the direction of the Sword Sect. He’d come for nothing, they’d left so quickly! So the second generation Blue Moon had run off? His people had seen them here!

What a damned shame! Were blood pearls really that effective? I really don't know how good a Nova level one might be, what a pity! He hadn't paid attention to these treasures before. Now that he did, everyone was looking for Red Moon members. There was no chance for him to locate one.

Hot damn, I was a step too late! If he hadn't been, he could've collected a Nova level blood pearl and witnessed its effects. If it was highly useful... Forget that, it should be since Li Hao almost had three swords after strengthening his organs. It must have very good effects.

Yuan Shuo summoning his five spirits had to do with the blood pearls and Ying Hongyue was fashioning more... If everyone was crafting them and said they were good, then they must be good.

"What a pity that the second generation Blue Moon left so fast!" Although regretful, Hong Yitang put it out of his mind and drove for headquarters. He'd made haste when possible, but had still proven to be a step too late.

Hong Yitang sighed—he could only enter seclusion then. He'd have to be in seclusion until he laid hands on a few blood pearls. Who knew if that'd be too late?

As for the various probing words that little Li Hao had said... He couldn't be bothered with that. I ignored your master's challenges, so why would I entertain yours? I can't be bothered with you even after you finish the five swords.

Chapter 363: Understood (I)

At the same time, in another manor.

"Milord Blue Moon," a Ghostface ventured timidly. "Someone just went to our previous base."

Blue Moon wasn't surprised—he just asked casually, "The Night Watchers?"

"No, it was the leader of the Sword Sect."

“Earthturner Sword?” Blue Moon blinked with surprise, then smiled. “Does he want to join our banner? The Sword Sect is caught between the Night Watchers and us three. Is he finding it too difficult to maintain and looks to seek shelter? What a pity that he is no longer the mighty Earthturner that he once was. Initial Solar is someone powerful here, but no one in the central region.”

Blue Moon shook his head, not interested in Earthturner Sword. He would only consider it if the other showed up with the suits of armor in tow. He also couldn’t be bothered to meet the man. It would be worth it if Earthturner was a Nova or peak Solar, but for the moment... they had to keep a low profile so that Hou Xiaochen wouldn’t discover them.

His mood lifted when he decided there was no need to see Earthturner—his previous bad spirits were swept away. Blue Moon smiled. Following one’s heart was the most natural state of being, alright! He might be even more uncomfortable if he went to meet the man.

Blue Moon thought of nothing else when his thoughts traveled here. It was no big deal that their previous hiding spot had been discovered. They hadn’t particularly concealed their traces over the past couple of days and even wanted to lure Hou Xiaochen over. He gave up the idea only after Hu Qingfeng changed his mind and swiftly withdrew from their previous hideout.

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Li Hao did not return to the Silver Moon Guards after leaving the Sword Sect branch office. Instead, he headed for the Night Watcher headquarters. He mulled over some of Hong Yitang’s words.

Was Earthturner Sword truly crippled?

The young man didn’t think so. Repeated instances of probing the man yielded martial knowledge in abundance, but no other chinks in the wily old fox’s armor. Li Hao couldn’t immediately place his condition either.

If he wanted to conceal his strength, why not just keep quiet on everything and play dumb? Based on his performance in the ruins, the reality of the situation was that Hong Yitang had emerged safe

and sound, if a bit bedraggled. Though he'd been besieged by danger and nearly died a few times, nothing happened in the end.

There are quite a few hidden powerhouses in Silver Moon, but... why? Li Hao sank into deep thought. Why did so many mighty experts in the province choose to conceal themselves? Could it be that there were too many powerhouses in the central region that were stronger than them?

There must be a reason for so many hiding their strength. It wasn't all to play the pig! As a fellow martial master, Li Hao knew full well that continuous concealment and prolonged lack of battles might one day turn one into a real pig, despite a high cultivation level and powerful strength.

How would these veteran experts of Silver Moon's storied past not understand a concept that even he knew? And when it came to rebellion, strength was needed even more there. Who among the nobility of the lands would think well of them if they all hid themselves?

Would the people? Would the supernaturals?

This wasn't the right course of action, even if one only considered a potential rebellion. With so many titans, some of them should've been known throughout the lands a long time ago. Li Hao shook his head as he turned over the conundrum.

Forget it, this has nothing to do with me. A small smile appeared on his face. At least his trip hadn't been in vain. He'd confirmed some of his thoughts and obtained a great deal from the Sword Sect. One hundred sets of black armor and thirty martial masters!

There were only five hundred sets in the entire Silver Moon Guards, which meant that nearly half of the Guards were not provisioned with them. His entire team was outfitted in one fell swoop!

Of course, the Sword Sect was handing them in to the Guards and the Guards wouldn't give them all to him... but Li Hao wouldn't let that possibility come to pass.

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“What are you doing back here?” Manager Yu frowned. This guy had only been gone for a morning. He was back quick. And judging from his bedraggled state, had he fought with someone? Golden Spear?

Possibly.

Golden Spear hadn’t been present yesterday and most likely returned today. Mu Lin wouldn’t be able to harm Li Hao; only Golden Spear possibly could so in all of the Guards.

“Mu Lin wants me to build a one hundred person team in the Guards, but I don’t know anything.” Li Hao scratched his head with resignation. “I’m penniless, strapped for resources, and without a reputation. Even if I do have some fame, it’s tarnished from my master. His enemies are everywhere, how am I supposed to recruit people?”

“.....” Manager Yu could not find a proper response. That was true, it was a very tall task for Li Hao and one that quite tested his skills. But if he succeeded, it would be of enormous help to him. Martial masters could be independent, but if they were so independent that they were without friends or connections, that would make one the next Yuan Shuo with enemies all over the place.

“Then... what do you want from me?” Manager Yu grasped that the young man was here to ask for help. The hint of a smile played on her face. Li Hao had been quite the honest boy when he first arrived, but soon revealed his true colors. He was just as self-assured as his teacher and didn’t think much of anyone. That was also what he thought about Hou Xiaochen.

Logically speaking, both master and disciple owed Hou Xiaochen a life, so Li Hao had joined the Night Watchers to pay back his debt. And sooner or later, Yuan Shuo would have to take action one time on Hou Xiaochen’s behalf. Favors of this kind were the hardest debt to pay off.

“I’m penniless and strapped for resources...” Li Hao pondered over the matter for a bit. “I’d like the manager to give me some special privileges.”

“Speak.”

“First, my promotion has to be secured. I can dangle it in front of people only when I have the title of a high level chief commissioner—no, I mean that people will understand how highly placed I am when I show them my identity. Otherwise, they’ll treat me as a joke if I try to recruit them as a low level commissioner inspector!

“I can’t stab everyone I meet to prove that I’m strong, now can I?” Li Hao sighed. “This is when background and identity are very important.”

“You’re right,” Manager Yu agreed after some thought. “I’ll make a trip to the Inspectorate and provincial government in the afternoon and try to finalize that for you as soon as possible.”

Li Hao was correct in this, a low level commissioner inspector was too humble. As for strength... he wasn’t a supernatural, so how would people know unless he took action? He couldn’t beat up everyone he came in contact with, right?

“Second, I’d like to obtain some sponsors...”

“What?” Manager Yu frowned. Sponsors?”

“I’ve only just got here and am afraid of making trouble for Director Hou if I keep asking him for resources,” Li Hao explained. “A new team will certainly result in greater consumption. Will it cause discontent with the other brothers in the Guards if the director gives me everything I need? But if he doesn’t, I won’t be able to build my team...”

That made sense. Upon further thought, the secretary said, “It’s your first time building a one hundred person team, so some basic requests can still be satisfied...”

“That won’t be enough!” Li Hao answered. “I want some other things, but they aren’t that important. I’d like some honorary low level chief commissioner positions. I want to use them to entice some sponsors—I won’t be giving them out randomly, of course!”

As for the sponsors he obtained, that would naturally all go to him.

Manager Yu frowned slightly. Even honorary positions couldn’t be given out lightly as chief commissioners were an executive position. After some thought, she shook her head. “That won’t do—chief commissioners also need to be approved by the various ministries. How about this, I can give you some commissioner inspector positions. Only an internal report is needed for those!”

Chief commissioner was out of the question. There were many commissioner inspectors, they didn’t matter. Apart from Slayers, almost everyone in the Guards was a commissioner inspector. They were all the low level kind, which made the position worthless. As for whether or not Li Hao could trade the title for some benefits... that was up to him.

Li Hao found the response troublesome and thought for a while. “Alright then!” He finally nodded. “I’d wanted to wave a chief commissioner title in front of Wang Ming. His family has money and they’re part of the military. Maybe they could’ve offered some funds. But if it’s commissioner inspector, he’s already one.”

The young man sighed helplessly. A speechless Manager Yu suppressed the urge to roll her eyes. So you wanted to trick some sponsorships out of Wang Ming? The Wangs do have money, but they need to develop their own people too. How much can they give you? What are you plotting?

Upon thinking of Li Hao’s network... Manager Yu didn’t think that the young man would receive much support either. The key point was that he’d been in that tiny town all along. Only Liu Long possessed some strength in Silver City, yet strength didn’t necessarily mean support.

The young man’s two points weren’t outrageous, but neither were they truly meaningful. Manager Yu smiled to see the frown on Li Hao’s face. It put her in a good mood to see Li Hao fret over this matter.

“Do you have any other requests?” She didn’t mind giving him some real support at this stage.

Seeing that she was in a good mood, Li Hao didn’t hold back and ventured carefully, “Manager, can you give me usage of a treasure that contains sword aura? I know the Guards possess them, but they’re all under Senior Golden Spear’s control. I’ve only just arrived and need to establish some authority. Having a treasure like this will help convince people!

“For example, late Sunderers can sense the aura only once every six months in the Guards. But I’m penniless and strapped for resources, can I wait for half a year? I can entice them only if I draw on these benefits ahead of time. What do you think?”

Manager Yu raised a brow as she listened. “These items are rare even in the ruins, not just any item will do! The kind you want is obviously the ones that are multi-use instead of using them once or twice...

“Treasures that we can comprehend the aura from are labeled dao comprehension weapons. They facilitate comprehension of dao and are exceedingly expensive. There’s no market for them as they’re hard to purchase even with mysterious power stones...”

Li Hao nodded continuously. Manager Yu was in a talkative mood today, which meant that there was room for negotiation!

Indeed, the secretary suddenly smiled. “I can give you one as the director thinks highly of you. It wouldn’t be right not to offer you any support. But, it comes with a request.”

“Please speak frankly!” Li Hao hastily said.

The woman looked at him for a while and smiled... “You must seize the origin weapon in Battle Heaven for the director!”

Li Hao paused and looked quizzically at the secretary.

Chapter 364: Understood (II)

“The eight families are of the same breath and branches,” the manager said calmly. “Battle Heaven is confirmed to be the ancient city of the Wangs among the eight families. Under normal circumstances, it is as difficult as ascending to the heavens if we wish to enter the inner city and take the origin weapon!”

“But someone of the eight families can likely accomplish the task. The caveat is that you’re still alive before you attempt to retrieve the origin weapon.”

Li Hao frowned and said calmly after a long while, “It’s not undoable, but that it’s not a proportional trade-off between payment and gain! I’m developing talents for the Silver Moon Guards, not putting things in my own pocket. Hence, even if you give me a dao comprehension weapon, I’ll be using it on the Guards. But for that, I need to pay an extremely high price and possibly even my life...?”

“It’s not out of the question. However, it’s not worthy of a dao comprehension weapon. If I help Director Hou with the origin weapon, then the debts incurred by me and my master for saving our lives will be annulled! I will still be part of the Silver Moon Guards, but just with the regular relationship of supervisor and subordinate, not as someone who had their life saved. Director Hou also once said that everything comes with a price!

“He doesn’t feel like he saved our lives. He had my master explore thirty ruins for him, but my master didn’t complete the task. Battle Heaven will count as me exploring on behalf of my master...”

“Alright, then your master’s debt will be paid off.” Manager Yu raised a brow. “And yours? Do you wish to use one expedition to pay off two people’s debts?”

She understood the director’s intentions, so if Li Hao said this was to pay off debt... then it was to pay off debt. When it came to martial masters, a favor owed was easy grounds for ordering them around. But Hou Xiaochen further understood that if this favor was the only tie holding the martial master to them, trouble would arise sooner or later. Some people could not be held with just favors alone. That meant the bond would end as soon as they paid off their debt.

“The ruins of Battle Heaven are far from ordinary,” Li Hao said solemnly. “They are also far more dangerous than usual. Even Novas run the risk of dying. Director Hao may know better than me and he may have investigated the ancient city before. He should be well aware of the risks within! Not to mention, the origin weapon of Battle Heaven is remarkable. I think it’s worth both mine and my master’s lives!”

“Are your lives worth so little?” chuckled Manager Yu. “The director thinks that your lives are so much more valuable than this treasure.”

“The director thinks too highly of us!” Li Hao said softly. “Not to mention, the director will be part of the expedition as well. If the director himself seizes the origin weapon, there won’t be any need for me. If he can’t, that means the danger is greater than we thought. So if I’m successful, it should be worth two lives!”

Manager Yu thought for a moment and nodded. “Very well! I agree on behalf of the director and will give you another dao comprehension weapon. But it can’t be used too many times—it will dissipate in roughly ten times if Sunderers draw upon it. It can be used by Summoners only three to five times.”

So it would appear that differences in strength made for different rates of consumption. If Sunderers could only study it ten times... It wouldn’t be an especially fine item.

“Very good!” Li Hao breathed out. This was an additional benefit!

It was not bad as well. The Sword Sect’s people needed to be met with more presents upon their admittance. It was just as well if some of their Sunderers could grasp the aura and become half step Dominators. As for Dominators, it would be an exercise in bolstering their auras. That would depend on their luck.

Comprehending and bolstering the aura was just a process. The question of whether or not one could set foot into Dominator was up to the accumulation and foundation of the individual martial master. Some martial masters could swiftly break through after sensing the aura.

The aura was their permit for passage. If one grasped the permit and still could not set foot into Dominator, that meant they weren't worth much. Times were hardly as they were when in a martial world suppressed by Yuan Shuo's will.

"Then that's it for now, is there anything else?" Manager Yu was in a good mood. You can leave if there's nothing else. She normally sent people on their way after a few words unless they were discussing business. This extended conversation with Li Hao was already an exception.

"One more thing!" Li Hao quickly brought up. "If I have Director Liu Long come here, I wish for the Night Watchers to send a Sunflare in return to Silver City. Can it be Senior Huang Yun? He's a wind supernatural, so he can get away easily if he runs into trouble."

"Hmm?"

Huang Yun? An initial Sunflare... He'd reaped some benefits from the ruins, so was now a mid Sunflare. This veteran Sunflare had remained at this cultivation level for many years.

A mid Sunflare...

If things were as if before, a supernatural of this caliber would never be sent to a minor Silver City. There were thirty-two cities in Silver Moon and Silver City was the smallest of them all. But now there was Liu Long in the city, a Dominator! It was absolutely fine to trade him for Huang Yun.

Manager Yu nodded. "That can be arranged!" It was a small matter for a Sunflare to hold down the fort in Silver City.

Li Hao had seen many Solars by now, but that didn't mean they were truly everywhere. His horizons were just raised an infinite number of times. The Solars he was familiar with were the top echelon of Silver Moon, the powerhouses from the central region. His line of sight had swiftly climbed from a tiny Silver City to the peak of Silver Moon. In reality, supernaturals were still rare in the province and Sunflare remained the height of provincial strength.

“My deepest thanks!” Li Hao grinned at accomplishing his goals. He didn’t want to stay any longer, he had a team to build! The young man wasn’t so inclined before, but since he’d accepted the job, he had to get on it.

There was power in numbers, not to mention his own plans that he had in mind.

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Li Hao set course for Hao Lianchuan’s office.

“Director, can we contact Silver City?”

“You want to talk to Liu Long?” Hao Lianchuan flicked a glance at him.

“Yes.”

“You can, but try not to mention anything classified. Although we have cross-city communicators, they’re easily intercepted...”

Li Hao didn’t ask how that was possible, he wasn’t interested. He wasn’t going to talk about anything classified, anyhow.

After Hao Lianchuan granted permission, he led the young man to an office on the fifth floor that was normally shut. There were people inside, but they rarely came out. There were some massive machines inside that Li Hao could not identify. They seemed to be antiques excavated from somewhere, or they might’ve been crafted in an antique style.

“Contact Mu Sen of Silver City!” Hao Lianchuan ordered and looked at Li Hao. “The Night Watchers of Silver City are newly established and haven’t had time to set up a communication system. Mu Sen has one, though.”

Li Hao nodded, watching the people around him swiftly get to work. Mu Sen’s portly face soon appeared on the big screen. Mu Sen and Mu Lin were very much alike! Mu Lin was even fatter, which cast Mu Sen in a skinnier light. The latter saw Hao Lianchuan as soon as he focused his gaze and beamed, “Director Hao!”

Li Hao looked at the machine instead of saying anything. It consumed mysterious power, making it a supernatural object. It was no ordinary electronic communications device.

“Have Liu Long come here, on the double! Li Hao has business with him!”

Mu Sen immediately ordered Communications to contact Liu Long. The man wouldn’t be too far away since the Night Watchers were next door at the law enforcement building. Liu Long was usually present in the office as well.

He strode into view less than three minutes later, wearing his usual trench coat. Liu Long greeted Hao Lianchuan when he saw the deputy director, then turned to Li Hao.

The young man ignored the others and said baldly, “Chief, I joined the Silver Moon Guards and now lead a hundred person team myself. I don’t have people on my team. If you don’t mind, bring the Demon Hunters here. There’s more opportunity in White Moon.”

Mu Sen was rather surprised by these words. Li Hao was building a team by himself? He was a Dominator? That was fast! Although startled, he found the situation easy to accept after thinking it over. Dominator was normal since Li Hao had been a half step away before. He’d simply gone through a fast rate of improvement.

It was just astonishing that an initial Dominator would be accepted so quickly to the point of building his own team! Meanwhile, Liu Long frowned.

“The Night Watchers will send Senior Huang Yun to take up residence in Silver City instead. I’ll have Wang Ming go as well if we really need it.”

Hao Lianchuan flicked a glance at Li Hao. Well well, you have quite the authority now, don’t you? Are Sunflares people you can order around?

Wang Ming was a true genius among Night Watchers—he’d sensed five supernatural locks. His path was not at an end, he’d simply just broken three locks at the moment. If all went well, he would eventually be a Nova.

Of course, potential was just potential. It was still up to his fortunes and luck as to whether he would actually succeed on his cultivation journey. However, Wang Ming’s transfer wasn’t something that Li Hao could decide—not unless Wang Ming himself wished the move. But was that possible?

Not likely, were Hao Lianchuan’s thoughts.

Liu Long thought for a moment before responding, “Is it everyone, or just me?”

“All martial masters can come and they should all come. As for Sis Yun Yao and the others, chief can ask what they want. But if they come, they can only join the Night Watchers or the Guards support system.

“Clouds surge and winds rise in White Moon City,” Li Hao concluded. “The opportunities may be greater here! You can be at ease about Silver City! Also, there are a lot of old seniors here—Earthturner Sword, Golden Spear, Yu Luocho, Southern Fist, the Heartjab Daughter...

“The martial world is back!” The young man grinned.

“Golden Spear?” Liu Long’s eyes widened. He had been one of the three premier martial masters of Silver Moon, alongside his father! So he was... still alive? Liu Long didn’t use the spear anymore, despite being Silver Spear’s son. However, his father’s reputation continued to deeply impact him. The Liu family spear had once been known throughout the lands!

Liu Long thought rapidly. If Li Hao wanted him to go, the lad must think that the current Silver City was no longer the center of disorder. The stone door ruin could also be set aside for now. Hence, he nodded after some thought. “Alright! I’ll pack up today and be at White Moon in three days. However, Huang Yun must be here within three.”

“No problem.” Li Hao grinned. “Senior Huang Yun can fly and he’s a wind supernatural. He’s very fast, one day is enough.”

Hao Lianchuan wanted to conspicuously roll his eyes! You talk like Huang Yun is one of your subordinates! It should be me saying these words.

Chapter 365: Understood (III)

Liu Long and Li Hao continued to ignore Hao Lianchuan. Liu Long wanted to leave immediately and get to work, but another question came to mind. “Is there anything you need me to bring or do?”

Who knew when he’d be back in Silver City upon this departure?

“Not much.” Li Hao smiled after searching through his thoughts. “But I left too hastily last time and forgot to burn some joss paper for my friend. If I could trouble you to make a trip, chief, and bring him a message for me that next time I visit, I’ll bring him quite a few Red Moon heads!”

Killing intent laced the words, but Li Hao spoke them very calmly and matter-of-factly. Even Mu Sen suppressed the urge to shiver through the screen. The young man seemed to have changed greatly on this trip to White Moon City.

Liu Long blinked before nodding without further word. He vanished from the screen as he left.

Mu Sen wanted to chat, but Li Hao cut him off as soon as he opened his mouth. “Inspector General Mu, Deputy Mu Lin says that he misses you very much and wishes for you to return to White Moon City as soon as possible.”

Mu Sen blinked. He misses me? Bullshit! But Li Hao wouldn't lie... there's no need to.

“I'll go back on my next break.” The man nodded. “Who would've thought that my big brother would suddenly turn so sentimental?”

Li Hao smiled and said nothing else. Hao Lianchuan indicated for someone to hang up. When the line was closed, he looked at Li Hao with curiosity. “Mu Lin would tell you that he misses his younger brother?”

“He wants to beat up Mu Sen!”

Hao Lianchuan found himself at a loss for words. The kid was really turning crooked!

“Do you need my help forming the team?” Now that Hao Lianchuan knew about the team, he was very eager to lend a hand.

Sadly, he wasn't a martial master, so Li Hao shook his head.

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Li Hao didn't linger for too long at the Night Watcher headquarters. He was a very busy person. He had sword dao to comprehend and a new team to prepare for. He wouldn't have returned to headquarters if he didn't have other stuff to do and Liu Long to contact.

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One hour later.

Li Hao was once more at the Guards barracks—he'd come back on a run. It was very tiring, but he couldn't use Director Hou's car whenever he wanted to. There was no choice about it.

Mu Lin sniffed him out as soon as he entered the building and immediately appeared. He looked at the young man up and down and chuckled, "Was that the Flaming Phoenix Spear?"

"Yep."

"It's good that you're back, the boss wants to see you!"

Golden Spear!

Li Hao was embarrassed to have just left the man behind earlier. "I really had matters to attend to earlier and also address my wounds. Senior Golden Spear isn't mad, is he?"

"He won't be," Mu Lin said as they walked. "Our boss is a generous person, just slightly forbidding and old fashioned. The only thing you have to do is follow the rules! Remember to watch your language in front of him, he doesn't like it when people crack jokes."

Li Hao nodded. The two headed for the office area.

"Additionally, he knows about your fights with the centurions. He didn't say anything, but don't go nuts and challenge him. He's very strong!"

"How strong?" Li Hao asked curiously. It was difficult to judge a martial master's strength from visual appraisal. They would only know that the person in question was strong, but it was difficult to determine how strong.

“How strong?” Mu Lin thought for a bit, unsure of how to respond. “He’s just very strong. When we explored a ruin last year, the boss sent a peak Solar flying with one spear thrust. If he’s not on par with a Nova... I think he’s just about!”

“He was strong in the early years, after all. Director Hou supported him a great deal then, so it shouldn’t be out of the question for him to rival an initial Nova now?”

Li Hao narrowed his eyes in thought, that did indeed make Golden Spear quite strong. But... strictly speaking, if the man had set foot into Dominator years ago and benefited from Hou Xiaochen’s support all along... and rivaled a Nova... That might make him the weakest in the trio with Tyrant Blade and Sky Sword.

Tyrant Blade had killed a Solar seven years ago. Sky Sword could kill some Novas in the central region. But considering that Golden Spear had relied on Hou Xiaochen to break Yuan Shuo’s will, Li Hao didn’t think further on it.

The two quickly arrived at a small building. A young man stood ramrod straight in front of it and looked at Li Hao. He seemed to be just thirty years old, if that.

“This is the captain of the boss’ bodyguards, his name’s Wang Qing,” Mu Lin transmitted. “He set foot into Dominator two years ago and is quite strong. He’s a blade user instead of a spear wielder.

“When it comes down to it, he might have a bit of a grudge against you. Your master killed two of the Four Blade Kings in Silver Moon, leaving only Tyrant Blade and Berserk Blade alive. This person is Berserk Blade’s disciple...”

If Berserk Blade is alive, where’s the grudge coming from? Li Hao thought for a bit and felt there was no other source aside from his teacher having beaten up Berserk Blade before. The man survived, which meant a grudge formed.

The young man knew a bit about Berserk Blade. Ever since characters from Silver Moon's martial world began appearing one after another, he'd done some research. Tyrant Blade was the strongest among the Four Blades. Berserk Blade was quite strong as well to survive Yuan Shuo's challenge—he disappeared from public view for many years after that.

Berserk Blade was said to be adept at the Blood Eruption Berserk Blade. Yuan Shuo once mentioned that this was a very ferocious blade method of the ancient civilization. According to what the professor read, the Blood Eruption Berserk Blade was just one out of a series of blade methods. There were even stronger ones such as Emperor Slayer Blade or Divine Annihilator...

Just those names alone were stunning. However, they all seemed lost to the passage of time. Berserk Blade was known through Silver Moon, but he used only the Blood Eruption Berserk Blade.

The two carried on a transmitted conversation as the evenly-proportioned Wang Qing noted at Mu Lin. The man's right arm was slightly thicker than his left arm; he turned to Li Hao and said calmly in a neutral tone, "Centurion Li, we should spar when you have a free moment."

Li Hao looked at him and nodded. He didn't say anything in refusal. Berserk Blade's disciple! He may not be weak, but could he be stronger than Mu Lin?

"Boss is upstairs, please head up!" Wang Qing stepped aside to let the two through.

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Mu Lin transmitted as he took the stairs, "That kid is very strong and knows the core essence of the Blood Eruption Berserk Blade. He's comprehended blade intent."

"Mmhmm, is his master still alive?"

“He is,” Mu Lin responded silently. “Berserk Blade has always been alive, just not in Silver Moon these days. He’s only just returned a few years ago and now works for the army. I haven’t inquired about specifics, but I hear that Commander Yu values him highly.”

He’s joined the Silver Moon Division? Li Hao’s eyes darted around. Many of these veteran martial masters had chosen to join various institutions. Golden Spear was in the Guards, Berserk Blade to the Silver Moon Division, and Southern Fist joined the royal family... They’d all received innumerable benefits, hadn’t they?

“Why did Wang Qing come to the Guards then?”

His master was in the Silver Moon Division, why wasn’t he there?

“Wang Qing’s blade intent is different from his master’s, it’s more similar to our boss’ spear intent. The spear flashes out like fire and is ferocious without compare! Although Berserk Blade’s weapon is also fierce, it lacks a bit of force compared to our boss’ spear intent. Thus, Wang Qing himself chose to come here because of our boss.”

Li Hao understood. The two reached the second floor as they conversed. It was a massive place that was entirely Golden Spear’s. A receiving room greeted them at the head of the stairs. Golden Spear was in an office further inside. He had no secretary—Wang Qing functioned as his secretary.

“Come in!” came Golden Spear’s voice before Mu Lin announced themselves.

Mu Lin walked in with Li Hao. Golden Spear sat both upright in his chair and displayed a stiff smile when he saw his visitors.

“Sit!” Mu Lin sat down without hesitation. Li Hao followed his head.

Golden Spear stood up and scanned Li Hao’s face. “Yuan Shuo’s disciple, I have seen some of your strength. You are a credit to your master.”

“Thank you for your high praise, senior!”

“You don’t need to call me senior. We are in the army, so call me sir!”

“Yes, sir!” Li Hao was very biddable. He raised his head to meet Golden Spear’s appraisal as he wasn’t afraid of the veteran martial master. The look in his eyes was very sharp and his body extremely tall and strong. He looked to be in his fifties and had a boxy face. Stately dignity emanated from his face.

Silver Moon citizens tended to be on the towering side as the province was situated in the north. People in the north were taller than those in the south.

Golden Spear looked back at the young man staring at him. He simply gazed silently without flaring his aura. Upon seeing that prolonged consideration brought no fear into Li Hao’s eyes, a small smile appeared on the man’s face.

“You’ve got courage! But there are certain rules that must be followed after one joins the army. As a martial master, I know very well that martial masters do not like being constrained!

“But since you’ve decided to join, then certain compromises need to be made! Li Hao, I will not oversee you in normal times, but you must listen to orders when we conduct missions. You may not make unilateral decisions!

“This is one rule, the second is that you are permitted to build your own team, but you must be responsible for them to the last! Losses are permitted, but you are unfit for your position when the losses grow too big. You are to resign if you lose more than thirty percent of your people!

“Martial masters like adventure, but some like to use other people in their adventures. For all of their pros, martial masters have a severe con of being too alone and selfish! This is a universally acknowledged flaw. Other than one’s own family and discipline, everyone else’s life is up to fate! Such are the rules of the martial world, but you must recall that this is the army!”

Golden Spear pointed at Mu Lin. “This guy likes to go at things alone too! He was once a centurion, but quickly lost nearly half of his men. Thus, he was removed from his position. Although he’s a deputy now, that’s just a nominal title. He doesn’t lead any troops as he doesn’t have the right to!”

Mu Lin looked on dejectedly. He swiftly defended himself when he saw Li Hao look at him. “That’s not it! I was just unlucky that time and ran into huge danger. I was as responsible as I could! Forget it... I won’t explain myself. The army doesn’t give us chances to explain ourselves.”

He was morose as although the position of deputy was high, it didn’t have the true authority that the centurions wielded. He wanted to lead troops too... but Golden Spear wouldn’t give him the chance.

Chapter 366: Understood (IV)

“No excuses.” Golden Spear ignored Mu Lin and looked at Li Hao. “Li Hao, here is where you might learn what thinking for the greater good and responsibility are! The Guards will slowly teach you those concepts!

“As martial masters, we do not have to think of the greater good or keep responsibility in mind! But as the Silver Moon Guards that the province has heavily invested in, you must!”

Li Hao nodded, but didn’t feel one way or another about what the ranking officer was saying. Golden Spear understood his mentality quite well, most martial masters were of the same mind when they first entered the Guards. Sooner or later, they would all learn!

Of course, people might die in the process, but death was inevitable for a martial master. It was just the matter of a worthwhile death or not.

When Hou Xiaochen established the Silver Moon Guards, he’d recruited large sums of martial masters. Some of the martial masters from the martial world, used to their own style and rules, had eventually changed after becoming part of the army.

“Yu Luochoa just sent me a message telling me to give you a dao comprehension weapon. I can give that to you, but you must remember that every treasure in the Guards costs human lives!

“Everything you take now will require equal payment in the future!”

Li Hao was reminded of Liu Long. The chief had said similar things when he first gave Li Hao mysterious power. Some things had come about through human lives. It would demonstrate a lack of conscience to use them matter-of-factly and complain that there was too little of them.

Talents were nurtured and supported in hopes that one day, they would contribute back to the organization that'd raised them. If paying it forward was not forthcoming, it was only a matter of time before the team collapsed.

“Understood!” Li Hao nodded.

“Good!” Golden Spear abruptly changed the topic. “You’ll understand this later. Your master seems to be in the three northern provinces. It’s been a long time since he’s left Silver Moon. Ying Hongyue has sealed off all possible avenues of travel for him. He built Red Moon over the years to prevent Yuan Shuo from leaving the province and left him no chance whatsoever. Do you know why?”

“He is afraid of my master?” Li Hao offered after some thought.

“Correct!” Golden Spear affirmed solemnly. “Don’t think of Yuan Shuo as impotent after you’ve met some powerhouses. Your master may have been locked away in Silver Moon for twenty years, but there have been eyes on him all this time. They haven’t let him out of Silver Moon out of concern that he’ll soar into the open skies and leap over the dragon’s gate!

“Ying Hongyue doesn’t care if people like us leave the province. The only one he’s wary of is your master!

“Therefore, Ying Hongyue is the one who wants Yuan Shuo’s head the most now that he’s left Silver Moon. The leader of Red Moon knows all too well what will result if your master is granted sufficient time and opportunity!”

Li Hao looked at Golden Spear, not understanding what he meant.

“According to what I know, the Orange and Yellow Moons have recently disappeared among the Seven Moons. They’ve probably gone to kill your master!” Golden Spear said frankly. “The second and third strongest of Red Moon have gone for your master! They have stunning battle accomplishments in the central region and have killed Novas!

“Orange Moon was once a Silver Moon martial master. She was known far and wide, you might know her through the moniker Black Spider!”

“The Black Widow?” Li Hao raised a brow.

“Yes, but she prefers to call herself Black Spider.”

“I see!” Li Hao said after thinking for a bit.

What do you see?

Golden Spear was puzzled.

Li Hao did indeed see. The third generation Violet Moon is Orange Moon’s daughter, so I need to capture Violet Moon and use her to threaten Orange Moon. How would I not understand this? If Orange Moon dares do anything, I’ll grab Violet Moon and cut off her arm one day, then her leg another...

Would Orange Moon dare do anything then?

If these powerhouses had the temerity to visit Silver Moon, Li Hao would ask the hidden powerhouses to take them out. As for whether or not they would take action, he had his ways. Therefore, he did see.

Capture Violet Moon to threaten Orange Moon. That was what Golden Spear meant, correct?

The ranking officer was rather skeptical—do you really understand? He meant to tell Li Hao the importance of constant vigilance, that slacking off was not permitted just because he was very strong now. Your master is caught in the middle of danger. Someone like him may die at any time and the same goes for you. Therefore, you need to cultivate even harder! If there comes a day in which your master is killed, you'll need that bit of strength to take revenge.

Mmhmm, that was what he meant.

Li Hao didn't say anything. So what if Black Widow was very strong and had killed Novas? She may be listed in the Record of Thirty-Six Heroes, but he didn't fear these people. His teacher once mentioned Black Widow in passing, to say nothing of anything else. He'd told Li Hao not to mind these people who relied on their looks and seduction to trick victims. They were no kind of powerhouse.

Black Widow had earned her moniker due to her eight dead husbands. She was the only one who knew how they died and certainly cared about this daughter of hers. She was the Black Widow, not the Black Mother. Li Hao didn't know how many children she had, but since Violet Moon had been arranged to be one of the Seven Moons, Orange Moon plainly cared a lot about her.

As for whether or not Manager Yu would be involved... Li Hao didn't care. If you kill my master, I kill your daughter. And if Manager Yu interferes, I'll tolerate her for a bit and kill her as well after some time passes...

He quickly shoved this thought down. He couldn't think that way. The secretary was quite nice at the moment.

The conversation was over; a confused Golden Spear watched them go. This fellow had demonstrated such intense killing intent for a second. What had he understood?

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Li Hao returned to his accommodations. He had no duties at hand since his team was yet to come together. According to the thoughts of Golden Spear and the others, it would be quite a feat if Li Hao could gather his team by the end of the year.

Therefore, the young man had a lot of time. It was only mid September, leaving him more than three months until the end of the year.

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Inside the new lodgings.

After Li Hao's fight with the Flaming Phoenix Spear, the few pieces of furniture that were damaged were already switched out. The building itself was fine. Structures made by supernaturals were very sturdy.

Li Hao walked up to the balcony on the third floor. He sat down cross-legged, finally having a moment to think over his reflections of the day. The extremity of speed!

He brought out the Flaming Phoenix Spear again—it no longer threw off fiery light. It was back to its dim self. Perhaps the phoenix soul was also digesting what it'd gained from the mysterious power stone.

Li Hao knew what he knew and understood what he grasped, but he had not grasped a new aura. Hong Yitang had said that once he knew the feeling, he should practice. If a hundred times didn't do

it, then a thousand times. If not, then ten thousand times until Li Hao could deploy the aura. He already knew it, had the target and the direction. All he needed was the process.

The extremity aura could be found in speed and eruption.

After some thought, Li Hao rose to his feet. Practical application was best for martial masters. Sitting cross-legged took place only when absorbing energy. In other instances, it was best for the weapon to be close at hand.

He began practicing the sword!

In order to minimize the disturbance, Li Hao practiced the Ghost Shadow Sword. He waved Stellaris around again and again, seeking only the ultimate peak of speed.

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Off in the distance.

Golden Spear could barely make out the figure on the balcony of the small building. Other than Wang Qing, there was also a young woman next to him. She appeared to be the same age as Li Hao.

Wang Qing was watching the figure as well. He broke the silence after a while, "Milord, why doesn't Old Demon Yuan's disciple walk the path of the Five Styles and instead pursue sword dao?"

"The Five Styles..." Golden Spear suddenly recalled what Li Hao had said before. "There is only the question of appropriateness in martial dao, there is no fixed path to pursue. Perhaps he is more suited for sword dao. Additionally, the Five Styles aren't limited to fist or palm either..."

Wang Qing was not satisfied by this answer. The young woman on the other side of their superior said softly, “The Five Styles is just a foundation. They can be called the Five Styles Sword or Five Styles Spear. The blade, spear, sword, halberd, fist, palm, leg, and foot are all external forms. Whether martial dao or auras, the core is the same. whether or not a weapon is involved does not matter.”

“Well said!” Golden Spear nodded in approval, a small smile crossing his face. “In the path of martial dao, some are suited to teach, some are not suited. I’m actually not that suited. Youyun is right, Yuan Shuo is more adept at teaching than I am and can adapt his tutelage to the need. Since Li Hao is willing to walk the path of the sword, then so he does...”

Wang Qing said no more and asked no further questions. Golden Spear was very strong, but sometimes he felt that his superior... wasn’t very talented at explanations or descriptions of certain inspiration. He had incredible potential, but perhaps he was more suited for individual cultivation.

He cast a look at the young woman with them. Golden Spear’s disciple must have marvelous potential and powers of comprehension. Otherwise, she might be crippled throughout the course of learning from Golden Spear.

“Master, what cultivation level is he?” asked the young woman.

Golden Spear searched for the proper words. “Based on strength, he should be mid Defier of Ten Thousand.”

Defier of Ten Thousand!

Prior to Yuan Shuo introducing the concept of Summoner of Spirit, certain martial masters had reached beyond Dominator of Thousands with their strength. Unbeknownst to Yuan Shuo, the martial world of the central region had coined a term for the next cultivation level—Defier of Ten Thousands.

This cultivation level greater than Dominator had many possibilities to it. There were many paths and choices available to martial masters, so it was difficult to describe each level of strength. Hence, they could only tie the partitions to corresponding level of supernatural ability.

Defier of Ten Thousand mapped to the Solar level. Dominators could fight Sunflares, whereas Defiers could battle Solars. One against ten thousand.

Among the Guards, Mu Lin belonged to this level. Strictly speaking, Golden Spear also belonged to this level. The peak of this level could match Novas. As Berserk Blade's disciple, Wang Qing was slightly below them, but beginning to grasp this level as well.

Chapter 367: Gathering (I)

"Li Hao hasn't trained for that long, but he's already so strong!" exclaimed the young woman. "Is big brother Wang not a match for him?"

Obviously not. Wang Qing knew that, Golden Spear knew that. Therefore, Golden Spear didn't sugarcoat it.

"No!" The man shook his head. "But if it's just sparring, it'll be like the fights with the other centurions. He's stronger than Wang Qing, so there won't be a case of accidentally using too much force. There are great benefits to be had in sparring."

"I don't want to fight him because of any grudge," Wang Qing murmured. "My master's not dead, so there's no hatred to speak of. I just want to see how strong the Five Styles discipline is. He's young, so I really want to broaden my horizons!"

Golden Spear nodded.

"Master, then I..." the young woman was tempted.

"You shouldn't go," Golden Spear reminded. "You'd have to be careful of dying to him!"

“Hmm?” exclaimed the young woman.

“You are a little stronger than Wang Qing,” Golden Spear exclaimed. “And have barely crossed the threshold to Defier. Your will poses a threat to him. The way of the spear is one of violence and slaughter. His killing intent is very strong. Li Hao may be able to pull his blows with Wang Qing, but he might not be able to do so with you.”

The young woman was on par with a Solar, and she was very young!

Off to the side, Wang Qing wasn’t surprised at all. This was to be expected as Kong Youyun not only had a powerful teacher, but also a noteworthy family. Her father was Inspector General Kong Jie of the Inspectorate. Kong Jie had been a martial expert back in the day, or he wouldn’t sit so firmly in the position of inspector general.

But after he ascended to the supernatural domain, he no longer passed on martial dao. Hence, he sent his daughter to learn from Golden Spear. It further emphasized that the Night Watchers and Inspectorate were two sides of the same coin. The Inspectorate had plainly known about the Guards long ago and provided significant help.

Kong Youyun didn’t say anything further. Since her teacher had spoken, there must be a certain rationale to his thinking.

“Master, what level is the Five Styles King now?” she asked instead. “He defeated the late Solar Qimei Staff... Is he possibly late or peak Defier?”

“Him?” Golden Spear gave it some thought. “He’s at least peak Defier, he wouldn’t have been able to kill Qimei Staff otherwise! Although Qimei Staff was only a late Solar, his martial will was never extinguished! His battle strength was exceedingly strong, which puts Yuan Shuo at peak Defier at the very least!”

“He’s improved so quickly!” Kong Youyun sighed. “He just broke through to Dominator and reached another level in the blink of an eye. No wonder he was the greatest demon back in those times!”

Golden Spear remained quiet, Yuan Shuo’s form appearing in his mind’s eye. This was a brazen, unbridled, and utterly cocky person. Yuan Shuo had caught his spear with bare hands in their fight. If it hadn’t been for how durable the spear was, he would’ve snapped it in two.

After losing to Yuan Shuo, Golden Spear fell from the cusp of breaking through to Dominator. He never reached it again. Every time he stood poised on the threshold of Dominator, he was assailed by an incredibly uncomfortable feeling to the point where he couldn’t breathe. It wasn’t until Hou Xiaochen stabbed his internal demon to death did he manage the final step.

Golden Spear himself also understood that this meant it was very hard for him to ever surpass Yuan Shuo. So long as Yuan Shuo’s path stretched onward, he would most likely be the victor if the two met again!

An internal demon was difficult to vanquish. Beside him, Kong Youyun noticed something and said softly, “Master, I will challenge the Five Styles King when I perfect my path of martial dao!”

“Forget it, the grudges of the past generation have nothing to do with you.” Golden Spear shook his head. A challenge wasn’t a spar, it was a very serious matter. Yuan Shuo would kill her in such a fight.

When Qimei Staff challenged Yuan Shuo, the latter hadn’t necessarily wanted to kill his opponent. But neither combatant cared about that when the interest seized them. In some people’s eyes, it was a mark of respect to kill their opponent.

Golden Spear looked at Li Hao on the balcony. The young man clumsily slashed forward again and again. Golden Spear didn’t find anything wrong with this sight; this was how the spear should be practiced. Perseverance prevailed, so he quite admired this kind of attitude.

But... that also meant he wasn't out recruiting people.

"Master, then... do we still go to the ruins?" asked Kong Youyun. "We didn't gain too much from our last trip. Although they aren't as dangerous as Battle Heaven, I feel that we'll still collect a lot if we fully explore it. Why don't we take Second Brother Mu and Li Hao with us? That might bring us other rewards."

Golden Spear sank into deep thought. He'd been exploring a particular set of ruins over the past couple of days. Although they weren't intact like Battle Heaven after millions of years, there was still notable danger within them. Danger meant opportunity.

He'd emerged empty-handed after three attempts. This time, he was of a mind to bring some Guard experts with him.

"Isn't Li Hao the disciple of the Five Styles King?" Kong Youyun pointed out. "The Five Styles King is most adept at exploring ruins..."

That tempted Golden Spear. He nodded after some thought. "Mm, notify him that he will go with me after five... no, ten days. We'll be in charge of exploring virgin land. The Guards can follow if we are successful!"

This was a Silver Moon Guard tradition. The strongest took the first crack and thus reaped the greatest harvest. The weak were allowed into the ruins after the biggest dangers were defused. There would still be danger left, but it was much reduced.

Granted, accidents were still possible. There'd been instances of severe casualties when danger was overlooked by the first team. It couldn't only be veterans filling the ranks of the Silver Moon Guards after so many years. Many of the veterans were long dead. The modern day Guards were the second or third generation of troops.

.....

Immersed in training, Li Hao was unaware that he would so quickly be assigned a mission. He was unable to extract himself from the joys of repetitive movement. The figure on the balcony hacked from morning to night. Thanks to sword energy, he wasn't concerned about accumulating injuries from overexerting himself. On the other hand, Golden Spear and Mu Lin were worried about the eventuality since the young man could be a bit too feverish at times. He would easily hurt himself if he continued in this vein.

However, their relationship with him wasn't that close, so no one stepped forward to speak some sense.

.....

The second day.

Li Hao disappeared.

He didn't leave the Silver Moon Guards. The young man continued his game of chase with Flaming Phoenix Spear in the jungle next to his apartment.

One human and one spear darted swiftly through the trees. It was just mysterious power stones—Li Hao was quite willing to spend when he needed to. Manager Yu was only lending the weapon to him for three days. How wasteful would it be if he didn't utilize it to its fullest extent?

.....

Li Hao was blind and deaf to the affairs of the outside world as he trained. A group of newcomers arrived at the complex on this day. Manager Yu was in the lead, as usual, but a dazed look was found in her eyes.

Hong Yitang's wife had sought out the Night Watchers that morning with this group of people. She was looking for Li Hao. Manager Yu learned of the situation after a brief conversation. Sponsors...

Li Hao really had gotten himself a sponsor, and not an ordinary one! The Sword Sect was giving him most of their martial disciples. This was the fullest display of support that they could give. While their strongest was late Sunderer, the Sword Sect's martial masters solidly cultivated their way to this level of achievement. They rarely employed mysterious power, so their foundations were very sound. Although Hong Yitang was no longer a martial master, he gave his disciples a thorough grounding and training process. He grasped a very deep understanding of martial dao.

These Sword Sect disciples might soon enter a period of fast development once they join the Silver Moon Guards. Manager Yu also knew that the director quite had his eye on the Sword Sect.

According to Hou Xiaochen, Silver Moon's martial masters had declined with the rise of the supernatural. There were very few systems within the province that continued to focus on raising martial masters and helping them learn and grow. Some sects touted themselves with martial heritage when, in reality, they utilized supernatural methods. They swiftly strengthened themselves with mysterious power with the goal of ascending to the supernatural once they reached peak Slayer.

Some with greater ambition aimed for Sunderer so they could cross over as a Sunflare. There were very few who remained on the straight and narrow of martial dao.

These people didn't care about passing on martial tutelage. There were supernatural techniques to be had once the crossover was made, so why waste time on learning to fling hands and feet around? Only a secret art that could take one to Sunderer was needed.

Such was the problem that existed with many martial masters of modern times.

Never could Manager Yu fathom that the faction the director had his eye on for the longest time would throw their lot in with Li Hao! Although Li Hao was also a Night Watcher, it didn't make sense to the secretary. Was Li Hao more dependable than the director? Hou Xiaochen would surely accept them if Hong Yitang went to him; there wouldn't need to be someone else between them.

.....

In front of the Silver Moon Guards building.

Golden Spear himself stood in welcome. He was startled to learn that these people came from the Sword Sect. Earthturner Sword's disciples. He inclined his head after sweeping them with a glance, surprised by their bearing and mood that plainly spoke of excellent condition. They lacked the lost dejectedness found in most martial masters of the day. Some martial masters were in exceedingly poor condition due to continued failure to ascend to the supernatural!

They were so obsessed with crossing over that they'd long lost the self-assured carefree poise that should be found in a martial master.

Earthturner Sword Hong Yitang had been quite famous back in his day. He'd become a laughing stock after avoiding several of Yuan Shuo's challenges. Ridicule became attached to his name, one that was just as striking as the mighty Sky Sword of the Seven Swords. It wasn't for no reason that people spoke of skies churning and earth turning when the swords were unsheathed!

Golden Spear swept a glance over Hongxiu, knowing some of the inside story. Hongxiu had been Hong Yitang's eldest disciple. ...forget it, he couldn't be bothered saying anything since both of them had become supernaturals. Golden Spear didn't even have the desire to tease them. He didn't consider Hongxiu for too long, but quickly turned to Hong Qing with some curiosity.

She had very solid foundations! All of the Sword Sect martial masters did, but Hong Qing was Hong Yitang's daughter. Being as mighty as he was, Golden Spear easily determined Hong Qing's strength with a quick glance. Hong Yitang's an interesting one! The other disciples more or less showed signs of mysterious power, even with reduced usage compared to other martial masters. The traces were obvious when mysterious power was employed, Li Hao was no exception either!

But Hong Qing was a bonafide late Sunderer, one who'd never supplemented with mysterious power. It was extremely rare to train to late Sunderer at her age without resorting to mysterious power!

Granted, there was also the possibility that she'd employed mysterious power stones instead. Mysterious power stones barely left traces of energy on the user.

Chapter 368: Gathering (II)

"Luo..." Golden Spear began and was instantly served an extremely aloof expression from Manager Yu. He was at a loss for words. It was just a habit, one that still existed after so many years. This exchange had taken place countless times, but he was still used to calling her that.

"Manager Yu!" Golden Spear forced out the awkward title. "This..."

"Swordmaster Hong has reached an agreement with Li Hao. These Sword Sect disciples will be joining Li Hao's team. Additionally, Swordmaster Hong is gifting one hundred sets of black armor to outfit the team..."

The martial masters watching the show winded their eyes with surprise. Hot damn! That generous?? Li Hao was being made a centurion right after his arrival, and here he was being delivered people and ancient armor without even completing his team yet?

"What's with Li Hao?"

"Is he becoming Earthturner Sword's son-in-law?"

"I hear that's Earthturner's daughter up front. Li Hao's just come to the Guards and lacks people. Here they are, giving him people and money. Damn if that isn't sweet..."

"Think about how hard we had it when we first came!"

"....." A low muttering started in the crowd. Some were envious, others emotional.

The centurions were green-eyed with envy. They'd all had to build their own teams and knew how difficult the process was. They'd expended large amounts of time, effort, resources... sometimes even their senior brothers, junior brothers, martial uncles and nephews... Some sects were recruited as a whole. The Mountain Ax discipline, for example, had become the Mountain Openers.

Therefore, how could they not be jealous of Li Hao?

And just that wasn't it. The Guards didn't have many suits of armor. There were approximately one hundred to share between all of the teams. It was nice to be allotted a dozen sets per team. The Night Watchers counted five hundred total sets after the last expedition to Battle Heaven, half of which went to the Guards. But even so, the centurions tried their utmost to claim more and brought all of their ideas to bear for that pursuit. Despite their best efforts, they were unable to fully outfit their teams. They could only let the weaker members wear the armor so that the team's average strength clustered closer together.

But when it came to Li Hao? He had a full complement of armor before he had all of his people! The Guards knew how impressive the armor was. The inherent defensive capabilities were astounding, to say nothing of anything else. Sunflares were hard to defeat armor-clad Sunderers, making the troop nearly invincible!

The crowd was envious, jealous, and resentful! Even Mu Lin found himself tongue-tied. Damn, what could he say about this? Was the kid utilizing certain assets to make a woman support him?

Earthturner Sword had a deep-running grudge with Yuan Shuo. The latter had insisted on issuing challenges three times, resulting in significant impact to Earthturner's reputation when they were declined. If he'd been someone who counted a good name among his valued possessions, this would've been a death feud!

Yet here he was, sending over so many of his people and treasures.... Did he mean to claim Li Hao as his son-in-law?

In front of the crowd.

Golden Spear was also surprised. The sect was sending suits of armor in addition to martial masters? But he found composure from years of experience and simply said, “Li Hao seems to be in a training session. Come on in, don’t stand at the door. I’ll have someone fetch him. Is Hong Yitang with you?”

“My husband is in closed door cultivation,” Madame Hong said softly. “His energy has been agitated lately and he’s yet to fully recover from the wounds he suffered in Battle Heaven. He planned on meeting Senior Golden Spear with me, but a pity...”

“That’s just as fine.” Golden Spear waved her off. “As for being hailed senior... I wouldn’t dare. I had just entered the martial world when Earthturner Sword made his name. In terms of age, I am only two or three years older than him...”

Is that so? You seem pretty old. Hongxiu kept these thoughts to herself.

Hong Qiu looked at Golden Spear with curiosity and worship. This was the head of the Three Spears, a great personage on par with Sky Sword and more famous than her father! She found it quite regrettable that her father no longer participated in the martial world after becoming a supernatural. She loved hearing stories about that world. Her father didn’t like to speak of them, but her stepmother liked telling her about them. Theirs was a good relationship.

With Hong Yitang’s wife in the lead of the delegation, Golden Spear showed them abundant face. Manager Yu was present as well—the three quickly entered the hall to converse. Hongxiu was a generation lower than them, but they were now all peers and could chat for a while.

The others did not enjoy similar privileges. Hong Qing and the others had to wait outside the building until Li Hao arrived. Mu Lin, Kong Youyun, and a few others kept them company. They were also quite curious about the Sword Sect.

When she saw that her master was entertaining Yu Luocha and Earthturner’s wife, Kong Youyun introduced herself. “I’m Kong Youyun, Golden Spear’s disciple. Are you Senior Earthturner’s daughter?”

“Greetings to senior sister!” Hong Qing glanced and nodded at Kong Youyun.

“Hello.” The two chatted while Mu Lin listened. He struck up a conversation with another Sword Sect late Sunderer after a while.

As the group buzzed with discussion, a figure flashed in from the distance and hovered over the ground. Sweat evaporated off Li Hao; his face was flushed. When he caught his breath, he strode over to the group. Sword aura gathered around him before he reached them, soaring into the air with complete disregard of Kong Youyun and Mu Lin!

As he padded over, the Sword Sect disciples that were looking around in all directions suddenly felt a surge of pressure rear over them, bearing down with the pressure of Mount Tai! Kong Youyun stopped talking. Li Hao ignored her—he didn’t recognize her, but he didn’t mind. Judging from her aura, she might be Golden Spear’s disciple and was decently strong.

But that was all! His focus was on the Sword Sect disciples. Li Hao flared his aura only because he wanted to put their quality to the test. They wouldn’t be of much use if their caliber was too poor.

He walked forward step by step. When the young man was thirty meters out from the group, half of the twenty Slayers were forced to back out of range due to difficulties with breathing.

Li Hao pressed forward. Another few Slayers retreated when he was twenty-five meters away. When he was twenty meters away, the remaining three peak Slayers also backed away. That left the ten Sunderers, Kong Youyun, Mu Lin, and a few others.

Li Hao’s sword aura loomed like Mount Tai bearing down on the assembly; he continued walking. The ten Sunderers were swaying with effort now, shocked expressions on their faces. How was the young man so strong?!

It was just an aura—it wasn’t like they’d never seen an aura before. But they sensed an overwhelming pressure and keenness from this one. As disciples of the Sword Sect, they trained sword methods. However, their swords seemed incredibly weak in front of Li Hao!

At their head, Hong Qing set her jaw and looked at Li Hao. She seemed to see her father in this moment. Indeed, the Earthturner Sword was one that could churn the skies and turn the earth. It naturally contained some earth aura. Li Hao was utilizing the earth sword aura at the moment.

The Sword of Mount Tai!

Several Sunderers broke out of the circle when Li Hao was fifteen meters away, all of them stunned and reluctant to accept their limits. More fled for safety when Li Hao reached ten meters. There was blood in some mouths as well as plenty of unwillingness.

Only Hong Qing was left at five meters. There was more than one late Sunderer in the Sword Sect delegation, but she was the only one who could remain standing within the range of Li Hao's aura. She grit her teeth and was prepared to struggle to the bitter end, but Li Hao suddenly retracted his sword aura.

Hong Qing stumbled and nearly fell over. Kong Youyun reached out to steady her and looked at Li Hao with an odd look. "Why did you stop, Centurion Li?" she asked softly.

"I'm just testing them, not killing people," he explained with a surprised look. "Since I've plumbed the depths of their capabilities, there is no need for further probing." He raised a cupped fist salute. "Li Hao!"

Kong Youyun wasn't used to cupped fists, she inclined her head. "Kong Youyun, disciple of Golden Spear."

"Well met!" Li Hao responded with a pleasantry and turned his attention to Hong Qing. "You've got a fantastically solid foundation. All of you, even the Slayers, have well-founded bases! You guys are stronger than I was before—I had to absorb large amounts of mysterious power to progress to Slayer. When my teacher brought his aura to bear against Director Liu Long's, the resulting clash was less forceful than mine. However, I couldn't move even from far away."

Some happiness crossed the faces of the Sword Sect disciples. It was a cause for celebration to be praised by a strong martial master. Much of their earlier dejection was swept away.

Hong Qing was likewise happy for a moment, then returned to her gloom. She'd seen Li Hao just a while ago—not yesterday, but when he fought Sun Moxian. Although he was strong then, she felt that she could've fought him too. She didn't measure up to him, but she could fight him. But now, just his aura alone nearly swept her off her feet. The gap between them was too great!

"How... how did you suddenly get this strong?" she couldn't help but ask.

"The Five Styles is formidable and I took a lot of blood pearls," Li Hao responded upon some thought. "I enhanced my organs to an incredible degree and also perceived the aura, so I became stronger! Your foundations are solid, so you'll swiftly step into Dominator with unstoppable momentum as soon as you grasp the aura. You'll enter a stage of rapid growth! Although none of you have comprehended the sword aura yet, martial uncle Hong has given you wonderful foundations. You'll improve quickly again once you sense sword aura!"

"But I've yet to grasp it even now..." Hong Qing responded with regret.

"That's because you haven't experienced dangerous enough situations yet!"

"Eh?"

"Battle Heaven was a great opportunity!" Li Hao sighed. "But your father kept you by his side, preventing you from striking out on your own. That was such a pity! Your foundations are good, but you lack sufficient killing nature. Not just you, but everyone here. A killing nature is very important for sword cultivators!"

Being a sword expert now, the young man spoke of certain reflections. "Whether it is the spear or blade, all of them draw upon the killing nature. Martial masters live for slaughter and violence. Simple training will not give rise to the aura!"

Hong Qing sank into thought, whereas Kong Youyun countered, “Centurion Li, pure slaughter and violence may not be the true meaning of martial dao! If killing is the only path, then a hundred flowers wouldn’t bloom in unison for martial dao. For a defensive martial master like Second Brother Mu, does he only have violence in mind when he cultivates?”

“That’s right, he does!” Li Hao nodded.

“.....”

Chapter 369: Gathering (III)

With that, Li Hao said nothing more and ignored Kong Youyun. There was no need to converse with those who liked to take an opposing stance in a conversation for the sake of doing so. He was speaking to those of the Sword Sect. If people who practiced the sword didn’t kill with it, were they looking to become sword dancers?

What was the point of this opposing viewpoint?

His teacher once said that if he ran into these people, he could go along with their conversation for a bit and then hack them to bits if they didn’t leave him alone! Of course, Li Hao wasn’t like that, but he could tell that Golden Spear’s disciple had her own understanding of martial dao. The young man didn’t seek to have everyone agree with his theories—that was impossible. Variations and eccentricities abounded on the path of martial dao. Everyone had their own thoughts.

Kong Youyun was strong enough and her aura mighty enough, so it was normal that she had her own conclusions. However, Li Hao would not identify with the thoughts of outsiders.

Kong Youyun was still waiting for Li Hao’s big idea, but she heard the young man say, “Don’t just stand here, junior sister Hong. I’ve already talked to Brother Second Mu. The thirty of you are assigned to two different buildings. I reserved them ahead of time, they’re over there.”

Li Hao pointed into the distance and continued talking as he walked, “Come with me, there’s also a few reminders I’d like to give everyone.”

He walked off with the crowd, leaving a frowning Kong Youyun behind him. She looked at Mu Lin. “Did I say something wrong?”

She didn’t think she’d offended Li Hao, she’d simply spoken of her own viewpoints. It was Li Hao who was the impolite one.

“You didn’t.” Mu Lin smiled and thought for a bit. “But everyone has their own understanding of their path. It’s not wrong when he tells the Sword Sect that slaughter is the core of the sword. If you say right now that it’s not the only way... Well then, it’s normal for him to ignore you.”

Kong Youyun found herself at a loss for words.

“Don’t try to change someone else’s thinking, martial masters have their own insinuations,” Mu Lin said. “Some might think it’s luck that swiftly propelled Li Hao to his current accomplishments, but can luck really create a sword cultivator who’s grasped multiple auras? Your family background is impressive, your father is strong, and your teacher is mighty. But do you think it’s family backing alone that brought you to your level of strength?”

Kong Youyun said nothing else after thinking it over.

“That guy moves quick, he’s got thirty people in the blink of an eye,” Mu Lin commented. “If he transfers some of the Guards to himself, his team will be almost complete.”

Li Hao had the right to move thirty-seven people to his team if he wished to. Added to that the thirty from today meant that he could quickly assemble more than sixty martial masters. That was extraordinarily quick work!

.....

Li Hao was no longer as restrained when there was no one else around them.

“I went to martial uncle Hong yesterday to invite you guys to my team,” he chuckled as he walked. “But not so you can enjoy life! I have a few goals, of which I can share with you. Number one, kill people! Number two, grow stronger! Number three, get rich!”

The first two were understandable, but Hong Qing couldn’t understand the last one. “Li Hao…”

“Call me centurion!”

“.....” Fine, she would change her honorific. “Centurion, what do you mean by get rich?”

“By the meaning of the word!” Li Hao laughed. “Blood pearls, mysterious power, mysterious power stones, origin weapons... Are there ever too much of those resources? Do you want dao comprehension weapons that you can sense the aura from? Only when you’re rich can you grow stronger. Those without money have to eat the earth, whereas when you grow stronger, you can kill people...”

“Centurion, when you say kill people, who do you have in mind?” asked a man in his thirties. He stood next to Hong Qing.

“Those who should die! Don’t worry, they’re not mundanes or on the side of good!”

The man nodded without further question.

“What’s your name?” Li Hao asked.

“Hong Hao.”

“You share the same Hao character as me?”

“No, it’s the one for vast!” Hong Hao shook his head.

“Then your relationship with martial uncle Hong...”

“I am master’s third disciple, but I grew up by his side.”

Third disciple...

That meant there were two more. He knew one of them—she was Hong Yitang’s wife now. So there was a second disciple who wasn’t here? The one in front of him seemed to be the oldest.

“Has martial uncle’s second disciple not come?” Li Hao didn’t beat around the bush.

When Hong Hao didn’t respond, Hong Qing explained, “Second senior brother is not in Silver Moon. He has wonderful potential and became a half step Dominator early on. He became dissatisfied that he didn’t break through, so he left for the central region a few years ago.”

Li Hao nodded slightly, then broke out in a wide grin. “There are many opportunities in the central region, but also many in Silver Moon! Here, I just need people to follow me and be willing to fight with me. We’ll be powerhouses, sooner or later!”

No one said anything. They couldn’t become powerhouses just because someone said so!

The group soon reached their destination. Li Hao pointed at one of the buildings.

“Settle in. I have other business to attend to over the next two days, so familiarize yourself with the environment. Some more people will be coming during this time—look after them for me, Hong

Qing. One of them is Liu Long, son of Silver Spear. He was my old team captain and is now a Dominator. There are also a few of my old colleagues from Silver City, they're all Sunderers..."

He gave a brief overview; his team would be immensely fortified once the Silver City crew arrived. However, there were still spaces to fill. He wouldn't fill them all with people from elsewhere in the Guards.

Some others came to mind, but Li Hao wasn't at ease when he thought of them. Hu Dingfang, for instance. Was his senior sister still there? Had she passed on more martial knowledge over the years? Hu Dingfang was once a martial master, did he have disciples?

But... he didn't really want to go to them.

He Yong seemed like a decent fellow, but he belonged to the royal family. Otherwise, an addition of disciples from the Southern Fist discipline sounded nice.

"Southern Fist, Earthturner Sword..." Li Hao suddenly thought of someone—Wang Henggang, the powerhouse of the Iron Shirt discipline and part of the Inspectorate. This person's identity passed muster and he was from Silver City. They hailed from the same hometown! So... did he have any peers or disciples?

Li Hao wasn't concerned about spies or pawns infiltrating his ranks. He wasn't going to rebel with his team. If he really was going to rebel, just one hundred alone wasn't enough!

With that in mind, he wasn't in a hurry to search out more people. His focus was on honing the sword of speed. He needed to make good use of time to complete the sword. Once it was finished and infused with the metal sword aura, he would take his people to accomplish the great deed of capturing Violet Moon!

Li Hao didn't care about the Nova that'd come from Red Moon. Someone would be along to take care of that one. Almost all of the major institutions were targeting Red Moon these days. The

young man was very bold. He either did nothing or he had Violet Moon in his sights. Thanks to his eyes, he'd stare at every clod of dirt and rock if he had to. He'd find his target!

.....

Li Hao spent only a little bit of time attending to the Sword Sect delegation before returning to his training. The forms of the young man and the Flaming Phoenix Spear soon reappeared in the artificial forest.

.....

Silver Moon was not at peace these days. Although the three great organizations abandoned the plan against Hou Xiaochen, the province's four institutions began their concerted efforts to eliminate the organizations. Hao Lianchuan urgently desired to obtain large amounts of blood pearls and devoted all of his efforts to tracking Red Moon members. He raced around the province with his men to kill them.

Violet Moon and Blue Moon didn't dare rashly show their faces in public, and that wasn't all of Red Moon's troubles. A group of bold martial masters from Silver Moon's martial world also moved against them. Not only that, but some mysterious people also targeted Red Moon powerhouses. As if that wasn't enough, immensely strong existences from the shadows likewise stirred to action.

Red Moon repositioned some Solars from neighboring provinces into Silver Moon, but they vanished after a few days before having a chance to showcase their power and prestige!

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Within a manor.

Blue Moon slammed his palm down on a table and smashed it to smithereens. He was livid over the unacceptably heavy losses of the past few days. Large numbers of their strongholds had been

obliterated and he'd met the new Solars only once before they disappeared. He didn't even have a chance to assign missions before being unable to find them!

Was there a need to explain what had happened? Others had surely killed them all. The key thing was that it happened in Silver Moon. The Solars' mysterious disappearance was certainly not due to desertion. It was more than likely the work of some mighty personages.

Solars continued to be the most lofty existences in certain provinces, so that they'd disappeared without raising a fuss was very hard for Blue Moon to swallow. Silver Moon was a province that many people were unfamiliar with in the central region. The older generation sometimes only mentioned it with an emotional sigh over the province that martial dao had once thrived in. These days, it seemed more terrifying than the central region!

There's still a period of time before the ruins open, this can't be allowed to continue. We must send even stronger powerhouses here or Red Moon will lose the right to speak in Silver Moon! Blue Moon clenched his jaw. If worst came to worst, the northern nineteen provinces could center on Silver Moon and congregate here!

Ying Hongyue had summoned Blue Moon for an audience before he set out for Silver Moon. The leader had said that if there was a need, he could call for all of the Red Moon branches in the north.

There was so much more to Silver Moon than met the eye! According to Ying Hongyue, this land hid too many secrets! They had to maintain a foothold here even if they were to abandon the other northern provinces. If they couldn't manage that now, it would be difficult for them to do so in the future.

However, Blue Moon still frowned despite making up his mind. This entailed relinquishing the profits in all of the other provinces. If they all came to Silver Moon and were still hit heavily, the losses would be too great to endure. Even he wouldn't be able to shoulder the responsibility.

But if this continued, they would be run out of the province!

Sighing, Blue Moon confirmed his decision. All nineteen Red Moon branches were to converge upon Silver Moon! This province could not be lost even if it was just for the ruins of Battle Heaven. There were many powerhouses in the other eighteen provinces and multiple Solars. A Nova elder could be found in the three northern provinces, so Blue Moon had to stabilize the situation in Silver Moon as soon as possible.

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On this day, large sums of Red Moon experts streamed to Silver Moon from the other northern provinces. Even the three northern provinces saw activity as Silver Moon appeared safer in their eyes. Almost one hundred Red Moon supernaturals had died in the three northern provinces lately—all to the Five Styles. Yuan Shuo was responsible for all of their deaths, and the fact that he was in the three northern provinces was soon public knowledge.

Chapter 370: Silver Moon's Eighth Sword (I)

The Silver Moon Guards.

It was September 12 in the blink of an eye, the third day since Li Hao's arrival. More newcomers arrived in the living quarters on this day.

Constant shock colored the face of simple and honest Chen Jian. He'd seen numerous martial masters along the way, all of them domineeringly strong. Multiple people exuded the overwhelming presence of the aura, something that should only come from half step Dominators. But here, it seemed that every other person possessed the aura. He'd thought that he and Wu Chao would count among the more powerful in a group of martial masters after absorbing incredible mysterious power. They'd swiftly progressed from initial Sunderer to mid Sunderer, but when they arrived at White Moon, they found that... Sunderer was incredibly weak!

The gaunt Wu Chao was likewise startled, no sign of his usual carefree ease to be found. He was so taken aback that he seemed to float his way over the path—there were so many powerhouses here!

The only one who kept his composure was Liu Long. Nothing could be discerned from Liu Yan, apart from some urgency and admiration deep in the depths of her eyes. She'd swiftly broken through to late Sunderer thanks to Li Hao's help, but half step Dominator was beyond her reach. No insight into the aura was forthcoming.

Li Hao hadn't gone to see her after he arrived at White Moon, but sent Wang Ming to her once. The handsome supernatural had told her to be as careful as possible and not to go to Li Hao if it could be helped. Their situation wasn't the safest. These instructions had caused her a bit of anguish, but she knew that under those circumstances, it was safest not to meet.

Now that she was part of the Guards, Liu Yan felt an increasing sense of urgency and suffering. There were so many martial masters here that a late Sunderer like her seemed very ordinary. Reality disproved her fantasy of being a powerhouse in the absence of supernaturals.

Liu Long walked calmly, not a flicker of change in expression. He followed a young man—not Mu Lin, but the captain of Golden Spear's bodyguard, Wang Qing.

The young man was curious about Liu Long, that was all. This was Silver Spear's son! The Three Spears were once known throughout Silver Moon. When one spoke of spear powerhouses in the province, these were the only three mentioned. Bronze Spear's legacy seemed to have ended and Silver Spear's son no longer employed the weapon. Wang Qing did not sense spear dao from Liu Long. He was curious about the son of Silver Spear who insisted on remaining in Silver City, but after seeing him... There didn't seem much to the man!

This was his most honest assessment. Liu Long didn't give him the slightest pressure—just the calmness of a water's surface without ripples. It was this martial master who once told the Night Watchers of White Moon that he would protect a city with his strength alone. He'd withstood the temptation of becoming a supernatural and decisively left White Moon, building the so-called Demon Hunters in the tiny Silver City.

The people by his side were the team members he'd cultivated over the years, weren't they? Three Sunderers...

Sunderers might be nice in a small place like Silver City, but they were the bread and butter of the Silver Moon Guards. They were the starting point and numbered more than half of the vast army unit. The rest were Slayers about to make the breakthrough.

"Chief Commissioner Liu, up ahead is where you'll live," Wang Qing introduced. "Centurion Li has been busy training lately and should not be disturbed. But he left instructions ahead of time that

Chief Commissioner Liu should do as you see fit when you arrive, and for you to help him straighten out some internal affairs. Centurion Li has already established his team—there are thirty members at the moment, all from the Sword Sect.”

“Many thanks!” Liu Long replied coolly as he inclined his head.

“You’re welcome.” Wang Qing led the group to the small building and thought for a bit before saying, “Chief Commissioner Liu can visit our ranking officer after you’re settled in. He has a few words he’d like to say to you.”

Liu Long nodded. Golden Spear! He’d known before coming that Golden Spear was in charge. The man had had decent relations with Silver Spear; his father had spoken some of the Three Spears when he was still alive. Liu Long met the man once when he was young, but that had been so many years ago that the impression had long grown hazy.

Liu Long watched Wang Qing march off. He wasn’t in a hurry to seek out Li Hao or meet the Sword Sect members. Instead, he led the members of the team into the room he’d been assigned.

All of the team members were present within the room, apart from Yun Yao who was a supernatural. He’d sent her to the Night Watchers because Liu Long didn’t want to cause trouble for Li Hao. Since the Guards were unwilling to accept supernaturals, the Darkmoon was much better off in the Night Watchers.

“After all these twists and turns... the Demon Hunters have still come to White Moon City,” Liu Long said softly and looked outside the window. “Since you’ve all come with me, there is nothing further to say. I am no longer your chief from this day forth. Li Hao calls the shots here. Although I am a Dominator, my strength is far less than Li Hao’s. Not only is my strength less, but so are my methods and courage.”

The small group was silent.

“Wang Qing looked at me up and down no less than ten times along the way, possibly thinking that this is Silver Spear’s son? He is so weak, how is his father worthy of being mentioned alongside Golden Spear?”

“Golden Spear’s bodyguard captain personally welcomed me undoubtedly to assess my capability. He saw it, but was disappointed. Otherwise, he would request to spar with me. He didn’t even mention that, so plainly, he doesn’t think much of me.”

These words stoked anger in the group, but they didn’t know what to direct their anger towards. Was Wang Qing wrong in not offering to spar with the chief?

No, but it did give one the feeling of being belittled.

“You have all been with me since the formation of the Demon Hunters,” Liu Long continued. “It’s been almost four years and I haven’t brought anything to you guys other than a body covered by injuries. Before Li Hao arrived, I was the only Sunderer on the team.

“If you’d been willing to come to White Moon early on, you might already be late Sunderer if you’d joined any faction, organization, or agency when the supernatural domain rose. You might even be a supernatural right now. After all these years, I’ve only brought roughly twenty insignificant cubes of mysterious power to you all.”

Silver City was too small and weak. That was all the mysterious power they’d obtained after all these years of killing Darkmoons from the shadows. There would certainly be a market for these peak Slayers if they’d come to White Moon City early on. It was easy for Slayers to ascend as Darkmoon and it’d be so much better than what they could earn in Silver City.

“Chief!” Chen Jian said in a muffled voice. “It was what we wanted too! Not to mention, I think things were fine! If you’re not comfortable here, we can go back to Silver City!”

“No, we won’t be going back!” Liu Long smiled. “At least not right now. Silver City is too small, even though it is our hometown. With Huang Yun there, Silver City will be fine. Only when we

come here, see more of the world, and obtain more benefits, will we have a chance of catching up to others.

“Are those in the outside world stronger than us? Not necessarily! They’ve just seen more and gained more. The benefits of coming from a small place like ours means that not all of our potential has been excavated yet. We’ll catch up to them sooner or later if a suitable opportunity presents itself!”

The group nodded their heads rapidly.

“I’ve decided to stay in the Guards!” Liu Long breathed out softly. “Dignity is earned, not given by others. The Demon Hunters are first rate no matter where we go! We were before and we will be in the future! Just remember that here, Li Hao is our heart. Don’t let others make a mockery of us!”

The group nodded again. They understood Liu Long’s meaning, they just felt bad for the chief. He’d always been the heart of the team; he’d raised Li Hao from humble beginnings, but now the young man was their superior. It was Liu Long who needed to make the biggest adjustment.

“Li Hao...” Chen Jian scratched his head.

“Don’t use his name in the future,” Liu Long reminded. “We’re in the army, so let’s go by his title. People might laugh at us otherwise and think that those who come from Silver City have no manners.”

“Alright then!” Chen Jian agreed with resignation. “The centurion... that’s his title, right? If the centurion isn’t here, shall we go meet those from the Sword Sect?”

“Let’s go!” Liu Long smiled. “We should strike up good relationships with them because we’ll be eating out of the same pot in the future. The centurion had me come also due to the fact that he has no foundation in White Moon City. He wants us to help him create a solid footing. So just remember that while we can suffer a bit, we cannot let other people suffer. We’re all on the same team behind closed doors, so we need to pull them to our side as well.”

He knew full well why Li Hao wanted him to be here, so Liu Long reminded yet again, “We are the centurion’s eyes and tongue in the team when he’s not here, does everyone understand?”

“Understood!” Everyone nodded.

Liu Long breathed out again without saying anything. He trusted that the team would be able to accomplish it, but he still couldn’t help but feel some apprehension and unease. With this trip to White Moon... who knew if he’d be able to find his footing in the end or flee back to Silver City in shambles?

He’d done the latter years ago.

Did Li Hao wish to make a name for himself in White Moon, or was it enough to keep himself safe? Liu Long wasn’t fully cognizant of the young man’s goals at the moment.

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Inside the jungle.

Li Hao waved stroke after stroke, his sword quick to the extreme. It suppressed the Flaming Phoenix Spear and every move was incomparably swift, but the more Li Hao struck, the more anxious he grew.

The sword aura was still not taking shape! The metal sword didn’t seem that easy to manifest.

The Flaming Phoenix Spear dulled, a sign that the latest mysterious power stone was about to be depleted. Li Hao had fed it nine times over the past three days! That was nine stones!

If it wasn't for the replenishment from earlier, what he had left wouldn't be enough. Nine mysterious power stones were the equivalent of several cubes of mysterious power and they were all being wasted. It was a worthwhile trade if the metal sword aura could appear. But when all he had to show for his efforts was simply food for the origin weapon, it gave Li Hao a feeling of enormous loss.

His sword strokes were faster and faster these days, so fast that a sonic wave formed long after his last stroke swung. The Ghost Shadow Sword was being practiced to perfection, but he still hadn't succeeded.